

**Characterization of alcohol consumption in university students****Caracterización del consumo de alcohol en estudiantes universitarios****Caracterização do consumo de álcool em estudantes universitários**Luis Enrique Jiménez-Franco<sup>1\*</sup> , Marianela Fonseca Fernández<sup>1</sup> <sup>1</sup>Universidad de Ciencias Médicas de Cienfuegos. Facultad de Ciencias Médicas Dr. Raúl Dorticós Torrado. Cienfuegos, Cuba.\*Corresponding author: [luis940@nauta.cu](mailto:luis940@nauta.cu)

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**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** within psychopathic substances, of a legal nature with an effect on the Central Nervous System (CNS), alcohol is presented as one of the most consumed according to sociocultural characteristics. **Objective:** characterize alcohol consumption in university students. **Method:** an observational, descriptive, cross-sectional study was carried out during the month of March 2024. The universe was made up of 258 participants. No sampling techniques were applied, so we worked with the entire universe, where inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Variables analyzed: age, sex, major, academic year and related to alcohol consumption. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) questionnaire adapted to Cuba based on international standards was applied. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. **Results:** the female sex stood out with 178 cases for 68.9%. Ages 21 predominated with 57 (22.09%) cases. The third year of

academic training stood out with 71 cases (27.52%). On the other hand, the Medicine degree stood out with 166 students (64.34%). Positive responses predominated (No or Never, depending on the aspect analyzed). Men stood out as the sex most at risk for alcohol consumption with 21 cases; (26.25%). **Conclusions:** the impact of alcohol consumption is broad in both sexes; with greater significance for the male. In turn, consumption patterns vary in relation to quantity and frequency. Aspects that determine the nature of the patient or case analyzed as a risk consumer.

**Keywords:** alcohol consumption; university; consumption of alcoholic beverages; students; medical students; alcohol related disorders



## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** dentro de las sustancias psicopática, de carácter legal con efecto sobre el Sistema Nervioso Central (SNC), el alcohol se presenta como una de las de mayor consumo según las características socioculturales. **Objetivo:** caracterizar el consumo de alcohol en estudiantes universitarios. **Método:** se realizó un estudio observacional, descriptivo, de corte transversal durante el mes de marzo de 2024. El universo quedó integrado por 258 participantes. No se aplicaron técnicas de muestreo por lo que se trabajó con la totalidad del universo, donde se aplicaron criterios de inclusión y exclusión. Variables analizadas: edad, sexo, carrera que cursa, año académico y relacionadas con el consumo del alcohol. Se aplicó el cuestionario Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) adaptado a Cuba a partir de las normas internacionales. Se aplicó la estadística descriptiva e inferencial. **Resultados:** sobresalió el sexo femenino con 178 casos para un 68,9 %. Predominaron las edades de 21 con 57 (22,09 %) casos. Destacó el tercer año de formación académica con 71 casos (27,52 %). Por otra parte, sobresalió la carrera de Medicina con 166 estudiantes (64,34 %). Predominaron las respuestas positivas (No o Nunca, según el aspecto analizado). Destacaron los hombres como el sexo de mayor riesgo por el consumo de alcohol con 21 casos; (26,25 %). **Conclusiones:** la repercusión del consumo de alcohol es amplia en ambos sexos; con una mayor significación para el masculino. A su vez, los patrones de consumo varían en relación a cantidad y frecuencia. Aspectos que determinan el carácter de consumidor de riesgo del paciente o caso analizado.

**Palabras clave:** consumo de alcohol; universidad; consumo de bebidas alcohólicas; estudiantes; estudiantes de medicina; trastornos relacionados con alcohol

## RESUMO

**Introdução:** dentro das substâncias psicopáticas, de natureza lícita com efeito no Sistema Nervoso Central (SNC), o álcool apresenta-se como um dos mais consumidos segundo características socioculturais. **Objetivo:** caracterizar o consumo de álcool em estudantes universitários. **Método:** estudo observacional, descritivo, transversal, realizado durante o mês de março de 2024. O universo foi composto por 258 participantes. Não foram aplicadas técnicas de amostragem, portanto trabalhamos com todo o universo, onde foram aplicados critérios de inclusão e exclusão. Variáveis analisadas: idade, sexo, curso, ano letivo e relacionadas ao consumo de álcool. Foi aplicado o questionário Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) adaptado para Cuba com base em padrões internacionais. Foram aplicadas estatísticas descritivas e inferenciais. **Resultados:** o sexo feminino se destacou com 178 casos para 68,9%. Predominou a faixa etária de 21 anos com 57 (22,09%) casos. O terceiro ano de formação acadêmica se destacou com 71 casos (27,52%). Por outro lado, destacou-se o curso de Medicina com 166 alunos (64,34%). Predominaram respostas positivas (Não ou Nunca, dependendo do aspecto analisado). Os homens destacaram-se como o sexo de maior risco para o consumo de álcool com 21 casos; (26,25%). **Conclusões:** o impacto do consumo de álcool é amplo em ambos os sexos; com maior significado para o sexo masculino. Por sua vez, os padrões de consumo variam em relação à quantidade e à frequência. Aspectos que determinam a natureza do paciente ou caso analisado como consumidor de risco.

**Palavras-chave:** consumo de álcool; universidade; consumo de bebidas alcoólicas; estudantes; estudantes de medicina; transtornos relacionados ao álcool

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, man has searched for substances that allow him to enhance his abilities for different tasks (combat, hunting, fishing, among others). Many of these substances, when used excessively, cause significant changes from the structural and functional point of view; most of them are irreversible. For this reason, the concept of drug or addictive substance arises, as any component (natural or synthetic), of legal or illegal character that once consumed exerts influence on the central nervous system (CNS) with stimulating, inhibitory or distorting effect of its functions. <sup>(1,2)</sup>

Among the psychopathic substances, of a legal nature with an effect on the CNS, alcohol is one of the most widely consumed; <sup>(3)</sup> according to sociocultural characteristics. García Gómez, et al.<sup>(4)</sup> in their research shows that approximately one out of every three persons over 15 years of age may be a drinker.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2016, about 3 million people died as a result of alcohol consumption; figures that represent a rate of 1 per 20 inhabitants. In the region of the Americas, countries such as Chile, Argentina and Venezuela have the highest incidence of alcohol consumption. In Cuba, the provinces of Havana, Cienfuegos, Isla de la Juventud, Camagüey and Villa Clara stand out. In each of the data, there is a predominance of the male sex. <sup>(4,5)</sup>

There are multiple risk factors that determine the influence of alcohol on the health of the organism. Patterns and lifestyles, together with sociocultural characteristics, are the key elements. Associated with these are the modes of consumption, which make it possible to differentiate, according to quantity and frequency, consumers into low risk and high risk (average consumption greater than or equal to 60 g/day for men and 40 g/day for women).<sup>(6,7)</sup>

In a practical way, alcohol consumption can be classified as: abstinence (no alcohol consumption), social consumer (one or two drinks, with less than five drunkenness events per year), moderate consumer (does not exceed  $\frac{1}{4}$  of bottle twice a week for strong drinks or 1L of wine). On the other hand, when the above aspects are exceeded, it is classified as a risk consumer and in severe cases it is called dependent consumer.<sup>(7)</sup>

Its effects on health are multiple; it constitutes the substrate for the development of more than 200 medical problems and the perpetuation of more than 40 diseases, including liver cirrhosis, acute pancreatitis and cardiovascular conditions from the organic point of view. To this list can be added the psychological and social repercussions such as: withdrawal syndrome, alcoholic hallucinosis, delirium tremens, alcoholic amnesia, alterations in intellectual capacity and substantial changes in personality, dissocial alterations with legal and moral repercussions respectively, among others <sup>(1,8,9,10,11)</sup>

The influence of alcohol consumption in society is widely spread. On the other hand, its repercussion on the state of human health has repercussions on the individual, family and social levels, leading to alterations in work and intellectual performance, which is why it is necessary to identify consumption styles in order to put into practice health promotion and prevention actions for healthy lifestyles. For this reason, the objective of this study was to characterize alcohol consumption in university students.



## METHOD

An observational, descriptive, of cross-sectional study was conducted on alcohol consumption in university students during the month of March 2024. The research had two moments: application of the questionnaire and data collection (January and February) and data analysis (March).

The universe was made up of university students who participated in the survey, for a total of 258 participants. No sampling techniques were applied; therefore, we worked with the entire universe. Inclusion criteria were: being a university student in any of the modalities of higher education in Cuba <sup>(12)</sup> (regular daytime or face-to-face course, meeting or blended learning and distance courses), giving consent to participate in the study (reflected at the beginning of the questionnaire). Participants who did not express their willingness or filled out the questionnaire incompletely were excluded.

The variables analyzed were related to the general characteristics of the population (age, sex, degree course and academic year). Those related to alcohol consumption were analyzed using a survey. Beside, the type of consumption (risky or not)

The information was collected from the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) questionnaire adapted to Cuba from international standards. This questionnaire is presented in the survey carried out in the present study and for further consultation in the Psychiatry Manual <sup>(1)</sup>.

The questionnaire was structured in three sections: the first section referred to the informed consent of the participants. The second section was aimed at collecting data on the general characteristics of the participants (by means of test-type questions). The last section addressed questions on alcohol consumption, related to frequency, quantity and other aspects in a multiple-choice format. The survey was applied online, using the Google forms system, through the following link: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefSwm5JQtb1i4TQTZyUSKZaob51M6ktplyQKhPIutA9w\\_RRg/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefSwm5JQtb1i4TQTZyUSKZaob51M6ktplyQKhPIutA9w_RRg/viewform?usp=sf_link)

Each aspect of the questionnaire was assigned a value; these were summed for a total value. Men and women with values greater than and equal to 8 and 7 points, respectively, were considered risk drinkers.<sup>(1)</sup> The data were deposited in a Microsoft Excel 2010 database (<https://zenodo.org/records/14812490>). For interpretation and analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics were applied.

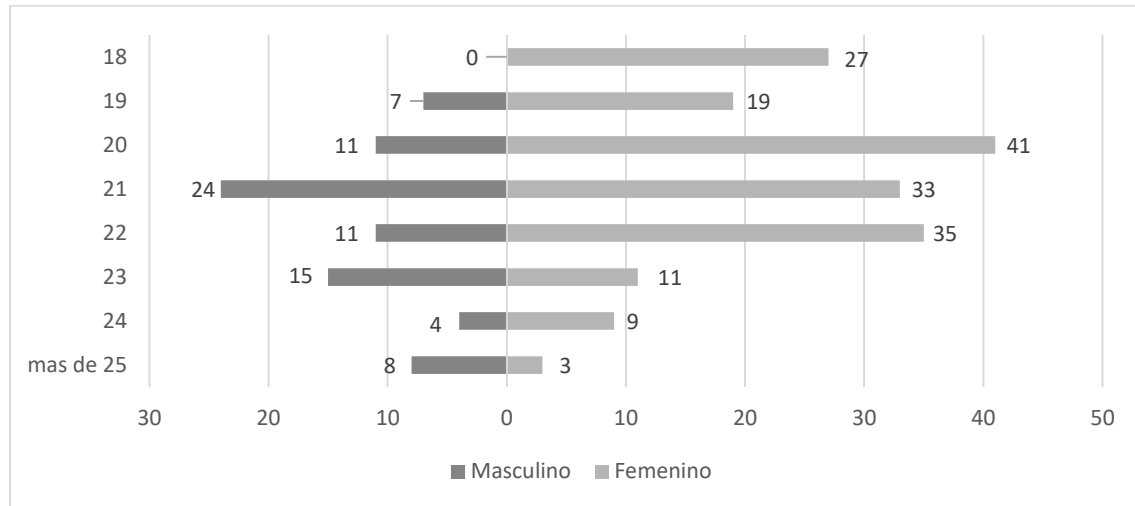
The Chi-square test ( $X^2$ ) was applied, using the following formula  $X^2 = \frac{n(ad-bc)^2}{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}$ . Where if calculated  $X^2$  tabulated  $> X^2$ ; the hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) that the risk for alcohol consumption is not related to male sex is rejected and the other hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) that there is a relationship and statistical significance is accepted, with 95 % confidence.

The Cuban ethical norms for research in health sciences and the aspects of the II Declaration of Helsinki were complied with; the data collected are confidential and were only used for scientific purposes. The Institution's Ethics Committee approved the study.



## RESULTS

Female sex stood out with 178 cases for 68.9 %. The predominant ages were 21 (mean age of the total number of patients surveyed) and 20 years with 57 (22.09 %) and 52 (20.15 %) cases respectively. In the female sex, the age of 22 years stood out with 35 females (19.66 %); on the other hand, in the male sex, the age of 21 years stood out with 24 cases (30 %). (Figure 1)



**Graph 1** Distribution of participants according to age and sex.

Source: questionnaire applied.

The third year of academic training stood out with 71 cases, for 27.52 %. This was followed by the fifth and first year with 49 (18.99 %) and 48 (18.60 %) cases, respectively. On the other hand, the Medicine career stood out with 166 students, equivalent to 64.34 %. It was followed by Nursing with 58 students (22.48 %) (Table 1)

**Table 1** Distribution of cases according to years and care

Academic Year	Higher Education Careers										Total	%
	Medicine	%	Stomatol.	%	Nurse	%	Health Tech.	%	Career MES*	%		
First year	34	20,48	3	42,86	6	10,34	3	30,00	2	11,76	48	18,60
Second year	23	13,86	3	42,86	2	3,45	3	30,00	4	23,53	35	13,57
Third year	47	28,31	0	-	15	25,86	2	20,00	7	41,78	71	27,52
Fourth year	18	10,84	1	12,29	13	22,41	1	10,00	4	23,53	37	14,34
Fifth year	26	15,66	0	-	22	37,93	1	10,00	-	-	49	18,99
Sixth year	18	10,84	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	6,8
Total	166	100,00	7	100,00	58	100,00	10	100,0	17	100,00	258	100,00

Stomatol.: Stomatology, Health Tech.: Health technician, \*MES: Ministry of Higher Education.

Source: questionnaire applied.

Table 2 shows the results of each of the aspects analyzed in the questionnaire. Positive responses predominated (No or Never, depending on the aspect analyzed). There were also negative responses related to the amount of consumption and frequency with 14 (5.43%) and 10 (3.88%) cases, respectively.



**Table 2** Distribution of cases according to aspects

Variable	No.	%
How often do you drink alcoholic beverages?		
Never.	62	24,03
Once or twice a month.	136	52,71
2 or 4 times a month.	45	17,44
2 or 3 times a week.	8	3,10
4 or more times a week.	7	2,710
How many alcoholic beverages do you usually drink in a normal drinking day? The amount is expressed, in standard beverage units, as follows: 1 U = 1 glass of wine, or 1 line of rum, or 1 beer.		
1 or 2.	168	65,12
3 or 4.	48	18,60
5 or 6.	24	9,30
7 or 9.	4	1,55
10 or more.	14	5,43
How often do you drink 6 or more alcoholic beverages in a single day?		
Never.	175	67,83
Less than once a month.	64	24,81
Monthly.	11	4,26
Weekly	8	3,10
How often in the course of the last year have you been unable to stop drinking once you start?		
<i>Never</i>	226	87,60
<i>Less than once a month.</i>	12	4,65
Monthly.	5	1,94
Weekly	5	1,94
Daily or almost daily.	10	3,88
How often in the course of the last year were you unable to do what was expected of you because you had been drinking?		
<i>Never</i>	242	93,80
<i>Less than once a month.</i>	12	4,65
Monthly.	1	0,39
Weekly	-	-
Daily or almost daily.	3	1,16
How often in the course of the last year have you needed to drink on an empty stomach to recover after drinking heavily the day before?		
<i>Never</i>	244	94,57
<i>Less than once a month.</i>	8	3,10
Monthly.	2	0,78
Weekly	1	0,39



Daily or almost daily.	3	1,16
<b>How often in the course of the last year have you had remorse or feelings of guilt after drinking?</b>		
<i>Never</i>	232	89,92
<i>Less than once a month.</i>	20	7,75
Monthly.	3	1,16
Weekly	-	-
Daily or almost daily.	3	1,16
<b>How often in the course of the last year have you been unable to remember what had happened the night before because you had been drinking?</b>		
<i>Never</i>	215	83,33
<i>Less than once a month.</i>	36	13,95
Monthly.	1	0,39
Weekly	-	-
Daily or almost daily.	6	2,33
<b>Have you or anyone else been injured because you had been drinking?</b>		
No	246	95,35
Yes, but not in the last year.	9	3,49
Yes, in the last year.	3	1,16
<b>Have any family members, friends, doctors or healthcare professionals shown concern about your drinking or suggested that you stop drinking?</b>		
No	245	94,96
Yes, but not in the last year.	2	0,78
Yes, in the last year.	11	4,26

Source: questionnaire applied.

There were 39 cases with risk consumption (15.11%): men were the sex with the highest risk for alcohol consumption with 21 cases, equivalent to 26.25% within their own sex, with a significant value (Table 3).

**Table 3** Distribution of cases according to criteria of risky drinker

Criteria for risky drinker according to sex	According to sex				Total	
	Male (greater than and equal to 8 points)	%	Female (greater than and equal to 7 points)	%	No	%
Yes	21	26,25	18	10,11	39	15,11
No	59	73,75	160	89,89	219	84,88
Total	80	100,00	178	100,00	258	100,00

$\chi^2 = 11,20$   $a=0,05$

Source: applied questionnaire.



## DISCUSSION

Alcohol consumption alters or influences each of the CNS functions, causing a distortion of reality. Its chronic use can influence the cognitive, integration and synthesis functions of the person; with a compromise of his capacity to adapt to the environment. In this sense, it is important to analyze the consumption behavior of this substance among undergraduate students.

Age is an important factor for alcohol consumption. Therefore, young people and/or young adults have a greater tendency to consume this substance for multiple reasons: seeking pleasure, acceptance or due to environmental influence and pressure (social groups, family and others).<sup>(13,14)</sup> This criterion is supported by the results presented by Armendáriz García, et al.<sup>(15)</sup> when referring in their research that those university students with a family history of alcohol consumption, presented a higher average compared to the rest. At the same time, they agree with this author with respect to the outstanding ages, showing in their results 20 years of age as one of the most representative. These results are in agreement with those presented by Villaquiran, et al.<sup>(16)</sup>

In relation to sex, the results shown by the present study, in correlation with those presented by Gómez-Tejeda, et al.<sup>(17)</sup> and Parra-Soto, et al.<sup>(18)</sup> are similar. These studies show a predominance of the female sex in 65.75% and 73.6% of the cases analyzed by each author, respectively. However, it is not the sex with the greatest impact on the consumption of this substance, as will be discussed below.

The undergraduate academic training presents a level of demand (according to the type of academic training) for the university student. The first years of undergraduate studies involve a period of adaptation to a new teaching and evaluation system. The student must adapt to it, at the same time that he/she adapts his/her study methods to the particularities of each subject and of his/her career in general. However, not all of them develop with the required promptness and effectiveness the mechanisms of adaptation to the new change and may take refuge in drinking. In turn, this is influenced by the environment and the friendships in which the student develops (criterion previously explained and substantiated). Augusto Mora, et al.<sup>(19)</sup> shows a greater tendency to alcohol consumption in the first years of education with figures that vary between 38 and 41% approximately; in comparison with the present study that shows a predominance in the third year.

Gogeochea-Trejo, et al.<sup>(20)</sup> in their study show a predominance of careers associated with economic and administrative sciences, compared to the rest. However, it places medical science careers in second place. According to the authors, this is an aspect of interest to highlight. On the other hand, Rodríguez de la Cruz, et al.<sup>(21)</sup> in their study of students in health sciences careers show a predominance of nursing careers, followed by medicine. The results of the present study differ from those shown by these researchers. On the other hand, it is valid to point out the role played by health personnel in the prevention and promotion of good health habits and lifestyles; an aspect that contradicts the results shown in these studies.





Health personnel should raise awareness of the complications of alcohol consumption for individual and social health. At the same time, they are examples of interest in healthy behavior patterns and habits for the community. For this reason, actions should be taken to reduce alcohol consumption among medical science students, with a view to their better professional performance.

In relation to the aspects of alcohol consumption in university students, Castaño Pérez, et al.<sup>(22)</sup> shows significant results for each of the variables, with a greater tendency towards consumption in contrast to the data shown by this study. In turn, Betancourth-Zambrano<sup>(23)</sup> shows a predominance of monthly consumption in comparison with the rest of the variables. However, the present study disagrees with this author by referring to the variable "Never" in each of the aspects related to frequency. Similar results were shown by Velastegui Hernandez, et al.<sup>(24)</sup>

Authors such as Castaño-Perez, et al.<sup>(25)</sup> and Sifuentes-Castro, et al.<sup>(26)</sup> show that 20.5% and 39.8% of their cases, respectively, were classified as risk consumers. The results presented by this study show similar data with respect to this author, although they are lower in relation to the second author. It is valid to recognize the significant value attributed in the present study to male sex as a predictor of risk alcohol consumption. Samudio Domínguez, et al.<sup>(27)</sup> recognized it as a risk factor, in addition to showing significant results in relation to male sex with alcohol consumption.

The increase in consumption in the male sex, and its greater significance, may be due to cultural and social criteria on displaying aspects of masculinity. In turn, it is believed that alcohol enhances these aspects such as charisma, performance and social interaction. Some even believe that alcohol can improve sexual performance; however, each of the above criteria are myths that encourage consumption among young people, especially among this gender.<sup>(28)</sup>

As a limitation, the study did not address the risk factors and motivations related to alcohol consumption among students. This aspect will be addressed in future research.

## CONCLUSIONS

Alcohol consumption is detrimental to the social and school performance of university students. Its impact is wide in both sexes; with a greater significance for males. In turn, consumption patterns vary in relation to quantity and frequency. Aspects that determine the character of risk consumer of the patient or case analyzed.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

**Author contributions:**

Luis Enrique Jimenez-Franco: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, research, methodology, project management, visualization, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing.

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[Base de datos empleada en Caracterización del consumo de alcohol en estudiantes universitarios](#)

