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*Youngsters with alcohol problems*

Problems connected with alcohol among youngsters have increased in Poland in the past years. According to the State Agency of Prevention of Alcohol Related Problems in Poland the number of young people drinking alcohol has been raising each year, while the number of teetotallers has gone down (10). At the same time there is decrease in age of alcohol initiation.

The limitation considering age of buying alcohol and its consumption differs even among countries of the European Union. In the majority of those countries age limit for buying alcohol is the age of 18, in USA and Lithuania – 21 years, at the same time in Germany, Austria, Belgium, France (8), Hungary and Switzerland – 16 years. In Greece and Portugal there is no such a limitation.

Many of the studies underline the correlation between social and environmental factors and alcohol usage among adolescents (3, 5, 6). Basically they are bound with attitude of the close social environment of adolescents and on the other hand, with general situation in their families.

Experiments with alcohol are taken up as part of the teenagers growing up process by societies of Europe and North America (7, 9).

The literature analysis of abusing alcohol by youngsters and showing the problems connected with it are the aim of the paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted by State Agency of Prevention of Alcohol Related Problems in Poland in the year 2003 has found rapid increase in consumption of high voltage alcohols in comparison to last years. It means that there has been rotation of the trend into changes of high voltage alcohols to beer. 78% of girls and 97% of boys from vocational schools had drunk alcohol for the very first time at the age of 11–15; the difference between sexes in secondary schools and technical schools was more visible (44% girls and 72% boys).

In almost half of European countries there was noted an increase in the percentage of drinking pupils 3 times or more in the last 30 days before conducting the study – the highest dynamics of changes was in Poland, Slovenia, Ireland, Denmark and Great Britain (in 1995 in Poland this percentage was 11% and in 1999 – 31%) (2).

There was noticed an increase in beer consumption among Polish youngsters: during the past 4 years at about 60% raised the number of youngsters drinking at least 1 liter of beer during last occasion (in 1995 – 12% and in 1999 – 19%). Besides this increase among Polish pupils (16-years-old) regarding the frequency of drinking beer (3 times or more during the last 30 days) they are located at the 12<sup>th</sup> position (39%) among youngsters from other countries; in Denmark and Czech Republic this ratio is higher by 50% (64%, 59%). The lowest percentage of beer consumers is in Hungary (12%), USA (16%) and Macedonia (16%). Polish girls locate in the middle of the table with score of 19%; this percentage is twice lower than that of Danish girls or in Greenland, who are located at first positions (42%, 43%) respectively (2).

The highest percentages of wine drinkers have been noticed on Malta, where 1/3 of pupils have been drinking wine 3 times or more during the last 30 days before the study. The score about 17–22% was shown in Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia, and the lowest one (4–6%) on Sheep Islands, in Greenland, Island and Norway and also in Portugal. Almost in the half of those countries the majority of wine consumers were boys, in many countries there were no statistically significant differences between sexes.

The most surprising data concern the comparison of percentage of youngsters drinking vodka (3 times or more during the last 30 days). Boys from Poland locate at the 27<sup>th</sup> position (13%), and girls at last 30<sup>th</sup> location (4%). Vodka was for many years Polish traditional alcoholic liquor: this result confirms, noticed in the last few years, changes in alcohol consumption model among citizens of Poland. The highest ratio of frequent consumption of alcoholic liquors was noticed on Malta (boys – 43%, girls – 45%), in Denmark (40%), Ireland (34%) and Great Britain (32%). It is surprising that in the last two mentioned countries – Ireland and Great Britain – the number of girls drinking vodka is more than 60% higher than the number of boys (boys – 26%, girls – 40%).

The youngsters who were binge drinking can experience many different personal consequences, such as problems at school, suspension or expelling from school, troubles with friends, health problems, sexual contacts without prevention or aggression.

Alcohol abuse may also cause the probability of being involved in high risk sexual contacts, aggressive behaviour, youngsters may be victims or perpetrators of sexual violence. We underline those consequences, because they can have important and chronic results, including venereal diseases, unplanned pregnancy, having conflicts with law or living in “emotional depression” after rape.

About 1/3 people at the age of 18–24 from emergency units were under alcohol abuse. Binge drinking often binds with homicides, suicides and drowning. The connection between alcohol abuse and dangerous driving is well known. About half of all fatal accidents among people at the age of 18–24 result from alcohol abuse; many of dead people were students. Alcohol may release driver reaction, influence concentration, and disturb pedestrian’s reaction.

The researchers indicate that prevention programs at school should be complemented not only by programs based on family, but also on societies and political strategies (1).

## CONCLUSIONS

1. According to the studies, people who drink in Primary School will be drinking even more in Secondary and High School.
2. Prophylactic programs by education about alcohol and encouraging being teetotaler should be sent to youngsters at the age of 9–12.
3. Prevention programs should involve family and political strategies which would change social and cultural attitude and in consequence decrease substantially alcoholism.

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### SUMMARY

Problems connected with alcohol among youngsters have increased in Poland in the past years. The limitation considering age of buying alcohol and its consumption differs even among countries of the European Union. In almost half of European countries there was noted increase in the percentage of drinking pupils 3 times or more in the last 30 days before conducting the study – the highest dynamics of changes was in Poland, Slovenia, Ireland, Denmark and Great Britain (in 1995 in Poland this percentage was 11% and in 1999 – 31%). The negative consequences of binge drinking may concern at the same time youngsters abusing alcohol as well as people from the closest circle. The youngsters, who abuse alcohol, may experience many personal consequences such as difficulties at school, suspension or expelling from school, troubles with friends, health problems, sexual contacts without prevention or aggression. Young people can become victims or perpetrators of sexual abuse. We underline those consequences, because of their distal consequences, e.g. venereal diseases, unplanned pregnancy, conflicts with law or emotional depression after rape. The results of the studies prove that prevention programs which should educate children in the subject of alcohol abuse and supporting being a teetotaler should be directed at children at the age of 9–11.

### Młodzież z problemami alkoholowymi

Problemy związane z nadużywaniem alkoholu wśród młodzieży stały się bardziej nasilonym zagadnieniem w ostatnich czasach w Polsce. Ograniczenia wiekowe dotyczące wieku kupujących i spożywających alkohol różnią się nawet w obrębie państw Unii Europejskiej. W prawie połowie państw europejskich zanotowano wzrost odsetka uczniów pijących alkohol trzy razy lub częściej w przeciągu ostatnich 30 dni przed przeprowadzonymi badaniami – największy dynamizm zmian był zauważalny w Polsce, Słowenii, Irlandii, Danii oraz w Wielkiej Brytanii (w r. 1995 w Polsce odsetek ten wynosił 11%, a w r. 1999 – 31%). Negatywne konsekwencje upijania się do nieprzytomności mogą dotyczyć zarówno samych nadużywających alkoholu, jak i ludzi z najbliższego otoczenia. Młodzież pijąca dużo może doświadczać wielu różnych konsekwencji osobistych, jak utrata roku nauki, trudności w nauce, wypadnięcie ze szkoły bądź studiów, problemy z przyjaciółmi, problemy zdrowotne, kontakty seksualne niechciane lub bez zabezpieczenia. Nadmierne spożycie alkoholu może również zwiększać prawdopodobieństwo zaangażowania się młodych ludzi w seks wysokiego ryzyka, a poprzez agresywne zachowania mogą się oni stać sprawcami lub ofiarami nadużyć seksualnych. Podkreślamy te konsekwencje, ponieważ mogą one mieć ciężkie, długotrwałe reperkusje, włączając zachorowanie na chorobę weneryczną, niechcianą ciążę, popadnięcie w konflikt z prawem lub życie w „emocjonalnym dołku” spowodowanym przez gwałt. Wyniki badań wskazują, że programy prewencyjne, które powinny wdrażać wiedzę na temat alkoholu wśród dzieci oraz wspierać abstynencję, powinny być skierowane do dzieci w wieku od 9 do 11 lat.