



HEALTH CULTURE AND ALCOHOL USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN MONTENEGRO

MSc Zoran Lalović



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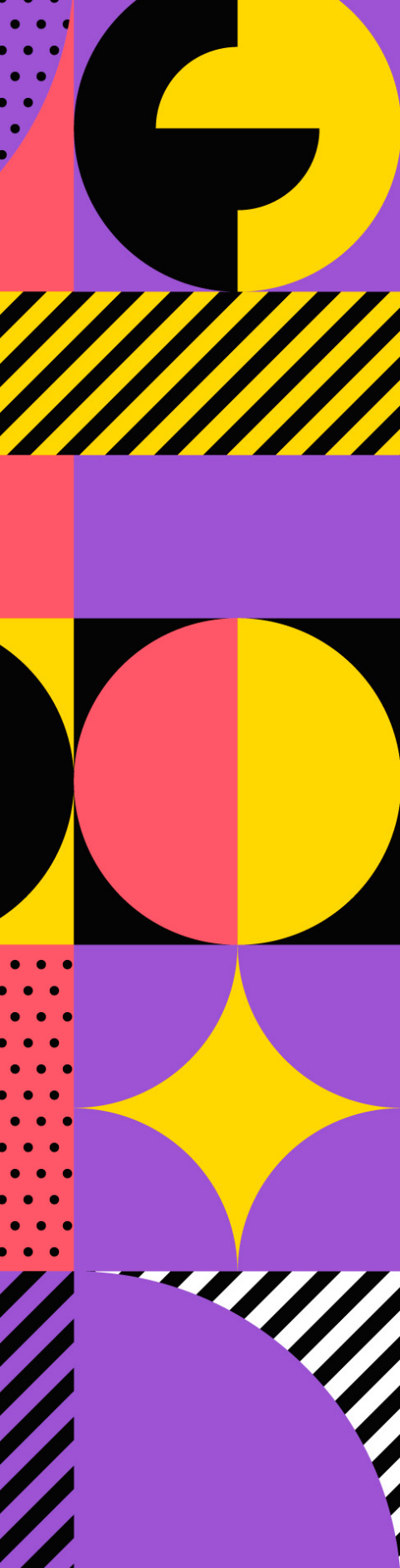
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FOREWORD





In an effort to provide a healthy environment for the development and growth of children and young people, Forum MNE, in cooperation with the Bureau for Education Services of Montenegro, conducted research on health culture and alcohol use among students in the country.

Through this comprehensive research, we sought to gain a better understanding of the causes and patterns of alcohol use among young people, their health habits, the impact of educational programs and peer pressure, as well as the potential for positive changes in attitudes and behaviour.

We hope that the findings of this research will serve as an important source of information for decision-makers, educational institutions, the civil sector, parents, and all those working with young people, and that they will form a basis for the development of prevention programs. Effective prevention should focus on eliminating risk factors, addressing root causes, early detection, and timely intervention. This is only possible through a multi-sectoral approach and cooperation among all stakeholders.

We would hereby like to thank all the research participants, educational institutions and students, who helped us to better understand the challenges and issues they face regarding alcohol use.

The research was conducted as part of the project "Change the Rules of the Game!", implemented by Forum MNE with the financial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) via ForumCiv and IOGT NTO Movement.

Forum MNE Team



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH SUBJECT

Alcohol consumption among young people is a serious social issue with negative consequences for their health and well-being. Young people are particularly vulnerable to the harmful physical effects of alcohol, as their bodies are still developing. Long-term alcohol use can have detrimental effects on their organs, especially the brain and liver. Alcohol has a negative effect on young people's mental health: it can cause or aggravate anxiety, depression and other mental disorders. When it comes to education, alcohol consumption leads to concentration problems, difficulties with studying, and an overall decline in academic performance. Young people are often unaware of the dangers of developing addiction. Early exposure to alcohol increases the risk of developing addiction in the later stages of life. Alcohol use negatively impacts young people's social relationships, including family dynamics, friendships, and overall interactions with their surroundings. Those who consume alcohol are often more prone to risky behaviours, such as drink-driving, aggressive behaviors etc., which increases the risk of road accidents and conflicts. Alcohol consumption frequently results in legal repercussions, including penalties and imprisonment.

Prevention of alcohol consumption among young people includes both the efforts within their families, schools, communities, as well as broad social strategies. This covers the education on harmful effects of alcohol consumption, mental health support, promotion of responsible behavior and strengthening relationship between young people and their communities. Early intervention and education can play a major role in the reduction of alcohol use among young people.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary research objectives are as follows:

- Better understanding of the prevalence of alcohol use among young people in Montenegro;
- Assessment of the impact of school and curriculum on health culture and attitudes of young people towards alcohol consumption;
- Identifying key challenges and opportunities for influencing attitudes, health habits, and alcohol use among young people;
- Developing evidence-based recommendations to improve the quality of the educational curriculum, with a focus on early intervention and youth education.

Specific research objectives:

- Assessment of the prevalence of alcohol use among students in Montenegro;

- Assessment of students' awareness of the consequences of alcohol consumption;
- Assessment of students' views on alcohol use;
- Assessment of the mental, social and physical health of students who consume alcohol;
- Learning about the healthcare habits of students who use alcohol and the way they spend their leisure time;
- Assessment of the impact of the family on the opinions, behavior and healthcare habits of students who use alcohol;
- Assessment of the impact of schools, expert lectures and standard curriculum on the opinions, behavior and healthcare habits of students who use alcohol;
- Assessment of the impact of the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" on the attitudes, behavior and healthcare habits of students;
- Identify the reasons behind youth alcohol consumption.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this subject for young people is best defined by some of their comments:

- *"A lot of our peers use alcohol."*
- *"It is beyond belief how casually alcoholism is accepted in our society."*
- *"Those who drink are perceived as cool."*
- *"The students who drink try to talk other kids into it."*
- *"This topic is very useful and I believe that we should discuss it more often, since the number of informed young people is low and yet the use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances results in various types of diseases."*
- *"The answers to the questions on alcohol use are familiar to me from personal experience, as I have an older friend who has problems with alcohol and other harmful substances."*
- *"Well, I think this is a big problem among young people, and it is important that we put our efforts towards reduction and prevention of all the issues mentioned in this survey."*
- *"What a great subject! I think it is really important and significant for those around me."*
- *"A lot of my friends drink and thus pretend to have come of age, but the problem is that the others look up to them."*

RESEARCH METHOD

The data were collected from the students through an online survey. All the elementary and secondary schools in Montenegro were provided with detailed

instructions related to the selection of the classes that should participate in the research, and then with those on the selection of students that should fill in the survey.

Selection of classes in the sample

It was envisaged that the survey should be filled in by students from at least half of the classes of every elementary and secondary school in Montenegro. As for the elementary schools, the sample included the students from the 8th and 9th grade classes, while it covered all the classes of the three-year or four-year secondary schools.

Selection of students from the selected classes

It was envisaged that 10 students from each selected class participated in the survey. The schools were recommended to randomly select the students, so that the sample contains every third student as per the class register. The smaller schools in which the number of students is lower than 30 per class were given the option to select a smaller number of participants.

Research implementation

The research was implemented in the period from 9th to 20th October 2023 in every elementary and high school in Montenegro.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

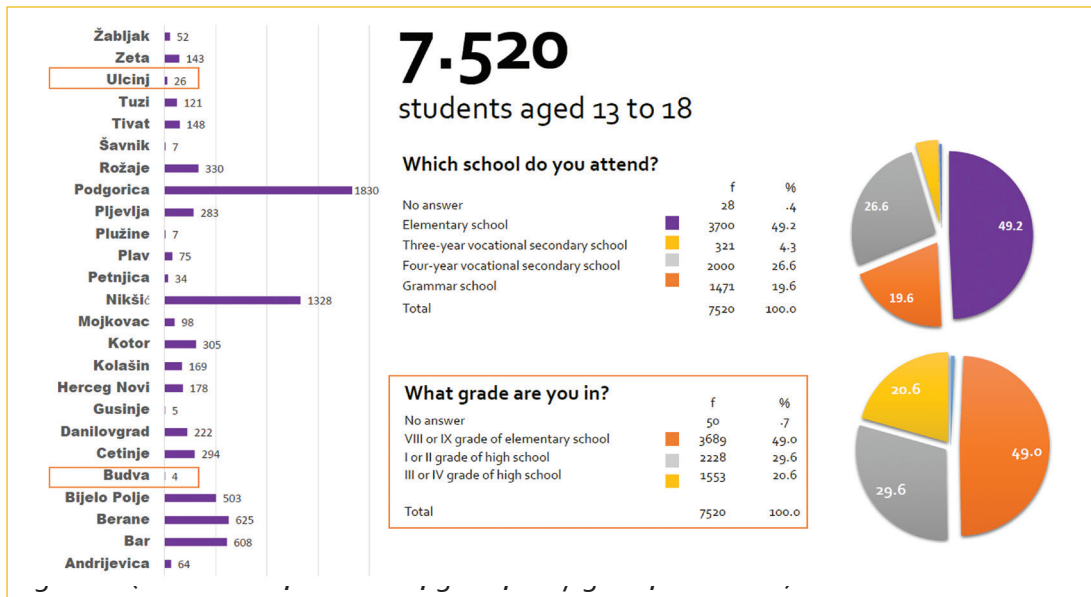
8, 185 students filled in the survey delivered to the schools. As a first step, all the surveys filled in partially were removed from the SPSS database. After that, in the second phase of filtering out the base, the surveys in which the response consistency was unsatisfactory were deleted. Finally, those surveys in which the students replied negatively to the direct questions on whether they understood the questions and whether they replied honestly were deleted. As a result, the final sample containing the replies of 7,520 students was processed.

The sample covered all the municipalities and schools in Montenegro. As can be seen in the table, the research was not implemented in Budva, neither in elementary schools nor in secondary school. The same applies for Tivat, where approximately 15 elementary school students filled in the survey.

Sample overview per municipalities and schools

	Elementary school		Grammar school		Four-year vocational secondary school		Three-year vocational secondary school		Did not answer which school they attend		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Andrijevica	37	1.0	19	1.3	8	.4					64	.9
Bar	230	6.2	116	7.9	243	12.2	17	5.3	2	7.1	608	8.1
Berane	253	6.8	71	4.8	260	13.0	39	12.1	2	7.1	625	8.3
Bijelo Polje	376	10.2	120	8.2	2	.1	3	.9	2	7.1	503	6.7
Budva	3	.1			1	.1					4	.1
Cetinje	103	2.8	51	3.5	122	6.1	18	5.6			294	3.9
Danilovgrad	145	3.9	67	4.6	7	.4	3	.9			222	3.0
Gusinje	2	.1	3	.2							5	.1
Herceg-Novi	175	4.7			2	.1	1	.3			178	2.4
Kolašin	62	1.7	60	4.1	34	1.7	13	4.0			169	2.2
Kotor	119	3.2	29	2.0	157	7.9					305	4.1
Mojkovac	12	.3	32	2.2	31	1.6	22	6.9	1	3.6	98	1.3
Nikšić	578	15.6	449	30.5	237	11.9	62	19.3	2	7.1	1328	17.7
Petnjica	29	.8	4	.3			1	.3			34	.5
Plav	72	1.9	2	.1	1	.1					75	1.0
Plužine	5	.1	1	.1	1	.1					7	.1
Pljevlja	181	4.9	41	2.8	60	3.0			1	3.6	283	3.8
Podgorica	731	19.8	323	22.0	636	31.8	135	42.1	5	17.9	1830	24.3
Rožaje	232	6.3			95	4.8	3	.9			330	4.4
Šavnik	6	.2	1	.1							7	.1
Tivat	15	.4	54	3.7	79	4.0					148	2.0
Tuzi	116	3.1	1	.1	3	.2	1	.3			121	1.6
Ulcinj	26	.7									26	.3
Zeta	141	3.8			1	.1			1	3.6	143	1.9
Žabljak	22	.6	19	1.3	10	.5	1	.3			52	.7
Total	3700	100.0	1471	100.0	2000	100.0	321	100.0	28	100.0	7520	100.0

The sample included 3,700 (49.2%) 8th and 9th grade elementary school students; 321 (4.3%) students of three-year vocational secondary schools; 2,000 (26.6%) students of four-year vocational secondary schools; 1,471 (19.6%) students of grammar schools, while 28 (0.4%) students opted not to answer the question on the school they attend.





RESEARCH RESULTS

PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL USE AMONG STUDENTS IN MONTENEGRO

Several independent criteria of the prevalence of alcohol consumption were used to gain a reliable assessment of the prevalence of alcohol use among students in Montenegro: personal acquaintance with someone who has an alcohol-related problem; the students' assessment of the number of their class peers who use alcohol; personal confession of students on using alcohol themselves. Each of these criteria provides insight into the prevalence of alcohol use among young people.

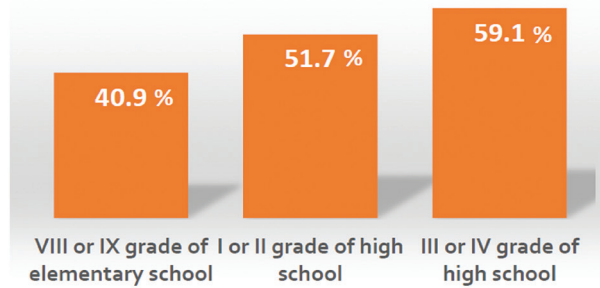
The prevalence of alcohol use among students gradually increases from grade to grade, with most students in the final years of secondary school occasionally or regularly consuming alcohol!

DO YOU PERSONALLY KNOW SOMEONE AFFECTED BY ALCOHOL-RELATED ISSUES?

Every other student (precisely 48%) aged 13 to 18 personally knows someone who uses alcohol. The number of students who personally know and socialize with person/s who use alcohol ranges from 40% in elementary schools (8th and 9th grade) up to 60% in final grades of secondary schools.

These data show that the students are familiar with the alcohol problems, and that from grade to grade they increasingly meet and socialize with persons who use alcohol on a daily basis.

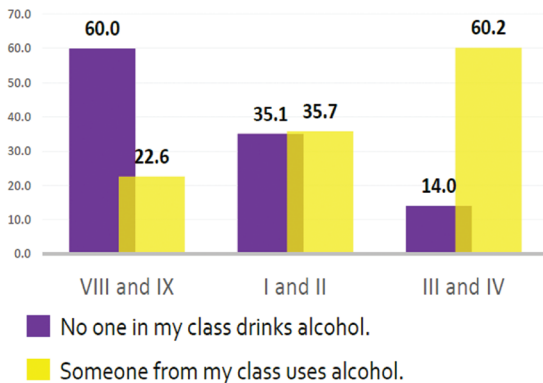
Every other student (precisely 48%) aged 13 to 18 personally knows someone who uses alcohol.



The number of students who personally know someone who uses alcohol increases from grade to grade.

ARE THERE STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

A significant number (33.9%) of students aged 13 to 19 regularly spend time in a class where one or more of their classmates use alcohol.

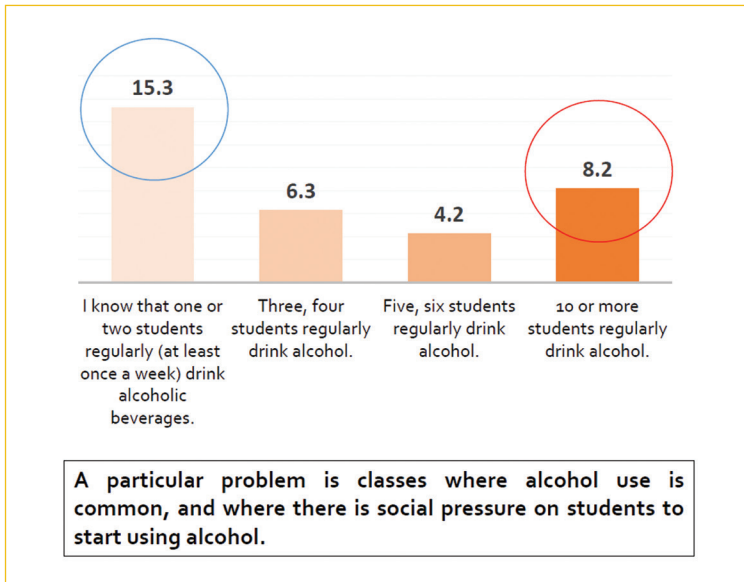


In the final years of secondary schools, most students are in classes where there are students who use alcohol.

The frequency of classes with students who use alcohol gradually increases from grade to grade, rising from 22% in elementary schools to 60% in high schools, where **most students** report that their classmates consume alcohol.

HOW MANY STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASS DRINK ALCOHOL?

There are *two types of classes* when it comes to the number of students who use alcohol: the first, more common type, are classes with **individual cases of alcohol use** – where one or two students use alcohol. The other, somewhat less frequent type of class is that in which alcohol use by students is **an occurrence** – with 10 or more students who consume alcohol. Such classes represent an especially unfavorable environment for studying and development, both for the students who use alcohol and those who do not.



The first type of class, with one or two students who use alcohol, is typical in elementary schools and the first two grades of secondary schools. The second type, where alcohol use is more widespread and involves 10 or more students, is mainly seen in the final grades of secondary schools. **Based on this data, it can be concluded that classes progress through phases: in elementary school, alcohol use is generally limited to a few individual cases, such as one or two students, and later becomes more widespread, involving 10 or more students.**

DO YOU DRINK ALCOHOL?

On average, a third (31.7%) of students admits that they occasionally or regularly consume alcoholic drinks! The prevalence of alcohol use significantly increases from grade to grade. For example, 17% of elementary school students (8th and 9th grade) occasionally or regularly use alcohol, while most of the 3rd and 4th grade secondary school students (61%) occasionally or regularly drink alcohol. The students who do not consume alcohol still represent the majority in 1st and 2nd grades of secondary schools as opposed to those who drink occasionally or regularly.

A third, or 31.7%, of students aged 13 to 18 say they occasionally or regularly use alcohol.

I have never consumed alcohol.

57%

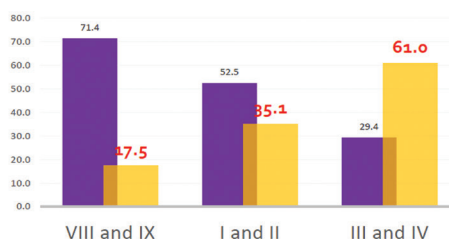


I consume alcohol.

31.7%

*I do not want to answer, 11.3% of students.

I don't drink alcoholic beverages.
I drink alcoholic beverages.



The number of students who use alcohol increases from grade to grade. In the final years of secondary school, the majority of students use alcohol occasionally or regularly.

The number of students who do not consume alcohol gradually decreases from grade to grade, and on the other hand the number of those who occasionally or regularly use it increases.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU DRINK ALCOHOL?

The majority of students who use alcohol make those who **rarely drink** (22%), i.e. those who occasionally drink when socializing, at parties, birthdays, etc. On the other hand, 9% of students claim they **drink on a regular basis**, at least once a week, and sometimes every day!

When it comes to the prevalence of alcohol use, three groups of students can be identified:

57.0	I have never consumed alcohol.	- Students who do not use alcohol ;
22.3	I drink rarely, sometimes with friends.	- Students who occasionally drink (in social settings, at birthdays, etc.);
4.7	I drink at least once a week.	- Students who regularly or frequently drink . 9%
1.9	I drink several times a week.	
2.8	I drink every day.	

Each of these subgroups has certain specific features and represents a unique challenge in the attempt to solve the issue of alcohol use among young people.

*I do not want to answer, 11.3% of students.

When it comes to the prevalence of alcohol use, the research shows that there are **three groups** of students:

- Students who **never drink** make up the largest group (approx. 57% of students claim they never use alcohol);

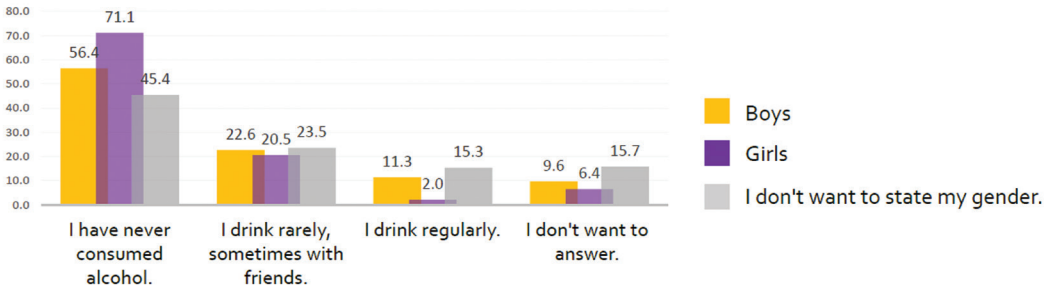
- Students who use alcohol can be separated into two groups: the first, larger group, (approx. 22%) make those who **drink occasionally**, when socializing, at birthdays, parties etc. The other, significantly smaller group (approx. 9%) is made of **students who drink on a regular basis**, at least once a week or more. Each of the two subgroups has certain specific features and represents a unique challenge in the attempt to solve the issue of alcohol use among young people.

ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS?

34% of boys, 22% of girls and 38% of students who opted not to answer the question on their gender replied that they occasionally or regularly use alcohol!

The category of those who regularly drink comprises significantly more boys (11.3%) than girls (2.0%), while the category of those who occasionally drink has an approximately equal number of boys (22.6%) and girls (23.5%)!

The category of those who regularly drink comprises significantly more boys than girls. The category of those who occasionally drink has an approximately equal number of boys and girls.

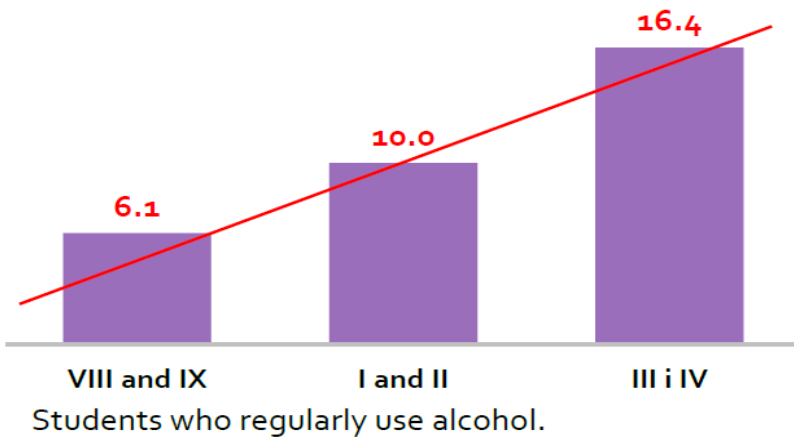
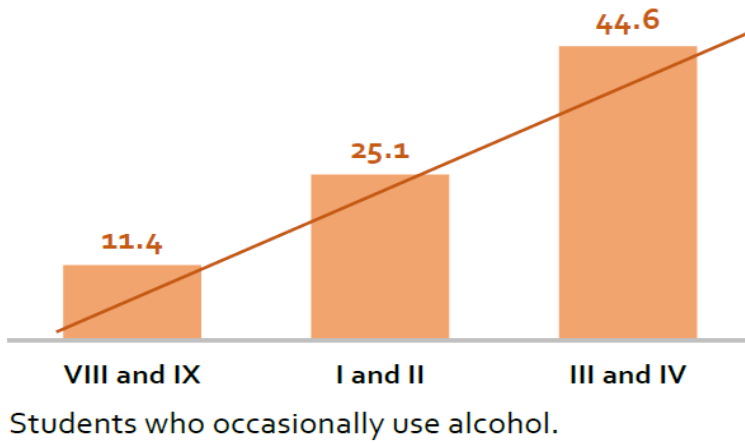
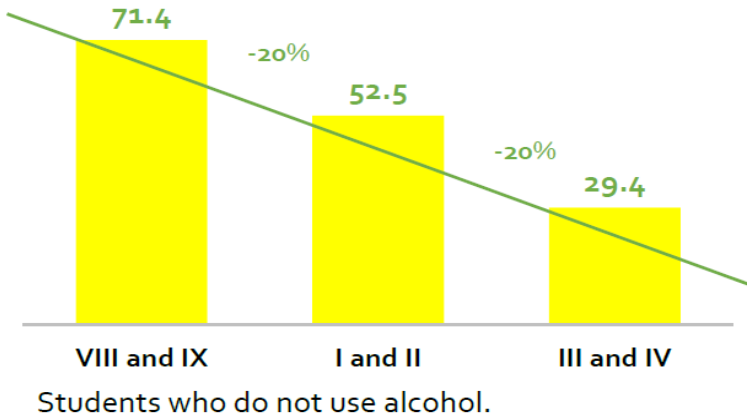


WHAT IS THE TREND OF ALCOHOL USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE?

The number of students who never use alcohol reduces from grade to grade by 20%. For example, in the age group of 13-14, 71% of students never drink alcohol. At the age of 17-18, approximately 30% of students do not use alcohol. The number of students who occasionally use alcohol doubles in each subsequent monitored age group. For example, in the 13-14 age range, 11% of students occasionally use alcohol. In the 17-18 age range, around 45% of students occasionally use alcohol. The trend of increase of students who regularly use alcohol is somewhat slower in elementary schools, and ranges from 6% among elementary school students to 16% among those in final grades of secondary schools. **The pattern shows that the number of students who do not use alcohol steadily decreases from grade to grade, in contrast to those who start using alcohol, initially occasionally, and then regularly.**

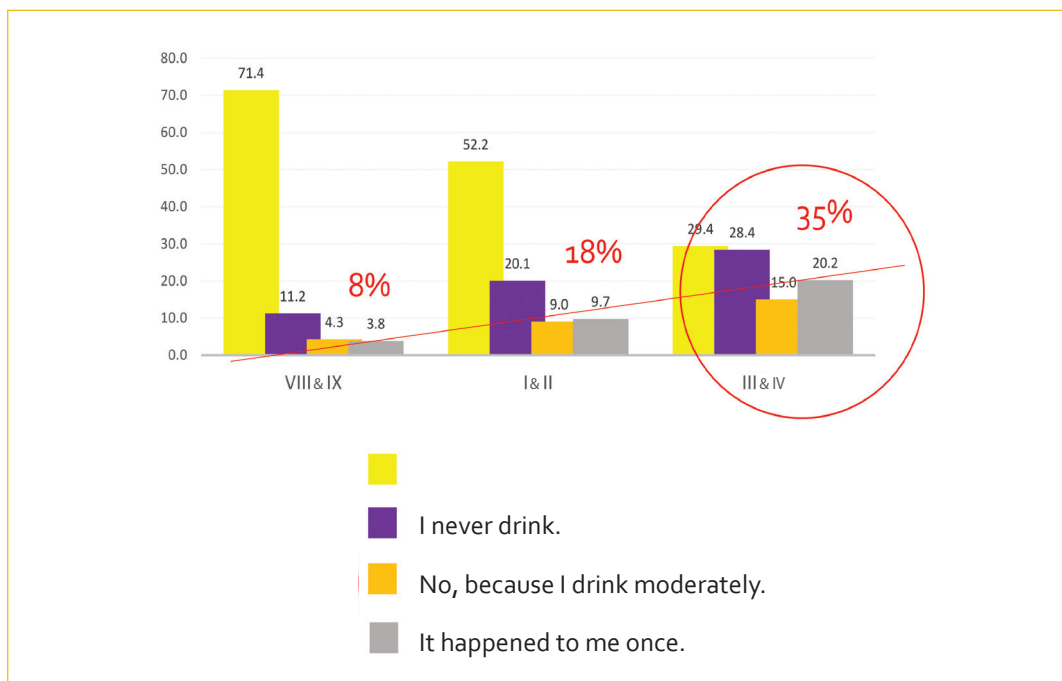
The challenge is **to slow the trend** in which students who don't use alcohol in lower grades begin using it occasionally at first, and then regularly, in higher grades!

Trend of alcohol use among young people



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN DRUNK?

A significant number of students (16.9%) have had the experience of being drunk, while 9% of them got drunk on multiple occasions.



It has happened to me on multiple occasions.

The percentage of students who have experienced being drunk increases with each grade, starting at 8% in elementary school and rising to 30% in the final years of secondary school. This is because **the number of students who use alcohol gradually increases from grade to grade, leading to a rise in the frequency of drunken episodes.** In the final years of secondary school, more students report having been drunk multiple times than those who have been drunk only once.

WHICH ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE DO YOU DRINK MOST FREQUENTLY?

The students most frequently consume beer and various spirits. Elementary school students (8th and 9th grade), grammar school school students and vocational school students and male students most frequently drink beer. Spirits are more often consumed by boys, while girls usually drink cocktails.

		ES	GS	IVVS	IIIVS	M	F
Beer	14.2	11.4	17.6	17.6	22.0	20.2	9.1
Wine	5.7	3.4	9.0	7.7	6.2	4.6	6.8
Spirits	10.7	4.6	16.5	15.4	11.8	11.6	8.4
Cocktails	5.8	3.1	10.1	8.2	2.8	2.9	8.1
I don't drink alcohol.	63.6	77.6	46.8	51.3	57.0	60.6	67.7

When asked how difficult it is to get alcohol, 75% of the students opted for the following claim: **It is not difficult; everything is available if you have the money.** This is the opinion of 66% of elementary school students, 80% of 1st and 2nd grade secondary school students and 86% of final grade high school students.

CONCLUSION

Every other student (i.e. 47.9%) aged 13 to 18 **personally knows** someone who uses alcohol. The number of students who personally know or socialize with students who use alcohol gradually increases from grade to grade: from 40% in the final grades of elementary school to 60% in the final grades of secondary school. Along with that, the **number of classes** with students who use alcohol increases as well: from 22% in elementary schools to 60% in secondary schools. In elementary schools, these are usually classes with one or two students who use alcohol, yet in the final grades of secondary schools the use of alcohol among students becomes **a regular occurrence in most classes.**

Every third student, i.e. 31.7%, claims to occasionally or frequently **use alcohol.** The number of students who use alcohol gradually increases from grade to grade – starting from 17% in elementary schools, and by the time they reach the final grade of secondary school the majority of students (60%) state they occasionally or regularly use alcohol. This is followed by the trend of **experience of being drunk**, from 8% in elementary schools to 35% in the final grades of secondary schools.

Among the students who admit to using alcohol, most (22%) say they drink **occasionally**, typically when socializing, at parties, birthdays, etc., while 9% say they

drink regularly, at least once a week. The number of students who drink occasionally increases significantly in each age group—from 14% in the 8th and 9th grades of elementary school to 45% in the final grades of secondary school. The growth in the number of students who drink regularly is somewhat slower, rising from 6% in elementary school to 16% in the final grades of secondary school. The key question is how to slow down this trend, where students who don't use alcohol at all in lower grades begin using it occasionally, then regularly, as they move into higher grades.

STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

The survey collected the students' opinions on their awareness of the consequences of alcohol consumption, whether they are familiar with the origin and reliability of the information they have and finally how much they really know about the harmful effects of alcohol use.

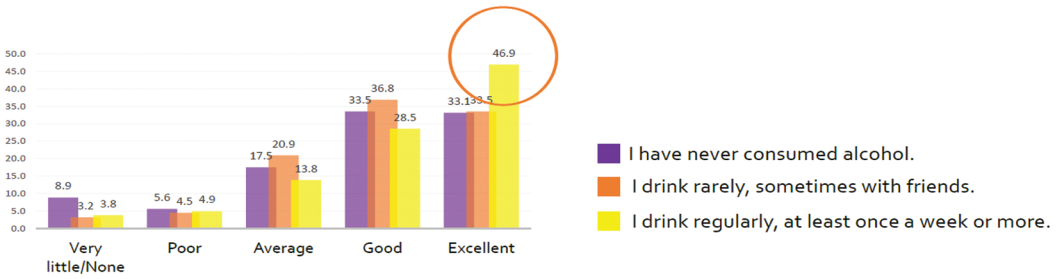
The students are convinced they are well aware of the harmful effects of alcohol use, while predominantly relying on unreliable sources of information!

HOW DO YOU ASSESS YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL USE?

Most students (67%) believe they are well-informed or even fully aware of the harmful effects of alcohol use. Those who drink regularly are the most confident in their knowledge of these effects, with most rating their understanding as excellent. Students who do not drink or only drink occasionally

tend to be more cautious in assessing their awareness, typically describing it as good.

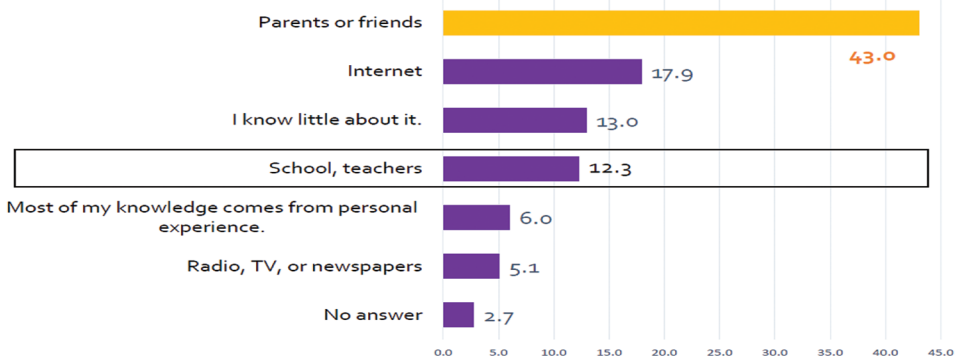
67% students believe they are well-informed or even fully aware of the harmful effects of alcohol use.



This seems unusual at first glance, yet further results of the research will show why the students who regularly use alcohol claim to be more aware of its harmful effects as opposed to the other two subgroups.

WHO INFORMED YOU THE MOST ABOUT THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL?

Most of the students quote **their parents and friends** as the most important sources of information on the consequences of alcohol use. As opposed to these sources (parents, friends, internet), the school has **significantly less influence** on students' awareness of the consequences of alcohol consumption.

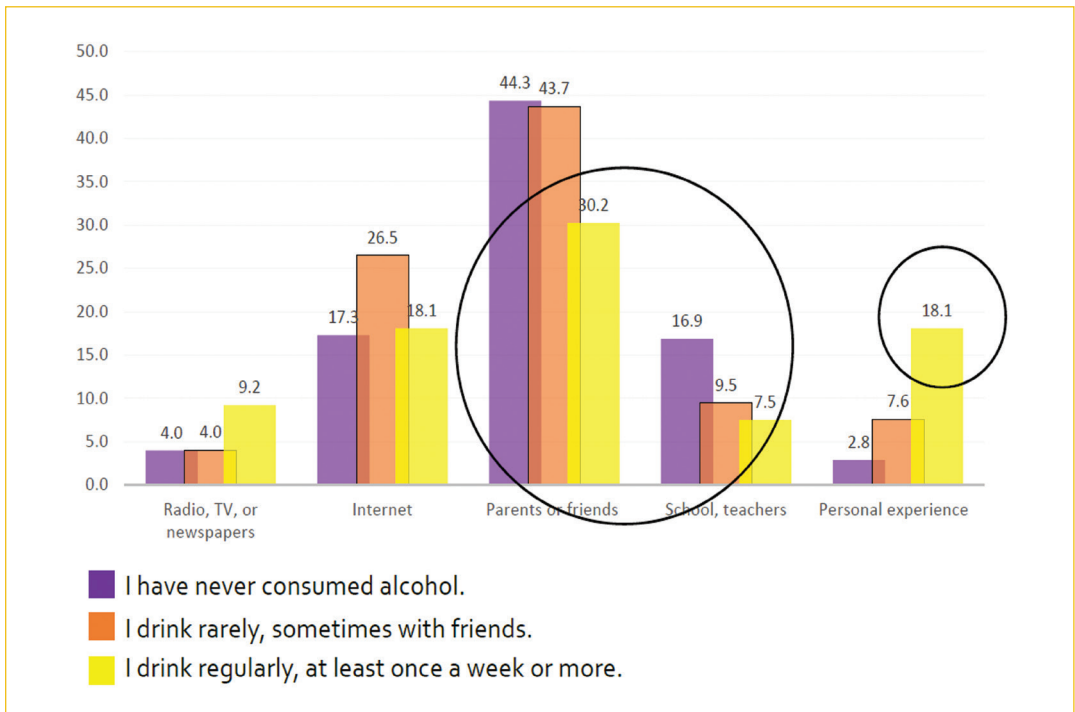


The cause can be found in these data – the students’ high confidence in their awareness of the harmful consequences of alcohol use on one side, and the predominant reliance on unreliable sources of information (friends, internet etc.) on the other, and unlike schools, these sources may provide semi or even incorrect information.

WHICH SOURCES OF INFORMATION DO THE STUDENTS MOSTLY RELY ON?

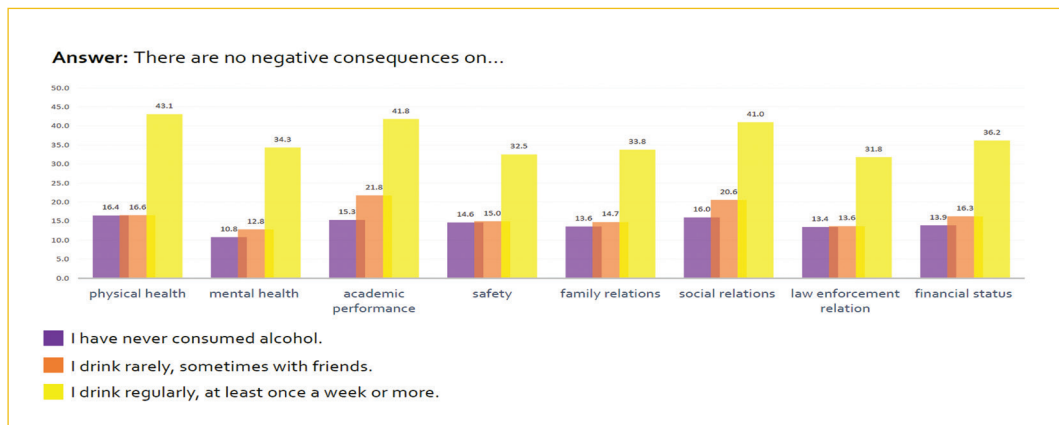
The students who regularly consume alcohol tend to be more resistant to external influences. When assessing the harmful effects of alcohol, they rely more on their own experiences than on information from schools. On the other hand, students who never drink alcohol mostly rely on the information they receive from their parents and teachers.

The problem is caused by this evident **resistance among the students who use alcohol** to accept the arguments coming from their schools and teachers.



WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL USE?

The students who regularly use alcohol negate or **downplay** the consequences of alcohol use on any aspect of their health far more than the rest of the students. The fact that the students who occasionally use alcohol are equally aware of the harmful effect of its consumption as those who do not use it at all is a plus.



The challenge lies in explaining why students who regularly drink alcohol tend to downplay its harmful effects, all while being confident in their knowledge on the subject and resisting the arguments they hear in school.

Such behaviour of the students who often and persistently use alcohol can be explained by **Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance**. According to this theory, to keep our inner peace intact we strive to balance between our attitudes and actions – for example, a person who has a negative attitude towards alcohol does not use it at all. But the situation can be reversed - a person who uses alcohol downplays its harmful effects and tries to resist the external influences that could affect this balance.

CONCLUSION

Most students, both those who do not drink and those who do it occasionally, are aware that alcohol consumption has certain harmful effects on their physical, mental and social health. They predominantly base their knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol on the information they get from their parents, friends or the internet, and they are very much convinced that they are well informed on this matter.

The students who frequently drink alcohol usually tend to negate or **minimize**

the possibility of the harmful effects of alcohol on their health. They base their knowledge on harmful effects of alcohol use **on personal experience** more than the other students and resist the external influence – primarily that coming from their schools. Such behavior is explained by Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance, according to which a person does not feel at ease if his/her actions and attitudes are in dissonance, and thus strives to either neglect or replace the attitudes that contradict his/her actions with the appropriate ones (for example, when faced with the facts on the harmful effects of alcohol in school, the students call on their personal experience – that alcohol relaxes them, etc.).

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL USE

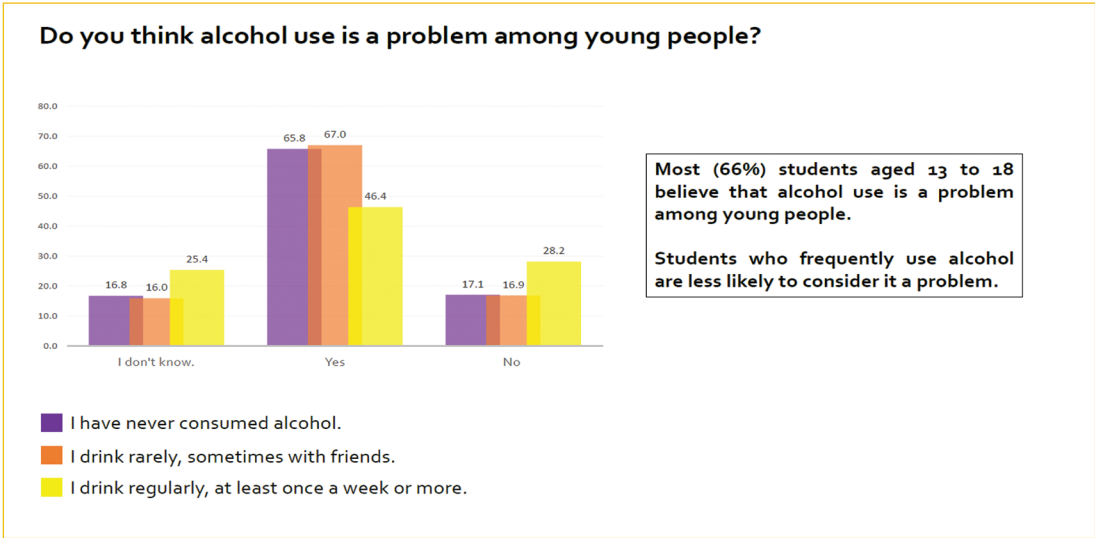
The survey also assessed students' attitudes toward alcohol use as a problem among young people, their views on peers who consume alcohol, and, finally, the extent to which they justify alcohol consumption.

Most students believe that alcohol use is a problem, yet at the same time most of them are neutral when it comes to the students who use it – they do not find them popular, but at the same time they do not condemn them! It is especially worrying that most students, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, show an understanding for alcohol use in certain situations!

IS ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION CURRENTLY A PROBLEM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE?

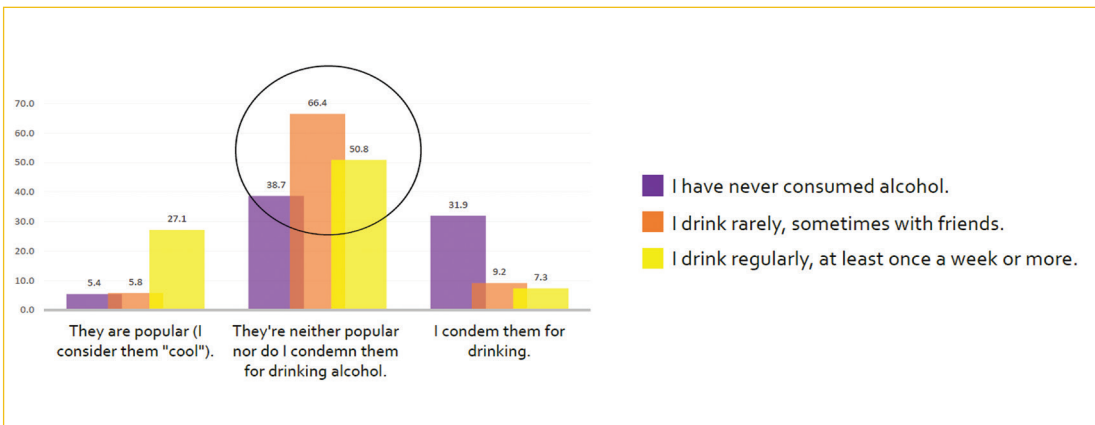
Most students, especially those who do not drink, but also those who do it occasionally, believe that alcohol use among young people is a problem. Most students who do not see it as a problem are those who drink regularly, which is in line

with the theory of the need to balance one’s opinions and actions.



WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE PEERS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

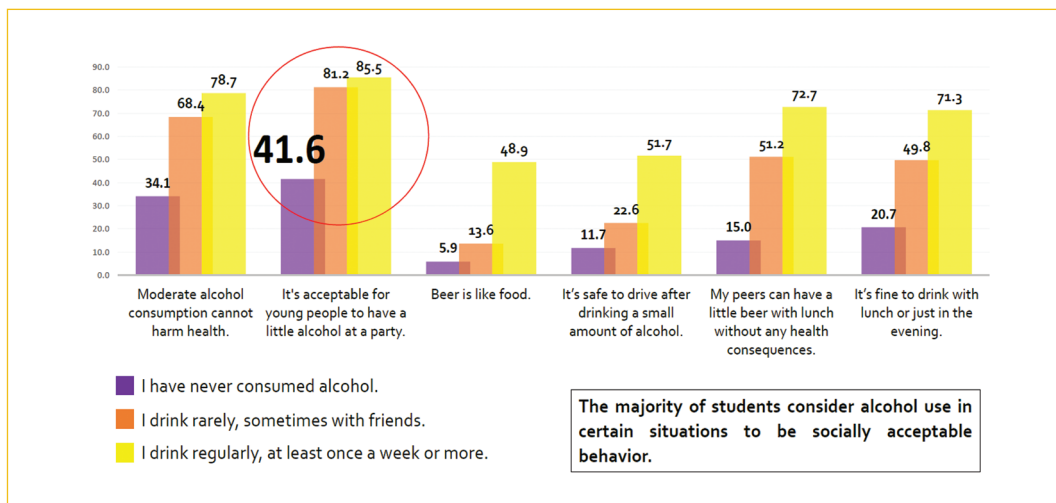
Most of the students who condemn those who use alcohol are those who do not drink at all. Those who find students who use alcohol popular are mostly the ones who consume it themselves.



It is worrying that most students have a neutral opinion on the behaviour of students who consume alcohol – they do not find them popular, yet they do not condemn them! It reflects the atmosphere and context in which such behaviour occurs.

HOW JUSTIFIED IS THE USE OF ALCOHOL?

The least justification for alcohol use is found among the students who never drink. On the other hand, the use of alcohol is mostly justified by those students who consume it. The students who occasionally drink have a similar opinion on this matter as those who drink regularly – they mostly justify the use of alcohol in certain situations as well.



It is especially worrying that **most students**, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, show a significant level of justification for the young people who drink small amount of alcohol at parties, and believe that the moderate use of alcohol cannot harm their health, for example when they have an alcoholic beverage with lunch or in the evening. Up to 42% of the students who do not use alcohol justify their peers who consume small amount of alcohol at parties.

CONCLUSION

Most students – 66% of them, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, see the use of alcohol as a **problem** among young people, but at the same time most have a **neutral** opinion on the students who drink – they do not find them popular, yet they do not condemn them for their behavior. It is especially worrying that most students, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, **show an understanding** for alcohol use in certain situations. The same is true with other opinions: that the moderate use of alcohol cannot harm their health, that it is fine if they drink with lunch or in the evening, etc. All of this reflects a specific atmosphere and context in which such behaviour of young people exists.

MENTAL, SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL

Numerous studies established the relationship between alcohol use and the mental, social and physical health of young people, whether in the case when alcohol use is the cause of health problems or the consequence of mental, social and physical health issues of young people. This research also dealt with that issue – what is the state of mental, social and physical health of students who use alcohol?

This research, like many others before, indicates that there is a certain relationship between alcohol use and problems with young people's mental, social and physical health.

WHAT IS THE MENTAL HEALTH STATUS OF THE STUDENTS?

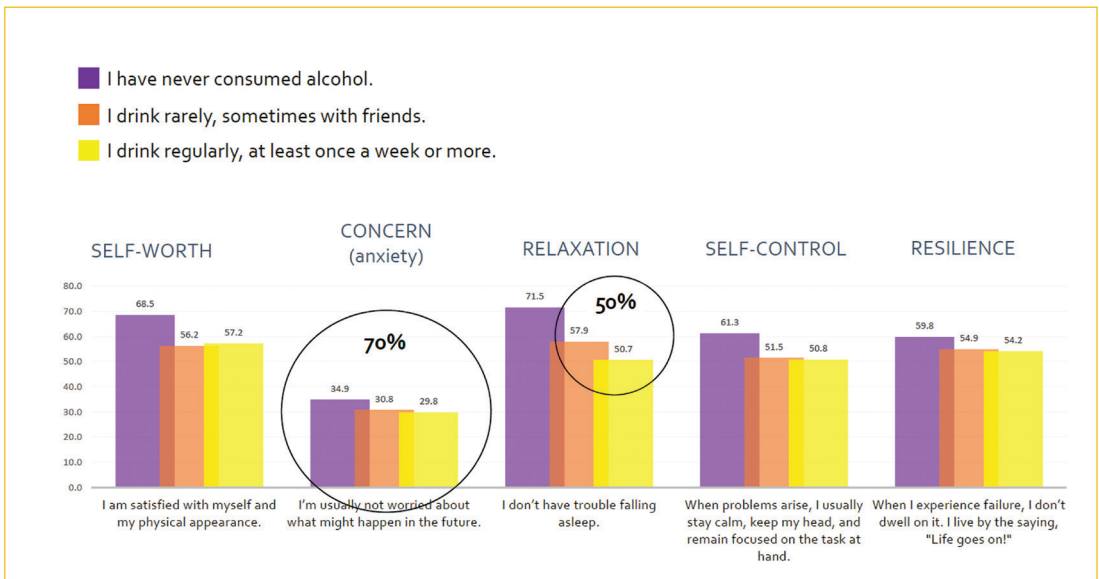
The students' reactions were tested based on Harter's self-perception scale¹ for preadolescents and adolescents, as follows: 1. *Global self-worth* – tests the degree to which the students are satisfied with themselves, their physical appearance and their lives in general; 2. *Concern* – an overt concern may lead to anxiety that causes many issues, including physical ones; 3. *Relaxation* – tests the issues related to leisure time, sleep and relaxation; 4. *Self-control* – tests the ability to react in a composed manner in situations that trigger intense emotions; 5. *Resilience* – tests the ability of an individual to recuperate quickly and return to the usual way of life after being affected by unpleasant events.

Most young people, 64% of them from 13 to 18 years of age, show a **high level of concern** for what could happen in the future. While concern is not the same as anxiety, it can create a fertile ground for various problems. Many young people (43%) show a low level of tolerance to frustration, and therefore are easily affected by failures in school, relationships etc., which, again, represents a basis for other problems.

¹ We used the adapted version (Pešikan & Lalović, 2021) of Harter's scale, *Profile for Children*, Harter, 1988

WHAT IS THE MENTAL HEALTH STATUS OF THE STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

In comparison to the rest of the students, the students who use alcohol are less satisfied with themselves. These students have a lower level of tolerance to frustration, they are easily affected by failure and recuperate harder than the others. They experience more relaxation and sleep-related problems than the rest of the students. The students who occasionally use alcohol experience similar problems, yet to a lesser extent.



WHAT IS THE STATE OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL WELL-BEING?

We tested the students' reactions based on the following scales²: 1. *Emotional intelligence* – the ability to establish and maintain good relations with others; 2. *Empathy* – tests the ability to understand what is it like to be in someone else's shoes and feel compassion; 3. *Tolerance* – tests the ability to accept and respect differences (different opinions, attitudes, behavior); 4. *Peacefulness* – tests the preparedness to solve conflicts with others in a non-violent way, to appreciate good communication; 5. *Social acceptance* – tests the degree to which an indivi-

² We used the adapted version (Pešikan & Lalović, 2021) of Harter's self-perception scale for pre-adolescents and adolescents (Self-perception Profile for Children, Harter, 1988)

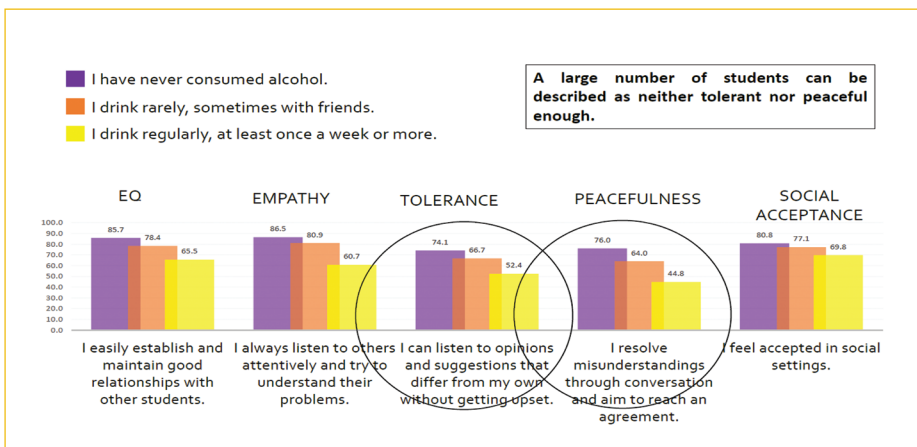
dual feels popular and accepted by their peers.

It can be claimed that a large number of students aged 13 to 18 (approx. 31%) are insufficiently tolerant or peaceful, which creates an unfavorable environment and problems in social relations among the students.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

The students who use alcohol feel unaccepted by the rest of the students and experience issues in establishing and maintaining good relations with their peers; they have less understanding for other people’s problems (they show less empathy), harder accept different opinions, attitudes and behavior (they are less tolerant) and are prone to aggressive reactions.

The social competences of students who drink occasionally are more similar to those of the students who never drink than those who drink often.



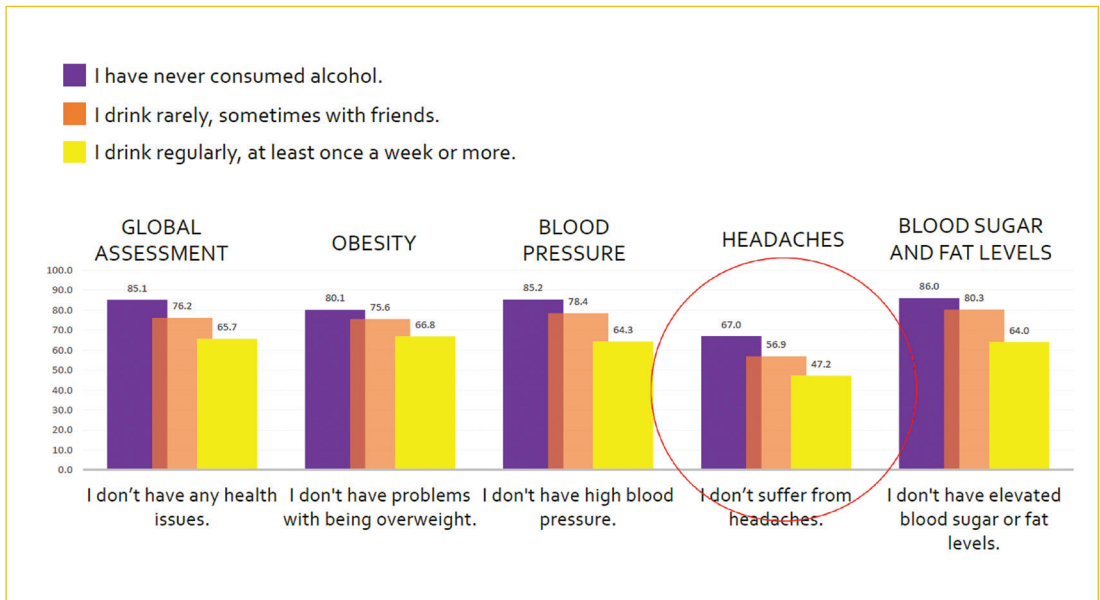
WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE STUDENTS' PHYSICAL HEALTH?

The students evaluated their physical health, both generally (how is your physical health) and specifically, in relation to obesity, blood pressure, headaches, blood sugar and fat levels. Obviously, the students cannot be expected to objectively assess their physical condition; here, it is more about their **subjective evaluation**, their perception of their physical state, which is significant for the topic of this research.

A significant number of students experience physical issues, and the data that almost 40% of students reported headache problems is especially worrying.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE PHYSICAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

The students who use alcohol evaluated their physical health far worse than the others. The evaluation of the physical health of students who drink occasionally fits right between the other two groups. The data on **headaches** especially stands out, as it is something that the students can objectively assess. The research shows that the students who use alcohol experience headaches more often than the others.



CONCLUSION

This research, like many before it, indicates a relationship between alcohol consumption and students' mental, social, and physical health issues. Based on the findings, it would be unjustified to draw conclusions about the direction of this relationship. However, it is most likely that there is a **mutual influence**: alcohol use may lead to certain mental, social, and physical issues, but at the same time, some mental, social, or physical challenges may make certain students more

prone to alcohol use. Regardless, it has been undeniably confirmed that students who use alcohol more frequently experience mental, social, and physical health issues.

The fact that a large number of students worry about their future and have a low level of tolerance to frustration is important for the topic of this research. When it comes to social relations, the students mostly show insufficient levels of tolerance and peacefulness. A large number of students reported certain physical issues and headaches.

LEISURE TIME AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO CONSUME ALCOHOL

The research explored how young people, especially those who consume alcohol, spend their leisure time and manage their healthcare habits.

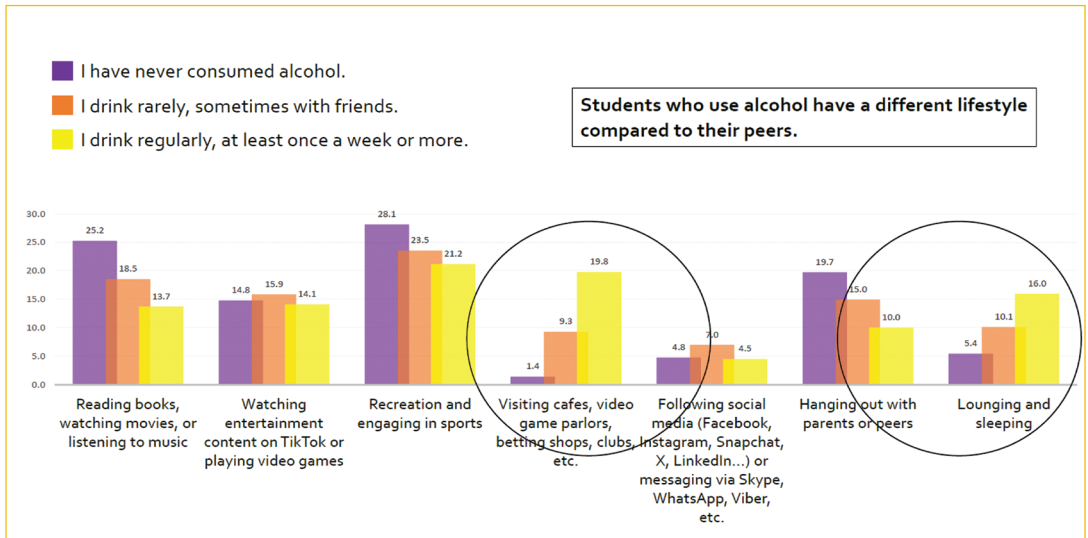
The lifestyle and healthcare habits of students who use alcohol are significantly different from those of the students who never drink.

WHAT IS THE IDEAL WAY FOR STUDENTS TO SPEND THEIR LEISURE TIME?

Most young people aged 13 to 18 relate the idea of ideally spending their leisure time with sports and physical activities, reading, socializing etc. However, there are students who rather spend their leisure time in bars, clubs, video game parlors etc.

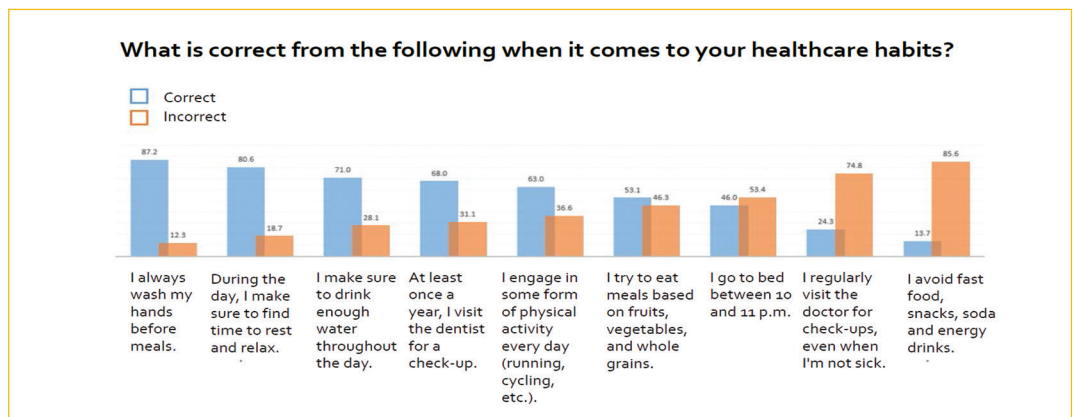
WHAT IS THE IDEAL WAY FOR STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL TO SPEND THEIR LEISURE TIME?

The students who often drink do not spend their leisure time reading books or socializing – they prefer going to bars, video game parlors, betting shops, as well as sleeping and lounging.



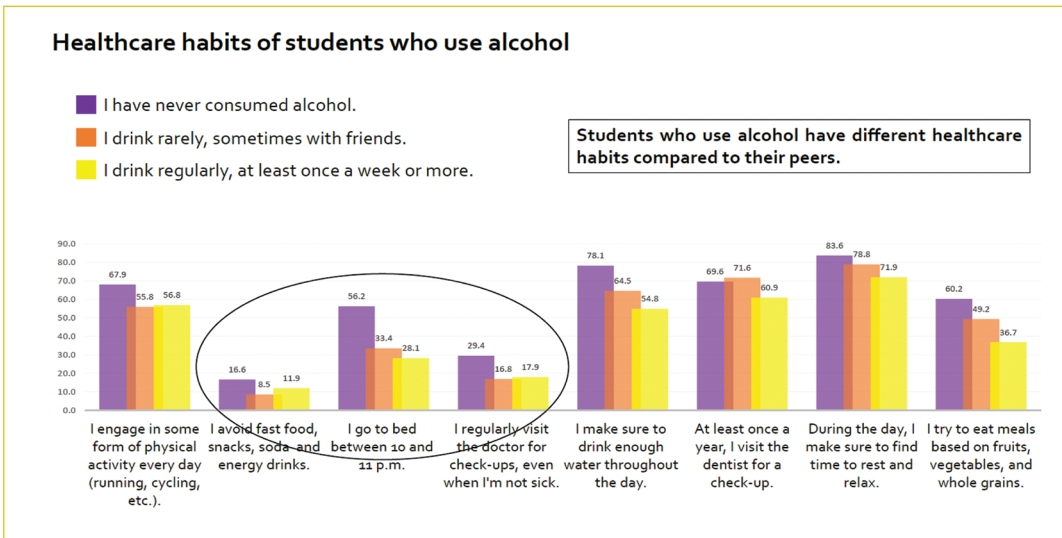
WHAT ARE THE HEALTHCARE HABITS OF THE STUDENTS?

Most students aged 13 to 18 tend to go to bed late, eat fast food and snacks, drink soda and energy drinks without restrictions, and rarely visit a doctor.



WHAT ARE THE HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

Young people who use alcohol, whether occasionally or regularly, have different healthcare habits than the other students, especially those who never drink. These students more often **go to bed late** and less care about healthy diet and regular physical exercise.



CONCLUSION

Lifestyle and healthcare habits of students who consume alcohol are significantly different to those of the students who never drink. These students more often frequent the bars, video game parlors, betting shops etc., and they prefer to sleep and lounge in their leisure time. They go to bed late more often than the rest of the students and take less care about healthy diet and regular physical exercise.

In relation to the subject, it is important to emphasize that most students go to bed late, eat fast food, snacks, soda and energy drinks without restriction and rarely visit a doctor.

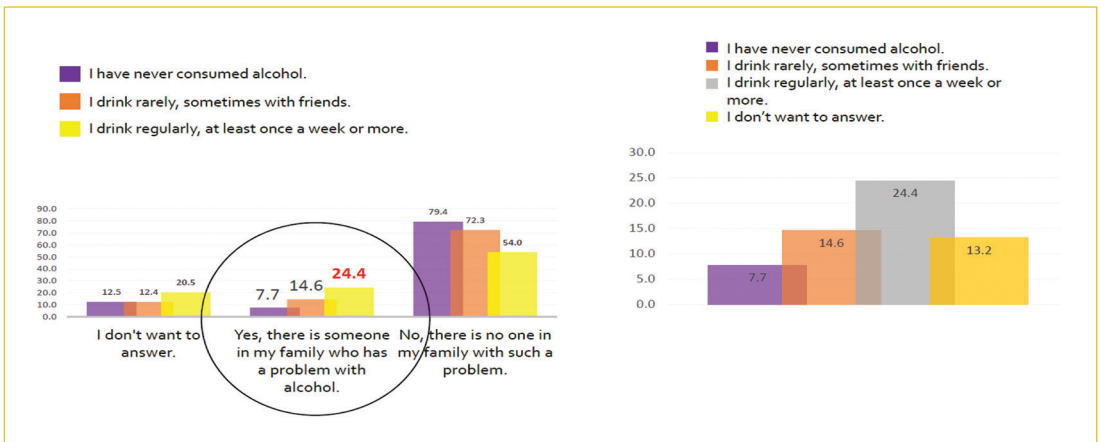
FAMILY INFLUENCE ON THE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL

The research also examined the family context of the students who use alcohol and the influence their families have on their behavior.

Students who use alcohol already have a model for such behavior in their families. They believe that their parents do not have unequivocally negative attitudes towards alcohol use, do not condemn the presence of bars and betting shops in the vicinity of schools, do not have high expectations from them when it comes to sports activities, healthy diet etc.

DO YOU HAVE A FAMILY MEMBER WHO HAS ALCOHOL PROBLEMS?

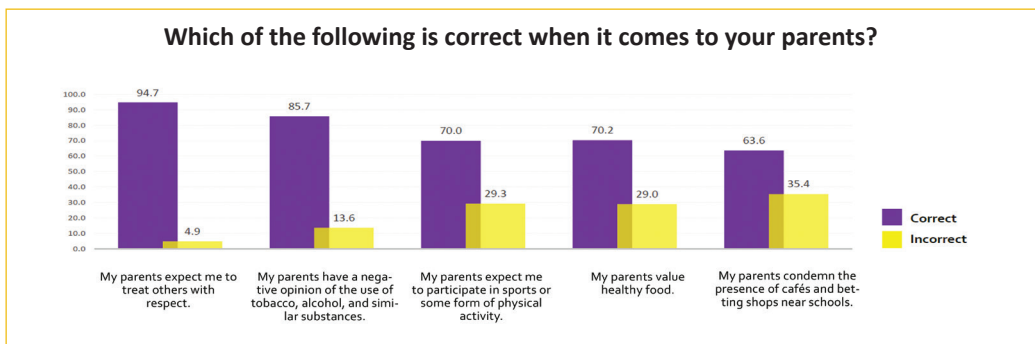
Students who consume alcohol more often come from families with members with alcohol-related problems! Bearing in mind the sensitivity of this matter, it is significant to point out that the majority of the students who opted not to answer this question are those who regularly consume alcohol.



HOW DO THE STUDENTS PERCEIVE THEIR PARENTS' ATTITUDES?

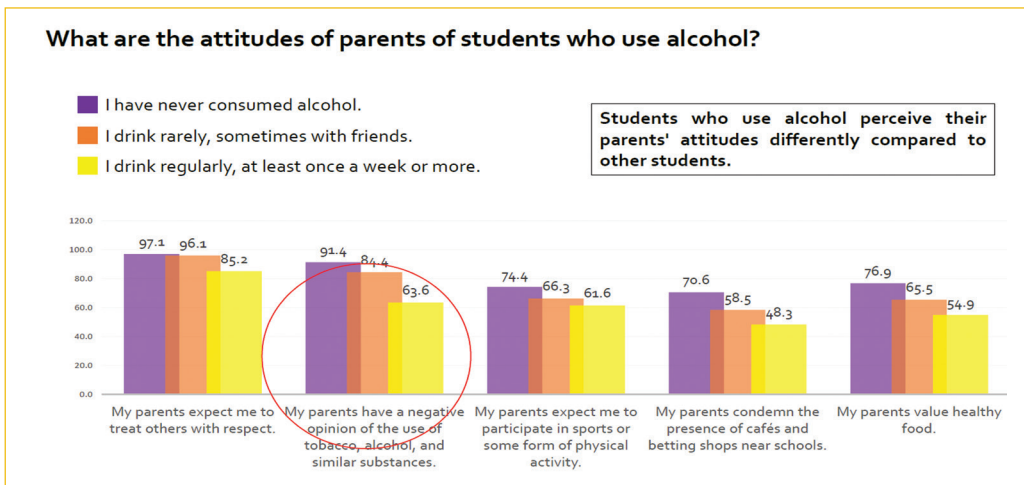
The research did not directly tackle the parents' attitudes on matters related to the topic, as it was not required. More important than the parents' attitudes is **their interpretation** by the children – how the children perceive/interpret the attitudes of their parents.

Overall, students believe that their parents have the fewest concerns about the presence of bars, betting shops, and similar places near schools. Up to 35% of students think this doesn't bother their parents, which reflects the attitude of young people towards frequenting such places.



HOW DO THE STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL PERCEIVE THEIR PARENTS' ATTITUDES?

The students who use alcohol believe that their parents do not have negative attitudes on the use of alcohol, tobacco etc., that they do not condemn the presence of bars and betting shops in the vicinity of schools, that they do not have high expectations from them when it comes to sports activities, healthy diet etc.



The way these students perceive their parents' attitudes may be more objective (since many of these students come from families with models of unacceptable attitudes towards alcohol use), but it can also be more subjective and serve as justification for their own behavior.

CONCLUSION

Students who use alcohol, and especially those who do it frequently, often find a **model for such behavior** in their families. They live in families with member/s who have alcohol-related problems. Along with this objective influence, there is another, subjective influence, reflected by the wrong (yet also possibly correct) interpretation of their parents' attitudes to justify their own unacceptable behavior. They believe that their parents do not have unequivocally negative attitudes towards the use of alcohol, tobacco etc., do not condemn the presence of bars and betting shops in the vicinity of schools, do not have high expectations from them when it comes to sports activities, healthy diet etc.

For this part of the research, it is not insignificant to point out the fact that a substantial number of parents, as per their childrens' opinion, do not see the presence of bars, betting shops etc. in the vicinity of schools as an issue.

■ INTEREST OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL IN SCHOOL AND TOPICS RELATED TO ADDICTION PREVENTION

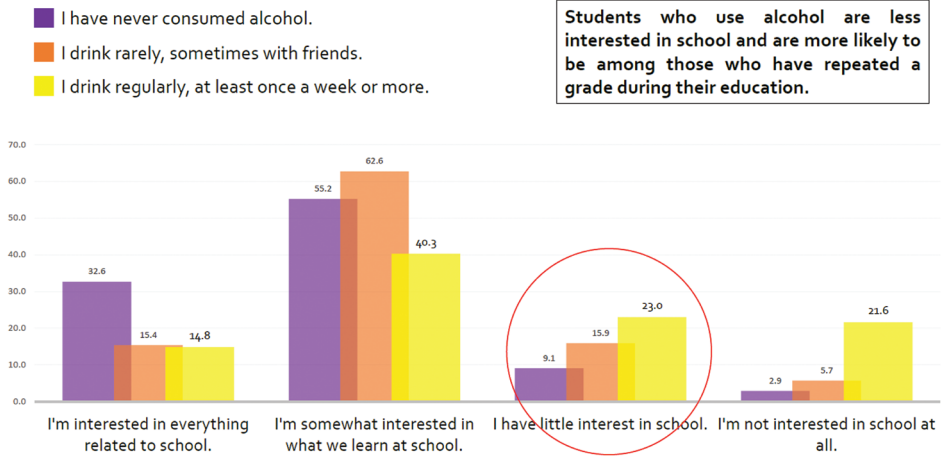
To assess the influence of school on the attitudes and behavior of students who consume alcohol, it is important to answer the question on their interest in school and topics such as healthy diet, physical activity, mental health, prevention of substance abuse etc. The potential of school to affect the attitudes and behavior of students who use alcohol largely depends on the answer to this question.

The students who use alcohol have little interest in school or topics related to substance abuse prevention etc., which points out to the limited possibilities of school to affect the attitudes and behavior of these students through educational programs. Most of the students who see the physical education classes as imposed on them are those who regularly use alcohol.

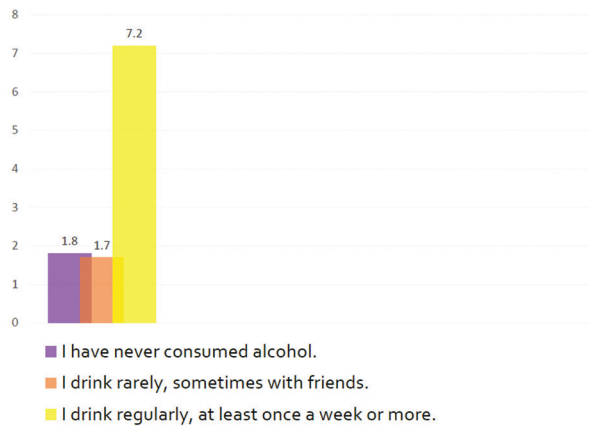
■ HOW INTERESTED ARE STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL IN SCHOOL?

Students who often consume alcohol **are less interested** in school and are more often found among the students who were held back during the education. Students who occasionally use alcohol have a moderate interest in school, while those who do not drink at all make up most of the category of students interested in school.

The level of interest in school among students who use alcohol



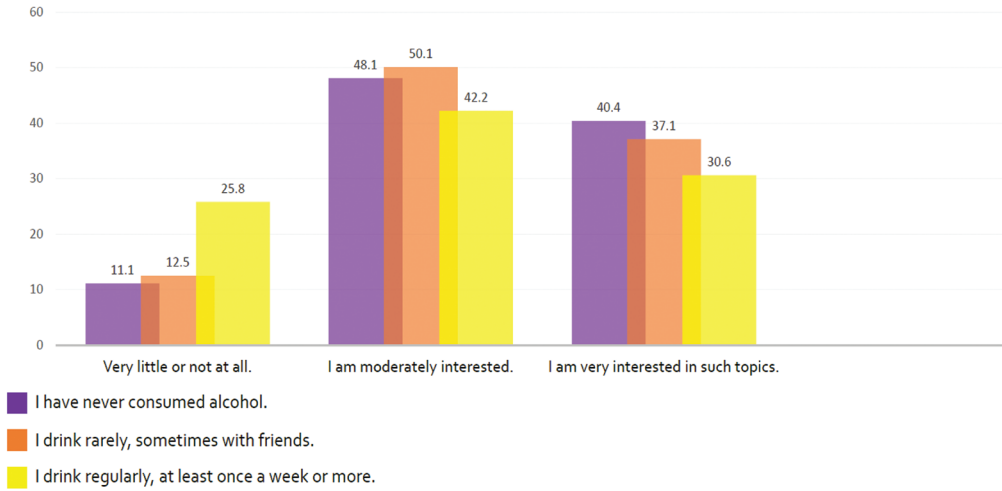
Have you ever repeated a grade in school?



HOW INTERESTED ARE STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL IN TOPICS SUCH AS HEALTHY DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, MENTAL HEALTH, PREVENTION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE ETC.?

Students who often consume alcohol are not only less interested in school, but also in subjects such as healthy diet, physical activity, mental health, prevention of substance abuse etc. The students most interested in these subjects are mostly those who never use alcohol.

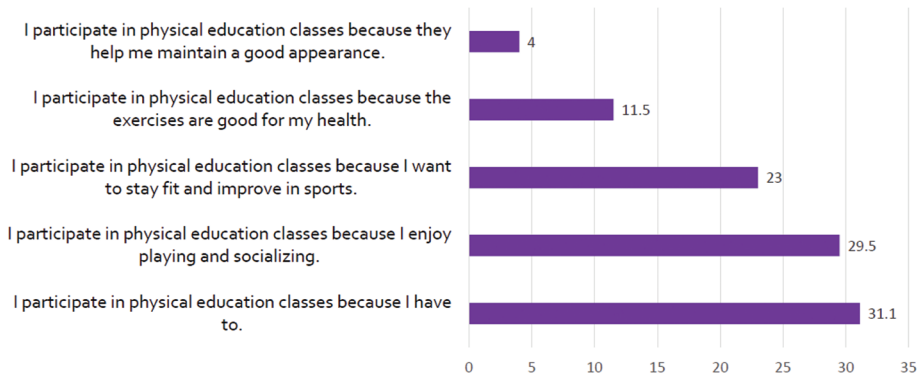
How interested are students who use alcohol in topics such as healthy diet, physical activity, mental health, prevention of substance abuse etc.?



HOW INTERESTED ARE THE STUDENTS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES?

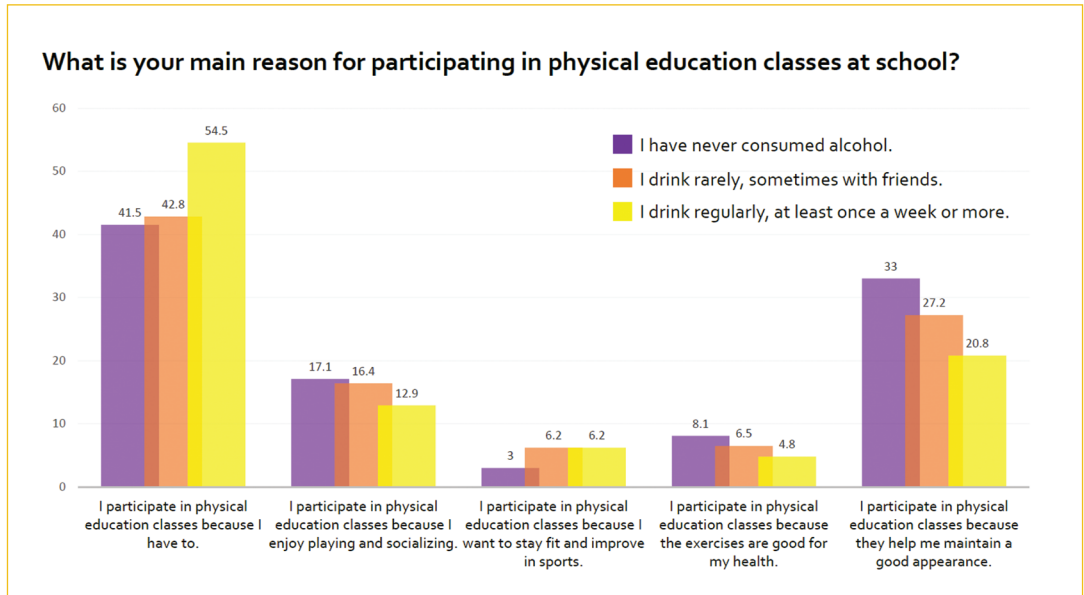
The research explored the students’ attitude towards physical education classes – what is the main goal for attending these classes? Most students have a positive attitude towards physical education for a variety of reasons: playing and socializing, keeping fit, maintaining their health, beauty etc. The worrying part is that 31% of students see these classes as **imposed on them** and they attend them just because they have to. There are probably objective reasons behind this – unfavorable conditions for delivering physical education classes, the lack of equipment, however along with that, the quality of classes should also be considered.

What is your main reason for participating in physical education classes at school?



HOW INTERESTED ARE THE STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASSES?

Most of the students who see the physical education classes as imposed on them are those who regularly use alcohol, which points out to the limited possibilities of schools to affect the behavior and healthcare habits of this group of students.



CONCLUSION

Students who regularly use alcohol are not interested in school or topics such as substance abuse prevention, which points out to the **limited possibilities of schools to affect the attitudes and behavior of these students through educational programs**. This is mainly not the case with students who occasionally use alcohol: they have a certain interest in school and topics related to substance abuse prevention, which increases the potential to influence them through educational programs.

The conditions and quality of physical education classes are a problem in its own right. The research shows that a large number of students, especially those who regularly use alcohol, perceive these classes as **imposed on them**.

IMPACT OF CURRICULUM ON THE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL

The survey included the following questions: do the schools deal with the development of the healthcare culture of young people at all, and what effect do the lectures on harmful effects of alcohol consumption in the regular curriculum and lectures held by the guest lecturers have on the attitudes and behavior of students who consume alcohol.

The following should be pointed out when it comes to learning about the harmful effects of alcohol in the regular curriculum: since various school subjects envisage lectures on such content^{3,4,5}, the question is not whether the students learned about it or not (and both can be true), but about the fact that some students are aware they learned this content, **while others do not have any recollection of it**. In this case the issue is more related to the quality of lessons in the regular curriculum than the presence of such content in the curriculum.

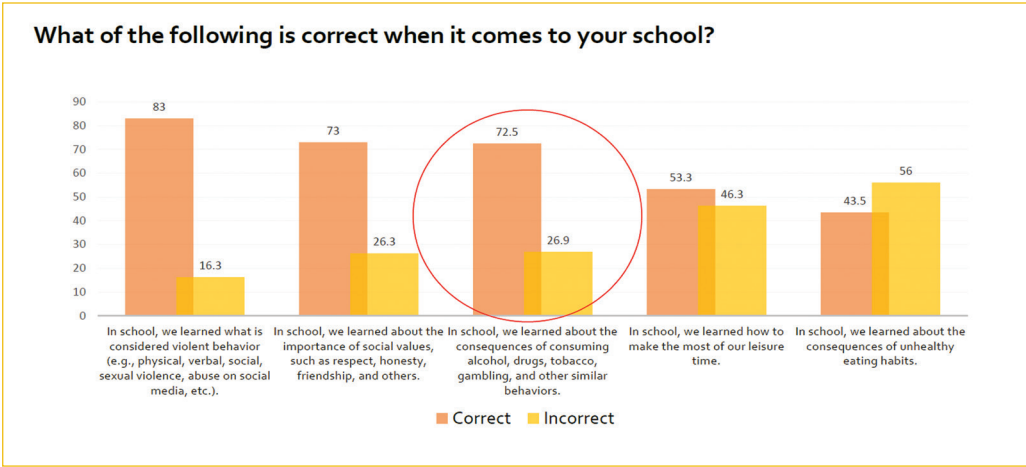
DO THE SCHOOLS DEAL WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HEALTH CULTURE OF YOUNG PEOPLE?

Schools generally deal with development of the health culture among young people. In this context, 83% of students report learning about violent behavior (e.g., physical, verbal, social, or sexual violence, abuse on social networks, etc.); 73% say they were taught about the importance of social values such as respect, honesty, and friendship; and 72% mention learning about the consequences of alcohol and tobacco use, gambling, and similar topics. In contrast, students reported learning less about how to make the most of their leisure time or the consequences of unhealthy eating habits.

³ At the 32nd Assembly of the National Council for Education held on 23rd March 2015, the Council defined the interdisciplinary areas in general-program high school subjects, with Healthcare Education as a specific discipline.

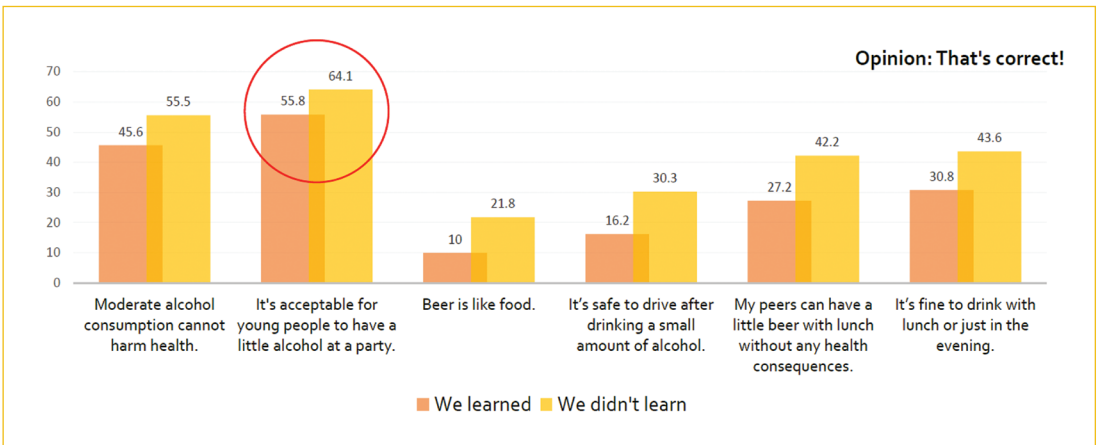
⁴ Mandatory programs in natural science, biology, chemistry and physical education include topics such as healthy diet, physical activity, mental health, prevention of substance abuse etc.

⁵ Montenegrin framework program of key competence recognizes the so-called personal, social and learning-to-learn competence, where the expected learning outcomes include: healthy lifestyle, development of body and mind, taking responsibility for the future etc.



DID LEARNING ABOUT THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN THE CURRICULUM AFFECT STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD JUSTIFYING ALCOHOL USE?

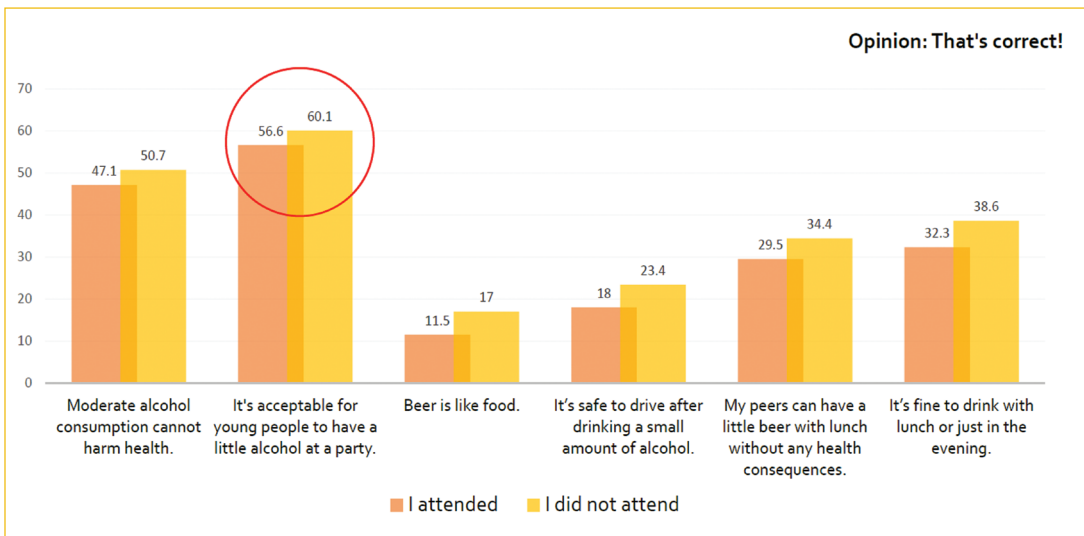
Students who learned about the consequences of consumption of alcohol, tobacco, gambling, etc. in regular curriculum **justify such behavior to a lesser extent** in comparison to those who did not learn about these topics in school. For example, among the students who justify alcohol consumption at parties, there are 10% fewer of those who who learned about the harms of alcohol in school.



Such differences can be found in responses to other questions too, so it can be assumed that learning about such content in regular curriculum influenced the young people to somewhat change their attitudes on justification of alcohol use.

DID LECTURES ON THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION HELD BY THE GUEST LECTURERS INFLUENCE THE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES ON THE JUSTIFICATION OF ALCOHOL USE?

The influence of lectures held by the guest lecturers on students' attitudes on the justification of alcohol use was explored as well: the results show that students who attended the lectures on the harmful effects of alcohol held by a guest lecturer in the past six months were less likely to justify its use in comparison to those who did not have the opportunity to attend such lectures!

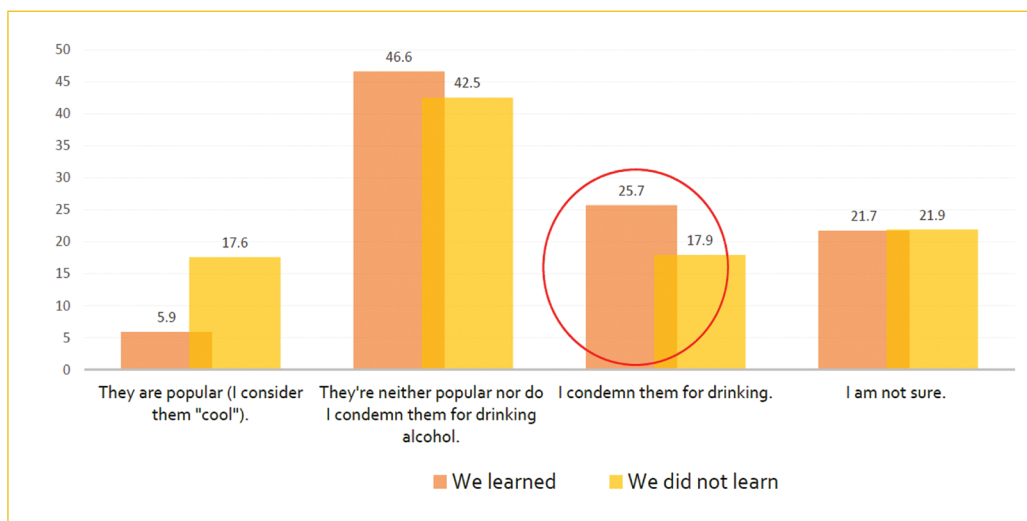


Comparing the difference in the degree of justification of certain actions by students which can be attributed to the regular curriculum in the first case (around 10%), and the guest lecturers in the second (approx. 4%), it is evident that the influence of such lectures is **somewhat smaller** compared to the impact of learning about these topics in regular curriculum⁶.

⁶ Lead by this fact, further on we show **only** the results related to the influence of the regular curriculum on the attitudes and behavior of the students.

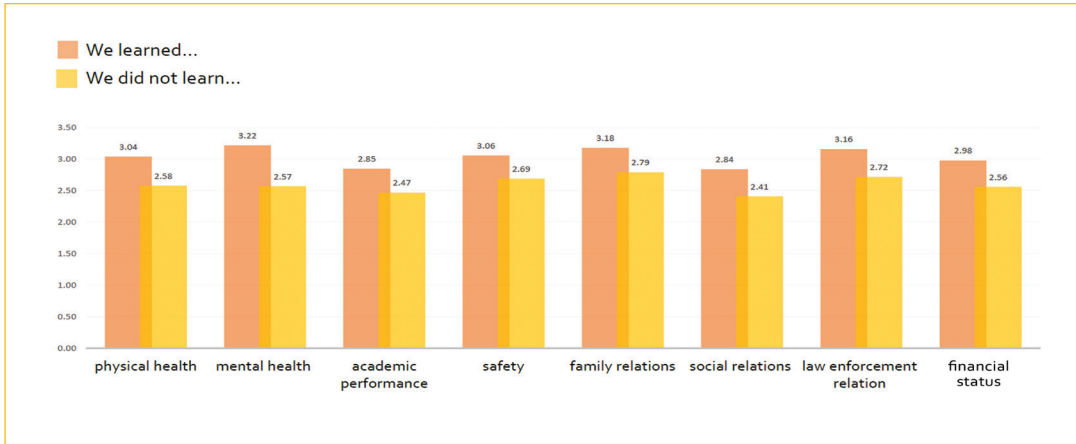
DID LEARNING ABOUT THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL IN REGULAR CURRICULUM INFLUENCE THE ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARDS STUDENTS WHO CONSUME ALCOHOL?

The students who learned about the consequences of the use of alcohol, narcotics and tobacco, gambling etc., as part of their regular curriculum in school, are **less likely to justify such behavior among their peers**. For example, there are 8% more students who learned about the harmful effects of alcohol as part of the regular curriculum in the category of students who condemn such behavior.



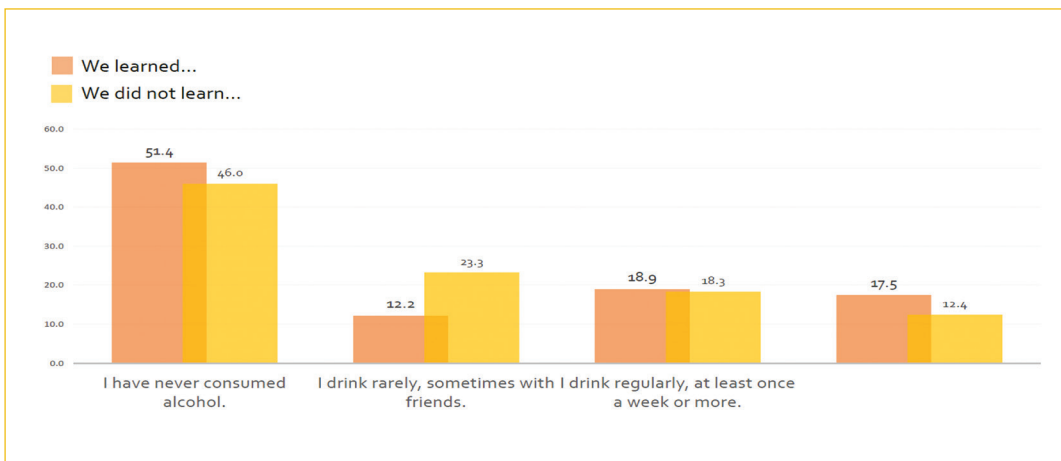
DID LEARNING ABOUT THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL IN THE REGULAR CURRICULUM INFLUENCE HOW STUDENTS ASSESS THE CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION?

The students who learned about the consequences of the use of alcohol, narcotics and tobacco, gambling etc., as part of their regular curriculum in school **can better recognize the harmful effects of alcohol** on various aspects of mental, physical and social health of students.



DID LEARNING ABOUT THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL IN REGULAR CURRICULUM INFLUENCE THE FREQUENCY OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION AMONG THE STUDENTS?

There is more students who never drink than those who do it occasionally (e.g. when socializing) in the group of students who learned about the consequences of the use of alcohol, narcotics and tobacco, gambling etc., as part of their regular curriculum in school. The percentage of students who drink regularly is the same in both groups: those who learned about the consequences and those who did not.



This fact indicates a **possibility** that learning about the harmful effects of alcohol as part of the regular curriculum prevented the increase of students who drink occasionally (at parties, birthdays etc.) - which is, as stated before, a trend; but also that it does not seem to have any influence on the students who drink regularly to change their behavior. **It seems that frequent alcohol consumption is influenced by other factors, and that it does not significantly depend on students' awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol.**

CONCLUSION

The research shows that learning about the harmful effects of alcohol as part of the regular curriculum **can change certain attitudes of students on alcohol use**, such as that they are less likely to justify the use of alcohol, that they change their opinion on students who use alcohol, better understand the harmful effects of alcohol, etc. It also shows that learning about the consequences of alcohol use in the regular curriculum **can slow down the trend of an increase of students who occasionally use alcohol**, but it is not realistic to expect that it will affect the change of behavior of students who regularly consume alcohol! It seems that frequent alcohol consumption is influenced by other factors, and that **it does not significantly depend on students' awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol**. The influence of occasional expert lecturers is even less evident.

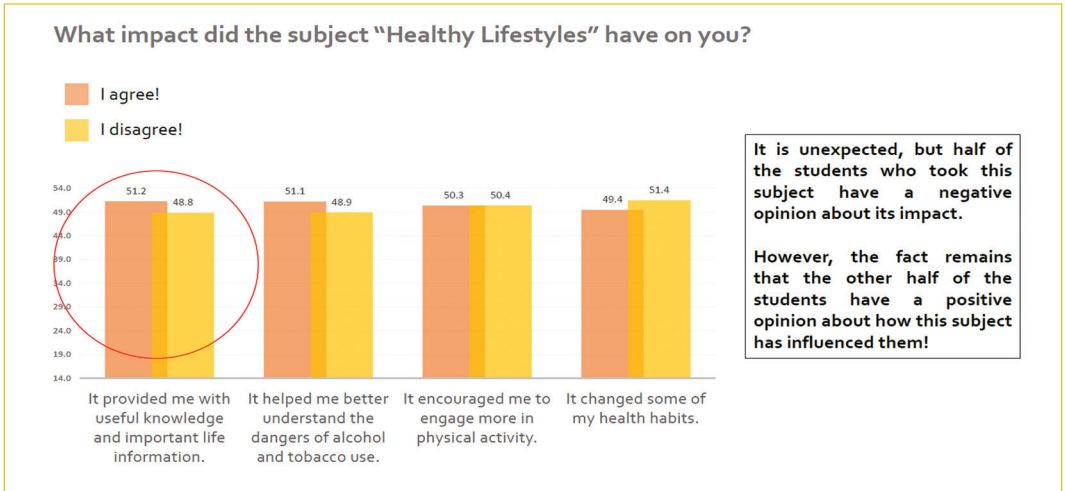
IMPACT OF THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" ON THE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS

As per the sample, 43% of students frequent or used to frequent the elective subject called "Healthy Lifestyles" which covers topics such as healthy food, physical activity, mental health, substance use prevention, etc. We examined whether these classes had any influence on the attitudes and behavior of the students who consume alcohol.

Learning about the consequences of alcohol use as part of the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" may influence the students to change some of their attitudes, provided that the classes are conducted in an interesting and adjusted way (tailored to suit the students' needs and interests). It is less probable that the "Healthy Lifestyles" classes impacted the change of behavior among the students who regularly drink alcohol.

WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" ON STUDENTS?

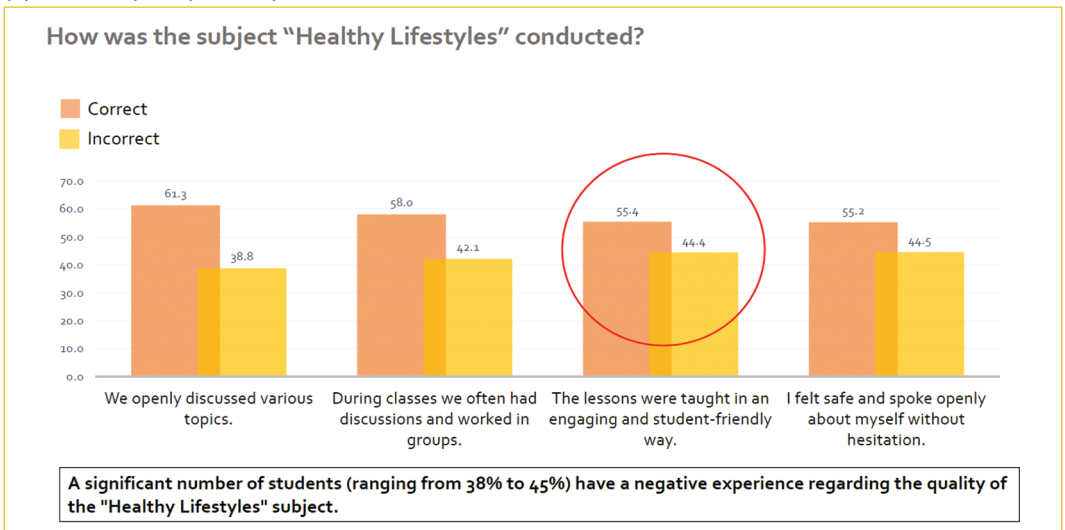
The students assessed the influence of the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles". It was surprising to see that almost half of the students who frequented these classes did not have a positive opinion on their impact: for example, most of them said that the classes did not influence them to change their healthcare habits or better understand the risks of using alcohol, etc.



The fact that attending the "Healthy Lifestyles" classes does not automatically mean that it has an expected impact on the attitudes and behavior of students raises the question about the quality of these classes.

WHAT IS THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH THE "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" CLASSES?

A significant number of students (38 to 45%) have negative experience regarding the quality of these classes. For example, 44% of students believe that the subject is not lectured in an interesting and adjusted way, 44% of them do not feel at ease to speak about themselves, while 42% of students did not have an opportunity to participate in the discussions.

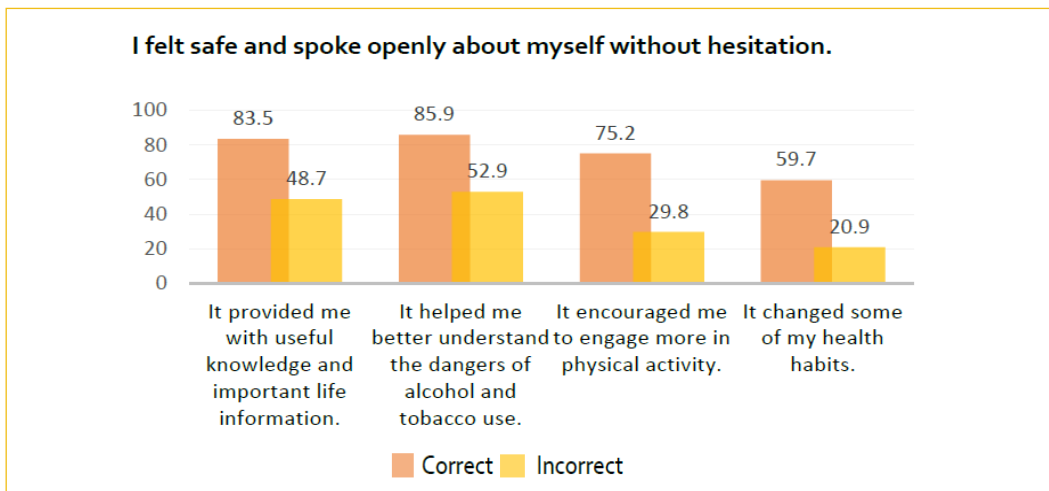


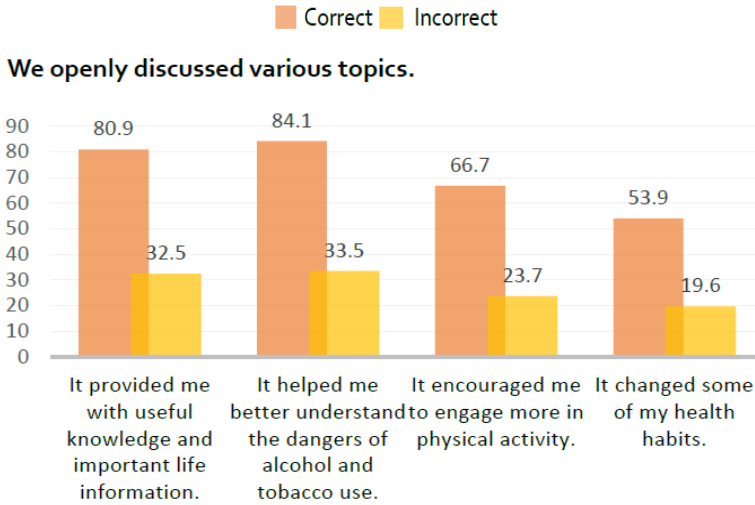
Similar conclusions may be drawn based on the students' comments on the quality of "Healthy Lifestyles" lectures. Alongside the positive comments, such as: "In my opinion, this is the best school subject because we can discuss various topics with our teacher ", "Everything I learned about is useful!", "I really enjoy these classes!" etc., there were also the negative ones:

- "The lectures are not interesting";
- "The lectures are based on theory, which is wrong!";
- "The lectures were not regular, and even when we had them we did nothing!";
- "We have been attending these lectures for a month now, and we are yet to open a textbook!";
- "Most lecturers skip the lessons on harmful effects of alcohol and sexual education, as children laugh and do not wish to learn about such topics!";
- "The teacher does not want to talk about the topics that interest us, she usually just teaches by rote – it is so boring!";
- "We usually work on other things – for example, we learn our biology lessons";
- "The teacher of this subject is our physical education teacher, and we do nothing".

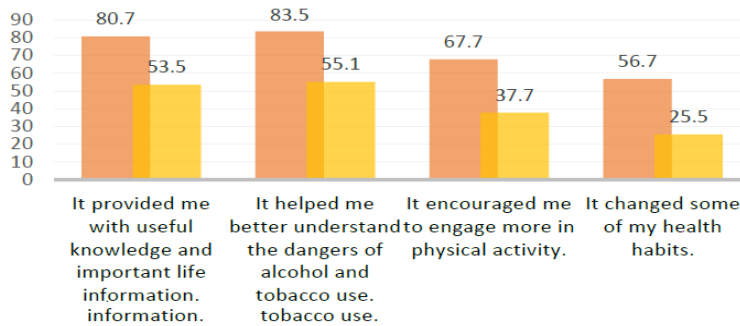
FOR THE SECOND TIME: WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" SUBJECT ON STUDENTS?

The influence of this subject was reassessed in two different scenarios: when the lessons are engaging and tailored to the students, and when they are not. It turns out that the subject has a meaningful impact on students, but only if it's delivered in an interesting and relevant way, with opportunities for discussion and group work, and if students feel comfortable and safe to openly discuss various topics and share about themselves without hesitation.

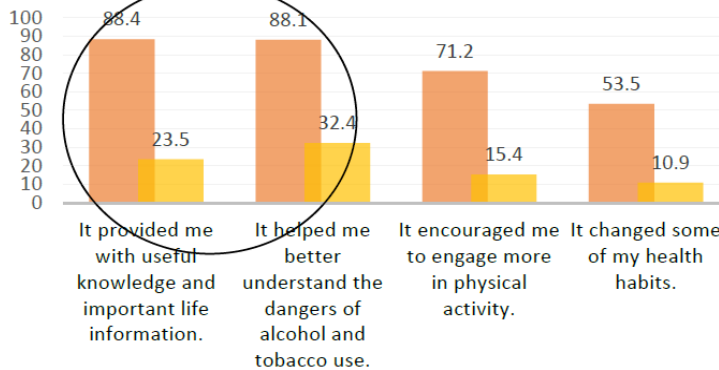




During classes we often had discussions and worked in groups.

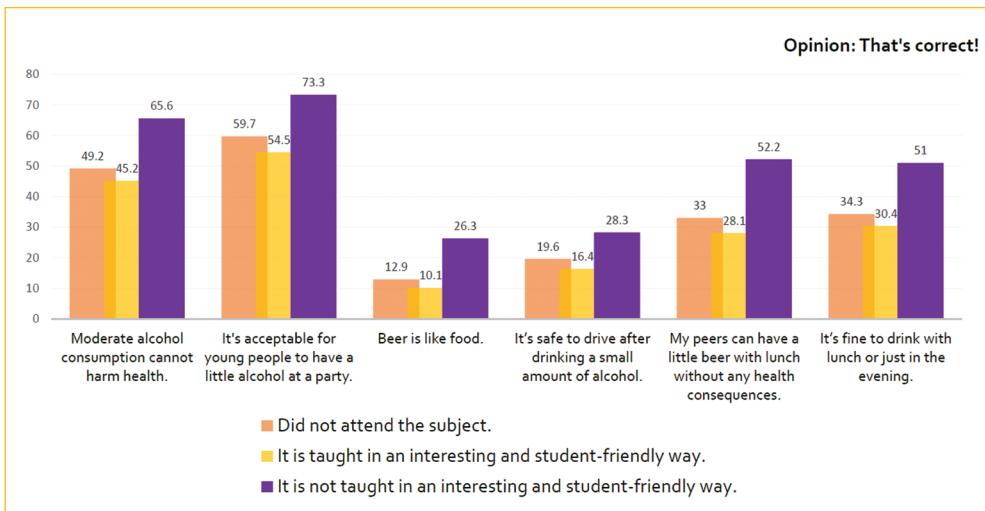


The lessons were taught in an engaging and student-friendly way.



DID ATTENDING THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" INFLUENCE THE ATTITUDES OF THE STUDENTS ON THE JUSTIFICATION OF ALCOHOL USE?

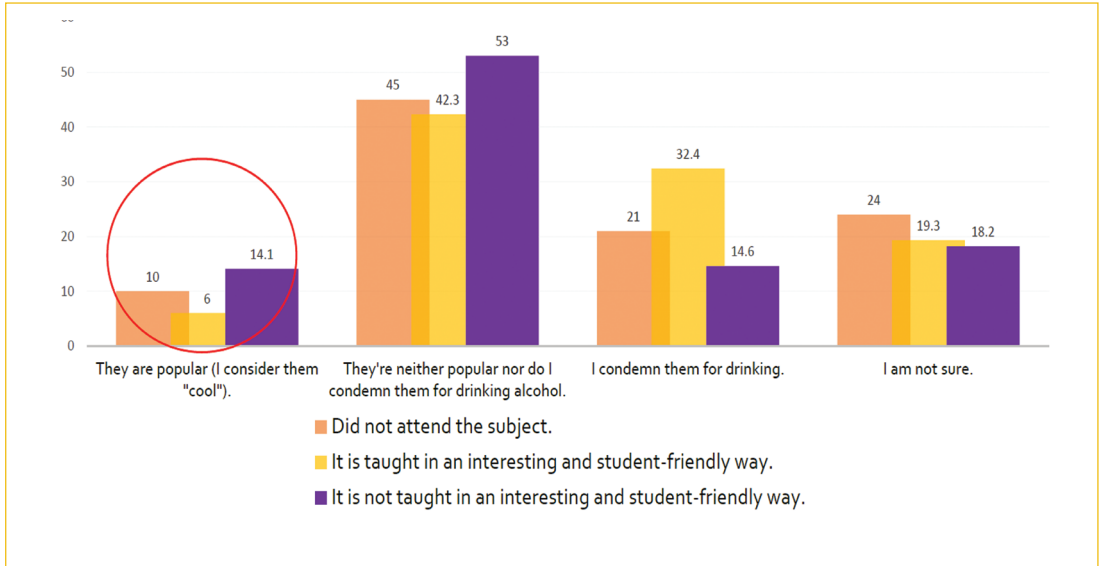
The students who frequented the "Healthy Lifestyles" classes conducted in an interesting and adjusted way **are less likely to justify the use of alcohol** than those who did not or those who frequented the uninteresting and unadjusted classes.



Interestingly, the students who frequented the "Healthy Lifestyles" classes organized in an uninteresting and unadjusted way have the least acceptable opinions on the justification of alcohol use, which can only be explained as **the reaction to the atmosphere and the manner of work in classes**.

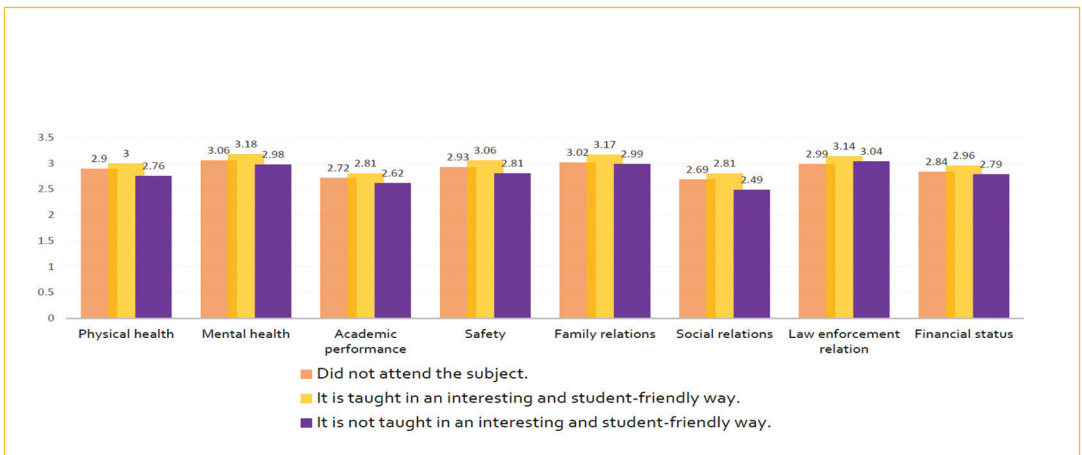
DID ATTENDING THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" AFFECT THE OPINIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS THOSE STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL?

The students who attended the "Healthy Lifestyles" classes conducted in an interesting and adjusted way **are less likely to justify the behavior of students who use alcohol** than those who did not. The students who attended the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" classes organized in an uninteresting and unadjusted way expressed most understanding towards alcohol use among students.



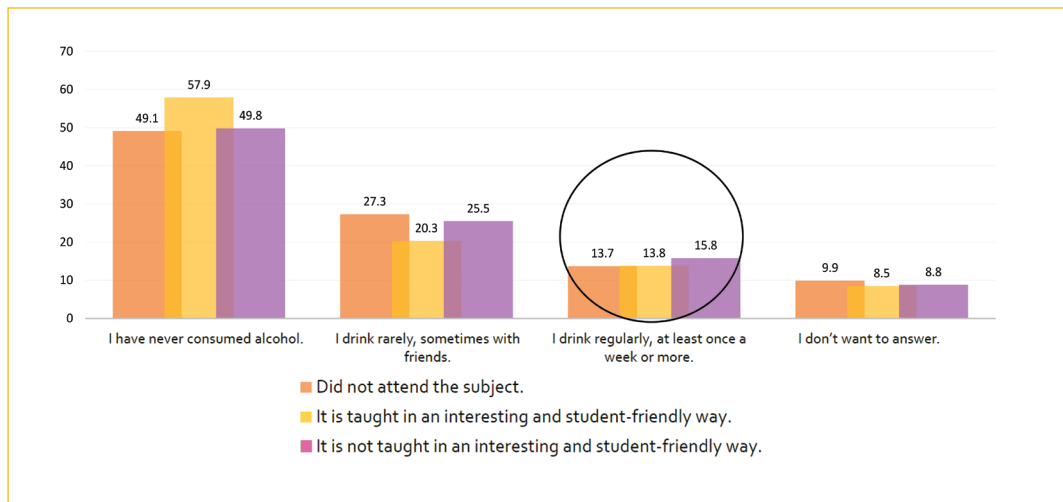
DID ATTENDING THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" CLASSES INFLUENCE THE ASSESSMENT OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL USE?

Students who attended the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" classes conducted in an interesting and adjusted way **better understand the harmful effects of alcohol consumption on various aspects of physical, mental and social health** than those who did not attend these classes or those who attended the classes organized in an uninteresting and unadjusted way.



DID ATTENDING THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" INFLUENCE THE FREQUENCY OF ALCOHOL USE AMONG THE STUDENTS?

When it comes to the frequency of alcohol use, **there is no difference** between the students who attended these classes, regardless of their quality, and those who did not attend them at all.



These data indicate the possibility that the contents on the harmful effects of alcohol use in the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" presented in an interesting and adjusted way stopped the increase of students who drink occasionally (which is a trend), but also that learning about these topics as a part of this subject, regardless of the quality of lectures, **has little effect on the change of behavior of students**. It seems that frequent alcohol consumption, as already stated, is influenced by other factors and less depends on the educational programs and students' awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol use.

CONCLUSION

Learning about the harmful effects of alcohol use in the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" can influence the students to change some of their attitudes on alcohol consumption, such as to be less ready to justify the use of alcohol, to change the opinion on students who use alcohol or to better understand the harmful effects of alcohol use, **yet on condition that the lectures are interesting and adjusted**.

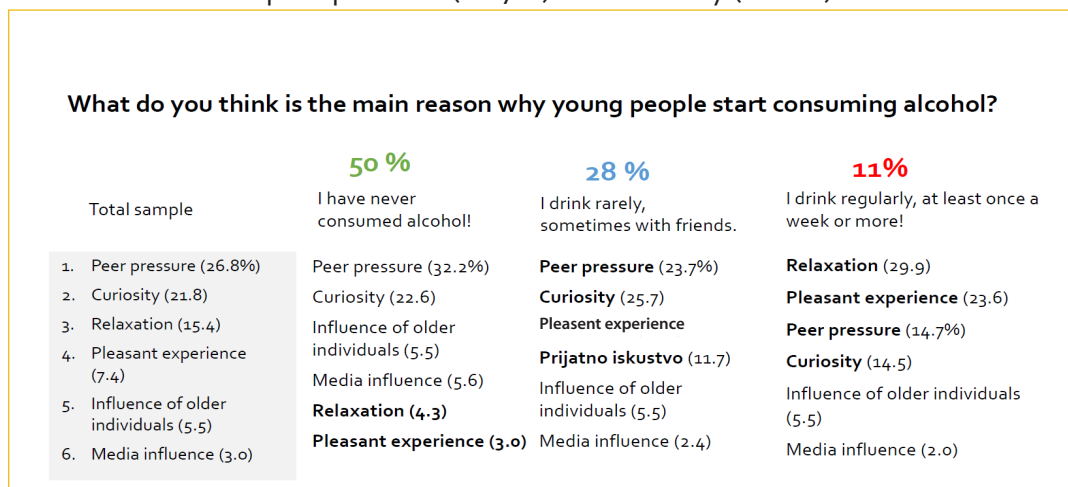
The data also show that the contents on harmful effects of alcohol use in this subject **may prevent the increase of students who drink occasionally** (which is a trend), again on condition that the lectures are organized in an interesting and adjusted way. It is less probable that this subject impacts the change of behavior of students who drink frequently, regardless of the quality of lectures.

REASONS FOR ALCOHOL USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

One of the topics of this research covers the main reasons behind alcohol use among young people, and especially whether the subgroups of students with different habits of alcohol consumption differ among themselves when it comes to the motives for alcohol use.

WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR ALCOHOL USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE?

Our research, as most others before, indicated that the most common reasons for alcohol use are peer pressure (26.7%) and curiosity (21.8%).



It is, however, interesting to analyze the reasons for alcohol use as per the students' subgroups.

The students who never use alcohol mention peer pressure and curiosity as the main reasons for alcohol use, while relaxation and pleasant experience take the last place in their assessment.

The students who occasionally drink, e.g. at parties, etc. quote **peer pressure and curiosity** as the main reasons behind alcohol use, and less frequently relaxation and pleasant experience. The reasons for alcohol consumption among this group of students can be related to the fact that in their case this behavior is unstable and **primarily situational**, under a strong influence of their peers that gradually grows from grade to grade (it leads to the increase of the number of students who do not drink at all and yet start to do it occasionally), and on the other hand the influence of the educational programs makes the trend of alcohol use habits among the students somewhat slower.

An especially interesting subgroup comprises the students who drink regularly, at least once a week or more. The main reasons for consuming alcohol, according to their statements, **are relaxation and pleasant experience**, followed by peer pressure and curiosity to a significantly smaller degree. The quoted reasons for alcohol use among this group of students can be related to the fact that, in their case, this represents an **established behavior** which is not strongly influenced by the awareness and educational programs, as well as that this subgroup of students is affected by numerous mental, social and physical health issues.

CONCLUSION

The subgroups of students with different patterns of alcohol consumption significantly differ as per the reasons for their use of alcohol, which is probably conditioned by some of their other features. For example, the subgroup with the most mental, social and physical health issues, characterized by persistence in alcohol consumption, state **relaxation and pleasant experience** as the reasons for alcohol use.

The students who drink occasionally, e.g. when socializing or at parties, mostly do so because of **curiosity and peer pressure**. The issue is the growing trend of peer pressure from grade to grade, which leads many students who don't initially consume alcohol to start doing so over time.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

The research aimed to gain a better understanding of alcohol use among young people in Montenegro, assess the influence of schools and curriculum on health culture and attitudes toward alcohol consumption, identify key challenges and opportunities for shaping attitudes and health-related habits, and explore ways to reduce alcohol use among youth. Additionally, the study sought to develop evidence-based recommendations for improving curriculum quality to support early intervention and youth education. A total of 7,520 students from all elementary and secondary schools in Montenegro participated in the research.

MAIN RESEARCH RESULTS

PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL USE AMONG STUDENTS IN MONTENEGRO

The number of students who consume alcohol gradually increases from grade to grade, so that most of the students in final grades of secondary schools occasionally or regularly use alcohol!

STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

There is a high level of confidence among the students in their awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol use on one, and the predominant reliance on unreliable sources of information on the other side. The school has **significantly less influence** on students' awareness of the consequences of alcohol consumption compared to the parents, peers and the internet.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ALCOHOL USE

Most students think that alcohol use is a problem, yet at the same time most of them are neutral when it comes to the students who use it – they do not find them popular, but at the same time they do not condemn them. It is especially worrying that most students, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, show an understanding for alcohol use in certain situations.

MENTAL, SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL

This research, like many others, indicates that there is a certain relationship between alcohol use and problems with young people's mental, social and physical health.

LEISURE TIME AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO CONSUME ALCOHOL

The lifestyle and healthcare habits of students who use alcohol are significantly different from those of the students who never drink.

FAMILY INFLUENCE ON THE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL

Students who use alcohol already have a model for such behavior in their families. They believe that their parents do not have negative attitude on alcohol use, that they do not condemn the presence of bars and betting shops in the vicinity of schools, that they do not have high expectations from them when it comes to sports activities, healthy diet etc.

INTEREST OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL IN SCHOOL AND TOPICS RELATED TO ADDICTION PREVENTION

The students who use alcohol have little interest in school or topics related to substance use prevention etc. The same is true for the physical education classes, which points out the schools' limitations to affect the attitudes and behavior of these students through educational programs.

IMPACT OF SCHOOL AND THE CURRICULUM ON THE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS WHO USE ALCOHOL

Learning about the consequences of alcohol consumption in regular classes has led students to change some of their attitudes, such as attitudes toward the justification of alcohol use, attitudes toward students who consume alcohol, and attitudes toward the consequences of alcohol consumption, etc. It is less likely that regular school programs have influenced changes in students' behavior, especially among those who consider themselves regular alcohol users. Lectures by experts have an even smaller impact on forming healthy attitudes toward alcohol use.

IMPACT OF THE ELECTIVE SUBJECT "HEALTHY LIFESTYLES" ON THE ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTHCARE HABITS OF STUDENTS

Learning about the harmful effects of alcohol use in the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles" lectures may influence the students to change some of their attitudes, provided that the lectures are interesting and adjusted. It is less probable that the "Healthy Lifestyles" lectures impacted the change of behavior among the students who regularly drink alcohol, regardless of their quality.

WHAT IS THE MAIN REASON FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO START USING ALCOHOL?

The subgroups of students with different patterns of alcohol consumption significantly differ as per the reasons behind their use of alcohol, which is probably conditioned by some of their other features. The students who persistently use alcohol state that relaxation and pleasant experience are the main reasons for their behavior. At the same time, this subgroup of students is affected the most by mental, social and physical health issues.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO ALCOHOL USE AMONG THE STUDENTS IDENTIFIED IN THIS RESEARCH

The research helped identify certain challenges that should be focused on in order to reduce or eliminate the use of alcohol among students:

- Frequent acquaintances and friendships of a large number of students with persons who use alcohol;
- A large number of students (especially those in high grades of secondary school) who occasionally or regularly use alcohol;
- The trend of gradual growth of the number of students who use alcohol from grade to grade, first occasionally, and then frequently, and the trend of an increase of students who have experienced being drunk from grade to grade;
- A special challenge are the classes in which alcohol use is an occurrence, with 10 or more students who use alcohol and the probable presence of social pressure to persuade the other students to start using alcohol too. Such classes are mostly found in higher grades of secondary schools;
- The students' attitudes, regardless of their age, that alcohol is available to them without any restriction and at any place, provided they have the money to pay for it;
- The students' high level of confidence in their awareness of the harmful effects of alcohol use on one side, and the predominant reliance on unreliable sources of information on the other. The school has far less influence on students' awareness of the consequences of alcohol consumption than their parents, friends and the internet;
- Resistance of the students who use alcohol to accept the arguments coming from their school and teachers;
- The neutral attitude of most students towards the behavior of students who use alcohol (they do not find them popular, but at the same time they do not condemn them);
- A special challenge is the fact that most students, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, show understanding for their peers who drink alcohol at parties;
- In general, a significant number of students express a high level of concern for what might happen in the future. They are easily affected by failure and spend a lot of time thinking about it. Mental health issues are more prominent among the students who use alcohol;

- A significant number of students generally do not show enough understanding for others and tend to react aggressively. The students who frequently use alcohol are especially prone to problems of establishing and maintaining good relationships with others;
- A large number of students, both those who use alcohol and those who do not, state that they often have headaches;
- The students who consume alcohol tend to frequent bars, video game parlors, betting shops, etc., and often spend their spare time sleeping or lounging. They are less engaged in reading, participate in sports less frequently, and spend less time with their parents.
- The students, especially those who use alcohol, do not have sufficiently developed healthcare habits: they go to bed late, consume fast food, snacks, soda and energy drinks and rarely visit the doctor;
- The students who use alcohol believe that their parents do not have unequivocally negative attitudes towards alcohol use, that they do not condemn the presence of bars and betting shops in the vicinity of schools, do not have high expectations from them when it comes to sports activities, healthy diet, etc.;
- Due to their lack of interest in school and health-related topics, the schools have limited possibilities to influence the attitudes and behavior of students who consume alcohol through educational programs;
- The impact of educational programs on young people's attitudes is highly dependent on the quality of teaching, whether the lessons are engaging for students, and whether they are adapted to different learning styles.
- Learning about the harmful effects of alcohol use, be it as a part of the regular curriculum or "Healthy Lifestyles" lectures, may slow down the trend of growth of the number of students who occasionally use alcohol, yet it is not realistic to expect that it will affect the behavior of students who use it regularly;
- Among students who regularly consume alcohol, there seems to be a stronger link between their mental, social, and physical health on one hand and frequent alcohol use on the other. Therefore, it is unlikely that these students will change their behavior solely through educational programs. They require broader psychological and social support.

MEASURES FOR MANAGING THE PROBLEM OF ALCOHOL USE

The research shows that certain measures could contribute to the reduction of alcohol use among students. Some of these measures are:

- Provide more presence and recognition of interdisciplinary subjects on healthcare education in the curriculum;
- Improve the quality of lectures on healthcare education to increase their impact on the attitudes and behavior of students;
- Provide wide support to the students in schools through better offer of non-curriculum activities and programs aimed at the prevention and development of healthcare culture;
- Reduce the pressure on young people who do not use alcohol;
- Provide psychological and social support to students who frequently and persistently use alcohol.

REASONING OF THE PROPOSED MEASURES

- Provide more presence and recognition of interdisciplinary subjects on healthcare education in the curriculum

The fact is that the general education curriculum of Montenegro contains an **interdisciplinary subject** on the healthcare education of young people, but also that a large number of students are unaware of learning about these topics in their regular curriculum. It implies the need to dedicate more attention to this topic in the future, by promoting its importance, identifying the contents in certain programs that are related to this topic, providing more space for the implementation of such content in the curriculum, educating the teachers to give lectures on these topics. An integral part of the implementation of this topic is also the elective subject "Healthy Lifestyles", which should include more students in order to systematize the knowledge on healthcare culture the students acquire through various grades and subjects.

- Improve the quality of lectures on healthcare education to increase their impact on the attitudes and behavior of students

It was determined that educational programs and learning about the consequences of alcohol consumption can influence young people's attitudes and

behavior, but only if the teaching is of high quality. This should not be a passive learning experience where students are simply given explicit information about the consequences of alcohol consumption: instead, the lectures should involve honest and open conversation with the students with reasoned discussions on various, even sensitive topics; the students should feel free at the lectures and able to talk about themselves and others without any hesitation. The issue of the quality of lectures is especially important keeping in mind the fact that these topics are mostly directed to the students who are generally uninterested in school and health-related topics. Further on, such contents address the students who believe in their opinions to a high extent, and yet resist external influence. The explicit contents will have zero effect, especially with adolescents. The research showed that active lectures, debates, reasoned discussions etc. are the key factors that separate the efficient and inefficient educational programs in school.

- Provide wide support to the students in schools through better offer of non-curriculum activities and programs aimed at the prevention and development of healthcare culture

The research showed that there is a relationship between the use of alcohol and young people's lifestyles. The young people who use alcohol frequently go to bars, video game parlors etc., they more often spend their time sleeping and lounging. The research indicated another connection - that between the use of alcohol and the **healthcare habits** of young people: young people who use alcohol, and not only them, go late to bed, consume fast food, snacks, soda and energy drinks without restriction and rarely visit a doctor. At the same time, the research revealed the presence of certain mental, social, and physical health issues, not only among students who consume alcohol. Many students express concern for their future, are easily affected by failure, and spend a lot of time dwelling on it. Additionally, many struggle with social relationships, often show intolerance, and sometimes react impulsively.

It all indicates the importance of a broad approach to solve the problem of alcohol use among young people, which means more support programs to the students at the school level though diverse offer of contents and activities, such as various **clubs and student organizations**, organization of various activities in schools, for example sports competitions to promote the importance of physical culture and sports spirit, certain **events** that promote the importance of preventive health checks, healthy diet, physical activity, organization of **expert lectures** on harmful effects of alcohol use, substance addiction, etc., planning and implementation of students' projects through which the students would explore a certain health topic and present their findings, organization of **workshops** to teach students the techniques of managing stress and anxiety, non-violent communication etc., organizing **debates** to openly discuss various challenges, such as sexual health, prevention of substance addiction, mental health etc. The mentioned school activities largely define the school culture, and it is one of the

most important factors that influence most young people to choose the path they will follow.

- **Reduce the pressure on young people who do not use alcohol**

A large number of students know or socialize with the persons who consume alcohol. Classes in which alcohol consumption is an occurrence and a large number of students use it, with strong pressure to persuade the rest of the students to start drinking, represent an especially unfavorable environment. Such classes should be intensely treated, in order to reduce **the peer pressure** on students who do not use alcohol.

The students who drink occasionally - at parties, birthdays, etc., state that **peer pressure and curiosity** are the main reasons for alcohol consumption. This behavior can be defined as unstable and situational, greatly influenced by the peer pressure that keeps growing from grade to grade. Along with this direct peer influence, there are other sorts of pressure: the research showed that most students, regardless of whether they use alcohol or not, show understanding for their peers who drink some alcohol in the evening, at parties or with lunch. To add to that, most students believe that alcohol is available to them without any restriction, at any time and any place, provided they have the money to pay for it. All of these are pressure factors that contribute to the growing trend of alcohol use among students as they progress through grades.

A favorable circumstance is that the educational programs have an effect on the behavior of students who do not use alcohol, as well as on those who do it occasionally, on condition that their quality is good. Such programs may strengthen the position of students who do not use alcohol and significantly slow down the trend of alcohol consumption.

- **Provide psychological and social support to students who frequently and persistently use alcohol**

Working with students who persistently use alcohol represents a specific challenge. Those are the students who drink at least once a week, and often more. There seems to be a connection between the frequent alcohol use and the unfavorable mental, social and physical state of the students who drink frequently and persistently. They state that drinking brings them pleasure and relaxation!

The students who drink frequently come from families with models of such behavior, and their parents do not have unequivocally negative attitudes towards alcohol use, frequenting bars etc. These students more often admit that they are affected by certain personal (they are often anxious, easily affected by failure and spend a lot of time thinking about it), social (they tend to be less accepted, they are less tolerant and prone to react aggressively) and physical issues (they experience various difficulties and frequent headaches). The spec-

ificity of these students is that they are very resilient to the influence of school and mostly refuse to accept the arguments on the harmful effects of alcohol consumption. Whether because of internal resistance or the fact that they are mostly uninterested in school, educational programs usually do not have an effect on these students.

It all points out to the required change of approach in the case of these students: along with the above-stated measures, they need **individual psychological and social support** to reduce their inner tension and integrate them better into the school collective.

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