



Physical Anthropology Section - 2013

I3 Alcohol Use and Juvenile Delinquency in Europe: Results of an International Study

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After attending this presentation, participants will be able to recognize some features of the relationship between alcohol use and delinquency among juveniles, particularly the strength and the characteristics of this association in various cultural contexts and the role of drinking patterns in the etiology of crime.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving as a key aspect for understanding the relationship between alcohol use and juvenile delinquency with the aim of improving preventive interventions.

The existence of a significant correlation between alcohol use and crime has long been acknowledged in the scientific literature. Moreover, alcohol use constitutes a serious public health problem. Several studies have shown that alcohol plays a prominent role in the genesis of deviant behavior, especially among the young.

In order to ascertain the existence of significant relationship among alcohol use and delinquency among young people and to describe the nature and characteristics of such a relationship, a database was set up to record the results of the "International Self-Report Delinquency Study 2." This database was created by selecting a sample of young people (N=57,771) of both sexes, aged between 12 and 16 years, in 25 European countries (Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Island, Norway, Finland, Austria, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Hungary, Armenia, Czech Republic, and Estonia).

The research focused chiefly on the role of alcohol use and the various modes of alcohol consumption, and sought to analyze the influence exerted by different life situations (age, sex, lifestyle, friendships, and personality traits).

Alcohol consumption proved to be a very widespread phenomenon among young people, particularly among youths who commit crimes and those who are victims of crime. Moreover, it emerged that the abuse of alcohol was the consumption modality most closely associated with both delinquency and victimization. Alcohol use was seen to correlate more closely with the involvement in violent crime than with property offenses. A possible explanation for this could be that, since alcohol exerts a pharmacological effect which simultaneously heightens aggression and blunts certain cognitive capacities, its consumption may play a greater role in the commission of unplanned offences.

The analyses conducted on the relationship between the involvement in alcohol use and various psychosocial factors, such as lifestyle, personality traits (self-control and inclination to violence), and belonging to delinquent youth groups, yielded particularly significant results.

When the results recorded in each country were examined individually, the association between alcohol use and delinquency was confirmed in all geographical settings, despite the considerable social and cultural differences. In particular, it emerged that, in all of the countries considered, alcohol use was more closely associated with involvement in violent crime than with property offenses.

The results yielded by the present study indicate that alcohol use is strongly associated with delinquency among young people in Europe and that so-called "binge drinking" is the consumption modality most closely associated with offending.

In conclusion, alcohol use and delinquency are closely related with one another. The nature and characteristics of these relationships suggest that the associations between alcohol use and delinquency are reciprocal rather than one-directional. Consequently, alcohol use constitutes a risk factor for criminal behavior. Likewise, involvement in delinquency increased the risk of alcohol consumption and, especially, of alcohol abuse.

Alcohol Use, Juvenile Delinquency, Relationship