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THE CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: INTERFERENCE IN THEIR ACADEMIC LIFE

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The proposed study is justified by the vulnerability of young people regarding psychoactive substances consumption. The objectives were: to identify the number of students who use psychoactive substances in an Institution of Higher Education; to identify factors that influence consumption and the number of students who need intervention. For data collection we used two instruments: the sociodemographic and ASSIST (Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test). In a sample of 437 students, we found that 221 of them must receive intervention and eight need to be referred for treatment; 68 students think that alcohol hinders them in college and 99 students miss classes due to alcohol consumption.

Descriptors: Chemical Compounds; Students, Therapeutics; Epidemiology.

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O CONSUMO DE ÁLCOOL E OUTRAS DROGAS ENTRE ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS: INTERFERÊNCIAS NA VIDA ACADÊMICA

A realização do estudo justifica-se pela vulnerabilidade dos jovens para o consumo de substâncias psicoativas. Os objetivos foram: identificar o número de universitários que fazem uso, em uma instituição de ensino superior, verificar fatores que influenciam o consumo e o número de universitários que necessitam receber intervenção. Para a coleta de dados utilizaram-se dois instrumentos: de caracterização sociodemográfica e o Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screen Test. Em amostra com 437 acadêmicos, verificou-se que 221 precisavam receber intervenção e oito precisavam ser encaminhados para tratamento; 68 universitários achavam que o álcool os atrapalhava na faculdade e 99 universitários faltavam às aulas devido ao consumo de álcool.

Descritores: Compostos Químicos; Estudantes; Terapêutica; Epidemiologia.

EL CONSUMO DE ALCOHOL Y OTRAS DROGAS ENTRE ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS: INTERFERENCIAS EN SU VIDA ACADÉMICA

La realización del estudio se justifica por la vulnerabilidad de los jóvenes para el consumo de sustancias psicoactivas. Los objetivos fueron: identificar el número de universitarios que hacen uso, en una Institución de Enseñanza Superiora; verificar factores que influncian el consumo; y el número de universitarios que necesitan recibir intervención. Para la recogida de datos se utilizó dos instrumentos: de caracterización sociodemográfica y el ASSIST (Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screen Test). En muestra de 437 académicos, se verificó que 221 necesitan recibir intervención y ocho necesitan ser encaminados para tratamiento; 68 universitarios creen que el alcohol les estorba en la facultad y 99 universitarios faltan a las clases debido al consumo de alcohol.

Descriptores: Compuestos Químicos; Estudiantes; Terapéutica; Epidemiología.

Introduction

In the early of the nineteenth century, due to health problems generated because of alcoholic beverages use, this “binge drinking” began to be seen as a disease and received greater attention⁽¹⁾.

Although many people have this conscience, their political, economic and social values are being threatened due to abuse or even addiction to this substance, the first contact with alcohol usually happens in adolescence, which is a phase characterized by several body and mind transformations⁽²⁻³⁾.

Studies show that drug consumption increases after young people go to college and this environment is an enabler of this access. Going to college brings positive

feelings, such as reaching an objective, however, it is often a critical period where it is more vulnerable to initiate and maintain the use of alcohol and other drugs⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾.

This research aims to identify the number of university students who use psychoactive substances, in an Institution of Higher Education and to identify factors that influence consumption; and the number of students who need to receive the intervention. This study is justified by high consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs among young people, especially, related to those who are using for the first time or increase the consumption when starting higher education, when barbecues and academic parties become more frequent.

Material and Methods

We conducted a descriptive, empirical, quantitative study in an Institution of Higher Education - IHE - from the city Médio Vale do Paraíba, Brazil.

There were 437 participants from all grades (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th) from the courses: Administration, Library Science, Biology, Social Communication (Journalism, Advertising, Radio and TV), Industrial Design, Arts Education, Languages Education and Pedagogy. This number represents 40% of total students enrolled in IHEs, in 2010.

This research was submitted to the Research Ethics Committees and received approval n. 90/2009.

The researchers, initially, presented to the coordination of the Institute of Research and Scientific Initiation of the IHE a statement with the research objectives, requesting authorization to collect data with the students of these courses.

Granted permission, data collection was carried out from April to May 2010, at nighttime classes, from 7pm to 10pm. The researchers asked teachers permission to interrupt their classes for a few minutes, they presented themselves to the academic students, explained the objectives of the research, invited the students to participate, and, then, delivered the Informed Consent for those who agreed to participate.

We used two instruments to data collection: sociodemographic characteristics and screening test for detection of alcohol, tobacco and other substances - ASSIST (*Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test*), so it could be possible to determine how many students were using substances, how many would need to receive intervention or who would need to be referred for treatment due to these substances abuse.

Results

The data were tabulated and treated in the software Epi Info® and statistically analyzed.

Sample characterization

With respect to age, we found that in the Administration course women have an average age of 25.8 years ($\sigma^2=46.20^2$; $SD=6.79$) and men 26.4 years ($\sigma^2=37.45^2$; $SD=6.12$); in Library Science course participants have an average age of 28.5 years; in Biology course women have an average age of 22.7 years ($\sigma^2=26.72^2$; $SD=5.16$) and men 25.3 years ($\sigma^2=50.04^2$; $SD=7.07$); in Social Communication course we found that women have an average age of 25.3 years ($\sigma^2=69.67^2$; $SD=8.34$) and men 24.4 years ($\sigma^2=26.97^2$; $SD=5.19$); in Industrial Design, women have an average age of 21 years ($\sigma^2=8.52^2$; $SD=2.91$) and men 22.3 years ($\sigma^2=15.89^2$; $SD=3.98$); in Arts Education the majority are 25 years old; in Languages Education, women have an average age of 22.7 years ($\sigma^2=25.2^2$; $SD=5.02$) and men 24.4 years ($\sigma^2=16.74^2$; $SD=4.09$). Finally, in Pedagogy course women have an average age of 33 years.

We found that the rate majority comprises singles without partners, therefore, in the Administration course single students without partners represent single and 45.8% ($n=49$); in Library Science course, 50% ($n=2$); Social Communication, 59.1% ($n=26$); Industrial Design, 56.7% ($n=34$) and Languages Education, 44.2% ($n=50$).

The courses that showed different results were Biology, comprising the majority of single university students who are dating represented by 41.1% ($n=23$), which was also verified in the Arts Education course, represented by 60% ($n=3$). In the Pedagogy course, the majority rate is represented by married women who account 31.3% ($n=15$).

The rate majority of students who participated of the research works, as verified in the Administration course represented by 77.6% ($n=83$); Library Science, 75% ($n=3$); Biology, 62.5% ($n=35$); Social Communication, 81.8% ($n=36$); Industrial Design, 65% ($n=39$), Arts Education, 80% ($n=4$), Languages Education, 66.7% ($n=74$) and Pedagogy, 79.2% ($n=38$).

We found, in general, that academic students like to go out at night - Administration: 95.3% ($n=102$); Library Science: 50% ($n=2$); Biology: 92.9% ($n=52$); Social Communication: 97.7% ($n=43$); Industrial Design: 98.3% ($n=59$); Arts Education: 100% ($n=5$); Languages Education: 96.5% ($n=109$) e Pedagogy: 91.7% ($n=44$) – and, when go out, they usually go to parties– Administration: 36.3% ($n=37$); Biology: 44.4% ($n=24$); Social Communication: 44.2% ($n=19$); Industrial Design: 56.7% ($n=34$); Arts Education: 50% ($n=2$); Languages Education: 59.5% ($n=66$) e Pedagogy: 36.4% ($n=16$); the only course that presented different result was Library Science, where 75% ($n=3$) usually go to restaurants and pizzerias.

Related to alcohol use, a large percentage of students, although not the majority, responded to possess alcoholic relatives (parents, siblings, uncles, cousins, grandparents) and a small percentage answered feeling influenced by alcohol consumption.

From the data on the influence that the consumption of alcohol and other drugs has on university life, we found that 28% ($n=30$) of the students who attend Administration course think alcohol hinders their performance at university. In agreement are 16.1% ($n=9$) from Biology; 11.4% ($n=5$) from Social Communication; 11.7% ($n=7$) from Industrial Design; 20% ($n=1$) from Arts Education; 13.6% ($n=14$) from Languages Education; 4.2% ($n=2$) from Pedagogy; in the Library Science course all participants responded not feeling influenced by alcohol and other drugs consumption. Another factor that negatively influences academic life is the fact that students have made or are making use of alcohol at the same time of classes, leading them to miss classes.

In general, we observed that a relatively higher percentage of students miss classes for having made or are making use of alcohol, 22.65% ($n=99$), but only 15.56% ($n=68$) have admitted that alcohol, in fact, hinder their academic performance.

We found that the age group of the first use of alcohol was from 13.2 to 17 years.

ASSIST Results

We verified with the responses obtained in ASSIST that, with regard to the consumption of *alcohol*, the Administration course provides 15.9% (n=17) of students who need to receive intervention with respect to high consumption, with a mean age of 25.2 years ($\sigma^2=20.722$; SD=4.55), mostly are men, 64.7% (n=11), and single, 58.8% (n=10). Among Biology students, 21.4% (n=12) need to receive intervention in relation to alcohol, with a mean age of 22.6 years ($\sigma^2=19.512$; SD=4.41), 50% (n=6) are women and 50% (n=6) are men, most of them unmarried, 58.3% (n=7).

In Industrial Design, 18.3% (n=11) of the students need receive intervention due to alcohol consumption, with a mean age of 22 years ($\sigma^2=5.802$; SD=2.40), the majority, 63.6% (n=7) are men, and unmarried, 72.7% (n=8); and 1 (1.7%) student needs to be referred for treatment.

In Arts Education there was no participant who showed need for intervention in relation to alcohol consumption. In Languages Education, 24.8% (n=28) of the students must receive intervention regarding alcohol abuse, with a mean age of 23.5 years ($\sigma^2=17.662$; SD = 4.20), mostly are women, 57.1% (n=16) and are dating, 50% (n=14); 1 (0.9%) student needs to be referred for treatment.

Library Science, Social Communication, Arts Education and Pedagogy showed no statistically significant results for interventions, although it is important to highlight that in Social Communication, 11.4% (n=5) students must receive intervention regarding the abuse use of alcohol, and in Pedagogy, 16.66% (n=8) must receive intervention.

Related to the use of *tobacco*, Administration was represented by 17.8% (n=19) students who need to receive intervention, with a mean age of 25.4 years ($\sigma^2=41.3743$; SD=6.4323), the majority, 68.4% (n=13) are men and 2.8% (n=3) need to be referred for treatment, with a mean age of 27.3 years ($\sigma^2=34.332$; SD=5.85), the majority 66.7% (n=2) are men.

In Biology, 17.0% (n=10) of the students need to receive intervention regarding the use of tobacco, with a mean age of 22.9 years ($\sigma^2=10.982$; SD=3.31), 50% (n=5) are women and 50% (n=5) are men, 40% (n=4) are single and 40% (n=4) are dating.

In Social Communication, 20.5% (n=9) of the university students must receive intervention due to tobacco consumption, with a mean age of 25.7 years ($\sigma^2=47.692$; SD=6.90), mostly are men, 55.6% (n=5) and 66.7% are single (n=6).

In the Industrial Design course, 20% (n=12) of the participants need to receive intervention, with a mean age of 21.2 years ($\sigma^2=8.382$; SD=2.89) and 75% (n=9) are men and 66.7% (n=8) are single.

In the Languages Education course, 24.8% (n=28) of the university students must receive intervention, with a mean age of 22.4 years ($\sigma^2=8.032$; SD=8.03), 60.7% (n=

17) are women and 50% (n=14) are single. In Pedagogy, 12.5% (n=6) must receive intervention.

Regarding consumption of other drugs, we observed that although it is not the majority of the students, and therefore, the numbers are not significant, there is a small percentage of students who need to receive intervention and referred for treatment.

Discussion

The present study has found that the rate majority with respect to marital status is composed of single who are or not dating, represented by 42.79% (n=187), unlike what was observed in another study, in which single segment represented 95.27% (n=262)⁽⁶⁾. This result may indicate that, in the studied IHE, the students go to college after a conjugal society, revealing profile peculiarities of that population, regarding this matter.

As to the place attended by the students, we observed that most of them usually go to parties⁽⁷⁾, which shows a trend among young Brazilians.

A study performed by a State University of São Paulo detected that the first university students' experience with alcohol occurred from 13 to 18⁽⁸⁾ and in this study the results had almost the same proportion, considering that the students had their first experience with alcohol from 13.2 to 17 years.

There was a significant percentage of students who often miss classes because they have made or are using alcohol during classes period, 22.65% (n=99), slightly less than that found in another study, where it was found that 35.7% of students often miss classes from one to three times in the last thirty days and 19% missed nine times or more, generally⁽⁹⁾.

Regarding the occurrence of licit drugs use the results of this investigation were similar to those found in another study in which alcohol and tobacco were stressed by excessive consumption by academic students⁽¹⁰⁾. Given the high consumption of alcohol and tobacco, 81 students must receive intervention, three need to be referred for treatment, 84 need to receive intervention and three need to be referred for treatment, respectively.

Social Communication presented a higher frequency of alcohol and other drugs, in which 24.8% of the students need to receive intervention regarding the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, as well as being the only course with statistical significance for marijuana use. Among the reviewed studies, there were no articles that addressed the use of alcohol and other drugs in a Social Communication course.

We verified in the researched articles that the highest rate of alcohol and other drugs is done by male students, although there are fluctuations with female or nearly equivalent rates of consumption, i.e., related to this consumption, women have a behavior quite similar to men⁽¹¹⁾. Another study conducted in 2009 also included that the use of alcohol and tobacco had percentages significantly higher among males⁽¹²⁾.

According to the results it appears there is not a relationship between academics who often miss school because they have used or are using alcohol at the time of the classes and those who responded that alcohol hinders them, since we observed that the majority of students (n=99) often miss classes, and the minority (n=68) admitted that alcohol hinders them, i.e., there is a significant number (n=31) of students who are harming themselves, but not consciously.

Due to the large number of students who need intervention or be referred for treatment, as observed in the present study, it is clear that the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are interfering in the students' lives, representing a high risk of addiction⁽⁸⁾.

The *ASSIST* proved to be a very effective screening test, useful and practical to intervene in relation to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs⁽¹³⁾, presenting the number of students who need to receive some type of intervention or those who need to be referred for specific treatment.

Final Consideration

The authors have found that most of the university students who use alcohol and other substances are men. However, some women participants also showed a high consumption, including in particular courses this rate is prevalent.

It was also possible to identify 221 students who must receive intervention due to abusive use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and that eight of them need to be referred for treatment. The results confirmed the *ASSIST* effectiveness in these cases.

We identified that the students had their first experience with alcohol in between 13.2 to 17 years; the higher consumption was licit drugs as alcohol and tobacco. In relation to illicit drugs marijuana had the higher consumption.

The authors believe that IHEs should develop actions in partnership with the Departments of Health, for health education and brief intervention sessions. The IHEs that have Health Undergraduate can benefit themselves due to produced intramural knowledge and human resources (students and teachers) to develop the actions.

The consumption of alcohol and other drugs is a reality in all society sectors and prevention should be organized, health promotion and some interventions in order to prevent more people from becoming addicted to psychoactive substances, which is increasingly growing with more negative impacts to human health and to the economy of the country.

The authors consider that working with themes related to the identification of psychoactive substances consumption among college students is quite challenging. It took a significant approach during data collection to clarify that the identification data would not be disclosed, so that there was adherence to participation. Nevertheless, many students have chosen not to participate in the

study, which explains the 40% of students enrolled in the participating courses.

For a further identification of alcohol and other drugs consumption study, the authors propose intervention to the participants through brief intervention sessions and/or motivational consultation.

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