

ESTUDES 2021

Summary Report

The XIV edition of the Survey on Drug Use in Secondary Education in Spain (ESTUDES) has been compiled from **22,321 questionnaires** answered by students aged 14 to 18 years in **1,311 classrooms** corresponding to **523 public and private secondary schools**.

The sample was collected throughout Spain and is nationally representative, with a **sampling error of 0.7%** for a confidence level of 95.5%. The fieldwork was carried out between **March 8th, 2021 and May 18th, 2021**. This survey is promoted and financed by the Government Delegation for the National Plan on Drugs and has the collaboration of the Autonomous Communities and Cities. ESTUDES has been carried out every two years since 1994.

This survey was performed during the Covid epidemic as restrictions were applied to many activities and public gatherings.

Legal psychoactive substances

In 2021, **alcohol** is the psychoactive substance with the highest prevalence of consumption among students aged 14 to 18 years: 73.9% of young people acknowledge having consumed alcoholic beverages at some time in their lives; 70.5% have done so in the last year and 53.6% in the last month. Despite having experienced a decrease in consumption with respect to 2019, in the entire historical series, alcohol remains the legal psychoactive substance with the highest prevalence of consumption among students aged 14 to 18 years. The prevalence of consumption of alcoholic beverages is higher in females than in males in all age groups and in all time periods analyzed, reaching the highest difference by sex in 2021.

Regarding other aspects of the patterns of alcohol consumption (binge drinking, perceived drunkenness or street consumption with peers "botellón"), 27.9% of students say they have consumed alcohol in the form of **binge drinking** in the last 30 days (32.3% in 2019), a figure that stands at 52.6% among those who have consumed alcoholic beverages in the last month. **Drunkenness** has also decreased slightly: 23.2% of students say they have been drunk in the past month, compared to 24.3% in 2019. In addition, 41.1% of students say they did "**botellón**" in the

past year. For all patterns of alcohol consumption (binge drinking, drunkenness or “botellón”) the prevalence of such consumption is higher in girls than in boys in all age groups analyzed.

Tobacco is the second substance in terms of consumption. A total of 38.2% of students between 14 and 18 years of age reported having smoked tobacco at some time in their lives, 30.7% in the last year, 23.9% in the last 30 days and 9.0% daily in the last 30 days. The prevalence of tobacco use is higher among women in all age groups and in all time periods analyzed. Tobacco consumption registers a decrease compared to 2019 and these are the lowest prevalences of consumption since the consumption of this substance has been monitored.

Up to 19.6% of Secondary Education students claim to have consumed **hypnosedatives (with or without a doctor's prescription)** at some time in their lives, 13.6% in the last 12 months and 7.5% in the last month. The prevalence of hypnosedative use is higher in women in all time periods and in all age groups. There has been an upward trend in the prevalence of consumption of hypnosedatives with or without a doctor's prescription in all time periods since the beginning of the historical series, reaching the highest values since this indicator has been monitored in 2021.

Regarding **hypnosedatives without a doctor's prescription**, 10.3% of students aged 14 to 18 years recognize having consumed them at some time in their lives, 7.2% in the last year (9.4% in girls and 5.1% in boys) and 3.6% in the last month, the highest figures of the entire series.

On the other hand, for these three substances (alcohol, tobacco and hypnosedatives), a series of common behavioral patterns can be observed:

- The average age of onset of consumption is between 14.0 and 14.4 years of age.
- There is a higher prevalence of consumption among women.
- As the age of students increases, prevalence of use increases.

Illegal psychoactive substances

The ESTUDES survey includes a large number of illegal drugs (more than 20 different drugs).

Cannabis is considered the third most consumed psychoactive substance by students aged 14-18 (after alcohol and tobacco) and is the first among illegal drugs. Data show that 28.6% of young people report having used cannabis at some time in their lives, 22.2% in the last year and 14.9% in the 30 days prior to the survey. Within the series, these results represent a break in the upward trend that had been recorded since 2016. The prevalence of cannabis use is higher in males aged 16 to 18 years and in females aged 14 and 15 years in all time periods analyzed.

After cannabis, **ecstasy** is the next illegal drug with the highest prevalence of use among secondary school students, overtaking cocaine for the first time. A total of 3.1% admit having taken ecstasy on some occasion, 1.8% in the last 12 months and 0.6% in the last month. Regarding the lifetime period, there is an increase in the consumptions of this substance since 2014 (from 1.2% to 3.1% in 2021).

Cocaine (powder and/or base) shows a decreasing prevalence of consumption since 2004. In 2021, 2.7% have used it once in their lifetime, 2.1% in the last year and 0.6% in the last month.

All other drugs have a prevalence of use of less than 2%. Of those surveyed, 1.4% of respondents acknowledge having consumed **new psychoactive substances** in the last 12 months; 1.1% has consumed **volatile inhalants**; 1.0% has consumed **hallucinogens**; 0.9% has consumed **methamphetamines**; and 0.9% has consumed **amphetamines**. The prevalence of use of the rest of the psychoactive substances studied was below 1%.

As for legal psychoactive substances, the main characteristics in the pattern of consumption of illegal drugs are:

- There are variations in the average ages at which these substances begin to be consumed: 14.9 years in the case of cannabis, 15.4 years for ecstasy and 15.3 years for cocaine.
- Male students report the highest consumption prevalences of these drugs.
- Age also influences the consumption pattern: the older the age, the higher the prevalence of consumption.

Perceptions and opinions regarding the use of psychoactive substances

The ESTUDES survey addresses issues such as risk perception, perceived availability of different substances, channels of information about drugs, and the importance of implementing actions to address the drug problem.

The **perception of risk** is the belief on the part of students aged 14 to 18 years that certain behaviors can lead to many or quite a few problems, and is almost absolute when referring to the frequent use of substances such as heroin (97.0%), powder cocaine (96.8%) or ecstasy (96.7%). On the other hand, more socially widespread practices, such as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day (93.9%) or even drinking 5 or 6 alcoholic beverages during the weekend

(75.7%) are also perceived as dangerous. Since 2010, tobacco consumption continues to be considered more dangerous than cannabis consumption.

As for the **perception of being able to easily obtain different psychoactive substances**, more than 90% of students aged 14 to 18 years consider that they could get alcohol or tobacco relatively easily. Of the illegal drugs, cannabis is the one with the highest perception of availability associated with it (61.1%).

On the other hand, in general, only 1 in 5 students between 14 and 18 years of age acknowledges being fully **informed about drugs** (22.5%). Compared to previous years, this is the lowest figure of all the surveys conducted.

Regarding the **measures that could be implemented to solve the drug problem**, students believe that the most effective should be education at schools (96.3%), voluntary treatment for consumers (94.9%) and police and customs control (92.4%). Since 2014, actions related to the legalization of cannabis and of all drugs in general are being less mentioned as options of high importance to solve the drug problem. In this sense, the legalization of cannabis went from being a very important action for 40.3% of students in 2014 to 28.4% in 2021; the legalization of all drugs dropped from 29.6% to 17.3% in the same period.