

# Alcoholism – Epidemic of the Current Time after COVID-19 Pandemic (Letter to the Editor)

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## Abstract:

**Introduction:** Harmful consumption of alcohol has a serious impact on public health and is considered as one of the main risk factors for health damage and disease on a global level. Increased consumption of alcohol is dangerous at any age; however, a greater risk has been shown at younger age. For this reason, our research has been focused on the consumption of alcoholic beverages among adolescents.

**Objective:** We investigated the attitudes of students in relation to alcohol consumption.

**Material and methodology:** To obtain necessary information, we used existing available professional literature and a non-standardized questionnaire. For the defined research goal, we included in the research group older elementary school students and high school students. 272 respondents took overall part in the research. To test the hypotheses, we used Pearson's chi-

square test of independence, Student's t-test and one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA test - non-parametric version).

**Results:** The results showed significant differences in alcohol consumption between smokers and non-smokers of elementary school students and high school students. In the observed group, today's generation of young people and teenagers have almost equal experiences with alcohol, whereas boys have a slightly higher drinking frequency. We also confirmed the connection between the frequency of consumption of alcoholic beverages and smoking. Regarding prevention, girls perceive a higher prevention than boys, but the subjective rate of alcoholism prevention importance is not age related.

**Conclusion:** Of all the negative phenomena of modern human society, alcoholism is the most dangerous, due to its massive distribution. Therefore, prevention at primary level is to be taken seriously, which emphasizes a controlled consumption of alcohol. Considering the unfavorable statistical indicators of the increased alcohol consumption, especially in case of women, it is necessary to create long-term selective preventive programs.

## Introduction

*“A glass of alcohol hides all the happiness in the world and all the despair of not being able to achieve that happiness.”*

(Pierre Baudelaire)

The repeated trivialization of alcohol consumption, which is undeniably supported by the cultural tradition of our society, does nothing to change the fact that alcohol is still the number one drug in our conditions. Due to the influence of mass communication media and the influence of advertising, we are becoming more and more tolerant of alcohol abuse, which many parents, teachers, and professionals working with people of different age groups perceive as the lesser evil. Of all the negative phenomena of modern human society, alcoholism is the most dangerous, due to its mass distribution.

Every year, 4,000 Slovaks die because of drinking alcohol, and the reason for every third visit to the doctor is a disease that is a consequence of excessive drinking. Alcoholism has long been one of the leading causes of divorce rates and has a negative impact on violent crimes, injuries and traffic accidents.

### **Alcoholism as a medical and a social problem**

According to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), they are addicted from psychoactive substances mental disorders and di-

sorder behavior induced using psychoactive substances (1). The social and medical view of the problem of alcohol addiction was evolving gradually, the very concept alcoholism is today common and customary. In the past, alcoholism was considered more of a moral weakness, but today's modern medicine has named it as a disease.

In the 1980s, the term alcoholism was replaced by the term alcohol addiction syndrome(2). MKCH distinguishes the various syndromes caused by alcohol – diagnosis F:10. x, which in practice can be classified together. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports findings that excessive alcohol consumption is involved in more than 60 diseases and damages to human health. Most often there is: cancer; damage to the liver and pancreas; increased blood pressure; heart disease; disorders of a nervous system; negative influence on the potency and healthy development of a fetus. Psychological consequences and complications are not negligible, apart from the addiction itself, especially, depression as well as inclinations to committing a suicide. Alcohol is the most common risky factor, which could be prevented from damages to health and deaths of young people. It proved that the control of availability and offers of alcohol belong to between the most effective and financially the most effective approaches to restrictions of health damages in connection with alcohol (3).

## Incidence of Alcoholism in the Countries of the European Union

In February 2011, the World Health Organization published the results of a survey of alcohol consumption in the world in the years 2003-2005. In 2005, 6.1 liters of alcohol were consumed per person in the world.

Numerical data on alcohol consumption in the selected, total of 18 countries of the European Union, are set at the value of 1 liter of 100% alcohol, per person in a specific country, a state from the period of February and March 2009. From the presentation of the survey, it is clear that the lowest alcohol consumption is in Norway 5 l / person, followed by Sweden 6.71 l / person, Poland 8.26 / person, overall average value, Netherlands 9.45 l / person, Belgium 9.64 l / person, Finland 9.72 l / person, Great Britain 9.73 l / person, Spain 11.17 l / person, Denmark 11.3 l / person, Hungary 11.5 l / person, Croatia 11.98 l / person, Austria 12 l / person, Slovak Republic 12.11 l / person, Germany 12.54 l / person, France 13.54 l / person, Czech Republic 14.94 l / person, Ireland 15.8 l / person, with the highest value Portugal 16.59 l / person. Slovaks' annual consumption of alcohol per person is 10.3 liters, to which 3 liters of home-made alcohol must be added, which ranked us the 19<sup>th</sup> place.

The survey was aimed at residents of individual states aged 15 and over. Alcohol contributes

to 2.5 million deaths, annually. In Slovakia, this is the death of every 10<sup>th</sup> man. Slovakia suffers more from pure alcohol consumption than from drugs. In 2008, experts in Slovakia estimated 10,600 to 33,500 problem drug addicts and 433,000 people, i.e. 8% of the adult population, who have problems with alcohol. More than 3 million people died in the world in 2016 because of drinking too much alcohol, more than three quarters of these deaths concerned the male population. Currently, 2.3 billion people worldwide consume alcohol and according to WHO estimates, 237 million men worldwide have alcohol problems and 46 million women.

Europe leads in alcohol consumption per person, despite the fact that balance has decreased roughly by 10% since the year 2010. Current trends point to increasing global consumption of alcohol per person in following years, especially, in Southeast Asia, the Western Pacific, and both American continents. In Slovakia, according to the data of the Slovak Statistical Office, a slightly decreasing trend has been recorded of alcohol consumption per person since 1990. In 1990, consumption of pure alcohol per inhabitant of the SR per year was 10.4 liters and in 2015, it was 8.7 liters. Similar trends are also in the age categories of 15+ years and 18+ years. In the year 1990, recalculated consumption per person in the categories 15+ years she was 13.9 liters and in

**Chart 1** Consumption of alcohol in the selected countries of the EU according to the annually 100% alcohol drunk in liters.



(Source:<http://www.ipsos.cz/>)

age category 18+ years was 14.9 liters. In 2015, this consumption dropped to 10.2 liters at the age of 15+ and to 10.7 liters at the age of 18+ per year per inhabitant in the Slovak Republic. The data are derived based on the balance in manufactured alcohol method and illegal consumption is not taken into account (4).

From 2004 to 2008, a sharp increase in alcohol poisoning was recorded, especially among young people aged from 15 to 30, which was caused by the so-called binge drinking of alcohol. During this period, the number of people aged from 35 to 50, treated for cirrhosis of the liver, and people who voluntarily submitted to alcohol treatment increased. Excessive drinking of alcohol causes up to 60 physical diseases (5). Every 3<sup>rd</sup> visit to a general practitioner is related to excessive alcohol consumption. Activity reports of the outpatient clinic for drug addictions point to an increase in the number of examinations of alcoholics, which in 2003 accounted for 47.5% of all examinations.

In 2003, 19,374 alcohol addicts and 4,970 drug addicts were treated in drug addiction clinics. These figures also indicate that alcoholism in Slovakia is a serious social, societal and health problem for the entire society (6). It is estimated that between 5% and 10% of adult men and about 2% of adult women are addicted to alcohol (7). At the end of the Eurobarometer survey, published in March 2007, it is stated that: 25% of Slovaks did not drink alcohol in the last year; 5% drank daily; 29% drank once a week; 20% once a month.

The situation in Slovakia is as follows: 2/3 Slovaks have 1 or 2 drinks; 14% do not drink at all. As many as 75% of the respondents expressed the opinion that everyone is responsible for protecting themselves from the harmful effects of alcohol (8).

The consumption of alcoholic beverages in the Czech Republic also increased in 2012. According to the statistics of the CZSO, the average resident of the Czech Republic consumed 175.2 liters of alcohol per year, which is 6.4 liters more than in 2011. The largest increase in the consumption of alcohol from the assortment was recorded by beer, when its consumption increased by 6.1 liters year-on-year. The annual consumption of wine also increased 0.4 liters yearly. It stopped at a total volume of 19.8 liters per per-

son. The consumption of spirits, on the other hand, apparently thanks to the methanol case, fell by 0.2 liters to the final 6.7 liters per person. Beer accounts for 85%, wine 11%, and spirits 4% of the total volume of consumption of alcoholic beverages (9).

### **Reasons for Addition to Alcohol among Children and Youth**

Increased consumption of alcohol is dangerous at any age, but young people are at greater risk. In 2005, it was found that up to twice as many children regularly consume alcohol in Slovakia than in 1995. From 2000 to 2005, up to 131 severely intoxicated children were hospitalized in the Children's Faculty Hospital in Bratislava, with an average age of 14 to 15 years (TASR, 2005).

Risks of alcohol in children and adolescents according to Nešpor (2010): due to the fact that the weight is lower, alcohol is slowly absorbed and can lead to poisoning sooner; inhibitions are lost under the influence of alcohol; the tendency to take risks increases. Addiction rises at a young age more often than in adulthood; alcohol having a stronger effect on the psyche due to lower tolerance. Often people who had experience with alcohol in their youth also start experimenting with other addictive substances; there is a higher risk of intentional or unintentional harm to themselves or other people; as a result of drunkenness there is also a high risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy (10).

Since we are talking about young people, it is highly assumed that they attend school. Therefore, it should be noted that alcohol also disrupts the development of the brain, especially the white matter and the hippocampus, which is essential for memory. This can lead to learning difficulties. Furthermore, it can also affect growth retardation, hormonal disorders of girls and lower bone mass density of boys (11). In 2007, the Public Health Office of the Slovak Republic, the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Center published the results of research on the target group of respondents from 15 to 29 years of age, which show that 39.5% of respondents started drinking alcoholic beverages at the age of 15 or earlier. If parents do not drink, the number of respondents who have not tried alcohol increases. As many as 79% of respondents think that the legal norms, which are

supposed to protect young people from alcoholism, are not observed in the Slovak Republic (12).

### The Research Objectives

The objective of the research was to find the attitudes of pupils and students regarding consumption of alcoholic drinks. On the basis of the defined research, we formulated the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Gender of respondents influences the frequency of alcohol consumption.

**Hypothesis 2:** Smoking supports consumption of alcohol.

**Hypothesis 3:** The gender of respondents affects the subjective assessment of importance of alcoholism prevention at schools.

**Hypothesis 4:** The subjective measure of evaluation of the importance of alcoholism prevention depends on the age.

### Research Methodology

In order to reach the defined research objectives, we involved older pupils at primary schools and secondary schools. 272 respondents participated in the research. We processed the obtained data into a tabular database, from which we drew statistical data evaluation. To verify hypotheses, we used The Pearsons chi-square test of independence, Students t-test as well as one-factor analysis dispersion (ANOVA test–non-parametric version).

### Demographic Data

Out of a total of 272 respondents, 137 boys and 135 girls participated in the research. The composition accordingly were the total number of those involved respondents from the perspective of type schools is 18.8% of pupils at primary schools, 24.9% of students at secondary grammar schools and 57.3% of students at vocational secondary schools.

Another demographic question we ascertained - the age of the respondents. The youth who participated in the research were from 14 up to 20 years of age. Other characteristics of the age-related research and a gender-related research are listed in Table 2.

For further evaluation of the obtained data, we divided the research participants according to the age into 3 groups: 14-15-year-olds, 16-17-year-olds and 18-20 year-olds. We did not create a separate group of 20 year olds as only 3 respondents, 2 boys and 1 girl participated in the re-

**Table 2** Division of Respondents according to Age

Characteristics according to age	The boys	The girls	Total
	Age in years		
Average Age	17.31	16.73	17.02
Medium Value File (MEDIAN)	18	17	17
The most numerous occurrence (MODE)	18	17	18
Marginal Values	14-20	14-20	14-20

**Table 1** Division of Respondents According to Gender

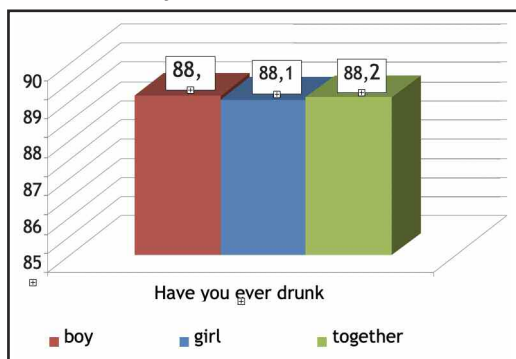
Gender	Total	Primary School	Secondary Grammar School	Secondary School	Total	Primary School	Secondary Grammar School	Secondary School
	frequency				percentage ratio%			
Boys	137	18	23	96	50.4	35.3	35.4	61.5
Girls	135	33	42	60	49.6	64.7	64.6	38.5
Total	272	51	65	156	100	100	100	100

search in this age category. In terms of the correctness of the evaluated results, it is so low that the number in the group is not representative, therefore, we merged these respondents with the planned one group of the age between 18 and 19. Division of respondents according to the age related to gender is documented in the column Graph 2.

**Graph 2**

It illustrates the percentage of pupils and students, divided by gender, who have already been drunk at least once in life. The data found are balanced and show that gender parameter practically does not affect the alcohol consumption.

**Graph 2** Percent of age of students who have already drunk alcohol



Next, we searched the ratio of respondents who have already been drunk. 64.7% of all research participants have already been drunk. 65.2% of interviewed boys and 66.7% of girls at grammar school have already experienced being drunk. In vocational secondary school drunkenness is reported by 81.3% of boys and 65.0% of girls. The situation is different at primary schools, where 38.9% of interviewed boys and 27.3% school girls have already experienced drinking alcohol.

The frequency with which young people consume alcohol has a lot to say about young people's approach to alcohol; their life priorities; the way they spend their free time. Descriptive statistical evaluation is in Table 3. The more significant difference between the sexes is in the groups of frequent consumption, 5.1% of boys and 1.5% of girls consume alcoholic beverages several times a week. Daily consumption was reported by 3 male respondents but no female, which corresponds to 1.1% of the total number of respondents. The largest group for both boys and girls are consumers in the group 1 to 6 times a year. 70.8% of the interviewed boys and 80.7% of the girls consume alcoholic beverages never or at most once a month.

**Table 3** Frequency of Alcohol Consumption

	Boys			Girls			Total		
	n	%	Cumulative	n	%	Cumulative	n	%	Cumulative
never	20	14.6	14.6	21	15.6	15.6	41	15.1	15.1
1to 6 times a year	47	34.3	48.9	57	42.2	57.8	104	38.2	53.3
Probably once a month	30	21.9	70.8	31	22.9	80.7	61	22.5	75.8
2 to 3 times a month	21	15.3	86.1	15	11.1	91.8	36	13.2	89.0
Probably once a week	9	6.6	92.7	9	6,7	98.5	18	6.6	95.6
several times a week	7	5.1	97.8	2	1.5	100	9	3.3	98.9
Almost daily	3	2,2	100	0	0.0	100	3	1.1	100
Total	137	100		135	100		272	100	

n - absolute frequency, % - relative frequency

### Hypothesis verification

**Hypothesis 1:** Respondents' gender affects frequency of alcohol consumption.

The results obtained by evaluating the questionnaire survey are worrying from the point of view of the effective fight against adolescent alcoholism. Among the pupils and students of the participating schools, 88.3% of boys and 88.1% of girls have experience drinking alcohol. 73.0% of the interviewed boys and 58.3% of the girls had already experienced drunkenness in their lives. 29.2% of boys and 19.3% of girls consume alcohol at least several times a month. Consumption several times a week was reported by 5.1% of boys and 1.5% of girls. From the analysis of the frequency and percentage distribution of the frequency and frequency of alcohol consumption, we can conclude that, from the point of view of gender, today's generation of young people and adolescents has almost equal experiences with alcohol, boys have a slightly higher drinking frequency.

**Table 4** Results testing for verification Hypotheses 1

Characteristics Chisquare test independence	
count degrees freedom	6
borderline Value	12.54
testing Value	7.7658
p-value	0.00048
F-test	0.54673

The calculated test value of 7.7658 is less than the Chi-square distribution table value of 12.59. The probability of the null hypothesis determined by the p-value of 0.00048 is low and based on this result we reject the null hypothesis. At the significance level of 95%, the alternative hypothesis is valid. A low value of the F-test result indicates a mismatch of variances of the dependent variable. The stated results indicate a weak dependence. Nevertheless, based on the described findings, we can conclude that the dependence of the frequency of consumption of alcoholic beverages by young people by gender was confirmed in the monitored group.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant difference in the frequency of alcohol consumption between smokers and non-smokers.

In the evaluated group of young people, only 13.3% were smokers, 23.7% were occasional smokers and up to 63.0% were non-smokers. Compared to the large group of relatively regular alcohol drinkers, the proportion of smokers among pupils and students is therefore small. In the presented hypothesis, the smoking category is an independent nominal variable, the dependent variable, the frequency of alcohol consumption, is specified by frequency. We verified the hypothesis statistically using the Chi-square test at a significance level of 5%.

**Table 5** Results testing for verification Hypotheses 2

Characteristics Chi square test independence	
count degrees freedom	12
border line Value	21.03
Testing Value	49.9011
p-value	5.5E-15

The calculated value of 49.9011 is greater than the table value of 21.03 based on this result we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. The true p-value calculated from the Student's t-distribution is significantly lower than the chosen level of significance. The test result at the 95% level showed significant differences in alcohol consumption between smokers and non-smokers. In the monitored group, the dependence of the frequency of consumption of alcoholic beverages on smoking was confirmed, which most likely promotes alcohol consumption among young people.

**Hypothesis 3:** The gender of the respondents affects the subjective evaluation the importance of preventing alcoholism in schools.

The results obtained by processing data on the gender of the respondents and their subjective evaluation of the importance of alcoholism prevention are processed in Table 6:

**Table 6** Division of Frequency to Hypothesis 3

Rating Importance	the boys			the girls			together		
	n	%	Cumulative	n	%	Cumulative	n	%	Cumulative
very important	31	22.6	22.6	30	22.2	22.2	61	22.4	22.4
more likely important	47	34.3	56.9	45	33.3	55.5	92	38.8	56.2
I do not know	29	21.2	78.1	39	28.9	84.4	68	25.0	81.2
more likely useless	12	8.8	86.9	10	7.4	91.8	22	8.1	89.3
useless	48	13.1	100	11	8.2	100	20	10.7	100
Total sum	137	100		135	100		272	100	

n - absolute frequency, % - relative frequency

According to the data in the table, the differences between boys and girls are practically not negligible. In the studied data set, the category gender is an independent nominal variable, the dependent variable, the evaluation of the importance of prevention, is a nominal ordinal variable expressed on a 5-point scale. Since these are nominal variables, we will use the non-parametric Pearson's Chi-square test at the 5% significance level for testing.

**Table 7** Results testing for verification Hypotheses 3

Characteristics Chisquare test independence	
count degrees freedom	4
Borderline Value	9,488
Testing Value	3.38741+
p-value	0.05519
F-test	0.74764
t-test	0.90891

A high value of a 2-tailed t-test with equal variance (0.90861) indicates a statistically insignificant difference in means between groups. The results of statistical testing of the obtained data show that Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed in our research set. Girls perceive the importance of prevention more than boys. We have to state the

fact that the results of our research did not demonstrate with sufficient significance the influence of gender on the subjective personal assessment of the importance of prevention against alcohol among adolescents.

**Hypothesis 4:** The subjective measure of evaluating the importance of alcoholism prevention is related to age.

We will evaluate the influence of the age parameter on the subjective expression of the degree of importance of organizing preventive programs and activities. This is the relationship of an ordinal variable and a cardinal scaled variable. For verification, we used a one-factor ANOVA test. The results obtained by data processing are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8** Results testing for verification Hypotheses 4

Characteristics one-factor ANONA test	
Factor-count degrees of freedom	2
Error-count degrees freedom	269
Total variability	403.99
Error variability	409.5
F-value	1,812
p-value	0.16535



The calculated probability p-value (0.16535) is higher than the determined

level significance level of 0.05 and therefore, the agreement of the mean values in the groups cannot be rejected. Differences between age groups cannot be considered statistically significant. The subjective rate of assessment of the importance of alcoholism prevention is not related to age.

## Discussion

Alcohol is an insidious substance. Culturally and socially accepted, even celebrated, but from a chemical and physiological point of view clearly poisonous and addictive (13). Increased consumption of alcohol is dangerous

at any age, but young people are at greater risk. The youth themselves generally present themselves as sufficiently informed about the harmful effects of alcohol and the danger of addiction, but the results of long-term surveys regularly confirm negative trends in the consumption of legal and illegal drugs. This raises doubts in society about the sufficiency of prevention in schools, about its quality and effectiveness.

The results of our research also related to the issue of alcohol consumption by teenagers and the issue of alcohol addiction prevention in schools. 272 senior elementary school students and students of various types of secondary schools were included in the research group. The results of the research confirm that young adolescents often have to deal with the consequences of high levels of alcohol consumption, and at least some of them directly belong to the at-risk part of the population in relation to alcohol or other addictive substances.

Therefore, it is indisputably important to properly educate young people in the process of forming, as well as effective and targeted prevention of substance addictions.

In 2006, a survey was conducted in Slovakia to estimate the number of problem drinkers and alcohol-dependent individuals among adolescents aged 15 to 19 using the ADS scale. According to the results of this scale, 65,000 young people would be problem drinkers. While stating that around 18,000 young people would have physical manifestations of alcoholism (14). Based on the results, a high prevalence of alcoholism in these young people can be assumed at

an older age. Also, a representative study conducted by the Federal Ministry of Health in Germany provided information according to which about 3% of the population over the age of 18 are addicted to alcohol (1.5 million) and 5% (3.5 million) are at risk of alcohol addiction.

Alcoholism will always occur in society. It would be naive and unrealistic to strive for the complete elimination of these socially pathological phenomena, but even so, we must take steps and thus fight for the prevalence of alcoholism among the adolescent population. The most important measure against the emergence of these socio-pathological phenomena is already rooted in early childhood, where through education we show the child that there is also a healthy way of life. It is also necessary to introduce appropriate measures to reduce the occurrence of these cases, not only through legislative amendments related to the issue of: inadequate sanctions, regulation of advertising of alcoholic beverages in the media. But also to actively carry out and support education, counseling of the youth and adult population (15).

## Conclusion

The results of regular surveys at the national and international levels still point to an unfavorable development in alcohol consumption not only among adults but among children and youth. Therefore, the fight against alcoholism and the creation of various forms of strategy in the prevention of alcohol consumption are still relevant. It turns out that upbringing in the family has a fundamental influence on the development of an attitude towards alcohol and its consumption. Prevention at the primary level is particularly important, which emphasizes the controlled consumption of alcohol in view of cultural acceptance in our environments. Taking into account, the unfavorable statistical indicators of the increase in alcohol consumption, especially, on the part of women, it is necessary to create long-term selective preventive programs. The most critical moment in the attitude towards improving health is insufficient information, or insufficient knowledge of broad sections of the population (16).

Providing information about the consumption of alcoholic beverages in the least harmful way (principle of harm reduction) is recommended for experimenting adolescents. Preventive services

at the secondary and tertiary levels have their historical background and are carried out at a highly professional level in our territory (17).

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