In 7,000 post mortem examinations done in the Medico-Legal Institute of Oporto, we found out that there is a close relation between death and alcohol. We observed the highest incidence in the small quantities of alcohol like 0-50 mg%. The percentages of the alcohol blood levels found were the following, in mg%: 0-50 (33.24); 50-100 (14.93); 100-150 (15.66); 150-200 (15.48); 200-250 (7.83); 250-300 (6.19); 300-350 (3.09); 350-400 (1.45); 400-476 (0.72).

The mortal road accidents with positive alcohol in the blood (64.12%) are more frequent than in the suicides (7.65%), homicides (2.00%) and other accidents (11.65%). The small quantities of alcohol in the blood in the mortal road accidents, as well as in all cases of violent death, were also comprised between 0 and 50 mg%. The percentages found were the following ones: 0-50 (33.52); 50-100 (16.19); 100-150 (19.03); 150-200 (16.19); 200-250 (9.94); 250-300 (2.84); 300-350 (1.70); 350-400 (0.56).

The male sex (86.88%) is more affected than the female sex (13.11%). The lion's share of all the cases is registered in July and August, months of vacations, and this increase is due to road accidents, which are the most important group of violent death.

The working classes (35.88%) are those with more cases of violent death and with positive alcohol in the blood and the less affected are the free professions (1.82%). The group between 21 and 30 years
old (21.68%) was the most affected. In the other groups we found the following values: 11-20 years old (10.38%); 31-40 (12.02%); 41-50 (17.85%); 51-60 (12.39%); 61-70 (10.93%) and 71-80 (4.92%). With 9, 10 and 80 years old there were 1, 2 and 3 cases respectively.

In Portugal the most important problem related with violent death and alcohol is due to road accidents, and there is not yet any legislation about its consumption, except in Azores, Portuguese islands in the Atlantic Ocean, where there is a legal value fixed by law for driving motor vehicles and which is 0.8 g/l. We considered this value too high for the road traffic in Portugal, considering the great number of motor vehicles in circulation, the bad quality of our roads and the great number of mortal accidents. The most reasonable value should be 0.5 g/l, but even if with this value, the number of mortal accidents will go on, then we propose that it should be forbidden the driving of motor vehicles with any quantity of alcohol. This was the final advice of the 1 National Symposium on Alcoholism (Portugal, 1980). We must not forget that death due to road accidents is a very important cause of death in Portugal. In our Institute the post mortem examinations of road accidents represent 64.5% of all the examinations (1).

It is very important to do the systematical study on alcohol in the blood in all the persons intervening in the road accident and not only in the corps of the victim. It is in the driver and not in the pedestrian runned over that the action of alcohol is more important. In 72 of 1,000 autopsies of road accidents the great majority pedestrians (60%) there was alcohol in the blood in different quantities till a maximum of 397 mg% (7).

Acute alcoholic poisoning is responsible for many anti-social behaviors, which is a great risk and which may lead into crime. The mortal cases registered in our Institute occurred as much as in taverns, streets or in the victim's home. Sometimes homicide appears as an exaggerated answer to provocations made by persons under the influence of alcohol sometimes in quantities close to 100
and 200 mg%, like 119 and 285 mg% (6). Acute alcoholic poisoning is more related with homicides and sex crimes than the chronic alcoholic poisoning but this last one is also a criminal factor. Alcohol is intimately related to mendicity and unemployment because laziness, instability or social inaptness conduct to vagabondage, laziness, parasitism, abandonment of the family and robbery of food and other things because of the lack of money. The inter-relation between alcohol and violence is not only important in the criminologic field. In suicide, alcohol appears as a very important factor reducing the aversion gradient. Between 1963 and 1972, there was alcohol in 20% of the cases studied in the Medico-Legal Institute of Oporto (3). Alcohol can also be used as a direct form of suicide like in the acute alcoholic poisoning leading to the stage of coma and death, as we saw in one of our cases, relating to a man who drunk a bottle of aqua-vital (445 mg%) (3). Alcohol also interferes with the attention and equilibrium, and for this reason it is very related to with many accidents due to little lack of precision, which sometimes caused death, like the accidents with electricity. In 60 mortal cases of electrocution we found 8 cases with positive blood alcohol, comprised between 23 mg% and 277 mg% (2).

Alcohol may be responsible for suicide in the form of chronic alcoholism, as a mental illness, as we saw in one of our cases of hanging in which the blood alcohol level was very small (52.4 mg%) (3).

Over and above the innumerable lost hours of work because of incapacities related to alcohol, this one is also responsible for many deaths. Between 1970 and 1974 we registered in our Institute 22 mortal cases of work accidents, in which the alcohol levels varied between 52 and 381 mg% (5).

The mortal alcoholic poisonings represent 6.4% of the total forms of poisonings registered during 78 years in our Institute (4).

In 145 cases of homicide victims, studied in our Institute between 1960 and 1978 we found 22 cases with alcohol in the blood in values
comprised between 26 mg% and 317 mg% (8).

The Alcohol problems are presently a point of explanation for the Portuguese people, although it is not very easy to find an immediate solution because they are based in very deep social, economical and cultural reasons.

References


