PERCEPTION OF DRINKING OF OTHERS IN A SAMPLE OF 20-YEAR-OLD MEN: THE MORE I THINK YOU DRINK, THE MORE I DRINK

Nicolas Bertholet

Jacques Gaume

Mohamed Faouzi

Jean-Bernard Daeppen

Gerhard Gmel

Background

- According to social norms theory, the amount a person drinks can be influenced by their perception of drinking of others

- As such, the belief that others drink heavily will have considerable influence on the amount a person drinks

Background

- The perception of how much others drink has been the focus of various studies among students in the US and other countries
- This research has demonstrated
  - A high prevalence of overestimating (i.e. thinking that others drink more than they actually do)
  - This overestimation has been identified as a strong predictor of one's own drinking
- This has been used as a starting point in numerous interventions providing normative feedback

Background

- Nevertheless, less is known about perception of drinking of others outside of the student population

- Factors such as living on campuses or being part of student activities may have an impact on perceptions

- Therefore, before testing normative feedback interventions, it is important to estimate alcohol perceptions in an entire population

Background

- In countries with a mandatory army conscription, there is a unique opportunity to access the total population

- Switzerland: Virtually all non-institutionalized Swiss citizens are called for conscription at age 20

Objectives

- We studied whether perception of drinking of others (same age and sex) was associated with one's own current drinking, and the factors that are related to this perception among 20 years old conscripts

Methods

- We studied a random sample of drinkers (n=404) from a census of 20-year-old Swiss men (n=9,686)

- The 404 drinkers were asked to estimate the percentage of others who drink more than they do

- Using weekly alcohol consumption data of the census, we computed for each subject the percentage of individuals drinking more than they do

Methods

- We compared the "perceived" to the "computed" alcohol consumption
- We classified the drinkers as
  - Overestimating
  - Underestimating
  - Accurately estimating drinking of others

An accurate estimation was considered a perceived proportion within the ± 5% range of the computed proportion

Methods

- We compared the alcohol consumption of those who overestimated drinking of others to those who did not, using analyses of variance/covariance

- We used logistic regression models to evaluate the impact of age, education, occupation, living environment and family history of alcohol problems on estimations of drinking of others

Results: characteristics of the 404 subjects

Age in years, mean (SD)	19.4 (1.1)
Living in an urban environment, %	51%
Highest completed education level: obligatory school only versus higher, %	43%
Current occupation	
Employed, %	23%
In training, %	74%
Inactive, %	3%
Current alcohol use in drinks per week, mean (SD)	8.0 (9.8)
No family history of alcohol problems (versus yes), % (n)	68%

Results

- 45.5% overestimated drinking of others
- 35.2% underestimated drinking of others
- 19.3% made an accurate estimation

Proportion of subjects overestimating, underestimating and accurately estimating drinking of others by current weekly drinking (in drinks/week)
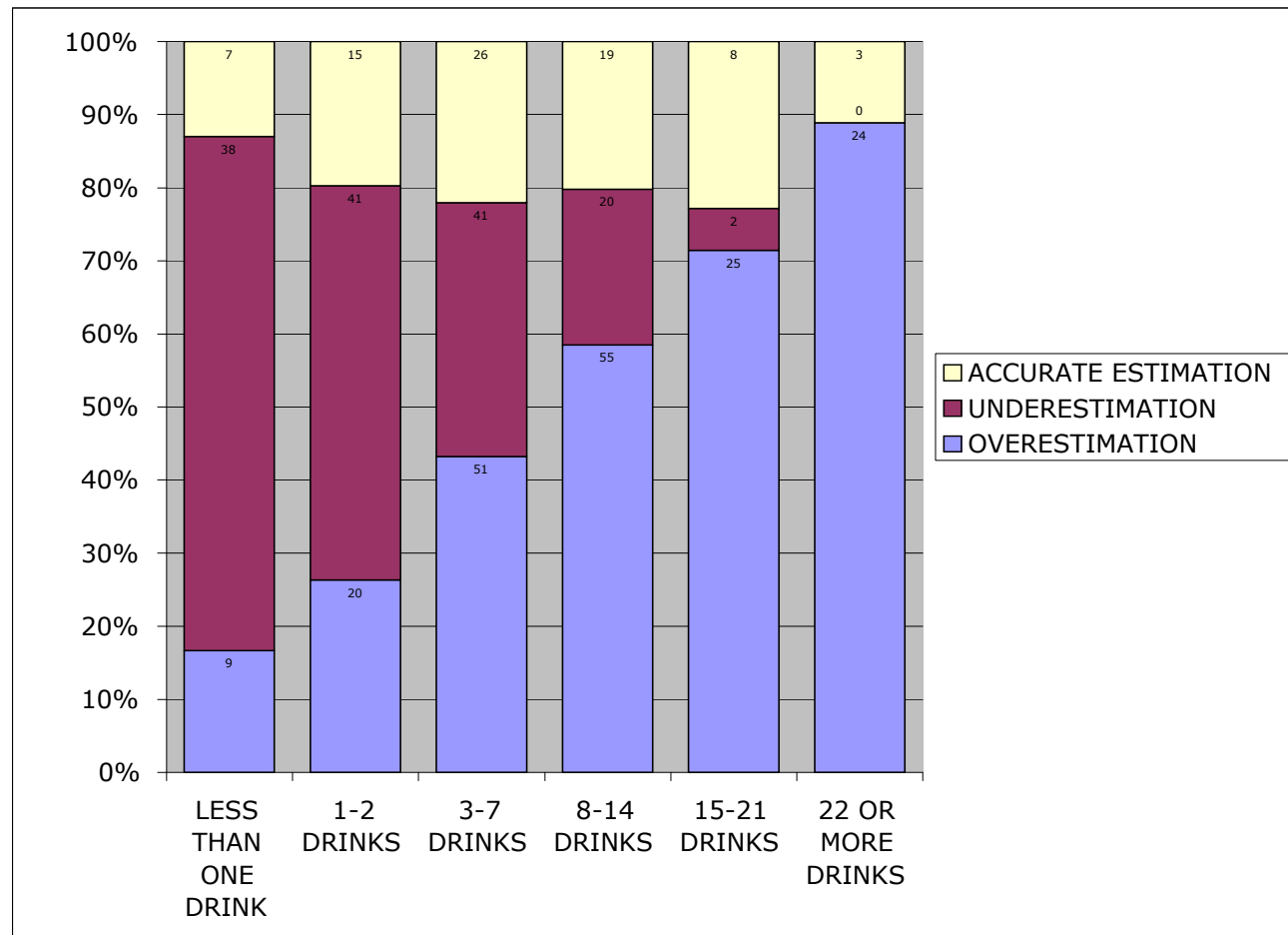
Results

- The likelihood of overestimating drinking of others increased as individual alcohol use increased

- Those overestimating drinking of others consumed more alcohol than those who did not:
  - Adjusted* mean number of drinks/week (SE) 11.45(1.12) vs 4.50(1.08), p<.0001

  *: adjusted for age, education level, occupation, living environment and family history of alcohol problems

Results

- In a second step, we studied factors associated with overestimating drinking of others

Results: factors associated with overestimating of drinking of others

	UNADJUSTED LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS	ADJUSTED LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL
	Overestimating drinking of others, OR (95% CI)	**Overestimating drinking of others, AOR (95% CI)**
Current alcohol use (in drinks per week)	**1.14 (1.10; 1.18)***	1.14 (1.10; 1.18)*
Age (in years)	0.89 (0.74; 1.08)	0.86 (0.68; 1.08)
Highest completed education level (obligatory school only versus higher)	0.83 (0.56; 1.23)	0.63 (0.38; 1.04)
Current occupation (reference group=employed)		
In training	1.07 (0.67; 1.71)	1.25 (0.46; 1.40)
Inactive	1.27 (0.38; 4.23)	1.31 (0.21; 2.75)
Living in an urban environment	0.80 (0.54; 1.18)	0.96 (0.62; 1.49)
No family history of alcohol problems (versus yes)	0.90 (0.59; 1.38)	0.79 (0.49; 1.25)

Results: factors associated with overestimating of drinking of others

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Results

- Except for current drinking, no other variables were significantly associated with overestimating drinking of others

Conclusion

- These results confirm prior findings within selective student populations:
  - High prevalence of overestimation
  - Association between overestimation and current drinking
- It sets the stage for preventive actions, such as normative feedback based on social norms theory among swiss conscripts
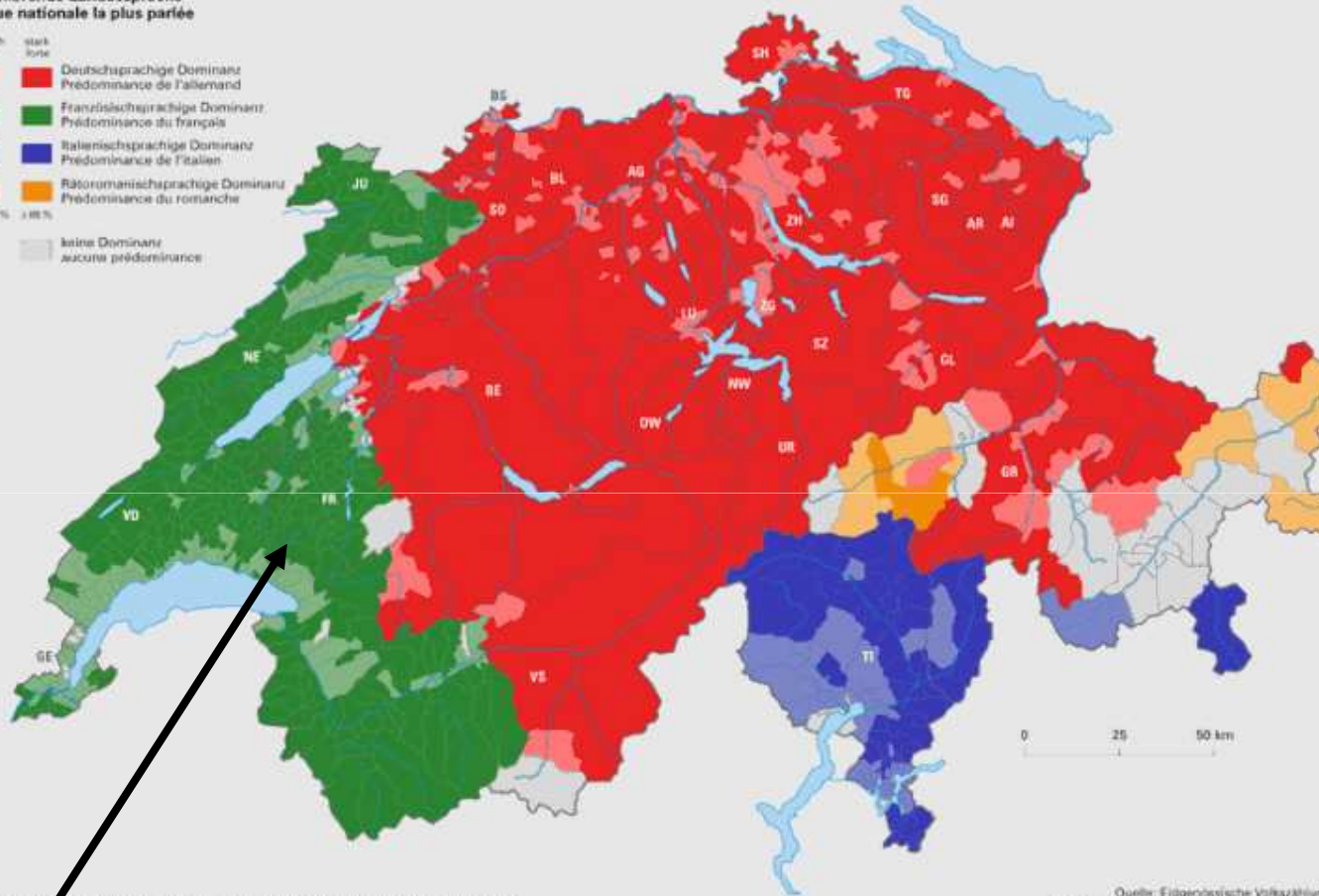
Funding

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Thank you

Nicolas.Bertholet@chuv.ch

Landessprachen in den Gemeinde(gruppe)n, 2000
Langues nationales parlées dans les (groupes de) communes, en 2000

French speaking: 20.4% of the population