

I ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE - WHY BOTHER?

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Abstract:

The main causes of death in young males are accidents, in some countries even violence. This highest risk is associated with binge drinking, i.e. consumption of alcohol in significant quantities, with the purpose of getting drunk. Young age drinking suggests strongly that unhealthy lifestyles are about to be established, not only with drinking. The risk for habituation and dependency, and even toxic damage to bodily organs is high. The earlier a person establishes drinking habit, the higher the risk for alcohol related problems. If the adult society demonstrates caution with alcohol, and keeps consumption low, it is likely that young people will do the same. This is a nice illustration of how the over-all consumption level of alcohol in a society, to a large extent determines the incidence of harm in the same society. Individuals are different, and some are definitely more vulnerable than others.

Keywords: alcohol, young, risk factor, society.

The main causes of death in young males are accidents, in some countries even violence. Most incidents of this type are not fatal, but may still have grave consequences for the victims. This also goes for similarly frequent health risks in female youth, where sexual harassment is a typical example. Drinking or use of drugs is more often than not a complicating issue in such cases, sometimes on one side, but frequently both in the delinquent and the victim. Figures differ greatly from one country to another, but it is safe to say that consumption of alcohol and other drugs is a major risk factor in young people throughout Europe.

This highest risk is associated with binge drinking, i.e. consumption of alcohol in significant quantities, with the purpose of getting drunk. This is a pattern well known all over the world, in some countries a pattern which has been maintained for generations, in other a relatively modern phenomenon.

In addition to the immediate risk connected with intoxication, early onset of drinking habits increases the risk of long term damage. Young age drinking suggests strongly that unhealthy lifestyles are about to be established, not only with drinking. The risk for habituation and dependency, and even toxic damage to bodily organs is high. The earlier a person establishes drinking habit, the higher the risk for alcohol related problems.

The statements above are true, in spite of the fact that the majority of young people are little or not affected. Studies among college aged youngsters in the US suggest that many do not drink at all or less than six times a year. For persons like this, the greatest risk is the behaviour of other people, who might be drunk, or eventually the one occasion when he or she let the hair down.

The high risk group is a minority, although a relatively large one (20 - 30 % of the young population?) There the incidence of health damage and embarrassing situations is relatively high. Students who establish frequent drinking habits while they are minors (12 - 15), have at least three times as high consumption when they reach maturity (18) as the average. It seems that young people are pretty vulnerable, which calls for community action to protect them.