Abstract

Numerous studies have shown that alcohol intake causes neuropsychological disorders that affect various brain structures. The "premature ageing" hypothesis proposes that the brain areas of alcoholics undergo deterioration similar to that observed in old age. We investigated whether alcohol abuse by young people (binge drinking) causes alterations comparable to some found in elderly people. Ninety-one people were divided into four groups: a) young people who abused alcohol; b) young people who drank alcohol in moderation; c) young people who did not drink alcohol; and d) elderly adults without any significant cognitive deterioration. All of them were assessed with a neuropsychological battery. We observed some similarities in the results obtained by young drinkers and the elderly participants, which would provide some support for the hypothesis of premature aging. The tasks that young drinkers performed worse were those related to executive functions, in which the prefrontal cortex plays an essential role. We also found differences between the two groups of young drinkers (moderate and high consumption), which leads us to believe that the amount of alcohol consumed and the pattern of consumption are factors to consider in relation to cognitive impairment.