



Drinking wine to “get high”: The influence of awareness of the negative effects among young adults

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In a group of university students, the current study investigated the relationship between drinking wine to get high and the awareness about its characteristics, composition, positive and negative effects on health. **Methods:** Through a web-based survey, 1685 students at the University of Siena completed a self-report questionnaire to assess consumption behaviours, knowledge about wine and the awareness about its effects. **Results:** Seventy-three percent reported drinking wine. Males were more frequently wine consumers ($p = 0.037$). Among the students who reported drinking, 69.3% engaged this habit during the weekend. Almost 12% reported drinking wine to get high. Drinking wine to get high correlated with the consideration of its consumption: using this beverage to get high was strongly associated with considering wine like other spirits ($p = 0.033$). **Conclusions:** Older age, female gender, and considering wine as a part of the diet were found to be protective factors against wine drinking-to get high. In contrast with some literature, awareness of the negative effects correlated with higher propensity to use wine to get high. Potential interpretations and limitations are addressed.

1. Introduction

Consumption of alcohol is widely spread among young people. Drinking alcohol is a socially and culturally accepted behaviour, although it is one of the most dangerous drugs and it has a strong ability to induce physical dependence (Nutt, King, Saulsbury, & Blackmore, 2007). The number of young people drinking alcohol has increased constantly over the last few years. In 2016 in Italy, almost the half of the young adults aged 18–34 years old consumed alcohol out of the meals, and during 2015 2.5 every 1000 young individuals aged 20–34 died for abuse of alcohol (Italian Council of Statistics, 2018).

Most of the research about alcohol use among young people focused on a series of individual and ecological factors related to interpersonal relationships and the social environment (Pons & Buelga, 2011; Vantamay, 2009). Psychosocial models assumed that the causes of abuse of alcohol should not only be sought in the individual characteristics of the abusers but also in the social framework they belong to and in the relational models they follow (Francalanci, Chiassai, Ferrara, Ferretti, & Mattei, 2011; Mallett, Bachrach, & Turrisi, 2009).

This evidence is consistent also for wine use and abuse, although

drinking wine represents a sort of cultural lifestyle. Literature highlighted the positive effects of this beverage on health (Artero, Artero, Tarín, & Cano, 2015) and the diffuse perception that drinking wine is healthier than other alcoholic drinks (Chang, Thach, & Olsen, 2016; Saliba & Moran, 2010; Vecchio et al., 2017; Yoo, Saliba, MacDonald, Pranzler, & Ryan, 2013).

Some scholars explored the changes in young people's behaviours related to alcohol and wine consumption (Atkin & Thach, 2012). These behaviours are characterized by a high consumption of beer, spirits, and wine aimed at a rapid achievement of drunkenness (Atkin & Thach, 2012; Marinelli et al., 2014; Valentine, Holloway, & Jayne, 2010). A generation of youngsters identifies alcohol and wine as a mean to get high, especially during the weekend (Chiassai, Ferrara, Francalanci, Ferretti, & Mattei, 2010; Maggs, Williams, & Lee, 2011), deleting each benefit correlated to a moderate consumption of wine.

Conversely, few studies examined the association between alcohol use and the awareness of the users about what they are drinking and its effects. Beck and Summons (1986) explored the relationship between alcohol consumption and sources of information among high school students; findings highlighted that users consistently reported that their

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own experience was their best source of information. A group of college students was recruited by Park (2004) to assess the motivations for their choices on the consumption of alcohol, reporting that young people experienced more positive than negative consequences and that such experiences influenced their future decisions about drinking alcohol. Similar findings were reported in the study of Park and Grant (2005). More recent research underlined that the so-called “Millennials” do not rely their decisions about consumption on the quality of the product, but on the label imagery and alcohol content (Atkin & Thach, 2012).

Some research investigated the role of alcohol expectancies across demographic and cultural variables, including gender and age (Montes et al., 2017). Some studies reported gender-related differences in alcohol expectancies showing greater positive reinforcement expectancies in women (e.g., Lundahl, Davis, Adesso, & Lukas, 1997), whereas other studies show men to report greater positive reinforcement expectancies (Brown, Goldman, Inn, & Anderson, 1980). Findings have been similarly mixed for negative reinforcement expectancies: some studies have found men to report greater tension reduction expectancies (e.g., Rohsenow, 1983), whereas other studies have failed to demonstrate such a relationship (O’Hare, 1990). Some authors investigated alcohol expectancies in different age groups, hypothesizing that, since expectancies about the effects of alcohol may change as drinking experience is accumulated, it could be that the association between alcohol expectancies and drinking differ with age (Leigh & Stacy, 2004). It has been reported that positive expectancies predicted drinking better than negative expectancies only among younger respondents (aged under 35), while negative expectancies were a better predictor of drinking in most older respondents (aged over 35 years) (Leigh & Stacy, 2004).

Little is known about the influence of information on wine drinking behaviours, not even on the awareness that alcohol users have about the effects and the characteristics of the drink they are assuming. The term “awareness” was used instead of “information”, because the former implies a higher level of consciousness that should be able to drive the consumers’ choices.

Starting from these points, the aim of this study was to investigate in a group of university students the relationship between drinking wine to get high and the level of awareness about the characteristics of this beverage, its composition, its positive and negative effects on health.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study design and participants

During July 2016, a sample of 1685 students registered at the University of Siena (Italy) was enrolled in a research project named “Wine: a glass for your health”. The sample was collected through a web-based self-report survey, which used the online platform of the University (LimeSurvey). At the end of the survey, a group composed by 15,625 students registered within 7th August 2016 (10.8% of the population) responded to the web-survey. The resulting sample was representative of the population according to gender and age. Seventy-seven respondents were excluded because of the age: young adults were the target population of the study; therefore, respondents aged 35 years old or over were excluded. The final database included 1608 participants.

2.2. Measures

The original research questionnaire contained 35 questions, concerning consumption behaviours, knowledge about wine and the level of awareness about its effects. Age and gender were assessed as demographic characteristics, wine consumption habits (HAB: “Spreaded throughout the week days” or “Gathered in the weekend”) and consideration (CONS: “It’s like other alcoholic drinks”, “A part of the diet”, “A pleasure to take occasionally” or “Other”), age at the first time of

consumption of wine and, finally, an array of questions concerning knowledge related to the beverage. Self-reported use of alcoholic drinks and/or wine with the aim at getting high was investigated through a question with binary response choice. The respondents had to indicate whether they drank to get high or not.

This last set of questions provided the measure of awareness about the characteristics of this drink, by identifying whether or not the respondent gave right answers related to the topic described. An array of 19 multiple-choice questions, divided into four groups, was used. The first group of questions (9 questions) asked information about the knowledge of wine composition (COMP), while the second group (5 questions) was dedicated to exploring the knowledge about metabolism of wine consumption (METAB). The third and the fourth groups covered the opinions of participants related to positive and negative effects of wine (respectively POS and NEG, 3 and 2 questions).

The measure of awareness was estimated through the number of correct answers provided by the students compared to the possible options. A total score of awareness (AWA) was obtained by the sum of correct answers (min = 0, max = 34), and four sub-scores were calculated, each one for every group of questions (COMP: min = 0, max = 9; METAB: min = 0, max = 12; POS: min = 0, max = 6; NEG: min = 0, max = 7).

2.3. Statistical analyses

Descriptive statistics were performed on the whole sample and on the subgroups of drinkers and non-drinkers, to examine the main characteristics of the participants. Participants were classified as “drinkers” if they reported drinking wine. Fisher exact test was used to assess the association between qualitative variables (for example: gender vs group, or comorbidities vs group). After having verified the violation of normality, Mann-Whitney *U* test was applied to compare the groups of participants on quantitative variables (age and awareness scores).

The sub-set of data related to the participants who reported drinking wine was used to fit a set of models, which aimed at explaining the dependent variable (DGH, self-reported declaration related to the attitude among wine consumers: normal drinkers vs drinkers to get high) through a series of independent variables, including the awareness scores and self-reported wine consumption, controlling for gender and age as factor and covariate, respectively. A series of General Linear Models with a binary response variable was fitted, where Gender and Age were control variables, while CONS and AWA, COMP, METAB, POS and NEG, used in different models, were predictors:

$$\text{Model 1: } DGH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ CONS} + \beta_4 \text{ AWA} + E$$

$$\text{Model 2: } DGH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ CONS} + \beta_4 \text{ COMP} + E$$

$$\text{Model 3: } DGH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ CONS} + \beta_4 \text{ METAB} + E$$

$$\text{Model 4: } DGH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ CONS} + \beta_4 \text{ POS} + E$$

$$\text{Model 5: } DGH = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Gender} + \beta_2 \text{ Age} + \beta_3 \text{ CONS} + \beta_4 \text{ NEG} + E$$

Each model was checked for basic assumptions (linearity, normality of residuals and homoscedasticity). Multicollinearity was assessed comparing Type I and Type III Sum of Squares estimations of effects. Models with interactions (even “shotgun models”) were also evaluated, but without appreciable findings compared to the model with main effects only. The significance of the Omnibus test was checked to assess the predictive power of the models. The statistical analyses were performed through the SPSS-IBM version 21 software, and the level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

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