

INFLUENCE OF DIFFICULT MINING LABOUR ON THE INCREASE OF ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

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Abstract: *Alcohol drinking in the mining environment is demonstrated by certain researches that were conducted in areas with this socio-economic profile. In this study we want to highlight the following aspects: the socio-cultural determination of alcohol consumption; the worship of alcohol as the expression of a popular culture; the motivation of excessive alcohol consumption through hard physical work that requires such a "therapy" for the recovery of forces; the negative influences of alcohol drinking on the family. This study is based on a socio-anthropological research performed in several stages. The methodological aspects are explained in the study based on the statistical results obtained by applying a sociological questionnaire to a sample of 843 subjects (active miners, all male). The study hypothesis is the following: difficult mining labour causes an increase in temptations to consume alcohol over the levels generally acceptable in the social environment. It is necessary to analyse the phenomenon of alcohol consumption because it has turned into a "cultural" pattern, hiding a reality with serious medical, family and social consequences in general. This survey aims at raising the awareness of community-level decision makers, but also at reducing alcohol drinking. Professional prevention campaigns are required, but they are still lacking. There are no specialists able to change the distorted collective perception of alcohol consumption, but they have to be trained and involved in a specific social work activity.*

Key words: *family; society; cultural pattern; the tradition of alcohol consumption between "normal and pathological"; the alcoholic.*

1. Alcohol consumption as social- cultural determination

We ought to ask ourselves: *why the alcohol consumption culture?; why the alcohol consumption culture in the mining milieu?; why the alcohol consumption culture in the Jiu Valley mining milieu?* There are three questions that naturally originate from the title of this study, and they have, through the answers they may receive, the purpose of a scientific approach to the analysis of alcoholism from general to particular. We do not necessarily propose solutions, but we want to

present a profound phenomenology based on sociological research. The statistical results we have obtained are *in se* a quantified alert signal in figures. Behind these figures, however, there is a much more dramatic reality summarized in the very phrase "the culture of alcohol consumption". We asked ourselves why alcohol consumption is considered a "culture"? We know that a culture is defined by the values that have been proven over time. When alcohol gradually turns into alcoholism, we cannot speak of values, but of non-values, with serious social consequences. Then, in fact, the expression "alcohol consumption culture" is an upside-down culture, one triggered by any intoxication state of society. Generalized drunkenness brought about by alcohol in a community is comparable to other types of "intoxication", nevertheless it has its peculiarities producing a special image in the social field.

Generally speaking, it is accepted that the phenomenon of alcohol consumption is determined by factors extrinsic and intrinsic to the people who join the ranks of ordinary consumers. Thus an important extrinsic factor is the social and family environment in which consumer patterns are created. An intrinsic factor is the genetic predisposition, sometimes neglected by those who analyse the phenomenon of alcoholism. For a clearer perception of this phenomenon, we need to proceed to a brief analysis of its specific concepts.

Abuse. The meaning we have in mind is the excess in the consumption of substances which can lead to addiction, including alcohol. A complex definition of abuse is found in Esther Gwinnell, M.D. and Christine Adamec (2006): „*Excessive use of a substance, whether it is alcohol, tobacco, prescribed medications, or other items. Individuals who exhibit an abusive behaviour may escalate their behaviour into an addiction, which includes both a physical and psychological need to carry out the harmful behavior repeatedly. Some individuals can abuse drugs, alcohol, and other substances on one or more occasions without behaviors developing into addictions. This does not mean that substance abuse is harmless. For example, an individual could drink to excess and subsequently cause a severe car crash leading to loss of life. Alternatively, a person could have unprotected sex with many individuals over a short period of time and contract a sexually transmitted disease that he or she may subsequently spread to others*” (p.1).

Alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse is an excessive use of alcohol that ultimately leads to addiction. Excessive alcohol consumption may result, according to Esther Gwinnell, M.D. and Christine Adamec (2006: 1), to issues of the following type:

1. Incapacity to fulfil social responsibilities: "They fail to fulfil their responsibilities at work, school, or home" (*Ibidem*: 5).
2. Excessive alcohol consumption causes the loss of reflexes and accountability through actions that lead to accidents: "They drive or operate hazardous equipment while under the influence of alcohol" (*Ibidem*).

3. Drunkenness can lead to a series of antisocial acts: "They have been arrested for an alcohol-related problem such as driving while intoxicated or assaulting another person when drunk" (Ibidem).

4. Excessive alcohol consumption leads to the deterioration of family relationships: "They drink, despite family or personal relationship problems that are either created or worsened by the excessive drinking" (Ibidem).

The abuse of alcohol as well as of other substances create a negative condition for consumers who settle over time, as Kathleen Bradbury-Golas points out: "Substance abuse harms the body not only from the use of the substance itself but from the negative lifestyle behaviors in which the user participates. Poor nutrition, tobacco smoking, insomnia, and lack of exercise all impact on the physical well-being of a person" (2009: 3).

Addiction. In a general sense, addiction is a total or partial lack of autonomy. Alcohol addiction of an individual represents a certain state of the individual in which a permanent mechanism of consumption settles in as emotional need: „*The emotional and often physical need to perform a certain behavior, whether it is consuming large quantities of alcohol, taking illegal drugs, or acting on other compulsions. Some experts use the word "dependence" as a substitute for "addiction"*” (Gwinnell, Adamec 2006: 2).

As Kathryn H. Hollen shows, addiction creates a complex state for those concerned: „Addiction is a complex disorder whose principal diagnostic feature is a repeated compulsion to take a certain substance or indulge in a certain behavior despite negative consequences. As an addicted person increasingly begins to rely on the object of addiction for physical or emotional gratification, he or she tends to neglect other, healthier aspects of life” (2009: 2).

2. Veneration of alcohol - the expression of a popular culture

When alcohol addiction occurs, this substance becomes a drug and must be treated in this way, without any circumspection. This attitude is all the more necessary as alcohol gets to be revered, becoming a kind of element of a popular culture. As Griffith Edwards shows: „*The veneration with which one regards alcohol in a drinking-supporting culture determines every person who develops in that environment to appreciate more and more the pleasures of alcohol and less and less the risks of consuming alcohol. The psychological packaging invites him to drink all the time and neutralizes the warnings about the danger he is exposed to*” (2006: 41).

The history of alcohol use is long and this is the reason why this drink is a cultural element of humanity that has a certain mythological load. For example, Dionysus Zagreus's entire mythology would be meaningless except for the use of alcohol and even abuse of consumption. This is surprised by Griffith Edwards, E. Jane Marshall, Christopher C.H. Cook: "Alcohol is a beverage which is rich with symbolic significance when used in social, cultural and religious custom and ritual. Its

properties have been familiar to countless peoples around the world for thousands of years. However, it is also a drug that has important pharmacological and toxic effects, both on the mind and on almost every organ and system in the human body" (2003: 30).

3. The mining milieu causes an increase in alcohol consumption

A mining milieu is mainly represented by an area that has a predominant mining economy. The Jiu Valley can be considered to have been such a mining environment for a long time because the basic economy is represented by the extraction of coal. Economic consequences have been fully reflected on the social increased poverty in the area damaging the quality of life. These negative aspects have induced an accumulated economic and psychological discomfort to the individual level (Andrioni, Goian, 2011: 7). Prior to the creation of this industry, we can talk here only of a primitive rural local economy, without too much importance beyond that area. For a clearer understanding of the situation here, we reproduce the four images of the miner that appear in the book *The aporias of Gilgamesh's youth. Philosophical research* (Hirghiduș, 2016): „A first image is that of the miner of the early mining period. Accepting heavy and dangerous work, he gained some freedom and somehow escaped the servitudes of a society in whose hierarchy he was ranked last. To the question: Who are the miners from the beginning of mining in the Jiu Valley (the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century)? - a relatively simple answer can be given: the mining population is an amalgam of ethnicities (Hungarians, Germans, Italians, Romanians, etc.). Over time, Romanians have begun to dominate. The Romanians came from outside the Jiu Valley to work in mines, but locals were also hired (the "momarlanî") because the mines offered much better possibilities than the practice of mountain subsistence agriculture. Over time mixed families have emerged through the marriage between the "barabe" and the "momarlanî". The mutual reluctances have been mitigated over time, but there is still a negative image of the ones about the others.

A second image of the miner was built during the interwar period, when his figure became a strong one. The long series of strikes for economic and social claims has turned the miner into a true struggler. Work in mines has begun to be regarded with respect, even if it always demanded sacrifices of human life.

A third image of the miner is formed in the socialism years. He is part of the working class which, according to the slogans of the Romanian Communist Party, was the leading class. The figure of the miner becomes very strong and representative of the Romanian economy and society. Because the Jiu Valley continued the tradition of strikes, even though at a much lower level than the interwar period, not everyone could become a miner. There was a permanent

control of the Securitate over miners, but this control could not prevent some events unwanted by the state-party.¹

A fourth image of the miner is the post-December revolution one, deformed by a state policy. Paradoxically, the miner has become the synonym of an evil that must be eliminated".

4. Methodological aspects of the sociological approach

The target population is represented by the miners who live and work in the Jiu Valley and who are active. Their number has dropped sharply over time. If in the 1990s there were more than 70,000 miners (at a certain moment even 90,000), their number dropped dramatically after the 1989 revolution. The most dramatic decline in the number of miners occurred during Victor Ciorbea's government (December 12th 1996 - April 17th 1998) when about 30,000 miners were laid off for the so-called mining restructuring. There followed successive layoffs that led mining to collapse. Currently there are 5,144 employees in the mining sector and the adjacent sectors (services, thermal power plants), but only 3654 of them work in the mines in the Jiu Valley (Lonea - 742, Livezeni - 854, Lupeni - 1096; Uricani - 300; Vulcan - 662). Of the 3654 miners, we extracted a sample of 843 male individuals. The sample is based on linked quotas (studies, age, mining length of service, marital status). The research was carried out in September 2017 at the five mines in the Jiu Valley. We used the indirect survey because it was easier to fill out the questionnaires. With the permission of the mines top management, we explained to miners who came out of the shift, in the Appeal Hall, how to fill in the questionnaire. The sociological questionnaire is made up of 32 questions, of which 26 are actually questions related to alcohol consumption, the other questions being related to the identification of the subjects of the research. The questions processing (for obtaining frequency and correlation tables) was done through the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 17.

According to statistical data, the distribution of 843 subjects was made:

- **By age:** below 30 years of age, inclusively – 13.3% (112 subjects); 31-40 years of age – 32.9% (277 subjects); aged 41-45 – 47.2% (398 subjects); over 45 – 6.6% (56 subjects).

- **By length of service in mining:** up to 10 years inclusively – 23.5% (198 subjects); 11-15 years – 32.9% (277 subjects); 16-20 years – 37% (312 subjects); over 20 years – 6.6% (56 subjects).

- **By studies:** vocational school – 53.9% (454 subjects); high school – 36.3% (306 subjects); college – 9.8% (83 subjects).

¹ Such as the miners' strike of 1st-3rd August 1977, one of the most powerful movement of communism contestation in Romania.

- **By marital status:** married – 56.7% (478 subjects); de facto relationship – 26.8% (226 subjects); single/widowers – 16.5% (139 subjects).

- **By the number of children in their care and support:** one child – 16.6% (140 subjects); two children – 27% (228 subjects); three children – 16.6% (140 subjects); four children – 13.2% (111 subjects); more than four children – 10.1% (85 subjects); childless – 16.5% (139 subjects).

- **By the mine and locality where they work:** Livezeni Mine – 22.9% (193 subjects); Lona Mine – 20% (169 subjects); Lupeni Mina – 29.9% (252 subjects); Uricani Mine – 10.2% (86 subjects); Vulcan Mina – 17% (143 subjects).

5. Presentation of the sociologic survey results

The sociological research has highlighted multiple aspects of the motivations that lead the miners to drink different alcoholic beverages. The presentation of these motivations is necessary in order to understand why alcohol is always present in individual, family and social life.

Heavy physical labour - a reason to consume alcohol over the limits accepted as normal

Heavy physical work is often associated with strong men. The miners have often thought of themselves and still see themselves as strong men, who, united, can do everything. As a result, they can drink alcohol anytime because alcohol is often associated with strong men, like in the 2002 Stalinskaya vodka advertisement², where this alcoholic beverage is presented in a natural environment where men and wolves compete for territory domination. Men will dominate because they have the power to consume vodka, as shown in the voice message that doubles the imaginary reality: "Stalinskaya - for the strong."

Heavy physical labour can constitute imaginary scenarios in which those who practice them are like Hercules, who can hold the Earth on his shoulders if he wants to. Such an assignment of an unlimited force is also common to many miners when they look at themselves. This terrible force is associated with bodily and spiritual health that can only be potentiated by higher alcohol consumption. Drinking alcohol over normal limits is a sign of power, and some develop this image through their resistance to alcohol, the ability not to be dominated by it, by the reinvention force, and by the power to stay sober irrespective of the amount of alcohol consumed. Miners must see their own image as something out of the ordinary that cannot be compared to anyone, possibly only to those who are like them.

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kdYpZW8gMg>, available online: May 2019.

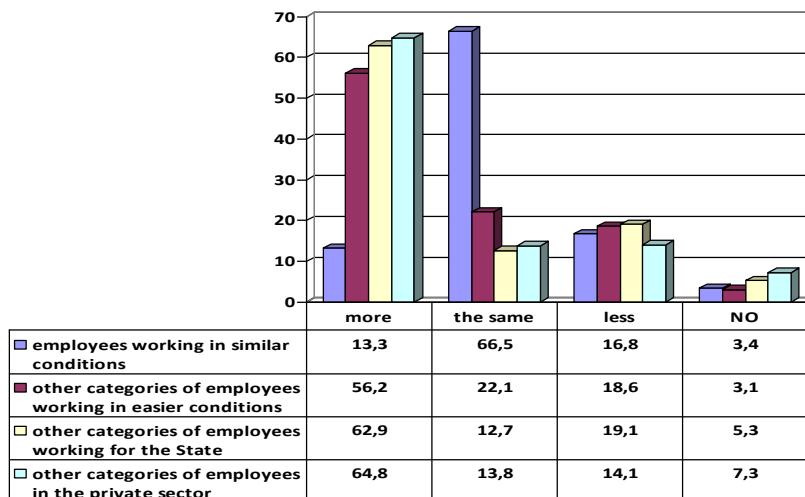


Fig. 1. Miners consume alcoholic beverages in comparison with other categories of employees... (%)

The perception of miners who responded to the sociological questionnaire is that in working conditions similar to those in which they work, drinking alcohol is the same for 66.5%. This appreciation can be regarded as a respect for those who are similar to them. The image of "strong people" also emerges from the comparison with other categories of employees, as follows: miners consume more alcoholic beverages than those working in less difficult working conditions (56.2%), than other employees working for the State (62.9%), than the employees working in the private sector (64.8%). So alcohol is associated with heavy labour and its consumption becomes a rather powerful motivation, a kind of flag to be paraded around with pride. It is clear that there is a definition of a time-consolidated status that makes the mining profession an exemplary one that requires respect. It has been proven that there is a truth in this regard, considering that the miners are regarded as a category of people who drink themselves into stupor, as the saying goes. But the image that others have of the miners is mostly negative, a picture deformed especially during the period of regression of mining, the falling of this occupation into collapse.

In the respondents' view, there is a direct link between the increase of the number of alcohol consumers and the heavier work conditions. For a percentage of 59.5%, the extent to which hard work conditions lead to an increase in the number of alcohol consumers over the normal limits is very high + high. This reinforces once again the view that alcohol consumption should be accepted in certain special situations, such as the ones in which miners work. Alcohol consumption is determined by causes that are related to personal and social factors. These factors often outline a so-called "culture" of alcohol consumption.

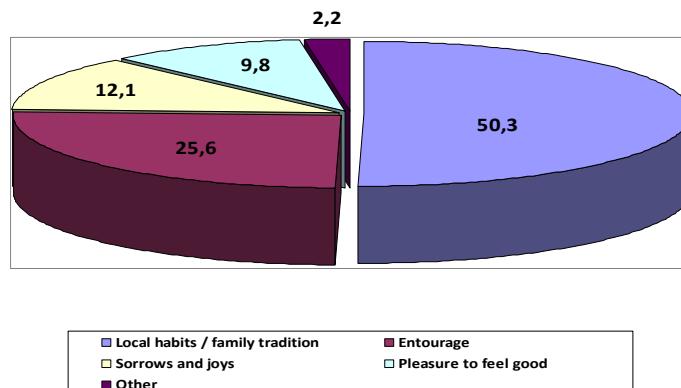


Fig. 2. Main reason determining the alcohol consumption (%)

Most of the miners questioned, 50.3%, believe that the main reason for alcohol consumption is represented by the local customs and the family tradition. Or, alcohol drinking is a custom of the place when you analyse the Jiu Valley. This habit is not necessarily specific to this area because we find alcohol consumers in many places in Romania, Europe or the world in general. Socially-based habits create strong patterns that have too long been conducive to social behaviour. A change in social mentalities about alcohol consumption is cumbersome and needs a very long time. The habit of drinking alcohol before and during meals or after meals is also referred to as an act with medical connotations because it would create a better digestion, an affirmation that is often false. This custom is well established in the social world of the Jiu Valley and is not necessarily determined by the practiced trade, the social origin, the social category. It comes from a common perception that moderate alcohol consumption may have first and foremost positive implications, even in the prevention of serious illness.

On the family level, things are not different from the social environment in general, but here is a certain distinction and a certain hierarchy of families in terms of alcohol consumption, the most accepted alcohol category. Thus, in the families of locals in the rural area of the Jiu Valley (called momarlanii), the most commonly consumed beverage is the fruit brandy obtained by natural fermentation and produced within the household. But the "momarlanii" are big consumers of other beverages as well in the absence of home-grown brandy (often because of fruits shortage). The other inhabitants of the Jiu Valley, pejoratively called "barabe", i.e. "venetici", people come from other regions, not natives, got accustomed in time with the customs of the place, but also brought from their home villages or towns specific habits related to alcohol drinking. As a result of the observations we have conducted, it seems that miners, no matter what province they come from, are no bigger drinkers than the locals. On the other hand, the majority of the "momarlanii"

have been and still are directly related to mining because their employment in mining has created an important opportunity to earn more money.

Another cause that should not be neglected is the entourage of the miners when they drink alcohol. This is a very important form of socialisation and most friendships are determined by it. The social environment is influenced by entourage, which appears as an important form of maintaining community-level relationships. But in this respect the men's world is not pure because a fairly large number of women go to the pub with their men or other acquaintances.

As we have noticed, most miners, when they finish their shift and come out of the mine, be it day or night, go to the taverns kept opened especially for them, located in the proximity of the mines. Some have one glass, others several glasses. Many people spend hours drinking alcohol, sometimes forgetting about the family, getting drunk, but rarely exhibiting antisocial behaviours. The miner even in these cases does not necessarily become a brute, despite the fact that this negative image has often been propagated among the public opinion throughout the country. It is important to observe the real motivations of alcohol consumption immediately upon leaving the shift.

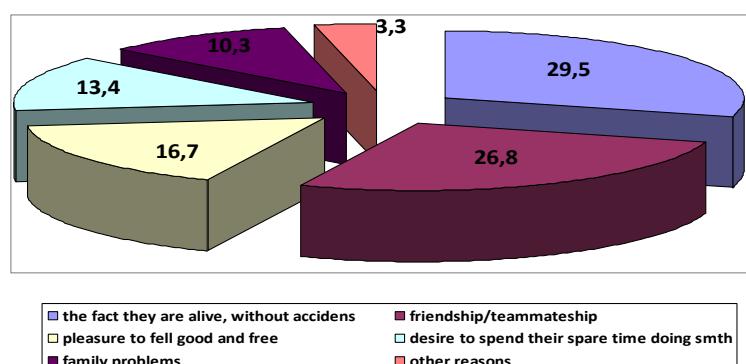


Fig.3. The main cause of alcohol consumption by most miners as soon as they come out of the shift (%)

Drinking alcohol becomes a necessary evil after all because it is a compensation, a sort of tribute paid to life itself. Accidents in the Jiu Valley mines have been quite numerous, with loss of life or lifetime mutilation. Entering the shift for miners working in underground mining is always a bet with life. For them life is the supreme value, but they take risks in order to have a better living, to have enough money to live a decent life from this point of view. It is not surprising in this context that a significant percentage of the questioned miners, 29.5%, argue that they use to drink out of joy, celebrating the fact that they have escaped and come out of the mines alive. Life for them becomes a exchange currency and, paradoxically, they keep on doing so, but when they start their shift underground they do not have the absolute certainty they shall come back alive to join their loved ones. It is a kind of

sacrifice for the spirit of the earth, as mining catastrophes (Hirghiduș, 2016) are considered. I have written somewhere this significant fact about miners' lives: "Man is defined by his earth to which he has a multitude of attitudes, from veneration to curse. Miners' life is, in this sense, the most suggestive because they are touched by the "curse" of the earth more than the medieval peasants. If the land he cuts out to take its riches is barren, then this can bring him to the brink of bankruptcy. If, on the contrary, they find abundantly what they seek to accomplish their economic purpose, their families will thrive. But the relationship between miners and earth is not just an economic one. Economy is nothing more than the possibility of having things and enrolling in a certain kind of civilisation." (Ibidem: 264) Miners are tied to the Generic Spirit of the Earth (Ibidem: 265), whom they see in the Holy Martyr Varvara. As a matter of fact, when entering the shift to disturb the innards of the earth, the miners do not penetrate a Godless world, but a mythologically populated land: "Among the governing gods of the mine, we may mention: God (The Lord of the World, the Great One, the Lord, the Old Man, the Wise Man), Jesus Christ, Saint Peter, Holy Hope, Santa Claus, "Valva Baii", St. Varvara, the Sun, the Mineral Spirits, the Devil, the Demons of Underground Flames etc." (Ibidem: 260) It is enough motivation to consider a person's and a colleague's life sufficiently protected, even if personal fears do not disappear definitively. As a result, alcohol consumption on the exit from underground shift seems to be normal, in the natural order of things, with the consent of the tutelary gods and protectors of the miner's life. The other causes: friendship, freedom, family – become secondary in the general plane of life, but not deprived of importance.

Excessive alcohol consumption - among the main causes "guilty" for the breakdown of families

There is always a pretext for daily consuming alcohol in the miners' families. A 30.2% percentage of the miners questioned admit that their families are always consuming alcohol, which means that women drinking alongside men and children are affected by this toxic environment from the point of view of health and moral behaviour. Excessive alcohol consumption often leads to violence within the family (as admitted by 69.6% of respondents), but also within society (as 73.5% of respondents declare). A high percentage of the surveyed subjects, 83.5%, know enough cases of families that have broken up because of excessive alcohol consumption. The attitude of accepting alcohol consumption as a normal fact is also reflected in the assertion that "drinking a glass of alcohol a day is not a tragedy." A total of 53% of the subjects fully agree with this statement, and only 23.3% disagree with this statement (these are the subject who never drink alcohol: 196 subjects of the 843 questioned).

The so-called alcohol benefits may be summed up in the aspects listed below:

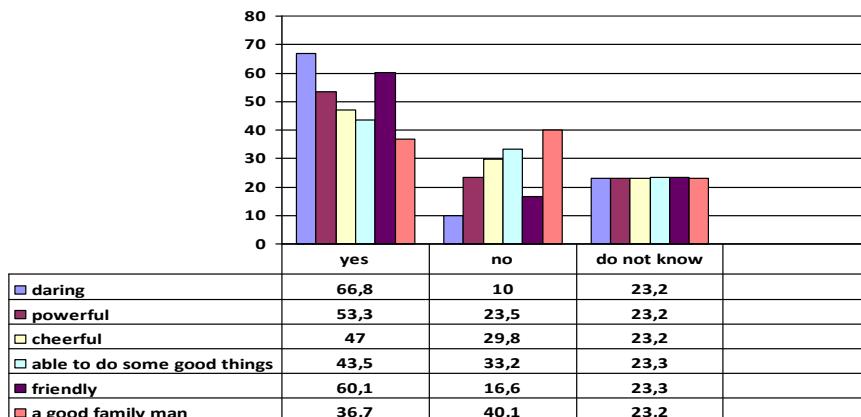


Fig.4. The man who consumes daily one or two glasses of alcohol becomes more... (%)

We notice that ordinary miners drinking alcohol every day have a positive image of alcohol consumption, one which makes them "real men". Most of them think they are more daring (66.8%), more friendly (60.1%), more powerful (53.3%), more cheerful (47%), more capable of doing certain good things (43.5%). On the other hand, alcohol consumption in the opinion of 40.1% does not make them better family men, which highlights the fact that miners are aware of the dangers of alcohol consumption on the family.

In the Jiu Valley mining environment, all categories of alcoholic beverages are consumed, but there are preferences for some of them, which preferences are probably determined by their price.

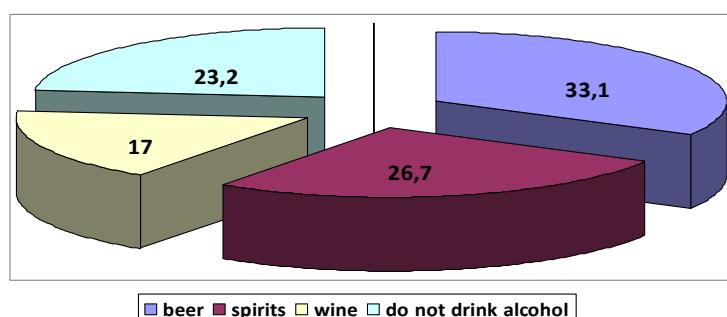


Fig.5. Favourite beverage (%)

The preference for certain alcoholic beverages creates addiction to them. Beer is ranked first by 33.1%, the second rank is occupied by spirits, for 26.7% and the third rank is taken by wine, for 17%.

As for the quantities of alcohol consumed by miners, they are well above the national average. For example, drinkers who prefer beer have declared that they drink at least 1-2 litres of this beverage per day when they leave the shift. The main reason is to clean the dust they swallowed in the mine from their throat. Miners who

prefer spirits are also well above the national average because they consume at least 150 millilitres of alcohol a day. Wine consumers are more moderate, declaring to drink only two litres of wine per month.

As it resulted from our sociological research, there is a 23.3% percentage (196 of the 843 persons questioned) who do not drink alcohol at all. The causes are mainly religious for 57.1%, and the other causes are: poor health, family interdictions, lack of temptation to consume alcohol.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study confirm the idea that a certain tradition of alcohol consumption has formed over time in the mining milieu. This tradition only takes into account the so-called beneficial consequences and does not take into account the serious negative consequences (deterioration of health, deterioration of the family environment, danger to children in alcoholic families).

The motivations of daily alcohol consumption confirm the hypothesis that a hard work environment determines addiction to alcohol. Thus, most miners consume alcohol in very large quantities compared to the national average, which makes them possible alcoholics. And, yet, there are quite few cases of miners who do not carry out their job duties or who end up in rehab. They are accustomed to drinking daily at the exit from the shift, but do not neglect the job that brings the only income for the family.

In the context in which alcohol is a common presence for most miners, it becomes an element of a culture that we call "a reverse, upside-down culture", with negative effects on the family and the social environment in general.

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