

Tendances n° 10

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Facts and figures

The Use of Psychoactive Substances among Adolescents in their Late Teens – Setting up a Annual Survey.

The survey, whose results are shown here, was carried out within the context of the Journée d'appel de préparation à la défense (JAPD, Roll Call Day of Preparation for Defence) established by the October 28th, 1997 Law (pertaining to the French National Service). The ending of the French National Service having led to closing the selection centres, the yearly surveys upon the use of psychoactive substances carried out by the Military Health Department¹ have ceased from 1996 onwards. The information system about drugs and drug addictions would then be deprived of an observation device centred on a most affected population (male, young individuals), more particularly on recent trends. To make up for this lack of information, the OFDT therefore undertook the setting-up of the Enquête sur la santé et les comportements lors de l'appel de préparation à la défense (ESCAPAD, Health and Behaviour Survey during the Roll Call of Preparation for Defence). The questionnaire covers the use of psychoactive substances, as well as the youth health and leisure behaviours. It is self-answered and anonymous. The ESCAPAD 2000 Survey was proffered to every youth attending the May 10th and May 13th sessions in Metropolitan France. Thanks to it, about 14,000 individual answers have been collected.

The JAPD device is based upon a twice weekly reception of the youth for a whole day (Saturday or Wednesday), in 250 to 300 civilian or military centres scattered around the whole national territory. Distributed among groups of 40 individuals and supervised by a serviceman and a reservist, more than 10,000 youngsters are admitted on Saturdays, and about 5,000 on Wednesdays. The three-quarters of the attending individuals on a given day are the same age by three months or so (between 17 years-old and 17 years and 3 months old), and near all of them are between 17 and 19 years-old. This procedure has been put into practice on October 3rd,

¹ As these surveys only concerned males ageing from 18 to 23, their results have not been compared with those from the new one.

1998. Considering girls are only affected by this roll call² since April 1st, 2000, only those of 17 years-old were summoned that year. Thus the results cover the 17 to 19 years-old boys and girls of 17; as a consequence, the age evolutions referred to within the text only apply to boys.

The purpose of this crosswise survey, carried out on an important and representative sample of the young French, is to give accurate results on a narrow age-bracket. It is part of a general project including a school survey, the ESPAD, carried out in March 1999, and a phone survey among 12-75 year-olds, the Baromètre Santé, conducted in late 1999. If these three surveys bring noteworthy similar trends into light, they nevertheless differ in their methods, purposes, and the populations they enfold, proscribing any deduction whatsoever from comparing one with the other. The ESCAPAD Survey, which appears here for the first time, will then be carried out again every year, in order to grasp the use evolutions among youngsters and young adults.

Level of Use of Psychoactive Substances

Experimentation refers to using a substance at least once in one's life.

The notion of repeated use applies here from one cigarette a day onwards during last thirty days for tobacco; from ten times onwards during last thirty days for alcohol; and from ten times onwards during last twelve months for cannabis.

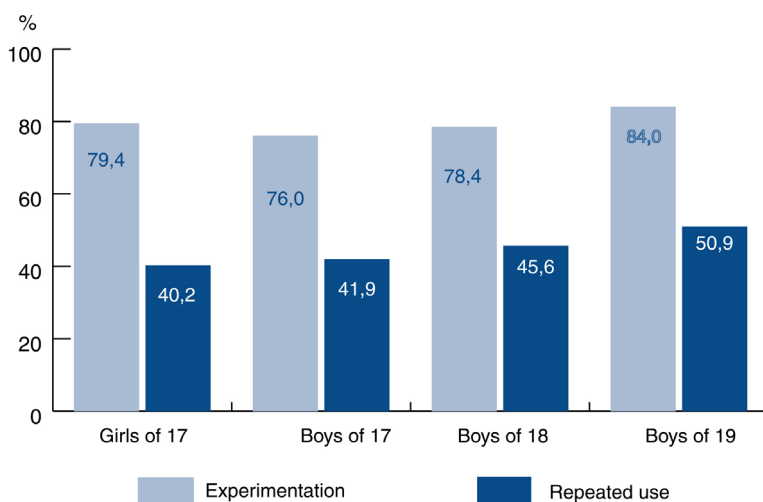
Even though resulting from a sensible choice enabling comparison with other surveys, such thresholds are bound to be arbitrary and do not make the difference between sometimes dissimilar realities.

Tobacco

The tobacco experimenting proves widespread: whatever the age or gender, more than three-quarters of teenagers surveyed declare having already smoked one cigarette during their lives. At the age of 17, tobacco is more often tested by girls than by boys (79.4% against 76.0%). However that disparity vanishes when it comes to repeated use: at 17, the daily tobacco use affects 4 teenagers out of 10, girls or boys. Experimentation and repeated use steadily increase with age: at 19, 84.0% of the boys have already smoked one cigarette and 50.9% of them smoke on a daily basis.

² Earlier they could attend if they volunteer for it.

Tobacco Experimentation and Repeated Use



Source: ESCAPAD 2000 – OFDT

At 17, the tobacco repeated use is similar in quantities for girls and boys. Only a minority of daily smokers uses one packet or more a day (6.4 among girls, 6.8 among boys). The level of use increases with age: among boys smoking on a daily basis, 30.2% smoke more than 10 cigarettes a day at 17 against 41.0% at 19.

Distribution of Daily Smokers according to the Daily Amount of Smoked Cigarettes

	Girls of 17	Boys of 17	Boys of 18	Boys of 19
1 to 5	35.3%	31.8%	25.5%	23.2%
6 to 10	37.4%	38.0%	37.0%	35.8%
11 to 20	20.9%	23.4%	28.0%	32.1%
20 &>	6.4%	6.8%	9.5%	8.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: ESCAPAD 2000 – OFDT

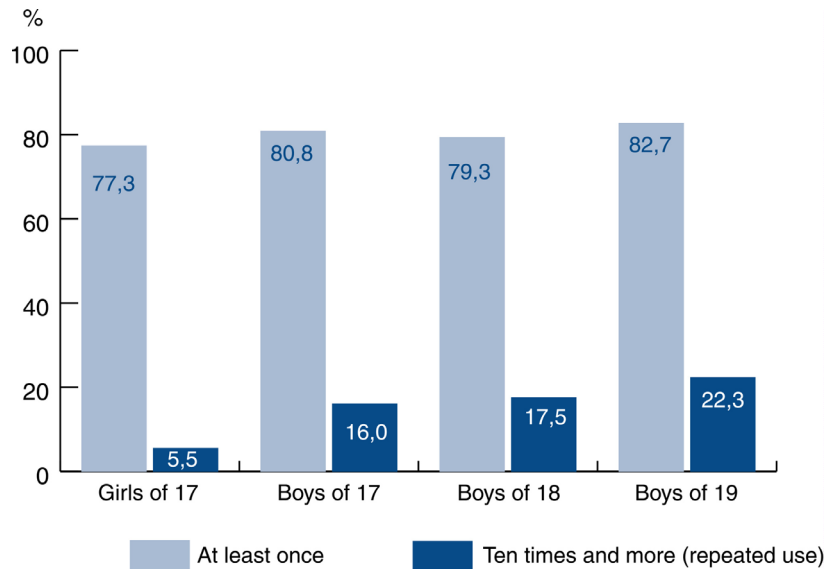
Alcohol

Disparities among gender are more notable for alcohol use. At 17, girls are a bit less numerous for drinking alcohol during the previous month (77.3% against 80.8% as far as boys are concerned), and especially three times less numerous to claim a repeated use (5.5% versus 16.0%). That recurrent use increases with age (22.3% for boys of 19). Thus an important majority of teenagers has drunk alcohol at least once during the previous month, yet the repeated use remarkably affects more males.

The results prove similar as far as states of drunkenness are concerned: at 17, 49.8% of the girls and 63.5% of the boys have already been drunk during their lives (74.9% at 19), whereas boys more often declare experiencing at least 10 states of

drunkenness during their lifetimes (15.1% versus 4.6%), a ratio increasing with age (25.4% of the 19 years-old boys).

Alcohol Use during Last Thirty Days

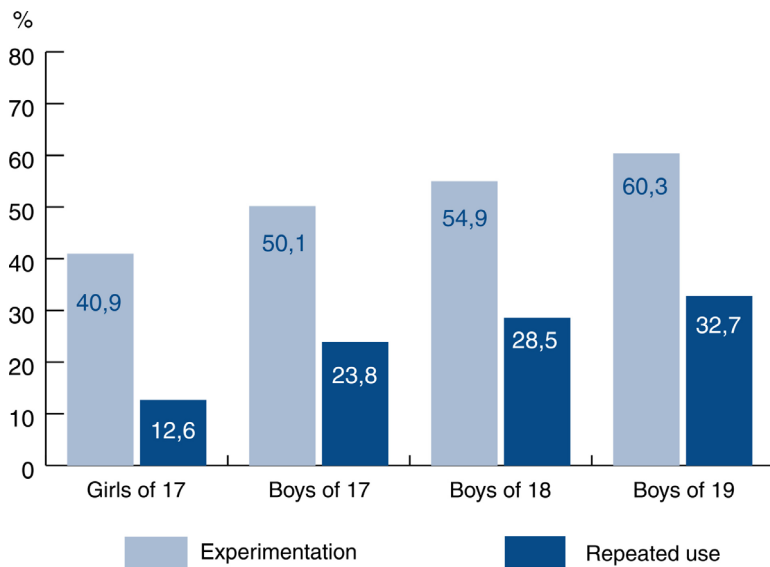


Source: ESCAPAD – OFDT

Cannabis

At 17, 40.9% of the girls and 50.1% of the boys have experienced cannabis, a rate reaching 60.3% for the latter at 19. These significant disparities according to gender and age can also be observed when it comes to repeated use: at 17, boys are twice more numerous for using cannabis at least 10 times during the year (23.8% versus 12.6%), the ratio for recurrent users reaching 32.7% for the 19 years-old boys. At 17, cannabis use seems therefore to belong to the way of live of a not insignificant proportion of teenagers.

Cannabis Experimentation and Repeated Use



Source: ESCAPAD 2000 – OFDT

Having smoked cannabis alone is an unusual behaviour among girls (it affects about one fourth of the girls experimenting it) yet not among boys (about half of them). Having smoked it in the morning or at noon proves more common: nearly half the girls having already smoked cannabis and two-thirds of the boys have experienced it. A surveyed individual having already smoked alone will nearly always have smoked at the beginning of the day, whereas having already smoked in the morning does not imply having already smoked alone. In a very large proportion, those two practices refer to at least repeated cannabis usage. In that respect, they can circumscribe under-groups of more frequent uses.

Other psychoactive substances

Besides tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis, the most frequently reported substances are psychotropic drugs, hallucinogenic mushrooms, poppers, ecstasy, and substances to inhale, as well as LSD, amphetamines, and cocaine to a lesser extent. At 17, those experimentations are always more frequent among boys, except for psychotropic drugs: 29.0% of the girls and 10.6% of the boys have already taken such medicines. However the survey does not provide the means to determine if those drugs have been ingested within the context of a medical prescription. Apart from medicines and as far as the 19 years-old boys are concerned, only four substances exceed 5% when it comes to experimenting them: hallucinogens (8.7%), poppers (8.3%), ecstasy (6.7%), and substances to inhale (6.3%). Poppers (a synthetic inhalant, whose sale is controlled) and hallucinogenic mushrooms prove therefore more often experimented than other substances benefiting from more media coverage, such as ecstasy. The

ratios observed for both those substances also emphasise the need to make them explicitly appear in the questionnaire, as it is generally not done as far as surveys among teenagers are concerned.

Other Psychoactive Substances Experimentation

	Girls of 17	Boys of 17	Boys of 18	Boys of 19
Psychotropic drugs*	29.0%	10.6%	12.7%	13.6%
Hallucinogenic mushrooms	1.6%	4.5%	6.9%	8.7%
Poppers	1.3%	3.4%	4.8%	8.3%
Ecstasy	1.4%	2.8%	4.7%	6.7%
Substances to inhale	3.3%	4.9%	6.6%	6.3%
LSD	0.8%	1.6%	2.8%	4.8%
Amphetamines	0.6%	1.4%	2.4%	3.7%
Cocaine	0.6%	1.3%	2.7%	3.3%
Heroin	0.4%	0.9%	1.4%	1.3%

Source: ESCAPAD 2000 - OFDT

* Labelled as “medicines to cure nervousness, sleeping pills” in the questionnaire.

Multiple Use of Psychoactive Substances

The notion of multiple experimentation refers here to having already use at least two of the three most common substances (tobacco, alcohol, cannabis) in one’s lifetime.

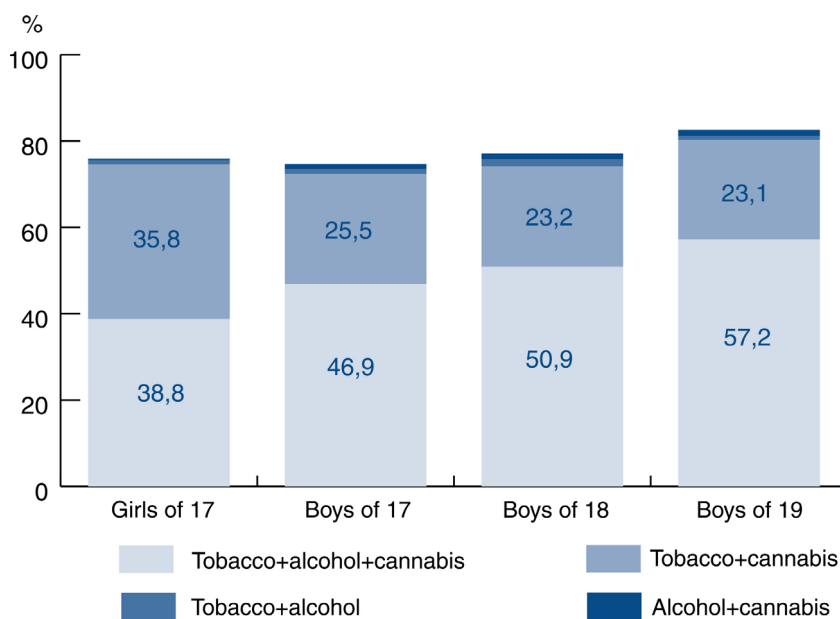
A repeated multiple use implies declaring a repeated use for at least two of the substances aforementioned.

Such indicators do not enable to determine whether those uses do simultaneously occur or not.

Multiple experimentation

At 17, 75.9% of the girls and 74.7% of the boys have experimented at least two substances among tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis. At that age, experimenting the three substances is more frequent among boys (46.9% versus 38.8%), whereas girls are more numerous to have experimented only alcohol and tobacco. Multiple experimentation increases with age to reach 82.6% at 19 (and 57.2% when tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis are combined).

Multiple experimentations



Source: ESCAPAD – OFDT

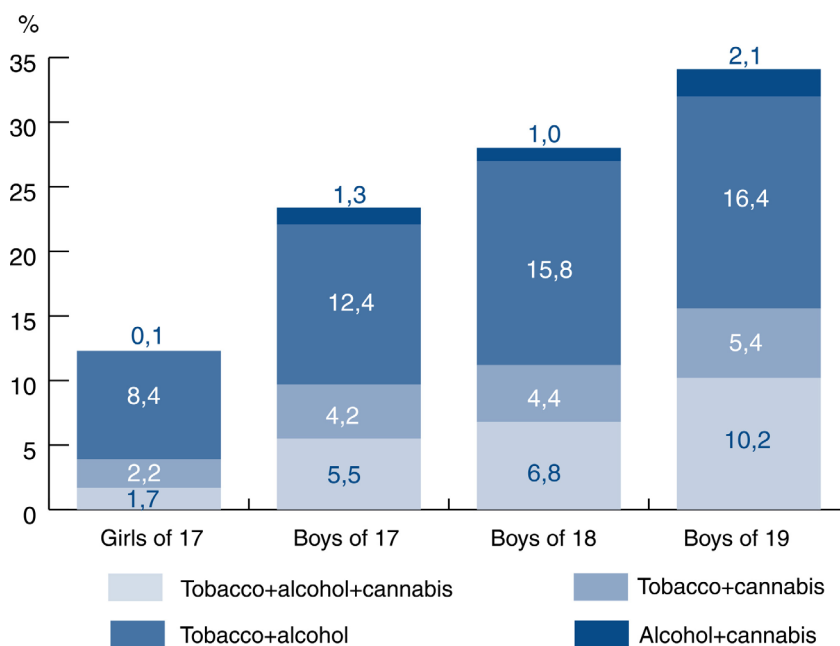
Only individuals indulged in multiple experimentation are shown in this diagram. Percentages are calculated on the whole sample.

The other types of multiple experimentation (tobacco+cannabis, alcohol+cannabis) are unsubstantial: cannabis is then very seldom used without experimenting tobacco and alcohol beforehand. Whatever the age or gender, experimenting these three substances prove more frequent than testing two of them only: those experimentations seem closely connected then.

Repeated multiple use

The variations detected according to age and gender are quite prominent. At 17 repeated multiple use is twice more frequent among boys (12.4% of the girls versus 23.4% of the boys); for both genders, it mainly refers to tobacco and cannabis. Tobacco is the most frequently present substance in repeated multiple uses: actually whatever the age or gender, the most infrequent multiple use matches the combination where tobacco is absent (alcohol+cannabis). Repeated multiple use increases between 17 and 19 to reach 34.1%. Such a rise particularly refers to the following multiple uses: tobacco+alcohol+cannabis (from 5.5 to 10.2%) and tobacco+cannabis (from 12.4 to 16.4%).

Repeated multiple uses



Source: ESCAPAD 2000 – OFDT

Only repeated multiple uses are shown in this diagram. Percentages are calculated on the whole sample.

The results presented here provide a starting point for an annual follow-up of the evolutions of psychoactive substances use in late teens. The whole report deals with a dozen of themes: it particularly studies the links between those uses and health behaviours, school and family contexts, and sport practice. This survey will be extended towards the overseas French départements from 2001 onwards in partnership with regional health monitoring centres, for comparability's sake with metropolitan France.

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- **For more information**

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- **Methodological references**

For the sake of economy, the statistical meanings of the disparities shown are not brought about. When there is no significant difference, it explicitly appears in the text; otherwise deviations prove relevant from 5% onwards, and more frequently from 0.1% onwards.

The JAPD turnout is substantial as it exceeds 90% for both first quarters of 1999, all the more so since it is a low estimate of the attendance ratio: it can be obtained by relating the number of the attending individuals to the amount of summons, taking into account that one individual may be summoned several times. Such a non-appearance does not really stand for a bias (of the same kind as absenteeism in surveys carried out in a school context): absentees will attend their JAPD later, and some attending teenagers also straighten out their situation following their non-appearances at a previous summon. The JAPD is de facto somewhat mandatory: by the end of the day the individuals in attendance are delivered a certificate whose presentation has become necessary to enlist for examinations or competitive entry examinations under the control of public authorities (driving licence, baccalauréat, university examinations...). Some people may be declared “definitely unfit” on presentation of a disability card or a medical record (diseases, physical impairment...) and get their certificate without attending that day. In September 1999 and June 2000, about 7,000 boys have been exempted under those grounds, for more than 670,000 attending the JAPD, that is a little more than 1% of the whole.

As well as benefiting from a collecting mode identical to school surveys, the ESCAPAD Survey enables to grasp a significant proportion of youth who have not been granted schooling. Within consultations with the Direction du service national (National Service Head Office), the date of the survey was chosen in order to avoid examination and holiday periods, so that the presence or non-appearance of the young summoned do not depend on a school or professional particular situation. That survey therefore took place on Wednesday May 10th and Saturday May 13th, 2000. The number of conscripts summoned amounted to 15,858. Among them 1,305 (8.2%) do not appear at the JAPD. Among the 14,553 individuals in attendance, 91 gave back a blank questionnaire, so 14,462 forms were filled in. Among the latter, 505 were removed following too high an amount of non-answers, when neither age nor gender were answered, as well as when for at least two substances among tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis, the use during one's life could not be ascertained. The final survey covers 13,957 individuals: 5,053 boys of 17, 3,736 boys of 18, 1,807 boys of 19, and 3,361 girls of 17. The quality of responses prove satisfying: the non-answers and inconsistencies about the questions concerning the use of psychoactive substances only pertain to 2% of the questionnaires dealt with.

As the attending youth during those days do not know each other, it vouches for a better confidentiality of answers than in school surveys, where all the pupils of the same class fill in the questionnaire together. The latter has been set up in order to be approximately of the same duration when a user or a non-user of psychoactive substances would fill it in, thus avoiding to make the difference between both profiles conspicuous while the answering was in progress. Its length was fit to the allotted time within that day, to wit about twenty minutes. The operation took place by late morning for the conscripts no to be neither taken aback by this comparatively atypical survey, nor already bored by filling in various forms. Ultimately the supervising personnel was asked to briefly introduce the survey, its nature and purposes, to insist on its strictly anonymous and confidential characteristic, and not to go around the rows while the operation was in progress. After the twenty minutes duration the questionnaires were collected and put into a postal envelope that was sealed at once under the eyes of people in attendance.

The ESCAPAD Survey supplements a youth monitoring system, which also includes school surveys (ESPAD) or phone ones (Baromètre Santé). Because of the collecting modes, its results concerning the use of psychoactive substances stand above those of the Baromètre Santé and pretty level with those of ESPAD.

Tendances

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