

CHEERS OR CONCERNS? PEER INFLUENCE ON ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NOVI SAD

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Background: Young people represent a key population in the context of alcohol use, often experimenting with this substance. The aim of the study is to assess the association between peer influence and alcohol consumption and binge drinking among first- and second-year university students in Novi Sad.

Methods and Objectives: The study was conducted as a cross-sectional study among students of the University of Novi Sad in 2019, as part of the project “Health behaviors of students: benefits and risk” funded by the Provincial Secretariat for Higher Education and Scientific Research. A total of 664 students participated (456 first-year and 208 second-year) from 13 faculties. An online questionnaire with electronic consent was distributed to students after lectures. Alcohol consumption was categorized based on daily alcohol unit consumption. The association between peer influence and alcohol consumption and binge drinking was analyzed using the Chi-square test.

Results: Around 4% of students (3.8%) believe that, due to peer influence, they drink more alcohol than they would otherwise, with a higher prevalence among young men (7.0%) compared to girls (2.4%) ($p<0.001$). Among male students who said that they always drink more due to peer influence prevalence of heavy drinking (92.3%) and binge drinking (85.7%), was significantly higher than among students who said that friends don't influence their drinking (41.7% and 51.7%, respectively) ($p<0.001$). Also, female students who always drink more due to the influence of friends reported higher levels of heavy drinking (81.8%) and binge drinking (72.7%), compared to those who stated that peer influence does not affect their drinking habits (34.9% and 38.0%) ($p<0.001$).

Conclusions: The findings of this study indicate that negative peer influence is associated with increased alcohol consumption and more frequent binge drinking among students in Novi Sad

Keywords: Alcohol Drinking, Binge Drinking, Young Adult, Peer Influence, Students