4.N. Pitch Presentations: The effect of alcohol on children

Resource use data from sickness funds: their story about alcohol intoxication in minors in Belgium
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Background
Results of the Belgian National Health Survey show that 14% of people aged 15–24 years are drinking six or more glasses of alcohol on one occasion at least weekly. This leads to alcohol intoxication (AI) with possible acute life threatening complications such as unconsciousness. Moreover, AI often results in aggression, unsafe sexual behaviour, accidents and in the long run possible cognitive damage.

Methods
The Intermutualistic Agency in Belgium can estimate alcohol abuse in minors based on claim records on reimbursed health care. They counted the number of unique minors (12-17 years) per year who were making use of an emergency department or were being admitted to hospital for one night, and in whom a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) was assessed on the same day. Physicians only prescribe a BAC test when there is a strong suspicion of AI so the test is almost always positive. Therefore, this registration allows us to get an idea of the number of minors suffering from an AI.

Results
In 2013, there were 2,376 minors with a suspicion of AI, much higher than reported by a study in the Netherlands. In Belgium, the number slightly increases: 30/10,000 in 2008; 31/10,000 per year during the period 2009–2011, 32/10,000 in 2012 and 33/10,000 in 2013. AI was more prevalent in boys compared to girls and 7% were registered more than once in 2013. Incidence was higher in minors with a lower socio-economic status. Half of the cases occurred during the weekend or a holiday.

Conclusions
AI in Belgian minors seems to be high. Our data could lead to more awareness in young people and their parents. Stronger enforcement of existing legislation by the authorities is also of importance. Moreover, unlike most of the EU-member states, Belgium has no complete ban on the sale of alcohol to minors. A registration system in emergency departments and among pediatricians in Belgium is recommended to make data on alcohol intoxication in minors more reliable.

Key messages
- Alcohol intoxication in Belgian minors is not a rare phenomenon and seems to be increasing
- A registration system in emergency departments and among pediatricians in Belgium is recommended to make data on alcohol intoxication in minors more reliable.