

ALCOHOL ABUSE AMONG YOUNG POPULATION IN THE TAQUARI AND RIO PARDO VALLEYS

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INTRODUCTION: Excessive alcohol consumption represents a major public health challenge, driven by complex social factors and associated with significant clinical consequences. **OBJECTIVE:** To enhance the understanding of alcohol abuse, particularly among young adults. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** A self-administered questionnaire designed by the authors was distributed via social media platforms in the form of a Google Forms® survey. The inclusion criteria targeted individuals aged 18 to 35 years, residing in the municipalities of the Taquari and Rio Pardo Valleys. The study was approved by the Univates Research Ethics Committee (approval no. 7.048.494). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. **RESULTS AND CONCLUSION:** A total of 175 individuals participated in the survey, with 150 meeting the inclusion criteria. Among these, 98.7% reported having consumed alcohol at least once, with an early onset of drinking: 32.8% started between the ages of 11 and 14, and 58.9% between 15 and 17. The primary factors influencing early alcohol consumption included peer pressure, social settings such as bars and parties, family dynamics, and easy access to alcohol. While the majority of respondents (49.7%) reported consuming alcohol only on special occasions, the frequency of binge drinking was concerning. One-third of participants indicated they had been intoxicated more than five times, a pattern historically associated with higher risks of traffic accidents, violence, health complications, and other social issues. Most respondents (60.9%) reported avoiding alcohol while taking medication, and 31.9% based this decision on the type of medication they were using. However, 7.2% reported continuing alcohol consumption even when on medication. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions involving healthcare professionals, community leaders, and policymakers to reduce and regulate harmful alcohol consumption, particularly among young adults. Additionally, understanding the social influences and behavioral patterns behind alcohol use is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies that address both the behavior itself and its underlying causes.