

# Drugs: perceptions of substances, public policies and users

**Stanislas Spilka,  
Olivier Le Nézet,  
Eric Janssen,  
Alex Bressot,  
Antoine Philippon,  
Sandra Chyderiotis**

Since 1999, the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) has been quantifying the opinions and perceptions of the French population on drugs and related public policies through the EROPP survey (Survey on representations, opinions and perceptions regarding psychoactive drugs). For this fifth edition, a sample of 2 001 individuals, representing the French population aged 18 to 75, was selected based on quota sampling. The survey makes it possible to see how opinions are structured around issues in the public debate but also to consider how opinions in France have developed over the last twenty years. For continuity, most of the themes studied in previous surveys have been kept (for example, the perceived dangerousness of different psychoactive substances, the representation of heroin users and opinions on drug legislation). In addition, questions on current topics and new issues have been added.

In 2018, the EROPP survey focused on five psychoactive substances: tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine and heroin. These are the most well-known substances and those that are most often spontaneously identified as drugs or which are the most widespread in France. This is particularly the case for alcohol, tobacco and, to a lesser extent, cannabis (widely used by the French population), while cocaine and heroin use remain much more limited [1, 2].

Cannabis is a special case when it comes to the range of psychoactive substances, so the 2018 survey expanded and developed the questions on this substance. In recent decades, its use has increased in France<sup>1</sup> and in many other countries. Although it is still classified as a narcotic, both in France (since the 1925 International Geneva Convention) and internationally (UN Conventions of 1961, 1971 and 1988), several countries have decided to decriminalise the possession of small quantities for personal use [3] or even to legalise the market (Canada, Uruguay and some American states) [4, 5]. It is likely that these recent developments may have influenced the opinions of the general public and helped normalise user behaviour.

**The fifth edition of the survey on representations, opinions and perceptions regarding psychoactive drugs (EROPP 2018) reviews developments over the last 20 years**



This issue of *Tendances* first discusses drug-related knowledge and how dangerous they are perceived to be. Secondly, it reports on individuals' adherence to public policies that are currently in force or being discussed in France or in other countries. Finally, a final section summarises cannabis users' opinions through a classification that groups together individuals with similar views. Where possible, the results are compared with those from previous surveys.

## ■ Perceptions of drugs

### “Drugs”; a subject rarely considered to be a concern

As a preamble, respondents were asked to state their reasons for concern for French society, from a list of predetermined topics. In 2018, the public health issues put forward (drugs, AIDS) were very rarely cited as a cause for concern, with respondents expressing more concern about economic, social or environmental issues (Table 1). The theme of “drugs” was cited by one in eight people (13%), which is considerably less than the proportion of people who cited poverty (59%), unemployment (42%), pollution (39%), safety (35%), and AIDS. This relative position shows that this issue is no longer a predominant cause for concern.

<sup>1</sup>. The proportion of adults who have used cannabis in their lifetime increased from 13% in 2000 to 45% in 2017 [2].

## Knowledge of drugs: relative stability over time

The number of people who feel they are informed about drugs has increased significantly over the last two decades. In 2018, 68% of respondents felt that they were “very or somewhat well-informed about drugs”, compared to 58% in 1999 [6].

To the question “what are the main drugs you are aware of, even if you have just heard their name before?”, in 2018, all respondents cited at least one substance, most often an illegal substance (Table 2). Cannabis was still the most commonly named substance (88%), followed by cocaine (68%) and heroin (50%). As was the case in 1999, in 2018, alcohol and tobacco were only spontaneously mentioned by one in four people and only 10% cited one of these two substances as the first substance they thought of. Crack (15%), MDMA (7%) and morphine (5%) were mentioned less often. Lifetime users of at least one illicit drug were able to state an average of two more substances than individuals who had never used them (5 for the former and 3 for the latter).

The ranking of the substances listed has barely changed since 1999. It should be noted, however, that ecstasy was mentioned slightly less often than in the past, but MDMA (the active ingredient in ecstasy) was mentioned more often in 2018.

Most people were able to correctly rank these substances based on their distribution levels in France. Three-quarters (76%) of respondents said cannabis was the most widely used illicit substance. A minority thought it was cocaine (7%),

**Table 1. Response rate to the question “What are the two issues facing French society that concern you the most?” (%)**

	2002	2013	2018
Poverty	34	54	59
Unemployment	33	61	42
Pollution	29	16	39
Safety	50	33	35
Drugs	23	25	13
AIDS	29	9	6

*Interpretation: 59% of respondents reported poverty to be one of the two issues they found most concerning among the 6 suggested response categories.*

Sources: EROPP 2002, 2013, 2018; OFDT

ecstasy (5%) or heroin (2%), while 10% of people did not say anything.

In a second phase, respondents were asked to provide an estimate of the proportion of cannabis and cocaine users they thought there were. One in two respondents (51%) (rightly) considered that “around half” of French people had used cannabis in their lives. Three in ten (31%) thought that “most” people were lifetime users of this substance and 14% said they thought “very few” people were.

With regard to cocaine, 71% of respondents believed that the proportion of lifetime users was limited (“very few”<sup>2</sup>). On the other hand, nearly one in five respondents (18%) thought that half of French people were lifetime users and according to 6% of them, this phenomenon even affected “most” adults.

More lifetime users of at least one illicit drug overestimated the spread of cannabis in France. In contrast, those who had never tried it clearly under-

**Table 2. Substances spontaneously cited as a drug (%)**

	1999	2018
Cannabis	77	88
Cocaine	53	68
Heroin	45	50
LSD	28	30
Ecstasy	39	27
Alcohol	21	24
Tobacco	21	22
Crack	12	15
Other opiates	8	10
MDMA	Na	7
Morphine	8	5
Other products mentioned (hallucinogenic mushrooms, GHB, ketamine...)	16	23

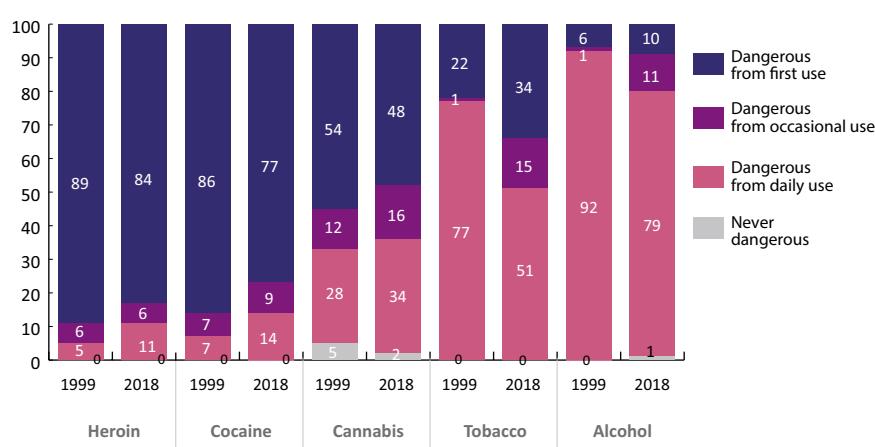
*Note: in 1999, MDMA was sometimes mentioned among other substances.*

Sources: EROPP 1999, 2018; OFDT

estimated the proportion of lifetime users, reflecting a common tendency in opinion surveys for respondents to over-estimate figures based on their own circumstances.

Although most respondents did not spontaneously cite tobacco or alcohol as drugs, two-thirds (66%) agreed that “alcohol abuse poses more problems to society than (illicit) drug use” and more than half (55%) agreed that this was the case for tobacco use. These opinions have remained the same since 2002 [7]. Finally, only 28% of respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the opinion that “we can eventually arrive at the point where no one will smoke tobacco”. About half as many (17%) believed that “we can eventually arrive at the point where no one will drink alcohol”.

**Figure 1. The threshold of different drugs perceived to be dangerous in 1999 and 2018 (%)**



Sources: EROPP 1999, 2018; OFDT

<sup>2</sup> By 2017, 5.6% of adults aged between 18 and 64 were lifetime users of cocaine, according to the French Public Health Agency health barometer (SpF).

## Tobacco and alcohol: developments in the limits perceived to be dangerous

Over the last twenty years, the vast majority of respondents have continued to believe that illicit substances, other than cannabis, pose a major health risk from the first time they take them. In 2018, 84% considered heroin to be dangerous from the first time it is taken, while 77% considered this to be the case for cocaine (Figure 1). These proportions were slightly lower than they were in 1999, while a slightly higher proportion of respondents considered that cocaine and heroin would only be dangerous if they were used on a daily basis.

For cannabis, one in two people (48%) considered it to be dangerous from the first time it is taken, while one third of respondents (34%) defined the dangerous limit as taking the substance every day, while 16% said occasional use was a dangerous level (for which there is no specific definition). As is the case with other illicit substances, there has been a shift in what is perceived as a dangerous level of cannabis, from lifetime use to at least occasional use. For most respondents, this dangerousness is reflected in terms of dependency: 85% of them considered that a cannabis smoker can become "so dependent that they can no longer do without it". Cannabis is, along with alcohol, the only substance that a very small proportion considered to never be dangerous (2% and 1% respectively).

The level of cannabis people considered to be dangerous is strongly linked to lifetime use of an illicit drug. People who had already used an illicit drug themselves were less likely to consider the substances dangerous from the outset: only 33% of them reported that they deemed cannabis to be bad for your health even from just experimenting with the substance, compared to 57% of people who had never used an illicit substance (see box).

Unlike illicit substances, only a minority of respondents considered licit substances to be dangerous from the first use: 34% for tobacco and 10% for alcohol. For these substances, 51% of respondents said that using tobacco everyday was dangerous, while 79% said this was the case for alcohol. The estimated dangerous limit has mainly changed for tobacco, as almost one in two French people (49%) now consider that even lifetime or occasional use are harmful and bad for your health. While twenty years ago, this figure was one in four (22%).

Once again, the respondent's relationship with these two substances had an influence on their perceptions. Respondents who reported to be smokers are less likely than others to classify tobacco as dangerous from the first time it is used (28% compared to 36%) and they are more likely to only

consider it to be dangerous if used daily (56% compared to 49%). The same is true for alcohol: 5% of people who drink at least once a week said it is dangerous from the first time it is used, compared to 11% of those who do not drink as often or not at all.

## Users' "relationship" with substances; the main factor associated with opinions on drugs

Opinions on drugs in general, or on cannabis in particular, vary significantly depending on the sex and age of the respondents. But these differences tend to disappear when opinions are analysed based on respondents' relationship with drugs. Therefore, opinions and representations of psychoactive substances are strongly linked to whether they are a lifetime user, a regular user, or simply depending on the number of people using them in their close circle. Therefore, differences in opinion based on sex and age can be largely explained by differences in the proportion of people using in these categories.

For example, when it comes to cannabis, young adults have more positive representations of the substance compared to older adults. However, in 2017, 17.7% of 26-34-year-olds used cannabis over the year, compared to 1.6% of 55-64-year-olds [2]. Likewise, men were more likely to have these positive opinions, who were twice as likely as women to have smoked cannabis over the year.

Other socio-economic factors are likely to have an impact on shaping opinions, such as the respondents' social and professional status.

## In short



### Tobacco

- For 54% of respondents, people are less accepting if you are a smoker.
- 15% of respondents estimate that up to 10 cigarettes a day can be smoked without any health risks.
- 37% considered e-cigarettes to be less harmful than normal cigarettes, 6% considered them to be more harmful, 46% said they were as harmful and 11% didn't know.



### Alcohol

- For 56% of the respondents, offering or drinking alcohol is polite and shows good manners.
- 36% had never noticed a logo on alcohol bottles warning of the dangers of alcohol for pregnant women\*.
- 23% of respondents recalled seeing or hearing an advert for an alcoholic beverage in the last week.
- 45% of people considered it acceptable to have your first alcoholic drink before the age of 18.

(\* ) made mandatory on alcoholic beverage bottles since 2007 (ministerial legislative order of 2 October 2006) [8].

## ■ Public policy: between consent and willingness to change

### What penalties are there for drug users? Against prison and in favour of care measures

The survey focused on opinions about criminal responses to drug use. Almost all respondents (93%) considered compulsory drug treatment for users to be a “very good thing” or “a rather good thing” (53% and 40% respectively). This has been the case since 1999.

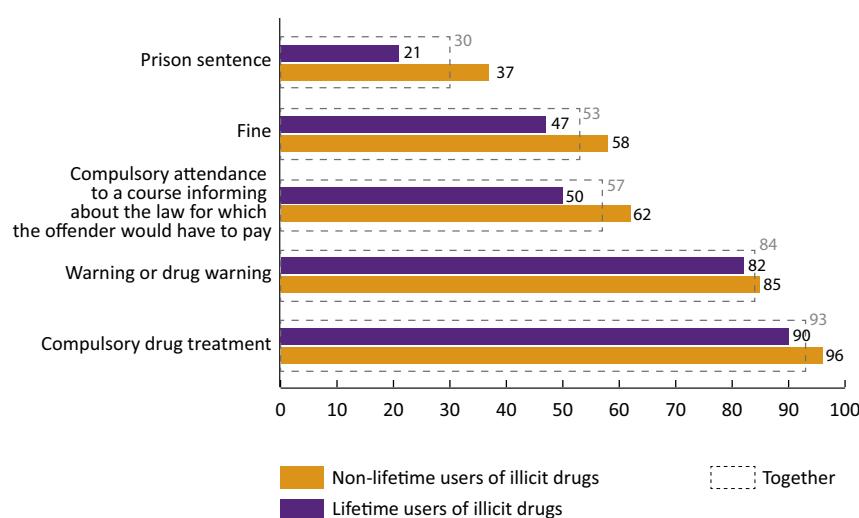
More than half of the respondents agreed with the idea of being fined (53%) or “imposing compulsory attendance to a course informing them about the law” for which the offender would have to pay (57%, Figure 2). In contrast, seven in ten respondents (70%) considered the possibility of a “prison sentence for users” to be a bad thing. A warning or drug warning is a method for penalising users that was supported by 84% of respondents. People who have used an illicit drug in their lifetime are more likely to be against all kinds of criminal measures. Therefore, only 21% of them approved of the idea of imposing a prison sentence on illicit drug users, compared to 37% of non-lifetime users. The same applies to the idea of fining users (47% compared to 58%) and imposing compulsory attendance to a course informing them about the law for which the offender would have to pay (50% compared to 62%).

Moreover, while 36% of respondents agreed with the idea that “banning drugs is an infringement of the right to do what you want with your body”, only 15% believed that “all illicit drugs should be sold over the counter like tobacco and alcohol”.

When only asked about penalties for cannabis use, respondents’ opinions did not vary with regard to the use of fines, warnings or drug warnings and courses informing users about the law. But they were slightly less in favour of the option of a prison sentence (23%) and compulsory drug treatment (82%).

Besides the same number of respondents being in favour of fines, the number of those in favour of other measures was down compared to 2013 (36% of respondents were in favour of a prison sentence for cannabis users then) [9]. Again, lifetime users of an illicit substance (mainly cannabis) were less inclined to accept the legislative measures in force: only 12% considered a prison sentence to be an appropriate penalty for using cannabis and 39% were in favour of the idea of a fine, compared to 30% and 60% of people who had never used an illicit drug, respectively.

**Figure 2. Percentage of respondents who considered each of the possible criminal responses to drug use as “a very good thing” or “a rather good thing”, depending on whether they are lifetime users of an illicit drug or not (%)**



Source: EROPP 2018; OFDT

### Mixed opinions on cannabis legalisation, but consensus in favour of its medical use

In 2018, 45% of respondents answered positively to the question “Would you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the legalisation of cannabis?” which was asked for the first time in the survey. Nineteen percent “strongly agreed” and 26% “agreed” (Figure 3), while 33% “strongly disagreed” and 21% “disagreed” (1% did not state their opinion). This view is strongly related to whether the respondents had used cannabis in the past: 66% of those who were lifetime users said they were in favour of legalisation, compared to 29% of those who had never tried it. 94% of recent users (individuals who had used cannabis at least once in the month preceding the survey) were in favour of legalising cannabis.

A slightly smaller number of French people supported the idea that “cannabis should be sold over the counter, like tobacco or alcohol” (38%), with some of those in favour of legalisation wishing for an alternative regulatory model that is either more or less restrictive. Nevertheless, this proportion appears to be on the rise compared to 2013 [9], when only 23% of them supported this idea.

However, when the question was asked for the first time, there was a considerable proportion of people in favour of the “medical” use of cannabis<sup>3</sup>: 91% of respondents supported the principle of physicians prescribing cannabis “for

certain serious or chronic diseases” (56% “strongly agreed” and 35% “agreed”).

Finally, 40% of respondents maintained that “those who wish to do so should be allowed to grow small quantities of cannabis for their own personal use”. As with legalisation, this opinion varied widely depending on how much they had used cannabis in their life (63% of people who had already tried cannabis were in favour, compared to 22% of those who had not).

### Wide approval for prevention and harm reduction

Established more than thirty years ago, harm reduction has become institutionalised over time, culminating in its underlying principles being legally recognised in 2016 [10]. Prevention and harm reduction measures have been widely approved. Almost all respondents (98%) agreed with the following statement: “In order to reduce health risks, some people think that drugs and their effects should be discussed openly with young people.” In addition, 75% of respondents believed that “drug users should be informed about the least dangerous way to use drugs”. 82% of them even considered it to be a good thing that “there are now kits with

3. At the time of the survey, the French National Agency for Medicines and Health Products Safety (ANSM) had just created a temporary specialised scientific committee (CSST) to assess the relevance and feasibility of making cannabis available for therapeutic use in France. This committee issued its first conclusions on 13 December 2018.

sterile syringes and injection paraphernalia available to drug users to reduce the risk of infection and the spread of disease”.

As such, several questions of opinion were asked about drug consumption rooms, presented as “spaces reserved for people who inject drugs, where they can come and use the substances they brought themselves in good sanitary conditions and in the presence of trained staff in order to avoid overdoses and infections and to prevent them from injecting in public places”.

82% of respondents had already heard of these rooms before the survey and 80% thought that the fact there are two of these rooms in France (that opened in 2016 in Paris and then in Strasbourg) is a good thing, especially if they had already heard about them [11]. Finally, 76% of respondents believed that “they should open this kind of room in other cities in France”.

### Tobacco and alcohol: reducing access rather than increasing prices

With regard to licit substances, the majority of respondents disagreed with the idea of increasing tax on them to reduce their use: 45%, i.e. 17% of smokers and 55% of non-smokers, agreed that it is necessary to “continue increasing the price of cigarettes so people smoke them less”. This is particularly true for alcohol: only 32% of respondents agreed with the statement “some believe that, as is the case with cigarettes, the price of alcoholic beverages should be regularly increased to reduce how often they are consumed” (22% of weekly alcohol users and 36% of non-weekly users).

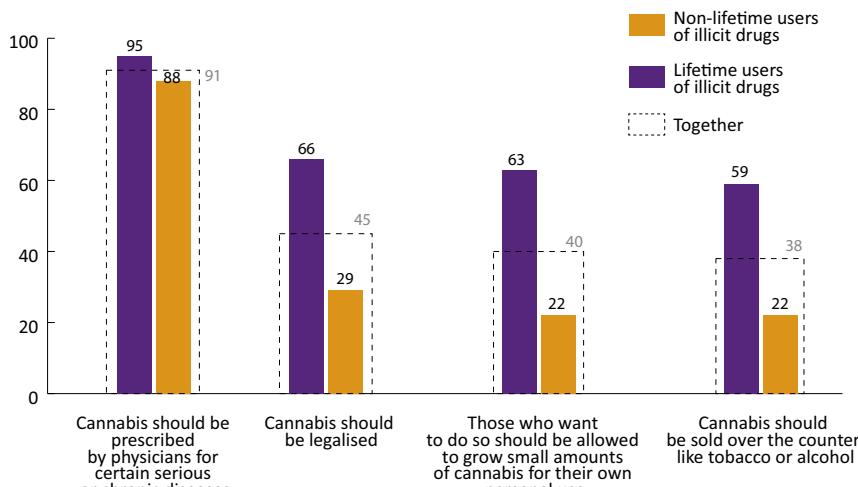
As for alcohol, respondents were more in favour of measures limiting the visibility of products, like those that are currently in force for tobacco. For example, two thirds of respondents supported totally banning alcohol advertising: 38% “strongly agreed” and 27% “agreed”. They were also in favour of only selling alcoholic beverages in specialised shops (30% “strongly agreed” and 31% “agreed”), as is already the case in several Scandinavian countries and in many Canadian states, which makes them less readily available and it facilitates buyers’ age being monitored more thoroughly<sup>4</sup>.

## User representations

### Illicit drug users are still seen as threatening

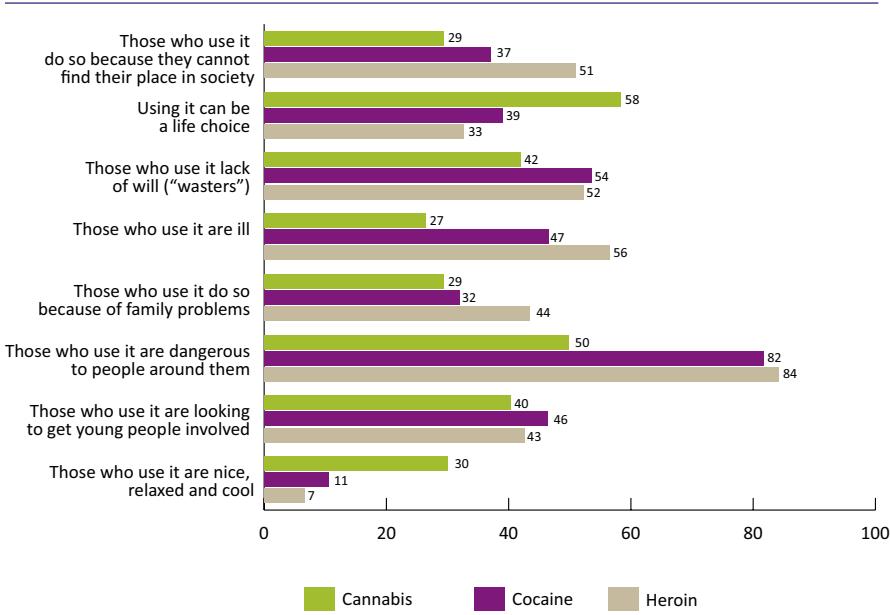
More than eight in ten (84%) said they “strongly agree” or “agree” that “those who use heroin are dangerous to those around them”, a similar proportion

**Figure 3. Views on changes in cannabis legislation by whether or not respondents are lifetime users of the drug (%)**



Source: EROPP 2018; OFDT

**Figure 4. French representations of users of different illicit drugs in 2018 (%)**



Source: EROPP 2018; OFDT

to the figure observed for cocaine (82%, Figure 4). These figures have remained the same since 2008 [12]. Cannabis users are much less likely to be perceived as dangerous to those around them: 50% in 2018, compared to 66% in 2013.

However, there is little variation between substances in the proportion of respondents who believed that drug users “are looking to get young people involved”: 40% for cannabis, 43% for heroin and 46% for cocaine. Conversely, three out of ten respondents (30%) saw

cannabis users as “nice, relaxed and cool”, an opinion which is much less associated with cocaine users (11%) and heroin users (7%). There is therefore still a wide range of views in the ways that drug users are seen, depending on the substance in question.

4. The issue presented was: “To limit alcohol consumption, especially among adolescents, in some European countries, alcoholic beverages are sold in specialised shops and not in general food shops (greengrocers’, mini-markets, supermarkets, etc.). Some think that the same should be done in France.”

## Heroin users are seen as ill, unlike cannabis users

While cannabis use was considered a “life choice” by 58% of respondents, only 39% considered cocaine use to be a life

choice and 33% for heroin use. Heroin users were more often considered to be “ill” (56%), while this figure was much lower for cannabis users (27%), with cocaine users being somewhere in the middle (47%). A “waster” image was

associated with heroin use for 52% of respondents, cocaine use for 54% and cannabis use for 42%.

Finally, some French people also considered that external factors can lead to an individual using illicit drugs. 51% of respondents considered that “heroin users use the substance because they cannot find their place in society”. 37% of people thought the same for people who take cocaine and 29% for cannabis users.

Moreover, 44% of respondents said heroin use is related to family problems, with only 32% and 29% of respondents referring to this aspect for cocaine and cannabis users, respectively.

Therefore, the moral representations associated with heroin users, who are considered as deviant, ill and “wasters”, has persisted since 1999.

## ■ Opinions on cannabis use

In order to summarise the wide variety of opinions on cannabis users, respondents who expressed similar judgements about users and the legislative framework were grouped by factor analysis (see methodology).

Five groups can be identified (see p.7), with a variable proportion of respondents: the largest comprises one third of respondents (34%) and the smallest comprises 7%. These categories can be seen as the different groups of society with varying opinions on cannabis use.

## ■ Conclusion

While drugs are not a major concern for most of the individuals surveyed, they are nevertheless aware of the main trends and they seem better informed than in the past.

Tobacco and alcohol are still rarely seen as “drugs”, which is a term that is more commonly attributed to illicit substances. Nevertheless, French people seem to be more aware of how harmful these substances can be for their health. Their responses have changed over the last two decades, with increased awareness of the dangers of tobacco and alcohol. This results in increased support for reducing access to tobacco and alcohol, as well as the visibility of alcoholic products.

With regard to illicit drug users, the results particularly show that there is a strong link between opinions and respondents’ relationship with this

## Methodology

The 2018 EROPP survey interviewed a sample of 2 001 individuals over the phone from 12 November to 18 December 2018. The sample was selected in line with quota sampling, an empirical method that is well suited to small samples. Unlike the first four years, which surveyed a population between the ages of 15 and 75, in 2018, it was limited to 18-75-year-olds - it is now more difficult to survey minors, particularly on sensitive subjects like drugs.

The questionnaires were sent out by the IFOP survey institute, using the computer-assisted telephone interview system (CATI system). Interviews were conducted from Monday to Friday, from noon to 9pm and on Saturdays from 10am to 7pm and they lasted an average of 30 minutes. Two randomly generated telephone number sampling frames were created, the first consisting of landline numbers (45%) and the second of mobile numbers (55%). The landline sample was put together in several steps: firstly, a random draw of numbers with a so-called “geographical” prefix (numbers starting with 01 to 05) was carried out in a directory, which was stratified by region and the size of the city. Then they gradually went through the telephone numbers from this draw in order to reach the individuals on the red or orange lists. In the absence of a directory, the numbers that were not in a group (numbers starting with 09) were drawn randomly. Likewise, for mobile numbers, a random draw was carried out based on the prefixes and number of members assigned by the French regulatory authority for electronic communications and postal services (ARCEP) to each operator. The sampling plan was developed using INSEE employment survey data and the representativeness of the sample was ensured by adjusting for the following criteria: age cross-referenced with the sex and socio-professional category of the respondent, as well as their household region and the size of their city.

However, the results obtained are not fully representative of the French population: due to the sample size, the quota method and the data collection method, there may still be some unavoidable biases.

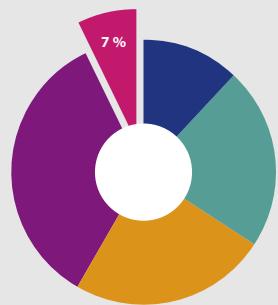
Among the respondents, 56% had never used an illicit drug, 32% were lifetime users of cannabis, 11% were lifetime users of cannabis and had tried at least one other illicit drug and 1% were lifetime users of at least one drug other than cannabis. A total of 43% were therefore lifetime users of cannabis and 12% were lifetime users of another illicit drug.

Correspondence factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to classify the opinions on cannabis use. This is a statistical technique designed to group and rank the data collected by a set of categorical variables by measuring the common factors that link them. Depending on how similar their responses were, individuals were then grouped together by a method known as bottom-up hierarchical clustering, until they formed a few large synthetic groups, that were not only homogeneous (minimisation of intra-group variability) but also very different from one other (maximisation of intergroup variability). In this case, 20 opinion variables on cannabis legislation and use were included in the analysis (opinions on cannabis users, on criminal penalties for cannabis use that were in force at the time of the survey and on potential legislative changes).

### The “advocates for repression”

Are radically opposed to relaxing legislation

This positioning includes a significant proportion of women and pensioners or other members of the non-working population, who are in favour of an essentially repressive approach to cannabis use: these respondents believe that cannabis is like any other drug and its users are as ill and dangerous as heroin users. More than half of the members support the idea of imposing a prison sentence on cannabis users (58%) and for there to be no flexibility with legislation in this area. This group is particularly against the medical use of cannabis (99% are against it).

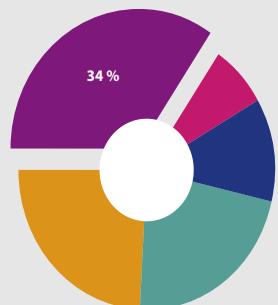


### The “conservatives”

See cannabis use as dangerous and support pursuing a criminal response, except for prison sentences

This group is mainly made up of women and people who have never smoked cannabis.

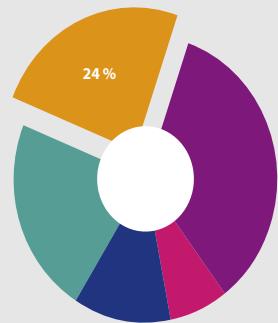
Half of its members consider cannabis users to be “wasters” (47%) and “looking to get young people involved” (50%) and two thirds (66%) see them as dangerous individuals. The social and health aspects do not play a big part in their understanding of the phenomenon. According to them, it is more down to individual choice. Respondents support the principle of fines (67%) or drug treatment orders (91%) for users, but few support the idea of penalising users with prison sentences (29%). In addition, they stand against cannabis legalisation for recreational use (68%), the abolition of penalties for users (69%) and the act of growing your own cannabis (87%). However, they support the medical use of cannabis (97%).



### The “moderates”

Are in favour of developing the medico-social approach while maintaining a penal framework

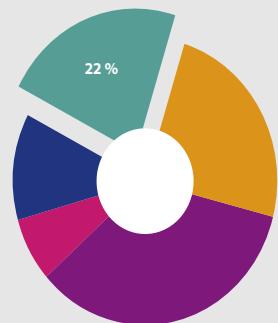
This group is most often made up of women and over 55s. Its members tend to have a balanced attitude: they tend to opt for the middle options more than the average respondent, such as “agree” or “disagree”. Three-quarters of them (75%) consider cannabis users to be “dangerous to those around them”, but they were seen above all as victims of their use: 57% of this group consider that people who use cannabis are ill, 71% think that they use it because they cannot find their place in society and 73% think it is because of family problems. The proportion of people with a repressive approach to cannabis use is average (27% in favour of prison sentences, 57% in favour of fines), but a large proportion is in favour of alternative measures (drug treatment orders, awareness training or simple drug warnings). However, although they are rather opposed to the legalisation of cannabis (63%) and it being sold over the counter (70%), half of them are nevertheless in favour of abandoning penalties for simply using cannabis.



### The “cautious reformers”

Are in favour of legalising cannabis while they are concerned about health risks

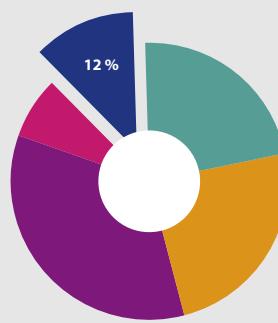
This is a rather male predominated group, with an over-representation of young people (36% were between 18 and 34 years old, compared to 27% in the overall sample). As they themselves are often cannabis users (65%), many members of this group consider using the substance as a life choice (70%). They are very much in favour of its legalisation (75%) and the abandonment of any form of penalty for people who are simply using the substance (79%). But, despite using the substance, they consider it as potentially dangerous and so they support the idea of the courts still being able to issue drug treatment orders.



### The “advocates for full legalisation”

Want cannabis to be fully legalised

This predominantly male and rather young group accounts for two thirds of yearly cannabis users. According to them, cannabis users are not dangerous to those around them and their use is not the result of any particular suffering. On the contrary, they seem to see it as a simple expression of individual freedom. They are radically against all current criminal provisions for using cannabis, including awareness courses and drug treatment orders and nearly all of them are in favour of the substance being legalised (88%) and it being legal to grow the substance for personal use (83%).



kind of substance. Representations of drug users remain divided, with heroin and cocaine users being seen as very dangerous, unlike cannabis users. As was the case in 1999, people have mixed opinions towards heroin and cocaine users, seeing them both as offenders and victims. At the same time, the survey shows that the proportion of people supporting prevention and harm reduction measures has increased, as illustrated by the almost unanimous agreement in favour of drug consumption rooms.

Cannabis users are seen in a better light and are sometimes associated with a positive image. Cannabis is therefore a unique case: part of the population believes that cannabis use is a personal life choice, and also believe in the principle of legalising its use and sale. The wish to see it legalised, mainly by people experimenting with the drug and users, is still not a common opinion, but some of those who are against legalisation would nevertheless like to see changes in the criminal response to simply using the substance. More broadly, the survey shows the public is generally much more accepting of cannabis and its users.

Measuring an opinion should be carefully considered, as it suggests that respondents already had that opinion before, while they may tailor or even form that opinion for the first time when taking the survey. By focusing on quantifying an opinion or value judgement, a study such as EROPP determines a "subject" which, by nature, is likely to vary depending on the respondents' level of knowledge, the socio-political context or the media coverage of certain events. As a result, respondents were able to express very

clear-cut opinions about drugs, while they sometimes did not know a lot about the subject or thought it was not important.

At the time of the survey, Canada had just legalised cannabis production and sale (17 October 2018), while in France, the possibility of supplementing existing legislation by extending the criminal fine procedure for narcotics use was under discussion (Act no. 2019-222 of 23 March 2019 on 2018-2022 programming and reform for justice).

The general context of social mobilisation against tax (the "Yellow jackets" movement) is another factor that may have influenced people's opinions. These claims, which were widely publicised at the time of the survey, may have turned more people against the idea of increasing the price of a substance in order to limit its use (some respondents made explicit reference to them). As a result, respondents were more in favour of the public authorities using other drivers rather than price to reduce use, such as further reducing or even banning all alcohol advertising.

## bibliography

1. BECK F., SPILKA S., NGUYEN-THANH V., GAUTIER A., LE NÉZET O., RICHARD J.-B. and GROUPE BAROMÈTRE SANTÉ "Cannabis : usages actuels en population adulte. Résultats de l'enquête Baromètre santé 2016", Tendances, OFDT, n° 119, 2017, 4 p.
2. SPILKA S., RICHARD J.-B., LE NÉZET O., JANSEN E., BRISSOT A., PHILIPPON A., SHAH J., CHYDERIOTIS S., ANDLER R. and COGORDAN C., [Levels of illicit drug use in France in 2017](#), Tendances, OFDT, n° 128, 2018, 6 p.
3. EMCDDA, Legal topic overviews: possession of cannabis for personal use. <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/legal-topic-overviews/cannabis-possession-for-personal-use> [accessed 15/04/2019].
4. OBRADOVIC I., [Cannabis legalisation and regulations in Canada](#). Memo 2018-04, Saint-Denis, OFDT, 2018, 26 p.
5. LALAM N., WEINBERGER D., ALIMI D., OBRADOVIC I. and GANDILHON M., [Cannalex - Une analyse comparée des expériences de régulation du cannabis \(Colorado, État de Washington, Uruguay\)](#). Final report, Paris, INHESJ (Institut national des hautes études de la sécurité et de la justice) ; OFDT, 2017, 75 p. A summary in English is also available: <https://en.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/ExecutiveSummaryCannalexEN.pdf>
6. BECK F. and PERETTI-WATEL P., [EROPP 99 : enquête sur les représentations, opinions et perceptions relatives aux psychotropes](#), Paris, OFDT, 2000, 203 p.
7. BECK F., LEGLEYE S. and PERETTI-WATEL P., [Penser les drogues : perceptions des produits et des politiques publiques](#). EROPP 2002, Paris, OFDT, 2003, 227 p.
8. INPES, Zéro alcool pendant la grossesse : des messages sanitaires pour informer dès le 3 octobre 2007. News release of 26/09/2007. <http://inpes.santepubliquefrance.fr/70000/cp/07/cp070926.asp> [accessed 15/04/2019].
9. TOVAR M.-L., LE NÉZET O. and BASTIANIC T., "Perceptions et opinions des Français sur les drogues", Tendances, OFDT, n° 88, 2013, 6 p.
10. BRISACIER A.-C., DÍAZ GÓMEZ C., MILHET M. and MOREL D'ARLEUX J., "Interventions en réduction des risques et des dommages", In: Drogues et addictions, données essentielles, Paris, OFDT, 2019, pp. 95-98.
11. BRISSOT A. and SPILKA S., "Opinions et perceptions sur les drogues en 2018", In: Drogues et addictions, données essentielles, Paris, OFDT, 2019, pp. 87-90.
12. COSTES J.-M., LE NÉZET O., SPILKA S. and LAFFITEAU C., [Ten years of change in French people's perceptions and opinions regarding drugs \(1999-2008\)](#), Tendances, OFDT, n° 71, 2010, 6 p.

## tendances

Director of publication - Julien Morel d'Arleux

Editorial Committee

Christian Ben Lakhdar, Bruno Falissard, Virginie Gautron, Emmanuelle Godeau, Aurélie Mayet, Frank Zobel

Editor in chief - Julie-Émilie Adès

Graphic designer - Frédérique Million

Documentation - Isabelle Michot

French Monitoring Centre  
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

69, rue de Varenne - 75007 Paris  
France

Phone: (+33) 1 41 62 77 16

e-mail : [ofdt@ofdt.fr](mailto:ofdt@ofdt.fr)



[www.ofdt.fr](http://www.ofdt.fr)

## Acknowledgements

To the members of the Scientific and Technical Committee of the EROPP survey for their advice and recommendations: François Beck (INSEE), Régis Bigot (Crédoc), Valérie Carrasco (DRESS), Jérôme Cubille (EDF R&D ICAME GRETS), Stéphane Legleye (INSEE), Jean-Baptiste Richard (SpF).

To Thierry Delprat, Cristina Díaz Gómez, Anne de l'Eprevier, Carine Mutatayi, Ivana Obradovic, Christophe Palle and Caroline Protais for their careful proofreading; to Amélie Jaoui (IFOP) and to the investigators from the company Phone City.