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## Alcohol consumption among university students: The case of Ondokuz Mayıs University

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### ABSTRACT

The consumption of alcohol has become more common worldwide, including among university students, due to easy access, liberal environment for drinking, low level of parental control, social equality and peer group pressure. This study analyses the factors affecting alcohol consumption by university students in Turkey. The purpose of the research was to understand how the students habituated to consuming alcohol, especially by evaluating social activities, cultural and social norms in drinking patterns. The research data were collected from 384 students who answered questionnaires at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun Province, Turkey. The Chi-square test was used to analyze the data. The study showed that socio-demographic factors, namely age, gender, marital status, idols' using alcohol, household size, household income, accommodation, parental drinking status, residential area and smoking, were statistically significant factors for alcohol consumption and therefore played an important role in alcohol consumption by students. This study showed that public and non-governmental organizations should organize programs to educate students about harmful drinking, and also future decisions about student's alcohol consumption can be renewed by the laws.

### Keywords:

Alcohol consumption  
Social-demographic factors  
University students  
Turkey

## Üniversite öğrencilerinde alkol tüketimi: Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi örneği

### ÖZET

Alkol tüketimi; sosyal eşitlik ve akran grubu etkisi, yetersiz aile kontrolü ve çevre şartları nedeniyle üniversite öğrencileri de dâhil olmak üzere dünya çapında yaygın hale gelmiştir. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'de üniversite öğrencilerinde alkol tüketimini etkileyen faktörler analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı, öğrencilerin özellikle sosyal aktiviteleri, kültürel normları ve tüketim yapısındaki sosyal normlarını değerlendirerek alkol tüketmeye nasıl alıştıklarını analiz etmektir. Araştırma verileri, Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesinden 384 öğrenciyle yapılan anketlerden elde edilmiştir. Verilerin analizinde Ki-kare testi kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada; öğrencilerin yaşı, cinsiyeti, medeni durumu, idolün alkol kullanımı, hanehalkı büyüklüğü, hanehalkı geliri, öğrencinin barınma yeri, ailelerin ikamet ettikleri yer, ebeveynlerin alkol tüketim durumu ve öğrencilerin sigara kullanım alışkanlıkları gibi sosyo-demografik faktörlerin alkol tüketiminde istatistiksel olarak önemli olduğu ve bu nedenle öğrencilerin alkol tüketiminde büyük rol oynadıkları tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları, öğrencileri zararlı olan alkol kullanımı konusunda eğitmek için, kamu ve sivil toplum kuruluşları tarafından programların yapılması, ayrıca öğrencilerin alkol tüketimiyle ilgili gelecekteki kararlarının yasalar tarafından kontrol altına alınması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

### Anahtar Sözcükler:

Alkol tüketimi  
Sosyo-demografik faktörler  
Üniversite öğrencileri  
Türkiye

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## 1. Introduction

The consumption of alcohol is common worldwide, including among university students. The consumption of alcoholic beverages such as Turkish raki, beer and wine is an important part of Turkey's food culture and celebration of special events such as New Year, Valentine's Day, student graduation and wedding parties by students. However, drinking to excess is not only harmful to health, but also creates problems and social issues such as violence, child neglect and abuse, and absenteeism in the workplace (Ramstedt, 2002; Tse, 2011; WHO, 2011). Almost 4% of all deaths worldwide are attributed to alcohol consumption, being higher than deaths from violence, tuberculosis or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) (WHO, 2011). In many studies, heavier alcohol consumption and alcohol abuse were observed among male university students (Pedrosa et al., 2011; Abayomi et al., 2013).

Risky alcohol consumption among young people, particularly students, is becoming a key public health priority because of its important consequences for health and education among those aged 15-29. The use of alcohol among young people accounts for more than 10% of the overall burden of disease and injury (WHO, 2004; Lorant et al. 2013; Johnston et al., 2015). The consumption of alcohol is a lot commoner among students than the public, particularly among college and university students. The number of drinkers of alcoholic beverages is increasing, not only in Turkey but worldwide day by day, due to easy access, liberal environment, low level of parental control, social conformity and peer pressure (Wu & Meng, 2014). Students who live apart from their families, with roommates, living alone or in a shared house with other students, are more likely to use alcohol (Burns et al., 2016). The three general types of motives for drinking quoted by college students are for social purposes or camaraderie, emotional escape or relief or tension reduction (Bear, 2002), and mood enhancement (Cronin, 1997). The most common reasons given for alcohol use were for social purposes and partying or celebration; male students were more likely to consume alcohol for relaxation, excitement and social reasons, while female students tended to drink for celebratory purposes and its taste (Griffiths et al., 2006). The prevalence of alcohol use was 40,6% among Nigerian university students (Abayomi et al., 2013). Similarly, across students enrolled at four universities in Slovakia, 41% of students drank alcohol at least once a week (Sebena et al., 2011). In England, 65% of female and 76% of male students reported heavy episodic drinking. This number for both male and female students in New Zealand was 81% (El Ansari et al., 2013), with male students more likely to use alcohol (Pedrosa et al., 2011; Trkulja et al., 2003).

The consumption of alcohol has negative effects on students and causes a lot of problems such as; psychosocial, economical, educational, antisocial activity, car accident and suicide. In order to reduce these problems, in 2013, the Turkish government passed laws limiting retail licenses between 10 pm and 6 am, and banning student dormitories, health institutions, sports clubs, educational institutions and gas stations to sell alcohol. In Turkey, the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages is restricted to persons 18 and over. A new law introduced in January 2011 banned the sale of alcohol at various events to persons under 24 years of age, rather than 18, as was previously legislated. However, the ban was lifted by the courts in May 2011 (Surrett, 2013; Revolvu, 2017).

The consumption of alcohol is prohibited in Islam (Martin, 2014). At only 1.5 liters/year, Turkey has the lowest per capita alcohol consumption rate in Europe, with 83% of the population not consuming alcohol. Furthermore, the current Turkish government is trying to reduce the consumption of alcohol among young persons.

It is not only Turkey that is seeking to reduce the consumption of alcohol by the young generation; in 1984, the United States Congress encouraged each state to enact a minimum legal age of 21 years for the purchase of alcohol (Toomey et al., 1996). On the other hand, most European countries have a minimum purchase age of 18, while a few (such as Italy and Malta) have a purchase age of 16 (Ellul, 2008). In recent years there has been a movement towards raising the minimum age to 18 years to bring them into line with other countries. In 2002, cities such as Madrid, Valencia and the autonomous region of Catalonia raised the minimum age for the purchase of alcohol to 18 years. In 2004, Denmark raised its off-premises purchase age from 15 to 16 years. In 2009, France raised its minimum purchase age from 16 to 18 years. In 2009, the government of Malta passed a new law raising the drinking and purchase age from 16 to 17 years (Consumer Rights Guide, 2017).

This study analyzed the factors affecting alcohol consumption by students at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun, Turkey. The purpose of this research was to understand how the students become accustomed to consuming alcohol; we especially evaluate social activities, culture and social norms in drinking patterns.

## 2. Material and Methods

The sample size of the study was estimated as 384 by using the ungrouped one-stage random likelihood sampling method, as presented by Cochran (2007). Data were collected from students who answered questionnaires at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun Province, Turkey in 2018. Descriptive statistics and the Chi-squared test of independence were used to determine whether significant associations existed

between alcohol consumption and the demographic characteristics of the students.

### 3. Results and Discussion

According to survey results, the students' average age was 21 years. The majority of participants (54.2%) were female. Of the students, 17.2%, 27.6%, 25.5% and 29.7% were in first, second, third and fourth year in university, respectively. The average household size of students was 4.6 persons. Regarding the place of the family residence, 60.2%, 31.5% and 8.3% of students' families lived in the city, district and village, respectively. Moreover, the average monthly household income was \$3604.9.

A majority of students (62.5%) lived at their family house or apartment and 37.5% lived in a dormitory with 3-4 roommates. The number of students living in a house or apartment was higher than in a dormitory, a situation that is probably due to the more liberal environment e.g., easy access to bars and places where alcohol can be purchased, less strict rules, and access to night activities, including involvement in traditional student folkloric activities.

The survey also revealed that 54.9% of students were smokers and that they were more likely to drink alcohol. The percentage of non-drinking students (52.6%) was higher than drinking students (47.4%). Turkish society is based on strong family relationships, family values, respect for family and community norms that shape behavior and these factors are likely to influence the decision as to whether to consume alcohol or not. In contrast to the students, only 19.8% of students' fathers and only 4.7% of their mothers use alcohol, which suggests that other factors also influence personal decisions regarding alcohol consumption (Table 1).

Table 1. The consumption of alcohol and cigarettes by students

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student using alcohol		
Yes	182	47.4
No	202	52.6
Father using alcohol		
Yes	76	19.8
No	308	80.2
Mother using alcohol		
Yes	18	4.7
No	366	95.3
Smoking tobacco		
Yes	211	54.9
No	173	45.1
Idol's using alcohol		
Yes	92	44.9
No	113	55.1

In Table 2, a Chi-square test of independence was used to examine the difference between the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and alcohol consumption. On average, the students had their first drink at the age of 16, and as their average age increased, the percentage of drinking alcohol also increased. The current study showed that 63.2% of the older students and 40.9% of younger students drink alcohol ( $P<0.01$ ). Of the male students, 71.2% drink alcohol, as opposed to 30.7% of female students ( $P<0.01$ ). These results reflect the restrictive norms that apply to the consumption of alcohol by women in Turkish culture. In Brazil, the USA and across several European countries, male students also consumed alcohol at a higher frequency than females and alcohol abuse was observed in male university students (Pedrosa et al., 2011; Trkulja et al., 2003; Stock et al., 2014). As well as the age of students, as students spent each additional year at the university, the percentage of drinking alcohol increased, possibly because each year students made new friends and had social activities, small gatherings and parties, but the Chi-Square test result was not statistically significant ( $P>0.05$ ). Separately, students living in smaller households were more likely to consume alcohol than those in larger households ( $P<0.01$ ). Results also revealed that the students whose parents were divorced were more likely to consume alcohol than students whose parents were not divorced ( $P<0.05$ ).

It has been reported that the children of parents who consume alcohol are more likely to drink alcohol than the children of non-drinking parents (Grant & Dawson, 1997). In the present study, the proportion of students who consume alcohol whose parents also drink alcohol was higher than the proportion of students who drink but whose parents do not drink alcohol; 81.6% of students whose fathers drink alcohol also drink alcohol. Results showed that there was a positive and statistically significant association between the father's use of alcohol and the student's use of alcohol ( $P<0.01$ ). A similar result was found between the student's use of alcohol and the mother's alcohol use ( $P<0.01$ ).

In addition, students who smoke were more likely to use alcohol than non-smokers ( $P<0.01$ ). This result is quite similar to Turkish studies by Bilgic et al (2009) and Akbay and Kafas (2017). The residential area of the family was also a significant factor in the consumption of alcohol; the students living in the city were more likely to consume alcohol than those whose families live in districts and villages, probably due to a more liberal lifestyle and easy access to alcohol. Furthermore, household income impacted on the consumption of alcohol and it was statistically significant ( $P<0.05$ ). Students from households with higher incomes were more likely to consume alcohol than students from households with lower income. Table 2 shows that the percentage of drinking students living in a house or apartment was higher than for

dormitory students, presumably due to the less strict environment allowing easy access to alcohol from various outlets and social environments that encourage drinking. On the other hand, all of the students were not allowed to drink alcohol in the dormitory. The results showed that more students living in student houses consume alcohol than students living in dormitories ( $P<0.01$ ).

Whether or not the student has an idol who drinks

alcohol also affects alcohol consumption. França et al. (2010) reported that 56% of French students overestimated the prevalence of heavy episodic drinking behavior in their peers. Moreover, among European university students, 72% of male and 51% of female students consumed alcoholic drinks with their peers (Stock et al., 2014). According to this research, students whose idols used alcohol were more likely to consume alcohol; 88.9% of students whose idols drink alcohol also consume alcohol more properly ( $P<0.01$ ).

Table 2. The factors affecting alcohol consumption of students

	Not consuming alcohol (%)	Consuming alcohol (%)	Chi-Square	P-Value
Age				
<20	59.14	40.86		
20-21	49.37	50.63	11.332	0.003
≥22	36.84	63.16		
Gender				
Male	28.85	71.15		
Female	69.32	30.68	62.632	0.000
Class				
First year	54.55	45.45		
Second year	51.89	48.11		
Third year	45.92	54.08	4.5666	0.206
Forth year	40.35	59.65		
Household size				
≤4	34.12	65.88		
5	54.37	45.63	41.761	0.000
≥6	77.14	22.86		
Marital status				
Married	47.94	52.06		
Divorced	22.73	77.27	5.282	0.017
Idols' using alcohol				
Yes	19.57	80.43		
No	64.60	35.40	41.668	0.000
Father using alcohol				
Yes	18.42	81.58		
No	54.55	45.45	31.906	0.000
Mother using alcohol				
Yes	11.11	88.89		
No	49.18	50.82	9.973	0.001
Smoking tobacco				
Yes	27.96	72.04		
No	71.10	28.90	70.945	0.000
Area of family residence				
City	41.13	58.87		
District	56.20	43.80	9.245	0.010
Village	59.38	40.63		
Household income				
Lower Income	56.59	43.41		
Middle Income	46.34	53.66	7.818	0.020
Higher Income	39.39	60.61		
Accommodation				
House/apartment	37.08	62.92		
Dormitory	64.58	35.42	27.299	0.000
Work status				
Not Working	48.99	51.01	3.443	
Working	33.33	66.67		0.064

#### 4. Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that socio-demographic factors, such as age, gender, marital status, idols' using alcohol, number of household members, parental status, parental drinking status, family area of residence, smoking, household income and accommodation type were statistically significant factors and therefore played an important role on alcohol consumption among the students at a Turkish university.

The students who lived apart from their families, with roommates, living alone or sharing a house with other students, were more likely to drink alcohol than students who lived with their family or in dormitories. The students stated that the most common reasons why they consumed alcohol were for social activities and party celebrations, the relief of anxiety, relaxation from the stress of family or daily life problems, and because their parents drink.

The excessive consumption of alcohol has negative effects on students by causing economic, educational, environmental health problems, antisocial behaviour, and increased risk of injury, self-harm and suicide. In Turkey, there are no laws and regulations related to the purchase alcohol, except for age, but its consumption is controlled by society for fear of health problems, religious and economic reasons, social and family pressure, fear of addiction and tradition. Thus, the government should consider taking a more important role in efforts to reduce the consumption of alcohol among students, especially male and underage students. Moreover, this research provides information about students' use of alcohol that can be included in the making of future decisions about alcohol laws. Also, public and non-governmental organizations should organize programs to educate students about harmful drinking, rather than only the suppression of drinking.

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