

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Frequency of Alcohol Use among Year 1 University Students and Its Affecting Factors

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Main Points

- More than one-third of students have consumed alcohol.
- The age of first alcohol use has been determined as 9. Intervention programs need to be initiated at the basic education level.
- The gender norms and family role modeling in alcohol use increase the risk of alcohol use among young people.

Abstract

In most of today's societies, alcoholic beverages are seen as a routine part of the social environment. It is overlooked that alcohol is an addictive psychoactive substance and constitutes a significant global disease burden. It is known that adolescents constitute the most risky group in society in terms of starting addictive substances. The aim of this study was to determine the prevalence of alcohol use and the factors affecting it among first-year students of a university in Türkiye. The population of the descriptive cross-sectional study consisted of 9050 first-year students. The sample size was calculated as 955. Nine hundred eighty-one students participated. Of the participants, 39.4% stated that they had tried an alcohol product at least once, and 14.9% stated that they were still using it. Male gender of the student, previous or current employment, higher education level of the mother, and having alcohol users in their families were found to be factors that increased the risk of alcohol use ($p = .001$; $p = .000$; $p = .000$). The determination of the age of alcohol experimentation as 9 shows that intervention programs need to be brought down to the basic education level. The gender norms and family role modeling in alcohol use increase the risk of alcohol use among young people. First of all, campaigns should be organized to raise public awareness that alcohol use is not a part of social participation and that it is not only a harmful habit but also an addiction. Multi-stakeholder studies should be carried out involving university students who are in the age group with the highest usage rate.

Keywords: Alcohol, university, students, gender, social participation

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Introduction

Alcoholic beverages are commonly consumed as a regular part of social interactions in today's societies. They are often seen as a way to socialize and are a common aspect of cultural, religious, and social customs. Approximately 50% of adults worldwide have consumed alcohol in the past year. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that worldwide, 55.5% of the population over the age of 15 has experienced alcohol use, ranging from 5.1% (Eastern Mediterranean Region) to 83.1%

(American Region). The usage level in the European region is 76.4% (WHO, 2018). In Türkiye, the alcohol use rate in the population >15 years is 5.9% for females, 18.4% for males, and 12.3% in total (Turkish Statistical Institute [TUIK], 2022).

The fact that alcohol is an addictive psychoactive substance and causes a significant global disease burden is largely ignored. It causes more than 200 health problems, such as cardiovascular and liver diseases, cancers, infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and HIV, as well as injuries following traffic



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accidents, violence, and suicide. Alcohol use can lead to toxicity in various organs, alcohol-induced psychological problems, and health/social harms following intoxication. A significant number of alcohol-related disease and injury risks have been coded in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems - 10th Revision (ICD-10) (Rehm et al., 2017; WHO, 2018).

Agreements are being made to remove “obstacles” to the international trade of alcohol by supporting it as a commercial product. This makes it difficult to develop control programs at the international level. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations aim to provide a fair and sustainable future for all people by 2030. Article 5 of SDG 3 is defined as “strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance use, including the use of narcotic drugs and the harmful use of alcohol.” The fact that a separate title was allocated to alcohol is an indication that the harmful use of alcohol is considered a problem to development (WHO, 2018).

It is known that in terms of addictive substance use commencement, adolescents constitute the most risky group in society. It is common for people to try addictive substances to cope with stressful events (Sütlü et al., 2021). It is reported that heavy alcohol drinking worldwide occurs especially in the university years, which include young adults aged 20 – 24 (Nasui et al., 2021; Riordan & Carey, 2019). Alcohol use is generally accepted in the university, and this environment may even become supportive of alcohol use commencement. The first year of university is considered a period of increased risk. This is because people often leave home and go to other cities and join new circles of friends. In this context, it is important for awareness and protection studies to be carried out in universities, especially at the first-year level.

An important step for preventive studies is determining the frequency of substance use and identifying the psychological, social, and economic factors that lead to alcohol use commencement (Emre et al., 2015). By determining the frequency of alcohol use among students as well as the risks that facilitate its use, it is possible to plan preventive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services. The research is valuable because it is aimed only at 1st-grade students, conducted with the participation of students from all departments, involves a large sample, and stands out from other studies. It will be possible to plan, implement, and evaluate preventive measures by determining the current usage status and effective factors. This study aimed to determine the frequency of alcohol use and its affecting factors among University 1st-year students.

Material and Methods

The data for this descriptive cross-sectional study was collected online between December 2022 and February 2023. This study included 12 faculties, 7 colleges, and 15 vocational schools. The study population consisted of 9050 1st-year students. Since there was no previous prevalence study at our university, the prevalence of alcohol use was accepted as 50%. Accordingly, using the EpiInfo program and taking into account the prevalence of 50%, a 3% margin of error, and a 5% type 1 error, the number of students representing the population was calculated as 955. Considering the possibility of not participating in the research,

1500 students were selected through randomization. The students selected for the sample were informed about the survey content via text message. Participation in the survey was requested on a voluntary basis. All students who answered the survey were included in the research, and no exclusion criteria (comorbid disease, etc.) were applied. Access to the survey was provided electronically through the University’s Distance Education Center System. A total of 981 students answered the questions.

Data Collection Tool: The questionnaire consisted of questions examining sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, income status, employment status, whether there is any loss of school year, parents’ education) and alcohol use characteristics (alcohol use in the family, temporal characteristics of the student’s alcohol experience). It was developed by the researchers.

Data Analysis: Data collection forms were analyzed based on frequencies, percentages, and averages using the IBM SPSS version 23.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) package program. Descriptive statistics were presented as number, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum values. The Chi-square test was used in analytical evaluations. Any value of $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant. In order to determine the reasons that facilitate alcohol use, the variables found to be significant in univariate analyses were used to create a model on which a logistic regression analysis was done.

Ethics Committee: Ethics committee permission for the project was received from the University Non-invasive Clinical Research Ethics Committee (GO 2022/954). At the beginning of the survey, the participants were informed about the research, and informed consent was obtained.

Results

A total of 39.4% of the participants stated that they had tried an alcohol product at least once, and 14.9% stated that they still continue to use it. The average students’ age was 21.6 ± 4.4 (min = 18max = 57) and 63.1% were girls. About 31.7% stated that they had lost a school year. The average age for alcohol experience was determined as 17.83 ± 2.3 (min = 9, max = 25). The students’ alcohol use experiences are shown in Table 1.

The Chi-square test was applied to determine the effects of the students’ sociodemographic characteristics on alcohol use (Table 2). Male gender, being previously or currently employed, insufficient income, high education level of the mother and father, and alcohol use in the family were found to be factors that increase the risk ($p = .000$; $p = .000$; $p = .011$; $p = .017$; $p = .000$). Independent variables with statistically significant differences were included in the logistic regression analysis. Male gender, being previously

Table 1.
Distribution of Alcohol Use Duration

Alcoholuse Duration	n	%
Alcohol used	387	39.4
Last 12 months	310	31.6
Last 30 days	143	14.6
Still using	146	14.9

Table 2.
The Effect of Students' Sociodemographic Characteristics on Alcohol Product Use

Independent Variables	Use of Alcohol Product					
	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Total n (%)	Chi-Square	p	
Sociodemographic characteristics						
Gender	Male	177 (48.9%)	185 (51.1%)	362 (100%)	21.294	.000
	Female	210 (33.9%)	409 (66.1%)	619 (100%)		
Missing academic year	Yes	134 (43.1%)	177 (56.9%)	311 (100%)	2.510	.065
	No	253 (37.8%)	417 (62.2%)	670 (100%)		
Employment	Employed before/currently employed	249 (50.8%)	241 (49.2%)	490 (100%)	53.533	.000
	Not employed	138 (28.1%)	353 (71.9%)	491 (100%)		
Income level	Not sufficient / only sufficient	320 (41.3%)	454 (58.7%)	774 (100%)	5.613	.011
	Sufficient	67 (32.2%)	140 (67.6%)	207 (100%)		
Paternal education	More than 8 years	202 (36.5%)	352 (63.5%)	554 (100%)	4.748	.017
	8 years and under	185 (43.3%)	242 (56.7%)	427 (100%)		
Maternal education	More than 8 years	237 (35.0%)	441 (65.0%)	678 (100%)	18.363	.000
	8 years and under	150 (49.5%)	153 (50.5%)	303 (100%)		
Alcohol use in the family	Yes	168 (71.5%)	67 (28.5%)	235 (100%)	131.894	.000
	No	219 (29.4%)	527 (70.6%)	746 (100%)		
Total		387 (39.4%)	594 (60.6%)	981 (100%)		

or currently employed, the mother's high level of education, and the presence of alcohol users in the family were determined as factors that increase the risk of alcohol use ($p = .001$; $p = .000$; $p = .000$) (Table 3).

Discussion

A total of 39.4% of the students stated that they had tried an alcohol product at least once, and 14.9% stated that they still use it. Studies conducted with university students in Türkiye showed that the alcohol consumption rates of the students vary between 16.9% and 76%. (Alaçam et al., 2015; Ay et al., 2024; Emre et al., 2015; Erdal et al., 2013; Havaçeliği Atlam & Yüncü, 2017; Koca & Oğuzöncül, 2015; Korkmaz et al., 2013; Ulukoca Neşe et al.,

2013; Ünal Belgin & Ergör Gül, 2013). Other studies conducted worldwide showed that the alcohol consumption rates of university students are between 25% and 68.8% (Musyoka et al., 2020; Osei-Bonsu, 2017; Reznik et al., 2019).

The rates vary depending on the department, city, and the students' current class of study; it was reported that alcohol use in the first year is lower than in the other classes (Alaçam et al., 2015; Nasui et al., 2021). Since our study is aimed at first-year students, it is lower than the data from studies including university students.

Alcohol use is affected by gender, the countries' economic situation, lifestyle preferences, and religious and cultural norms.

Table 3.
Binary Logistic Regression Analysis Results Including Factors Affecting Alcohol Use among 1st Year University Students

Independent Variables	B.	SE	Wald Test	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Interval	p	
Gender	Male	.406	.156	6.810	1.501	1.106 – 2.036	.009
	Female					Reference	
Student's employment status	Employed before/currently employed	.950	.154	38.239	2.584	1.913 – 3.492	.000
	Not employed					Reference	
Mother's education level	More than 8 years	-.485	.177	7.478	.616	.435 – .872	.006
	8 years and under					Reference	
Alcohol use in the family	Yes	-1.846	.174	112.452	.158	.112 – .222	.000
	No					Reference	

SE: Standart Error. Any value of $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant.

Worldwide, it is known that women consume less alcohol than men. In studies conducted among university students, being male is an important risk factor for alcohol use (WHO, 2018) (Alaçam et al., 2015; Emre et al., 2015; Havaçeliği Atlam & Yüncü, 2017; Htet et al., 2020; Korkmaz et al., 2013; Musyoka et al., 2020; Nasui et al., 2021; Ndegwa et al., 2017; Oppong Asante & Kugbey, 2019; Osei-Bonsu, 2017; Neşe et al., 2013; Ünal Belgin & Ergör Gül, 2013; Wicki et al., 2010) The findings obtained in our study are consistent with those in the literature in terms of the high risk of alcohol use in men (OR: 1.501; $p = .009$). It is known that boys have a higher addiction risk due to gender roles. Substance use is considered a sign of masculine behavior and courage (Pollard & Hyatt, 2009; Sezgin, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that addiction is one of the most important examples of the negative reflection of gender on men's health. Although biological sex is an unchangeable risk factor, it should not be forgotten that it is possible to transform gender perceptions.

It was determined in our study that the risk of addiction was higher in students with a family history of alcohol use than in those without (OR: 0.158; $p = .000$). Family can be both a protective and risk-increasing factor for all addiction kinds (Sütlü & Kutlu, 2024). Parents are role models in the growth and development of their children. There are many publications showing that parents' alcohol use behavior increases the risk of their children trying alcohol (Ajayi et al., 2019; Bo et al., 2018; Bohm & Esser, 2023; Erdal et al., 2013; Atlam & Yüncü, 2017; Htet et al., 2020; Ndegwa et al., 2017; Newton et al., 2017; Oppong Asante & Kugbey, 2019). Alcohol use in the family can make it easier for the children to access alcohol and therefore increase their risk of trying it. One of the theories that explains addiction is the social learning theory, and it defines addiction as a set of learned behaviors. Bandura's social learning theory argues that people can be influenced by each other through observation, teaching, and/or modeling, and therefore their environments, such as family and home environment, contribute to the exhibition and maintenance of problematic behaviors (McLeod, 2016). The literature and data obtained from our study support this theory. In addition, if a role model consumes alcohol, the behavior can be normalized, and this makes it easier to access alcohol (Dijkstra et al., 2001).

Children of mothers with more than 8 years of education have a higher level of alcohol experience than those of mothers with lower education levels. There are studies reporting that as the education level of the mother increases, the risk of young people experiencing alcohol increases (Erdal et al., 2013; Melotti et al., 2011; Nazir & Thabassum, 2022; Neşe et al., 2013). As the education level increases, the mothers' participation in business and social life increases. Studies have reported that alcohol use increases among women as their occupational prestige and level of education increase (Ames & Rebhun, 1996; McKetta & Keyes, 2020). As the level of education increases, the possibility of a woman working in prestigious jobs also increases. Women exhibit male-like behaviors such as smoking and alcohol use, especially when trying to prove their presence in the business world. While women's use of alcohol is culturally frowned upon and unacceptable in rural and low social classes, this is considered normal in environments with high social status. The social status of women who are educated and have high economic income also increases.

Alcohol use by mothers who are role models can also affect their children.

It has been determined that those who are currently employed and those who stated that they have been previously employed have a higher risk of alcohol use than those who have never been employed. There are studies reporting that young people with work experience have a high risk of trying alcohol (Reznik et al., 2019; Sütlü et al., 2021; Wicki et al., 2010; Zhu et al., 2019). Young people prove that they are "adults" by using alcohol in work environments where older people are present. They may experiment with alcohol to adapt to their new social environment. Earning additional income also makes it easier to access alcoholic beverages that were previously unavailable due to economic reasons. A study reported that people who earn extra income from daily jobs increase their alcohol use (Arıcı & Yaman, 2021).

Our study is limited in terms of representing the whole since our research was conducted at a single university with first-year students and volunteers. Alcohol use is a preventable public health problem that continues to have a global impact. Studies conducted at universities show that alcohol use rates are quite high. Alcohol is considered a habit; it is not seen as an addictive substance due to its cultural acceptance as a means of socialization. This is an obstacle to the fight against alcohol use. First of all, campaigns that teach alcohol use is not a part of social participation and that it is an addiction rather than a harmful habit should be organized to raise public awareness. Multi-stakeholder studies should be conducted, including university students who are in the age group with the highest usage rate.

Our research was conducted among first-year university students, and it was found that the minimum age of alcohol trial was 9 years old. This shows that efforts to combat alcohol use should start at the primary education level. The male gender appears to have an increased risk of alcohol dependence. Discussions about gender's negative effects on health tend to prioritize the female gender, but the fact that being a man increases the risk of using cigarettes, alcohol, and substances can be ignored. Also, the alcohol consumption behaviors of mothers are often taken as an example by their children. It is observed that the level of alcohol use level is high among people who have to work while being students. In order to attain the complete well-being included in the WHO definition of health, ensuring economic well-being, which is one of the social determinants of health, will also contribute to protection from addictions.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Ethics Committee Approval: This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Mehmet Akif Ersoy University (Approval No: 2022/954, Date: 7.12.2022).

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from the students who agreed to take part in the study.

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