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## Original Research

# Perception of health risks among adolescents due to consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and psychoactive substances in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** This article describes the perception of health risks in adolescents due to the consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and psychoactive substances in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), as well as their observation of the behavior of their peers related to addictive behaviors.

**Methods:** For the analysis was used a database from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) survey which was conducted in FBiH in 2011. The target population were students in the second grade of secondary schools in FBiH born in 1995 according to the ESPAD protocol. The total number of respondents from the cohort born in 1995 was 3813 students.

**Results:** The research results showed that the prevalence of risk perception due to the consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and psychoactive substances among adolescents in the FBiH is lower than the mean prevalence in countries which have implemented the ESPAD survey of 2011.

**Conclusions:** Preventive activities should be aimed at adolescent risk behaviours and empower them to make the right decisions that can have far reaching significance. Attention has to be paid to selective prevention that is directed towards individuals or subgroup of population where the risk of developing disorder is much higher than average.

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## Introduction

Perception of health risks due to cigarette consumption, alcohol consumption and consumption of psychoactive substances are significant indicators of beliefs, expectations and understandings among young people and all of those are crucial to start consuming these substances. Therefore, a degree of perception of health risks is a potential risk factor to begin consumption of these substances, especially psychoactive substances. Primary factors that influence formation of attitudes and perceptions of risk are primarily environments in which young people live and work.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescents are dependent on their families, their communities, schools where they learn and acquire important life skills that enable them to resist pressures they face and allow transition from childhood to adulthood to become successful. According to social learning theory, adolescents whose family members, friends and peers use cigarettes, alcohol and drugs are likely to do it themselves.<sup>2,3</sup> Evidence suggests that a degree of perception of the health risks and benefits of addictive behaviour has a significant influence on the development of these habits among young people. It is proven by the numerous theories of health behaviour where the belief about the consequences of certain behaviour is deciding whether an individual will accept that behaviour.<sup>4–9</sup>

Policy on Health and Youth in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBIH) setting out development of youth health. The main objective is to provide a higher level of knowledge and skills in the field of youth health and healthy lifestyles, and through all forms of education – formal and informal and lifelong education. The policy directions are adapting existing and introduction of new educational programs relating to youth health and healthy lifestyles, with the participation of young people in all the processes of creating and implementing the program. However, in countries which undergoing strong socio-economic transition, such as the FBIH, adolescent health is exposed to a number of challenges due to unsafe living environment, increasing poverty and influence of various lobbies related to greater availability of cigarettes, alcohol and psychotropic substances.<sup>10</sup> Hence, in the paper, a hypothesis that the prevalence of risk perception due to the consumption of cigarettes, alcoholic beverages and psychotropic substances among adolescents in FBIH is low.

Important instruments are international research studies such as the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) aimed to provide basic data and indicators related to specific aspects of youth health – smoking, drinking alcohol and substance use among adolescents aged 16, as well as perception of risk factors.<sup>11</sup>

Constant research and monitoring knowledge, attitudes and practices of adolescents on the perception of health risks related to smoking, alcohol and drug consumption is an imperative need, especially in transition countries, with an aim of defining routes, primarily for public health activities. This is an opportunity to affirm integrative approaches in local communities (community approach) which should be a basic resource for health in transition countries.<sup>12</sup> Conducting this research is welcomed in the current transitional moment in

the FBIH, particularly in order to define indicators for monitoring health of young people and continuous evaluation of outcomes in health in general.

## Methods

For the analysis we used a database from the ESPAD survey which was conducted in FBIH in 2011. ESPAD survey in FBIH is a part of the international ESPAD study that in 2011 was conducted in 36 European countries. In the FBIH research was conducted by the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) and Federal Institute of Public Health (FPHI) with the support of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

The target population were students in the second grade of secondary schools in FBIH born in 1995 according to the ESPAD protocol. Sampling frame included all high schools in the FBIH, and those schools were classified by the type of school as a gymnasiums, comprehensive secondary schools (technical and vocational schools) and art schools. Schools for young people with special needs were not included in the sample frame. Sample frame consisted of 329 secondary schools.

FBIH consists of 10 cantons and each one is a separate administrative and political unit. In order to obtain representative data for the entire FBIH it has been made a combined sample stratification into four strata (micro, small, medium and large strata) according to the number of schools and the number of classes in secondary schools in the cantons. In the micro and small stratum (10–30 schools), a list of classes of the second grade level strata and classes were systematically selected (one sheet for each stratum). In a medium to large stratum (135–154 schools), schools were selected with probability proportional to the size of the school, and then from each school was selected a department.

To fulfill the recommended sample size according to the methodology of the ESPAD survey of at least 2500 students cohort born in 1995, the sample included 122 schools and a total of 195 classes. Only one school refused to participate.

Response rate of students attending classes on the day of the survey at school was 100%. Total number of respondents was 4528, and for the purpose of analyzing ESPAD methodology set aside cohort born in 1995 and there were 3813 of them, 1880 male students and 1921 female students.

The study used a basic ESPAD questionnaire with 44 questions about consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and various types of psychoactive substances (marijuana, amphetamines, ecstasy, inhalants, tranquilizers) as well as their perception of risk of harming their health associated with the consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and various types of psychoactive substances.

Fieldwork was carried out by specially trained interviewers, who have been granted by cantonal ministries of education to enter schools. Before the beginning of the survey, the interviewers have read the instructions, and answered shortly the possible questions. During the survey, the teachers weren't present in the classes.

Additional parent permit on conduction of the survey was not necessary. Questionnaire lasted 45 min. Students packed

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