

A GENDER ANALYSIS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN SPANISH YOUNG PEOPLE  
ANÁLISIS DE GÉNERO DEL CONSUMO DE ALCOHOL EN JÓVENES ESPAÑOLES

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**Abstract**

In European countries, there is a high incidence of alcohol consumption among the young. Taking a gender perspective, the aim of this study is to find out what factors act as motivations in Spanish young people's alcohol consumption. We carried out a qualitative investigation using in-depth interviews of 24 young people. The results show that peer pressure and family permissiveness can have an influence on their alcohol consumption patterns, while easy access to alcohol and the positive social view of alcoholic drinks in Spain are factors that also bring about heavy drinking.

**Keywords:** Alcohol; Young people; Gender; Prevention.

**Resumen**

En los países europeos hay una alta incidencia de consumo de alcohol entre la juventud. Este trabajo pretende conocer cuáles son las motivaciones de jóvenes españoles para consumir alcohol a partir de la perspectiva de género. Se llevó a cabo una investigación cualitativa con entrevistas semi-estructuradas dirigidas a 24 jóvenes. Los resultados revelan que la presión del grupo de iguales y la permisividad familiar tienen influencia en los patrones de consumo, así mismo la facilidad en el acceso al alcohol y la valoración social positiva del alcohol también influye en el consumo excesivo.

**Palabras clave:** Alcohol; jóvenes; género; prevención.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The consumption of alcohol is a widespread practice in Spain. The data of the latest *Survey on the Use of Drugs in Secondary Schools in Spain* (OEDA, 2018) indicate that alcohol is the most consumed psychoactive substance in the surveyed population. Almost 59% of those surveyed between the ages of 14 and 18 ( $n = 38.010$ ) had drunk alcohol in the previous 30 days. During this time period, 24% had got drunk and 32% had indulged in binge drinking. These patterns of excessive consumption have increased compared with 2016.

From this same report, it emerges that the average age at which alcohol consumption begins is at 14 years old, with the first time of getting drunk 14.8 years old. It also reveals that girls tend to consume more “legal drugs”, including alcohol, than the boys. In the youngest age group (14-15 years old), a higher proportion of girls admit to having been drunk than their male counterparts. This trend is reversed in the 16-18 age group.

As is shown in this report, women are getting involved in similar and heavier drinking patterns than men at an early age. In this regard, some studies (Gaete & Araya, 2017; Golpe *et al.*, 2017) corroborate that girls already consume more alcohol and tobacco than their male counterparts. However, various studies have shown how in Spain there is greater prejudice directed against young women, in the form of disapproval and reproach of their behaviour; they are judged, and it is considered intolerable that they should get drunk (Lennox *et al.*, 2018; López-Morales, Álvarez-Bernardo & Romo Avilés, 2021; Romo-Avilés, García-Carpintero & Pavón-Benítez, 2020; Romo-Áviles *et al.*, 2018; Ronaldo *et al.* 2016).

Along with the personal variables described, one can undertake an explication of alcohol consumption in adolescence using the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This makes it possible to analyse the influence that different levels of interaction exercise in drinking (Pons & Buelga, 2011; Teixidó-Compañó *et al.*, 2019). In this regard, getting drunk is associated with a central part of growing up in youth (Andrade, 2019; Beccaria & Sande, 2003; DiBello *et al.*, 2019; Ruiz-Juan & Ruiz-Risueño, 2011). The

influence that the peer group exerts is part of this development. Some studies (Martín-Santana *et al.*, 2014; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2007; Ruiz-Juan & Ruiz-Risueño, 2011; Scholte *et al.*, 2008) state that there is not always an intrinsic reason for drinking, but that it can start out from friendships that “pressurize” young people into drinking. According to Mora *et al.* (2005), having the recognition of the friendship group is crucial in first-time drinking, through which they seek new experiences, a break from routine, and test their vigour and toughness. The fact of drinking in the company of friends makes it possible to speak of “positive drunkenness”, which is to say, the well-being that people experience in feeling accompanied in a relaxed setting and environment in which the risks of alcohol abuse are not noticed (Romo-Avilés, 2016). In this environment, young people have little perception of the risks associated with alcohol consumption (Espada, *et al.*, 2008; Pedrero-García, 2018; Rolando *et al.*, 2012). This false perception of risks is also associated with weekend drinking or drinking related to certain parties and celebrations. In both cases, it is not understood as a dangerous behaviour as it is sporadic and it is assumed that there are no harmful health effects (Romo-Avilés, 2016).

Together with peer pressure, other microsystemic variables play a role. One such variable is parental permissiveness, which enables the young women and men to drink without many restrictions, due to the lack of parental control or supervision (Carlson, 2016; Gaete & Araya, 2017; Nargiso *et al.*, 2013; Teixidó-Compañó *et al.*, 2019). A permissive parental environment is also associated with heavier drinking by young people. When parents offer alcoholic drinks, it is interpreted as a sign of trust toward alcohol consumption (Harrison *et al.*, 2000). Another important family factor is related to the perception of risk that exists toward alcohol consumption; when there is consumption in the family environment, there is less perception of risk. In this regard, Ruiz-Juan and Ruiz-Risueño (2011) found that among students of compulsory secondary education, there was greater probability of drinking if they had a sister who drank. This degree of influence was followed by a brother, fathers and mothers. After that stage, in non-compulsory education it is brothers who drink that are the greatest risk factor.

Continuing with the ecological model to explain alcohol consumption among the young, it should be stated that, at the mesosystemic level, it is important to know the influence that certain institutions, such as the education system, can have on the prevention of this behaviour. Some experiences (Bukhart, 2011; Danielsson & Romelsjo, 2007; Díaz-Aguado *et al.*, 2013) show that the participation of schools can help to reduce certain addictive behaviours – mainly when teachers get involved and can count on the resources and training necessary to raise student awareness.

Another mesosystemic scenario concerns the environments in which alcohol consumption occurs, and the mechanisms of young people's access to alcohol. A permissive environment in gaining access to alcohol, where there are no strong restrictions, can be decisive in young people starting to drink alcohol (Nargiso *et al.*, 2013).

Lastly, on the macrosystemic level, several factors can explain young people's drinking patterns. In the case of Spain, which is applicable to other southern European countries, there is a positive social view of alcohol consumption. Alcohol is an integral part of main social events, which some authors have associated with "Mediterranean drinking culture" (Beccaria & Prina, 2010; Petrilli *et al.*, 2014; Pons & Buelga, 2011; Rolando *et al.*, 2012). That positive social view is adopted by young people, who consider that alcohol is not as dangerous as other drugs in general use (e.g. tobacco), and, as a consequence, end up minimizing its effects (Espada *et al.*, 2008).

Taking into account the factors that influence drinking, preventative actions and campaigns that stress the different levels involved should be designed. It is vital that authorities consider the purpose of campaigns (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2007) – to prohibit or to reduce – as well as the socio-educational dimension of their content (Faggiano *et al.*, 2010; Mora *et al.*, 2005), and the agents involved (Elmeland & Kolind, 2012; Faggiano *et al.*, 2010).

Taking all this as a starting point, the aim of this study is to learn, using gender perspective, the factors that act as motivation in alcohol consumption by Spanish young people, along with the effect of prevention campaigns and campaigns that aim to reduce consumption.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Sample

In this study, we have analysed 24 in-depth interviews conducted in a research project on gender-based and interpersonal violence in juvenile recreational contexts. Specifically, we interviewed ten (41.66%) young women and fourteen (58.33%) young men, all Spanish, between the ages of 16 and 22, residing in two Andalusian provinces (one in the east and the other in the west). The sociodemographic variables of the sample selected (environment, gender, age and partner) give a heterogeneity of profiles and discourse of each group for the purpose of discovering, analysing and interpreting different perspectives. The average age of the sample was 17.7 years old. The interviewees were drinkers and, in some cases, also consumed drugs.

### 2.2. Fieldwork

The fieldwork began in May 2017 and ended in July 2017. Using purposive sampling, we carried out a process of searching for independent networks in different environments. The general inclusion criteria were: women and men between the ages of 16 and 22 years old who were drinkers and who frequented youth leisure places, with normalized profiles (they were in education, they lived with their family, and were neither youth offenders or criminals nor at risk of social exclusion).

In the first phase of the study, we conducted the in-depth interviews, which made it possible to explore both personal and interpersonal aspects, and aspects of the socio-cultural context. The interviews were recorded and, once finished, were transcribed word-for-word. The average duration of the interviews was 60 minutes. The end of the process of data collection was determined following the principle of theoretical saturation, after which we carried out summative content analysis. After the first general reading of the transcriptions, we made a primary identification of codes and categories that served to reach agreement on the criteria for the coding process and the thematic units of interest. The categories developed were then collated, using triangulation to test the level of consistency and to resolve discrepancies. After coding, the most significant units of analysis were extracted and

the interrelations between the different themes were identified. All this analytical process was undertaken using the QSR NVivo 11 program.

### 2.3. Ethical considerations

The study was approved by an Ethics Committee<sup>1</sup>. The participants received a letter of commitment to confidentiality signed by the research project's principal investigator, and they agreed voluntarily to being interviewed. The families of those young people who were minors received information about the study and signed an informed consent form, by which they gave their consent for their children to participate in the study. Those young people who were legally of age signed the informed consent form personally.

### 2.4. Results

In the following section, we present the results derived from the interviews of the informants.

#### 2.4.1. Motivations for drinking: from micro to macro

Upon analysing the drinking patterns of the interviewees, we detected a series of variables that can be framed in the different levels of the aforementioned ecological model. Gender marks important differences in the drinking patterns of men and women. In this sense, alcohol is channelled as a way to reinforce masculinity in front of the peer group, and to show sexist attitudes in front of young women. In general terms, the female and male informants of this study are in agreement in stating that young men drink alcohol to reinforce their manhood. Regarding this, Gonzalo, a nineteen-year-old young man, commented:

*Normally [they drink more] to play the tough guy, the macho men, you know. (Gonzalo, 19 years old)*

*I see a difference in that the boys tend to go out with more money than the girls [...] the boys also think they're superior for being able to drink more alcohol [...] and the girls so as not to do anything stupid that people might see, that "what will they say", maybe stop drinking, like, they drink less. (Silvia, 18 years old)*

Similarly, the young women interviewees who drink heavily are socially penalized, because they stray from the social prototype of femininity. The friendship

group itself can be the source of recrimination against those who drink more than what is deemed socially desirable, as occurred with Eva and Patricia:

*They told me that I was out of control with drinking, that I was another person and that I couldn't be myself without drinking. Well, they said this behind my back [...] they criticized me another time and it was then that I said: "look, I'm not going to try be friends with people who are like this, really", and I stopped seeing them. (Eva, 18 years old)*

*There were also people who had seen us like that [drunk], so yes as well, and they said to me, "But what are you doing with your life?" And I replied, "well, you are the ones who drink before anyone, and everything, so don't you come saying anything to me". (Patricia, 17 years old)*

Despite the rejection and criticism they receive, some of the young women interviewed state that drinking is a way of escaping, of coping with certain day-to-day problems, as Ana and Patricia attest.

*They [young women] as they deal with, like, when you've got problems, straight away, you have to drink. Then something happens to them and it's not like they say, "oh, then I'll drink two and stuff". They grab the bottle and don't stop until they've necked it. (Ana, 16 years old)*

*When I'm feeling bad and want to forget everything, I go out on a Friday and it's like, "that's it", and I know I'm going to be really really late getting home, what I like is... well, that [...] because I forget about everything and I'm happy. Well, bipolar rather than happy. For a while, and that's that. (Patricia, 17 years old)*

For both the young men and the young women who participated in this study, the group of friends is shown to be one of the agents that exercises a great deal of influence on the initiation and incitement to excessive consumption of alcohol. The interviewees consider that the influence of their friends is what makes them give in and drink more than they had planned to or even wanted to. Forming part of a group whose members drink heavily can end up conditioning the consumption patterns of one of its members. As shown by Luis, alcohol consumption can become a competition between the group of friends, a challenge to see who can drink the most:

*Some people [are competitive] yes. Some say, "well last night I drank eight" and that night goes for nine instead of eight, and they overdo it and start puking and everything. (Luis, 17 years old)*

<sup>1</sup> Commission of Ethics in Research of the University of Granada (CEI-UGR / 883)

Other informants state that the interaction with certain friends can condition drinking habits. In this regard, Antonio reveals how the fact that his friends are of legal age and that they were used to drinking large amounts regularly led to him drinking more:

*In my grandmother's town, some friends of mine came who are practically all over eighteen, if not all of them, and sure, they do tend to drink more and I remember that I don't know if I drank two or three rum and cokes and five shots, at least. So that was when I was fourteen in one of my town's festivals. (Antonio, 16 years old)*

Moreover, the interviewees have shown that this group drinking is a way of gaining recognition and admiration through friendships. Alcohol encourages a lack of inhibition and greater integration with the peer group. In the case of young men, alcohol consumption can be seen as a way of demonstrating their masculinity, particularly in the way they have of relating with members of the opposite sex. As Eva shows, the young men who drink use alcohol as an excuse to be able to commit acts of sexual aggression:

*So if you put all that together, the alcohol, dancing, it's a bit of an annoying combination, but maybe it also affects the subject of rape, because yeah, because it's at night, they have less inhibition, so if it's a normal situation they would think twice about it, but here they don't even think about it. They do it and that's that. (Eva, 18 years old)*

In contrast, not drinking or drinking moderately, without getting drunk, can also entail reprobation from the group of friends. In this sense, some interviewees comment that being the only person in the group who doesn't drink causes a lack of integration and acknowledgement. Faced with this situation, some people decide to start drinking to feel as though they are an active member, one of the gang. For example, Patricia relates how she felt pressured to fit in with her group of friends; and for her, drinking was the only way of being part of the group:

*I started to drink because I was the only one who didn't, and I felt like I was the littlest, I felt outside the group, I don't know, and I said: "well, then, to fit in, then I'll drink" [...] Then I say: "I'm an idiot, what am I getting drunk for?" [...] When I said: "I don't drink because I don't drink" and then I started to drink because the rest drink and, well, so from then on you get hooked [...] Me, what I've always wanted is to fit in because I didn't fit in at my*

*old school, so I say: "I have to fit in here whatever it takes, so I'll do what the others do." (Patricia, 17 years old)*

As with friendships, the family also has influence on the drinking patterns of young people. In this regard, some of the interviewees comment that the education they received at home has conditioned their relationship with alcohol. For some, such as Felipe, the fact that their parents had not got drunk in their presence or had not encouraged them into abusive drinking can help to explain their moderate drinking pattern. In Felipe's case, his reality was in contrast to that of his friends with a different family environment:

*I think I drink less because of my parents. I have always seen that my parents have never been drunk, they have always been well, they have always given me, I think, the education they needed to give and I think that for this very reason I haven't gone the way of drinking much alcohol or anything. I have friends who do have parents who drink, and that for sure, for the children seeing those parents, maybe they say: "I want to try it too" ... I even have friends who live by themselves and, living alone, then sure, you're not with your parents getting education or anything, it's just you by yourself and you're going to be guided by the help of others, and if the rest say to you, "try this, it'll relax you", then people are going to do it. (Felipe, 18 years old)*

In these family contexts that are more permissive regarding alcohol consumption, some of the interviewees describe experiences of heavy drinking in company and under the control of their parents. They explain how their parents prefer them to drink with them, even if this means to the extent of getting drunk. This is the case with Ana:

*I don't drink, unless, for example, I'm with my father and he says: "pour a drink for the girl". [...] Yes. My father says, "If you drink, I prefer you to drink in front of me, that you have one in front of me, rather than drinking behind my back". And I've always followed this to the letter. "What do I fancy?" "Well, Dad, give me a sip," and he says to me, "take this, go on, I'll get myself another". For sure, I've done that many times [...] At a wedding with my father, the two of us ended up in pieces, it's true that I drank a lot and I drank nearly nine mixed drinks by myself [...] My father the same, but my father it's that it goes to his head more quickly. (Ana, 17 years old)*

This is in contrast to the comments of some of the people interviewed, who coincide in stressing the

disciplinary role that is exercised from the nuclear family. Many parents penalize and punish – even physically – their children if they have got drunk or consumed other substances, such as happened to Gabriel:

*I get home all in a mess, I couldn't even speak or anything, and my mother... just as she calls him, he appears: "How are you?" I say that I'm well. "Get up," and as soon as I got up, wham, he thumped me, whacked me...right in my face. My father had never hit me, but he did that night. But afterwards came a big hug, and he simply told me that of course he loved me and that of course he was going to stand by me. Then that's when I burst into tears, and since that day, I've been clean. (Gabriel, 21 years old)*

Access to alcohol is one of the mesosystemic variables mentioned by the participants when it came to explaining their drinking patterns. On this issue, they state that they tend to hold "botellones" (street drinking parties) because it is a much cheaper way to drink, compared to the price of drinks in bars or discos. As one of the interviewees says, the norm is to drink before going to the nightclubs due to the high price of alcoholic drinks in such places, as well as making the most of promotions or gift drinks that are on offer:

*My friends we normally have what you call a 'botellón' [...] but yeah it's true that we drink a little and as the drinks are a bit expensive in the clubs, we drink beforehand and then in the club maybe a drink or two if they come with the entrance fee, then we drink them the whole time we are there. (Julio, 18 years old)*

Regarding access to alcohol, some of the minors interviewed come up against the legal restrictions that affect its purchase. They develop different strategies to circumvent this, such as turning to a friend who is of legal age, or going to those shops or bars that do not exert a strict control over its sale. Below we can see some of the strategies that the interviewees use to acquire alcoholic drinks:

*Well, a year ago I couldn't, but this year they asked me to buy it for them, for those 17-year-olds and some 16-year-olds who get together with us. They get me or another mate to buy it because they don't let them, for example if you go to [well-known food-store chain] they ask you for ID and so on. We go and I buy it with a friend, we've each put our money in and we buy bottles, maybe vodka or rum or stuff like that. (Felipe, 18 years old)*

*They asked for our ID everywhere, and as it was now like "fuck", and so then well so... there was a place where they didn't ask us for it. (Patricia, 17 years old)*

The same informant, Patricia, tells how she had a bad experience when trying to buy alcohol in a supermarket. From then on, she refused to go shopping again in that place, since she feels that the same thing could happen again at any moment.

*So if I'm with someone, that's better, because I'm seventeen and not of a legal age and it really freaks me out, because they already asked me for my ID once and they've got me clocked in [well-known food-store chain], I don't know, a security guard took me away and took a photo of my ID. So for me it's embarrassing, I'm scared to shop there. (Patricia, 17 years old)*

At the macro, social level, alcohol consumption is viewed positively in Spain. It is related with a series of values (modern, cheerful...) that favour its consumption, as well as the connection that exists between alcohol and partying. Some of the interviewees were alike in stating the importance that drinking alcohol has when out partying:

*I think people are obsessed with the subject of alcohol, in that if you drink it seems you are cooler for drinking more and so on. (Felipe, 18 years old)*

*It's just not the same, I have a better time a little tipsy, it takes away my shyness and I speak to everyone [...] The times I've gone out without drinking, I've had a good time, but not in the same way. (Lola, 16 years old)*

#### 2.4.2. Alcohol prevention campaigns: significance and effects

The interviewees view campaigns for the prevention of alcohol and/or drug consumption as a mechanism for finding out about drugs as well as the possible effects of consuming them. They also consider that these campaigns remove the myths surrounding certain disinformation and false beliefs that exist around these substances and patterns of consumption. Specifically, they value positively those campaigns that are part of official programmes and are undertaken by police or healthcare workers, as Enrique states:

*Apart from learning the things they tell us, I have always liked to demystify things, for example what is said about alcohol, and hey, it's always good to be informed about what it can cause and all that, it did help me. (Enrique, 19 years old)*

However, some of the young people interviewed indicate that those campaigns orchestrated with a more traditional methodology, based on a lecture with an exposition of facts and which discouraged participation or interaction with the public, are not very effective. In this regard, Julia and Julio say that this methodology ends up making the content less interesting:

*I remember the typical talks in the huge lecture hall that they have there, which is like a cinema, with seating that I don't know what, well, they put on the typical PowerPoint and the police explained to us what was happening and so on. (Julia, 18 years old)*

*It is usually the typical talk where a nurse or a policeman comes, someone you pay attention to because it's a somebody that you say, "God, he knows what he's talking about"... it's not the same when a teacher says it to you than when a policeman or a nurse or a doctor says it to you. But there are people who as it's the typical talk that they keep you there an hour and a half, talking and talking and explaining with a PowerPoint, going from slide to slide, and he's going on and on, well I see that people are... because it's happened to me, you switch off, you don't pay any attention and of course, they do that to you once and as they tend to have it in primary school, in secondary and now even in sixth form. (Julio, 18 years old)*

The situation described is in contrast to what some interviewees state. They think that workshops should focus on narrating first-person experiences, on sessions with first-hand accounts from those who have had an experience and/or a negative relationship with alcohol:

*Then maybe the talk, as it didn't have much of an impact on me, but maybe a person who's maybe never heard of the consequences, maybe if they are struck by the consequences that for example it has for the nervous system, which maybe they didn't know, they hadn't even considered it. (Andrea, 18 years old)*

*They should make them more entertaining as far as possible, or if not, make it a bit more shocking, that you see [...] or show a photo that impacts with what is being seen and they associate it and say, "I don't want that to happen to me", or for example to bring someone who is alcoholic or who's had problems with alcohol and they tell you about their bad experience and sure, now it's not a police officer or doctor explaining it to you as something they've studied, rather someone who's been through it is saying it to you, and so then you say, "Wait, maybe this could happen to me and I don't want that". Something*

*that has more of an impact on people. If you simply spend two hours speaking to them, then you get fed up. (Julio, 18 years old)*

However, some informants don't identify themselves with the professionals' words. In these cases, they consider that there is a certain generational gap, since from their professional position they do not know the personal experiences and lives of young people. In other words, as Julia and Gabriel attest, they perceive an insurmountable generational and hierarchical gap that lessens the effectiveness of the message.

*Yes, at school we had them sometimes. But really everyone took them as a joke and nobody paid attention. They gave workshops on drugs, above all on driving under the influence of alcohol, on other types of drugs I can't remember, really, but we have studied them. (Julia, 18 years old)*

*Because the person they send to tell you that drugs are bad hasn't tried them. Am I going to sell you a car when I don't even have a car? What the hell are you telling me? Bring me someone who's recovered, bring me someone who's trying to recover [...] by all means. You can't have someone come, a nurse or psychologist from the Junta de Andalucía who don't know a damn thing. Speaking badly and too soon, straight up, because they don't get the half of it. You may be a psychologist, you can be whoever you want, but you don't know what that does to you, neither do you know how it makes you feel. You may know what someone else has told you about their experience, but never what's going on inside. (Gabriel, 21 years old)*

### 3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Using the gender perspective, this study aims to analyse what factors influence alcohol consumption among young women and men, as well as the perception they have of alcohol prevention campaigns. The results reveal that, examining the microsystemic dimension, peer group influence and pressure is a significant variable for understanding drinking patterns in adolescence, both for the young women and the young men interviewed. The informants show that drinking alcohol is a mechanism to fit in with a group of friends, so as to fall into line with regards to its rules of interaction. This result is in line with previous research, such as the study by Robinson *et al.* (2016) with a group of young people. Their findings indicate how the motivation for drinking can be related

with the pressure they experience from their peers. They showed that the young people who felt that they were going to be judged demonstrated higher levels of drinking than those who did not feel such pressure.

On this level, it is important to highlight the differences according to the variable of gender: drinking alcohol allows the young men to reinforce their masculinity, whereas the young women who drink alcohol are penalized socially. Regarding perception of the amount of alcohol consumed, the informants of this study state that the young men drink to reinforce their pattern of masculinity (“playing the tough guy”). The young women, for their part, join certain patterns of consumption – relatively recent in the southern European environment – that can be related to the new mechanisms of identity construction and the very image of femininity (Demant, 2007), producing a break from normative social patterns (Graziano *et al.*, 2012). The female informants of this study mention that their alcohol consumption patterns are criticized in their peer group. This finding is akin to those found in other studies carried out in southern Europe (Martínez-Montilla *et al.*, 2020; Petrilli *et al.*, 2014). Despite the social criticism they are subject to, the young women interviewed maintain patterns of heavy alcohol consumption that are related both to it being a coping mechanism and as a way of escape, as well as to fit in with the peer group. Similar results have been found in previous studies (Dir *et al.* 2017; Kuntsche *et al.*, 2015). In short, these new drinking patterns mean that young women are breaking from the gender norms established in society, particularly from the image of passivity and moderation (Bailey, Griffin & Shankar, 2014; López-Morales; Álvarez-Bernardo & Romo Avilés, 2021; Lyons, Emslie & Hunt, 2014; Patró-Hernández, Nieto & Limiñana-Gras, 2020; Romo-Avilés, García-Carpintero & Pavón-Benítez, 2020; Romo-Avilés *et al.*, 2018).

Continuing with the microsystemic level, the family has been seen as another of the agents that can have an influence on young people’s drinking patterns. In the present study, we have not found gender differences regarding the role that the family can exercise in the drinking patterns of young men and women, in contrast to other studies, which have identified a weakness in parental relationships as a risk factor for young women (Fisher *et al.*, 2007; Luthar

& Goldstein, 2008; Schinke *et al.*, 2004). Some of the interviewees stated that they have drunk alcohol with a close family member. These moments are connected to festivities or special days, and are understood as part of the socialization process. This result can be linked to one of the patterns of the so-called “Mediterranean Drinking Culture”. As Beccaria (2010) shows, these first memories of alcohol consumption in the family are associated with fun, festive times, which produces a positive and normalizing image toward them. The parental permissiveness that some of the informants of this study mention can result in a low perception of risk toward alcohol consumption in families. Similarly, Pinazo & Pons (2002) conclude that around 80% of parents maintain that alcohol helps to liven family parties and meetings.

On the mesosystemic level, in this study we can highlight that access to alcohol is relatively simple. Both the young women and the young men who participated in this research mention different strategies that enable them to buy alcohol even when they are not of legal age (in Spain, 18 years old). Among these strategies, it is worth mentioning: using a friend who is of legal age to make the purchase, or finding venues (shops or bars) that are not strict in controlling alcohol sales, where no proof of age is requested. Both these strategies have been identified in previous studies. As a consequence, Nargiso *et al.* (2013) conclude that accessibility to alcohol is the second predictor when it comes to explaining drinking in young people. In a context in which the restrictions for selling alcohol to under-eighteens is not applied strictly (Pedrero-García, 2018), this results in a positive, risk-free image of alcohol consumption (Teixidó-Compañó *et al.*, 2019). This idea of the social perception of alcohol has also been demonstrated by the participants in this study. They remark that alcohol enjoys a good social image and even that its consumption is overvalued. In contrast to other studies, such as that by Grüne *et al.* (2017), the young women interviewed did not lower their consumption despite the legal prohibitions and restrictions on acquiring alcohol. As with their male companions, they sought out strategies that would allow them to get around the legal controls on the sale of alcoholic drinks.

Regarding prevention campaigns, the interviewees recognize that despite the fact that their content

might be interesting, the methods of delivery are not appropriate. Some state that these campaigns tend to fail because the message does not pique their interest, it does not get through. This finding coincides with other studies (Bukhart, 2011), which conclude that the mere transmission of information on the risks of drinking is not effective. Perhaps the lack of sensitivity to gender that some of these preventative campaigns show may mean that the young people who participated in this study have not detected the effects looked for in them. In this sense, studies such as those by Schinke *et al.* (2004) and Lyons, Emslie & Hunt (2014) conclude that when these campaigns take gender perspective into account, their effects are more notable and significant. This is of the utmost relevance for authorities, particularly for the design and implementation of prevention campaigns. Thus, heeding to the agents that could be related to drinking, it is necessary to design holistic strategies that address the complexity of the problem. These campaigns should tackle the emotional dimension to mobilize the rational dimension. Some authors, such as Martín-Santana *et al.* (2014), state that making the most unpleasant side of drinking visible is a way of raising young people's awareness about its risks. To do so, the use of images (Beerli-Palacio *et al.*, 2012) or the giving of personal accounts of the experience (Hernández-Zambrabo *et al.*, 2014) can be more effective than merely transmitting a linear message on the risks of alcohol (Pons & Buelga, 2011). As Skärner and Månsoon (2008) emphasize, it is essential that messages transmitted to young people coincide with their own lives and experiences. In the design of these strategies, therefore, attention should also be given to some specific aspects of adolescence, such as the feeling of group belonging or desirability. In this way, some programmes that have addressed the role of social influence have shown some highly successful results with respect to the reduction of consumption (Faggiano *et al.*, 2010).

In addition, these campaigns should include the families (Carlson, 2016; Faggiano *et al.*, 2010), improving and promoting the parental-filial relationship (Pons & Buelga, 2011) and sibling relationships (Espada *et al.*, 2008; Harrison *et al.*, 2000), given that the drinking patterns of older brothers and sisters have also been shown to have an effect on the young's relationship with alcohol (Wilkinson, 2020). Likewise, bars and shops also have an important role in the

prevention of youth alcohol consumption (Bukhart, 2020). In this regard, the need for the staff of these establishments to require proof of the purchaser's age is a crucial aspect that has been observed in previous studies (Clark, 2007; Huckle *et al.*, 2007).

Lastly, following the proposals made by Bukhart (2011, 2020) and Nargiso *et al.* (2013), there needs to be prevention on the socio-cultural level through a change in the social perception that exists concerning alcohol consumption. This change in perception should take into account the cultural characteristics that alcohol has in the society concerned and the rituals associated with drinking (Beccaria, 2015; Beccaria *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, these campaigns cannot be gender neutral (Beerli-Palacio *et al.*, 2012), because young men and women have a different exposure to alcohol. In particular, campaigns should stress that alcohol consumption by young women cannot be linked to negative behaviours that violate their rights and integrity – specifically, the sexual violence and harassment that they are subject to in the context of the night-time economy.

This study has certain limitations, one of which is the period of time when the fieldwork was undertaken. The last two years have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has brought about significant changes in our forms of socialization and, among others, in the alcohol consumption patterns of young people. The ESTUDES report (OEDA, 2021) shows that during 2020 alcohol consumption fell considerably among Spanish young people. Regarding the consumption differences according to gender, young women show higher consumption patterns than their male counterparts. However, we have not found any studies in Spain that might explain why drinking has remained higher among young women compared to young men in this new pandemic environment. Future research will therefore need to analyse with gender perspective the impact of COVID-19 on the alcohol consumption patterns of Spanish young people. Likewise, future studies will need to make a more detailed analysis of more specific variables such as communication and the relations within the family unit and their possible connection to drinking patterns. In this regard, other studies carried out in Mediterranean cultures (Picoito *et al.*, 2019) have found a relationship between these dimensions and gender-differentiated alcohol consumption, particularly how a lack of communication and a weak

intra-family relationship is related to heavier drinking among young women. Lastly, another limitation of this study concerns measuring the actual effect of specific campaigns on the alcohol consumption of young women and men. Future studies should not only look into the general perception that young women and men have of preventative campaigns, but also assess particular initiatives that have been designed for this purpose. Previous studies carried out in Europe have found important differences in the effects of these preventative campaigns according to the gender of their target population, as well as the gender of the people who are spreading those messages (Longshore *et al.*, 2007).

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