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Drug affinity among young people in the Federal Republic of Germany 2001

Summary of a repeat survey by the
Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), Cologne

February 2002

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Details of the study: Goals and methods

Project title:	Drug affinity among young people in the Federal Republic of Germany 2001
Goals:	Long-term study of <ul style="list-style-type: none">- the use of alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs- the factors which facilitate and inhibit drug use- the extent to which adolescents can be reached by communicative prevention measures.
Method:	Repeated surveys of the population aged 12 to 25 years old in the Federal Republic of Germany.
Mode of data collection:	Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI)
Sample design:	Random sample (computer-generated random telephone numbers, random selection of individuals aged 12 to 25 year in the household). Sample size: 3,000 respondents West Germany: 2,000 East Germany: 1,000
Survey period:	November 2000 to January 2001
Data collection, computer analysis and statistic analysis:	Forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, Berlin
Concept development, analysis and reporting:	Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne, Unit 2-25, Gerhard Christiansen, Volker Stander and Jürgen Töppich

Introduction

Since 1973, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has carried out representative surveys of substance use among young people and young adults in the Federal Republic of Germany at three to four-year intervals. The results of the individual repeat surveys are published under the title "Drogenaffinität Jugendlicher in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland" [Drug affinity among young people in the Federal Republic of Germany]. The name of the project, "Drug affinity", is an indication of the subject of the survey. Firstly, it is concerned with epidemiological data on substance use, i.e. alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, but other indicators of proximity to or distancing from these substances are also involved, such as willingness or unwillingness to take them, motives for consumption and attitudes to substance use. Other data are also included that are additionally collected in the individual repeat surveys to meet current information requirements of specialist departments at the BZgA, such as data regarding settings and information media via which young people can be reached, this being important for drug prevention.

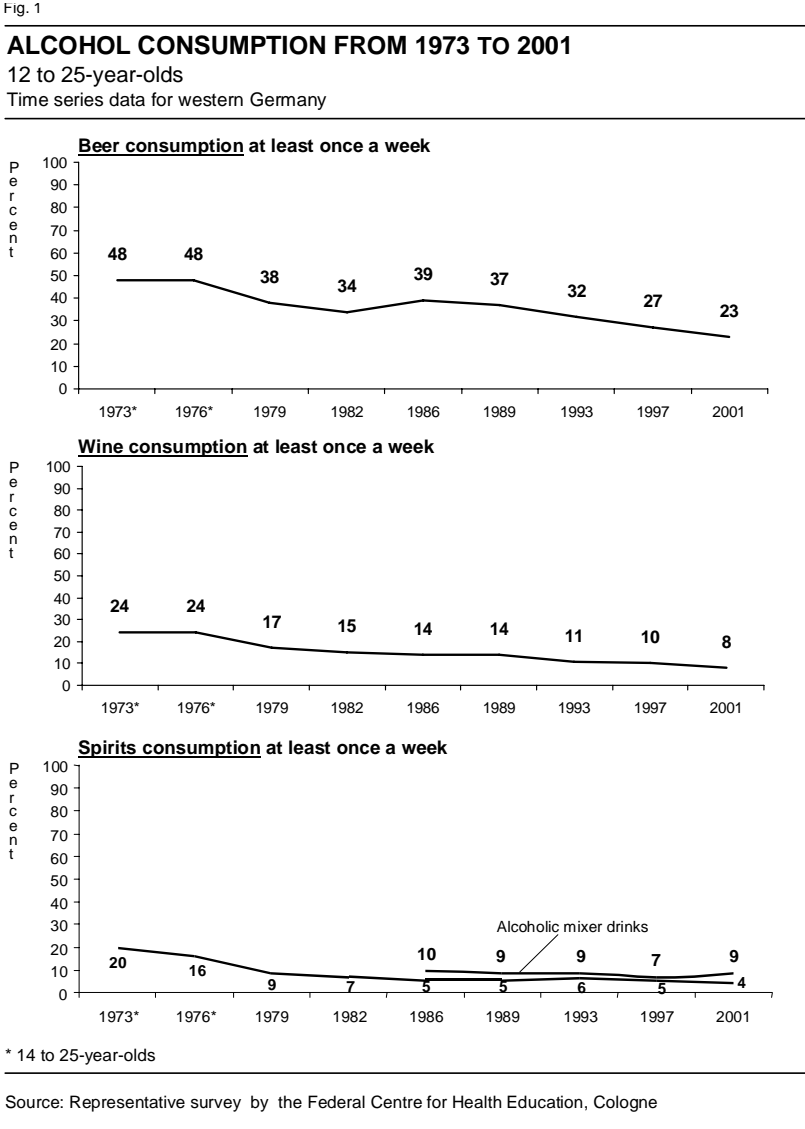
The data for the last drug affinity study were collected from November 2000 to January 2001. During this period, 3,000 young people aged from 12 to 25 years were questioned: 2,000 people in western Germany, 1,000 in eastern Germany (a disproportionately high percentage so as to be better able to trace and analyse the particular developments in substance use in the new German states). The survey method used was the computer-aided telephone interview (CATI). The data were collected by the Forsa institute, Berlin.

The study is currently being analysed. The first part of the analysis has already been completed and the results published in a research report¹. It contains the most important indicators for the prevention of high-risk substance use. These first include the long-term trends in substance use among young people from 1973 to 2001, the intensity and direction of which may be important for assessing drug prevention in the Federal Republic of Germany. Secondly, they involve results regarding short-term changes over the past few years, which may be useful for the further development of prevention strategies. Both the long-term trends and a number of important current results have been compiled below, firstly regarding alcohol consumption, then for tobacco use and, in a third section, for the use of illegal drugs.

Alcohol consumption

¹ Die Drogenaffinität Jugendlicher in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 2001 [Drug affinity among young people in the Federal Republic of Germany 2001]. Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, Cologne; <http://www.bzga.de/studien/daten/stud.htm>.

The drug affinity study has been observing developments in alcohol consumption among young people since 1973, separately for beer, wine and spirits, and also including alcoholic mixer drinks since 1986. For each of these four types of alcohol, a time series exists for the proportion of regular drinkers, i.e. for those young people who drink the relevant type of alcohol at least once a week. These time series are shown only for western Germany. This is firstly because data for the whole of the Federal Republic so far exist only for three measurement points and, secondly, also because different consumption behaviour in eastern Germany might distort the time-series results.



Examination of the four time series reveals that, on the whole, alcohol consumption by young people has decreased over the past quarter of a century. Beer, in particular, is being drunk increasingly less frequently by young people. In the Seventies, almost half of all young people drank beer regularly (48%). The figure was 38 per cent in 1979 and the proportion of regular beer drinkers among 12 to 25-year-olds has dropped by 15 percentage points to 23 per cent since then.

The temporary increase in the Eighties was the result of demographic changes: decreasing birth rates in the Seventies meant that the proportion of younger age groups among the 12 to 25-year-olds declined for a period, while that of the older age groups (with more alcohol consumption) became correspondingly larger, meaning that the figures for alcohol consumption were bound to rise simply as a result of the changing age structure. If the effects of the changes in age structure are eliminated, these structurally adjusted results reveal a continuous, linear trend towards increasingly lower levels of regular beer drinking among young people (with a statistically significant negative slope). Wine consumption is also decreasing. This figure had dropped by approximately half in 2001 in comparison with 1979, when 17 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds drank wine or sparkling wine at least once a week. Eight per cent of young people (in western Germany) currently still drink wine regularly. This development also shows a continuous and statistically significant course. But it is particularly in the consumption of spirits that a change can be seen. The 1973 drug affinity study showed that 20 per cent of young people regularly drank schnapps, whiskey, fruit schnapps or other strong spirits, a figure that was almost as high as the percentage of regular wine or sparkling wine drinkers at the time. By 1979, consumption of spirits had decreased clearly to 9 per cent. Seven years later, at 5 per cent, the figure was only about half as high. Since that time, it has remained constant at this low level. An average of 9 per cent drink "alcoholic mixer drinks" and this figure has not changed during the observation period from 1986 to 2001.

It is not only in western Germany that young people are drinking less. Beer consumption by young people is also decreasing in eastern Germany, where the drug affinity study for 1993, 1997 and 2001 also gathered data on alcohol consumption among 12 to 25-year-olds. Wine, on the other hand, is being drunk slightly more frequently in 2001 than in 1993. A particularly sharp decrease can be seen in those types of drink that were consumed far more frequently by young people in eastern Germany than in western Germany at the start of the Nineties. These include spirits and "alcoholic mixer drinks", in particular. The latest drug affinity study shows that, in the meantime, the alcohol consumption of young people in eastern Germany has largely come into line with that of young people in western Germany and only slight differences remain between the young people of the eastern and western parts of the country.

This can be seen, for example, in the figures for total alcohol consumption that add up the frequencies for beer, wine, spirits and "mixer drinks": in total, about one third (30%) of 12 to 25-year-olds in the Federal Republic drink alcohol at least once a week, the figure being 30 per cent in western Germany and 31 per cent in eastern Germany. The percentage of young people with

low alcohol consumption, i.e. those who drink alcohol less than once a month or never (in the last twelve months), is 34 per cent in total, 35 per cent in western Germany and 34 per cent in eastern Germany.

There continue to be clear gender-related differences in alcohol consumption. For instance, the decrease in consumption of beer and spirits is almost exclusively among young men (aged over 17 years); among young women, alcohol consumption remains largely constant at a comparatively low level. Despite this process of alignment between young men and women, almost twice as many young men (39%) as young women (20%) still drink alcohol regularly. Young men also drink considerably larger quantities. This can be seen from the results of what is known as a "frequency-quantity index" that indicates the quantity of alcohol drunk each week in grams of pure alcohol. According to this index, 14 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds drink more than 120 grams per week; the figure for young men is 22 per cent, while it is only 6 per cent for young women.

The decreasing development in alcohol consumption and a relatively high proportion of young people with low consumption must not be allowed to conceal the fact that alcohol is the substance with which young people are most likely to come into contact. The majority of young people has some experience of alcohol: 92 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds in the Federal Republic of Germany have already drunk alcohol during their lives, either once or more or less often (lifetime prevalence). Only 8 per cent of this age group have been totally abstinent with respect to alcohol by this time. A large percentage of young people has experience of alcohol intoxication. 60 per cent have already experienced alcohol intoxication once in their lives, 40 per cent in the year preceding the time of questioning (young men 42 per cent, young women 35 per cent). 20 per cent have been drunk six times or more in their lives to date (male young people: 27 per cent, female young people: 12 per cent). And no change can be detected in the long-term development of experience of alcohol intoxication among young people.

Smoking

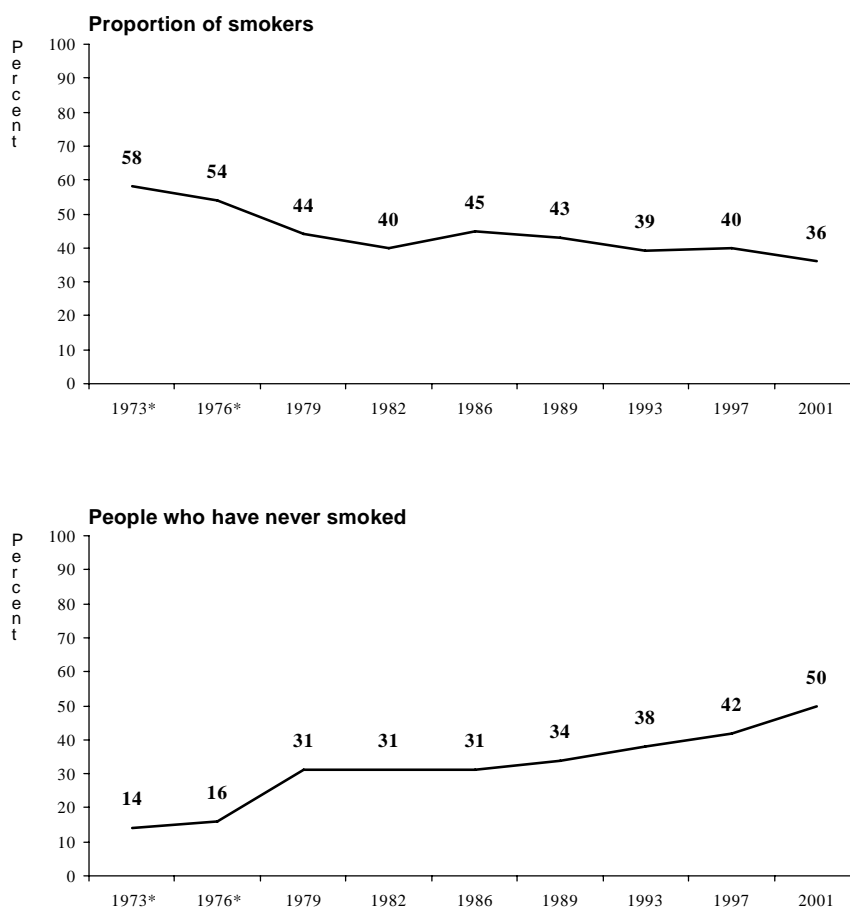
69 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds say that they have already smoked on some occasion. Some have obviously only tried a few cigarettes because a figure of 51 per cent is obtained if we use the frequently employed definition, according to which those who have not smoked more than 100 cigarettes to date are counted as never having smoked. 38 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds are current smokers, the figures being 38 per cent for young men and 37 per cent for young women. At 40 per cent, the proportion of smokers is slightly higher in eastern Germany than in western Germany, where 36 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds smoke.

Fig. 2

TOBACCO CONSUMPTION FROM 1973 TO 2001

12 to 25-year-olds

Time series data for western Germany



* 14 to 25-year-olds

Source: Representative surveys by the Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne

If we look at the whole period from 1973 to 2001, the percentage of smokers has decreased. In 1973, 58 per cent of young people smoked, while at present the proportion of smokers is 22 per cent lower, lying at 36 per cent (in western Germany). The proportion of smokers has stagnated in the past few years. The cause of the changes that can be observed, the decrease from 40 per cent in 1997 to 36 per cent in 2001, is in part the change in age structure. The decreasing trend is partly being slowed down by the smoking behaviour of 12 to 17-year-olds. In this age group, the proportion of smokers rose from 20 per cent in 1993 to 28 per cent in 1997 and remains at this level in 2001. The change in tobacco consumption among 12 to 17-year-olds occurred both in western Germany (an increase from 21 to 27 per cent) and in eastern Germany (an increase from 20 to 34 per cent).

The long-term trend in tobacco consumption among young people is, however, primarily determined by the sharp increase in the number of those who have never smoked. At the start of the series of observations in 1973 and 1976, the proportion of those who had never smoked was very low and then rose to 31 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds by 1979. In 2001, as many as half (50%) of the young people in western Germany were in the group of those who had never smoked. The trend curve calculated from the structurally adjusted results shows a statistically significant rise.

In addition to the increasing number of young people who never start smoking, a further trend towards less risky tobacco consumption can also be seen over the past few years. The number of heavy smokers among young smokers, i.e. those who smoke 20 cigarettes or more daily, has seen a marked decrease. In 1993, one-third (34%) were heavy smokers. In this year's repeat survey, 19 per cent stated that they smoked 20 cigarettes or more per day.

Illegal drugs

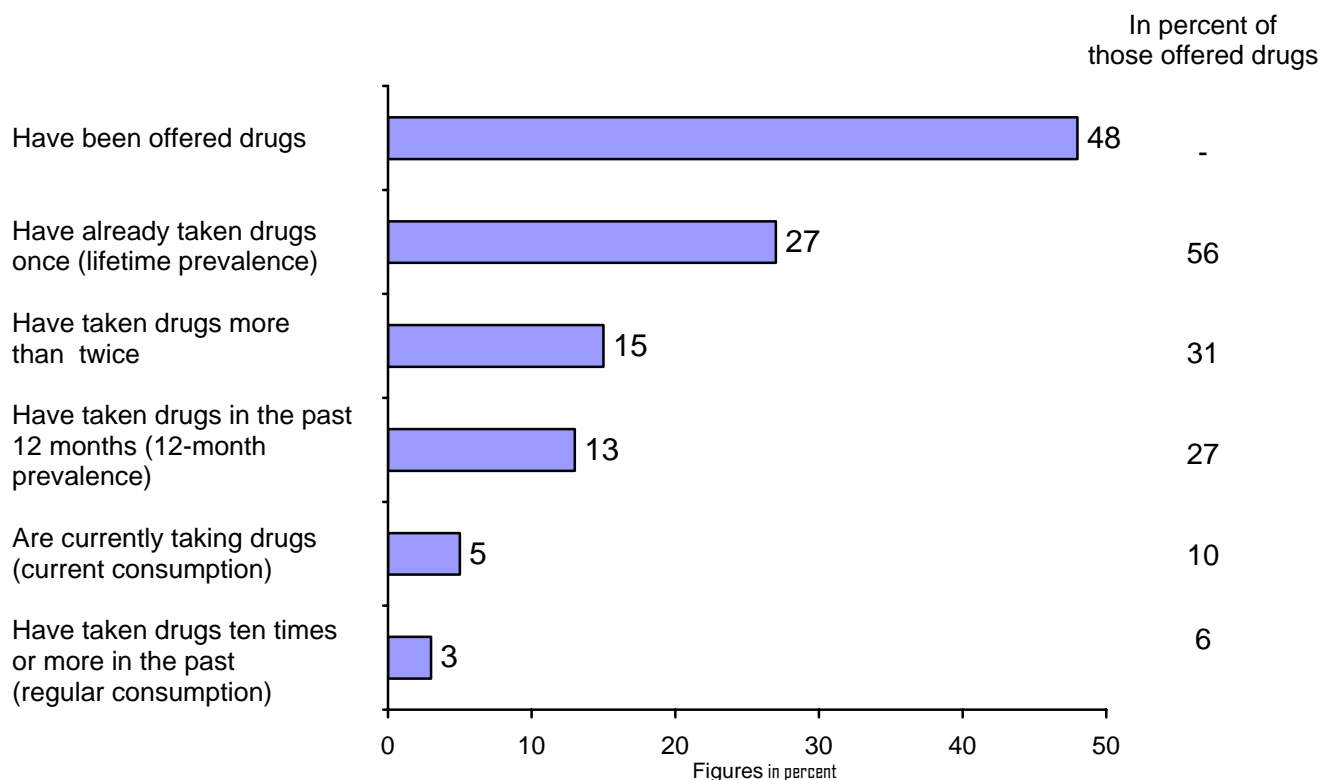
27 per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds in the Federal Republic of Germany have taken illegal drugs at least once in their lives (lifetime prevalence). Almost all of them had their drug experience with cannabis: 26 per cent have tried cannabis once or taken it more or less frequently. Only far smaller sub-groups of young people have experience of any of the other substances: 4 per cent say that they have tried ecstasy, 3 per cent amphetamines, 2 per cent LSD, 2 per cent cocaine. The drug affinity study yielded very small proportions for heroin, at 0.3 per cent, and crack at 0.2 per cent. A further 3 per cent named other narcotics, such as "magic mushrooms", or unusual jargon terms for conventional illegal drugs. The proportion of those with experience of drugs is 28 per cent in western Germany and 24 per cent in eastern Germany. Young males, with a lifetime prevalence of 30 per cent, have more experience of drugs than females (24%).

Drug use by young people cannot be completely described by the lifetime prevalence parameter. The drug affinity study therefore uses several indicators, the results of which have been compiled in Figure 3 and arranged in such a way that the whole process can be seen, from the first time of being offered drugs, through first-time use and up to current consumption.

Fig. 3

INDICATORS OF DRUG USE

12- to 25-year-olds in the Federal Republic of Germany



Source: Representative survey by the Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne

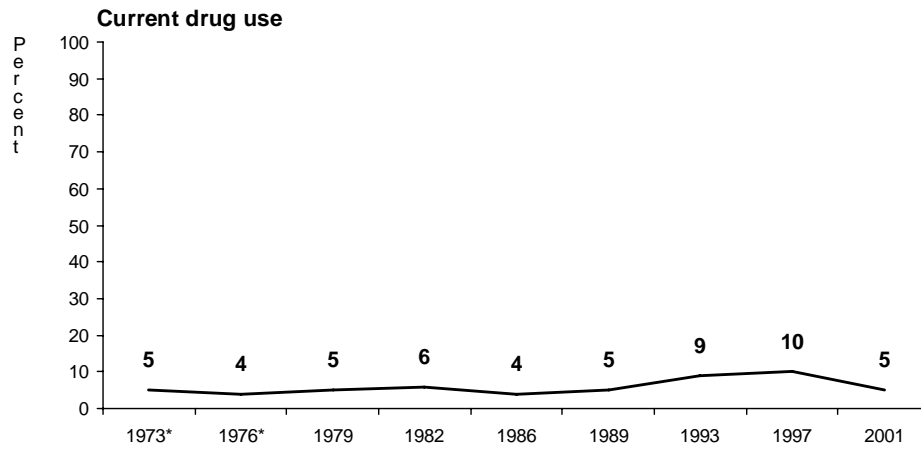
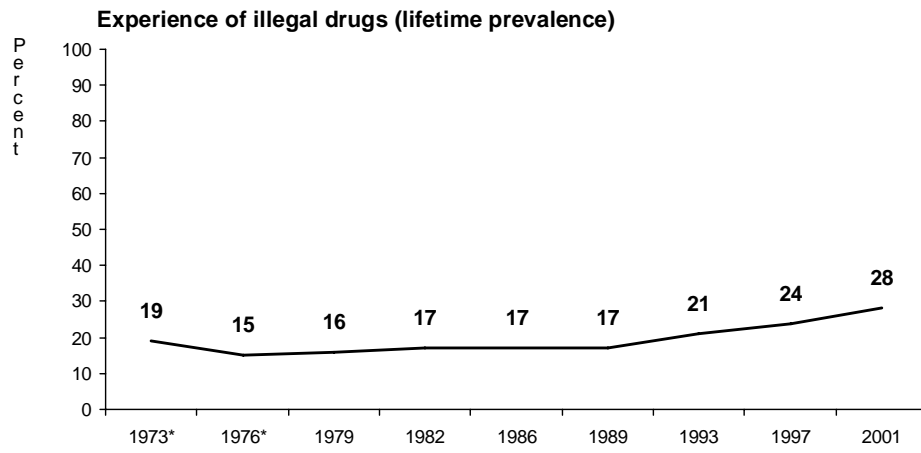
About half (48%) of the 12 to 25-year-olds say that they have been offered drugs at some time. However, by no means all of those offered illegal drugs actually take them or become more or less regular consumers. Thus, the lifetime prevalence is substantially lower than the number of those who have been offered drugs: the 27 per cent who have tried illegal drugs at some point make up slightly more than half (56%) of those who have been offered them at some point. A major proportion of those who accepted the offer of drugs only sampled them, so that 15 per cent of young people remain who have taken illegal drugs more than twice. The twelve-month prevalence, i.e. the figure for those who have taken drugs within the past twelve months, accounts for about a quarter (27%) of the figure for those offered drugs. And even in the case of drug use referred to the past year, the majority of cases involved trial consumption. Those who took drugs regularly in the past year, i.e. ten times or more, make up three per cent of all young people. Five per cent of 12 to 25-year-olds currently take drugs. This is one-tenth of those who have been offered drugs at some point. The figure for present consumption as a proportion of lifetime prevalence is 19 per cent; four-fifths of those with experience of drugs have therefore already stopped taking them again.

Two of these indicators, the proportion of those with experience of drugs (lifetime prevalence) and present consumption, have been recorded on a long-term basis since 1973. The curve for the proportion of those with experience of drugs runs at an average level of 17 per cent without any significant change until 1989; since 1989, the curve has been gradually rising. Calculation of the trend for the period from 1979 to 2001 yields a slightly ascending curve, although the increase does not differ significantly from zero. If we look at the curve over time for current drug use, there is an initial slight decrease in 1986 and 1989 and an increase in drug consumption in the mid-Nineties - as a side effect of the developing party culture among young people that included the consumption of new illegal substances, such as ecstasy, but also of cannabis. Current drug use declined again from 1997 to 2001. The increase in the figures for lifetime prevalence, together with the recent tendency for somewhat reduced present consumption, can be partly explained by the current composition of 12 to 25-year-olds in terms of age groups with different drugs experience. Thus, for example, the values at present for lifetime prevalence are particularly high because, on the one hand, those age groups with comparatively little use of drugs in the Eighties are no longer included. On the other hand, there is a concentration among the present 12 to 25-year-olds of those age groups in which relatively large numbers tried one illegal drug or another at least once in the mid-nineties.

Fig. 4

CONSUMPTION OF ILLEGAL DRUGS FROM 1973 TO 2001

12 to 25-year-olds
Time series data for western Germany



* 14 to 25-year-olds

Source: Representative survey by the Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne

The increasing number of those with experience of drugs may also be partly the result of the fact that more and more young people consider that trying cannabis, the drug principally consumed, is a possibility. The data regarding willingness to try or refuse various illegal drugs show a clear increase from 1993 to 2001 in the proportion of young people who believe that it might be all right to try cannabis once. In 1993, this was said by 22 per cent; in 2001, the figure had risen to 44 per cent. Even among those who have not yet had any experience with cannabis or other illegal drugs, 31 per cent believe that it might be all right to try cannabis once.

Table 1

WILLINGNESS TO TRY ILLEGAL DRUGS

12- to 25-year-olds with and without experience in drugs

	could perhaps try at some point	should never take at all
Cannabis		
1993	22	75
2001	44	55
-with experience of drugs	78	22
-without experience of drugs	31	68
Ecstasy		
1993	4	72
2001	12	87
-with experience of drugs	16	84
-without experience of drugs	10	89
Amphetamines		
1993	4	78
2001	12	87
-with experience of drugs	15	84
-without experience of drugs	10	88
LSD		
1993	3	80
2001	6	93
-with experience of drugs	9	90
-without experience of drugs	5	93
Cocaine		
1993	4	94
2001	6	93
-with experience of drugs	10	90
-without experience of drugs	5	94
Heroin		
1993	2	97
2001	3	96
-with experience of drugs	3	96
-without experience of drugs	3	96

Figures in percent

n= 3003

Source: Representative survey of the Federal Centre of Health Education, Cologne

An increase in the proportion of those willing to try can also be seen in the context of other illegal substances, for example an increase from 4 per cent in 1993 to 12 per cent in 2001 for ecstasy and amphetamines, and from 3 per cent to 6 per cent for LSD. However, in contrast to cannabis, the majority of young people are not at all willing to try these last substances, nor to try cocaine and heroin. This also applies to those who already have experience of drugs: 84 per cent would never take ecstasy, and the figure for those definitely refusing to take amphetamines is also 84 per cent; 90 per cent would never take LSD or cocaine, and 96 per cent of all young people, whether with or without experience of drugs, would never try heroin.

Summary

The current situation as regards the use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs by young people can be summarised as follows:

1. Experience of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs is widespread. Nine-tenths (92%) are familiar with alcohol from experience of drinking it themselves. Seven-tenths (69%) have already smoked at some time and over a quarter (27%) of 12 to 25-year-olds have already tried illegal drugs on some occasion.
2. In many cases, these experiences are limited to experimental and trial use; but there are also various sub-groups of young people who regularly, i.e. at least once a week, drink alcohol (30%), smoke constantly or occasionally (38%) or are currently using illegal drugs (5%).
3. In the long term, regular consumption is decreasing - in the case of alcohol consumption and smoking - or remaining basically unchanged - in the case of illegal drugs.
4. This development has led to a situation where a substantial proportion of young people in the whole of the Federal Republic today consumes moderate amounts or is totally abstinent. For example, 34 per cent drink alcohol rarely or not at all, 49 per cent have never or hardly ever smoked, and 73 per cent have never taken cannabis or other illegal drugs.