Association between personal and perceived peer alcohol drinking among Danish adolescents
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Background
Research on social norm theory suggests that adolescents often overestimate peer risk behaviour such as alcohol misuse. When adolescents experience a misperception on alcohol norms they tend to adjust their own consumption pattern to align with that of the believed peer consumption leading to higher rates of personal use. This study aims to investigate misperceptions of peer alcohol consumption among Danish adolescents, and specifically if (mis)perceptions are associated with personal drunkenness.

Methods
Data on personal and perceived peer substance use were collected among 1,447 pupils in 8th and 9th grade from the Region of Southern Denmark participating in the cluster randomized controlled trial The GOOD life. The pupils were asked to report personal drunkenness and perceived percentage of peers who have ever been drunk. Personal experience of ever been drunk was analysed as dependent variable with socio-demographic factors and perceived peer drinking behaviour as independent variables.

Results
All pupils provided significantly higher estimates of the percentage of peers who have ever been drunk compared with the actual percentage of pupils who have ever been drunk (t-test p<0.001). Pupils who have ever been drunk estimated that 62% (SD 25.8%) of their peers’ have done the same, while pupils who never have been drunk estimated that only 37% (SD 26.4%) of their peers have done the same. Hence the higher the pupils perceived peer drunkenness to be, the more likely they were to be drunk themselves (OR= 1.03 per 1% increase in perception, p<0.001). In addition older age and higher grade were significantly associated with ever been drunk, while gender and family affluence were not associated.

Conclusion
Estimated peer behaviour regarding drunkenness is positively associated with personal drinking experience.

Key message:
- We suggest normative feedback to correct misperception of peer alcohol behaviour as a promising preventive strategy for Danish adolescents.