

**Bundeszentrale
für gesundheitliche
Aufklärung**

**Federal Centre
for Health
Education**

**Centre Fédéral
d'Éducation
pour la Santé**



**Drug affinity
of adolescents in the
Federal Republic of Germany
1997**

A repeat survey of the
Federal Centre for Health Education,
Cologne, Germany

– Summary –

November 1998

Details of the study

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| Project title: | ”Drug affinity of adolescents in the Federal Republic of Germany 1997” |
| Goals: | Long-term study of the use of alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs, its motives and situational conditions, as well as facilitating and hindering factors on drug use, and the extent to which adolescents can be reached by communicative preventive measures. |
| Method: | Representative repeat survey of the 12 to 25-year-old population in the Federal Republic of Germany. |
| Mode of data collection: | Structured face-to-face interviews |
| Selection procedure: | Stratified multi-stage sample, sample size: $n = 3000$ subjects in total ($n = 2000$ West , $n = 1000$ East) |
| Survey period: | October to December 1997 |
| Data collection, computer analysis: | GFM-Getas Gesellschaft für Marketing-, Kommunikations- und Sozialforschung mbh, Hamburg |
| Concept development, analysis and reporting: | Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne, Section 2-25, Gerhard Christiansen, Ilona Renner and Jürgen Töppich |
| Graphic design: | Michael Wunderlich |

Summary

Substance use among 12 to 25-year-old adolescents and young adults – Trends and tendencies

Alcohol

The proportion of 12 to 25-year-old West German adolescents and young adults who regularly consume alcoholic beverages at least once a week has been gradually declining since 1973 in all beverage categories studied (beer, wine/sparkling wine, spirits, alcoholic mixed drinks).

Since 1993 this trend has been evident in both the western and eastern Federal Länder. The proportion of those who rarely or never drink beverages of this kind is increasing accordingly.

This downward trend is particularly evident among young men in the East and West. Nevertheless, they still drink alcoholic beverages much more frequently than young women (except for wine/sparkling wine).

The decrease in alcohol consumption can primarily be attributed to a reduction in frequent, weekly drinking. The proportion of young people who drink alcohol on the weekends hardly changes at all. However, smaller quantities of alcoholic beverages are consumed on the weekends as compared to 1993.

The decrease in the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption is accompanied by a decline in the experience of 12 to 25-year-olds with drunkenness.

Alcohol consumption is primarily motivated by its (purported) effect of promoting a sociable atmosphere. However, about one-fifth also mention the individual stress-relieving effect.

Smoking

The number of smokers is decreasing over the long term, but only very slowly: by 11 percentage points between 1973 and 1997.

An exception to this rule is East Germany. A two-fold process of adaptation has occurred there in recent years. On the one hand, the number of smokers among young East Germans has increased so drastically that it now exceeds that of young West Germans. On the other hand, the smoking habits of young women in the new Federal Länder have now come to match those of the young men.

In general, the proportion of smokers among the younger age groups (12 to 17 years) rose slightly between 1993 and 1997.

The increase in the number of smokers in East Germany, and among 12 to 17-year-olds in general, was predicted by the particularly high proportion of young people trying cigarettes in the 1993 drug affinity study.

Two trends of significance for disease prevention can be observed: (1) The proportion of those who have never smoked is increasing more rapidly than the proportion of smokers is decreasing. (2) Smokers are starting to smoke later. The average age of smoking onset is rising slowly but steadily. Above all, the proportion of those who smoke their first cigarette before the age of 14 is on the decline.

Apparently, young people are increasingly deciding not to smoke right from the start. This statement is also supported by the fact that nearly all those who have never smoked do not expect to smoke in future. Non-smoking is primarily based on health-related arguments. Furthermore, the social support of non-smoking is particularly strong among those who have never smoked.

On the other hand, young smokers are also becoming "more conscious" smokers. A smaller proportion than in previous drug affinity studies expects to give up smoking. The social support provided by friends to quit smoking is also decreasing and smokers more frequently have peer groups consisting primarily of other smokers. To justify their smoking, smokers increasingly refer to those motives also communicated by cigarette adverts as incentives to buy.

Illegal drugs

One-fifth (21%) of 12 to 25-year-olds in the Federal Republic of Germany have taken one or more illegal drugs at least once in their lives. The proportion is 22 percent in West Germany and 17 percent in East Germany. The long-term development of this indicator – the proportion of young people who have experience with drugs (lifetime prevalence) – is characterised (in West Germany) by its consistency up to the end of the 1980s and by an increase in the 1990s.

The proportion of those with drug experience increased by 3 percentage points among all 12 to 25-year-olds in 1997 (21%) as compared to 1993 (18%). On the one hand, this increase can be attributed to the fact that, in West Germany, a statistically significant increase of 4 percentage points was recorded among young women and of 3 percentage points among 12 to 17-year-olds. On the other hand, the proportion of those with drug experience in the new Federal Länder has risen: it increased there from 6 percent in 1993 to 17 percent in 1997, and has thus nearly tripled. It is the young women and the 12 to 17-year-olds in East Germany, in particular, whose drug consumption has approached the level of young West Germans in recent years.

These changes in the new Federal Länder can partially be explained by the fact that more young people there now have access to drugs: while 17 percent said in 1993 that they had already been offered drugs, this figure was up to 33 percent in 1997 (West Germany 1993: 41%, 1997: 43%). In addition, there are indications that young East Germans behave somewhat differently than West Germans in terms of the use of illegal drugs: Although a comparatively large proportion of young people in East Germany is against drugs in general, a larger proportion of those who have started taking drugs has continued to be drug users up to the present and a larger proportion of current users takes drugs on a regular basis.

Attitudes *against* drug use are widespread among young people in both West and East Germany. A total of three-quarters (74%) of 12 to 25-year-olds have neither taken drugs, nor are they willing to do so in future. This figure amounts to 73 percent in West Germany and 80 percent in East Germany.

The acceptance of some substances, such as cannabis, Ecstasy and amphetamines, has increased in the 1990s. Nevertheless, a considerable portion of young people also rejects the use of these substances: roughly three-quarters would never take cannabis, and roughly nine-tenths would never take Ecstasy or amphetamines. The rejection figures for LSD, cocaine and heroin are even higher.

When young people are offered illegal drugs for the first time, 70 percent of them say no. This proportion is even higher in the new Federal Länder at 78 percent. The most important reasons for saying no are distance and lack of interest in drug use in general, as well as fears about the health-related consequences of drug use.

Not all of them stick to their refusal. Of those who have ever been offered illegal drugs, half (51%) have also tried or taken drugs at some point. Curiosity is the most common explanation for this behaviour. As with alcohol, illegal drugs are increasingly purported to raise spirits and facilitate social contacts, particularly by young people who have had experience with the use of illegal drugs.

Ecstasy

At the end of 1997, 5 percent of 12 to 25-year-olds in the Federal Republic (East: 4%, West: 5%) had taken Ecstasy at least once in their lives. This corresponds exactly to the proportion of those who, in the last survey in 1993, said that they could imagine trying Ecstasy at some point. Thus, Ecstasy is the second most frequent drug – after cannabis – with which 12 to 25-year-olds have experience.

Boys and young men (West: 7%, East: 5%) said much more frequently than girls and women (West: 4%, East: 3%) that they had already taken Ecstasy on some occasion.

Most (three-quarters) of the young people who have had experience with Ecstasy have taken this substance up to 10 times. However, 6 percent of those with Ecstasy experience say their frequency of use is 100 times or more.

The decisive factor influencing whether or not young people take Ecstasy is their peer group and not primarily the frequency and duration of visits to techno events. However, the frequency of visits to techno events is associated with increased integration in the "scene", and thus also an increase in the probability of making friends with people who take Ecstasy.

Relationships in the use of psychotropic substances

If the use of psychotropic substances is viewed in context, the results of the present study indicate that the use of various substances is a step-by-step "learning process". Young people are more willing to try a further substance if they have already had experience with another. For example, smoking increases the probability of more intense alcohol consumption (to the point of drunkenness), more frequent experience with drunkenness increases the probability of cannabis consumption and this, in turn, is more likely to lead to the use of other illegal drugs, such as Ecstasy, amphetamines, LSD, cocaine or heroin. The probability of consumption increases especially if several substances have been taken previously.

However, this process is not inevitable. The decision to either not even start consuming individual psychotropic substances, or to stop later on, is influenced by the general attitude towards health: the drug affinity study shows substantial differences in health awareness between users and non-users for all the substances investigated here.