Alcohol and other drug use among students in Greenland – a comparison between some 1999 and 2003 ESPAD data

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ABSTRACT
Objectives. Smoking and drinking habits among young people are of great concern in Greenland. The Home Rule government has through the Department of Prevention (PAARISA) carried out several campaigns to highlight the risks of smoking and drinking alcohol. To monitor the changes in these habits Greenland has participated in the European Survey Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD) in 1999 and 2003. The objective of this article is to make some preliminary comparisons between the 1999 and 2003 survey results on smoking and drinking alcohol. Study design/Methods. The survey population in both the 1999 and 2003 surveys are all students in the 9th, 10th and 11th grade (persons between 14 and 16 years old). Hence the surveys include students born in 1982-84 and 1986-88, respectively. The ESPAD questionnaire focuses on alcohol and other drug use, but it also includes questions on lifestyle, relations to family and friends and the students’ perception of their living conditions. Only answers from respondents born in 1983-84 and 1987-88 and only questions on smoking and drinking habits are analysed in this article. Results/Conclusion. Smoking and alcohol drinking among students aged 14-16 years has been decreasing from 1999 to 2003 measured by use during the last 30 days. The same trends cannot be found in students’ use of marijuana/hashish and sniffing different substances.

Keywords: Greenland, students, Alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, ESPAD

INTRODUCTION
In 1995, twenty-six European countries performed the first The European Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD). Thirty countries participated in 1999, and 33 countries took part in the survey in 2003. The Swedish council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs, CAN, Sweden, initiated the project, which is supported by the Pompidou Group at the Council of Europe.

The main purpose of the ESPAD project is to collect comparable data on alcohol, tobacco and drug use among 15-16-year-old students in as many European countries as possible. The studies should be conducted as school surveys by researchers in each participating country, during the same period of time and with a common methodology. The goal is in the long run to study trends in alcohol, smoking and drug habits. Comparing trends in the different countries may function both as incitements to preventive initiatives, to study effects of such initiatives, and changes in some countries might serve as forecasts for countries where such changes have not yet occurred.

The ESPAD project was launched as a continuation of the work of the Pompidou School Survey Subgroup in the 1980s and the battery of questions developed by this group.

The questionnaire has been developed in cooperation between the participating countries with a possibility for the participating countries to add on a few country-specific questions (1).

Greenland has participated in the ESPAD project in 1999 (2) and 2003 (3). ESPAD is a joint ef-
fort by Statistics Greenland in collaboration with PAARISA (the Dept. of Prevention) within the Greenland Home Rule Directorate of Health. Statistics Greenland is responsible for the international co-operation and for conducting the survey in Greenland as well as the data analyses.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The target population for the ESPAD project is students who turn 16 years old during the year of the data collection. The sample should consist of randomly selected classes and it has been recommended that each country should draw a sample of about 2,800 students as a minimum.

Because of the size of the Greenland population and the specific year groups, the Greenland branch of the ESPAD survey has been carried through as a population survey of all students in grade 9-11 in both 1999 and 2003. This implicates that the two Greenland surveys consist of respondents born in 1982-1984 and 1986-88, respectively.

For the purpose of this article different drinking and smoking habits among all respondents born in 1983-84 and 1987-88, respectively, have been selected, implicating that the respondents compared were between 14 and 16 years old at the time they completed the questionnaire. The response rate (number of respondents in the age group/number of students in the age group attending school) was 64% in 1999 and 70% in 2003.

Data for the analysis are obtained from questionnaires completed by the individual students in the classroom. The class teachers have been asked to schedule the survey for one lecture following the same procedure as for a written test.

The Greenland students have answered the same core questions as the students in the other countries and a few Greenland-specific questions. Only a small part of the results from the two surveys are presented in this paper. The focus will be on comparing the answers in 1999 and 2003 to the following questions:

- How frequently have you smoked cigarettes during the last 30 days?
- On how many occasions (if any) have you had any alcoholic beverage to drink during the last 30 days?
- On how many occasions (if any) have you used marijuana (grass, pot) or hashish (hash, hash oil) during the last 30 days?
- On how many occasions (if any) have you sniffed a substance (glue aerosol etc.) to get high during the last 30 days?

**RESULTS**

Figure 1 on smoking habits among 14-14-year-old students shows a significant increase in the group of non-smokers during the last 30 days. 44% of the students - an increase by 19% - declare that they did not smoke the last 30 days. There is too an increase among those who smoke less than one per week and less than one per day. This means that over a four-year period, the group smoking on a regular basis from one a day and above has decreased from 51% to 39%, a decrease of almost a quarter. Data distributed by regions tell about differences in smoking habits between students in West, North and East Greenland, but in all regions the tendency is for more students to smoke less.

![Figure 1. How frequently have you smoked cigarettes during the last 30 days? 14-16-year-old students in 1999 and 2003 (%). Source: ESPAD 1999 – Greenland population survey on students born in 1983 and 1988; ESPAD 2003 – Greenland population survey on students born in 1987 and 1988.](image)
While almost the same proportion of the students had drunk alcoholic beverages 5 times or less during the last 30 days in 1999 and 2003, there is a 21% increase from 48% to 58% of the 14-16-year-olds who did not drink any alcoholic beverage at all in that period (Figure 2). Drinking patterns too vary from region to region, but the overall tendency that a larger proportion of the students have not drunk any alcoholic beverage during the last 30 days can be seen in all regions. 5% of the students on an average drank alcohol six times or more during the 30-day period. This average is the result of a broad variation among the regions, between 5% in the Disko region (Qeqertarsuaq, Ilulissat, Qasigiannguit, Aasiaat and Kangaaq municipalities) and 15% in the Northern region (Uummannaq, Upernavik and Qaanaaq municipalities).

Figure 2. On how many occasions (if any) have you had any alcoholic beverage to drink during the last 30 days? 14-16-year-old students in 1999 and 2003 (%). Source: ESPAD 1999 – Greenland population survey on students born in 1983 and 1988; ESPAD 2003 – Greenland population survey on students born in 1987 and 1988.

Figure 3 shows the use of marijuana or hashish during the last 30 days and Figure 4 illustrates on how many occasions (if any) during the last 30 days the respondents have sniffed a substance to get high. Contrary to the above-mentioned changes in the 14-16-year-olds’ habits regarding smoking and drinking alcohol, there do not seem to be signs of a similar positive trend in the use of marijuana or hashish. Whereas sniffing, as illustrated in Figure 4, seems to have been stabilised, the group that did not use marijuana and hashish during the last 30 days has increased by more than 3%.
CONCLUSION
Smoking and alcohol drinking among 14-16-year-old students have without doubt been decreasing from 1999 to 2003 measured by use during the last 30 days. This seems to be documented by the preliminary findings from the 2003 ESPAD survey compared with the 1999 ESPAD survey. At the same time, it seems that the same trends cannot be found in the students’ use of marijuana/hashish and sniffing different substances.

Further analyses on the 1999 and 2003 data will highlight some of the causes to these overall developments and the regional differences. At the same time, these analyses will hopefully contribute to understanding how different means of prevention work, so that the effort to reduce smoking, alcohol drinking and drug use among youth can be still more effective.

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