

PILOT STUDY ON DRUG USE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AGED 12 AND 13 YEARS OLD IN THE 1ST AND 2ND YEAR OF COMPULSORY SECONDARY EDUCATION (ESO) IN SPAIN

Executive summary

During 2023, the XIV edition of the "Survey on Drug Use in Secondary Education in Spain (ESTUDES)" was carried out, which has been conducted biennially since 1994, and aims to know the situation and trends of drug use and other addictions among students between 14 and 18 years of age in Secondary Education.

This year, as a novelty, a pilot study was conducted on alcohol and tobacco consumption and possible behavioral addictions in young people aged 12-13 years (1st and 2nd ESO), thus extending the ESTUDES sample framework to these age groups.

This pilot study promoted and financed by the Government Delegation for the National Plan on Drugs, was carried out simultaneously with the ESTUDES survey, from February 5 to May 28, 2023, which allows temporal and methodological comparability.

Although this project shares objectives with the ESTUDES survey, it does not include all the issues raised in the survey, since it has had to be adapted to the target public. Therefore, in general, the use of all illegal substances has been excluded from the study.

The study was carried out nationwide. Its sample design allows acceptable precision in terms of the results on prevalence at the national level but not at the autonomous community level. The response rate of the centers was 85%, somewhat lower than the ESTUDES rate (86.7%). However, the response rate of the students in ESTUDES and in this pilot was exactly the same (99.7%).

The main results obtained are shown below:

Consumption of psychoactive substances

Alcoholic beverages

- 34.6% of students aged 12 and 13 years recognize having consumed alcohol at least once in their lifetime. This prevalence decreases, as the time period analyzed becomes shorter (30.6% in the last 12 months and 21.5% in the last month).
- In all time periods analyzed, age is a determining factor that causes the proportion of consumers to rise, reaching more than twice as high among students between 14 and 18 years of age as among 12-13 years old ones.
- The extent of lifetime and last-year use of this substance was very similar among boys and girls. However, in the last 30 days, there was a slightly greater presence of consumers among boys (22.3%) than among girls (20.6%). This situation is reversed in the 14-18 age group, where alcohol consumption for all time periods is more widespread among girls.
- A total of 7.2% of students aged 12 and 13 years reported having been drunk at some time in their lives (5.8% in the last year and 1.9% in the last month). The prevalence of acute alcohol intoxication increases with age, regardless of the time period analyzed. This type of consumption is higher among girls than among boys both in the ever-in-a-lifetime period (8.2% vs. 6.2% among boys) and in the last 12 months (6.7% vs. 4.9% among boys).
- A total of 8.3% of students aged 12 and 13 years recognize having consumed alcohol in "botellón" in the last 12 months, a proportion that is reduced to less than a half when the time period is adjusted to the last month (3.1%). Prevalence

is somewhat higher among girls than among boys. With respect to age, the proportion of students who admit to having consumed alcohol in “botellón” increases threefold from 12 to 13 years of age in the last 12 months (from 3.7% to 12.4%), and fivefold in the last month (from 1.0% to 4.9%).

- In all time periods and for all types of consumption analyzed, an increase in prevalence is generally observed among students as alcohol consumption among their parents becomes more frequent.

Energy drinks

- 37.7% of students aged 12 and 13 years have consumed energy drinks (Red Bull, Burn, Monster, etc.) in the last 30 days, and 10.2% mixed with alcohol.
- These consumptions increase as the age of the students increases. Thus, in the case of energy drinks mixed with alcohol, the figure obtained in the 14-18 age group is almost double than that observed in the 12-13 age group (19.5% vs 10.2%).
- According to sex, the consumption of both energy drinks alone and mixed with alcohol is higher among men than among women in both age groups.

Tobacco

- 8.5% of students aged 12 to 13 years recognize having smoked tobacco at some time in their lives (6.5% in the last year and 4.1% in the last month).
- Consumption is somewhat more widespread among girls than among boys, regardless of the time period analyzed. These differences are accentuated among students between 14 and 18 years of age.
- The prevalence of consumption increases as the age of the students increases. Thus, the ESTUDES prevalence results for the 14-18 age group are five times higher than those recorded among 12-13 year-old students for the last month (from 4.1% to 21.0%).
- Boys aged 12 and 13 smoke more intensively than girls did, with a higher average number of cigarettes smoked per day: 6.3 compared to 4.8 for girls. Older students smoke more cigarettes per day than 12-13 years old ones.
- Analyzing the type of cigarettes consumed by 12 and 13 year old students who have smoked tobacco in the last 30 days, the most common type of cigarette consumed was pack cigarettes (46.1%). 38.5% reported having smoked both types of cigarettes (pack and roll-your-own) and a small group (15.4%) acknowledged having smoked only roll-your-own cigarettes.

Electronic cigarettes

- One in four students aged 12 and 13 years reported having used electronic cigarettes at some time in their lives (25.2%), 21% in the last year and 11.2% in the last month.
- Regardless of the time period analyzed, the prevalence of e-cigarette use is somewhat higher among girls than among boys.
- Age is a key factor when analyzing the prevalence of e-cigarette use among the youngest secondary school students. Thus, the data recorded for 13-year-old students are practically double than those of 12-year-old ones in the last month (14.5% vs. 7.6%).
- The prevalence of e-cigarette use is higher among students aged 14 to 18 years than among those aged 12 and 13 years in all time periods and in both sexes.

Water pipes

- 9.5% of students aged 12 and 13 years recognize having used water pipes, understood as hookahs, shishas, narghile, etc., at some time in their lives (7% in the

last year). The prevalence of use among boys and girls in this age group is similar for both time periods.

Behavioral addictions

Video games

- The vast majority of 12 and 13 year-old students acknowledge having played video games in the last 12 months (91.3%).
- By sex, it can be observed that, among boys, practically all of them (98.3%) recognize having spent part of their leisure time in the last year in this activity, a figure that drops to 84.0% among girls.
- A negative relationship was observed between the prevalence of video game use in the last 12 months and age, which is reflected when comparing the data obtained for students aged 12-13 years and those aged 14-18 years (91.3% and 83.1%, respectively). By gender, this drop is almost entirely explained by a deterioration in the interest of girls as they get older in this leisure activity (84.0% among 12-13 year-old girls and 69.7% among 14-18 year-old girls).
- Regarding the frequency of video game use, it is observed that 12 and 13 year-old students play more frequently than older students and the frequency of daily use is three times higher in boys than in girls (32.6% vs. 10.3%).
- In terms of the average number of hours of video game use per day and the total money spent in the last 12 months to improve their position, there are practically no differences by age between students aged 12 and 13 and those aged 14 to 18. However, by sex, a higher frequency of video game use is still observed, as well as a higher expenditure in boys than in girls, in both age groups.
- When analyzing the prevalence of being an eSports spectator in the last 12 months, it is observed that it stands at 54.7% among students in the 1st and 2nd years of ESO. Once again, this activity is more widespread among boys than among girls. In terms of age, from 12 to 13 years, the prevalence remains the same and even increases slightly (from 54.1% to 55.3%); when compared to the data for the 14-18 age group, it is only reduced by 2.2 percentage points (52.5%).

Playing with money

- 9.3% of students aged 12 and 13 admit having gambled with money online in the last 12 months. This practice is notably more widespread among boys than among girls of this age (12.6% vs. 6.0%). Among students aged 14 to 18, the prevalence of online gambling increases to 10.7%. Within these figures we have to take into account that a significant percentage of students indicate that they only play video games. Nowadays there is a multitude of virtual games where people play with their own currency in a virtual universe, which can lead to misunderstanding that they are "earning money" with these games. On the other hand, it is known the millionaire market that currently exists in the acquisition of skins and virtual weapons in order to improve the characters and go further in the game, without the objective to "earn money" in the real world.
- An analysis of the prevalence of gambling online in betting and games of chance (excluding these exclusive cases of video game users) shows that 6.5% of students aged 12 and 13 years recognize having gambled online with money. This proportion is 8.8% among boys and 4.2% among girls.
- In both age groups video games are the online games on which students spend the most money.
- Regarding gambling with money in person, the prevalence among students in the first cycle of ESO is 12.7%. As was the case online, this behavior is more widespread among boys (14.6%) than among girls (10.8%).

- Gambling with money in person increases with age, with a prevalence of 17.7% among 14-18 year old students.
- Regarding the type of game played in person, it is observed that in both age groups, lotteries are the games in which students from 12 to 18 years old spend the most money, followed by sports betting and betting pools.

Internet

- The possible problematic use of the Internet among students in 1st and 2nd year of ESO in the last 12 months is 14.5%. Contrary to the rest of the behaviors analyzed in relation to the online world, the prevalence is higher among girls (18.0%) than among boys (11.0%). Among students aged 14 to 18 years, the presence of students with a possible problematic use of the Internet increases to 20.5%. This increase is more evident in the case of girls, where the figure stands at 25.9%.

Perceptions and opinions of the population regarding the use of psychoactive substances.

Risk perception

- There is a broad consensus among students aged 12 and 13 years (91.6%), which is maintained among those aged 14 and 18 years (93.4%), in relation to the risk posed by habitual tobacco consumption, understood as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day.
- In the case of alcohol, there is also a majority among 12 and 13 year-old students regarding the risk associated with drinking 5 or 6 beers/alcohol drinks on the weekend: 71.2% recognize that this behavior can cause some or many problems. This perception decreases to 63.4% among students aged 14 to 18.
- Regarding the consumption of 1 or 2 beers/alcohol drinks daily, the opinion of students in the first cycle of ESO is much more polarized: 58.9% of students identify it as a problematic behavior. Contrary to what happened with alcohol consumption on weekends, the perception of risk with respect to daily alcohol consumption is higher among 14 to 18 year-olds by 4.7 points (63.6%).

Perception of availability

- More than half of 12- and 13-year-old students consider that it would be easy or very easy for them to purchase alcohol if they would like (52.2%). In relation to obtaining tobacco, the perception of availability is reduced by 10.4 percentage points among these students (41.8%).
- In the 14-18 age group, the presence of students who consider that it would be easy or very easy for them to acquire these drugs increases exponentially, reaching 92.9% in case of alcohol and 89.1% in case of tobacco.

Information channels on psychoactive substances

- 39.3% of students aged 12 and 13 consider themselves to be fully informed about drug use and its associated problems. This proportion drops to 26.2% among students between 14 and 18 years of age. It is observed that among boys in the first cycle of ESO there is a greater presence of those who consider themselves to be perfectly informed on this subject than among girls (42.2% compared to 36.4%).
- 77.8% of students aged 12 and 13 years indicate that in their educational center they have received information on drug use and associated problems, or the subject has been discussed. Families, however, seem to be a source of information with less scope: 65.6% of students indicate that they have received this type of information from their family environment (69.6% of girls vs. 61.8% of boys).

- The addiction to which 12 and 13 year-old students have been alerted to the greatest extent in their educational centers are the problems associated with the misuse of new technologies (71.7%). This is followed at some distance by education related to the effects and problems associated with the consumption of legal drugs (59.0%). On the other hand, only 47.1% of students say that they have been informed about the effects and problems associated with online gambling and betting. It is worth noting that girls have greater consideration than boys about the topics that were discussed in their educational centers about drug use and other addictions and their associated problems.

Leisure environment: activities, nights out (frequency and schedule) and money available

- The fact of going out at night is what marks the greatest differences in the prevalence of consumption: 50.9% of those who have gone out admit having consumed alcohol compared to 20.8% among those who have not gone out; 13.8% have smoked tobacco in the last year compared to 2.8% among those who have not gone out.
- Although to a lesser extent, the fact of going out in the evenings with friends also has some influence on the extent of consumption of these substances, especially in the case of alcohol (31.8% of alcohol consumption among those who go out in the evenings vs. 19% among those who do not).
- It should be noted that students who do not read books for fun have a higher prevalence of consumption of the aforementioned substances. The same is true for those who do not have other hobbies.

Family economic situation

- An analysis of the economic situation of the families of students who have acknowledged having consumed alcohol and tobacco in the last year shows that these are similar to those obtained at the general level, with a slight increase in the presence of those who believe that their situation is better than average, to the detriment of those who consider that they are at the same level.