

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Prevalence and Factors Associated with Alcohol Use among Dayak Adolescents in Sarawak, Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Alcohol is classified as a psychoactive substance, and its dependence is one of the three leading risk factors for death, disability, or disease. Early age alcohol use by the age of 15 is implied to be harmful due to interference in the brain development of adolescents, causing alcohol-related problems later in life. This study aims to determine the prevalence and factors associated with alcohol use among Dayak adolescents in Sarawak, Malaysia.

**Methods:** This was a cross-sectional quantitative research approach. A total of 12 districts within the 12 divisions were selected by multistage stratified cluster sampling. Dayak housing area lists were obtained from district offices and the local councils. The respondents were selected systematically according to male and female respondent houses, and they were interviewed using an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Data were entered into Microsoft Excel and analysed through IBM SPSS Version 27.0. **Results:** Dayak adolescents' mean age was 17.31 years. They were either low-risk (50.0%), hazardous (31.0%), abstainers (11.0%), harmful (5.0%) or alcohol dependant (3.0%) drinkers. Age ( $p < .001$ ), gender ( $p < .05$ ), ethnicity ( $p < .001$ ), religion ( $p < .05$ ), employment ( $p < .001$ ), level of education ( $p < .01$ ), allowance ( $p < .001$ ), family relationship ( $p < .05$ ), and family size ( $p < .05$ ) were the potential predictors of alcohol use disorder. **Conclusion:** Dayak adolescent alcohol drinking is prevalent and a public health problem, particularly among disadvantaged socio-economic families. The lower proportion of abstainers suggested that alcohol use among adolescents is on the rise. Hence, the results should be utilised to do targeted health promotion regarding harmful alcohol use among adolescents since early use of alcohol among adolescents may lead to more severe health and non-health outcomes in the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Alcohol, commonly known as ethanol or ethyl alcohol, is a psychoactive drug that consists of an organic compound containing hydroxyl (-OH) and carbon atoms, with ethanol being the psychoactive component (1). It is produced through fermentation and distillation processes and is widely used as an active ingredient in beverages such as wine, beer, and hard liquor (2). Alcohol crosses the blood-brain barrier to act in the neurochemistry pathway producing changes in the function of neurotransmitters, enzymes, and receptors leading to deranged synapses that regulate compulsivity and inhibition (3). Due to the pathogenicity of alcohol in the brain, prolonged use will lead to tolerance or withdrawal effects (4). Effects of alcohol differ from person to person, depending on the person's risk factors such as pre-existing health conditions, other substance

abuse, and the level of consumption (5). Alcohol use disorder was previously known as alcoholism or alcohol dependence. The term describes alcohol consumption that led to mental or physical health problems (6). The diagnosis follows the criteria mentioned in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (DSM-5) (7). Symptoms include being unable to limit drinking, persistent drinking despite having problems personally or professionally, needing a larger amount of alcohol to get similar effects, and frequent intoxications (4).

Current drinkers were those who had drunk any alcoholic drink in the previous 12 months, whereas binge drinkers were those who had six or more standard alcoholic beverages in one sitting (8). More than half of the people in the Americas, Europe, and the Western Pacific consume alcohol, making up a substantial portion of the world's 2.3 billion alcohol drinkers. On the other hand, while per capita alcohol consumption remained stable in most parts of the world, it surged in the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia regions. More than a quarter of current drinkers are adolescents aged