



Letter to the Editor

# Alcohol abuse in teenagers and its repercussions in environments, health, and society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Abuso de alcohol en adolescentes y sus repercusiones en ambientes, salud y sociedad durante la pandemia de COVID-19.

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**Abstract:** Alcoholism is caused by the excessive consumption of substances with alcoholic content. The consumption of this legal substance occurs frequently in the adolescence; from this point, the patient tends to increase the consumption excessively. As a result of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and due to lockdown, the tendency to consume alcohol in greater quantities is increased. In this paper, a general review is presented about the increase of alcoholism throughout pandemic. It is important to give special interest on patients with behavioral problems already predisposed, which could develop post-traumatic stress and physiological disturbances due the sickness. The COVID-19 pandemic has not been transitory, even though effective vaccines have been already produced; therefore, new symptoms of alcoholism and abuse of other substances are appearing around the world population. So far, research is being carried out to determine alcohol consumption in a sample of university students, from their adolescence and during confinement.

**Keywords:** Alcoholism; COVID-19; pandemic.

**Resumen:** El alcoholismo es causado por el consumo excesivo de sustancias con contenido alcohólico. El consumo de esta sustancia legal ocurre con frecuencia en la adolescencia; a partir de esto, el paciente tiende a aumentar el consumo en exceso. A raíz del impacto de la pandemia de COVID-19 y debido al confinamiento, se incrementó la tendencia a consumir alcohol en mayor cantidad. En este artículo se presenta una revisión general sobre el aumento del alcoholismo a lo largo de la pandemia. Es importante prestar especial interés a los pacientes con problemas de conducta ya predispuestos, que podrían desarrollar estrés postraumático y alteraciones fisiológicas debido a la enfermedad. La pandemia de COVID-19 no ha sido transitoria, a pesar de que ya se han producido vacunas efectivas; por lo tanto, nuevos síntomas de alcoholismo y abuso de otras sustancias están apareciendo alrededor de la población mundial. Hasta el momento, se están desarrollando una investigación para determinar el consumo de alcohol en una muestra de estudiantes universitarios, desde su adolescencia y durante el confinamiento.

**Palabras Clave:** Alcoholismo; COVID-19; pandemia

### Letter to the Editor

Nowadays, ethanol is probably the most widely consumed and abused legal drug [1,2]. Even that ethanol is a psychoactive and very addictive substance, it is very affordable and accessible. Due to the simplicity to be synthesized (which easily occurs in the nature), ethanol has been consumed during the evolutive history of humans [3]. This historical selection for the consumption of ethanol, plus other diverse important factors, has conducted to the expression of alcoholism as a clinical syndrome [3]. It is not news that alcoholism is a prevalent disease, but it is important to analyze the increase of alcoholism during the lockdown of the current coronavirus pandemic which started on December of 2019 (the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, SARS-CoV-2) [4–6]. In this regard, the concern is the long-term effect of this new increasing tendency, especially if alcoholism is increasing disproportionately during current pandemic. For example, it has even predicted some years ago that abuse of substances would impact on the mental health of the people [7]. Even more, there is a high possibility of psychological impact on the world population after the pandemic, even four years after the pandemic [8]. It is important to note that people who have been exposed to the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) in 2002–2003 show post-traumatic stress and psychological disturbances [9].

As the social, environmental, and personal factors are involved in the development of alcoholism, the use of alcohol by teenagers is probably the most alarming concern regarding the increase of alcohol consumption during the present pandemic [10]. Since the family plays the strongest role in the social sphere, the family could be the first responsible in sharing alcohol with teenagers. Thus, the communication and trust between parents and children is of great importance to diminish this social factor involved in alcoholism development, especially because of the occurrence that teenagers consume ethanol for the first time hidden from their parents. The environmental factor refers to the exposition of the teenagers to advertisings, television shows, internet, and even social media that promote the consumption of alcohol. Furthermore, a lot of news and trends dealing on wars, natural disasters, terrorism, and diseases have been associated with an increase in the rate of alcohol consumption and abuse [11].

For an adult this is a difficult subject to deal with, now is necessary to think about teenagers. The present pandemic will surely influence the behavior of individuals since the beginning of the pandemic until a few years later; so, persons with alcohol problems will remain in the consumption for a longer period of time [11]. People addicted to substances generally belong to marginalized groups [12] that do not have access to quality health care services; thus, they are part of the population at high risk of being infected with SARS-CoV-2 and, in the worst scenario, they are at high risk of dying. For this reason, the world health organization (WHO) proposes to promote a change focused on the teenager environment instead of focusing directly on the adolescent as the problem [13].

Alcoholism is a worldwide chronic disease, which leads the patient to lose control over drinking; but it is not only a health problem, but a social, political, and economic problem [14]. Definitely, present pandemic turn alcoholism into an opportunity area for the health system in every country. As alcohol consumption and abuse is currently in increase during this pandemic, alcoholism could be manifested more intensely in the decision-making of teenagers [14]; hence, the entry of teenagers into the use of other illicit drugs is a possibility, which could have greater consequences at a behavioral and physical level, thus becoming in a worldwide major health problem [15]. The Epidemiological Surveillance System of Addictions (*Sistema de Vigilancia Epidemiológica de las Adicciones*, SISVEA) of México informs that 43% of the population that uses other drugs than ethanol, began precisely consuming alcohol [16]. SISVEA also reports that only a small part of them remains as a single user, that is, consuming only alcohol, and that there are individuals that consume a second substance of abuse along with alcohol [16]. In other countries,

statistically speaking, the pandemic caused several admissions to the emergency unit, where 25% of patients were attended with alcoholic intoxication and a total of 17% were teenagers [17]. Other analysis shows that 34.7% of a studied sample increased alcohol consumption during the lockdown [18]. All those analyses confirm the prevalence in an excessive consumption of alcohol, and that an important part is related to teenagers.

The impact of alcohol consumption is definitively high, but it is fortunately preventable. It is necessary to use all the information already available for decision-making, which enables a more adequate balance between the purely commercial interests and short-term profitability with the interests of public health and long-term benefits for the entire society [19]. It is important to consider the health of teenagers, since the future of any nation will depend on them. Prevention is the most important tool, since with this, fewer adolescents will fall into the use of substances, especially alcohol abuse. In this way, the number of fatalities and the presence of future liver diseases in patients can be reduced [20]. In conclusion, and one of the possible aggravating factors for the increase in cases of alcoholism in the world population in general, and not only in adolescents, is an imminent economic crisis for this year, since due to the low economic activity during the confinement and coupled with the conflicts between some nations, this is expected to start a new economic depression. This very likely generates negative behaviors related to substance use, especially alcohol in young adolescents, even more so in those who have some predisposition.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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