Rules for
the use of
ESPAD databases

Including motivational comments

September 2009
Background
This document includes some general aspects as well as detailed rules related to the ESPAD 03 and ESPAD 07 databases respectively. It has been continuously updated and this version takes into consideration what was decided at the ESPAD Project meeting in Riga in October 2008.

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) has collected data four times in an increasing number of countries. The first data collection in 1995 included 26 countries, the second in 1999 30 countries and the third in 2003 35 countries. The fourth survey in 2007 also gathered 35 countries. The first three international ESPAD reports were based on standardised national reports produced by each national ESPAD researcher, while the result section of the report from 2007 was based on a common database.

The possibility of gathering the 2003 data in a common database was discussed at several ESPAD Project meetings and a large majority of the ESPAD researchers was always in favour of this idea. As a pilot project, Thoroddur Bjarnason gathered and analysed some national datasets from the 1999 data collection. For this purpose he produced a limited database. His experiences were positive and resulted in a database containing data collected in 2003 in around 30 countries.

As mentioned above, the results chapters of the report from the 2007 data collection were based on a common database to which all countries had to contribute with national datasets.

There are two important aspects to consider in relation to a common ESPAD database. One is related to the production of future ESPAD reports, which would be simplified that way, and the other to the possibility to do further analysis on already merged data, be it a matter of a few or many countries’ data.

At the Steering Committee meeting after the Vienna Project meeting in 2004 Björn Hibell, Thoroddur Bjarnason and Gerhard Gmel were appointed to work out a suggestion about the use of a common ESPAD database for further analysis. The ideas of the group were presented at the Project meeting in the Faroe Islands in September 2005. The draft guidelines were accepted in principle even though all ESPAD researchers were given the possibility to send comments until October 15. It was also decided that a decision about the content should be taken by the Steering Committee, after which it was up for decision again at the Project meeting in Helsinki, June 2006.

With the large number of participating countries that collected data from a large number of students (more than 100,000 in each of the two data collections data collections), ESPAD data can be a very important source for a better understanding of the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs among young people.

There are several aspects to consider about an ESPAD database, including who should contribute and who should be allowed to use it and under which conditions. The decided rules are presented in this document together with some motivational comments.

When writing earlier versions of this document we looked at the procedures used by the GENACIS Project (Gender, Alcohol, and Culture: An International Study), in which Gerhard Gmel is active, as well as the HBSC project (Health Behaviour in School – aged children). We also studied the rules that are related to the use of the EMCDDA Databank on population surveys.

Contribution to the ESPAD database
It has been decided that future ESPAD reports should be produced by the help of common databases. A delivery to an ESPAD database for the production of ESPAD reports only means that the delivered data can be used for the production of an ESPAD report. Any national Principal Investigator should have the possibility to forbid any further use of the delivered national dataset.
Rules

- All ESPAD researchers are obliged to deliver their national datasets at a time decided by an ESPAD Project meeting.
- With the exception of the production of common international ESPAD reports, no one will be forced to make their data available in a common ESPAD database.

Access to the ESPAD database

It has been discussed at several ESPAD Project meetings that access to the ESPAD database initially should be limited to ESPAD researchers. If so, how long should this period be? One or two years seems to be too short a period. One possibility could be to follow the idea in the guidelines for the use of the HBSC database, which would mean that access to the ESPAD database should be limited to ESPAD researchers until the database from the next data collection is available. After that a restricted version of the database, in which single students or classes should not be possible to identify, might be available to the international research community.

Since ESPAD researchers can use 12 months to produce a paper it seems reasonable to keep this before the database should be made available for the international research community. This would mean that the ESPAD 03 Database should be open for external use from April 1, 2010.

To keep some kind of control of the use of the 03 Database it seems reasonable that all external researchers should apply via a Principal Investigator, who becomes responsible for submitting the application to the committee. Possible overlaps can be informed about to let the researchers decide how to deal with it.

Should there be any limitations in ESPAD researchers’ access to the ESPAD database? Should for example an ESPAD researcher that does not allow his/her data to be used for any other analysis than for the production of an ESPAD report be allowed to use the database without any limitations? It sounds reasonable to think that access to the database should have the same limitations that someone puts on the use of his/her national data. A consequence of this would be that ESPAD researchers that don’t allow others to use his/her data (level 1) should not have access to the ESPAD database during the time when ESPAD researchers have exclusive rights to do so.

It would be valuable for the authors of international ESPAD reports to have a possibility to work in peace and quiet and not to feel any pressure to “compete” with others that have started to use the database. The process of writing a report also includes uncovering possible errors in the national datasets or the common database why an international database cannot be considered ready for use until an international ESPAD report is completed. Furthermore, an ESPAD report is a ‘reference work’ against which everybody using a database can check their findings. It is therefore important for quality assurance that papers are not produced before the report has been published. A conclusion of this would be that the initial access to a database should be limited to those who directly work with an international ESPAD report. Each researcher, however, can of course continue to analyse his/her own national dataset, as have been the case from the beginning of the ESPAD project.

Another aspect, which points in the same direction, is that the content of international ESPAD reports has developed over time and that it is planned to continue this development. Thus, the authors should be given the opportunity to include data that seem relevant and important without limitations formulated by others that have started to use the database.

Yet another aspect that points in the direction of initially limiting access of a database to the persons that are directly working on an international ESPAD report is the risk of leaks. The smaller the number of people that have access to a database before an international report is published the smaller the risk of leaks.
Rules

General

- Until the day that the international ESPAD report is launched access to a new database is limited to those who are directly involved in writing that report.
- The use of a new ESPAD database is restricted to ESPAD researchers.
- Old ESPAD databases will be open for use by non-ESPAD researchers.
- Researchers must follow all rules specified in this document.

2. The 03 Database

- The ESPAD 03 Database will be open for external use from April 1, 2010.
- External researchers shall apply via a Principal Investigator (PI) who is responsible for submitting the application form to the ESPAD coordinators.

3. The 07 Database

- The use of the 07 Database is limited to ESPAD researchers
- The database is open for applications from April 1, 2009.
- ESPAD researchers that don’t allow other ESPAD researchers access to his/her national (level 1) data should not have access to the ESPAD 07 Database.

Conditions for submitting data

The goal should be that a final (after the publication of an ESPAD report) ESPAD database includes as many national datasets as possible.

All Principal Investigators shall inform the coordinators whether their national data set can be in the database that is available for research purposes. To avoid misunderstandings it is important that all communication about a country’s choice of access level is done in writing and that this is a process between the Principal Investigator in each country and the ESPAD coordinators.

Rules

- The Principal Investigator in each country should specify in writing the type of access to the national dataset that will be allowed. The type of access can be changed in writing by the Principal Investigator at any time.

- Three levels of access are specified:
  
  **Level 1**: Allows the use of data for writing an international ESPAD report only. It does not allow the data to be distributed beyond the Steering Committee or to be used for any analysis other than what is required for the writing of an international report.

  **Level 2**: Allows other ESPAD researchers access to the data. All ESPAD Principal Investigators should be informed about incoming applications and have a possibility to deny access within a 3 weeks period. The Chair of an ESPAD Thematic group or the Principal Investigator of a national research team must apply for such access according to the rules detailed below, and upon approval the applicant must sign a contract specifying the terms of use.

  **Level 3** (only relevant for the ESPAD database): Allows non ESPAD researchers access to the data. Such use must be applied for according to the rules detailed below, and upon approval the applicant must sign a contract specifying these terms.

Application procedure

Once a new database is ready for use it could in principle be available for any ESPAD researcher that wants to use it for analysis that meets scientific standards and is not sponsored by the alcohol, tobacco,
pharmaceutical or gambling industries. However, if no application procedure is used there is a risk that two research teams, unaware of each other, are working on more or less the same research question.

Another aspect to consider is whether there should be some kind of quality criteria, i.e. that the analysis should be judged in advance as being of “enough” a high quality.

It seems doubtful to have some kind of quality control in advance. One reason for this is that it from a rather short description can be difficult to judge the quality. And even if the quality appears to be satisfactory this is no guarantee for a good work. Another aspect is that it in most cases probably will be such a control at a later stage, when an article is sent to a peer reviewed journal. Hence, it seems reasonable that an interested researcher decides what he/she wants to do and describes this in an application, but that this is not exposed to any quality control.

An ESPAD database is unique since it contains a lot of variables gathered in many countries that makes it useful for a large number of different analyses. Hence, it seems to be a waste of time and resources if two or more researchers/research teams analyse more or less the same research question at the same time. To avoid this a rather simple application form is used at which the interested researcher describes the planned project in a standardised way (the main objective, the research questions, the countries included, the variables that are planned to be used and the planned strategy of data analysis). If it turns out that two or more research teams have similar ideas, the Application committee (see Appendix 2) could act as a facilitator to bring groups with the same aims together.

In order to give all individual ESPAD researchers and the ESPAD Thematic groups a reasonable time to write an application when a new database is ready, a deadline for submission of initial applications will be decided. If two or more researchers are interested in the same or a similar research question, the Application committee will try to find a solution that suits all parties concerned. If an application from an individual and from an ESPAD Thematic group are similar and no solution can be found that suits all parties concerned, it seems reasonable that priority is given to the application from the Thematic group. After this initial deadline there will be no more time limits.

To avoid that an ESPAD researcher blocks too many research questions a possibility might be to limit the number of proposals from a country or from an ESPAD Thematic group. On the other hand, maybe that the most important is not the number of research questions someone is working at but to avoid that the different ESPAD researchers/research groups work on similar issues without knowing of each other. A way to avoid possible misunderstandings related to this aspect could be to restrict the application signing right to national Principal Investigators and to chairs of the ESPAD Thematic groups.

When someone gets an approval to start analysing a specific research question, which will be blocked for other ESPAD researchers, the question arises about for how long time the researcher can work alone on the specified issue. It seems obvious that we need some kind of a time limit, otherwise an interesting research question can be blocked for too a long time.

The GENACIS project uses a time limit of one year for the researcher(s) to complete the specified analysis. Another timeframe could of course be a year and a half (18 months) or two years. To stimulate a continuous development of the research field in which ESPAD data can be of value, it seems important that the time to use for the suggested research question is not too long. With this perspective, the 12 months period used by GENACIS seems to be a reasonable time period.

To avoid that ESPAD researchers send applications about research questions that someone already is working on, it would be an advantage if approved applications are easily found somewhere. The easiest would be to put them on the ESPAD web page, which also should have a publication record of all kinds of reports that have used the ESPAD database.
The easiest procedure seems to be that applications are sent to the ESPAD coordinators. Before deciding about an application the coordinators could consult the Database manager. If there are uncertainties the coordinators may also consult other ESPAD researchers.

A more formal version could be to form a small Application committee consisting of the ESPAD coordinators and the Database manager complemented by two experienced senior ESPAD researchers.

Another possibility could be that a decision about an application is taken by the ESPAD Steering committee. However, since it is expected that only very few applications will be similar to already approved applications, most of the work of handling applications will probably be rather routine like. If this becomes the case it seems more pragmatic that a decision is taken by a smaller group than the Steering committee.

**Rules for ESPAD researchers wanting to use the most recent ESPAD database**

- All ESPAD researchers that want to use a new ESPAD database shall fill in a simple application form. The main purpose of this is to avoid accidental duplications.
- Applications should be sent to the ESPAD coordinators. Decisions should be taken by the ESPAD Application committee consisting of the coordinators, the database manager and two experienced senior ESPAD researchers. Whenever relevant, the Application committee will consult one or more of the Thematic group leaders.
- When a new database is ready a deadline for internal applications from ESPAD researchers will be announced. After that applications can be sent at any time.
- Applications must be submitted by a national Principal Investigator or the chair of an ESPAD Thematic group, although these individuals need not to be (co-)authors of the articles, papers and reports.
- If two or more applications are too close the Application committee will try to find a solution that suits all parties. If this cannot be done and if one of the applications is from an ESPAD Thematic group the latter will be prioritised.
- After the database has been delivered to an applicant he/she should submit an article/paper/report within 12 months. After that other researchers that are interested in investigating the same research question can submit an application.
- An application will be considered successfully completed when it has been submitted to a scientific journal or publisher.
- All approved applications will be listed on the ESPAD web page.
- Any possible disputes about an application should be solved by the ESPAD Steering committee, which is the final arbiter of such issues.
- Applications that fulfil the conditions and do not overlap with applied applications will be routinely accepted.

**Rules for non-ESPAD researchers**

- Non-ESPAD researchers only have access to old ESPAD databases after a specific date decided by an ESPAD Project meeting.
- The ESPAD application form should be used.
- The application form should be sent to the Principal Investigator in the country where the researcher is located. If a non-European wants to apply he/she has to find an ESPAD researcher to apply via.
- Applications should be forwarded by the Principal Investigator to the coordinators. Decisions shall be taken by the Application committee decided above.
- Possible overlaps with other applications will be informed about by the Application committee to let the external researchers decide how to deal with them.
Ethical aspects

The main idea behind the development of common ESPAD databases is of course, besides the production of ESPAD reports, to make a rich and unique source of information available for future research. It might seem obvious that this search for new knowledge only should be in the hands of the international research community and that the use of the ESPAD database solely should be based on research oriented aspects. This means, as a logical consequence, that the database should not be used for commercial purposes.

It can of course be difficult to draw a strict borderline for this, but it raises the aspect of having some ethical conditions related to the use of the ESPAD database. At the ESPAD Steering Committee meeting in Stockholm in January 2005 it was concluded that ESPAD should not have any direct cooperation with the alcohol industry. One reason for this was that many national funders are governments and that many governments would hesitate if ESPAD data should be used by the alcohol industry or with industry funded resources.

This ethical perspective could be broadened also to include possible cooperation with other industries, such as the pharmaceutical, tobacco and gambling industries.

Another ethical issue is that the results from an analysis might be controversial to a country. In such a case it is important that conclusions are not based on misunderstandings or on a lack of knowledge of the situation in the country in question. It is also important to realise that governments or politicians might be sensitive in some countries. One way of dealing with such issues is to have a dialogue with the Principal Investigator in the country concerned.

Rules

- ESPAD databases may not be used for any commercial purposes.
- Direct or indirect funding from the alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceutical and gambling industries is not allowed when using the ESPAD database.
- If results might be controversial to a country the Principal Investigator in that country should be contacted for comments.

Data availability

There are in principle two ways of making ESPAD data available for a researcher that have got his/her application approved. One is that he/she is given access to the whole database, i.e. all variables from all countries that have allowed their data to be used. The other principle would be that the applicant only gets access to the variables that have been included in the application and only data from those countries that have been indicated.

Other aspects to consider are whether delivered data should be allowed to be used for other purposes than those mentioned in an applied application and what the applicant should do with the delivered data when the analysis is finished and the report(s) is (are) ready.

The easiest from an administrative perspective would be that an applicant, after the application has been approved, gets access to the whole database. A disadvantage with this could be that it increases the risk that other variables than those specified in the application will be used for analytical purposes. This could, for example, create a conflict with other researchers whose approved applications include analysis of these other variables.

Another disadvantage to allow access to the whole database is that it most probably increases the risk that ESPAD data will be distributed out of the control of the ESPAD project. On the other hand, from the perspective of the database manager, the easiest would of course be to send the whole database.
It is probably rather obvious that a researcher should not be allowed to use the received data for any other purposes than those mentioned in an applied application. This also implies that it should not be allowed to forward data to any researcher that is not directly involved in the defined project. It also seems reasonable that all copies of a delivered dataset should be destroyed when the planned report(s) is ready.

**Rules**

**General**

- When an application is approved, the Principal investigator, the chair of a Thematic group or the external applicant will get the whole database on a CD.
- It is strictly prohibited to use data from the database for any other purposes than those mentioned in an approved application.
- If an applicant wants to extend the analysis to other variables than those mentioned in the applied application, he/she needs the approval of the Application committee.
- The applicant is not allowed to forward data to any person that is not directly involved in the applied research project.
- When an application is approved the applicant should sign a contract with the rules before the CD with the ESPAD database is delivered.

**Non-ESPAD researchers**

- Non-ESPAD researchers are only allowed to use old ESPAD databases decided about by an ESPAD Project meeting.
- The applicant is allowed to use the ESPAD 03 Database up to 12 months.
- After 12 months the applicant shall confirm in writing to the ESPAD coordinators that the CD is destroyed and that all possible copies are deleted. This document shall be accompanied by all papers, articles, reports etc. in which ESPAD 03 data have been used.

**ESPAD researchers**

- Unless otherwise negotiated and confirmed in writing all copies of the delivered database should be destroyed by the estimated date of completion, but not later than 12 months after the database has been delivered, when the planned report(s) is (are) ready, when an article is submitted for publication or whenever the ESPAD Steering committee decides that they should be destroyed. The 12 months is the deadline for submission and data can be kept longer for revisions, but not more than 24 months all together, after permission from the Application committee.
- When an article is submitted for publication or a report is ready, or when the time limit has passed, all possible copies of the database should be destroyed.
- When finished, the Principal Investigator, or the chair of a Thematic group, should confirm in writing that all copies of the database are deleted. For pragmatic reasons the Principal Investigator, or the Thematic group chair, will be allowed to keep the original CD. However, it is strictly forbidden to use this version until a new Application is submitted and accepted.
- The Principal Investigator, or the chair of a Thematic group, who is given the responsibility of a CD with an ESPAD database is responsible for informing all colleagues that might get a copy of the database about these rules.
- If a country gets a new Principal Investigator he/she is obliged to take over all responsibilities from the previous Principal Investigator.

**Authorship and acknowledgements**

With such a large number of countries and researchers that will contribute to the ESPAD database, it is important to have as clear rules as possible about the authorship. In line with guidelines used by scien-
tific journals and others, the mere fact that someone has contributed to the ESPAD database is not an enough reason for inclusion in the list of authors.

In line with other guidelines it is reasonable that authorship should be restricted to those persons that have had an active role in the production of an article or other publication. The rules below are to a large extent based on the guidelines used by the GENACIS project.

**Rules**

- The first author of any publication based on the ESPAD database will be the individual who played the primary role in conceptualising, designing, interpreting and writing about the analyses reported in that article, paper or report.

- Other major authors will be those individuals who make substantial contributions to conceptualising, conducting, interpreting and/or writing about the analyses in that publication.

- After a collaborative analysis has been completed, a draft report of the findings will be provided to all participating authors. These partners will be expected to respond to the draft in a timely manner and to submit to the first author of the publication their suggested additions, revisions and corrections.

- The following acknowledgement footnote should be used in all publications using data from ESPAD databases:

  “This article (paper, report) includes data from a database produced within the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD), a collaborative European project coordinated by the Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN). This article (paper, report) is written in line with the rules for the use of the ESPAD database. The National Principal Investigators providing data for this study were (name, country, institution) (in alphabetical order by country).

- The ESPAD Steering committee will review and resolve possible disagreements about authorship or substantive content of publications that cannot be solved informally. The ESPAD Steering committee will be the final arbiter of such issues.

**Changes of the rules**

Since the rules are decided by an ESPAD Project meeting, the principle ought to be that any future changes also should be decided by an ESPAD Project meeting. However, when changes are judged to be urgent it seems reasonable also to have another possibility. The most logical solution in such a case seems to be the ESPAD Steering committee.

**Rules**

- Changes of these rules should be decided by an ESPAD Project meeting.

- In urgent cases this can also be done by the ESPAD Steering committee. In such a case the decision should be ratified, or changed, at next ESPAD Project meeting.
The use of the ESPAD 03 data base

By October 5, 2006 the Principal Investigators in the following countries have allowed access for the use of their national data in the ESPAD 03 data base on the levels below. A more detailed description of the levels is found on page 4 above.

Level 1: No use at all

Level 2: Permission required in advance for any use of a national dataset

- The Netherlands
- The United Kingdom

Level 3: The National dataset can be used by ESPAD researchers who have got an application approved

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- The Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- The Faroe Islands
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Isle of Man
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malta
- Norway
- Romania
- Russia
- The Slovak Republic
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- Ukraine
The use of the ESPAD 07 Database

By September 2009 the Principal Investigators in the following countries have allowed access for the use of their data in the ESPAD 07 Database on the levels below. A more detailed description of the levels is found on page 4 above.

**Level 1: No use at all**
- Monaco

**Level 2: Access limited to ESPAD researchers – conditioned a three week notice is made before an application is approved by the Application Committee.**
- Armenia
- Austria
- Belgium (Flanders)
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Faroe Islands
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Isle of Man
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- Slovak Republic
- Slovenia
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Ukraine
- United Kingdom
**ESPAD Application Committee**

The ESPAD Project meeting in the Faroe Islands September 12-13, 2005 appointed an Application committee, which by April 2009 consists of Björn Hibell (Sweden) chair, Thoroddur Bjarnason (Iceland), Gerhard Gmel (Switzerland), Ulf Guttormsson (Sweden) (replacing Barbro Andersson) and Marina Kuzman (Croatia).