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**A comparative study of alcohol drinking in Polish and Italian adolescents****SUMMARY**

The aim of the study was to answer the question whether - and if so, to what extent - patterns and correlates of alcohol drinking are the same or different in adolescents brought up in various socio-cultural settings, i.e. in Poland and Italy. Subjects in the study were students of above-elementary schools, aged 15 - 18. Data were obtained from 614 boys and 620 girls in Poland, and from 532 boys and 555 girls in Italy, using a Polish and an Italian adaptation of the „Health Behavior Questionnaire” by R. Jessor, J. Donovan and F. Costa.

Obtained results have shown which aspects of alcohol drinking experiences are of a cross-cultural character, being specific to the developmental stage, and which ones are related either to the cultural context or rather to socio-demographic characteristics (such as e.g. gender). The majority of adolescents from both samples have already had some experience with alcohol drinking. The proportion of those drinking excessively, i.e. in a way involving risk of developing alcohol dependence, was similar in both samples. Also in both samples girls predominated among those drinking occasionally and in small amounts, while boys - among those drinking frequently and in considerable amounts. Our findings confirm also that alcohol drinking is an important cross-cultural component of the problem behaviors syndrome of adolescence. As regards differences between Polish and Italian adolescents, they pertained mostly to perceived attitudes toward alcohol drinking (Italian adolescents more frequently perceived in their close environment positive attitudes towards drinking than did Polish youngsters), age of alcohol initiation (earlier in Italian than in Polish youth), and the rate of development of alcohol drinking experiences. In Polish adolescents initiation to alcohol drinking is followed rather by a systematic continuation of experiences in this area, while in the Italian sample a large proportion of those after initiation do not go beyond alcohol drinking on sporadic occasions only.

**Key words:** adolescents, alcohol, cross-cultural comparisons

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