

## Adolescents Alcohol consumption, Prevalence and Trends

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### Abstract

There is this false popular belief that alcohol dependence is most common in one's 40s, In fact, alcohol dependence is most common in young adulthood and has its origins goes back to adolescence. Alcohol use at the end of adolescence can be a detrimental factor in its use in young adulthood. The issue of continuity of alcohol use is also associated with the personality characteristics of the individuals, their individual characteristics and the environmental factors affecting them. It will be useful to identify and investigate the factors affecting individuals' high levels of alcohol use. Therefore, continuity of alcohol use lays the foundation of prevention programs for alcohol use in adolescence. Reducing alcohol use will also lead to secondary gains such as the prevention of accidents, injuries, and criminal behavior.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; Alcohol Consumption; Prevalence; Trends

### Introduction

Teenage and underage drinking is a serious health and social problem in many countries of the world. According to WHO [1] worldwide more than a quarter (26.5%) of all 15 - 19-year-olds are current drinkers, amounting to 155 million adolescents. Europe is the heaviest drinking region of the world with 10.9 liters of pure alcohol per person (15+ years). This is nearly twice the world average and drinking patterns vary considerably across the region.

While it is considered that alcohol dependence is most intense during young adulthood [2], it seems the root goes back to adolescence. Most young people begin using alcohol between the ages of 12 and 16 year as a result of gain increasing independence and spending more time outside the home with friends unsupervised. During that stage, the direct influence of parents diminishes and friends become influential and important. In fact, according to DSM criteria, alcohol dependence exists even at the age of 16 - 17 [3].

### Prevalence

In studies with young adults (in their early 20s), alcohol consumption rate was found to be 15% for Australia, and in countries such as Denmark, Ireland and Poland, and the United Kingdom, one-third of young adults were frequently drinking [4]. It was also found that two-thirds of adolescents in Australia were drinking recently and using alcohol at the rate of one-third weekly [5]. In another study with teenagers in Australia, Bonoma., *et al.* [6] found that 5% of the participants met the criteria for alcohol dependence according to DSM IV. It seems that going through this drinking habit in young adulthood originates from the drinking behavior in adolescents. The most effective prediction of alcohol consumption in young adulthood is the regular consumption of alcohol for recreation and relaxation during adolescence.

Some studies have also indicated that there is a gender difference in the continuity of alcohol use [7]. Kessler, *et al.* [8] argued that, in Western countries, the rate of alcohol dependence among young adults is 5% for men and 2% for women. In 2014, weekly drinking differed between countries for girls and boys. The lowest prevalence for girls was seen in Iceland (2%), Finland, Ireland, Norway and Sweden (3%), and Latvia and Portugal (4%), and the highest in Malta (26%), Hungary (18%), and Greece and Italy (17%). For boys, Iceland (3%), Norway (4%), and Ireland and Sweden (5%) reported the lowest weekly drinking, and Croatia (33%), Malta (32%), Italy (31%) and Hungary (29%) the highest. In 2002, more than one in five girls in 15 countries in Europe reported weekly drinking, with the highest prevalence in England, Scotland, Malta and Denmark. By 2014, only one country (Malta) had a prevalence of more than 20%. During the same time period, Finland was the only country where less than 10% of girls reported weekly drinking.

According to the National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) in 2016, the lifetime alcohol use among adolescents in South Africa can be characterized as stable but high during 2002 - 2011, with age of initiation < 13 years. In North and South America alcohol prevalence increases with age and by the age of 18 almost all young people have tried alcohol. A survey in Belize 1992 from 3473 students, alcohol was the only drug that showed rising use. In the same survey one-quarter of students age 10 years or younger reported to had used alcohol while 82.6% of 17-year-olds had tried alcohol (Pride Belize Survey Project Team 1992).

As of 1996 in Bolivia's cities, 17.7% of those between the ages of 12 and 17 reported having used alcohol which reflects an increase from 16.7% in 1992 and the lifetime prevalence rate for 12 - 17 age group was 38.6% (Del Castillo and Salinas 1992).

A survey of households in São Paulo Brazil also found that 35% of adolescents between 12 and 17 years had used alcohol [9]. It was reported in Canada in 1995, 58.8% of students in Ontario had used alcohol and the largest percentage of alcohol use by 16 to 17, 14 to 15 and 13 and below age group was 75%, 56.9%, and 31% respectively [10]. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2017 alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth.

### Trends in alcohol consumption by gender

In 2014, the highest prevalence of drunkenness for girls was observed in Denmark (38%), Wales and Hungary (34%) and lowest in Israel (5%) and Iceland (6%). For boys, the highest rates were seen in Lithuania and Hungary (41%), and Croatia (40%), and lowest in Iceland (6%). The greatest decrease in drunkenness was observed in Ukraine (29%) in girls (from 45% in 2002 to 16% in 2014) and 41% in boys (from 61% in 2002 to 20% in 2014). Also, there was a significant increase in drunkenness among girls in Malta from 17% in 2002 to 28% in 2014 and Hungary from 26% in 2002 to 34% in 2014.

### Trends in early alcohol consumption by gender

Generally, early alcohol initiation declined substantially in most countries and regions, from 46% in 2002 to 28% in 2014. The greatest reductions between 2002 and 2014 were seen in Czech (from 71% to 22% among girls, and 76% to 28% for boys) and Wales (65% to 25% among girls, 69% to 25% boys). In 2014, Across all countries and regions in Europe, more than one in four 15-year-olds (28%) reported that they had first started consuming alcohol at age 13 years or younger (25% of girls and 31% of boys). The highest prevalence of early alcohol initiation was among boys in Estonia (50%), Greece (47%) and Croatia and Hungary (46%); for girls, it was Estonia (47%), Lithuania (41%) and Greece (38%). The lowest prevalence among girls was in Israel (4%), Iceland (5%), Italy (12%) and Sweden (13%) and among boys in Iceland (6%), Sweden (15%) and Norway (16%).

### Factors influencing alcohol consumption among adolescents

There is strong social pressure and influence that promotes intense alcohol consumption among youngsters. Adolescents being role models for each other; presenting alcohol consumption in the press, advertising, social media as a normal expectation that everyone does and should do; producers producing sweet and colorful alcoholic beverages; alcohol consumption being presented as fun, attractive and sexy activity with an intense advertising and marketing method lead to doubts and controversy about what "healthy norms" are with

regard to alcohol use. It is important to know that, most adolescence uses alcohol to fulfill many reasons ranging from social and personal needs, enhance contact with peers as well as to initiate new relationships with others. According to Strijdom [11], Meursing and Morojele [12] in Sub-Saharan Africa, young people have the notion that drinking is an important component of having fun and the main goal is to get drunk.

Alcohol use by adolescents is also influenced by a dynamic interaction between individual, familial and social or environmental factors. However, genes, social experiences, cultural norms, social circumstances, and gender roles all play an interactive role in adolescence alcohol consumption. Young adults from countries termed as individualistic countries (such as Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), for example, showed stronger social and enhancement motivations to drink (that is, drinking with others and drinking to get drunk) than those from countries termed as collectivist (such as Portugal and Spain).

Individuals at the end of adolescence and in their early 20s consume alcohol at a high rate [13]. It is the result of alcohol use in adolescence and age-specific limit testing and excitement seeking behavior [14]. This is also considered as an effort to complete the adolescent's task of growth and reach psychological maturity [15]. However, studies have also found that low parental education and unemployment are associated with increased alcohol use among adolescents. Research from Finland reported that higher educational aspirations were protective agents against regular alcohol use and drunkenness among young adults.

In Norway, it was observed that the increased prevalence of violent behavior among students with low socioeconomic status was due to higher rates of heavy episodic drinking and higher impulsivity compared to students of higher socioeconomic status. However, other studies reported that greater family wealth is associated with a higher risk of drinking but high parental education may also play a role in moderating this effect. In Africa, it was observed that countries with low income are often countries with high alcohol use among it young adults.

Pape and Hammer [16] stated that the individual's strike a balance in their drinking in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, those who drank too much decreased the use and those who did not use some alcohol; in short, there was no danger for the general young population. In fact, it was seen that many drinkers initially reduced their drinking and scaled it down to a normal level. Although very few of the individuals who participated in the study had not tried any alcohol in the first place, half of them started to use alcohol while the other half did not use it at all. This could be associated with the fact that some young people drink for the fun of it as well as with the intention of imitating adults a time.

Drinking in adolescence has psychological functions such as disobeying authority, leaving childhood and imitating adults. Especially for boys, alcohol use is a process in which they socialize among themselves and try their adult roles [16]. Other researchers define adolescence as a typical period in which individuals separate from their families and form their own identities [17].

Furthermore, alcohol use and continuity may be culture-specific. In some countries, many adolescents try alcohol and do not use it afterward as opposed to that in some countries alcohol is used in religious ceremonies or charismas celebrations. For example, in Nigeria, alcohol use is an integral part of festivals and most adolescence as early as 8 years use alcohol usually during family festivities [18].

### Associated consequences of alcohol consumption

It was reported that late adolescence is the period in which alcohol consumption peaks [16] and then, tends to decrease [19]. More specifically, the level of drinking appears to decrease after the ages of 21 and 22. It has been seen that people who were drinking in adolescence reduce it and strike a balance in young adulthood. However, only a small number of people drink extensively during adolescent while the majority increasingly intensify it after adolescence. Alcohol consumption is a situation that provides the social interaction of adolescents in many countries [6]. People, most of whose friends use alcohol in adolescence, are 8 times more likely to drink alcohol than

other adolescents and those who smoke (more than 10 cigarettes daily) are 5 times more likely to have alcohol dependence in young adulthood.

In the longitudinal studies performed by Pape and Hammer [16] on “continuity of alcohol use” among Norwegian adolescents, it was seen that some individuals increased alcohol use while others decreased it in the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. The rate of those who increased was slightly higher than those who did not. In the study, 37.5% of them consumed alcohol less, 29.8% more and 32.7% did not change. Since individuals’ responsibility for life increases during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, there is a general decrease in alcohol use, but this does not apply to everyone. Research and experiences show that alcohol use in adolescence determines later drinking habits [20].

While some suggest that adolescents drink small amounts and controlled drinking, some researchers argue that neurological and cerebral development of adolescents continues until the age of 18 and they should not use alcohol at all. This means that alcohol consumption during adolescence can have an impact on neurological and cerebral development.

It was also found that alcohol dependence is associated with alcohol-related injuries, high rates of smoking and anti-social behavior. That study observed that alcoholics had divorced parents; at least one of their characteristics is that their parents were alcoholic and they were using alcohol in adolescence years [6]. A study by Galduroz., *et al.* [21] also reported a link between adolescence alcohol consumption to fighting and missing school. It also has detrimental consequences; for example, it plays a role in accidents, injuries, interpersonal aggression and adolescent deaths [22]. It has also been emphasized that adolescence is a period in which criminal behavior is highly observed [23].

There is a serious relationship between substance use (alcohol and drugs) and sexual behaviors of adolescents and it constitutes an important public health problem. It causes sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancy through sexual experiences and behaviors [24]. Public health experts and public health policymakers need to pay attention to these issues. Early sexual experience, having sex with multiple partners and unprotected sexual intercourse are frequently observed in adolescents using alcohol and drugs [24].

Drinking at such a heavy dose also has risky consequences; such as, passing out, feeling bad the next day, inability to recover, violence and having unsafe sexual intercourse [25]. For adults who have liver, pancreas, digestive system, neurological and cardiovascular problems due to alcohol-related problems traced back to the adolescent alcohol drinking habits.

Starting from different times in different states in the United States, the legal age of alcohol purchase and consumption have been increased from 18 to 21 years old [24]. Identification and age check is strictly followed for alcohol sales in the US, and no alcohol is sold after certain hours in the evening. Alcoholic entertainment venues and restaurants are concentrated in certain places. Alcohol sales on Sundays are completely prohibited. Alcohol consumption is prohibited in public spaces and parking spaces. It is forbidden to have alcoholic beverages with an opened cap on the vehicles.

Protective, preventive and intervening policies on alcohol should definitely target adolescents because drinking and regular alcohol use which start in adolescence continue to increase in young adulthood. Furthermore, exhaustive, long-term longitudinal studies with large participation are needed for investigating all these contradictions [26-30].

## Conclusion

It seems that alcohol usage and dependence is an increasing trend among the teenagers universally. Research from different part of the world proves that, young generations are curious about alcohol usage, but at the same time the alcohol producer companies are also choosing young people to market their products. Therefore, it is very important to be aware of the problem before it gets out of hand. Governors, policy makers, health departments, mental health services should provide educational opportunities for young people and their

parents and teachers. A global and wholistic approach is really necessary to develop awareness in order to protect young people from risk behaviors. Bulut and Bozkurt (2019) emphasized the importance of motivation for the treatment of this problem. Their results shows that treatment motivation is very important in order to begin, attend and complete the assigned alcohol treatment programs. Furthermore, their study found out that people who are able to seek interpersonal help are doing better than non help-seeker. For those who applied the compulsorily to the treatment program were mostly court ordered, on the other hand for those who applied by themselves were more internally motivated and provided better results. Again, for those who trusted the treatment services were more likely successfully finish the programs than those who are not trusted the treatment services. It appears that it is very important to get to know the alcoholic patients life conditions and personality treats if any care and treatment is going to be provided for them.

Alcohol consumption is an universal phenomenon among young people and especially; young people and women are encouraged to consume it for the sake of being cool, being independent or being more free. It is important to raise children and teenagers who has positively regard themselves and have high self-esteem to say no for peer pressures. One parents or a school system approach is not good enough for the preventive measures. It should be a general overall preventive measures among all of the national institutions and international agencies as well as non-profit organizations.

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