Does alcohol use during undergraduate years predict economic dependence in late 20s?

To evaluate the association between economic dependence in early adulthood and alcohol use patterns during their undergraduate years (risky consumption and heavy episodic drinking) in a cohort of Spanish university students at 10-year follow-up.

A cohort study was carried out. The study population was first year students (18 to 19 years old) at the University of Santiago de Compostela (Spain) (initial study sample = 1369). Alcohol consumption was measured with the Galician validated version of the AUDIT at the beginning of the study, and after two and five years. Risky consumption (RC) was defined as a dichotomous variable generated from AUDIT total score. A different cut-off value was established according to gender: > 4 for women and > 5 for men. Heavy Episodic Drinking (HED) was defined as a dichotomous variable generated from the third AUDIT question “How often do you have 6 or more alcoholic drinks per occasion?” which was coded as: never = 0, less than once a month = 0, once a month = 1, once a week = 1, daily or almost daily = 1. Economic dependence was measured with the EuropASI in 2015. Two logistic regression models were constructed (men and women separately) using the economic dependence as dependent variable.

The response rate at ten-year follow-up was 30.3% (n = 415; 325 females).

The prevalence of RC during their undergraduate years (2005, 2007 and 2010) was not significantly different between women and men. However, significant differences were found in terms of prevalence of HED, being more prevalent among males.

RC and HED during undergraduate years were not associated with economic dependence in late 20s neither in case of females nor males.

Different alcohol use patterns during undergraduate years have been confirmed between women and men. It could be thought that harmful patterns of alcohol use at that time, such as RC or HED, influence the fact of achieving or not economic independence in the early adulthood. However, no association has been observed. Selection bias, because of the loss of subjects in the follow-up, could partly explain the absence of significant results.

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.