

PRESS RELEASE

Croatian Medical Journal
Zagreb University School of Medicine
Šalata 3b
10000 Zagreb
Croatia

Phone: ++385-1-4590-286

Fax: ++385-1-4590-222

Mail: dario.sambunjak@mef.hr

All articles published in the Croatian Medical Journal
are freely available at www.cmj.hr

Lithuanian adolescents prone to alcohol and tobacco, but rarely smoke marihuana

ZAGREB – Lithuanian boys and girls are getting drunk two times more often than their peers from other EU member states, but they smoke marihuana less frequently, shows a study published in the Croatian Medical Journal.

These data were obtained through the World Health Organization collaborative cross-national study carried out in 32 European countries and regions, Israel, Canada, and USA in 2001-2002. In Lithuania, approximately 4500 11-, 13-, and 15-year-old students were surveyed. They were chosen from 105 randomly selected schools in the country. A total of 115,980 respondents were surveyed in 22 EU member states. Cyprus, Luxemburg, and Slovakia did not participate.

The results showed that the mean age of drinking alcohol for the first time among Lithuanian boys was 11.6 years, which is earlier than EU average (12.3 years). Girls, however, did not differ from their EU peers. Although Lithuanian students consumed alcohol less frequently, the amounts of alcohol they consumed were rather high. For example, the proportion of 11-year old boys who got drunk two or more times a week was 8%, as opposed to 4.2% average in EU.

Lithuanian adolescents start to smoke very early: mean age of onset of smoking (at least one cigarette) among boys was 10.7 years, which is the lowest in the surveyed EU countries. The girls started smoking at the mean age of 12.3 years, also at the younger age than EU average. On the other hand, young Lithuanians rarely experiment with drugs: 11.2% of 15-year old boys and 4.5% of 15-year old girls have ever used cannabis or marihuana, whereas the EU average is 24.5% for boys and 18.3% for girls.

The study also explored other health-related habits of school-aged children. In comparison with their EU peers, Lithuanian students are physically more active, but watch more TV; eat less fruit, but have breakfast more regularly and consume less sweets and soft drinks. Their oral hygiene is not good: only one in 3 boys (32%) and every second girl (47.7%) brushed their teeth more than once a day. In Sweden, Denmark, UK, the Netherlands, and many other EU countries and regions, more than 75% of the surveyed adolescents brushed their teeth at least twice a day.

The limitation of this study was in that it was not designed to analyze the impact of social and environmental factors on health behavior. The health of youth is undoubtedly influenced by social changes, political and economic reforms, new technologies, and globalization. Still, the results of the study clearly point to the need of programs to improve the health behavior of adolescents in Lithuania. Such programs could be useful also to other transitional countries which recently joined EU or wish to join it in the future.

Correspondence to:

Apolinaras Zaborskis
Institute for Biomedical Research
Kaunas University of Medicine
Eiveniu str. 4
LT – 50009 – 7
Lithuania
socped@kmu.lt