

Young people who go out drinking start earlier and consume more and more alcohol, Spanish study shows

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Young people who go out drinking start earlier and consume more and more alcohol. Credit: Olmo Calvo | SINC

Teenagers and university students are unaware of the negative consequences of alcohol consumption or the chances of developing an addiction as a result. In addition, they start at a younger and younger age and drink more and stronger alcohol according to a study headed by the University of Valencia.

Current drinking trends amongst Spanish youth are characterised by what is known as botellón or drinking in the streets. Researchers at Valencia's universities, Miguel Hernández de Elche and Jaume I de Castellón, have conducted a study funded by the Spanish National Drugs

Plan identifying the different types of alcohol consumers and defining the profiles of each. It has been published in the '*The Spanish Journal of Psychology*'.

"The general [tendency](#) is to think that university students drink more alcohol than [teenagers](#) as they are older and can access it more easily. But this is not true. Males in secondary school and university drink the same amount of alcohol while practicing botellón. The same is the case for females," as explained to SINC by Begoña Espejo Tort, lead [researcher](#) of the study at the University of Valencia.

The scientists gathered data from 6009 [youngsters](#) between the ages of 14 and 25 from 2007 to 2009 in three Spanish cities (Valencia, Castellón and Alicante). For the study they selected those who reported episodes of intensive alcohol consumption.

According to results, males drink more and aim to get drunk yet they associate their [alcohol intake](#) with the possibility of developing an [addiction](#) to a lesser extent than [females](#).

"We have observed that university students progressed to drink more alcohol. When they were [adolescents](#) they drank less alcohol and then more when reaching university. Nonetheless, today's adolescents drink the same amount as university students," outlines Espejo.

What will happen to these adolescents in a few years?

If intake levels for secondary school and university students of the same sex are similar, this means that when [secondary school](#) students reach the age of 20, the consequences will be much greater than those seen amongst current university students. The expert highlights that this will have negative repercussions "on their studies, their work, and personal relationships and their finances."

"Nearly all adolescents who consumed alcohol started at around 13 or 14 years of age by drinking distilled alcohol (drinks with high alcohol content) in large quantities. On the other hand, university students started between 14 and 15 with fermented drinks like beer in relatively low quantities," confirms the expert.

Furthermore, adolescents allude to personal aspects to justify their alcohol intake whereas university students link their drinking to control of leisure.

That said, the main reason for alcohol consumption in both groups is to have fun. Espejo explains that "drinking is the objective. Only university students mention financial reasons. Almost 70% of students refer to financial reasons for practicing botellón compared to 20% of adolescents.

The consequences are not understood

As for the consequences associated with alcohol consumption, neither youngsters nor university students are aware of the consequences. The same can be said for those who drink a lot or those who drink less. They only take into consideration those consequences that repeatedly appear in television campaigns, like those relating to drink driving and personal relationship problems due to aggression. They are also only aware of the immediate physical consequences like vomiting, dizziness, falling over and hangovers, etc.

In general, youngsters feel that their alcohol consumption will have no [negative consequences](#). They believe that for this to occur they would have to greatly increase their alcohol consumption. This, however, does not imply that the problem does not already exist but rather that it is not recognised," concludes the researcher.

The authors of the study warn of the need to take action amongst these groups to reduce and change [alcohol consumption](#). In the case of the youngest, who refer to confidence reasons when justifying why they drink alcohol, campaigns on self-esteem and interpersonal relationship management should be reinforced. For [university students](#), education on leisure habits is the key.

More information: Begoña Espejo, María Teresa Cortés, Beatriz Martín del Río, José Antonio Giménez, and Consolación Gómez. "Traits that Define the Different Alcohol Intensive Consume Type during the Practice of 'Botellon'. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology* 15 (1): 256-264, 2012.

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