Abstract

Background: Anxiety disorders are highly prevalent, affecting approximately 10% of individuals throughout life; its onset can be detected since early childhood or adolescence. Studies in adults have shown that anxiety disorders are associated with alcohol abuse, but few studies have investigated the association between anxiety symptoms and problematic alcohol use in early ages.

Objective: To evaluate if anxiety symptoms are associated with problematic alcohol use in young subjects.

Methods: A total of 239 individuals aged 10-17 years were randomly selected from schools located in the catchment area of Hospital de Clínicas de Porto Alegre. The Screen for Child Anxiety-Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED) was used to evaluate the presence of anxiety symptoms, and the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST), to evaluate alcohol use.

Results: One hundred twenty-seven individuals (53.1%) reported having already used alcohol. Of these, 14 individuals showed problematic alcohol use (5.8%). There was no association between lifetime use of alcohol and anxiety symptoms, but mean SCARED scores in individuals with problematic alcohol use was higher if compared to those without problematic use, even after adjustment for age and gender (29.9±8.5 vs. 23.7±11.8, p < 0.001).

Conclusions: Despite the limitation of a cross-sectional design, our study suggests that anxiety symptoms are associated with problematic alcohol use early in life.

Keywords

Child, adolescent, anxiety, alcohol drinking.