

SUMMARY

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ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLAND

WORKING ASSUMPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the study was to find out the main reasons why young people use drugs and legal highs, to determine the main source of information for young people on the harmfulness of legal highs, to find out which psychoactive substances are most frequently used by young people, to estimate the average age at which young people use legal highs for the first time, to find out where young people first try legal highs, and to determine whether there are differences between girls and boys in terms of succumbing to peer influence, expressing refusal to take drugs, spending money to buy legal highs and experiencing unpleasantness associated with taking these substances. The intention of the research was also to find out the correlation between the results of the national survey conducted in 2017 and the 2023 survey conducted in the Wielkopolska region.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In 2017, a randomly selected, randomised group of 6044 junior and senior high school students in Poland from the age range of 14-15 and 17-18 years was surveyed. The research tool used in the study was a survey questionnaire developed by a scientific and research team established at the GIS, which included 40 questions on the volume, frequency, prevalence, reasons for using drugs and legal highs and consequences resulting from their consumption. The questionnaires were completed by the students themselves. The surveys were conducted in schools and were voluntary and anonymous. A total of 5545 correctly completed survey questionnaires were qualified for statistical analysis. 2584 girls and 2961 boys were surveyed.

In the months of April-June 2023, secondary school students (general secondary school, basic vocational school, technical school) from the age range of 13-19 were surveyed in the districts of the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. The same survey form that was used for the 2017 survey was used for the study. The survey was in electronic form and was completed online via the Microsoft Forms web platform. The link and QR code for the survey was sent to the headmasters of the secondary schools electronically, and these were then forwarded to the teachers of the individual classes, where the teachers passed it on to the individual students in the class, so that every student who was ready and willing to participate in the survey could complete the survey form on their smartphone.

The surveys were completed by the students themselves. The surveys were conducted in schools and were voluntary and anonymous. 1292 correctly completed questionnaire questionnaires were qualified for statistical analysis. 737 girls and 555 boys were surveyed. The data from the

questionnaires in electronic version were transferred to a database, on the basis of which statistical analyses were carried out.

RESULTS

There has been a decrease in the proportion of students who think they are learning at least well (46.7% vs 42.9%), while on average 1 in 10 students think they are learning not very well (9.1% vs 8.7%).

Adolescents in a difficult situation most often try to solve their problem themselves, with an increase in the proportion of students who do so (44.5% vs 51.4%). On average, only one in 10 adolescents in a difficult situation talks to loved ones (family) (11.4% vs 11.9%). The percentage of adolescents who drink alcohol or use drugs in a difficult situation has increased (2.3% vs 3.1%).

Among all psychoactive substances, only drugs and legal highs were considered by young people to the greatest extent as 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to buy.

The proportion of young people who associate legal highs with 'escape from worries and problems' has increased (18.3% vs 27.5%).

The majority of adolescents have never been offered legal highs and/or drugs (64.7% vs 69.5%), however, on average one in five adolescents have access to legal highs in their neighbourhood (21.5% vs 21.6%). City students have easier access to legal highs.

The role of the school as a source of information on the harmfulness of legal highs for young people is diminishing. Teenagers, as a source of information on this topic, are starting to mention the Internet in the first place.

The percentage of adolescents who have already tried various drugs, i.e.: cannabis (22.0% vs 16.1%), amphetamine (4.8% vs 2.6%), hashish (6.6% vs 3.1%), has decreased. On average, one in three adolescents declare that they have never tried any stimulants (34.1% vs 35.2%).

Adolescents admit that they most often take legal highs by inhalation (smoking), as well as by sniffing, by ingestion (swallowing) and by injection.

The proportion of adolescents who have experienced any unpleasantness as a result of using legal highs has decreased (17.4% vs. 7.5%). Boys are far more likely to experience unpleasantness as a result of using legal highs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The attitudes and behaviours of young people towards psychoactive substances in the two studies are partly similar, but also different in many aspects, which shows that the problem of young people's perception and use of psychoactive substances, including drugs and legal highs, is very complex and may undergo specific changes over a short period of time. The main reasons for young people's use of drugs and legal highs include a desire to be liked by the group and the increasing problems reported by young people at home, which may reflect a growing sense of loneliness in the family home and a desire to assimilate with peers. Of psychoactive substances, adolescents most often use alcohol and cigarettes, followed by cannabis and other substances, indicating that adolescents most often use psychoactive substances that they can purchase (usually less officially) in a shop, near their home or school. Adolescents usually try legal highs for the first time in an open area, however, increasingly first-time use of legal highs

is also taking place at home, indicating that both the house party and the use of legal highs at home are becoming circumstances that favour drug initiation.

Systematic monitoring and analysis of changes in perceptions and behaviour regarding psychoactive substances among young people both nationally and in individual regions of the country should form the basis for planning health education and health promotion programmes. Education and education programmes on psychoactive substances should be implemented in the youth population in a systematic, consistent and complementary manner. Young people's knowledge, views and behaviour towards psychoactive substances during adolescence determine to a large extent their subsequent physical, mental and social health, including often the length and quality of a person's life.