Chahaps in Slovenia: could we do more?

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Slovenia is facing a considerable alcoholism problem, and there are still policy, social and healthcare items in this area to be perfected. In the Chapaps project, two big fields of interest and research actually meet: alcoholism and violence in the family. In this article author presents Chapaps project activities and events in Slovenia.

INTRODUCTION

With its population of roughly 2 million, Slovenia is a relatively young country within Europe. It declared independence in 1991, and in twelve years later it became a member of EU like most of its neighbouring countries (Italy, Austria and Hungary), with the exception of Croatia.

Nevertheless, Medical School has been a partner in several EU research projects, some of them Encare. In the Chapaps project, two big fields of interest and research actually meet: alcoholism and violence in the family. As the data proves, Slovenia is facing a considerable alcoholism problem, and there are still policy, social and healthcare items in this area to be perfected.
DATA COLLECTION

We used some of the data available through the previous research projects, such as IATPAD, ESPAD and HBSC. The results mostly deal with prevalence of alcohol consumption in the young population, the age when they start drinking alcohol etc. Additionally, we searched the data available on the internet with all of the keywords and combinations, suggested in the section B1 (Guidance on WP 5).

Several items were collected, mostly in the form of graduation thesis at various levels (diploma, MS, PhD) universities (social studies, psychology, social work etc.) The topics are mostly addiction in the young and the consequences, suggested strategies for treatment and prevention. The contents is hard to access, since graduation thesis are mostly in the domain of the respective universities and colleagues. Among 172 items examined, there was no specific research data on Chapaps.

Several items concerning the alcohol and/or drug abuse in the young population were retrieved, but none on the specific topic of Chapaps.

We detected on descriptive article on “Typical alcoholic family and social environment” in a popular lay-public-aimed magazine Viva, written by an addictologist / psychiatrist Maja Rus Makovec (ISSN 1318-6620), published Dec 1999, yr 5, issue 24, pages 7–8.

INDIRECT DATA ABOUT ALCOHOL USE

Due to alcohol, in the Republic of Slovenia in 2004, 466 people died (27.3 per 100 000 adults). The most frequent cause of death was liver disease (303 cases), 327 deaths were premature (i.e. younger than 65 yrs), 4 177.5 years of life lost. On average, each of the diseased lost 12.8 yrs).

The data about alcohol consumption in Slovenia is also worrying. According to the results of ESPAD (European research on alcohol and drug consumption in the high school population), the consumption
of alcohol among the youngsters in Slovenia is increasing. In 2003, 27.3% male and 18.5% female high school students have claimed to have been drunk at the age 13 or younger. 72.4% male and 64.7% female high school students have claimed to have drunk beer before or at the age of 13 years. Wine has been consumed before or at the age of 13 by 68.1% male and 63.1% female high school students. 41.7% male and 34.6% female students have drunk spirits before or at the age of 13. Only 7.3% male and 9.3% female students have stated to never have tasted alcohol. 32.2% male and 18.1% female students have consummated alcohol on more than 40 occasions. In 2005 the average age at first consumption of alcohol was 12.8 let in male, and 13.3 years in female population.

When diagnosis foetal alcohol syndrome has been proved in newborn (Q86,0, according to ICD), the data is recorded by the treating physician and entered into PIS plus forwarded to the Institute for public health for statistics/epidemiologic purposes.

If an infant has been admitted to hospital later, after having been discharged from the perinatal unit, the data is entered into the yearly statistic for hospital treatment (BOLOB), which is being followed up and reported yearly by the Institute of public health in the section Alcohol consumption and the consequences of alcohol misuse. Between 1999 and 2007, 1 or none alcohol syndrome per year was detected in the Republic Slovenia.

SOCIAL AND ACTUAL DAMAGE, DUE TO ALCOHOL IN SLOVENIA

The consequences of driving under the influence of alcohol: 3,913 traffic accidents were connected to alcohol (9.1% of all). Death was the outcome of 97 accidents. Among the drivers, who caused the accident and lost their life, 72 (27.5%) were driving under the influence of alcohol. In 2006, the average level of alcohol in drivers, who were driving under the influence, was 1.5 promile.

Alcohol and criminal activity: in 2006, alcohol was involved in 76,693
criminal acts and traffic accidents. Alcohol was involved in 20,685 criminal acts and (36.9% of all) and in 56,013 (10.2% of all) traffic accidents. Most of the drivers under the influence of alcohol were between 20 and 24 years old. In 2004 2,586 (1.5 per 1,000) of all incarcerated citizens were under the influence of alcohol; most of them were young men between 20 and 24 years.

DATA ON TREATMENT OF ALCOHOLISM IN SLOVENIA

Slovenia has had a long tradition within the national health system in treatment of alcohol dependence (40 years long). There is an ongoing alcohol dependence treatment in 5 hospitals throughout the state (Ljubljana, Ormož, Vojnik, Begunje na Gorenjskem, Idrija). Treatment includes family therapy, and each patient should have a member of his family regularly attending some of the sessions and group therapy. The Institute of public health of Slovenia registered 3,950 hospital admissions for the alcohol dependence treatment in 2004 and 91,278 hospital days due to alcoholism (which is 4.2% of all hospital days in Slovenia). The average duration of hospitalisation in 2004 was 23.6 days. Beside the hospital treatment there is an outpatient programme also in some other hospitals in Slovenia (i.e. Splo na bolni nica Maribor).

Besides, there are several different clubs in Slovenia, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, locally founded. They help the already treated alcoholics as well as those, who cannot decide for institutionized treatment. There are about 100 local clubs in Slovenia, lead by social workers, nurses and some by family/general practitioners.

In the late 70-ies, clubs have been initiated by the late dr. Janez Ruglelj, promoting the Vladimir Hudolin method of treatment. One can only enter the program together with a co-therapist (spouse, member of the family, friend). The program is rather rigorous, with regular physical activity, writing, improving the formal education etc.
CURRENT PRACTICES FOR CHAPAPS IN SLOVENIA

NGO foundation “Use your head when you go to the party” or better “You Can Choose, Win or Lose” (since year 2000): its first goal is to develop and regularly run alternative events – parties promoting healthy life-style and well-accepted events for the young people, where the visitors don’t need cigarettes, alcohol or forbidden drugs to actually feel good. The events that are prepared with a successful mass media coverage for university and high school students are not restrictive, which means that visitors can freely decide on their own whether they are going to drink alcohol or not, however the numerous attending. The program has been ongoing for 7 years now, the main goal is to promote a full and alcohol-free life. 250 events with over 200 000 participants were attended by the volunteers, which undergo a short educational course and are mostly medical school students and other volunteers. Over 55 000 questionnaires were filled out and 60 000 breathalyser tests performed. All sober participants were awarded practical prizes in the value of 310 000 euro. The action is well recognized in media, they broadcast a weekly, very popular show, featuring celebrities and other people who live successful and alcohol free lives. Even some politicians during the election campaign responded by the so called “40 days without alcohol pledge”. Several sports activities have been organized and the so-called “zero-zero generation” (meaning having a concentration of 0,0 alcohol in blood) is going big. Personalities like dr. Zdenka Čebašek Travnik, the Slovenian ombudswoman and Mr. Bojan Žlendre, a government official responsible for education and safety in road traffic are well involved in the activities.

The prizes are reserved only for those who decide to remain sober (http://www.fundacija-zgnz.si).

The aims are to in Project “A message from the bottle” (since year 2003): its main goal is to inform, built awareness on possible alcohol related harm and to stimulate young people and others to reduce alcohol drinking through different “above and below the limit. The action
involves young people, through different actions, happenings, exhibitions, workshops, videoclips shown on TV, webpage, where one can acquire all kinds of information and test oneself for the level/evaluation of one`s own alcohol consumption and get specific advice as well. The action was led by the Department of family medicine at the Medical School, University of Ljubljana. In cooperation with the Department of fine arts and the Department for social studies. The project was supported by the Ministry of health and it included several local communities, public health institutions and the network of “healthy towns”.

Know your limits: part of a central government Department of Health initiative. A national TV, radio campaign and website designed at young people around the dangers of alcohol misuse and to raise people’s awareness.

Project “Use your own head” (one year project in 2007): on-line project prepared by the “Regional institute for health Ravne na Koro kem” in collaboration with some health professionals and high school students with the goal to inform the youth and make them think about alcohol drinking related problems (http://www.mislizglavo.si).

Project man: a humanitarian, non-profit organisation for the users of alcohol and illegal drugs and their parents. At the time, 70 users and 150 parents are included. It is targeted at all who can reach a starting abstinence.

Drogart: the goal is a life without dependence, continuation of education, keeping the employment and living a social life. It includes preventive programs in schools, educational and informational literature (leaflets), educational programs for those who are willing to work with the addicted. 16 professionals and several (about 20) volunteers are active within the organisation. The staff includes ex-users. A help-centre has been set up in 2006, offering basic info about the forms of help, a 6-month program for the users, group-workshops and therapy for the parents is available (http://www.drogart.org).

Wind in your hair: the program has been set up in 1996 with the
The purpose of promoting sport over drug and alcohol dependence. The main stakeholder is The Sport Union in Slovenia, which is organizing various sport events in Slovenian towns with the cooperation of local sport clubs, schools, humanitarian organisations and individuals. The most frequent sports are volleyball, soccer, basketball (often the so-called street basketball, sport celebrities participating), roller blades, dancing etc. (http://www.sportna-unija.si).

Youth center Malci Belic: a Center set up by the government, which can accept up to 60 schoolchildren. It is a programme for the children, living in unfavourable family environments, facing problems such as alcoholism, drug dependence, parental incarceration, violence, neglect, other social extremes (according to the chapters 120 and 121 of the Family law). Children are referred to the centre by a respective social care center, children are provided with lodging, food, teachers/advisers, psychological support (daily) and a psychiatric consultant can be contacted. Weekend and holiday arrangements are negotiated with parents individually for each child. Local welfare clubs such as Lions Club Ljubljana and Inner Wheel Club Ljubljana have sponsored additional and holiday activities for years now (http://www.arnes.si).

CONCLUSION

Despite several different activities in Slovenia, none of them is specifically aimed at children of alcoholic parents.

Networking among the present subjects, more efficient policy making and more specific programmes and educational activities for all coming in contact with the chapaps is to be desired.

Overcoming stigmatisation and shame of the chapaps while advocating the three main messages (it is not your fault, you are not alone, there is help) should be the main goals while planning future activities in Slovenia.
REFERENCES

1. http://www.arnes.si