

## **ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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**Summary:** The study investigated the alcohol consumption among university students (N = 658, mean age  $20.63 \pm 2.59$  y/o). More than 90% of students consume alcohol. Although the alcohol abuse is more serious in male students, females are also affected. Almost 90% of male and 80% of female students have been drunk during their life. Binge drinking is widespread among the university students. Drinking pattern does not depend on marital status; and most students do not drink alone. It suggests that they consume alcohol rather for fun than for melancholy. The persistence of high levels of alcohol consumption in a large proportion of university students stresses the need for effective preventive and treatment interventions for both sexes.

**Keywords:** alcohol consumption, binge drinking, university students.

### **Introduction**

It is well-known that Hungary takes place an unfavourable position among European countries regarding the alcohol consumption. The WHO European Information System on Alcohol and Health put Hungary into the leading countries regarding the levels of alcohol consumption [1]. The alcohol abuse arise problems among university students worldwide [2]. Across the world it has been reported that university students' alcohol consumption is higher than their non-university peers [3, 4]. This is a concern because heavy alcohol use is not only harmful to health, but also may create social problems in the university environments. The ESPAD report in the 2011 survey about the drinking patterns in 36 European countries found significant increase of alcohol use in Hungary between 2007 and 2011. The binge drinking appeared as a new "chic" among the students, when they drink five or more drinks (males) or four or more (females) on one occasion [5]. Screening the alcohol use in university student population provides an essential source of information about the prevalence and frequency of substance use as the university students represent a group at high risk for excessive alcohol consumption [6].

This study aimed to analyse drinking habits of the university students including frequency of alcohol consumption, binge drinking and drunk episodes. We looked association in alcohol use between the students living single or with steady relationship.

### **Materials**

#### *Study participants*

A cross-sectional study was undertaken in 2010 and 2011. All participants were full-time students of the University of Miskolc representing five faculties (Faculty of Materials Science and Engineering, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Economics and

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Faculty of Health Care). There were 138 male students ( $20.63 \pm 2.59$  y/o) and 519 female students ( $20.88 \pm 3.38$  y/o) without significant difference in age.

### Survey

We used the alcohol-related part of the “Study about the student’s health” survey created at the University of Rouen for evaluating the French university students’ health behaviour. The alcohol-related self-reporting questionnaire contains 11 closed questions. The participants answered on a scale sticking the check-boxes.

### Statistical analysis

Data were presented in percentage and Chi-square test and t-test were employed as appropriate for group comparison. Spearman’s rho was used for analysing the correlation between the ordinal scales. SPSS 19.0 statistical software was used for data analysis.

### Results

There were no differences between the male and female students who accept and refuse the alcohol. Averages of 9% of the students have never drunk alcohol.

Figure 1 presents alcohol consumption by genders.

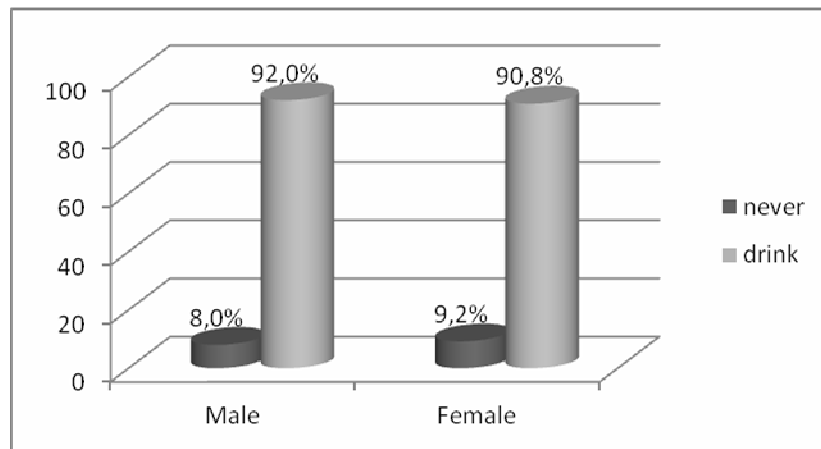


Figure 1. Alcohol consumption by gender (in percentage)

Regarding the frequency of alcohol use (1 = never, 2 = monthly, 3 = 2–4 times/monthly, 4 = 2–3 times/week, 5 = 4 or more time/week) we observed gender differences. The male students consume larger amounts of alcohol than females (Pearson chi-square = 54.265,  $df = 8$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) (Figure 2).

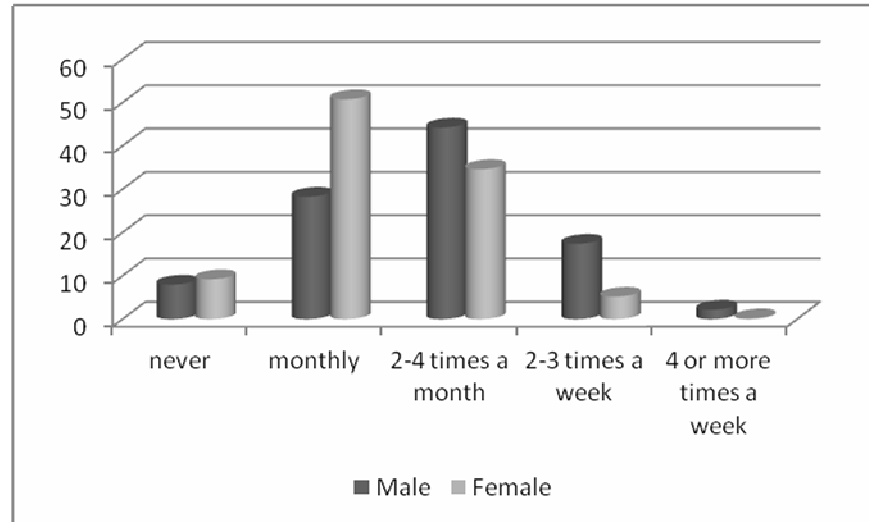


Figure 2. Frequency of alcohol consumption by gender (in percentage)

We found that 89.7% of males and 80.0% of females have ever been drunk during their life. This ratio is 80.3% in males (32.1% more than 10 times) and 64.3% in females (9.7% more than 10 times) in the previous 12 months. Students had their first experience at the average age of 16.19 ( $\pm 1.65$ ) in males and 16.58 ( $\pm 1.09$ ) in females. We found that 90.6% of the students never drink alcohol when they are alone. 78.4% of males and 50.6% of females reported regular alcohol abuse; namely five or more drinks for males, and four or more for females on a single occasion. We found significant differences between the genders ( $\chi^2 = 58.540$ ,  $df = 4$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Figure 3 shows the frequency of the binge drinking by gender. Eighteen percent of the students have been in a vehicle driven by themselves or by someone else; and 18.4% of the students complained that they have ever had problems because of the alcohol use. We found significant correlations between the vehicle use and frequency of alcohol use ( $\rho = 0.218$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and the vehicle use and frequency of binge drinking ( $\rho = 0.251$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), respectively. There is also significant correlation between the frequency of alcohol use and the episodes when students have forgotten things they had to do because of alcohol ( $\rho = 0.270$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); and significant correlation was found between the frequency and any problems occurred because of alcohol use ( $\rho = 0.239$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). These correlations are a little bit stronger comparing with binge drinking ( $\rho = 0.347$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and  $\rho = 0.283$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), respectively.

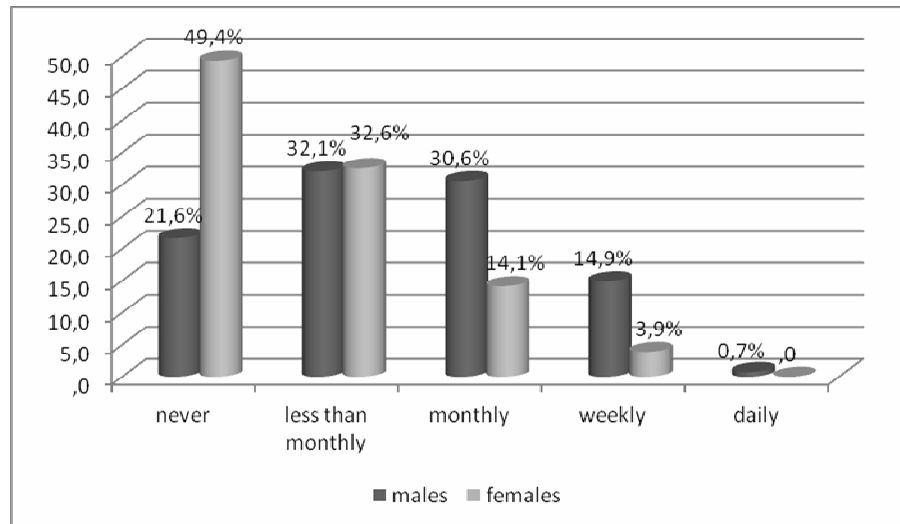


Figure 3. Frequency of binge drinking by gender (in percentage)

When we compared the frequency of alcohol use and binge drinking with the marital status (living alone or with stable relationship) we observed no significant differences. We found no relationship between the marital status and the alcohol use because of relaxing or feeling better.

### Discussion

Our findings provide evidence that increased alcohol consumption exists in university student population. Most students drink alcohol regularly and they see as an integral part of their higher-education life. The binge drinking is widespread among students. Although the alcohol abuse is more serious in male students, females are also affected. Less than 10% of the students drink alcohol alone which assumes the importance of company and entertainment spent together. The students had the first time drunk episode at the average age of sixteen. Students' drinking behaviour has been formed before the university years. So the university is not the first possible environment for alcohol consumption, but appropriate one for extension of excessive alcohol consumption. Alcohol use has negative impact on the mental behaviour and can lead to transport disaster. More the students are under the influence of alcohol, more frequently they use vehicle as a driver or as a passenger. Students drinking habits are independent of their marital status. It suggests that they consume alcohol rather for fun than for melancholy.

The persistence of high levels of alcohol consumption in a large proportion of university students stresses the need for effective preventive and treatment interventions for both sexes.

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