

Summary

Substance use among pupils in Switzerland in 2014 and trends since 1986 – Results of the “Health Behaviour in School-aged Children” (HBSC) study

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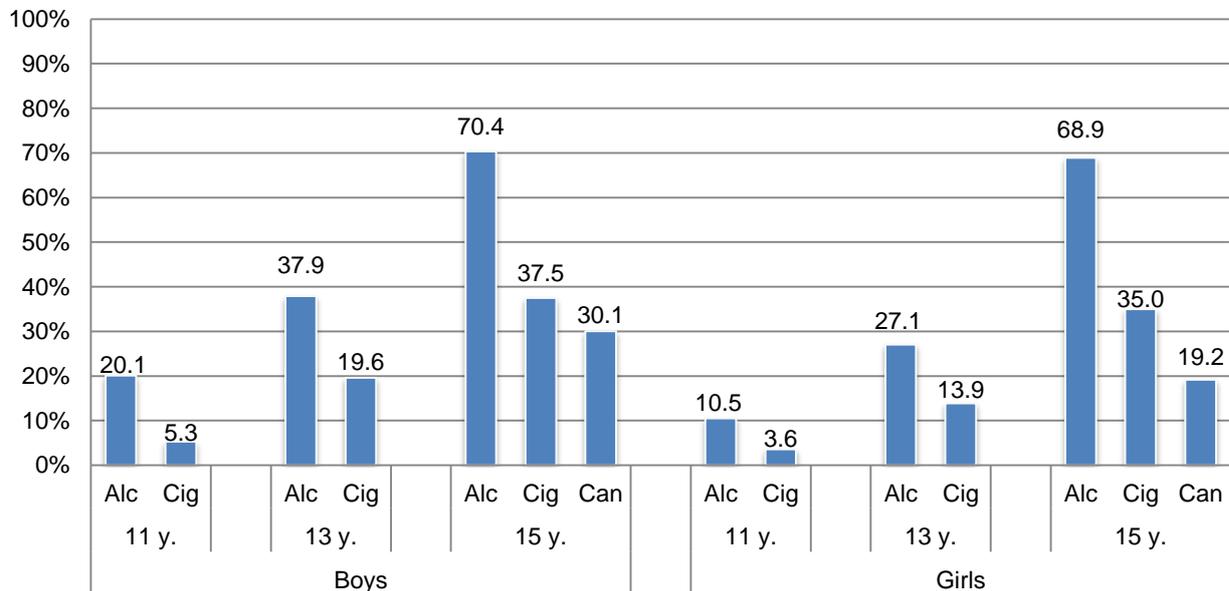
The HBSC study

The international “Health Behaviour in School-aged Children” (HBSC) study is conducted every four years in more than 40, mostly European, countries. Its purpose is to collect data on 11-to-15-year-old adolescents' health behaviour and to observe its evolution over time. The main advantage of the study is that it allows researchers to compare the students' health behaviour between different countries and years. In 2014, Addiction Switzerland conducted the study in Switzerland for the 8th time since 1986. The present scientific report describes the findings of the **Swiss HBSC study 2014** on substance use among school children and its evolution since 1986.

In 2014, 734 public school classes from grade 5 to 9 (i.e. grade 7 to 11 HarmoS) were randomly selected to participate in the national Swiss HBSC study. A total of 630 school classes comprising 9894 girls and boys aged 11 to 15 took part in the survey. The questionnaires were sent to the classes between January and April 2014 and the pupils were given one lesson's time to fill them in. The participation was voluntary as well as anonymous. The survey process had previously been examined and authorized by the Ethics Committee of the Canton of Vaud.

Alcohol, cigarettes and cannabis at a glance

Figure 1. Lifetime prevalence (substance used at least once in a lifetime) of alcohol, cigarettes and cannabis, by age group and sex, HBSC 2014



Note: 100% minus the percentage presented above equals the percentage of adolescents who have never used the considered substance.

Example: 20.1% of the 11-year-old boys have drunk alcohol at least once in their life; accordingly, 79.9% have never drunk alcohol.

The lifetime prevalence of alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking increased noticeably over the age groups (figure 1): The older the age group, the larger the proportion of adolescents who have used the considered substance at least once. Alcohol consumption (at least once in a lifetime) was more prevalent compared to cigarette smoking and cannabis use within each age and sex group. More than two thirds of the 15-year-olds have drunk alcohol at least once in their life and more than one third have smoked cigarettes. Among the 15-year-old boys, the lifetime prevalence of cannabis use and of cigarettes smoking are rather similar (about one third). Compared to cigarettes, a smaller proportion (about one fifth) of the girls aged 15 have used cannabis.

Cigarettes

The proportion of pupils who have smoked cigarettes **at least once in their life** increased considerably over the age groups: 5.3% of the 11-year-old boys and 3.6% of the 11-year-old girls have smoked cigarettes; this proportion rose to 37.5% (boys) and 35.0% (girls), respectively, among the 15-year-olds.

About 2.4% of the boys and 0.9% of the girls aged 11 smoked **at the time of the survey** – most of them less than once a week. Among the 15-year-olds, 17.6% of the boys and 15.0% of the girls smoked when the survey took place; 6.6% of the boys and 6.4% of the girls within this age group used to smoke on a **daily** basis.

About half of the 15-year-old daily smokers smoked **5 cigarettes a day at most** whereas more than one quarter of the boys and one fifth of the girls smoked 6 to 10 cigarettes a day. About one fifth of the 15-year-old daily smoking girls and boys smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day.

Alcohol

The proportion of pupils who have drunk alcohol **at least once in their life** increased noticeably with age: 20.1% of the 11-year-old boys and 10.5% of the 11-year-old girls have already drunk alcohol; among the 15-year-olds, this proportion rose to more than two thirds (boys: 70.4%; girls: 68.9%).

Less than 10% of the adolescents aged 11 had drunk alcohol **within the 30 days preceding the survey**. Among the 15-year-olds, 46.0% of the boys and 41.0% of the girls had drunk alcohol during this period. Most of the pupils didn't drink alcohol on more than two days within the 30 days preceding the survey.

The 15-year-olds mostly reported drinking **beer**, followed by **spirits/liqueurs, alcopops and wine**. Within this age group, drinking beer was particularly prevalent among boys whereas girls had a similar preference for spirits/liqueurs and beer.

Less than 4.0% of the 11-year-olds reported **having been really drunk** (according to their own perception) **at least once in their life**. A proportion of 30.0% of the boys and 24.3% of the girls aged 15 have already been really drunk at least once. Most of them have been really drunk less than four times in their life. Among the 15-year-olds, 12.0% of the boys and 9.6% of the girls reported having been really drunk at least once within the 30 days preceding the survey.

Among the 15-year-olds, 27.3% of the boys and 22.9% of the girls reported **binge drinking** (i.e. drinking 5 or more drinks on one occasion) at least once within the 30 days preceding the survey. The vast majority of them didn't engage in this behaviour more than twice.

When asked about possible reasons why they drank alcohol, the 15-year-olds mainly mentioned social and reinforcement (of positive feelings and emotions) **motives**. Coping as well as conformity motives were reported less frequently.

Cannabis

More than three quarters of the pupils aged 14 to 15 have **never tried cannabis**. Among the 14-year-olds, 21.1% of the boys and 10.4% of the girls have used cannabis **at least once**. Cannabis use at least once in a lifetime was more prevalent among the 15-year-olds (boys: 30.1%; girls: 19.2%).

Cannabis use **within the 30 days preceding the survey** was far less common among 14-year-old girls (4.1%) compared to 14-year-old boys (8.9%). This proportion was larger among the 15-year-olds (boys: 14.5%; girls: 10.2%). About half of the 15-year-olds who used cannabis during the last 30 days used it on two days at most.

Other psychoactive substances

Relatively few 15-year-old adolescents reported having used other psychoactive substances than alcohol, tobacco or cannabis in their life. Medicine (to get high) was mentioned most frequently (by 3% of the 15-year-olds). The proportions of pupils aged 15 who reported having used cocaine, ecstasy, magic mushrooms, amphetamines/speed, LSD or heroin/opium were very small.

Multiple substance use

The HBSC questionnaire contains separate questions on each psychoactive substance (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis) which is why only conclusions about the use of multiple substances *within a given period of time (for example lifetime)* can be drawn (i.e. multiple substance use). Accordingly, inferences about the use of multiple substances *at the same time* ("simultaneous polydrug use") are impossible.

Among the 11-year-olds, 79.4% of the boys and 87.7% of the girls have **neither drunk alcohol nor smoked cigarettes**. This proportion was smaller among the 13-year-old boys and girls (58.2% and 68.9%, respectively).

The vast majority of the pupils who have already smoked cigarettes reported having drunk alcohol as well. About a quarter (among the 11-year-olds) to a half (among the 15-year-olds) of those who have already drunk alcohol have also smoked cigarettes. Multiple use of **alcohol and cigarettes** was particularly prevalent among 14- and 15-year-olds.

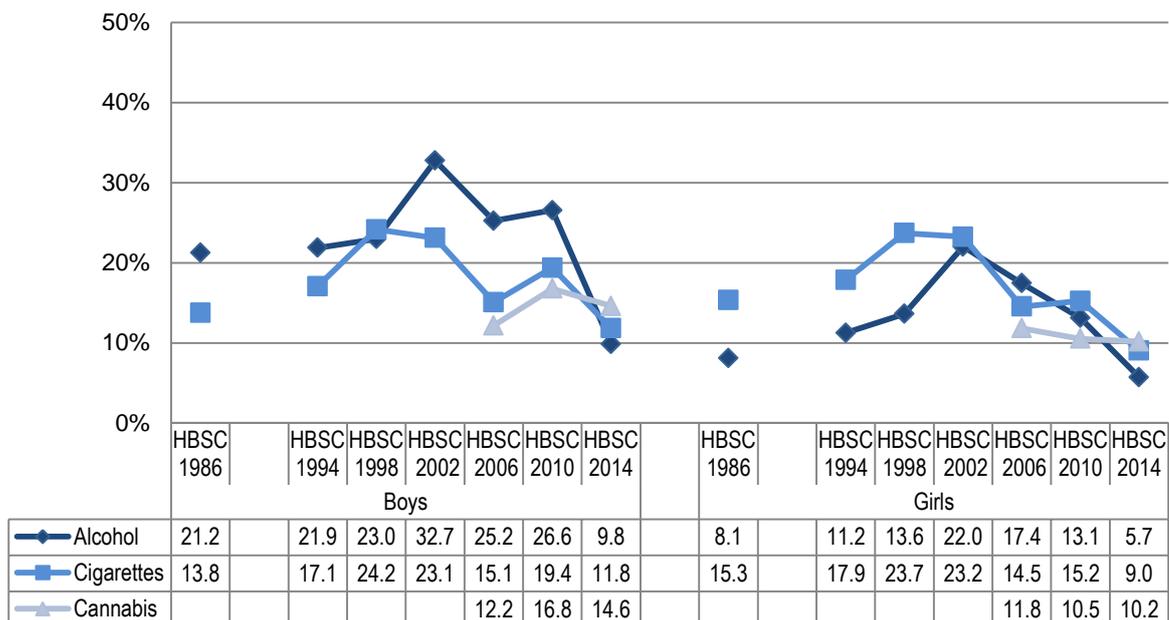
Most of the 14- and 15-year-olds who have used **cannabis** at least once in their life have also drunk alcohol and smoked cigarettes.

Comparatively few 14- and 15-year-olds have already used **other psychoactive substances** (like, for instance, cocaine or ecstasy). Most of these pupils have also drunk alcohol and smoked cigarettes and used cannabis.

About two fifths of the 14-year-olds have **never used any psychoactive substances** in their lives. This proportion is smaller among the 15-year-olds (about one quarter).

Trends

Figure 2. Evolution of alcohol consumption (currently at least weekly), cigarette smoking (currently at least weekly) and cannabis use (at least once in the last 30 days) among 15-year-olds, by sex and survey year, HBSC 1986-2014



Among the 15-year-olds, **alcohol consumption at least once a week and cigarette smoking at least once a week**, respectively, evolved rather similarly (figure 2): alcohol consumption and cigarette use (at least weekly) increased since 1986 and reached its peak between 1998 and 2002; subsequently, the use declined between 2002 and 2006 whereas it remained rather stable between 2006 and 2010. **Alcohol consumption and cigarette smoking decreased markedly between 2010 and 2014**; alcohol consumption (at least weekly) even declined by more than a half. Likewise, the prevalence of self-rated drunkenness (at least twice in a lifetime) as well as binge drinking (5 or more

drinks on one occasion; at least once within the 30 days preceding the survey) decreased between 2010 and 2014.

Data on **cannabis use** within the 30 days preceding the survey have only been available since 2006. The prevalence of cannabis use at least once in the past 30 days did not change markedly between 2006 and 2014.

Access to psychoactive substances

Pupils aged 15 who drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes and/or used cannabis at least once in the past 30 days most frequently reported having had **access to these substances** through someone they know, i.e. friends, siblings or others. Cigarettes were almost as often **purchased in stores, kiosks, bars, restaurants and from vending machines** (about three fifth of the 15-year-olds who smoked during the last 30 days bought cigarettes at least once) as they were received from known people. About one quarter bought alcoholic beverages in stores etc. by themselves at least once.

Conclusion

The use of psychoactive substances among 11-to-15-year-old adolescents in Switzerland is still widespread despite the decline in 2014. Many pupils still have access to alcohol and cigarettes in stores, bars etc. or via people they know. The existing bans on selling alcohol and cigarettes to minors ought to be enforced more consequently. Additionally, the adolescents' social environment should be encouraged not to give alcohol, cigarettes or other psychoactive substances to minors.