

Alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use during the « lycée years »

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Every four years, the ESPAD (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs) survey analyses and compares psychoactive substance use among 16-year-olds in more than 30 European countries [1, 2]. During the latest survey (2011) the OFDT coordinated the French ESPAD project and decided to expand the sample to include all French adolescents enrolled in the last three years of *lycée*, i.e., students in *seconde*, *première* and *terminale* at general and vocational *lycées*¹. By doing so, the ESPAD survey was able to collect data on the spread of substance use over time, focusing on school year and situation, key factors in the daily life of these adolescents, rather than age. This approach is similar to the one initiated by the 2010 HBSC survey, whose «collège years» results were presented in 2012 [3]. Henceforth, both surveys are used to observe levels of psychoactive substance use and trends over time from the *sixième* to *terminale* (Figure 1).

This issue of *Tendances* starts by presenting trends in the use of tobacco, alcoholic beverages and cannabis among *lycée* students. Two out of five *lycée* students reported last month cigarette smoking. Three quarters of these students stated having drunk an alcoholic beverage in the same period, and half stated having engaged in Heavy Episodic Drinking². One out of three *lycée* students stated last month cannabis use. Examining the diffusion of use during the «lycée years» reveals that use of these three substances intensifies in the first two years, and then stabilises in the last year.

This issue of *Tendances* first discusses two specific analytical approaches: the first addresses use in general *lycées* vs. vocational *lycées*, whilst the second focuses on the perceived availability and supply modes for alcohol, tobacco and cannabis.

■ The diffusion of use in *collège* and *lycée*

Tobacco: nearly one third of students are daily smokers

In 2011, seven out of ten *lycée* students stated lifetime tobacco use, and there was a higher proportion of girls than boys (73% vs. 68%) (Table 1). After the last two years of *collège* (the third and fourth years of secondary school), which are critical years in terms of the diffusion of tobacco use, transitioning

In 2011, for the first time, the French section of the ESPAD survey incorporated a study of use behaviours of lycée students (French equivalent of sixth form college in UK or High school in USA) and enabled to describe substance use among teenagers according to the type of school (general or vocational).



from *collège* to *lycée* is the last significant lifetime tobacco use phase for adolescents. The HBSC survey had demonstrated that half of *troisième* students (52% of these students in their last year of *collège*) had already experienced lifetime cigarette use. In *seconde* (the first year of *lycée*), 66% had experienced lifetime cigarette use and by the end of *lycée*, three out of four (74%) were lifetime users. These tobacco lifetime use estimates only pertain to cigarettes (which remain the most widespread mode of tobacco use). Other modes of tobacco use, such as snuff or chewing tobacco, were not explored in this survey³. However, since 2007, the use of tobacco with a hookah (water pipe) has been surveyed. In 2011, 61% of *lycée* students stated having used a water pipe and 7% had done so without ever having smoked a cigarette. These figures complete the review of lifetime tobacco use, which pertained to eight out of ten students in 2011. *Lycée* also represents a period during which daily smoking intensifies: 16% of *troisième* students smoked daily, and this figure dou-

1. The «lycée years» correspond to the last three years of secondary school, from «seconde» to «terminale», which would be the equivalent of years 12 and 13 of sixth form college in the UK and grade 10 through to grade 12 in the United States respectively, and involves two types of school: general or technical (vocational) college or high school, including agricultural school. The students surveyed are aged sixteen to eighteen years old in the year of the survey.

2. The students were asked how many times they had five drinks or more on a single occasion during the past 30 days (Alcoolisation ponctuelle importante or API in French).

3. These two methods of use are marginal: in 2012, snuff and chewing tobacco represented 0.5% of the total volume of tobacco sold in France (Altadis Distribution France).

bled in *seconde*. By the end of *lycée*, one out of three students stated that they were daily smokers. Furthermore, 5% of daily smokers in *troisième* stated smoking more than 10 cigarettes a day. This proportion jumped to one quarter (24%) of daily smokers in *seconde*. Tobacco smoking intensifies partly because of the highly addictive nature of tobacco, which leads to a «mechanical» intensification of use among users over time. It is likely that students leaving *collège* and entering *lycée* experience an emancipation of sorts, accompanied by more opportunities to smoke: during parties, with friends in front of school between or after classes, and in public settings.

Development of drinking behaviours

When starting *lycée* in *seconde*, over nine out of ten students stated lifetime alcohol use, and there was no difference between boys and girls. The «*lycée* years» are not years in which alcohol use is initiated; rather, they are years in which use becomes rooted and excessive use of alcohol begins (Table 1). Alcoholic beverages are psychoactive substances used by a vast number of *lycée* students. Nearly four out of five surveyed students sta-

ted last month alcohol use. One out of five *lycée* students claimed regular last month alcohol use. Finally, half (52%) of *lycée* students stated having engaged in Heavy Episodic Drinking (HED) [4], which means having consumed at least five drinks on a single occasion in the last 30 days, and six out of ten *lycée* students stated having experienced at least one drunken episode (vs. 18% of *collège* students according to the HBSC survey). Regardless of the case, more boys than girls engaged in this type of alcohol use: 29% of *lycée* students stated regular use versus 14% of female *collège* students. Furthermore, this type of alcohol use increased sharply from the beginning to the end of *lycée*: the number of last month HED episodes and repeated drunken episodes increased by 10 points over the period (from 47% to 56% and from 19% to 29% respectively).

Drunken episodes and HED are two closely related types of drinking behaviour. The majority of young *lycée* students who stated having experienced a last month drunken episode also stated having experienced HED during the same period. These types of drinking behaviours can be concomitant, since HED can lead to drunkenness, but the survey could not identify this.

Regardless, the frequency of alcohol use seemed to be strongly correlated with these two types of intensive alcohol use behaviours. Subsequently, more than half (53%) of regular alcohol users responded that they had experienced one HED and one drunken episode in the last month, vs. barely one out of ten (12%) less frequent users (i.e., those who stated having drunk alcohol fewer than three times in the last month).

Intensification of cannabis use in *lycée*

Half of *lycée* students (49%), and more boys than girls (51% vs. 46%) stated lifetime cannabis use. The diffusion of cannabis use among *lycée* students was comparable to that of tobacco, although levels of use were lower, and use started approximately one school year later. The transition from *collège* to *lycée* corresponded to one of the most significant cannabis initiation phases. Lifetime use was observed starting in *quatrième* (the third year of *collège*) (11% of students), but levels of use rapidly increase thereafter, doubling in *troisième* and again in *seconde* (reaching 24% and 41% respectively).

Regular cannabis use (i.e., use more than 10 times in the last month) really started to increase among *lycée* students (8% of *lycée* students stated regular use). The highest level (11%) of regular cannabis use was reached in *première* (the second year of *lycée*). In *terminale*, the last year of *lycée*, there was a three-point decrease in regular cannabis use. Like alcohol, regular cannabis use in *lycée* seems to be much more frequent among boys (12%) than girls (5%).

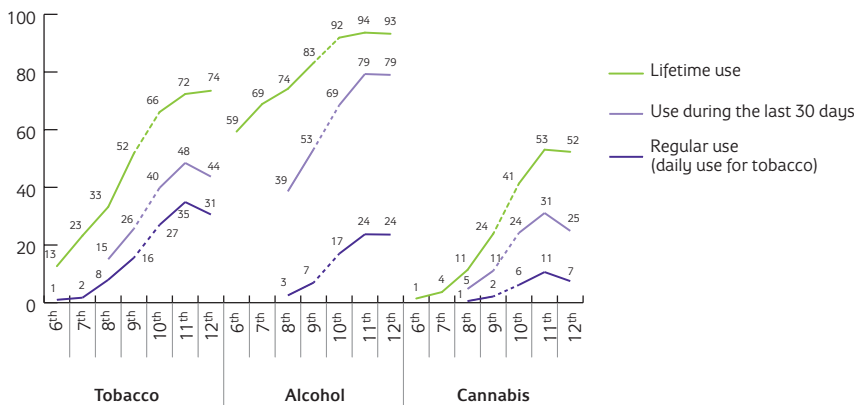
Use by type of school and year

At the end of *collège*, French adolescents can go to one of two types of *lycée*: general or vocational.

Observed substance use among *lycée* students varied dramatically with the type of *lycée*, with higher levels of use seen in vocational *lycée* students. More students starting in vocational *lycées* (*seconde*) smoked daily than their general *lycée* counterparts did (35% vs. 22%). This trend was also seen in subsequent vocational «*lycée* years», but the difference narrowed in *terminale*. The observed levels of regular alcohol use were higher among vocational *seconde* and *première* students (30% vs. 19% of students in *première* at a general *lycée*), although levels were comparable for *terminale* students in both types of *lycée* (24%). However, there was very little difference observed in cannabis use by students of both *lycée* types.

Moreover, after a nearly linear increase in levels of use since entering *collège*, there was a drop in use in *terminale* for

Figure 1 - Use of the main psychoactive substances among *collège* students in 2010 and *lycée* students in 2011 by school year (%)



Source: HBSC 2010, use by the OFDT, ESPAD 2011 "lycée years", OFDT-INSERM-MEN

N.B. The results are presented here as if they were longitudinal data, which is not the case for these two transverse surveys. However, it is highly likely that the observed trends partially reflect the reality of the diffusion of these three substances during adolescence.

Use is illustrated by the following indicators:

- lifetime use: use at least once in a lifetime
- current use or last year use: use at least once in the 12 months preceding the survey
- recent use or last month use: use at least once in the month prior to the survey
- regular use: use at least 10 times in the 30 days prior to the survey
- daily use: use at least once daily in the last 30 days
- repeated heavy episodic drinking: at least five drinks on a single occasion, at least three times in the last month
- regular heavy episodic drinking: at least five drinks on a single occasion, at least 10 times in the last month

These indicators describe use during adolescence in a simple way. The concept of lifetime use (or experimentation) encompasses all types of users, including adolescents who have just tried a substance once without ever reusing it; therefore, it describes more the diffusion of a substance in a population than the current use of this substance.

Table 1 - Use of psychoactive substances by gender and by school year among *lycée* students in 2011 (in %)

		Gender			School year level		
		All (10 th to 12 th)	Boys	Girls ⁽¹⁾	Seconde (first year of <i>lycée</i>) 10 th	Première (second year of <i>lycée</i>) 11 th	Terminale (third and final year of <i>lycée</i>) 12 th
Tobacco	Lifetime use	70.4	68.2	72.6***	66.1	72.4***	73.5 ns
	Last month: ≥ 1 cigarette	44.0	43.6	44.5 ns	39.8	48.5***	43.7**
	Daily: ≥ 1 cigarette/day	30.8	31.2	30.5 ns	27.0	34.9***	30.6**
	Hookah (lifetime use)	60.6	63.7	57.7***	53.4	63.8***	65.8 ns
Alcohol	Lifetime use	92.9	93.8	92.1*	91.9	93.7*	93.3 ns
	Last year: ≥ 1 time	88.6	90.4	86.8***	86.4	90.5***	88.8 ns
	Last month: ≥ 1 time	75.3	80.1	70.9***	68.5	79.3***	79.0 ns
	Last month: ≥ 10 times (regular)	21.3	29.1	13.9***	17.0	23.7***	23.6 ns
Heavy Episodic Drinking	Last month: ≥ 1 time	52.3	60.2	44.8***	46.5	54.9***	56.3 ns
	Last month: ≥ 3 times (repeated)	22.8	30.1	16.0***	18.7	25.1***	25.3 ns
	Last month: ≥ 10 times (regular)	4.0	6.0	2.0***	3.8	4.5 ns	3.5 ns
Drunken episodes	Lifetime use	61.4	65.1	57.8***	52.8	64.1***	68.8**
	repeated: ≥ 3 times in last year	24.2	29.7	19.0***	19.4	25.2***	29.0**
Cannabis	Lifetime use	48.6	51.4	46.0***	41.3	53.1***	52.3 ns
	Last year: ≥ 1 time	40.5	44.5	36.7***	36.6	45.6***	39.0***
	Last month: ≥ 1 time	26.9	31.1	22.8***	24.2	31.1***	24.9***
	Last month: ≥ 10 times (regular)	8.1	11.8	4.7***	6.2	10.6***	7.5***

Source: ESPAD 2011 "lycée years", OFDT-INSERM-MEN

1: *, **, *** and ns: Chi² test significant respectively at 0.05, 0.01, 0.001 and "non significant". In the "Girls" column, the tests compared girls with boys. In the "School year level" column, the tests compare the level with that of the column to the left.

Note: The levels were grouped according to the theoretical year of school (i.e., assuming no skipping ahead or being left back). In the tenth year of school (which corresponds to the first year of *lycée* in France), 66% of the students are in a general *lycée* seconde class and 34% are in a vocational *lycée* seconde class.

both *lycée* types (Figure 1). For the first time, the diffusion of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use ceases to increase.

However, once again, there were variations in this trend according to *lycée* type. For general *lycées*, only the level of regular cannabis use shifted in *terminale* (10% vs. 7%). It is worth noting that the survey was conducted a few weeks prior to final examinations (and the baccalauréat examination in particular); therefore, it is reasonable to believe that *terminale* students reduced certain use behaviours while preparing for these examinations. The clear drops in cannabis use levels suggest that students perceived such use as inappropriate during periods that require significant concentration and memorisation. In contrast, the level of

regular alcohol use, which continued to increase between *première* and *terminale* (19% vs. 24%), led to the hypothesis that students did not attribute the same risks to alcohol use as they did to cannabis use.

In vocational *lycées*, regular use of alcohol and cannabis declined in *terminale* and reached the levels seen in general *lycée terminale* students. This trend reversal in vocational *lycées* may be mainly related to the *lycée* drop-out rate. Although the large majority of students entering *lycée* obtain their diploma, some adolescents «drop-out» before completing their studies. This drop-out rate is much higher in vocational *lycée*, where nearly 10% of vocational *première* students do not go on to *terminale*, versus less than

3% of general *lycée* students. Furthermore, the students who drop out tend to have higher levels of use [5]. Subsequently, the absence of these adolescents from vocational *lycée* classes after they drop out, mechanically decreases observed levels of use.

■ Perceived availability and supply

The diffusion of a substance within a population is measured first by the number of individuals stating lifetime use of the substance. However, it is also possible to evaluate the spread of substance use within a group through the group members' perceived availability of the substance in question. For example, it is possible to ask adolescents how difficult (or easy) it seems to obtain a substance they wish to use. Levels of lifetime use of a substance are purported to be commensurate with the substance's «inaccessibility» or «perceived inaccessibility». Students were also asked whether or not they had purchased tobacco, an alcoholic beverage or cannabis in the last month. The availability of a substance depends on several factors: first and foremost, current legislation regulating the substance, which dictates whether or not the substance is legal for sale (e.g., the French HPST law, which prohibits the

Other illegal substances

Young *lycée* students also state having used other illegal substances. However, levels of use for these substances are nowhere near the observed levels of cannabis use. Hence, 13% of *lycée* students state lifetime use of at least one illegal substance other than cannabis, and with very few exceptions, most of these students had already used cannabis. Boys had higher levels of lifetime use of other substances than girls (14% vs. 11%, $p < 0.01$). No difference in use with school year was observed; 12% of *seconde* students already stated lifetime use of these other substances.

The most frequently mentioned substances were hallucinogenic mushrooms (5.5%) and cocaine (5.2%). These were followed by ecstasy (3.7%) and amphetamines (3.3%). Lifetime use of other illegal substances (heroin, LSD, crack) ranged from 0 to 2%. A large majority (57%) of these students had only experienced lifetime use with one of these illegal substances (other than cannabis) ■

sale of alcohol and tobacco to minors⁴), for purchase or for use, and second, the diffusion of the substance within a peer group. A substance whose sale is prohibited can, paradoxically, seem very accessible to an adolescent if one or more family members or friends use it.

Hence, legislation that prohibits the sale of alcohol or tobacco to minors can lose its effectiveness for adolescents who frequent adults, which was the case in *lycée*, where one third of the student was of legal age (33%) at the time of the survey. This coexistence of underage and legal age adolescents in the sample generated perceptions of substance availability that varied with the age of the student.

For cannabis, one question helped discover whether or not a purchase had been made in the last 30 days.

Tobacco: easy access, including for minors

Cigarettes were deemed easily accessible by over two-thirds (69%) of *lycée* students, while only 12% stated that it would be difficult or impossible to acquire cigarettes (Table 2). At the same time, one-fifth of adolescents were uncertain (21%). In comparison, the proportion of students uncertain about

the availability of cannabis was only 11% and of wine was only 2%. The reason for this large proportion of uncertain students was probably the contradicting image that cigarettes have. It is not uncommon to see large numbers of students smoking by schools or in public settings. This highly visible, even «ostentatious» use is in contradiction with the image one would anticipate of a substance, whose sale to minors i.e., the vast majority of *lycée* students, is prohibited.

Consistent with the perceived high availability, both underage and legal age adolescents frequently purchased cigarettes from a tobacconist: 94% of daily users stated having purchased cigarettes from a tobacconist and less than 2% of smokers stated only having purchased their cigarettes «on the street» or «from friends». Being of legal age or underage did very little to change the perceived availability of cigarettes or cigarette-purchasing behaviour: slightly fewer underage students deemed cigarettes «very easy» to obtain compared with students of legal age (45% vs. 54%) and, in terms of purchasing, only 5% of minors who smoke daily did not purchase their cigarettes from a tobacconist in the last month, compared to 3% of students of legal age.

Alcohol: availability varies with type of beverage

Many *lycée* students (64% to 80%, depending on the type of beverage) believed that alcohol is «easy to get» (Table 2). However, the degree of availability varied drastically from one beverage type to another, regardless of the level of use of the beverage in question. For example, cider was considered easy to access by the large majority (76%) of *lycée* students, but it was consumed relatively infrequently (27%) in the last month. In contrast, spirits, which are among the alcoholic beverages with the most frequent last month use, followed closely by beer (61% and 56% respectively), were perceived as the least accessible alcoholic beverages. One quarter (26%) of students stated that it would be difficult to obtain, versus 12% for beer. Wine is in a sort of class of its own, since nearly one out of two *lycée* students deemed it very accessible (48%), while it had the highest proportion of students (16%) believing that it would be impossible to obtain.

Contrary to cigarettes, age appears to be a more determinant factor with alcohol: the perceived availability of spirits in particular was much higher among *lycée* students of legal age than among underage *lycée* students (78% vs. 57%).

For alcoholic beverages, two supply modes were proposed: shop purchases (supermarkets, grocery shops, service stations) and purchases in a restaurant, bar or nightclub.

The proportion of students⁵ who purchased their beer in a store was 46% and who bought their spirits in a store was 51%, so the difference was not very marked. The drinking of beer in bars, pubs and restaurants, however, appeared to be more widespread than that of spirits (62% vs. 53%) (Figure 2). The difference in price between these two alcoholic beverage types was undoubtedly a determinant factor. Finally, one third of students stated last month use of both.

Once again, variations in last month use appeared according to the age of the *lycée* students. Underage students stated having purchased less frequently than their legal age counterparts (27% vs. 32% for spirits). Contrary to cigarettes, the purchase of alcoholic beverages was less widespread among drinkers (between one quarter and one third of recent consumers did not buy their alcoholic beverages). This is probably because these *lycée* users drank alcohol more frequently in a private setting (parties, dinners) that did not require them to purchase their own drinks. These are the preferred settings of *lycée* students for the use of alcohol.

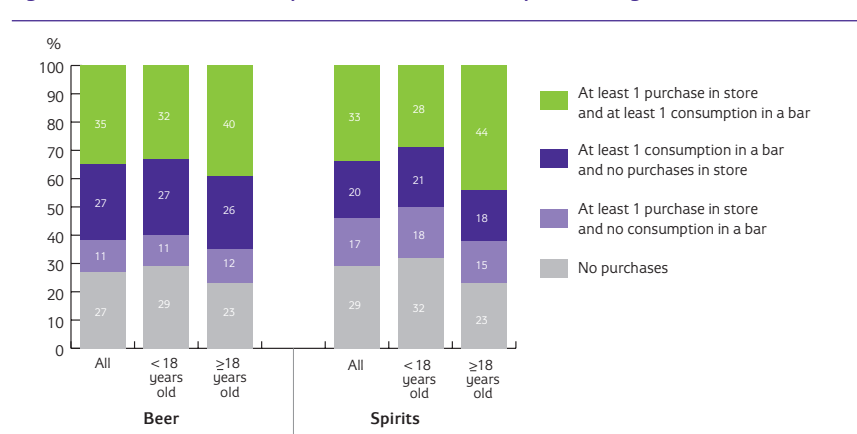
Table 2 - Perceived availability of cigarettes, alcoholic beverages and cannabis among *lycée* students (in %)

Substances	Cigarettes	Spirits	Beer	Cider	Wine	Alcopops	Champagne	Cannabis	
Perceived availability	Impossible	4	7	6	7	16	8	7	15
	Very difficult	3	6	2	2	3	3	4	8
	Fairly difficult	5	13	4	5	8	7	13	10
	Fairly easy	21	26	27	21	23	23	25	27
	Very easy	48	38	54	55	48	43	39	23
	I don't know	21	10	8	10	2	16	11	17

Source: ESPAD 2011 "lycée years", OFDT-INSERM-MEN

Interpretation: 4% of *lycée* students consider that it would be impossible for them to obtain cigarettes, and 15% believe this to be true for cannabis

Figure 2 - Purchase + consumption in a bar of beer or spirits among last month users (in %)



Source: ESPAD 2011 "lycée years", OFDT-INSERM-MEN

Interpretation: 62% (35% + 27%) of *lycée* students who drank beer in the last month also stated having consumed in a bar at least once. Of these, 59% were underage and 66% of legal age.

4. In France, minors are under the age of 18. The HPST law is the Hospital, Patients, Health and Territories, French law of July 21, 2009.

5. These are adolescents who stated recent consumption of beer or spirits, which were the two alcohols most frequently drank in the last month.

Cannabis: illegal, but fairly accessible

Cannabis is the only illegal substance whose use, sale and purchase are prohibited (sanctions range up to imprisonment). Yet, half (50%) of *lycée* students believed that cannabis is fairly or very easy to obtain, and only 15% deemed it impossible to obtain (Table 2). Overall, these levels are not all that different from what was observed for tobacco and alcohol. This perceived availability can be even more marked, depending on the people these adolescents frequent. Of non-smoking *lycée* students who stated having many friends who smoke cannabis, 66% believed it is easy to obtain vs. 29% of non-users who have no friends or few friends who smoke. This proportion was 51% among non cannabis-smoking students who have an older sibling who smokes, vs. 35% among those who do not have siblings who smoke.

Of the students who stated last month cannabis smoking, 52% had not purchased the cannabis during the same period (and 21% of these were regular smokers). For adolescents, the role of the people close to them is determinant in terms of supply.

Conclusion

The study of use among *lycée* students is a useful complement to the measures for observing substance use in the adolescent population. It is a continuation of the analyses conducted among *collège* students with the HBSC survey and among 17-year-olds with the ESCAPAD⁶ surveys.

The *lycée* years represent a period of intensified tobacco and alcohol use, and a phase of rapid cannabis diffusion. Increased alcohol use is accompanied

by new use behaviours, such as drunken episodes and heavy episodic drinking, and monitoring the evolution of these phenomena is crucial. However, it is important to specify that quantifying these two behaviours can be riddled with imprecision. The definition of «drunken episode», which is based solely on the evaluation of the person being surveyed, is highly subjective. It depends in large part on the «alcoholic experience» of the person. Two difficulties in assessing HED can be mentioned. The first pertains to the quantity of alcohol drunk (expressed in drinks), which is not precisely determined. The second pertains to the duration of alcohol consumption, which can vary from less than one hour in certain extreme cases, to several hours. Therefore, the concept covers composite realities that should be described in more detail in the future.

After a nearly linear progression in the levels of use from entry into secondary school in *collège* until the second year of *lycée*, there is a clear, observed turnaround in the diffusion of substances in *terminale*. This decline in the last year of *lycée* is difficult to interpret, and it does not in any way predict future use behaviours in young adults. However, two hypotheses can be put forth to explain this trend reversal at the end of secondary school. On the one hand, students appear to limit their use because of significant examinations (the «baccalaureate effect»). On the other hand, the marked decrease seen among vocational students is the result of a high drop-out rate at the end of *première*, which modifies the structure of the surveyed *terminale* population, and consequently, the observed levels of use. Finally, the survey provides a detailed look into the relationship between use and availability. It reiterates that there is no automatic relationship between availability (whether perceived or real) and observed levels of use. Indeed, peers

(and peers of legal age in particular), contexts of use for different substances and individual factors play an essential role in «deciding» to engage in lifetime use or use. Moreover, it would seem that the impact of legislation on sales of tobacco and alcohol differ with the age of the adolescents in question. The 2010 HBSC survey demonstrated that the age of first use is increasing (and this is corroborated by the ESCAPAD survey), which may be the result of a reinforcement in the perception of illicitness among youngest students.

It would seem that, given the levels of use observed among ESPAD survey *lycée* students and the proportion of those who state having purchased cigarettes or alcoholic beverages, this perception of illicitness is largely absent during the *lycée* years. The «de-trivialisation» of tobacco and alcohol among *lycée* students seems to occur through other prevention measures or more targeted information that take into consideration the specific behaviours of this population.

6. The Survey on health and use on national defence and citizenship day is carried out regularly by the OFDT with the National service directorate [4].

methodological reference points

The ESPAD survey was conducted by the OFDT with the support of the National directorate on school teaching (DGESCO) and the General secretariat of Catholic Education, and in partnership with unit 669 of the INSERM (National institute for health and medical research). The sample of *lycée* students was selected, along with that of students born in 1995 (European section), by the Performance and prospective studies department (DEPP) of the Ministry of National Education according to a balanced random survey with the following criteria: type of education (general or vocational), location of the educational establishment (urban or rural) and sector (public or private). Two classes per establishment (396 classes in all) were sampled, and all the students were surveyed. In total, between April and June 2011, 7,971 students enrolled in the last three years of secondary school, answered an in-class self-reported questionnaire in the presence of an investigator responsible for presenting the survey and supervising survey completion. Class participation was 95%, and given the students who were absent on the survey day and the refusals to participate (parents, students and classes), the student participation rate was 85%. After adjusting the data, the final sample was comprised of 7,918 students, of whom 6,048 (53.6% girls) were *lycée* students, and subsequently constituted the sample analysed here. The data were rectified to compensate for non-responses and to ensure representativeness of gender, age, class, sector (public/private) and school type (general or vocational).

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- For a breakdown of use by region: ODICER database (Territorial indicators for information about drugs and drug addiction), <http://odicer.ofdt.fr>

credits

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