

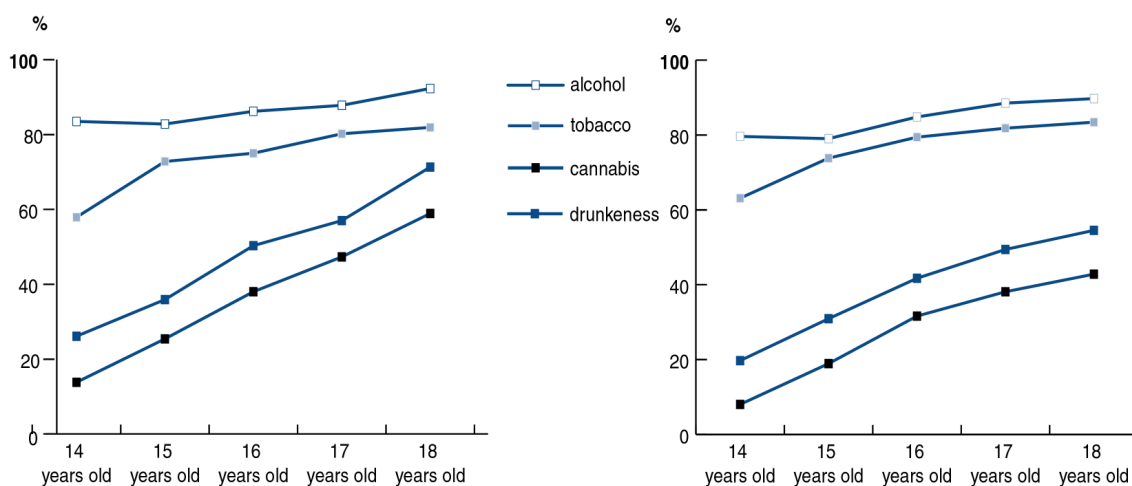
Psychoactive Substances Used by the 14-18 Year-Olds Attending School: 1999 ESPAD Survey, 1993-99 Evolution

Since 1997 the OFDT has set up a perennial device based upon national general population surveys for observing drug-related uses, behaviours, and opinions. Taking part in the ESPAD 1999 (European School Survey on Alcohol and Other Drugs) came within that scope. The survey was carried out by the INSERM team "Santé de l'adolescent" ("Teenager's health"; M. Choquet and S. Ledoux, who have been participating in the ESPAD project since 1993), in partnership with OFDT and the Ministry of National education. The first results are presented by gender and by age, these factors having a strong influence upon use. Other youth-related surveys carried out during the nineties, particularly by INSERM in 1993, help putting data in perspective.

Psychoactive substances experimentation

Experimentation refers to having already used a substance at least once in one's lifetime.

Experimentations: lifetime prevalence by age and by gender



Sources: ESPAD '99 – INSERM – OFDT – MENRT

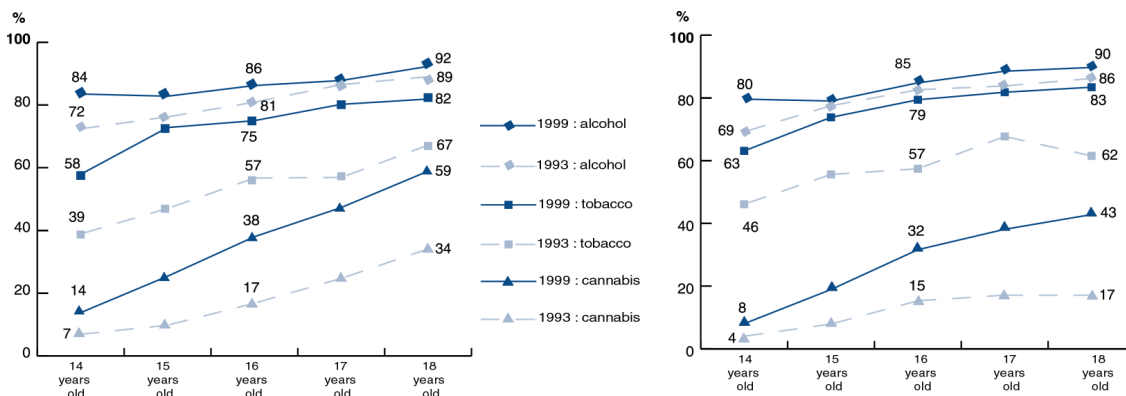
- **The 1999 standards**

The most experimented substance is alcohol, just preceding tobacco. Boys are a little more numerous than girls for having tried alcohol, and conversely, girls have tried tobacco a little more often. These rates increase slightly along with age, more for tobacco than for alcohol: at the age of 14, 81% of the polled have already drunk alcohol (versus 91% at 18). On the other hand, drunkenness depends on age and gender, as far as alcohol is concerned: if at 14 years-old 26% of the boys and 20% of the girls have already been drunk with alcohol, 71% of the boys and 55% of the girls are concerned at 18.

The cannabis experimentation clearly increases with age and proves more frequent for boys whatever their age. From 14 to 18, its prevalence goes from 14 to 59% for boys, and from 8 to 43% for girls.

The “abstaining” teenagers — to wit: youth who never tried alcohol, tobacco, or cannabis — stand for 11% of the boys and 12% of the girls at 14, 4% of the boys and 6% of the girls at 18.

Substances experimentations: lifetime prevalences by gender and by age (in percentage)



Source: ESPAD 99 – INSERM – OFDT – MENRT

For other psychoactive substances mentioned in the questionnaire, the experimentation rates remain low. Indeed, they always stand below 5%, except for substances to be inhaled (glues, solvents, etc.), and to a lesser extent for hallucinogenic mushrooms (among the oldest boys). Whatever age and substance, experimentation is always more frequent for boys than for girls. If it increases with age, as far as hallucinogenic mushrooms are concerned, the experimentation remains level among boys and even slightly decreases among girls, when it comes to substances to be inhaled. This last result can be notably explained inasmuch as, regardless of their gender, three-quarters of the experimenters took a substance to be inhaled before the age of 15, so that its prevalence does not change much during their lives¹. When reading the chart on the left, beware of not lending too much

¹ The survey covers teenagers of varied ages yet does not follow up the same individuals from 14 till 18. When taking that into account, a prevalence may prove

significance to the gaps between different ages, for most of them are not relevant. On the other hand, as far as these substances are concerned, repeated use is seldom observed. A majority of those who tried one of these substances do not revive the experiment.

- **The 1993-99 evolutions**

When comparing with the 1993 INSERM survey, the evolutions are contrasting from one substance to the other. The rate referring to teenagers having at least used **tobacco** once clearly increases between both surveys: for both genders and whatever their age, it stands 20% higher in 1999 than in 1993. Between both surveys, **the lifetime use increased more for girls**: in 1999, and whatever their age, girls are more often experimenters than boys, whereas in 1993, that experimentation was more frequent among 14 years-old females yet more frequent among 18 years-old males. The 1997 Baromètre Santé jeunes CFES provides here a means of comparison that confirms the tendency: in 1997, whatever age or gender, the tobacco experimentation stood midway between the prevalences observed in 1993 and 1999.

As far as alcohol is concerned, from 1993 till 1999, the increase is less obvious than for tobacco. It must be said that alcohol experimentation was already widespread in 1993, so that some saturation can be observed among prevalences, even though **alcohol experimentation proves more precocious in 1999.**

When it comes to cannabis, the increase becomes quite obvious since the age of 15. In 1999, at the age of 18, 59% of the boys and 43% of the girls declare they have already taken cannabis, versus 34 and 17% respectively, in 1993. **For other psychoactive substances**, the prevalences observed are so low that comparing could prove tricky. However the **experimentation rate globally seems to rise between two surveys**, especially concerning substances to be inhaled. Such increase notably relates to the youngest boys.

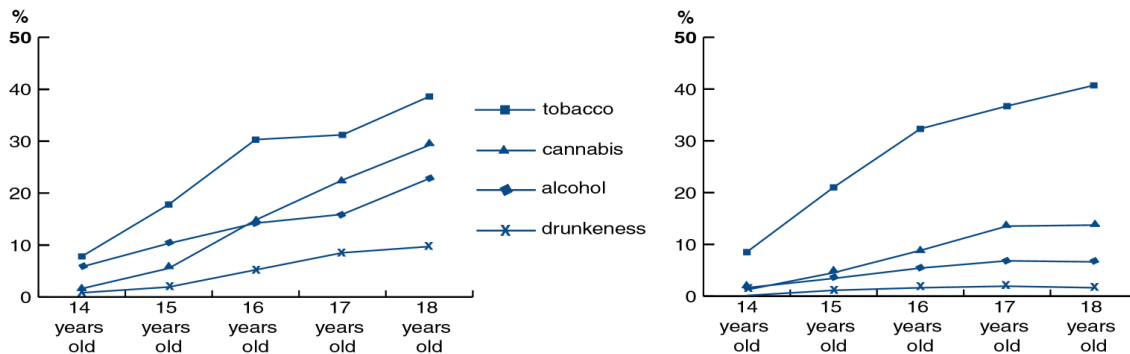
Repeated use of psychoactive substances

The notion of repeated use² must be detailed here as follows: from 10 times a month upwards for alcohol, from one cigarette a day upwards for tobacco, and from 10 times a year upwards for cannabis. As far as drunken states are concerned, the latter are considered to be “repeated” from the yearly number of 10 upwards. Even if they result from a reasoned choice, such thresholds are obviously biased and do not single out realities that sometimes vary much from one to the other.

higher at 14 than at 18 : if experimenting a substance rather happens before 14, but if the substance happens to be more used today than in the past, the young generations will have a lifetime prevalence higher than the one of older generations (generation effect).

² *That alludes to thresholds previously defined.*

Repeated use: rates by age and by gender



Sources: ESPAD 99 – INSERM – OFDT – MENRT

- **The 1999 standards**

The rate of daily smokers, slightly higher among girls, dramatically increases with age. From 14 till 18, it goes from 9 to 41% among girls, and from 8 to 39% among boys. Alcohol repeated uses and recurrent drunken states increase with age yet especially concerns boys. At the age of 18, nearly one male out of four drinks alcohol 10 times or more per month, and one out of ten gets drunk 10 times or more per year. For cannabis, the age-related rise prove more obvious among the boys for which repeated use goes from 2% at 14 years-old to 29% at 18. It must be noticed that 15% of 18 years-old male respondents had taken cannabis more than ten times during the last thirty days.

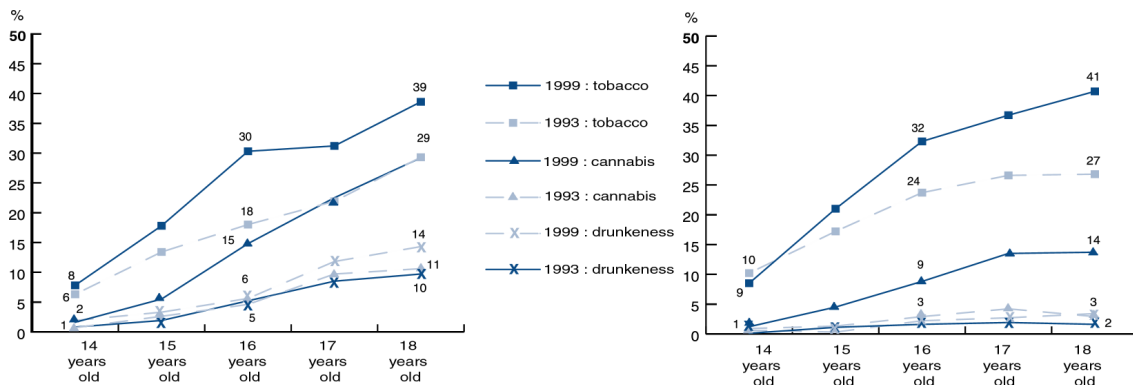
The 1993-99 evolutions

When comparing with the 1993 INSERM survey, repeated uses are apt to increase, a tendency more or less obvious from one substance to the other. **Regarding tobacco, girls are more affected by such an increase.** As for experimentation, daily use is more frequent among the girls whatever their age in 1999, whereas in 1993 the latter would have a tobacco daily use more frequent than 14 years-old boys, yet less frequent when they were 18. The 1997 Baromètre Santé jeunes and the 1997 CADIS-OFDT survey provide very close results, midway between those of '93 and those of '99, confirming the daily tobacco use tendency to increase during the nineties.

Concerning **alcohol repeated use**, comparing prove tricky (the questions asked in 1993 and in 1999 are not similar) yet it seems that **prevalences tend to plateau**. For repeated drunken states, a tendency to decrease can be observed between both surveys. However the 1997 CADIS-OFDT survey shows a rise between 1993 and 1997, yet it was undoubtedly due to an overestimate because the question was asked in different way.

When it comes to **cannabis**, a **distinct increase can be observed whatever age and gender**. The 1997 surveys provide here converging results: cannabis repeated use increases from 1993 till 1997, as from 1997 till 1999; yet after 1997 this rise especially relates to girls.

Repeated use of tobacco and cannabis, and repeated drunken states: rates by age and by gender, in 1993 and 1999



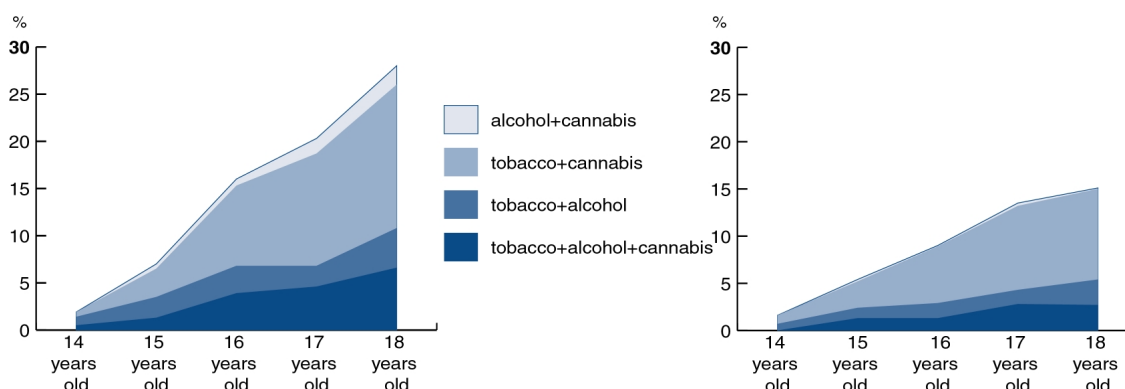
Sources: ESPAD 99 – INSERM – OFDT – MENRT; INSERM 93

Psychoactive multiple uses

Multiple use is here defined as cumulating repeated uses of alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis. Four types of multiple uses are to be considered: repeated use of two of those substances, exclusive of the third (tobacco + alcohol, alcohol + cannabis, tobacco + cannabis), repeated use of three substances (tobacco + alcohol + cannabis). Such combinations do not inevitably imply that those substances were simultaneously taken. As the alcohol-related question differed in 1993, the figures of these multiple uses cannot be compared between 1993 and 1999.

At 14 years-old, 2% of the boys repeatedly use at least two substances, versus 28% at 18. As far as girls are concerned, these rates go from 2 to 15%.

Multiple uses by age and by gender (in added percentages)



Sources: ESPAD 99 – INSERM – OFDT – MENRT

For **boys** between 14 and 18, the tobacco + alcohol combination does not evolve much, going from 1 to 4%. The three others increase more distinctly, particularly the **tobacco + cannabis** combination, which becomes **the most common with age** and concerns 15% of 18 years-old males.

Among girls, the different types of multiple uses also increase with age, yet always remain less frequent than among boys. As among their male counterparts, a prevailing tobacco + cannabis combination can be observed, going from 1% at 14 to 10% at 18 years-old, with a quick rise from 14 to 17, then a levelling off between 17 and 18.

Surveying the use psychoactive substances do not eventually uncover one trend but many of them. The differences observed from 14 to 18 years-old mingle some “age effects” and some “generation effects”: at a given date, behaviours are not the same at 14 or at 18, and for a given age they have also changed throughout the nineties. These tendencies differ according the age considered and the indicators retained. In this case, **experimentation and repeated use must not be mixed up, the latter being clearly less widespread.** These trends are also not similar from one substance to the other, which is due to a circulation that may be more or less widespread, early, or fast. Finally, plain differences emerge between boys and girls, referring to socializing processes and standardizing models which differ according to gender, and whose role still remain to be explored.

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You can also refer to the whole set of detailed charts concerning the use of psychoactive substances by getting into touch with the OFDT or by consulting these websites: <http://lifr69.vfj.inserm.fr/ado472> or www.droques.gouv.fr

- **Methodological references**

This cross-age-gender survey was carried out in around thirty European countries on the basis of a common questionnaire focusing upon drug-related uses, behaviours, and opinions. Initiated by the Swedish Committee for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN), this project is supported by the European Council (Pompidou Group). As it is to be renewed every four years at the same period, this survey offers real perspectives, as far as following up French trends and comparing on a European level are concerned. The data were collected from March till May 1999. In France, the sampling was set up according to the following standards: type of school (collège, vocational lycée, or general and technical lycée), sector (public or private), possible belonging to a ZEP (area targeted for special help in education) and situation (country or city). The selection was done on two levels, 300 schools being previously chosen, each of them having a probability to be selected in proportion with the number of its pupils. Afterwards, two classes were selected at random in each school. In the end the sampling reached 12 113 pupils, who individually answered the questionnaire within the classroom, in the presence of a referent adult in the private sector, and of a health professional (nurse, school doctor) in the public sector, who was responsible for presenting the survey to the pupils and answering the questions they might ask. Among the selected classes, 98,8% took part, and 89,1% of their pupils accepted to fill in the questionnaire: on the whole, the pupils' turnout amounted to 83,6% of the estimated initial sampling.

The survey covers declared uses (the self-answered questionnaire seems to be the best collection method). The youth polled are representative of their group for the ages whose schooling rate proves high (98% at 14, 93% at 16, and 76% at 18). Furthermore, recurrent absentees, who are known to be more often users than others, are under-represented. However, as those who did not come to school the day of the survey do not stand for a high number (9% of the sampling), the results cannot be questioned.

To grasp the evolutions throughout the nineties, the best reference here is the national survey carried out in 1993 by INSERM Unit 472 regarding teenagers health and behaviours (n = 12 391). The latter may indeed be compared with the ESPAD 1999 survey, as far as building up the sampling, the collecting method, or the questionnaire are concerned. Two other surveys, both carried out in 1997 were also used: the CADIS (Centre for Sociological Analysis and Interventions) one covering deviant behaviours of the lycéens only (n = 9 919), done within the scope of a convention with the OFDT, and the Baromètre Santé jeunes, a phone survey among the 12-19 year-olds (n = 4 166) carried out by the CFES (French Committee for Health Education).

- **For more information**

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