

Assessment Of Adolescent Alcohol Consumption, Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices in Kosovo

Adelina Lahu^{1,3,*}, Kaltrina Azizi^{1,3} and Ana Žepina Puzić^{2,3}

¹Department of Nursing, Heimerer College, 10000, Pristina, Kosovo

²Šibenik University of Applied Sciences, 22000, Šibenik, Croatia

³University of Novo mesto, Faculty of Health Sciences, Novo mesto, Slovenia

Abstract. The paper examines the alcohol consumption, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of adolescents in Kosovo. The study recruited 300 respondents aged 15-19 from three secondary schools in Mitrovica, Vushtri and Pristina, using a cross-sectional, quantitative approach to the ESPAD questionnaire and sampling between September and November 2023. 49.3% were females and 50.7% were males, of which 65% were from urban areas. Almost 32% of respondents drink alcohol, and reasons for not drinking include not being interested and religious beliefs. Curiosity and peer influence were the main reasons for initiation, and male respondents were more likely to do so. While the survey noted negative experiences such as physical violence, accidents and unprotected sex, with vodka and beer being the most common consumption it highlighted serious concerns about alcohol consumption among young people in Kosovo emphasized, with more than half reporting drinking in the past 30 days. Almost 50% of students started drinking before the age of 15, leading to serious health risks such as alcohol dependence and risky behaviours. These findings emphasize the need for continued monitoring and targeted interventions to address precipitating factors among Kosovar youth.

1 Introduction

Alcohol is considered one of the three key factors that significantly contribute to the global burden of disease [1], while alcohol consumption among minors causes serious health problems. Alcohol consumption among young people aged 15-19 years is a significant concern due to its various negative impacts [2]. Excessive alcohol use is associated with deaths from causes fully attributable to alcohol use [3], acute alcohol-related harms such as injuries, and car crashes, and increased risk for sexually transmitted infections [4]. The study aims to provide insight into the trends in alcohol consumption.

Adolescence is a peak period for the initiation and use of substances, and many adolescents experiment with or consume alcohol regularly. Although some experimentation is normative, prevention of early and excessive alcohol use among adolescents is important, particularly because it is associated with adverse psychological, social, and physical health consequences, including brain damage, academic failure, violence, injuries, and unprotected sexual intercourse [6].

Alcohol is considered one of the three key factors that significantly contribute to the global burden of disease [7], while alcohol consumption among minors causes serious health problems. Alcohol consumption among young people aged 15-19 years is a significant concern due to its various negative impacts [8].

In low and middle-income countries, the prevalence of alcohol use at least once in the past 30 days was 8.4%

among early teenagers aged 12–13 years. Excessive alcohol use is associated with deaths from causes fully attributable to alcohol use [9], acute alcohol-related harms such as injuries, and car crashes, and increased risk for sexually transmitted infections [8]. Other studies have reported alterations in the maturation and functioning of the adolescent brain because of early exposure to alcohol use [10].

Advertising alcohol has been recognized as an instigator of alcohol misuse and health risks to drinkers. Several studies have associated exposure to alcohol advertisements with alcohol consumption among adolescents [11]. A systematic review of alcohol adverts and prospects for alcohol consumption in developing countries showed that alcohol advertising predicted initiating alcohol drinking among children and youths. Similar evidence of alcohol adverts leading to alcohol consumption among children and adolescents has been documented in the USA, Thailand, and Australia [12].

Depending on the social context, teens may adopt behavior that is either protective or a risk to their health. Several factors determine drinking behavior among adolescents, including the need for socialization, relationships with the opposite sex, subjective expectations and norms, and, above all, family and social contexts. Social relations can exert either a beneficial influence on behavior or serve as a source of tension, stress, and conflict, especially in adolescence [13].

Spain is one of the countries with the highest rates of alcohol consumption, which nearly doubles the

* Corresponding author: adelinalahu@gmail.com

worldwide average (World Health Organization 2014). Among Spanish adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18, 76.9% have tried alcohol at least once in their lifetime, 75.6% have consumed alcohol within the last year, and 67% have had alcohol within the last month [14].

A very important aspect to evaluate and analyze is the way teenagers drink alcohol. Most adolescents and young adults who drink alcohol do so in social settings, with far fewer drinking alcohol while alone. For example, adolescent and young adult solitary (versus social-only) drinkers often report increased alcohol consumption and more alcohol-related problems [15].

However, there is some evidence of a changing trend in teenage drinking. Recent surveys have found a strong decrease in alcohol consumption among young people and this trend has been identified in European countries, Australia, and North America. Previous research suggests that the decline in alcohol consumption may be explained by changes in parenting style, increased use of social media, changes in gender identities, or a health and fitness trend [16].

2 Methodology

This research is a cross-sectional study that was conducted using quantitative methodology. Descriptive methods of data presentation were used for statistical processing, which included the presentation of data in tables with absolute frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency. The empirical research was conducted through the questionnaire of The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), which consisted of 23 items focused on the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The sample was selected using simple random and systematic sampling. The research was conducted in the State of Kosovo, in the cities of Mitrovica, Vushtri and Pristina, in high schools: "Dr. Xheladin Deda" High School of Medicine, Mitrovica; Technical High School "Lutfi Musiqi" in Vushtri and High School of Medicine "Resonanca" in Pristina, on a population of 100 of respondents in each school (total 300), aged 15 to 19 years, between September- November 2023. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school board of each school.

3 Results

Through the analysis of the obtained data, the current state of alcohol consumption among young people in Kosovo is investigated, with a comparison with the interim results and an analysis of expected changes in consumption as well as related factors. Based on sociodemographic data, the reasons, attitudes, and habits related to the consumption of alcoholic beverages in the adolescent population in Kosovo were analyzed. The positive relationship between internal motives for drinking and alcohol consumption will be examined. We also present an analysis through the gross domestic product of the state, comparing it with the drinking pattern according to WHO data, to get a picture of alcohol consumption at the

country level.

A total of 148 female respondents (49.3%) and 152 (50.7%) male respondents participated in the research, 152 (50.7%) respondents aged 15-16 years, and 148 respondents aged 17-18 years (49.3%) of respondents. Analyzing the place of residence, 195 (65%) respondents live in an urban area, and 105 (35%) respondents live in a rural area. Analyzing the habits of consumption of alcoholic beverages among the female respondents, 49 (33.3%) of them declared that they consume alcohol, while among the male respondents, positive consumption was also confirmed by 49 (32.3%) respondents, but considering the number of male respondents who participated the total percentage of consumption is slightly lower.

When we analyzed the reasons why female respondents do not consume alcohol, the most common answer was that they are not interested in consumption with 53 (53.5%), religious reasons were given by 30 (30.3%) respondents, harm to health the reason was mentioned by 9 (9.1%) respondents, possible drunkenness was mentioned by 3 (3%) respondents, and possible problems with parents by 2 (2%). Among male respondents, the distribution of answers with reasons why they do not consume alcoholic beverages is the most represented answers in the category that they are not interested in consumption with 43 (41.7%), the same number of answers are represented by religious reasons with 43 respondents (41.7%), the following the reason is possible damage to health with 10 (9.7%), then possible drunkenness with 3 (2.9%) respondents, while 2 (1.9%) respondents declared that the reason was also a possible problem with parents.

The most common reasons for starting to drink alcoholic beverages among female respondents are the persuasion of a friend 38.7% and curiosity 36.7%, while among male respondents curiosity is the predominant reason given by 48.9% respondents and then on the persuasion of a friend with 34.7%. Statements about the frequency of consumption among female respondents are in the category of 1-10 times 53.1% against male respondents with 24.5%, then in the category of 11-21 times with 0%, while among male respondents is 6.1% respondents, in the category of over 30 consumption of alcoholic beverages among female respondents, 12.5% responded positively, and 24.5% among male respondents.

In the last year, 20% male and female respondents did not consume alcohol equally, 40.8% female respondents and 44.9% male respondents consumed 1-5 times. 6-10 times were consumed by female respondents 12.2% and male respondents 2.1%.

The last consumption of alcoholic beverages by the respondents was in the category of 1-7 days, with 9 (18.3%) females versus, 15 (30.6%) males; in 8-14 days in females with 6 (12.2%) versus males with 5 (10.2%), in one month in females with 10 (20.4%) versus males with 9 (18.3%), and then more than a month in females with 18 (36.7%) versus males with 17 (34.7%).

Analyzing the place of the last consumption of alcoholic beverages at home, 14 (28.5%) female respondents stated against 13 (26.5%) male respondents,

at someone else's house stated 7 (14.3%) female respondents against 5 (10.0%) male respondents, on the beach was indicated by 4 (8.2%) female respondents against 9 (18.4%) male respondents, in the bar was indicated by 11 (22.4%) female respondents against 9 (18.4%) male respondents, and in the disco bar it was mentioned by 9 (18.4%) female respondents against 9 (18.4%) male respondents.

The last alcoholic drink consumed among women was vodka 18 (36.7%) and beer 14 (28.5%), while among male respondents, the drinks were varied from vodka which was drunk by 9 (18.3%), beer 17 (34.7%), brandy 6 (12.3%) and so on.

Respondents declare that they do not have specific days for consumption of alcoholic beverages with a response rate of 31 (63.3%) for female respondents versus 29 (59.1%) for male respondents. The next in order are weekends with a response rate of 15 (30.6%) in female subjects against 12 (24.4%) male subjects. The most common negative experiences caused by alcohol consumption in the last 12 months among women are physical violence 6 (12.2%), accident or injury 9 (18.4%), damage or loss of things or clothes 1 (2%), problem with by the police 3 (6.1%) and engaged in sexual intercourse without a condom 2 (4%). For men, the most common negative experiences resulting from alcohol consumption in the last 12 months are physical violence 3 (4%), accident or injury 7 (14.3%), damage or loss of things or clothes 10 (20.4%), problems with by the police 4 (8.1%). This question had the highest rate of refusal to answer it, with 29 (59.1%) female and 25 (51%) male respondents.

The most common negative experiences caused by alcohol consumption in the last 12 months are worrying, as phenomena such as violence, accidents or injuries result in an increase: physical violence from 1% as it was in 2020 results in 8.46%, accident or injury from 6% results in 15.36%. This question had the highest refusal rate, with 29 (59.1%) females and 25 (51%) males.

The reasons for consuming more alcoholic beverages in the last 12 months are to help in enjoyment among women aged 16 (32.6%) compared to men aged 21 (42.8%), to feel more high 18 (36.7%) among women compared to 12 (24.5%) male respondents, Fit in with a group you like in 7 (1.3%) female versus 8 (16.3%) male respondents, and Forget the problems 4 (8.1%) in female versus 4 (8.1%) male respondents.

The scheme for banning alcohol consumption for those under 18 in bars was evaluated positively by 30 (20.3%) female respondents against 45 (29.6%) male respondents, while 39 (26.4%) female respondents evaluated it negatively by 29 (19%) male. 62 (41.9%) female respondents chose not to know, compared to 76 (50%) male respondents.

132 (89.2%) female respondents and 126 (82.9%) male respondents stated that traffic safety is at risk after consuming alcoholic beverages, while 13 (8.8%) did not know female versus 16 (10.5%) male respondents. The fact that among the male respondents, 8 (5.2%) stated that they are not endangered after consuming alcohol is worrying.

Opinions on the number of friends who consume alcohol among female respondents answered that they all

consume 2 (1.4%), most consume 7 (6.4%), some consume 16 (10.8%), a few consume 16 (10, 8%), nobody 39 (26.4%) and 45 (30.4%) don't know. To the same question, male respondents answered that everyone consumes 5 (3.3%), most consume 9 (5.9%), some consume 24 (15.7%), few consume 26 (17.1%), none 45 (29.6%) and 33 (21.7%) do not know.

4 Discussion

As mentioned above, alcohol use among young people is a major concern in most countries. Therefore, many studies have been undertaken in an attempt to improve the understanding of consumption patterns. In Kosovo, there are especially few such studies, initially according to a study conducted in 2002, youth represented the highest age group of the population where 35% belonged to the age group of 15-24 years. According to data from the WHO survey [17] (rapid assessment and response) it has been found that the consumption of narcotics among young people in Kosovo was almost the same as young people in Western countries. Among school youth, tobacco consumption was 26.2%, alcohol 20.3%, cannabis 2.7%, heroin 0.3% and ecstasy 0.2%, pharmaceutical drugs 4.9%. All the data show that Pristina had the highest number of cases.

Another study was conducted by UNICEF [18] in 2004 in Kosovo, i.e. two years later, where, unlike tobacco consumption, however, alcohol consumption was a smaller problem. While almost only 6.4 percent of them have consumed alcoholic beverages. While this figure most likely underestimates the level of consumption, it does suggest that alcohol use among young people was much less widespread than elsewhere in European countries. However, it should be noted that while alcohol consumption was significantly lower among women than men, it was much higher overall among the Kosovo Serb population. Therefore, at that time, one of the most important objectives of the WHO was to prevent the abuse of narcotic substances, alcohol, and tobacco.

More precisely, although the prevalence of alcohol consumption is somewhat higher among boys, the difference in the odds of uncontrolled consumption between the sexes is not significant. The European Study, Survey Project Report on Alcohol and Other Drugs [19] noted that Denmark is the country with the highest prevalence among EU countries. When compared to data reported for the territory of the former Yugoslavia, boys from Kosovo show similar drinking patterns as their peers (47%, 43%, and 40% of alcohol users in boys from Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Croatia). Meanwhile, alcohol consumption in Kosovar girls was significantly higher than that for girls from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia (17.8%, 18%, and 39% for Croatian, Bosnian-Herzegovinian, and Kosovar girls) [20-22].

The prevalence of alcohol among young people in Kosovo turns out to be low compared to countries in the region or beyond, in this study we have a prevalence of 32%, which is almost the same as that of 2020 with a prevalence of 33% [23], where compared to ESPAD countries (2019 report) [24] except Iceland (37%) and

Kosovo (29%) resulting in an approximate percentage, the ESPAD average was 80% (range: 35- 96%). In 2011 this percentage was around 25%, with marked differences between men and women (for men this percentage was 35%, and for women 15%) [25].

A total of 52% of young people in Kosovo reported that they had consumed alcohol during the last 30 days. In 2020, this percentage was lower, with only 41% of participants reporting that they had consumed alcohol in the past 30 days [25]. According to the ESPAD report in 2019, this percentage in Kosovo was only 11%, while the majority, or 47% of students in ESPAD countries reported the use of alcohol during the 30 days before the survey. In Hungary, Greece, the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, and Denmark, more than three-fifths (61-74%) had consumed alcohol in the last 30 days.

The early start of alcohol use is associated with high risks of encountering health problems later in life, including alcohol addiction [26, 27], risky behaviors, and substance abuse. According to this study, the age of the beginning of alcohol consumption results in almost 50% of students being under the age of 15, which is a worrying phenomenon since in 2020, most of the participants declared the age of 17 when they started drinking alcohol. In the ESPAD report (33%) reported alcohol use at age 13 or younger. With a higher degree in Georgia (60%) and Latvia (48%). The countries with the lowest rate were Iceland (7.1 %), and Norway (13 %).

Among our participants, vodka 18 (36.7%) and beer 17 (34.7%) were the preferred drinks, in ESPAD countries on average, spirits (38 %) and beer (31 %) were the preferred alcoholic drinks.

Similar to the previous study where more than half (59%) declared that there are high rates of young people who consume alcohol in Kosovo, in 2024 this percentage is 49.66%

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the research highlights a significant concern regarding alcohol consumption among young people in Kosovo, mirroring trends observed in other regions. Despite limited studies, the available data indicates a prevalence rate of alcohol use among Kosovo youth that is comparatively lower than that in many European countries.

The studies examined reveal a persistent pattern of alcohol use, with over half of the youth reporting alcohol consumption within the last 30 days, although this percentage has seen a slight decline from 52% in previous years to 49.66% in 2024. Alarmingly, nearly 50% of the students started drinking before the age of 15, posing significant health risks, including potential alcohol dependency and engagement in risky behaviors.

Efforts by organizations such as WHO and UNICEF emphasize the necessity of preventive measures against substance abuse. The data underscores the importance of continuous monitoring and targeted interventions to address the underlying factors contributing to early alcohol consumption among young people in Kosovo. By fostering awareness and promoting healthy behaviors,

it is possible to mitigate the adverse effects associated with underage drinking and improve the overall well-being of the youth in Kosovo.

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