EARLY INITIATION OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION BY ADOLESCENTS IN RECONSTRUCTED FAMILIES MAY BE EXPLAINED BY PARENTING STYLE

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BACKGROUND. Literature about risk factors of alcohol use points at the association between alcohol use and parenting style. This study investigates the relationship between family structure of adolescents in Ukraine and their initiation of alcohol use with parenting style as a mediating variable.

METHODS: Pooled data from the repeated cross-sectional nationally representative survey of classes in Ukrainian secondary schools with target group of all 15-16 year old students, held in 1999, 2003, and 2007, were used for this analysis. Complete data were available for 11019 participants. Main exposures were family structure (full, single parent and reconstructed) and perceptions of the relationships with mother and father, rule-setting, control, and support provided by parents. Outcome measure was age when students started consuming alcohol.

RESULTS: In bivariate analysis, children in reconstructed families had higher risk for initiating alcohol use at age of 13 or younger (odds ratio 1.37, confidence interval 1.15-1.63) compared to full families. In reconstructed families, adolescents were more likely to be dissatisfied with their relationships with mother compared to intact family structure (8.7% vs. 4.7%) and dissatisfied with their relationships with father compared to intact family structure (19.8% vs. 9.1%). Parental support was lacking in higher proportion of reconstructed families, compared to intact family structure (20.7% vs. 15.1%). In the multivariate analysis, controlling for relationship with mother and father, support received from parents, and socio-demographic characteristics, the association between family structure and alcohol drinking initiation was attenuated.

CONCLUSIONS: Children in reconstructed families have higher risk of early drinking initiation. This study also supports the hypothesis that dissatisfaction with relationships with parents and lack of support received from parents may mediate the association between family structure and early drinking initiation. Hence, reconstructed families may require additional attention of public health professionals in their prevention programs.