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GENDER PREVALENCES OF ALCOHOL ABUSE AND DEPENDENCE IN PRIMARY CARE

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Aims: In Tunisia and in most Muslim countries, alcohol consumption has remained taboo. The aim of our study was to determine the prevalence of alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence in an adult primary care population and to compare gender prevalences and characteristics.

Method: This is a cross-sectional prevalence survey conducted in the district of Sousse from June to November 2006. Thirty primary care centers have been randomly selected. The sample was composed of 2576 subjects aged 18 years and more. Participants were interviewed by psychiatrists and medical trainers using the Composite International Diagnostic Interview, which was translated into the Tunisian dialect and validated.

Results: Females represented 78% of the whole sample. The lifetime prevalence rates of alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence were respectively 2,9% and 0,7%. The lifetime prevalences in the male subgroup were 12,9% for alcohol abuse and 3% for alcohol dependence. Only one case of alcohol abuse was found in the female subgroup.

Conclusion: The related alcohol disorders among the men of our study are as frequent as among occidental ones. The related alcohol disorders among women were unexpectedly very low. However, a similar result was reported in an other study conducted in the United Arab Emirates. This gender alcohol use discrepancy, found in our study, led to two main interrogations. The first one concerning the usefulness of the alcohol disorder structured interviews among Arabic women and the second concerning the Arabic women beliefs about alcohol consumption (Is it a result of religious thoughts or a deny?).