

# Drinking in Adolescents – Qualitative Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper was to explore alcohol consumption and the development of this habit in the adolescent population based on qualitative data from 59 anonymous essays written by high school students. We found that the most of adolescents had their first experiences with alcohol in the seventh or eighth grades. They reported that they usually drank alcohol to be happy, to relax, to be courageous in approaching the opposite sex, to fit into society, and to be popular. Factors affecting drinking are influence of peers, family and social attitude towards drinking, laws and enforcement of legislation. In further prevention programs, we must be able to demonstrate that »having a good time« does not mean drinking alcohol. Programs for the prevention of alcohol-related problems must begin by adolescence, including both sexes equally and can be achieved through a coordinated and intense public health effort.*

**Key words:** adolescents, high-risk behaviors, alcohol and alcoholism, behavior, community interventions, intervention programs

## Introduction

Alcohol consumption has been linked to an increased risk of negative health outcomes<sup>1</sup>. According data from ESPAD in Croatia 38% of boys and 16% of girls have had an alcoholic drink at least once in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>. In addition, 16% of boys and 11% of girls (13% all together) had an alcoholic drink 10 or more times in the last 30 days, which leads to Croatia being ranked eighth among all 35 countries<sup>2</sup>. In a 1998 study of Croatian high school students, it was found that 62.2% of students had consumed alcohol in the month preceding the survey and 47.1% had five or more drinks in a day<sup>3</sup>. A study of school students found that 5.83% of the primary school students and 28.81% of secondary school students consumed alcohol. Among students in the last two years of secondary school, 41.4% reportedly consumed alcohol<sup>4</sup>.

The Healthy Counties project brought together a group of public health workers dealing with qualitative analysis. Since drinking among the young has been recognized as a problem throughout the country, we search for qualitative explore this public health problem. In this

paper, we investigate the drinking pattern of high school students, including the quantity of alcohol consumed and as well as the reasons for it.

## Material and Methods

### *Qualitative analysis techniques*

The sampling frame was pupils 14 or 15 years old (N=59) in the two first classes in medical high school. They anonymously wrote essays about alcohol consumption. Essays were transcribed and analyzed as free text. First we thoroughly read each transcript. At least two team members coded the documents using ATLAS.ti software. We used an open coding technique, whereby investigators independently analyzed the data for common and recurrent themes relating to essays. Emerging themes were discussed at data analysis meetings. The goal during this initial reading was to identify episodes of alcohol consumption in the data. During the second step,

each episode was read and distilled into several descriptive sentences, and we extracted micro and macro terms. Based on those terms, we were able to describe the problem. At the end of the analysis, we presented a summary of our findings to the participants, who confirmed that we had adequately captured the main influences in alcohol consumption. This »member check« supports the trustworthiness of the data.

## Results

The essay data shows patterns of alcohol consumption in adolescents. The following micro terms were extracted from the essays:

- Most young people had their first experiences with alcohol in primary school in the seventh or eighth grade.
  - » ...two years ago when I first 'killed by alcohol'...«
- Young people consume alcohol to relax.
  - »...I still do not know why I continue to drink, perhaps because I can relax and feel that I can do all I want. And I don't mind for other...«
  - »...I like dancing when I boozy, I dance with no bad feeling...«
- Young people consume alcohol to be happy.
  - »...I was the happiest man in the world and nothing we did not stop...«
- Young people consume alcohol for fun.
  - »...I will probably continue to drink because it is fun, forget all the other crap, I am courageous...«
  - »...Today it is fun to drink and smoke, there is less of us who do not smoke, and I must admit that I do not know as many of them who had never drunk...«
- Young people consume alcohol to forget their problems.
  - »... Once I was drunk because I was depressed; parents were in conflict, the brother ran away from home, and I quarreled with my boyfriend...«
  - »...I was drunk when my grandmother died, when a song remind me of some sad situation in life...«
- Young people consume alcohol to reduce their inhibitions.
  - »...when I'm drunk or tipsy easier access for girls...«
  - »...a boy will be easier to approach a girl when he or she is drunk...«
- Young people consume alcohol to fit into society better.
  - »...if I didn't drink alcohol, others would think me a loser...«
  - »...Those who do not drink often do not go out...«
  - »...Those who do not drink do not go out because they are weaklings...«
- Young people consume alcohol to be popular.
  - »...in the city are known only by those who drink non-stop... and only know them and only them the story...«
  - »...your friends think you're great, and they're good if you drink...«
- Physical symptoms are apparent with the first consumption.
  - »...The feeling after about three beers was extra good, just too good. I was ready for anything...«
  - »...I felt nausea and headache...«
  - »...I could not walk. I'm just killed by alcohol...«
- Behavior changes under the influence of alcohol.
  - »...I was defeated with a friend who was also drunk...«
  - »...Guys are often aggressive and fearless, but very demanding, even if you refuse to feel fear...«
  - »...everything is normal when I'm drunk I understand, but somehow exaggerating, I'm aggressive, I just want a beat...«
- Alcohol is readily available to young people.
  - »...In bar Oks on Wednesdays the price of vodka is 1 kn...«
  - »...you do not have money for expensive cafes, drinking strong drink, whatever, just to drink...«
- Parents' attitude towards drinking alcohol is confusing.
  - »...Parents did not know I was drinking. They were angry, but all we resolved was I said that I will make sure that when I am in a bad state that I shall call for transportation...«
  - »...Mama does not like too much that I go out and drink (she likes to drink sometimes). Dad says, Go, my son, maybe you will be lucky...«
  - »...My parents allow me everything, and I think they are too soft ...«
  - »...The best part is that when I come home dead drunk... parents are just crazy! Then I get a beating... the horror ...«
- Personal attitude toward alcohol varies.
  - »... I'm not an alcoholic, I drink only when my friends and I agree...«
  - »...It has become normal to drink every Saturday...«
  - »...I think it is OK to drink alcohol but not in the quantities which throw...«
  - »...When I try to quit drinking, the alcohol always wins ...«

Based on micro-terms, all authors agreed that the basic macro terms are:

1. Parents drink alcohol, and also they are very tolerant of their adolescent children drinking.
2. The young use alcohol to excuse behavior.
3. The laws on selling alcohol are not enforced.
4. Alcohol is readily available to young people.
5. The influence of peers is a large factor in alcohol consumption.

## Discussion

To achieve efficiency in alcohol-related research and intervention, the current pattern of alcohol consumption must be understood. Most adolescents have their first experiences with alcohol in the seventh or eighth grades (at 14 or 15 years of age). In essays, young people ignored

the health implications of drinking; they justified it as a phase and did not recognise the potential long-term risks as health consequences<sup>5,6</sup>. They usually reported that they drink alcohol to be happy, to relax, to be courageous in approaching the opposite sex, to fit into society, and to be popular. These data are consistent with behavioral theory, which assumes that the susceptibility to problem behavior is the result of the interaction of people and the environment. »Model areas« also emphasizes the role intrapersonal, interpersonal and socio-cultural influences<sup>7</sup>. The young report engaging in more risky behaviour when they are under the influence of alcohol, like aggressive behaviour and sexual promiscuity. The influence of alcohol consumption on sexual behavior in the young is already described<sup>8,9</sup>. The availability of alcohol for the young affects their alcohol consumption. The legal drinking age in Croatia is 18 years; current law also prohibits movement of minors after 11 pm, unless adults accompany them. However, these laws are not enforced, and the it is usual to see drunken underage people in the streets, mostly on weekends. There is evidence that alcohol advertising affects attitudes and behaviour especially in the young<sup>10,11</sup>. In Croatia, beer is legally categorized as a food product, which enables its frequent advertising on television, and it is constantly associated with popular Croatian sports such as football. The advertisements imply a connection with drinking and having a good time. The parents' attitude towards drinking is very complacent; we could say even disinterested. Some study show that parental support may be a response to alcohol use in teens such that parents become more involved and open in talking with their teens when they notice these patterns of behaviour<sup>12</sup>. Also, familial environmental influ-

ences to shape motives for drinking in adolescents<sup>13</sup>. This is certainly a consequence of the drinking culture in Croatia, and the transition changes shaken our society back 19 years. Drinking alcohol is an integral part of family life for many people in Croatia. Parents are very tolerant of drinking. Most young people reported that their parents do not know when they come home, and they often come home in the early morning hours. Parents have sent a message that they do not care if their children come home drunk. The impact of parents' attitudes is already known<sup>14</sup>. The Croatia National program of combating addiction provides preventive actions in all segments of society<sup>15</sup>. Progress can be made toward the nation's objectives to decrease alcohol use and increase the age of first use through innovative education, not only for adolescents but also for parents who believe that teaching their children to drink at home is acceptable. Alcohol advertising has been influential with the young but can also be used to dissuade people from consuming alcohol<sup>16</sup>.

## Conclusion

The alcoholism among the young is a growing public health problem. We must be able to demonstrate that »having a good time« does not mean drinking alcohol. It is necessary to intensive work on the implementation of the National Prevention Program. Programs for the prevention of alcohol-related problems must begin in early adolescence and include both sexes equally. This can be achieved through a coordinated and intense public health effort.

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## **NAVIKA PIJENJA KOD ADOLESCENATA – KVALITATIVNA ANALIZA**

### **S A Ž E T A K**

Cilj rada je bio istražiti naviku pijenja alkohola kod adolescenata. Koristili smo podatke dobivene iz 59 anonimna eseja koja se napisali učenici dva razreda srednje škole. Rezultati su pokazali da mladi imaju prvo iskustvo s alkoholom u sedmom ili osmom razredu osnovne škole. Najčešće piju da bi bili sretni, opuštteni, da bi lakše pristupili suprotnom spolu, da bi se uklopili u društvo, te da bi bili popularni. Na konzumaciju najveći utjecaj imaju vršnjaci, stavovi obitelji/roditelja, društveno odobravanje, zakoni i njihovo provođenje. Potrebno je poboljšati implementaciju Nacionalnog programa sprečavanja ovisnosti. Ovakav i slične programe trebalo bi započeti što ranije, a u provođenje uključiti širu društvenu zajednicu, kako bi se smanjio ovaj javnozdravstveni problem.