

ALCOHOLISM AND ANTI-ALCOHOLIC SOCIAL MEASURES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY IN ROMANIA

O. ANDREESCU¹ A. NECULAU¹ I. PANTEA¹
L. ROGOZEA¹

Abstract: *Alcoholism is considered one of the most frequent social diseases in the early twentieth century, due to its relation to socio-economic conditions. In Romania alcoholism was considered a major contributing cause of tuberculosis, epilepsy and child mortality. Up to 50% of cases of conflicts that involved the Police were due to alcohol. Under these conditions the fight against alcoholism became the first and most important duty of politicians and physicians at that time.*

Key words: *alcoholism, temperance society, social measures.*

1. Introduction

The problem of alcoholism in Romania was and still is closely related to socio-economic conditions (the living conditions, the legislation and the economy of the country).

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when most peasants lived in conditions of misery and poverty, the problem of alcoholism was increasingly felt. At the same time, the hard life of the new class of proletarians, impoverished and exhausted by work (with very hard living and working conditions and the extreme unsanitary condition of their homes), implemented the idea that cheap alcohol was becoming a source of pseudo-relief of the problems, the source of a plus of momentary energy during labour, generating the illusion of happiness after consuming it, in “the pub that becomes a refuge” [3].

In this context, the Swedish doctor Magnus Huss introduced (1852) the medical vocabulary term of “alcoholism” a term that appeared from 1866 in almost all encyclopaedic dictionaries.

During the same period Charles Darwin said: “From my father and my own observations, I believe that alcoholism caused more losses to humanity than the plague and cholera together”.

2. The Alcoholism phenomenon in Romania at the End of Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century

In the early twentieth century in Romania, alcoholism was considered as a contributing factor to 30 [%] of the cases of tuberculosis, 50 ÷ 80 [%] of alcoholics were affected by tuberculosis, 22 [%] of the children of alcoholics had tuberculosis,

¹ Faculty of Medicine, Department of Fundamental Prophylactic and Clinical Disciplines, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

44 [%] of the children of alcoholics were epileptics and 47.7 [%] of children under 5 years died due to lack of parental care and alcoholism. In 50 [%] of the cases that involved the Police, the Gendarmerie and the Local Government, the conflicts were due to alcohol. Also, 70 [%] of prostitutes came from alcoholic parents [15]. About 40 [%] of the declared insane had this disease due to alcoholism [3].

At the late nineteenth and the early of twentieth century the nutrients for Romanian peasants was in such a matter that it could not have been envied by any beggar in the West. Meat was only rarely present on the table of the peasant (in great days of celebration), this was due on one hand to poverty but on the other hand to the times of fasting.

This diet insufficient in quantity and quality was not able “to repair the losses the body suffers while functioning. Together with alcoholism that reigns in our country, they result into: reduced productivity, mortality rather large and race degeneration” [13].

Prof. D. Obedenaru referring to the state of Romanian peasants said “Romanian peasants are subject to physiological decay. They surpass the Solognots in all respects” [10]. In the late nineteenth century decay Dr. D.D. Niculescu appreciated that “misery reigns in all its splendour, it is greater than with any other farm people from the West, despite the fact that Romania has a most favourable position be the home of the richest agriculture in Europe” [10].

Since Romania was an essentially agricultural country, many inhabitants of the country, who were peasants, preferred to transform agricultural products in alcohol. About 60 [%] of corn production in 1924 was thus transformed into alcohol and, in 1916, 92 [%] of plums were turned into brandy. Also, large quantities of potatoes, beet and grapes were used to produce alcohol [7].

While the Romanian peasants lived in misery preferring to eat corn, Al. Obregia determined the amount spent by the overgenerous on drinks to be around 7000 Lei / year, an amount surpassing the cost of bread and meat needed for a person for 1 year. In the same paper on – “Alcoholism” - published in 1925, awarded a prize by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Dr. Obregia said that “when making a statistical analysis of the quantities of alcohol consumed in Romania it is concluded that a person drinks at least 10 liters of alcohol while in Norway it is 2.5 liters per capita. While a Romanian citizen is overwhelmed by drink, poverty and distress, a Norwegian is healthy, clean and rich. Yet in 1860 Norway was drinking more than us. But good governments have saved Norway, which is today the head of nations” [14]. Comparison of alcohol consumption in different European countries during the period mentioned places Romania among the top of the countries: Denmark 6.2 [l / year], Belgium 4.7 [l / year], Romania 4.5 [l / year], Germany 4, 4 [l / year], France 4.3 [l / year], Switzerland 3.1 [l / year], UK 2.8 [l / year], Norway 1.4 [l / year], Italy 0, 7 [l / year] [13]. Among 1921-1937, the average consumption per capita in Romania was 42 [l / year] of wine, 5.9 [l / year] of brandy or spirits, 3.9 [l / year] of beer. Children, women and abstinence left aside, this phenomenon led to a frightening figure [17].

In 1929 there were 245 factories in the country that were producing and selling alcohol spirits to innkeepers of over 3 billion [Lei] per year, while savings in all popular banks in the country were only 600 million [Lei] and at deposits registered about 220 million [Lei] [18].

Under these conditions the fight against alcoholism became the first and most important duty of politicians at that time [18].

Thus, prohibitionist organizations appeared, that promoted complete abstinence, and temperance organizations, that fought for the regulation of quality and quantity of alcohol consumed.

3. The Fight against Alcoholism at Global Level in the 19th and 20th Centuries

At global level, the first temperance society was founded in 1813 in North America, at Boston [4].

At European level the first anti-alcoholic association appeared in Scotland in 1829. Most societies had numerous local sections, some with tens of thousands of members. There were also international societies like “The Independent Order of Good Templars” founded in 1851 in New

York, which had 577,547 members scattered worldwide. The principles of this association were total abstinence from any alcoholic beverage, also, through legislation, the prevention of manufacturing and selling of spirits.

Other international societies were founded in this period: “Federation Internationale de Societes de Temperance de la Croix Bleue” based in Geneva, “Der Internationale Alkoholgegnerbund” based in Basel [4], “World League Against Alcoholism”, “Bureau International contre l’Alcoolisme”, “World Prohibition Federation”, “Federation International Catholique contre l’Alcoolisme” and “World Woman’s Christian Temperance Union” [9]. It is interesting to see how was approached the anti-alcoholic propaganda in that time (figure 1).



Fig. 1. Example about how it was approached anti-alcohol propaganda at the beginning of twentieth century.

In 1885 Antwerp, Belgium, hosted the first International Congress against Alcoholism. In 1912 Iceland became the first country that

introduced alcohol prohibition, making it total in 1915, following a referendum held 4 years before [16].

4. Addressing the Issue of Alcoholism in the Early Twentieth Century in Regions Inhabited by the Romanians

In Transylvania, at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire - until 1918, the first Temperance Society was founded in 1847 in Brasov, led by Ioan Petricu. Its members promised not to drink distilled alcohol and to be as temperate as possible in wine and beer consumption [16].

The late nineteenth century could identify 28 to 30 anti-alcoholic associations, many operating in rural areas under the leadership of the village priest or teacher, including leading names involved in the anti-alcoholic fight like George Bariţ and Pavel Basici. Their functioning was facilitated by important anti-alcoholic existing provisions in Hungarian legislation that had taken important anti-alcoholic decisions at the confluence of centuries. For example, boys under 15 and girls younger than 14 were not allowed in pubs, the pubs could not operate near schools and churches, the pubs had to be closed during religious services and processions, the innkeeper was not allowed to give credit for products that exceeded the value of 4 crowns. Hungarian Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction called for establishment of temperance associations by circular no 1125 in 24 April 1903 [16].

Schoolbooks had to have anti-alcoholic brochures attached and by order of ministry, every school had to reserve one day for discussing the consequences of alcohol exposure, actions verified by royal inspectors [16].

In the second half of the nineteenth century up to the Second World War the "ASTRA" society activated in this region, whose medical and biopolitics departments, led by Julius Haţieganu, had a intense antialcoholic activity.

In the antialcoholic fight were implicated numerous church officials. Against this

background "Antialcoholic Temperance Meeting of Theologians from Blaj" was founded [19].

In the same period, the first anti-alcoholic events took place, being led by the most important personalities of medicine at that time: Prof. Dr. Babeş, Prof. Dr. Marinescu, Prof. Dr. Obreja, Prof. Dr. Parhon, Prof. Dr. Minovici, Prof. Dr. Proca, Prof. Dr. Felix, a.o.

The speech of the general prosecutor in Galaţi, which was held on the opening of the judicial year 1894-1895, presented the connection between alcoholism and crime. That resulted in a sharp rise of the interest of the Parliament in alcoholism, and after that monopoly on alcohol was proposed. Conferences were held and brochures were printed and recognized as useful by the Superior Health Council.

In 1897 the first anti-alcoholic society was established in – "Romanian League against Alcoholism" - founded in Iaşi, followed in 1908 by the "National League of Temperance". Without requiring the abandonment of all alcoholic beverage by its members, it was intended to combat abuse of spirits, using conferences, writings and publications, organizing "temperance societies, for consumption and economy" and approaching the authorities "to take measures against alcoholism" [4]. Later, in 1927, the "Temperance Society" was founded. At the initiative of this society "The Temperance Day" was set up, as the first Sunday of June. Also, "Temperance Society" considered necessary in order to strengthen anti-alcoholic manifestations to purchase a licence for a self-siphon device "Sparklet", for the manufacture of soft drinks. Obtaining the patent for the English "Sparklet" for our country was very expensive, so the company had to make a public appeal to underwrite the purchase of shares. Of the 12,500 shares offered for sale, after two years no more than 30 were

subscribed. The state did not help either, only by modest grants, 60,000 Lei in 1928 and 50,000 Lei in 1929, through the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Under these conditions, in order to obtain the necessary funds for anti-alcoholic propaganda, the society established a commercial company called "Practical Section for Replacing Spirits" through which to raise funds for a "theoretical section" for anti-alcoholic propaganda [2].

In parallel several associations were functioning such as the Association for Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women, releasing publications in order to achieve health education for masses (egg. "Antialcoolul" – "Teetotaller"), articles in popular periodicals with anti-alcoholic message like "Albina" – "The Bee", conferences and congresses. In 1900 "General Association of Physicians Congress" was entirely dedicated to the alcohol problem, when the final report was presented by Prof. Dr. Posa, one of the main founders of the "League against Alcoholism". The monthly magazine "Antialcoolul" appeared for 16 years under the leadership of Mina Minovici, labor cost, energy and money being charged to him [3, 5]. In the first issue of "Antialcoolul", issued in May 1900, a proposal came in a letter written by Dr. Prof. Xenopol to Dr. Mina Minovici "the ideal that the hygienic organization of the country should seek, should be for alcohol to be sold only at pharmacies as medical orders" [19].

In the 3rd decade of the twentieth century, Eugeniu P. Botez (literary pseudonym Jean Bart), founder of the first maritime magazine in our country, CEO of Social Services, wrote several brochures about public health, including "Alcoholism, an international problem" in 1929. Despite the concern for the anti-alcoholic fight he notes that: "Anti-alcoholic literature is a drop in a troubled ocean, is preaching in the

wilderness, the increasing number of anti-alcoholic printings is not decreasing drunkenness and anti-alcoholic organizations are exotic plants that do not catch on Romanian soil" [5].

In many of these works presented that that time the idea of a state monopoly for alcohol was presented. Alcohol monopoly was considered a duty of conscience and high patriotism. According to this "only the most careful rectified spirits will be on sale, and raising the price is not depriving the population of an indispensable product being a real benefit as one that helps to reduce consumption" [13].

During these events the doctors argued the need for extensive social measures to solve this problem and showed that as long as the public health was subordinated to economic and political interests, the proposed measures were ignored. In 1906, at the reception speech of the Academy, Prof. Dr. Marinescu argued that "social diseases must oppose social remedies to be opposed establishing a normal social and economic balance" [3]. These measures were necessary because "alcoholism has grown so much that one can say that it is a national distress. In villages, men and women are drinking about the 3rd part of the year: 52 Sundays, 30 Holidays throughout the year, 2-3 days every wedding, 1 or 2 days every baptism" [3].

During the year 1921, in three counties in Romania: Brasov, Caras-Severin and Cojocna (now known as county of Cluj-Napoca) selling spirits during the Christian holidays of the villages was banned, for a period of 6 to 12 months.

The result was that crime decreased by 50% (including murder) on those days, the interest about the cultural entertainment increased, the day of Monday was won as a for working day. In the same year, in Cluj were closed during the winter holidays in December, 450 pubs, leaving open. Only 50 restaurants and cafes where food was served remained open.

Violence and scandals were extinct although the number of policemen in Cluj did not increase. In the previous years the fights and stabbing numbered about 60 cases though all the police, the gendarmerie, and even the local government was mobilized to maintain order [7].

5. Aspects of Anti-alcohol Measures and the Influence of the Legislation Regarding its Impact on Socio-economic Conditions of Romania in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

In parallel with these social measures laws and directives against alcoholism were elaborated; their application proved to be difficult because of interventions of the spirits producer's, respectively those of the winemakers, which were considered "great electors".

The first law that was drafted in this regard was the one of 1867, respectively "The Law on Tax on Spirits", with subsequent amendments in which were stipulated differentiated taxes by type of alcoholic beverages; thus, in 1910 these charges were as follows: wine - 0.03 [Lei / degree of alcohol], brandy - 0.20 [Lei / degree of alcohol], beer - 0.50 [Lei / degree of alcohol]. In addition, in 1916, to those differential taxes, the Ministry of Finance proposed a surcharge on beer, tax that was not in accordance with the fiscal policy in other European countries where beer was not taxed due to low alcohol content.

Mr. Professor Istrati, a deputy at that time, wrote a volume of 500 pages on the issue of alcohol and alcoholism, opposing this proposal. He noted that in other countries (eg. France), the opinion of scientists is required and heard regarding alcoholic beverages, and that the Romanian deputies and senators are taking too much into account because the fact that many of them are vine growers. He was

personally supporting the idea that taxes should be in relation to levels of alcohol [6]. This phenomenon was sustained by the constant decrease of consumption and production of alcohol in the late nineteenth century (1884 to 1886-1887) due to the establishment of the tax per grade or 1 [Lei] per bucket and not per acre, and respectively the increasing of the number of litres consumed after the abolition of this tax [13].

From the sale of alcohol, Ministry of Finance gained, in 1924, 4 billion lei, all of which the state needed. By reducing the consumption of spirits IRS was losing revenues. But that did not take into account losses due to inactivity caused by alcohol which were in the same year estimated at minimum 10 billion lei [10].

"Health and Care Law" was also issued in 1930 in which according to Article 339 the hygienist doctor was entitled to intervene in reducing the number of innkeepers if the alcohol consumption was too high within a community.

The law of 1908 was also important - "The Spirits Monopoly Law in the Rurals and Measures against Drunkenness in Rural Communities", law adopted at the initiative of "National Temperance League", whose protractor was Professor Romniceanu. This gave a big blow to the rural innkeepers considered "great electors", as Dr. Felix said. But after only one year, the government made amendments to the law [3] in 1909, with subsequent amendments in 1910, 1914 and 1932. This law explicitly stated that the right to keep pubs went exclusively to rural community. The number of pubs was thus limited to a maximum of one for 100 family heads and the innkeeper had to be a Romanian citizen, at least 25 years old, married, literate and not affected by vices; also, from 1932 he was obligated to join the military service and to have the approval of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry for functioning [17].

The law of 1908 had as special provisions measures against drunkenness which limited the opening hours of pubs and also introduced a "list of shame" for those "who being intoxicated, will argue, will indulge in new disorders or fall on the road ". For these, it was provided a fine in the event of relapse and it could "lead to imprisonment". In addition, if the culprit was a voter he lost his right to vote and to be elected [17].

In 1914 Mina Minovici wrote in his magazine - "Antialcoolul" (intended as a warning): "Lower revenues from spirits will decrease five times or even ten times the cost of maintaining the hospitals and of the prisons" [5].

But there were also legal regulations in this period that appear to have been issued just to protect the consumers of alcohol.

For example, the penal code approved by King Michael I of Romania, under Articles 128 and 129 included some regulation that favoured those under the influence of alcohol. Thus, the article 128 of the penal code contained the following sentence: "He isn't responsible for the crime committed, when he committed it, is found unconscious because of derangement or of other causes". And in the article 129 it is stated: "One who in a state of complete voluntary drunkenness produced by accident, commits an offence, is punishable by the penalty fixed by law for that offence, whose maximum is reduced by a fifth, and the punishment is hard labour life, in which the punishment is hard labour that will be applied from 20 to 25 years" [8].

5. Conclusions Regarding Alcoholism Phenomenon in Romania in the First Half of the twentieth Century

As a general conclusion it can be said that there were anti-alcohol events in Romania in the first half of the twentieth century, in line with the trends in other

countries which were fighting alcoholism, events leading to measures that were taken both socially and legislatively.

Applicability of these anti-alcoholic "laws" was limited and sometimes prevented by the financial interests of producers and sellers of alcohol, but also by the state that appreciated more tax collection from this activity than losses due to this vice.

Nor the state, but not even the individual were really ready at that time to give up alcohol consumption. Fashion, tradition and financial interests of that time proved to be stronger than endangering human health as a result of heavy drinking.

References

1. Athanasiu, I.: *Alcoolul în Campanie, valoarea lui alimentară (Alcohol in the Campaign, his Food Value)*. București. Editura „Minerva”, 1914.
2. Boerescu, N.: *Referatul Delegatului Ministerului Sănătății Publice și Ocrotirilor Sociale din 15 Mai a.c. asupra scopului, activității și situației reale a Societății Temperanța (Report of the Delegate of the Romanian Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare on 15 May on the Purpose, Activities and Actual Situation of Temperance Society)*, 1929.
3. Cantacuzino, I.: *Contribuția unor medici de seamă la lupta împotriva alcoolismului în țara noastră (Contribution at the Fight Against Alcoholism by Great Physicians in Our Country)*. Editura Medicală, 1964.
4. Cuza, A. C. (secretar general al Ligei în contra alcoolismului): *Ce-i Alcoolismul (General Secretary of the League against Alcoholism - What is Alcoholism)*. Biblioteca Ligei Române în Contra Alcoolismului, Tipografia Națională Strada Alexandri, Iasi, 1897.

5. Firică, A., Husnar, T., Groza, M.: *Alcoolismul și cazurile de urgență (Alcoholism and Emergency Cases)*, 1983.
6. Istrati, C.: *Pericolul alcoolului în România*, Discurs pronunțat în ședința din 27 martie 1913 a Senatului (*Alcohol Danger in Romania. Speech Delivered at the Meeting on 27 March 1913 at the Senate*). București. Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Gobl, 1916.
7. Manliu, I., Cosmescu, V.: *Alcoolismul – Ministerul Sănătății Publice, al Muncii și Ocrotirilor Sociale (Alcoholism - Ministry of Public Health, Labour and Social Welfare)*, 1923.
8. Manoilă, M.: *Beția în Dreptul Penal (Drunkness on Criminal Law)*. București, 1943.
9. Manuilă, V.: *Asistența socială (Social Care)*. București. VI, Strada Costache Negri 20, 1932.
10. Meissner, E., Petrea, P.: *Asociația pentru emanciparea civilă și politică a femeilor române – Câteva cuvinte în chestia Alcoolismului (Association for Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women - A Few Words on the issue of Alcoholism)*. Tipografia „Lumina Moldovei”, 1924.
11. Minovici, M.: *Antialcoolul (Teetotaler)*. An I, Nr. 1, București. Stabilimentul grafic I. V. Socecu, 1900.
12. Murgeanu, G., *Catechism antialcoolic, întocmit spre folosința obștei rurale – Biblioteca anti-alcoolică a ministerului instrucțiunii publice și al cultelor (Antialcoholic Catechism, Prepared to the use of Rural Congregation, Anti-alcoholic Library from Ministry of Public Instruction and Religious Affairs)*. București. Editura casei școalelor, 1900.
13. Niculescu, D. D.: *Alcoolismul în România, Lucrare premiată de Universitatea din București (Alcoholism in Romania, Paper Awarded by the University of Bucharest)*, Editura Librăriei Socecu, 1895.
14. Obregia, Al.: *Ministerul sănătății și ocrotirilor sociale, direcția propagandei – Alcoolismul, scriere de propagandă antialcoolică (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Direction of Propaganda - Alcoholism - Antialcoholic Propaganda Article)*. București. Tipografia I. Brănișteanu, 1925.
15. Paulian, Dem.: *Despre alcoolism – Conferință la Radio în seara zilei de 27 ianuarie 1939 (About Alcoholism - Radio Conference on the Evening of January 27, 1939)*.
16. Roșu, V. T.: *Reuniunea de Temperanță Antialcoolică de la Blaj între 1910 – 1917), (Antialcoholic Temperance meeting at Blaj between 1910 - 1917)*.
17. Rotar, M.: *Propagandă și acțiuni antialcoolice în România interbelică (Propaganda and Antialcohol Measures in Romania Between the Two World Wars)*, <http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/authordetails.aspx?authorid=1b84abfe-fa57-4ef0-af02-9a019fd5dca3>
18. Simionescu, St.: *Despre alcoolism (About Alcoholism)*. Pitești. Tipografia „Artistica” P. Mitu, 1929.
19. Xenopol, A.D.: *Scrisoare către D. Prof. DR. M. Minovici (Letter Addressed to Mr. Prof. MD M. Minovici)*. Antialcoolul, An I, Nr. 1, București, Stabilimentul grafic I. V. Socecu, 1900.