

Malta Compared to other participating countries in the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other drugs (ESPAD) 1995 - 1999.

Sedqa, the National Agency Against Drugs and Alcohol Abuse, commissions various studies that help in the mapping of the local drug situation and keep a watchful eye on the trends and prevalence of drugs and alcohol abuse in neighbouring countries. The ESPAD, already held in 1995 and in 1999 in Malta, and in other European countries simultaneously, offers data that lends itself for such comparison.

By the age of 16 years, experimentation with illicit drugs is not uncommon as already evidenced in the 1995 ESPAD Study. The so-called “soft drugs” are often the first to be tried out. In this study, 7.24% reported at least one-time experimentation with Marijuana or Hashish (7.42% for boys, 7.08% for girls). This signifies a drop when compared to 1995 study, where 8.03% of the participants, admitted to have used Marijuana at least once in their lifetime. The most commonly abused illicit drug emerged again as the Inhalants. 16.24% reported to have used inhalants, with an insignificant drop compared to the previous study (16.94%). A significant drop was registered in relation to Tranquillisers and sedatives.

Fortunately, by this age, the experimentation with other drugs is not high – but still remains a worrying threat. It was anticipated that there would be a significant increase in lifetime use of *ecstasy*, being the drug “of the moment”.

Overall, 9.46% of boys and 7.63% of girls have reported in having experimented with illicit drugs at least once in their lifetime by the age of 16.

Contrary to alcohol use, Malta ranked very low when compared with other European counterparts with regards to Illicit Drug use. The lowest percentage reporting of illicit drug use after Malta, was Cyprus with only 3% admitting lifetime use. 36% of students taking part in this survey from U.K. reported lifetime experience of any illicit drug, followed by Czech Republic (35%), France (35%), Ireland (32%), Italy (26%), among other countries.

From all European countries taking part, the Czech Republic, France and U.K. ranked highest with 35% respectively of respondents admitting lifetime experience of marijuana or hashish. Malta placed at the bottom of the list with 7% admitting lifetime use after Cyprus (2%) and Romania (1%) respectively.

Problems related directly or indirectly Alcohol and Drug Abuse

2.98% of the respondents were engaged in sexual activity that they regretted the next day due to alcohol use, while another 0.25% claimed to have had the same problem due to drug abuse. 3.44% and 0.41% were involved in a scuffle fight due to alcohol and drug abuse respectively. 1.23% claimed to have had trouble with the police after drinking alcohol.

20.77% and 25.17% of the 16-year-old cohort said that they are not satisfied with their relationship with their mother and father respectively, while 16.63% are dissatisfied with their relationship with friends.

37.57% of the boys who took part in this survey, said that at least once in their lifetime they have participated in a group bullying an individual. For girls the figure was 23.35%.

45.23% of boys have admitted in being individually bullied by a whole group of people, while 34.47% of the girls said that a group has bullied them at least once in their lifetime.

Conclusion

Alcohol remains the number one problem. The fact that 1 in every 5 respondents said the last time they drank alcohol was at home, indicates the strong reflection of the acceptance of alcohol within our society and indeed, within our families.

A percentage of the population is always going to abuse substances, be it alcohol, tobacco or drugs. Various factors can lead to substance abuse, namely ecological environment, family environment, personality of the person, early behaviour problems, negative adolescent behaviour and experiences. As the population of substance abusers is on the increase, the fact that this study shows no significant increase over the study carried out 4 years earlier could indicate positive signs.

- a) The fact that 16-year-old students have more information on substance abuse, and yet were not attracted in starting experimenting with drugs, shows the importance of knowledge on the subject.
- b) Stabilisation in the comparative results indicates that prevention programmes starting from an early age might be having positive impact on the students.

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