ALCOHOL AS A SOCIAL MEDIATOR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Álcool como mediador social em universitários

Alcohol como mediador social de universitarios

ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify the prevalence of alcohol consumption in Psychology students of a higher education institution in the city of Montes Claros, MG. **Methods:** Quantitative cross-sectional descriptive research conducted from September to October 2014. The population consisted of 116 Psychology students from the city of Montes Claros, MG. Data were collected using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), the Inventário de Expectativas e Crenças Pessoais Acerca do Álcool – IECPA (Inventory of Expectations and Personal Beliefs about Alcohol), the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) and the Escala de Satisfação com o Suporte Social – ESSS (Social Support Satisfaction Scale). Descriptive analysis of data was performed using SPSS 19.0. **Results:** The sample had a predominance of female gender (82.75%, n=96), pardos (65.51%, n=76) and single (60.34%, n=70) individuals. Regarding the AUDIT risk classification, it was found that 49.13% (n=57) of the respondents were in the level 4, considered alcohol dependence. They reported occasional use of alcohol, smoking and other substances, which refer to ASSIST level 1 classification, with 94.82% (n=110). Regarding the IECPA, 87.06% (n=101) of the individuals were classified as level 1, with low vulnerability to the effects of alcohol. As to the ESSS, 68.10% (n=79) of the students showed high social support. **Conclusion:** Regarding the sample studied, it was found a high prevalence of dependence on alcohol and other legal and illegal drugs.

Descriptors: Alcohol Consumption; Students; Psychology.

RESUMO

Objetivo: *Identificar a prevalência do consumo de álcool em estudantes do curso de Psicologia de uma instituição de ensino superior da cidade de Montes Claros-MG.* **Métodos:** *Pesquisa quantitativa, do tipo transversal e descritiva, realizada entre os meses de setembro e outubro de 2014. A população foi constituída por 116 universitários do curso de Psicologia da cidade de Montes Claros-MG. Para a coleta de dados, foram utilizados o Teste de Identificação de Desordens Devido ao Álcool (AUDIT), o Inventário de Expectativas e Crenças Pessoais Acerca do Álcool (IECPA), o Teste de Triagem do Envolvimento com Álcool, Cigarro e Outras Substâncias (ASSIST) e a Escala de Satisfação com o Suporte Social (ESSS). Para a análise descritiva dos dados, aplicou-se o programa SPSS, versão 19.0.* **Resultados:** *A amostra apresentou predominância do sexo feminino (82,75%, n=96), pardos (65,51%, n=76) e solteiros (60,34%, n=70). Com relação à classificação de risco do AUDIT, constatou-se que 49,13% (n=57) dos participantes da pesquisa se enquadraram no nível 4, sendo considerados dependentes do álcool. Relataram fazer uso ocasional de fumo, álcool e outras substâncias, sendo uma classificação de nível 1 do ASSIT, com 94,82% (n= 110). Sobre o IECPA, 87,06% (n=101) dos avaliados se classificaram em nível 1, tendo baixa vulnerabilidade para os efeitos do álcool. Tratando-se do ESSS, 68,10% (n=79) dos universitários apresentaram alto suporte social.* **Conclusão:** *Com relação à amostra pesquisada, constatou-se alta prevalência com dependência do álcool e outras drogas, lícitas e ilícitas.*

Descritores: *Consumo de Bebidas Alcoólicas; Estudantes; Psicologia.*

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: *Identificar la prevalencia del consumo de alcohol de estudiantes del curso de Psicología de una institución de enseñanza superior de la ciudad de Montes Claros-MG.* **Métodos:** *Investigación cuantitativa del tipo transversal y descriptiva realizada entre los meses de septiembre y octubre de 2014. La población se constituyó de 116 universitarios del curso de Psicología de la ciudad de Montes Claros-MG. Para la recogida de datos fueron utilizados el Teste de Identificación de Desordenes Debido al Alcohol (AUDIT), el Inventario de Expectativas y Creencias Personales Sobre el Alcohol (IECPA), el Teste de Selección del Envolvimiento con el Alcohol, Tabaco y Otras Sustancias (ASSIST) y la Escala de Satisfacción con el Apoyo Social (ESAS). Para el análisis descriptivo de los datos, se aplicó el programa SPSS, versión 19.0.* **Resultados:** *La muestra presentó la predominancia para el sexo femenino (82,75%, n=96), pardos (65,51%, n=76) y solteros (60,34%, n=70). Respecto la clasificación de riesgo del AUDIT se constató que el 49,13% (n= 57) de los participantes de la investigación se encuadraron en el nivel 4, siendo considerados dependientes del alcohol. Los mismos relataron el uso ocasional del tabaco, alcohol y otras sustancias con la clasificación del nivel 1 del ASSIT, con el 94,82% (n= 110). Respecto el IECPA, el 87,06% (n=101) de los evaluados se clasificaron en nivel 1 con baja vulnerabilidad para los efectos del alcohol. Sobre el ESAS, el 68,10% (n=79) de los universitarios presentaron elevado apoyo social.* **Conclusión:** *De la muestra investigada se constató elevada prevalencia de dependencia del alcohol y otras drogas lícitas e ilícitas.*

Descriptores: *Consumo de Bebidas Alcohólicas; Estudiantes; Psicología.*

INTRODUCTION

Psychoactive substances (PASs) are substances capable of altering the mood, the level of perception or the functioning of the central nervous system. Tobacco, medicines and alcohol are examples of these substances, which, although legally permitted, cause many social problems[1].

In this perspective, alcohol is today one of the PASs most used by the population, being widely accepted. Its use as a social facilitator has many consequences: health problems, both physical and psychological; problems in family, social and employment relationships; domestic, labor and traffic accidents; violent behavior and self-harm. It is also related to the development of epidemics such as stroke, cancer, truancy, interpersonal problems and sexual risk behavior. It is also a risk factor in pregnancy, nutritional status and diet. Several studies have shown that binge drinking is responsible for failure among college students[2].

Alcohol consumption has been part of mankind as a legal and socially acceptable habit for centuries, being associated with instant gratification, relaxation and facilitation of sociability[3]. The several variables related to this consumption and alcohol dependence have very complex associations. Factors such as education, income and occupation have several associations with the use of alcohol[4].

Alcohol is associated with changes in the dietary habits and nutritional status of the user, especially for affecting appetite, food intake and/or for acting directly on the metabolism of specific nutrients such as the absorption of vitamins A and E and minerals such as copper, zinc and selenium[5]. Thus, the user with an alcohol dependence ultimately fails to eat and may present pellagra, a type of nutritional deficiency caused by the lack of niacin that is usually accompanied by a protein-energy malnutrition commonly caused by the abusive alcohol drinking[6]. Research indicates that alcohol drinking contributes to more than 10% of health problems in Brazil, and its high consumption is asscoaited with weight excess. Many individuals dependent on alcohol present overweight, obesity and waist circumference above the expected standards[7].

The consumption of alcoholic substances among young people is a phenomenon that has caused social, psychological and health problems. This has become a public health concern because the excessive use of alcohol has reached students of various academic degrees[8].

Health sciences college students deserve special attention in relation to the use of PASs. In this context, Psychology students, who are in between the health sciences and the human sciences, should give special attention to this issue during their professional practice, as they will be directly involved in the identification, prevention and treatment of individuals with problems related to the use of PASs[9].

Currently, special attention is given to this use among college students. The increased use of alcohol by this specific population is related to certain factors that have already been identified, such as not having a religion or not attending any religious celebrations, living away from parents, and having more free time on weekdays and high family income. Entering university can become a critical period because the autonomy that fits into the lives of many students is a generating factor of insecurity and increased vulnerability to the onset and maintenance of PASs use[9]. Furthermore, the increasingly early use of alcohol among young people is associated with a higher risk of becoming dependent[10].

Thus, this research is justified by the evidence that there is a high consumption of alcohol among health sciences students. Therefore, there is a need to check the actual situation of the use of alcohol by psychology students from a higher education institution in the city of Montes Claros, Minas Gerais, and use the results obtained to develop strategies aimed at controlling the abusive drinking of acohol.

METHODS

This is a quantitative cross-sectional descriptive research.

The nonprobability convenience sample comprised 116 students aged 19-47 years (26.2 ± 5.7) enrolled in and attending the Psychology school of a private higher education institution in the city of Montes Claros, Minas Gerais. After approval by the course coordinator for the research, we carried out a meeting with potential participants, and those who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study signed a free informed consent (IC).

Then, the instrument used for data collection was applied by the researchers in September and October 2014 during classes.

Data were collected using a sociodemographic questionnaire containing descriptive data (gender, ethnicity, marital status and course period) in order to characterize the sample group.

Additionally, four specific questionnaires were applied. The first was the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) composed of 10 questions that allow answers with predetermined weights from 0 to 4. In the end, scores are added up and the sum is classified into "risk zones": zone I (score 0-7 – low risk drinking, intervention: alcohol education), zone II (score 8-15 - medium risk, intervention: simple advice), zone III (score 16-19 - high risk; intervention: simple advice, brief counseling and continued monitoring), zone IV (score in excess of 20 - possible alcohol dependence). This questionnaire is the first specific screening intrument created by the World Health Organization (WHO) to identify persons with harmful alcohol consumption, as well as those with alcohol dependence in the past 12 months[10].

Next, we used the *Inventário de Expectativas e Crenças Pessoais acerca do álcool - IECPA* (Inventory of Expectations and Personal Beliefs about alcohol), which aims to know what people think about the effects of alcohol. It consists of an instrument with 61 items with five likert-type response choices with scores ranging 1 to 5. The next intrument was the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST), which consists of a self-administered questionnaire developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) containing eight questions on the use of nine classes of psychoactive substances (tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, stimulants, sedatives, inhalants, hallucinogens and opiates). Each response corresponds to a score ranging from 0 to 4, and the sum can range from 0 to 20. It is considered a score that ranges 0 to 3 as indicative of occasional use, 4 to 15 as indicative of abuse and ≥16 as suggestive of dependence.

Finally, we applied the *Escala de Satisfação com o Suporte Social - ESSS* (Social Support Satisfaction Scale), an instrument used to evaluate a set of measures that express health, well-being or ill-being, or which are closely linked to these variables. It consists of a self-administered scale composed of 15 sentences that allow respondents to check their level of agreement with each of them (whether the statement applies or not to their individual situation) on a likert-type scale with 5 response choices. The ESSS allows to understand four factors and dimensions: satisfaction with friends/friendship; intimacy; satisfaction with family; and social activities[11].

Data underwent descriptive analysis using percentage values, mean and standard deviation in the SPSS, version 19.0.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the *Associação Educativa do Brasil - SOEBRAS* (Brazil's Educational Association) under Opinion No. 530.651.

RESULTS

Most of the sample was female (82.75%, n=96), *parda* (65.51%, n=76), single (60.34%, n=70) and attended the 6th period (36 20%, n=42) (Table I).

Regarding the results obtained from the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), it was found that the majority of students (49.13%, n=57) was in the risk zone IV - alcohol dependence. As for the frequency of use of tobacco and other psychoactive substances in the same situations in which alcohol is consumed (ASSIST), it was found that 94.82% (n=110) of the students make occasional use of some type of substance. When assessing personal expectations about the positive effects of alcohol and the vulnerability to alcoholism of the students interviewed, it was found that 87.6% (n=101) presented low expectation/ low vulnerability to alcoholism. The ESSS analyzes the relationship between alcohol and socialization, in which it was found that 68.10% (n=79) of the students make use of alcohol as a social support (Table II).

Table I - Characterization of Psychology students of a private higher education institute. Montes Claros, MG, 2014. (n=116).

Variable		n	%
Gender	Male	20	17.25
	Female	96	82.75
Ethnicity	Asian	0	0
	White	27	23.30
	Indigenous	04	3.44
	Black	09	7.75
	Pardo	76	65.51
Marital status	Single	70	60.34
	Married	23	19.84
	Separated	07	6.03
	Widowed	0	0
	Dating	16	13.79
Period	5th	11	9.48
	6th	42	36.22
	7th	04	3.44
	8th	18	15.51
	9th	13	11.22
	10th	28	24.13

Table II - Analysis of the prevalence of alcohol consumption among Psychology students of a private higher education institute. Montes Claros, MG, 2014. (n=116).

QUESTIONNAIRE	LEVEL	n	%	CLASSIFICATION
AUDIT	1	44	37.93	Low Risk
	2	13	11.20	Medium Risk
	3	02	1.72	High Risk
	4	57	49.13	Alcohol Dependence
ASSIST	1	110	94.82	Occasional Use
	2	06	5.17	Abusive Use
IECPA	1	101	87.06	Low Expectation – Low Vulnerability
	2	15	12.93	High Expectation – High Vulnerability
ESSS	1	02	1.72	Low Social Support
	2	35	30.17	Medium Social Support
	3	79	68.10	High Social Support

DISCUSSION

This study assessed the prevalence of alcohol consumption among Psychology students of a private higher education institution in the city of Montes Claros, Minas Gerais.

Regarding the sample group, there was a predominance of females. In accordance with the results of this study, a previous study[12] on alcohol consumption found that most participants were female (61.6%) and only 38.4% of the sample was male; several other studies on the use of alcohol have also corroborated these findings [13-16].

Regarding ethnicity, the majority of the participants considered themselves *Pardos*. In contrast, a study[15] carried out to analyze the relationship between the ethnicity of college students and the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs showed that the majority (65.8%) of the students considered themselves White, 20.3% were *Pardos*, followed by Blacks (6.3%), Asian (2.5%) and Indigenous (0.5%).

The sample was mostly single. The results of a study conducted in the city of Montes Claros[13], located in the northern region of the state of Minas Gerais, are consistent with the results of the present study, in which most students are single. This may justify the high consumption of alcohol because single people have more active social life than the married ones or those who have a date.

The research was conducted with students enrolled in the 5th-10th period of the Psychology course, with a predominance of students in the 6th period. On the other hand, another study showed that the majority of research participants was in the 2nd period (21%), followed by the 3rd period (19%)[15].

In line with the results of the present research, a study[17] conducted in two public schools of Alagoas reported that most participants are in the first period (24.2%), followed by those who are in the third period (23.3%). It is believed that these results are due to a greater number of students in class during the early years of college.

Regarding the AUDIT results, it was found that most respondents were in the risk zone IV (alcohol dependence). The high consumption of alcohol has become a major public health problem in Brazil given the early onset of use of these substances by adolescents and young adults. As the number of people who drink alcohol increases, more negative psychological and social outcomes are evidenced[18,9].

A study conducted with 174 students at a public university in São Luís, Maranhão, found that 59% of the respondents had already experienced abusive drinking of alcohol, 20.7% of whom reported having been drunk in the last 19 days, and 14.9% in the last five days before data collection[19].

It can be observed that there is a great number of people who experience abusive drinking of alcohol and hence may be vulnerable to alcohol dependence. The individuals who were in AUDIT risk zone IV are people who need a specialized assessment to diagnose alcohol dependence and a specific treatment to face this problem.

In contrast, a study conducted in the city of Piracicaba, state of São Paulo, assessed the consumption of alcohol and the quality of life of 170 college students regardless of gender. It was observed that 68.20% of the participants presented low-risk drinking, 21.80% presented high-risk drinking, and 5.29% of the students were probably alcohol dependents[20].

Similarly, findings of a study conducted in a public school in São Paulo with 112 Nursing students aged 17-28 years found that 79.5% of the respondents were at low risk of alcohol dependence[14].

Another study carried out in a Clinical Hospital of the State University of Campinas with a sample of 4,352 individuals aged over 18 years showed that 9.7% of respondents presented high-risk drinking. This percentage is considered low, given the number of participants; however, most participants are young and therefore more vulnerable to alcohol consumption[15].

Although the results of the present research are contradictory, the results presented by the aforementioned studies are encouraging and should be taken into account; however, it does not reduce the chances of an increase in the rates of individuals with at-risk drinking, making it necessary to develop awareness campaigns about the risks caused by alcohol.

Regarding the use of tobacco and other psychoactive substances in the same situations in which alcohol is consumed, it was found that most college students make occasional use of some kind of substance, that is, individuals use alcohol and cigarette in the same circumstances, but they are at low risk of becoming dependent on nicotine.

In line with this finding, a study conducted in the Human and Natural Sciences Center of UFES with 300 Psychology students found that the substances most commonly used by college students are alcohol (85.07%) and tobacco (33.03%)[9].

Although these individuals have a great exposure to other psychoactive substances, it can be observed that among these drugs, young people prefer tobbaco, which, in most cases, is used along with alcohol. This finding corroborates the results of the present research.

Tobacco and alcohol are harmful substances, and by 2020 they will be major risk factors for deaths and disabilities of individuals predisposed to dependence[21]. About 84% of the population makes ocasional use of alcohol; however, any amount consumed can cause harms to an individual and even to people around him/her[22].

The growing alcohol use can lead people to use other psychoactive substances. Study reports that tobacco is the second most commonly used drug among young people worldwide, and that there is a relationship between the two substances, as those who drink alcohol use or have already used tobacco[22]. In the present study, the participants presented a low expectation/low vulnerability to alcoholism.

Findings of the *1° Levantamento Nacional sobre o Uso do Álcool, Tabaco e outras Drogas entre Universitários* (1st National Survey on the Use of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs among College Students) show that 22% of the

participants were at risk of developing alcohol dependence and had probable motivation for the misuse of alcohol[16].

Research conducted at the Federal University of Rio Grande on the impact of alcohol on the lives of individuals found that 23.7% of the respondents reported feeling dizzy and cases of falls, and 3% of the participants reported the occurrence of alcoholic coma[23].

To investigate the relationship between alcohol and socialization, we used the ESSS questionnaire (Social Support Satisfaction Scale), in which it was found that 68.10% of the students make use of alcohol in order to have some kind of social support.

In this context, a study conducted at the Federal University of Uberlândia showed that 66.3% of the students consumed alcohol and 65.17% drank occasionally[24]. The probable reason for the high consumption of alcohol is its great social acceptance. The author also states that parents are more concerned with raising their children awareness on the use of a marijuana cigarette rather than alcohol.

Alcohol advertisements influence the use of these substances by young people – in most cases they are targed to this population. In Brazil, there is almost no programs aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of alcohol abuse, and alcohol ads have almost no restrictions to be broadcast to the population[25].

Many of these individuals have no knowledge about what substances can cause to their health. When the individual becomes dependent on these substances, its total or even partial withdrawal becomes something more difficult as dependent individuals reject treatments and aids to quit the use, which makes it a challenge for those who fight against drugs and alcohol.

The small sample size and the selection of only one course are limitations of the present study. Thus, it is deemed important the conduction of further studies on the risks caused by alcohol abuse among health care college students, as they are knowledge holders and health promoters.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the sample studied, there was high prevalence of alcohol dependence and dependence on other licit and illicit drugs.

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