

INJURIES IN EUROPE: ROLE OF ALCOHOL

Background and Aim: Over the last decades, the health indicators have diverged and there has been apparent huge health gap due to injuries between western and eastern Europe. We aimed at explaining the reasons for such dramatic changes in mortality from injuries in European countries with special regard to the situation in the Baltic States and Russia.

Methods: Age-standardized (world standard) injuries mortality rates per 100,000 person-years at ages 20 to 64 for 4 groups of countries (CEE countries¹; EU15²; Baltic States³ and Russia) were computed using the World Health Organization Mortality Database.

Results: Generally the divergence of injuries mortality level among adults in Europe at the beginning of 21st century is enormous and multidimensional; (rates in 2002: Russia 502, the Baltic States 333, CEE 114, EU15 59; per 100000 population aged 20-64). The picture is identical in population of women, although at significantly lower level (rates in 2002: Russia 104, the Baltic States 63, CEE 23, EU15 17; per 100000 population aged 20-64).

Conclusion: The unusual leaps of the sudden deaths due to injuries and violence in the time of peace in eastern Europe is without precedence in modern history. The phenomenon concerns mostly the weakest, the worst educated, with no profession and the lonely people. Proximate cause leading to a very high level of injuries mortality is alcohol.

¹ Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) – Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria (EU7)

² EU15 – European Union countries before enlargement in May 2004

³ The Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (EU3)