

# Community involvement in the incentive to alcohol consumption among school students in Portugal

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## ABSTRACT

The debut in alcohol consumption among young people is becoming a reality with ascending precocity. The Portuguese society has been traditionally tolerant in this area. This study sought to understand the role of personal and social involvement in alcohol consumption, among young students of the municipality of Estremoz (Portugal) who share work and leisure spaces. A qualitative research was developed, using the direct method of data gathering. An interview guide was drafted, comprehending the personal, environmental and socio cultural dimensions. The sample consisted of fifteen student consumers from 8th, 10th and 12th grades from the secondary school. There is a practice of selling alcohol to young people under 16 years old, in various locations around the country and a first contact with the intake at the ages between 12 and 16 years old, in a nocturnal party environment in the company of friends. It is inferable a tolerant behavior of family members towards moderate intake of alcoholic beverages, providing money for parties where alcohol is present and the lack of control on incurred expenses. The influence of the group of peers, tacit or explicit, potentiates consumption. Despite the unpleasant consequences of alcohol ingestion, families condone, or tacitly approve, that their young even under 16, taste several drinks, encouraging them to drink moderate amounts on festive occasions or leisure time. The communication controlled by the community that promotes consumption prevails over the other, oriented to the choice and maintenance of healthy practices, hindering risk behavior.

**Keywords:** Alcohol, youth, family, community, consumption.

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## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a period marked by the search for new experiences. Young people want to try everything to build their own opinions. The consumption of alcoholic beverages has always been associated with fun, toasts and celebrations, religious ceremonies, social costumes, traditions, medicine and even inspiration (Hanpatchaiyakul et al., 2014). In Portuguese society among the majority of the segments of the population, alcohol consumption is a standard behavior: abstinence is seen in some quarters as strange. Therefore, this consumption is not seen, alongside tobacco, as if it were a drug (Cabral, 2007).

Decree-Law nr. 9/2002, of January 24, strives to give continuity to the mission of the Plan of Action against Alcoholism, approved by the Ministers' Council

Resolution nr. 166/2000, of November 29. It constitutes, therefore, a horizontal effort to implement the various measures foreseen in the Plan furthering inter-ministerial cooperation. The document begins by stating that "excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages entails serious health consequences". It defends "the struggle against excessive consumption or abuse of alcoholic beverages" without defining the maximum amount of alcohol that should be consumed or the concepts of "excessive consumption" and "abuse". The only indication regards the Road Code (Decree-Law nr. 44/2005, February 23) that states the prohibition of driving vehicles, for drivers on probation, with a rate of alcohol in the blood equal or superior to 0.2 g/L.

The Decree-Law nr. 9/2002, of January 24, prohibits

**Table 1.** Experimentation of alcohol consumption and other psychoactive substances (LTP) in 3rd Cycle Basic Education (CBE) and in Secondary Education (SE) (percentages).

Year	Alcohol		Tobacco		Illicit substances	
	3rd CBE	SE	3rd CBE	SE	3rd CBE	SE
2001	67	91	49	70	14	22
2006	60	87	35	55	8	16
2011	67	93	38	64	14	23

Source: Hibell et al. (2009, 2012); WHO (2013). In Portugal, basic education comprehends three cycles: the first (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades), the second (5th and 6th grades) and the third (7th, 8th and 9th grades). Secondary education (SE) comprehends the 10th, 11th and 12th grades. The third cycle (3rd CEB) is attended, in average, by children between 12 and 15 years old; secondary education is attended by teenagers between 15 and 18 years old.

the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors under 16 (paragraph 1 of Art. 2) and its consumption in public places and places open to the public (paragraph 2 of the same article). However, our observing experience, confirmed by interviewees testimonies in recurring public debates about this subject (e.g., RTP, 2013) allows us to perceive that in various commercial establishments there is a total disregard for this legal precept (underage drinking), as well as poor supervision by the authorities.

Within the family, alcohol consumption is more acceptable than tobacco. Sometimes it is the family that encourages consumption. Sons, nephews and grandsons consume alcoholic beverages (mainly wine or beer) to be “emancipated” in their masculinity, often incited by male family members (Marti, 1996). Often, young people with money and freedom adopt a nocturnal lifestyle where the presence of alcohol is constant.

A qualitative study realized by Gordo et al. (2012) in two Spanish schools with a sample of 16 students from basic education had as a goal to know the perception of the risk of consuming drugs and its influence in attitudes and behaviors. Results show that teenagers don't recognize alcohol as a psychoactive substance.<sup>1</sup> The first contact happens at 12 to 13 years old. Feelings of invulnerability and peer pressure are the main promoters of ingestion. The most considered negative effects are risks of sexual intercourse, traffic accidents and quitting school. The interviewees request a greater accessibility to health services. The study concludes that health strategies should meet teenagers' expectations and not just information.

Graffigna et al. (2011) developed a qualitative survey in Brescia (Italy) aiming to evaluate the efficiency of environmental communication in preventing unsafe behavior. The results show the potential capacity of environmental communication to sensitize young people to adopt safe conducts. However, communication had little impact on the perception of the risks associated with driving under the influence of alcohol. To achieve greater

efficiency, preventive communication should incorporate more complex and articulated communication and it should be projected in accordance with a profound and ecological understanding of real social contexts, specially the way young people use public spaces.

In Portugal, the lifetime prevalence (LTP) of alcohol consumption stands out relatively to the LTP of tobacco and illicit substances among the students in secondary education and third cycle of basic education (Table 1).

New experiences and phenomena arise as in the case of binge drinking (or heavy episodic drinking) where the only goal is to produce a state of rapid intoxication (Renaud, 2001). According to the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) (Hibell et al., 2012), this practice is adopted by 22 per cent of the national population, in a survey average of 39 per cent.

A survey conducted by Balsa et al. (2008) in 2007 at national level, involving 15000 interviewees aged between 15 and 64, reveals that about 48.3 per cent of the participants have consumptions of 4 to 6 drinks in one single occasion at least once in the last year, and 20 percent of those do not consider that there is no risk associated with this practice.

It is noticeable the community's tolerance for alcohol consumption, but simultaneously its condemnation of the behavior it generates.

The Alentejo region presents the higher prevalence of alcohol consumption at national level among 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of basic education and secondary education students. The northern regions register lower levels. The phenomenon of price influence was studied in some countries such as England (Betts and Scott, 2005) and the Netherlands (van Hoof et al., 2008), revealing that as a consequence of cost reduction there is an increase in consumption.

The teenagers, who can easily talk with both parents informing them where they are going, present healthier behavior. Teenagers who feel they have a supportive family helping them to make decisions and friends with whom to share happiness and sorrow, also exhibit healthier behaviors.

Given this reality consumption, this study is the following question pivot: What is the role of the

<sup>1</sup>We understand psychoactive substance as: “substance that, when ingested, affects mental processes, e.g. cognition ou affect” (WHO, 1994, p. 53).

community in encouraging alcohol consumption among students of non-higher education? The research aims to know the perceptions of students about the community's role in the influence of alcohol consumption and the risk of abuse and dependence later.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

The search for answers to the pivot question requires an in-depth analysis of the type introspective (Kaufmann, 1996). We decided, therefore, to perform a multi-case comparison (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003; Stake, 1994) centered on a narrative (Bassegy, 2002), where you could find similarities between cases who performed a priori categorically different: abstinent and consumers. The underlying logic to multiple cases, in the words of Barlow et al. (2009), is that can predict similar results (literal replication) from case to case, or that can be produced contrasting results, for predictable reasons (theoretical replication).

### Study area

This study was conducted at the secondary school in the municipality of Estremoz, located in the central region of Alentejo, Portugal. The Portuguese region of Alentejo comprehends the administrative districts of Portalegre, Évora, Beja, the southern half of the Setúbal district and part of the district of Santarém. It is the biggest region of Portugal, corresponding to 33 per cent of the continent. It has 733.327 inhabitants, according to the 2011 Census. The region of Alentejo is bordered by the Central region to the north, the Reign of Spain to the Este, the Algarve region to the South and the region of Lisbon and Tagus Valley and also the Atlantic Ocean to the West. Estremoz is one of the 20 cities of this region and according to the 2011 Census it has 13.753 inhabitants (INE, 2012).

### Subject

The study focused on 8th, 10th and 12th grade students aged between 14 and 18 years old. The school population comprised 80 students in the 8th grade, 165 in the 10th grade and 139 in the 12th grade, residing in urban and rural areas.

### Sample size and sampling procedures

The researcher followed the criterion of proportional stratified sampling (Buendía, 1998) based on the act of consuming. The sample consisted of five student consumers, for each year of schooling, referenced by the class director, based on criteria deal: availability of students to participate in the study and questioning about who considered themselves consumers/not consumers of alcoholic beverages: eleven were male (66.7 percent) and ten resided in urban areas.

### Research tool

We chose to adopt a semi-structured interview, aimed at thorough knowledge of the subject, ensuring that participants answered the same questions and maintained a level of flexibility in exploiting them. In the absence of a published script that suited our subject, an interview script was drafted based on the literature review and

the legal regulations, comprehending the following dimensions and sub-dimensions: personal (individual factors sub-dimension); environmental dimension (alcohol consumption habit promoter factors sub-dimension); socio cultural dimension (perception of health risk, social representations and social micro and macro factors sub-dimension). Each sub-dimension presented a set of goals, materializing in illustrative open questions, focused on the exploration of the interviewees' opinion.

### Validity of research tool

The script of the interview was validated in two stages. In the first stage the script was submitted to a panel of specialist judges. After getting feedback from the experts, suggested alterations were made. In the second stage, two students were subjected to a pilot interview in order to assess and incorporate alterations. The criterion for selecting these students was the same as before and the students did not participate in further study. These interviews led to vocabulary adjustments to facilitate interpretation of the questions, resulting in the final version.

### Data collection procedures

The schedule of the interviews was defined by the students' class directors and the researcher of this study. The interviews took place in an office provided by the school principal, located in a secluded wing, with adequate lighting and a warm, elegant and soberly decorated ambience, without disturbing or distracting elements.

The interviews were recorded with an *Olympus VN-6800PC* digital recorder and transcribed *verbatim* in *Microsoft Word 2007* and transcribed by the researchers.

### Data analysis

Then, the interviews' answers were analyzed and codified based on the open coding technic from the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Orlikowski, 1993) and the aid of Bardin (1994). Every interview was synthesized, with reference to the categorization established a priori, highlighting key ideas as meaning units, dependent on other parts of the text to each they related.

### Data management and ethical considerations

A constant of this work was the established relationship of trust and collaboration with the interviewees, valuing their independence, their integrity, their confidentiality and privacy and reports, as well as full information processing and analysis. The ethical dimensions between interviewer and interviewee revealed that cross the fullness of the work we were weighted. The General Directorate of Curriculum Innovation and Development of the Ministry of Education (nr. 0198100001, from April 5, 2012), the school principal and the guardians of the students gave the necessary authorizations for this study. The confidentiality of the students interviewed was guaranteed.

## RESULTS

### Personal dimension

The onset of alcohol consumption occurs, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, between 12 and 14 years old, confirming the results found in other studies (de Matos et al., 2006). 10<sup>th</sup>

grade students report having started between 13 and 15 years old and 12<sup>th</sup> graders between 13 and 16 years old. The space and time of initiation are associated with celebrations and festivities in the company of friends. The motives of ingestion point towards curiosity, explicit and/or implicit motivation, reaching the idealized aged of ingestion, party atmosphere will impose promotion and personal style:

"I was curious to know if it was good or not, if I liked some drinks...some of my friends were drinking..." (E1-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"What matters a lot to me are my friends...being together motivates drinking...the older ones...sometimes if we drink alcohol we seem older and that gives us a kind of pride and we are more accepted by the older ones, they start talking to us more, sometimes they talking about things that we don't even understand, they start getting closer to us...sometimes they're already a little...and they get closer to us and they talk and laugh...we get in a pleasant mood" (E1-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"My friends, my age, were all drinking and I drank too...I was curious...I saw everyone drinking and I also tried it. I had thought about it other times...they drank and I thought it would be good... and that they had style" (E4-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"It's a new stage in life, the time for experimenting. So I was curious and I tried it...with friends...we were at a party" (E8-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"Curiosity...we watch the older ones and we want to try to be like them, get along with lots of people, be popular...knowing what was the feeling...when I started going out and I saw people one older than me drinking I thought that if they were drinking, next year I could drink too...and so it was" (E9-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"When I started going out at night. When dinners with colleagues started, at birthdays, we started drinking. I always drank accompanied..." (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I was curious, my friends already drank and I wanted to try...at parties, at dinners" (E15-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

### Environmental dimension

Beer is the beverage consumed across all the age groups considered. 8<sup>th</sup> grade students also mention Eristoff Black, straight or with Coca-Cola and Vodka. 10<sup>th</sup> grade students mention mostly beer and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students mention a wider range of beverages both fermented and distilled. Heterogeneity coexists in the beverages consumed among peers, not always coincident amongst themselves. Concerning beer, the preferences indicate the pleasantness of flavour, low concentration of alcohol and reduced price:

"I like the taste. It's sweet" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"Mainly because they're drinks that aren't too much ... they're strong but... they don't seem very strong, sour, they're kind of sweet and... and one drinks that with some pleasure" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...) beer is what I drink most because it's cheap. The price matters. The other drinks taste good, but are off putting because they're expensive." (E15-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

The purchase of alcoholic drinks by young people under 16 is easy and no one obstructs its consumption. The major contribution to this situation, according to the unanimity of the subjects, is the economic advantage of the sellers. Some students mention that known traders sell them alcoholic beverages more easily. They claim that recently opened bars are more resistant to selling, but over time, the restriction is attenuated and they end up selling alcoholic beverages without checking the age of the buyers. On some occasions older colleagues buy the drinks and pass them along to the younger ones. The bars and clubs in the region do not comply with the restrictions on the sale and consumption of alcohol as well as those concerning the presence of under aged youths in their facilities.

Physical appearance, even in the more zealous places, is a safe pass for youths under 16 to access the bars in the city.

"They sell to minors. They don't ask identification. Never did. I go to the party counter upstairs and ask and they give me. They want to make money and as there are lots of people drinking they want to have even more" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"It's easy. I can buy without any problem. I wait until there are lots of people buying and then they don't pay attention to the younger ones. As I'm tall, I look 16 and what matters to them is selling... I think it all comes together" (E5-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"People already know us; we have greater confidence with people. It doesn't make a difference any more. They sell without any problem" (E6-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I think there's no difficulty. When I started there wasn't any and now I see there still isn't. Making money, even with the younger ones is what business man want." (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Most of the interviewees consider that the age limit to the intake of alcoholic drinks should stay as it is now:

"I think at 16 it's ok...it's when we have some maturity" (E1-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...I think 16 it's ok...the conscience to know how to drink doesn't have to do with age...it's different from person to person" (E7-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I wouldn't change that age but then... it just depends, then we have to stand up to the bar

owners...that is very complicated, up to 'x' drinks." (E13-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students consider that there should be greater control in verifying the age of the consumer as well as controlling the amount of drinks sold to each individual:

"(...) at (bar) and at (bar) there is control at the door...they look at the person, check the appearance and they let you in or not (...) but I think they should check...there are lots of people who are 12, 13 years old drinking" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"If we go to Lisbon there's always that restriction of showing ID (citizen identification card) at the door. Here it doesn't happen...I think it leads to more drinking and sooner...I think there should be greater control" (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

The money spent in alcoholic drinks is given mostly by parents on the day of the party, or beforehand in a periodical sum, part of which is put aside:

"I save from the allowance my mother gives me" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I ask my parents. Sometimes I ask for something else..., to have a snack...and then I keep some of the money and I buy" (E6-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I have a monthly allowance and put some money aside but it's not just for drinks. My mother also gives me money for parties" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"My mother and my father give me a weekly allowance..." (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

The students comment that in some festive events, at a given moment, the price of the drinks drops during a certain period of time, promoting the increase of consumption:

"Once, during a party, at a certain time, they lowered the price of drinks. It was Halloween. Everything was one euro. Everyone ran to the bar. At times like that the ones who like it the most go running. Everybody tries to buy at that time. It's cheaper and you take advantage..." (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

" Sometimes, at some parties, they do promotions...they lower 50 cents...and then everyone goes buying and instead of buying one ticket one buys three or four to use later because it's cheaper...we save...we drink more. The last one was at Halloween. They're called happy hours" (E9-10<sup>th</sup> grade).

Some of the students think that higher prices associated with less availability of money, would contribute to lower the consumption:

"But the price of alcoholic drinks is expensive, but I think it's ok...because it's like tobacco...tobacco is cheap. If it was one thousand euros, no one would buy it, no one would be a smoker. So I think that they should rise the price of alcoholic drinks (...) they would rise it and no one would consume" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...) they blow a horn and we buy cheaper and so we drink more...it's not about saving money it's about buying more. Higher prices lead to less drinking" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"Having money facilitates drinking. If we didn't have money we wouldn't drink" (E15-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

### Socio cultural dimension

Close relatives tend to encourage moderate drinking on festive occasions:

"At a wedding, my father asked me if I wanted to try some liqueur, which was very sweet" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"When I was small I drank with my parents as a joke...just wetting the lips...joking...not a big deal" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"At parties...New Year's Eve and weddings...I've been told to taste it" (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Older students also point to the influence of family relatives that produce alcoholic drinks, who promote the tasting and appreciation of those same drinks:

"Wine tasting...because my brothers produce wine and to get me to enjoy the sensation, to see if someday I could join the business, that's why...they encouraged me" (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...) my grandfather's *aguardente* [a kind of brandy]. I also like the flavour. He makes it himself, also wine, but I like *aguardente* better. I drink it when I meet my grandfather at the farm. He tells me: "Taste this one, it's newly made". I like to taste. I enjoy the flavour...the fact that he made it...and then he takes me tasting" (E13-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Moderate drinking habits among the student's family members, influences the moderate drinking of the students themselves, according to them.

Parents are relatively tolerant regarding moderate drinking:

"As they (the parents) think I don't drink too much, they just warn me not to abuse it" (E1-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...) just the fact of not mixing drinks, drinking a beer or two...no making a fool of myself" (E8-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"They don't like me to drink excessively and they

call my attention for it" (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Some 8<sup>th</sup> grade student's parents have no knowledge of their alcohol intake; and others, in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, consider alcohol drinking habits normal among teenagers:

"I told them (the parents) that in (refers the place), they served *sangria* and beer. Other than that they don't know anything else" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"My mother hasn't a clue. If she knew she would ground me for real. My father tells me:" Don't drink! It's bad for you" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"My parents know that I drink in small amounts and they consider it normal at my age, it's part of belonging in a group" (E11-10<sup>th</sup> grade).

It seems that parents tend to be intolerant with excessive drinking:

"My parents know that I don't drink much...they tell me to be careful...they don't like to see young people falling drunk" (E5-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"My parents know that I drink small amounts and at my age they consider it normal, it's part of hanging out in a group" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"The reaction to alcohol abuse is negative, but my father and my mother are aware that nowadays...when I go out, my brother and I, they know what we drink, which is normal" (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...) they've always told me: You may drink in moderation. And that's what I do." (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Most of the interviewees claim that they take their parents warnings and opinions in consideration, influencing them to drink moderately. Still, some students say that their opinion prevails over their parents', and that leads to excess when they're among friends. Some of the participants in this study consider that a critical and prohibitive approach by the parents is counter-productive:

"(...) they say one shouldn't drink but if I like it, not to drink in excess or became altered. I think that they're right, so I don't drink too much, I take that in account...my parents don't like to see the guys falling drunk at the end of a party, they think it's an abuse" (E4-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"Usually I don't consume a lot...I remember a little of what they say" (E8-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I think that nowadays parents are the major problem, some parents, forbidding people of doing this or that, and when people know that they can...they try to enjoy everything they didn't do so far and drink in excess. I think my parents did a good thing by letting me do things and learn for

myself (...)" (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students refer tacit and explicit influence from their peers towards alcohol consumption. 12<sup>th</sup> grade students mention just the tacit effects:

"Rita [a friend] encourages us to drink" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"There are some older ones that sometimes tell us:" Go on, take one! We end up drinking." (E4-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"If there's two or three of us, each one gets a drink and we spend the night. We're having fun, talking and listening to music...hanging out until we get somewhat alcoholised...Sometimes we cross that line..." (E7-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"If I get to a place and a friend is drinking, I drink to keep him company" (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Alcoholic drinks are taken to keep up with the friends. They may not be consumed when the students don't feel like it, when they're sick or on medication:

"If I'm sick...or ill" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"Usually when I'm on medication I never drink, but with nothing else, I usually drink" (E7-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"(...) if I'm not in the mood or it isn't the right time...because I have to be home soon" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"Sometimes I don't feel like it... or I'm on medication..." (E11-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Curfew is pointed by 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students as a factor of intake. If it's late, or if they stay overnight at friends, some of the interviewees say they drink in higher doses:

"If I go home later I can wait an hour until the effect wears off. If I'm sleeping at a friend's house, I can push it a little more, because I'm not with my parents. That's the problem: parents" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"My parents are very judgemental and maybe that's why I haven't told them that sometimes I drink...I do it when I stay over at friends in Estremoz. (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade).

In every age group considered, it's inferable an alteration in consumption habits, from reduction to abstinence, if it is the norm in the group:

"I wouldn't keep drinking (if her friends stopped) because it would feel bad to be the only one drinking. So if everybody stopped I would stop" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I would probably quit (drinking). Our group is very close knit and I think we are very supportive of each other. If everyone quitted I would quit" (E9-10<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I like to drink with my friends. If they stopped, I don't really know...it feels good to drink a beer pressure. Maybe I would drink less because I wouldn't have company..." (E13-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

At the core of intoxication, are attitudes such as "drink to show that you can" (especially younger consumers), "inexistent notion of the alcohol concentration in the drinks", "having money available", "going through a difficult time", "exciting party mood", among others:

"I drank more than the other times. I knew it was strong and I thought:" Today is the day!" I had more money that night" (E9-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "I think the first time one gets drunk is because one doesn't know quite the amount of alcohol in some drinks" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "Drunkness, and I have gotten drunk as well as my friends, happens because we start drinking *penalties* and that goes in very fast" (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

8<sup>th</sup> grade students seem to attach greater influence to the media. 10<sup>th</sup> graders don't recognize the connection between advertising and the consumption of alcoholic drinks. 12<sup>th</sup> graders reveal diverging opinions: some prefer to recognize the media influence and others don't:

"On TV they lecture against drinking because of the accidents. I don't think it's encouraging. But when I see people drinking those colourful drinks I get curious to taste them...they seem good" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "To me it doesn't have much influence...this drink is trendy or that one...no. I like this brand or that brand...but it's not advertising that makes me decide...it's the pleasure of drinking...this is the flavour I like...not due to advertising" (E8-10<sup>th</sup> grade)  
 "I don't think it influences consumption...by the young. At this point I don't watch much TV...I have little time..." (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "Sometimes commercials are funny but that's not what most influences us" (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "I think so (...) one sees those commercials and one begins to think how it is, what it tastes like...There's always that expectation and then we have a tendency to try" (E13-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

Most 8<sup>th</sup> grade students relate the attribute "popularity" with the ingestion of alcoholic drinks:

"I think the ones who drink are more popular...you talk with those people more or you want to hang out with them" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "The ones who drink are more popular among the classmates" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);

"I don't think there's much of a connection" (E3-8<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "I even think they're more popular" (E4-8<sup>th</sup> grade).

Most of their colleagues from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade state the reverse:

"That's got nothing to do with it..." (E7-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "We're well known in school because we've been here a few years...so we are well known...it's not because we drink..." (E13-12<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "In my group we're all important and popular because of our good mood" (E10-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "In my group there's no one more popular" (E12-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "At school we're known because we've been here for a few years...so we're better known...it's not because we drink...the students in this school, there must be few who don't drink..." (E13-12<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "(...) I think you're popular when you're sociable not because you drink" (E14-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

For the majority of the interviewed subjects consuming alcoholic drinks is being trendy. The main reason for alcohol consumption, among 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, is the amusement it provides. 10<sup>th</sup> grade students also mention companionship and festive occasions. Older students highlight the flavour and the pleasantness of taking a drink in a festive environment:

"(...) it's a way of having fun, it's not essential, but we have fun while we're drinking" (E2-8<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "I don't drink a lot. I enjoy, once in a while, hanging out like that with my friends" (E6-10<sup>th</sup> grade);  
 "Getting together with friends at parties...feeling good and the fact that I like the flavour" (E12-12<sup>th</sup> grade).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The onset of alcohol consumption among the young people participating in the survey reveals a tendency to precocity, as we consider the younger groups. Thus, regarding the personal dimension, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students report having drunk alcohol for the first time between 12 and 14 years old; 10<sup>th</sup> grade students between 13 and 15 years old and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students between 13 and 16 years old, converging with the results advanced by Feijão (2008) and by the HBSC/WHO Study Report (de Matos et al., 2006). The preferred sites of consumption are night party spaces, during the weekend, in the company of friends, confirming the HBSC/WHO survey (de Matos, 2008). Curiosity, tacit and explicit motivation from their peers, party atmosphere and the desire to be assertive and "having style" seem to be the drivers of intake.

The environmental dimension reveals that among the most widely consumed beverages, beer is referred across all the age groups, which is consistent with the results of the ESPAD (Hibell et al., 2009). As the age group advances the diversity of alcoholic beverages consumed, fermented or distilled, expands. Within a group of peers there seems to be some heterogeneity on the preferences regarding drinks consumed. The flavour, low alcohol concentration and reduced price, in the case of beer, point to the preference of some drinks over others.

Regarding the environmental dimension we also refer the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages in places of public access by young people under the age of 16 is relatively easy. The economic advantages of the transactions for the sellers contribute to facilitate the sell. Older colleagues buy drinks for the younger ones. In bars, parties or nightclubs, it doesn't seem to be standard practice to ask for identification or confirmation of young people's age. The majority of young people agree with the age limit of 16 years old for the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Parents provide money that is spent in the purchase of alcoholic drinks. More money available contributes to higher consumption. The price reduction of drinks, which occurs during a certain period at some parties, also leads to higher consumption, confirming the studies of Betts and Scott (2005) and van Hoof et al. (2008).

In the socio cultural dimension data show a family incentive to consumption, in moderate amounts, of alcoholic drinks in festive events or in tastings of family productions.

Moderate consumption witnessed among family members contributes to following the example. Parents are tolerant regarding moderate consumption by young people. Parents' opinions and advice influence towards moderate consumption. Prohibitions and restrictive attitudes by the parents contribute to poor intercommunication and to omitting behaviour by the children.

Late curfews enable higher consumption. An alteration in consumption habits may take place, namely reduction or abstinence, if the peers of their group abstain from drinking. Inebriation results from ignorance about the alcoholic content of the drinks, the availability of money, the desire to prove oneself to others, a festive atmosphere and personal problems.

The media contribute to the stimulation of consumption in younger students, sensing the connection between popularity and alcoholic intake. Drinking alcohol is fashionable.

The reasons leading to alcohol ingestion vary with the subjects' age. Amusement is the reason mostly mentioned by the younger subjects. The company of friends and celebrations are mentioned by the 15 to 16 year old students while older students state flavour and party atmosphere as the main reasons.

In summary, there is an explicit influence exerted by

family members in experimenting with alcohol at festive occasions and at tastings of family productions, sometimes even if the subject is less than 16 years old. The failure to comply with the law that states the prohibition of selling to minors under 16 years old and to those who show noticeable signs of intoxication, the advertising of alcoholic drinks as well as alcoholic consumption behaviours by adolescents, recommends the necessity to act on these exterior factors.

It seems important to raise the awareness of merchants and to enforce control measures in order to comply with the legislation, consequently contributing to the reduction of alcohol consumption among young people. At the same time, it seems imperative empowering young students so they can make conscious decisions regarding alcohol consumption, which seems so trivialized nowadays. In any event, despite the Portuguese legislation allows, it is recommended, based on scientific evidence that the consumption of alcoholic beverages will not occur up to 18 years old (NHMRC, 2009).

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