

Drugs and Drug Addictions, Essential Data

Fifth Edition of the Report on Drugs Phenomenon in France, carried out by the OFDT

For ten years the OFDT (*Observatoire français des drogues et des toxicomanies*; French Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction) has been publishing an updated report on drugs and drug addictions in France based upon data scientifically validated. Such a work represents for all specialists in this area a reference publication enabling to gather information about crucial issues pertaining to drugs in France.

For its 5th version, this report named *Drugs and Drug Addictions, Essential Data* carries on with the same purposes as previously: gathering and putting into perspective the most recent pieces of information in order to give the most comprehensive insight into this complex phenomenon.

As the former edition published in 2002 (*Drugs and Drug Addictions, Indicators and Trends*), this one includes three main lines. The first part offers an inventory covering major cross-disciplinary themes: usage and opinions, health and social issues, legal issues and supply. The second part is devoted to tendencies for each substance (alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and crack, ecstasy and amphetamines, synthetic and natural hallucinants, heroin and other opiates, non-opiate psychotropic medicines, poppers, glues and other solvents, tobacco and polyuse). At each step, the report sets out the main evolutions and compares France to its European environment. The third and last section focuses upon the legal framework (on alcohol, tobacco, psychotropic medicines and illegal drugs) and public policies including a presentation of the governmental plan to fight against illicit drugs, tobacco and alcohol (2004-2008). Eventually annexes (glossary, chronology and methodological references) complete the whole.

From a formal point of view, *Drugs and Drug Addictions, Essential Data* has been remodelled. Deliberately more succinct than the previous release (204 pages), the book is made up of files. Such a bias is meant for an easy access and reading, whether linear or selective, and whatever questions the reader may ask him/herself: general or specific to each substance.

The French edition is published by Éditions de la Découverte (Guides collection) and will be sold € 14.50 from March 24th, 2005 onwards. *Drugs and Drug Addictions, Essential Data* opens with a summary available on the following websites: www.ofdt.fr and www.drogues.gouv.fr

Drugs and Drug Addiction, Essential Data tries to bring about some facts to answer three basic questions: how many people use drugs in France, either as a single experience or as a more regular one? Which users are in trouble? Which health, social and legal damages are caused by these uses?

How Many People Use Drugs in France?

Use in the whole French population

Tobacco and alcohol are the mostly used psychoactive substances in France. Alcohol is used at least occasionally by a large majority of French, and more regularly by a quarter of the entire population. Tobacco is also widely experimented. Yet, because of its strong addictive power, it is often used daily: 3 individuals out of 10 smoke on a daily basis. Psychotropic medicines, mainly used in a medical prescription context, rank third when it comes to psychoactive substances frequency of use.

Cannabis stands for the most used illicit substance. While almost 11 millions French have experimented it, only a slight minority uses it on a regular basis. The other illicit drugs are tested more marginally.

Estimate of the amount of regular users of psychoactive substances among the 12-75 year-olds in Metropolitan France, 2003

<i>Alcohol</i>	<i>13.1 millions</i>
<i>Tobacco</i>	<i>13.0 millions</i>
<i>Psychotropic medicines</i>	<i>3.8 millions</i>
<i>Cannabis</i>	<i>850,000</i>

Note: regular use = 10 uses or more during last thirty days, except for tobacco (daily use)

Sources: Data from OFDT, INSERM/OFDT/MJENR, INPES; OFDT estimates

Use among youngsters

Usage among youngsters differs from that of their elders according to two main features: the prevailing rank of tobacco as well as the important role of cannabis.

Tobacco is undoubtedly the substance most regularly used by the young. At the age of 17-18, 4 youngsters out of 10 smoke daily. Regular use of alcohol and cannabis rank far behind: it concerns 1 youngster out of 7. As far as daily use is concerned, cannabis ranks before alcohol.

Therefore alcohol daily use is quite infrequent at that age (1%), and daily use of cannabis is less so (5%).

Regular use of psychotropic medicines is infrequent among young people (3% at the age of 17-18). At that age, contrary to what happens among adults, the intake of such medicines occurs through medical prescriptions.

Experimenting illicit drugs other than cannabis is a quite infrequent phenomenon that occurs for at most 5% of young people (aged 17-18), for such substances as: poppers, hallucinogenic mushrooms or ecstasy. Recent use of these substances remains even more occasional and never exceeds 1%, except for ecstasy.

Mostly masculine users

Men resort much more frequently to regular use of alcohol and especially of cannabis than females. On the other hand, smoking tobacco stands for a less gender discriminating behaviour, whereas the use of psychotropic medicines can more frequently be observed among females than among men.

The same gender disparities can be noticed among the 17-18 year-olds yet with some differences: gaps between genders are more significant than those among adults for alcohol and psychotropic medicines, and less significant for cannabis and tobacco.

Frequency of recent use for illicit drugs other than cannabis among the 17-18 year-olds, 2003

Ecstasy	1.6%
Hallucinogenic Mushrooms	1.0%
Poppers	1.0%
Amphetamines	0,9%
Cocaine	0.9%
Inhalants	0.7%
LSD	0.5%
Crack	0.4%
Heroin	0.3%

Note: Recent use = use during previous month

Evolutions

Evolution tendencies in drug use among the whole French population differ according to the substance and the age-bracket surveyed.

For the two most used substances, tobacco and alcohol, a decrease tendency comes to light. The reduction of alcohol quantities used is very old (more than 40 years) and mainly stems from the drop off in wine use. Thanks to such a decrease France is still losing its most outstanding early rank in Europe, although it stays within the group of countries with a high alcohol use. The decrease of tobacco use is more recent (around 15 years) and due to a declining male tobacco addiction. The current level of french tobacco addiction stands around european average.

Other uses are increasing, such as psychoactive medicines, and notably antidepressants. The frequency of using psychotropic medicines ranks high in France, as well as the use of regular medicines in general. Cannabis use is also on the rise. For other illicit drugs infrequently used, an increasing distribution can be observed, as far as hallucinants and stimulants are concerned, cocaine and ecstasy in particular.

Findings are slightly different among youngsters. In this age-group, the decrease tendency has reversed these last years. Currently the young French are around the European average as far as tobacco addiction is concerned.

The same yet more recent (2002-2003) turnaround seems to come into view for cannabis. After a decade (1990's) of high steady increase, when French youngsters were among the most heavy cannabis users in Europe, more recent data actually show stabilization, and even the beginning of a tendency reversal.

Alcohol use among youngsters, whose evolution proves more complex to establish, seems to be rising slightly. Even so, young French register much lower levels of use than the European average. This is also the case with experimenting or using other illicit drugs than cannabis. Yet in that respect the tendency is increasing.

Frequency of regular use of the four major psychoactive substances in Metropolitan France, among 17-18 year-olds (in 2003) and 18-75 year-olds (in 2002)

	17-18 year olds (2003)	18-75 olds (2002)
Alcohol	14 %	31 %
Tobacco	40 %	29%
Psychotropic Medicines	3%	9%
Cannabis	13%	1%

Sources: ESCAPAD 2003, OFDT; EROPP 2002, OFDT

Which users are in trouble?

Problem drug use

According to standards as regards the quantities used and the interval between waking-up and the first daily cigarette, one third of daily smokers aged 26-75 show some signs of addiction. Among the younger ones, 12% of the 17-18 year-olds show a strong addiction to tobacco.

Problem alcohol use may be considered through a criterion setting up the maximum amount of standard alcohol glasses drunk on a daily basis without harming one's health (3 glasses a day for men, and 2 for women, according to the World Health Organization): in 2002, on the previous day, 18% of men and 6% of women had used a higher number of glasses than those advised. According to surveys, there is an estimated 4 millions individuals (13% of men and 4% of women among the 12-75 year-olds) who can be categorized as alcohol users running the risk (old or current) of an addiction.

Cannabis use is usually "occasional", especially among teenagers and young adults. Its regular use may cause some troubles. Thus a majority of cannabis daily users acknowledge facing a problem at least once during usage: memory disorders, people around them blaming them for their behaviours, and other problems such as lousy grades at school or quarrels with friends. However such difficulties rarely occur again for the same person. They may nevertheless cause some users to resort to the medico-social system.

Consequences of problem drug use of illicit drugs are mostly related to heroin use. This is the main substance inducing a socio-sanitary care for illicit drug users, as cocaine, often used in combination with opiates, appears to a lesser extent. The estimate for 1999 is of 150,000 to 180,000 opiate or cocaine "problematic" users. This is a relatively young yet ageing population

(around 30), mainly male (4 men vs. 1 woman), frequently suffering from psychiatric disorders and socially difficulties. The observation of usage and users of such substances during last years shows, among problematic users, a rise in cocaine use, whatever the mode of use (injected, sniffed, smoked), while heroin use stabilizes after having decreased. Use of other substances are frequently combined with it, particularly alcohol, psychotropic medicines, and cannabis.

Care

Psychoactive substance users experiencing difficulties with their use can benefit from health or social care. The number of new patients cured each year for their problem drug use can be assessed: around 55,000 new patients admitted in tobacco specialized consultations, 43,000 in alcoholology specialized structures, and 34,000 in those dedicated to drug addiction.

Tobaccology specialized consultations treat as many males as females generally aged around forty. Most of the time, these are heavy smokers: more than one packet a day on average. Since 1999, when they could be sold without prescription, the use of nicotine substitutes has been steadily increasing.

Alcoholology specialized structures treat a population mainly composed of males (3 men vs. 1 woman), aged 40 on average, reasonably well-integrated socially. Nearly one third of patients are legally instructed to treatment, following road offences related to their alcohol use, and that proportion is increasing.

A large part of the population with a problematic opiate or cocaine use is subjected to a socio-sanitary care, notably through an opiate substitute treatment with methadone or high-dosage buprenorphine (HDB). The latter strongly developed in France during the second half of the 1990's. An estimation indicates that, in 2003, a majority of drug-addicts, between 83,000 and 100,000, were granted a substitute treatment. In about 85% of cases, it was a HDB cure.

Which damages are caused by these uses?

Health damage induced by tobacco and alcohol

Tobacco is the psychoactive substance causing the most significant health damages at community level. Upper aerodigestive tracts cancers, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases are the main pathologies of tobacco addiction. This addiction is regarded as responsible for about 60,000 yearly deaths, i. e., more than 1 decease out of 9. This death rate mostly affects males

(90%) but has been decreasing since the mid-90's, while rising during the same period among females, thus following with a time-lag the evolutions observed in the uses.

Alcohol causes directly a number of pathologies such as liver cirrhosis and foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). It is more or less involved in the outset of a vast number of other damages: aerodigestive ducts cancers, circulatory system diseases (alcohol and tobacco are both responsible for these two groups of pathologies), liver cancers, optical nephritis, polyneuropathy, psychological disorders, accidents (road, domestic, job), fights and suicides. The proportion of individuals in danger of an alcohol overuse, among hospitalised patients, is about 20%. An estimate indicates 45,000 yearly alcohol-induced deceases in France.

Health damages induced by illicit drugs

No decease by cannabis acute intoxication has been recorded yet. Cannabis is nevertheless suspected to play a role in road accidents, pulmonary and upper aerodigestive tracts cancers, and also in some vascular and psychiatric pathologies. Studies currently available do not allow to ascertain the consequences of cannabis uses in these pathologies.

Among drug-addicts, intravenous injection, which causes most of health damages undergone by this population, was frequently performed in the 1990's. Nowadays this mode of administration is decreasing. AIDS (HIV) prevalence keeps on decreasing since the early 90's while hepatitis C virus (HCV) carries on spreading among drug-addicts, now massively affected.

The number of drug-addict deceases has strongly decreased since the mid-90's. Therefore the yearly amount of overdose-induced deaths acknowledged by the police has dropped from 500 in the mid-90's down to less than 100 during last years. Compared to a population of the same age and sex, drug-addicts have nevertheless been proved 5 to 10 times more likely to die.

Social damages and legal problems in connection with alcohol and illicit drugs

Social damages due to alcohol or illicit drugs use are still poorly documented. However some facts can be established. Users of alcohol or illicit drugs under care have more precarious social conditions than those of the whole French population. A link can be drawn between problematic use of alcohol and illicit drugs on the one hand and social exclusion on the other, the features of that connection remaining difficult to figure out.

On the legal level, the main problems are offences of drug use and trafficking, as well as alcohol-induced road offences. In 2003, 108,000 individuals were taken in for questioning for breaches of the law on narcotics, among which 84% for illicit use, mainly of cannabis. Drug-induced legal proceedings mostly involve trafficking: nearly 17,000 convictions in that respect in 2002 with prison sentences in 8 cases out of 10, definite prison terms in 4 cases out of 10. In cases of simple use, following arrest, a great number of individuals involved have not been sentenced, as they benefit from an alternative measure to legal proceedings.

More than 191,000 alcohol-induced offences against road safety have been recorded in 2003. With nearly 109,000 sentences in 2002, such offences stand for more than half of the sentences for breaching the law in that area, and nearly a fourth of the whole sentences in France. Incarceration is ordered in more than 6 cases out of 10.

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