



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release: 3rd of November 2010

Alcohol most harmful drug and yet most advertised one

Independent scientific findings show that alcohol is the most damaging drug to user and to others overall.

A brand-new study, published in *The Lancet* this week, investigated a wide range of harm factors regarding drugs and ranked the severity of their impact on individual and on others. The conclusion is unmistakably clear: alcohol is the most socially-harmful drug. Andrea Lavesson, president of the European youth organization Active – sobriety, friendship and peace, reacts to the results by saying that “we experience this reality in our every-day work with young people all over Europe. What we are very critical against is that Europe’s most harmful drug is also Europe’s most advertised one. Young Europeans have to grow up in an intoxicating culture where alcohol is an essential part everywhere in society. That’s a screaming paradox given the latest findings.”

The study’s authors scored 20 drugs on 16 harm factors, nine of which related to the harms that a particular drug causes to the individual, and seven related to the harms a drug causes to others. The harm factors examined the social, physical and psychological problems. The independent group of scientists scored the drugs on a 100-point scale, with higher scores given to the most problematic drugs.

At 72 points, alcohol got the highest score. Heroin came in second, with 55 points, and crack cocaine was third with 54 points. “The most interesting fact about that result is”, explains Andrea Lavesson from Active, “that it puts an end to the picture of glamorous alcohol. Alcohol plays in the same league like heroin in terms harms to user and outclasses all other drugs in terms of harms to society. The way alcohol is being treated in Europe and the danger it poses to both individuals and society as a whole make up a screaming paradox. And so young Europeans ask what kind of world the grown-ups have created?” says Andrea Lavesson on behalf of Active’s members from all over Europe

In fact Europe is the heaviest drinking region in the world. In the EU there are about 9 Million children growing up in families with at least one alcohol addicted parent. Still alcohol is widely marketed, often targeting youth, and subsidised by taxpayer’s money.

Andrea Lavesson summarizes the facts and concludes: “The alcohol industry is allowed to paint a fake picture. But independent science reflects reality: It is the age of 14 years on average when young Europeans get drunk for the first time and by the age of 15 nearly half of the European youth uses alcohol weekly – way before the legal age limit. Given the danger inherent in alcohol we need policies that protect young people and society. We need a ban of advertising like we have for tobacco. We need to make alcohol much less accessible. We need higher prices. We need to treat alcohol for what it is, not for what we are made believe it could be: alcohol is no life enhancer. No drug is. Alcohol is the socially most harmful drug.”

“Active- sobriety, friendship and peace” is a non - governmental organisation gathering European youth temperance organisations working for a democratic diverse and peaceful world free from alcohol and other drugs where an individual can live up to her full potential. Active has more than 35 000 members in 26 European countries.