

## Alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems in Europe: Preliminary results of the RARHA project

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** With regard to the distribution of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems, comparability across European countries is restricted due to varying definitions, methods and operationalizations. The *Joint Action on Reducing Alcohol Related Harm* (RARHA) is a 3 year collaborative multi-national project funded by the European Commission under the second EU Health Programme. Within RARHA the project *Harmonizing Alcohol-Related Measures of European Surveys* (HARMES) collected comparable data from representative national surveys carried out in European countries. Using the harmonized database, this contribution presents preliminary results on alcohol consumption and related harm in Europe.

**Methods:** Inclusion criteria for national surveys were: a) Survey conducted between 2008 and 2012 in a European country, b) General population survey including information on alcohol consumption and/or alcohol-related harm, c) Nationwide data, d) age range 15+. In total, 24 Surveys out of 17 European countries were included in the study. Various types of instruments used to measure alcohol consumption (e.g. abstinence, drinking frequency, episodic heavy drinking), and alcohol-related harm (e.g. DSM-IV, AUDIT, CAGE) were harmonized in order to facilitate cross-country comparability. The distribution of alcohol consumption in Europe will be contrasted on the basis of descriptive statistics.

**Results:** Several consumption patterns across Europe could be identified. First, a clear north-south gradient was observed with regard to abstinence of alcohol consumption, i.e. abstinence rates were higher in Southern countries. Second, countries in middle and southern Europe exhibited higher frequencies of drinking as compared to countries from northern Europe. Third, a south-north gradient was observed with regard to frequency of episodic heavy drinking with northern countries showing more excessive drinking. Accordingly, northern European countries exhibited higher proportions of problematic drinkers (measured by AUDIT) as compared to southern European countries.

**Discussion:** Further analyses will focus on other alcohol-related measures such as harm from others drinking or context of drinking as well as socio-demographic differences. Together with other parts of the overall project, this work will produce a baseline estimate for the monitoring of alcohol consumption and related problems in EU member states and will improve methodological conditions for comparable alcohol research in the EU.

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