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Brief Report: Epidemiological Survey on Addiction 2021

Volume: Trends in the Prevalence of the (problematic) Use of Illegal Drugs by Gender and Age 1990-2021

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Introduction

The data presented below are based on the surveys of the Epidemiological Survey on Addiction (ESA) from 1990 to 2021. A detailed description of the methodology of the penultimate survey can be found in Rauschert et al. (2022). Results on trends in the prevalence of the use and problematic use (indicating dependence) of illegal drugs are presented and discussed for the total sample in Rauschert et al. (2022).

Definitions and calculation bases

Prevalence of use: Use at least one time for various illegal drugs estimated by lifetime, the last 12 months, and the last 30 days before the survey was completed. The variable for any illegal drug includes the substances cannabis, methamphetamine, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine, crack, and/or mushrooms.

Problematic use: Problematic use in the last 12 months was determined using the Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS, Gossop et al., 1995). A threshold of 2 points for cannabis and 3 points for cocaine was considered to be problematic use (Steiner et al., 2008).

Statistical analysis: Differences between 2021 and past survey years were tested for statistical significance using logistic regression, taking into account the control variables age, gender, and survey mode.

Literature

Gossop, M., Darke, S., Griffiths, P., Hando, J., Powis, B., Hall, W. & Strang, J. (1995). The Severity of Dependence Scale (SDS): Psychometric properties of the SDS in English and Australian samples of heroin, cocaine and amphetamine users. *Addiction*, 90(5), 607-614. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1360-0443.1995.9056072.x>

Rauschert, C., Möckl, J., Seitz, N.-N., Wilms, N., Olderbak, S., & Kraus, L. (2022). Konsum psychoaktiver Substanzen in Deutschland – Ergebnisse des Epidemiologischen Suchtsurvey 2021. *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, 119, 527-534. <https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.m2022.0244>

Steiner, S., Baumeister, S. E., & Kraus, L. (2008). Severity of Dependence Scale - Establishing a cut-off point for cannabis dependence in the German adult population. *Sucht*, 54(Sonderheft 1), S57-S63. <https://doi.org/10.1024/2008.07.07>

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Table 1: Lifetime prevalence of illegal drug use by age, 1990-2021 (percent)

	Age	Survey Year										
		1990	1995	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Any illegal drug ¹⁾	18-24	15,7*	25,2*	24,3*	37,1*	43,9	40,3	35,2*	28,8*	34,9*	41,7	42,7
	25-39	14,1*	16,8*	16,3*	24,7*	30,5*	32,7*	38,7*	39,5*	41,4*	42,4*	48,7
	40-59	-	5,2*	5,0*	10,6*	16,6*	17,2*	20,6*	19,8*	23,5*	23,6*	32,9
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	5,5*	7,2*	10,3*	13,5	15,0	17,6
Cannabis	18-24	15,2*	23,6*	21,5*	36,6*	43,0	39,5	34,5*	28,5*	34,6*	41,2	42,2
	25-39	13,4*	16,2*	15,7*	24,2*	29,8*	31,9*	37,5*	39,0*	40,8*	41,9*	48,5
	40-59	-	4,8*	4,9*	10,2*	15,9*	16,5*	19,7*	18,9*	22,8*	23,1*	32,7
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	5,0*	5,8*	9,6*	13,3	13,8	17,2
Amphetamine/ Methamphet- amines	18-24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,8*	4,7	6,5
	25-39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,7*	6,8	8,7
	40-59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,5*	2,6*	4,9
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,8	1,0	1,2
Amphetamine	18-24	2,6*	5,9	2,5*	4,6*	6,0*	5,4*	5,0	3,0*	3,7*	4,5*	6,5
	25-39	2,9*	2,8*	1,9*	2,5*	4,1*	3,5*	5,3*	5,3*	5,6*	6,6*	8,6
	40-59	-	1,0*	0,9*	1,3*	2,1*	1,5*	2,8*	1,9*	2,4*	2,5*	4,7
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	0,5	0,9	1,2	0,7	1,0	1,2
Methamphet- amines	18-24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,7	0,6	0,4
	25-39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,7	1,3	1,1
	40-59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,3*	0,4	1,0
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0
Ecstasy	18-24	-	5,8*	4,9*	5,2*	6,3*	5,4*	3,7*	2,0*	3,3*	4,8*	7,4
	25-39	-	1,4*	1,8*	2,0*	3,7*	3,9*	5,3*	6,0*	5,7*	6,3*	8,6
	40-59	-	0,1*	0,1*	0,1*	0,5*	0,3*	0,8*	1,1*	1,7*	2,7	4,2
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,2	0,2	0,5
LSD	18-24	1,1*	2,8*	1,7*	3,0*	3,3*	2,2*	1,1*	0,9*	1,6*	2,0*	4,2
	25-39	2,1*	2,2*	1,9*	2,0*	3,0*	2,4*	3,4	3,5	2,5*	3,0	3,9
	40-59	-	1,0*	0,8*	1,4*	1,8*	1,5*	2,4	1,6*	2,6	1,9	2,6
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	0,1*	1,1	1,2	2,8	2,2	2,2
Opiates	18-24	1,1*	3,3	1,2*	1,5*	2,0*	0,9*	1,0*	0,5*	0,8*	1,6*	3,1
	25-39	1,6*	1,8*	1,1*	1,3*	1,8*	1,5*	1,9	1,9	1,4	1,9	1,9
	40-59	-	0,4*	0,4*	0,4*	0,9*	0,9	1,7	1,1	1,4	1,5	1,2
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	0,1	1,5	0,3	0,9	1,1	0,6
Cocaine/Crack	18-24	-	4,3	2,1*	3,8*	4,7	4,1	3,8	2,1*	2,4*	2,9*	5,1
	25-39	-	2,9*	1,9*	3,7*	4,8*	4,1*	5,5	6,6	5,6	6,3	7,6
	40-59	-	0,4*	0,6*	0,6*	1,6*	1,5*	2,5*	2,3*	3,6	3,6	5,2
	60-64	-	-	-	-	-	0,3	0,3*	0,7	1,3	1,1	1,1

¹⁾ Cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine/crack, and/or mushrooms.

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to 2021.

-) was not collected.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, gender, survey mode.

Fisher's exact test was used for small cell sizes ($n \leq 5$).

Table 2: Trends in the lifetime prevalence of illegal drug use by gender, 1995-2021 (18- to 59-year-olds) (percent)

		Survey Year									
		1995	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Any illegal drug ¹⁾	Total	12,5*	12,3*	19,9*	25,3*	25,4*	28,4*	27,2*	30,8*	32,4*	39,8
	Men	16,7*	14,8*	23,5*	31,4*	29,6*	33,2*	31,7*	35,5*	37,0*	44,2
	Women	8,3*	9,8*	16,2*	18,9*	21,1*	23,5*	22,5*	26,0*	27,7*	35,1
Cannabis	Total	11,9*	11,5*	19,4*	24,5*	24,7*	27,5*	26,6*	30,2*	31,9*	39,5
	Men	16,0*	13,9*	23,0*	30,5*	28,8*	32,4*	31,1*	35,1*	36,4*	44,0
	Women	7,8*	9,2*	15,7*	18,3*	20,4*	22,3*	21,8*	25,3*	27,2*	34,7
Amphetamine/Methamphetamines	Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,7*	4,3*	6,4
	Men	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4,6*	5,2*	8,1
	Women	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,8*	3,4	4,7
Amphetamine	Total	2,4*	1,5*	2,3*	3,4*	2,7*	3,9*	3,1*	3,6*	4,2*	6,3
	Men	3,3*	2,2*	2,7*	4,4*	3,3*	5,5*	4,3*	4,5*	5,1*	8,0
	Women	1,5*	0,8*	1,8*	2,3*	2,1*	2,3*	1,9*	2,7*	3,2	4,6
Methamphetamines	Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,5*	0,7	1,0
	Men	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,7*	0,8	1,3
	Women	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,4	0,6	0,6
Ecstasy	Total	1,4*	1,5*	1,6*	2,4*	2,2*	2,6*	2,8*	3,2*	4,2	6,2
	Men	2,2*	2,0*	2,0*	3,2*	2,7*	3,2*	3,5*	3,7*	4,8*	7,8
	Women	0,6*	1,0*	1,1*	1,7*	1,7*	2,0*	2,0*	2,7*	3,6	4,5
LSD	Total	1,7*	1,3*	1,9*	2,5*	1,9*	2,6	2,1*	2,4	2,3	3,3
	Men	2,4*	1,9*	2,5*	3,2*	2,6*	3,5	2,6*	3,3	2,8	4,5
	Women	1,0*	0,7*	1,2*	1,7*	1,2*	1,6	1,5	1,6	1,7	2,1
Opiates	Total	1,4*	0,8*	0,9*	1,4*	1,1*	1,7	1,3*	1,3	1,6	1,7
	Men	2,0*	1,1*	1,3*	1,9*	1,2*	2,1	1,4*	1,6	1,9	2,1
	Women	0,8*	0,5*	0,6*	0,9*	1,0*	1,2	1,1	1,0	1,4	1,4
Cocaine/Crack	Total	1,9*	1,4*	2,3*	3,2*	2,7*	3,6*	3,6*	4,1*	4,4	6,1
	Men	2,8*	1,9*	2,9*	4,3*	3,3*	4,9*	4,6*	5,2	5,3	7,5
	Women	1,0*	0,8*	1,7*	2,0*	2,1*	2,4*	2,6*	2,9*	3,6	4,6

¹⁾ Cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine/crack, and/or mushrooms.

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to 2021.

-) was not collected.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, survey mode.

Table 3: 12-month prevalence of illegal drug use by age, 1990-2021 (percent)

	Age	Survey Year										
		1990	1995	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Any illegal drug ¹⁾	18 - 24	7,9*	16,7*	13,6*	21,8*	22,8*	17,5*	15,9*	14,7*	21,3	25,0	24,9
	25 - 39	2,4*	5,4*	5,1*	7,3*	8,7*	6,7*	7,2*	7,8*	9,1*	11,5	13,3
	40 - 59	-	0,6*	0,6*	0,9*	2,5*	1,7*	1,8*	1,6*	3,0*	3,2	5,0
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,2*	0,3*	0,4*	0,5*	1,2	1,6
Cannabis	18 - 24	7,7*	15,7*	11,9*	21,1*	22,1	16,9*	15,1*	14,3*	20,6	24,3	23,9
	25 - 39	2,3*	5,0*	4,8*	7,0*	8,4*	6,5*	6,7*	7,3*	8,3*	10,7	12,5
	40 - 59	-	0,5*	0,6*	0,8*	2,1*	1,5*	1,8*	1,4*	2,8*	2,6*	4,7
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,1*	0,1*	0,2*	0,4*	0,8	1,5
Amphetamine/ Methamphetamine	18 - 24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,6	2,5	3,0
	25 - 39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,3	2,5	1,9
	40 - 59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,5	0,3	0,5
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,1
Amphetamines	18 - 24	0,6*	3,1	1,8*	2,7	3,1	2,4	2,8	1,3*	2,5	2,5	3,0
	25 - 39	0,2*	0,6*	0,4*	0,5*	1,1*	0,7*	1,0*	1,2*	1,3	2,4	1,9
	40 - 59	-	0,1*	0,0*	0,1*	0,2*	0,1*	0,2*	0,3	0,5	0,3	0,5
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1
Methamphetamine	18 - 24	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,4	0,1	0,2
	25 - 39	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,1	0,3	0,2
	40 - 59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,1	0,1	0,1
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0
Ecstasy	18 - 24	-	4,2	2,8	2,9	2,1*	1,9*	1,3*	0,7*	2,1	2,8	3,2
	25 - 39	-	0,6*	0,9*	0,7*	1,2*	0,5*	0,6*	0,6*	0,8*	2,0	1,8
	40 - 59	-	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,2	0,3	0,3	0,1
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
LSD	18 - 24	0,2*	2,0	1,3*	1,0*	0,6*	0,4*	0,4*	0,3*	0,6*	0,9*	2,3
	25 - 39	0,0*	0,5*	0,2*	0,1*	0,4*	0,1*	0,1*	0,4*	0,2*	0,6	0,9
	40 - 59	-	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,2	0,1	0,2
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,0
Opiates	18 - 24	0,2*	1,5	0,7	0,8	0,5	0,3*	0,6	0,1*	0,3	0,8	0,9
	25 - 39	0,1*	0,5	0,4*	0,3*	0,5	0,4	0,3	0,6	0,2	0,6	0,6
	40 - 59	-	0,0	0,0	0,0*	0,2	0,2	0,1	0,2	0,3	0,3	0,3
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,3	0,1
Cocaine/Crack	18 - 24	-	2,4	1,8	2,5	2,1	1,9	2,1	0,9*	1,3*	1,6*	3,0
	25 - 39	-	1,1*	0,7*	1,2*	1,3*	1,0*	1,4*	1,5	0,7*	2,1	2,4
	40 - 59	-	0,1*	0,1*	0,1*	0,4*	0,2*	0,3	0,2*	0,4	0,5	0,7
	60 - 64	-	-	-	-	-	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0

¹⁾ Cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine/crack, and/or mushrooms.

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to 2021.

-) was not collected.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, gender, survey mode.

Fisher's exact test was used for small cell sizes ($n \leq 5$).

Table 4: 12-month prevalence of illegal drug use by sex, 1995-2021 (18- to 59-year-olds) (percent)

		Survey Year									
		1995	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Any illegal drug ¹⁾	Total	4,7*	4,4*	6,3*	7,4*	5,4*	5,6*	5,4*	7,5*	8,9	10,6
	Men	6,9*	5,8*	8,0*	9,6*	7,4*	7,3*	7,0*	9,3*	11,0	13,0
	Women	2,5*	3,0*	4,5*	5,0*	3,4*	3,7*	3,7*	5,6*	6,8	8,1
Cannabis	Total	4,4*	4,0*	6,0*	6,9*	5,1*	5,2*	5,1*	7,0*	8,3	10,0
	Men	6,5*	5,4*	7,6*	9,1*	7,0*	7,0*	6,7*	8,7*	10,3	12,3
	Women	2,3*	2,7*	4,4*	4,7*	3,1*	3,4*	3,4*	5,3*	6,2	7,6
Amphetamine/ Methamphetamine	Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,0	1,3	1,4
	Men	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,4	1,7	1,7
	Women	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,7	1,0	1,0
Amphetamine	Total	0,7*	0,4*	0,6*	0,9*	0,6*	0,8*	0,7*	1,0	1,3	1,3
	Men	1,2*	0,8*	0,8*	1,3*	0,9*	1,2	1,1	1,3	1,6	1,6
	Women	0,3*	0,0*	0,4*	0,5*	0,3*	0,5*	0,3*	0,7	0,0	1,0
Methamphetamine	Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,1	0,1	0,1
	Men	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,1	0,2	0,2
	Women	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,2	0,1	0,1
Ecstasy	Total	0,8*	0,8*	0,7*	0,8*	0,5*	0,4*	0,4*	0,7	1,2	1,2
	Men	1,4*	1,1*	1,0*	1,2*	0,8*	0,7*	0,7*	0,8	1,4	1,7
	Women	0,3*	0,5	0,3*	0,3*	0,1*	0,2*	0,2*	0,5	1,1	0,7
LSD	Total	0,5*	0,4*	0,2*	0,3*	0,1*	0,1*	0,2*	0,2*	0,4	0,7
	Men	0,8*	0,6*	0,2*	0,4*	0,2*	0,2*	0,3*	0,3*	0,6	1,0
	Women	0,2*	0,1*	0,1*	0,1*	0,0*	0,1*	0,1*	0,2	0,2*	0,4
Opiates	Total	0,4*	0,3*	0,2*	0,3*	0,3*	0,2*	0,3	0,3	0,5	0,4
	Men	0,6	0,5*	0,4*	0,4*	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,3	0,5	0,6
	Women	0,2*	0,0*	0,1*	0,2*	0,2	0,1*	0,3	0,3	0,4	0,3
Cocaine/Crack	Total	0,8*	0,6*	0,9*	1,0*	0,7*	0,9*	0,7*	0,6*	1,2	1,6
	Men	1,3*	0,9*	1,2*	1,5*	1,0*	1,3	1,1*	0,9*	1,5	2,2
	Women	0,3*	0,3*	0,6*	0,5*	0,3*	0,4*	0,3*	0,4*	0,9	1,1

¹⁾ Cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine, crack and/or mushrooms.

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to 2021.

-) was not collected.

- 12-month prevalence for ecstasy not collected in 1990.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, survey mode.

Fisher's exact test was used for small cell sizes ($n \leq 5$).

Table 5: Trends in the 30-day prevalence of illegal drug use by age, 1995-2021 (percent)

	Age	Survey Year									
		1995	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Any illegal drug ¹⁾	18 – 24	11,7	9,5*	13,3	12,5	8,4*	7,7*	7,0*	10,4	10,8	11,7
	25 – 39	3,4*	3,2*	3,6*	4,4*	3,6*	3,7*	4,2*	4,4*	5,0	7,0
	40 – 59	0,3*	0,5*	0,5*	1,0*	0,8*	1,0*	1,0*	1,7	1,2*	2,5
	60 – 64	-	-	-	-	0,0*	0,1*	0,2*	0,4*	0,8	1,2
Cannabis	18 – 24	9,9	8,3*	12,7	11,9	7,8*	7,0*	6,7*	9,7	10,3	10,9
	25 – 39	3,2*	3,0*	3,5*	4,1*	3,2*	3,4*	3,6*	4,0*	4,5	6,3
	40 – 59	0,3*	0,5*	0,4*	0,8*	0,6*	0,9*	0,8*	1,5	0,9*	2,3
	60 – 64	-	-	-	-	0,0	0,1*	0,0	0,4*	0,3*	1,1

¹⁾ Cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine, crack and/or mushrooms.

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to 2021.

-) was not collected.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, gender, survey mode.

Fisher’s exact test was used for small cell sizes ($n \leq 5$).

Table 6: Trends in 30-day prevalence of illegal drug use by gender, 1995-2021 (18- to 59-year-olds) (percent)

		Survey Year									
		1995	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Any illegal drug ¹⁾	Total	3,1*	3,0*	3,4*	3,7*	2,7*	2,8*	2,8*	3,7*	3,8*	5,3
	Men	4,9*	4,1*	4,7*	5,1*	3,8*	4,1*	4,0*	5,0*	4,9*	6,9
	Women	1,3*	1,8*	2,2*	2,3*	1,6*	1,6*	1,6*	2,4*	2,6	3,7
Cannabis	Total	2,8*	2,7*	3,3*	3,4*	2,4*	2,6*	2,5*	3,5*	3,4*	4,9
	Men	4,4*	3,7*	4,6*	4,7*	3,4*	3,7*	3,7*	4,6*	4,4*	6,5
	Women	1,1*	1,7*	1,9*	2,1*	1,4*	1,4*	1,3*	2,2	2,4	3,2

¹⁾ Cannabis, amphetamines, ecstasy, LSD, opiates, cocaine, crack and/or mushrooms.

* Statistically significant difference (p < 0.05) compared to 2021.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, survey mode.

Table 7: Trends in the prevalence of problematic cannabis use according to the SDS¹⁾ in the past 12 months among 18- to 59-year-olds, 2006-2021 (total population and users) (percent)

	Survey Year			
	2006	2009	2015	2021
Total (n)	6953	7256	8224	8018
Total population	1,5*	1,3*	1,2*	2,6
Consumers	33,1	29,8	17,8*	26,4
Men (n)	3062	3188	3690	3451
Total population	2,3*	1,8*	1,5*	3,5
Consumers	35,8	30,9	17,3*	29,2
Women (n)	3891	4068	4534	4554
Total population	0,8*	0,8*	0,9*	1,6
Consumers	27,0	27,6	18,8	22,2

¹⁾ SDS: Severity of Dependence Scale; sum value ≥ 2 .

* Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared to 2021.

Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, gender, survey mode.

n for the complete sample

Table 8: Trends in prevalences of problem cocaine use by SDS¹⁾ in the past 12 months among 18- to 59-year-olds, 2006-2021 (total population and users) (percent)

	Survey Year		
	2009	2015	2021
Total (n)	7312	8231	8058
Total population	0,2	0,2	0,3
Consumers	26,1	25,7	21,9
Men (n)	3227	3690	3472
Total population	0,2	0,2	0,5
Consumers	18,8	24,8	22,9
Women (n)	4085	4541	4573
Total population	0,2	0,1	0,2
Consumers	51,9*	27,6	19,6

¹⁾ SDS: Severity of Dependence Scale; sum score ≥ 3 . * Statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) compared with 2021. Logistic regression to predict prevalences with year (reference: 2021), age, sex, survey mode. n for the complete sample.