

Knowledge, attitude and practices of alcohol and smoking among undergraduate oral health students at a South African University.

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ABSTRACT

Background: The prevalence of alcohol consumption and smoking among university students is high.

Aim: To determine the knowledge, attitudes and practices of alcohol consumption and smoking among undergraduate oral health students at a South African university.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among dental and oral hygiene students (n=544) who were registered at a South African University in 2015. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect information on socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding consumption of alcohol and smoking. Data analysis included frequencies and correlations using chi-square tests at a level of significance of p<0.05.

Results: A total of 299 (78%) students agreed to participate. The mean age was 22 years and 74% were female. More than a third (41%) reported consuming alcohol regularly while 11% reported being current smokers. More males reported indulging in both habits as compared with females.

More than half felt that alcohol was acceptable as a social drink. The majority of clinical students (89%) associated periodontal diseases with smoking compared with pre-clinical students (74%).

Conclusion: The overall knowledge on social and health implications of excessive consumption of alcohol and smoking was adequate. The majority associated alcohol consumption and smoking with social activity.

Keywords: Knowledge, attitude, practices, alcohol and smoking, undergraduate university students

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol consumption and smoking tends to peak between the ages of 18 and 25 years and university students in these age groups are at particular risk for increased alcohol consumption when compared with non-enrolled age-matched controls.^{1,2} It has been observed that the overall trend of alcohol use increases

ACRONYM

OH : Oral Hygiene

The rate of consumption of alcohol among the general population and heavy episodic drinking of alcohol among young adults are on the rise in many countries.³ Alcohol use during adolescence and young adulthood remains a prominent public health problem.⁴ Excessive consumption of alcohol has been associated with alcoholism, social vices, esophageal and liver cancer, liver cirrhosis, epilepsy, vehicle accidents and other traumatic outcomes that result in disability and loss of life.⁵ The prevalence of drinking alcohol among South African medical students was as high as 85% while a study in Malawi reported that up to 54% of males consumed alcohol on a regular basis.^{6,11}

Alcohol consumption and tobacco use are strongly-related behaviours, and the association between these two substances has been found to be strengthened with the heavier use of either substance.^{12,13} A study reported that the urge to smoke increases rapidly following heavy drinking, even among light smokers.¹⁴

It appears that smoking as a habit increases from school years into university and that smoking patterns among university students are relatively high.^{15,16} The university years seem to be a time of increased exposure to the risk of starting to smoke and a progression into regular patterns of use.¹⁶ National studies in the U.S. have shown that approximately 30% of university students reported having smoked in the past 30 days and 40% reported having smoked in the past year.¹⁷ University smokers are more likely to be non-daily smokers but smoke more in social situations when compared with their non-university peers.^{18,19}

The prevalence of smoking among South African students varied between 37% and 43% among males in tertiary institutions.²⁰ As regards oral health students, only one similar study, has been carried out, in the Western Cape in 2010. Those authors reported a prevalence of 23%, which was lower than reports in other international studies.⁸

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