



# University drug use survey

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By [drugsand.me](https://drugsand.me)

in collaboration with [Student's Union UCL](#) and  
UCL societies

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## Introduction

[drugsand.me](http://drugsand.me) is an educational website that provides evidence-based information about existing harm reduction methods for drug users. By conducting this online and anonymous survey we aim to investigate whether drug-related services and information provided by universities reflect the students' needs.

This survey was distributed between January and March in 2017.

## Demographics

A total of 329 people from over 30 nationalities completed the survey.

Only the results of 280 respondents were analysed since the responses of non-student respondents were eliminated. This survey was solely targeting drug use amongst university students.

The largest portion of the respondents was British – 33.2% of respondents who reported their nationality.

36.7% of the respondents preferred not to report their nationality.

Some of the reported nationalities include French, Bulgarian, Andorran, Albanian, Chilean and Swedish.

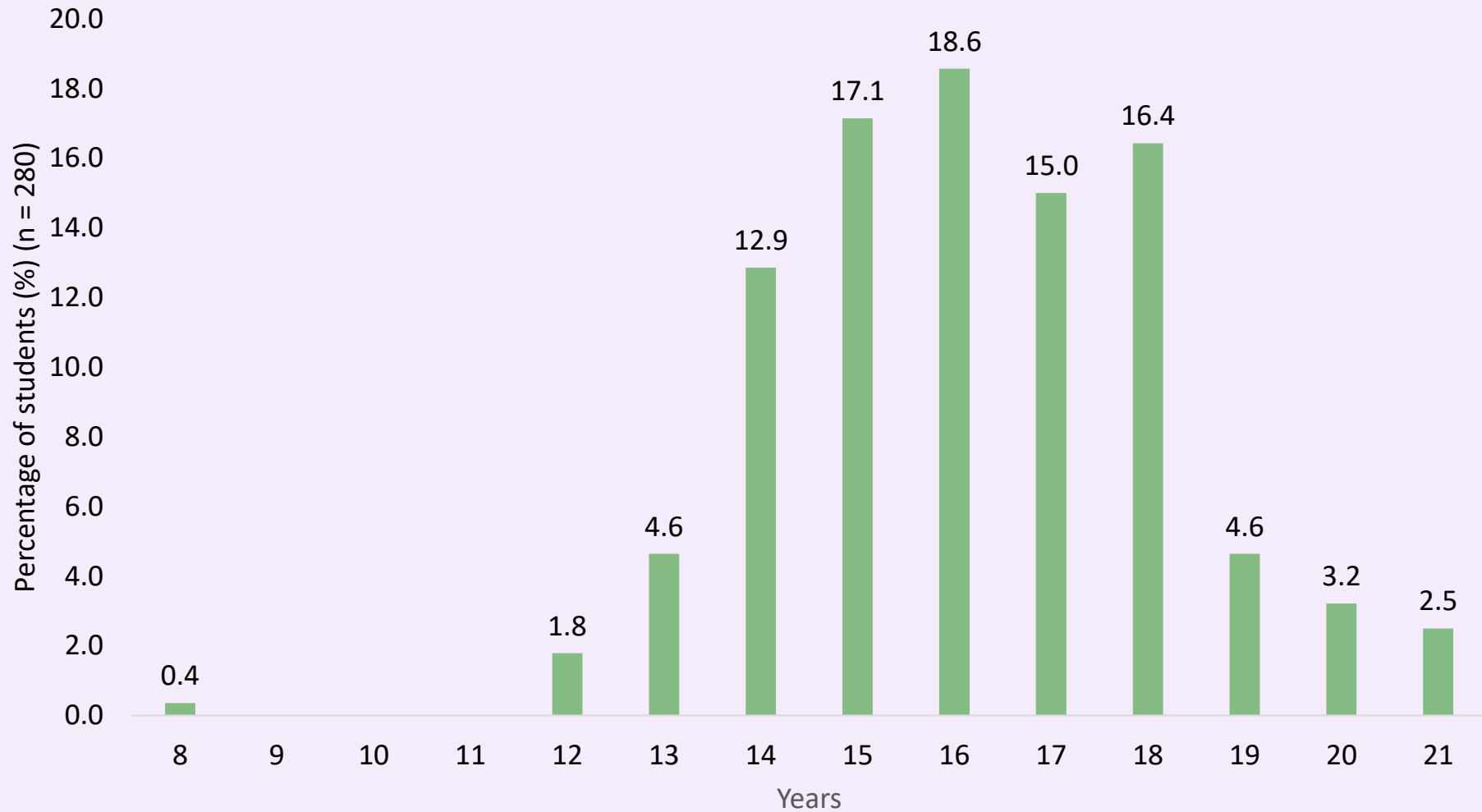
49.6% of the respondents were male, 46.8% were female and 3.6% chose ‘other’ as their gender.

74.3% of the respondents’ age ranged between 19 and 22 years.

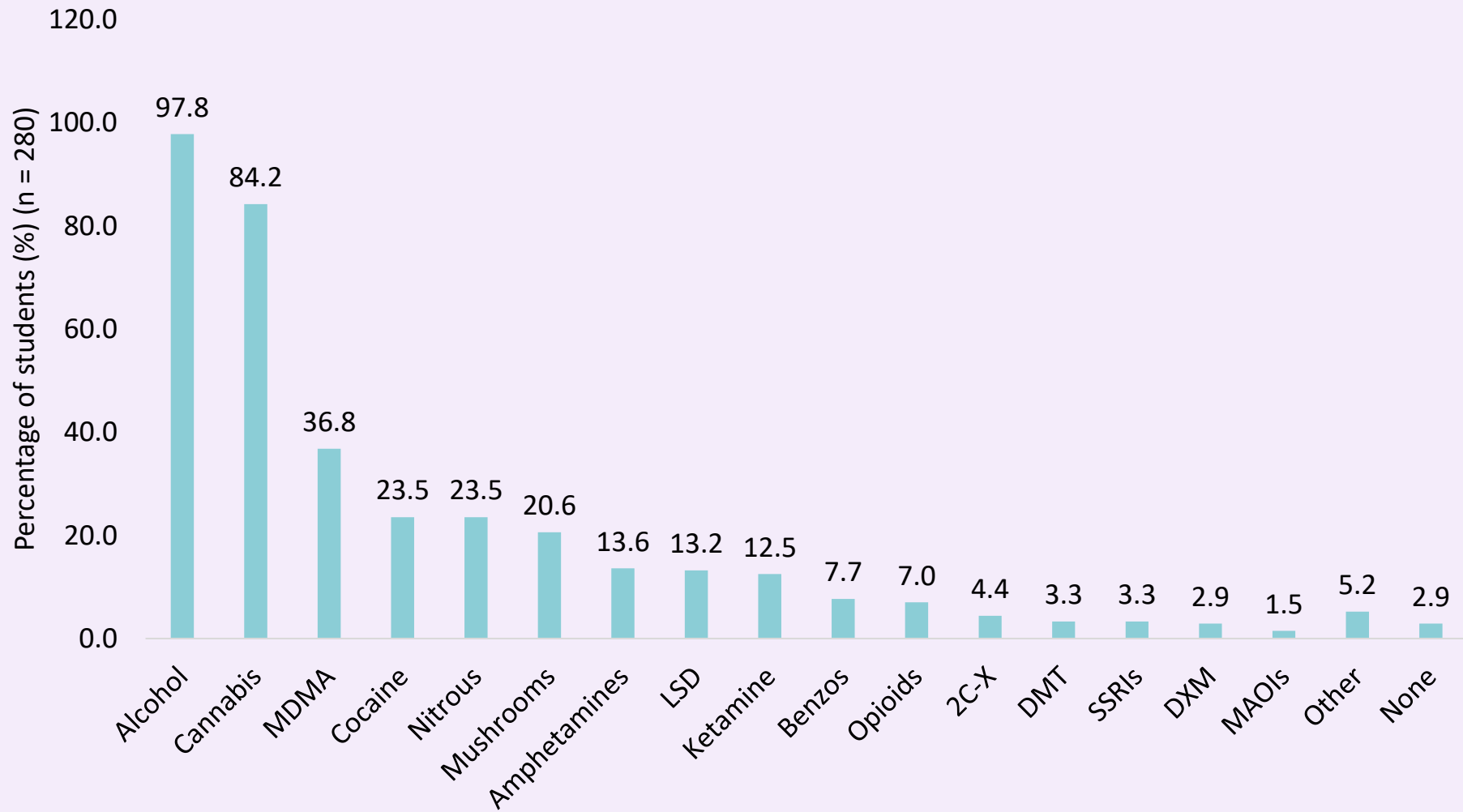
## Drug use

- **96.1%** of students **tried drugs** recreationally **before** coming to university.
- **80.0%** of students started using illicit drugs between the ages of **14** and **18**.
- The most common drugs students tried **before** coming to university were **alcohol** (97.8%) and **cannabis** (84.2%). **MDMA** (36.8%) was also popular before university.
- The most common drugs students first tried **while** being at university were **cocaine** (40.0%) and **MDMA** (38.9%) followed by **ketamine** (29.3%), **cannabis** (28.6%) and **LSD** (27.9%) while **20.7%** of students did **not try** any new drugs in university.
- **67.1%** of students think their drug use **increased** in university.
- The main **reason** for drug use was **recreational** (81.1%). 62.5% of students used drugs to **go out** to night clubs and 55% used drugs to **relax**. On the other hand, **depression** was an influential factor for 20.4% of students.

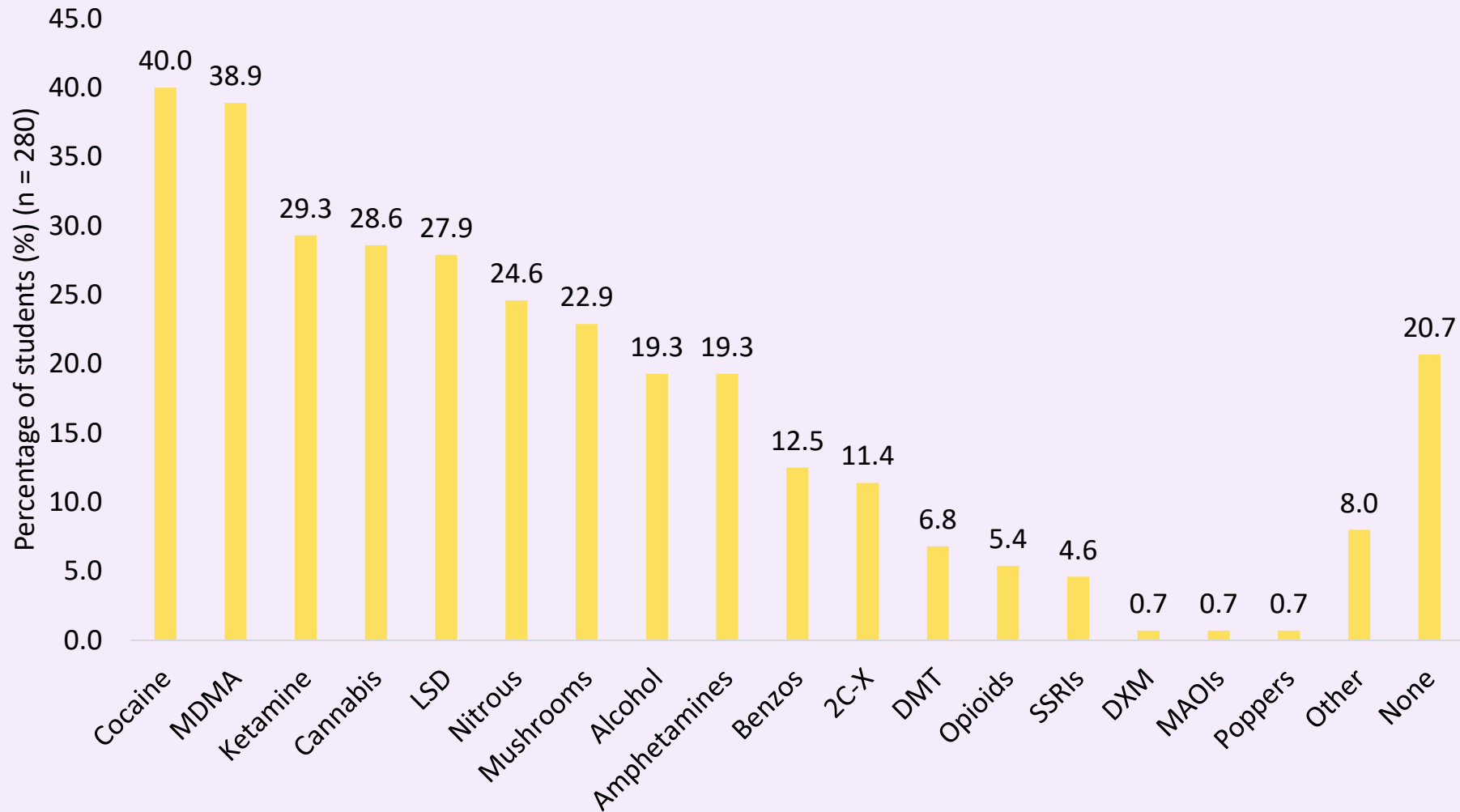
## The age when students first used illicit drugs



## The drugs students tried before coming to university

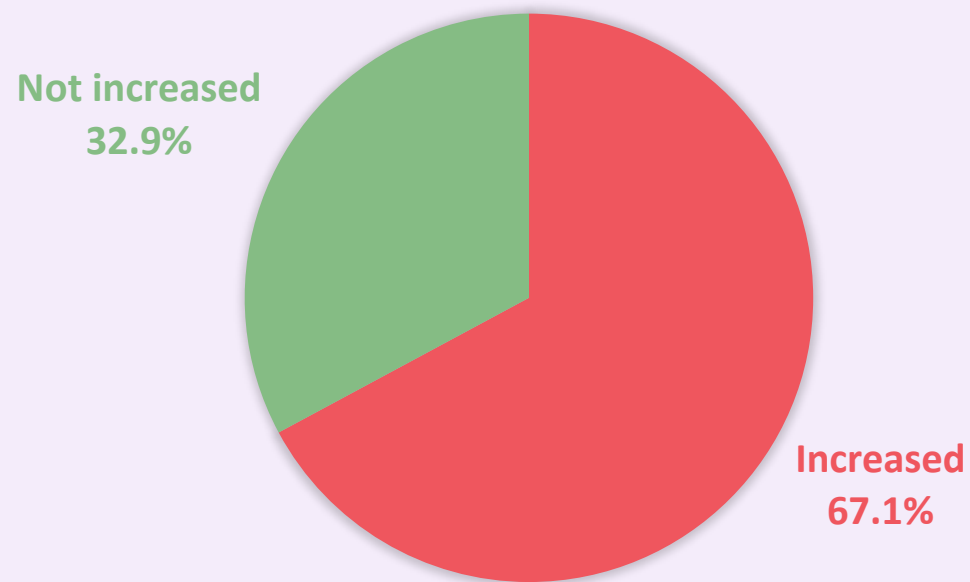


## The new drugs students tried while being in university

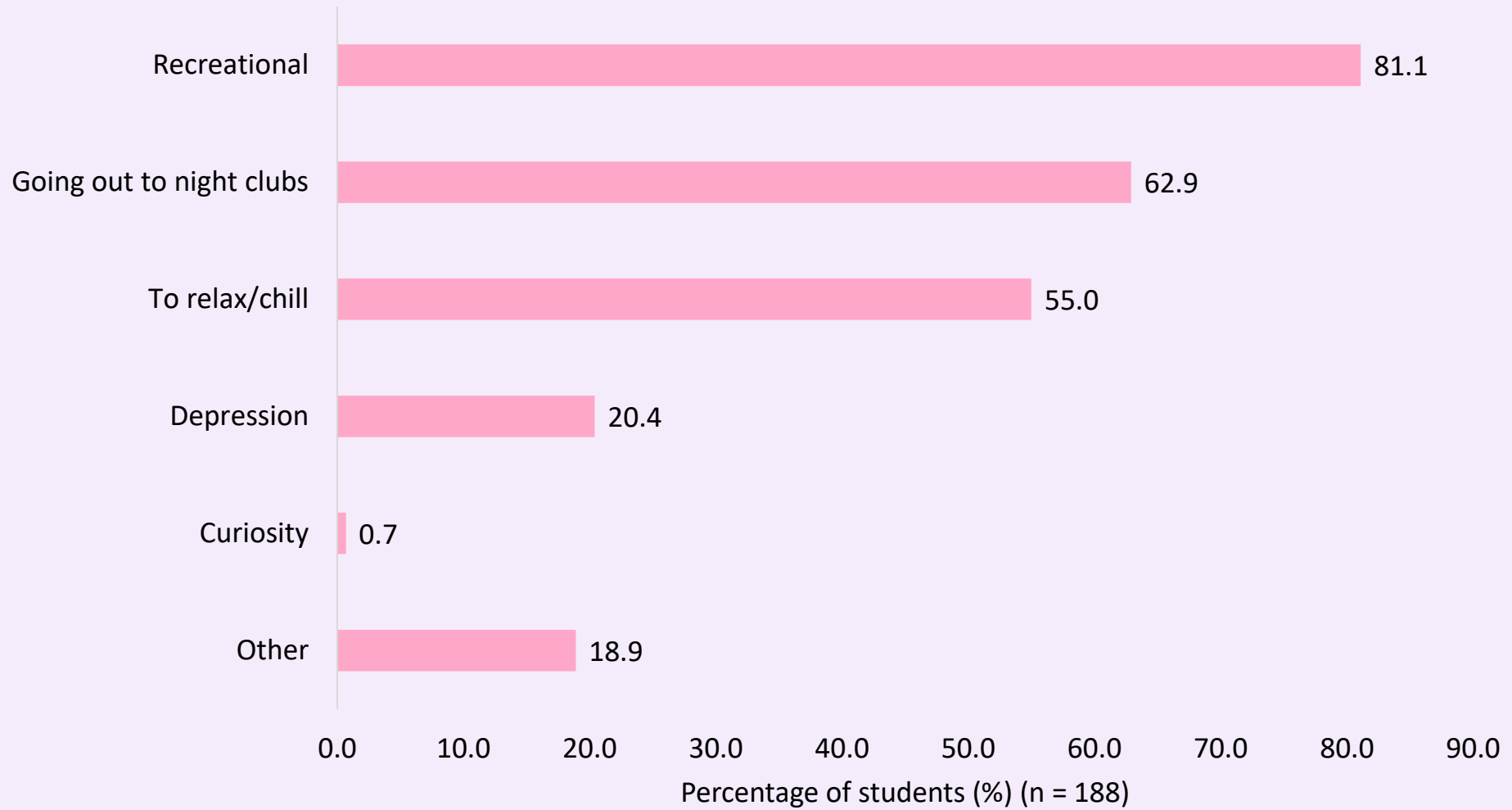




Students who think their drug use increased in university (n = 280)



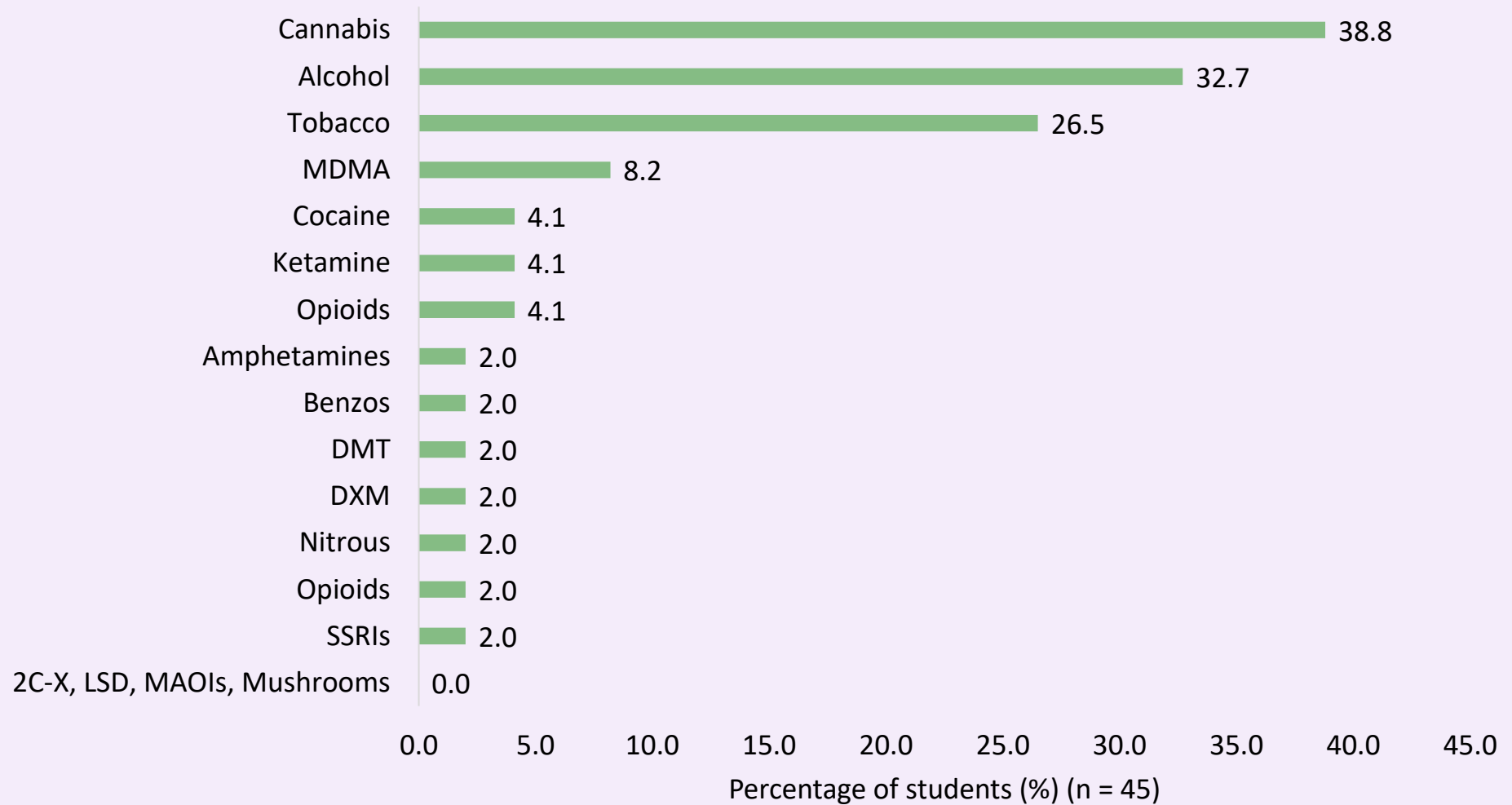
### The reasons which influenced students' drug use



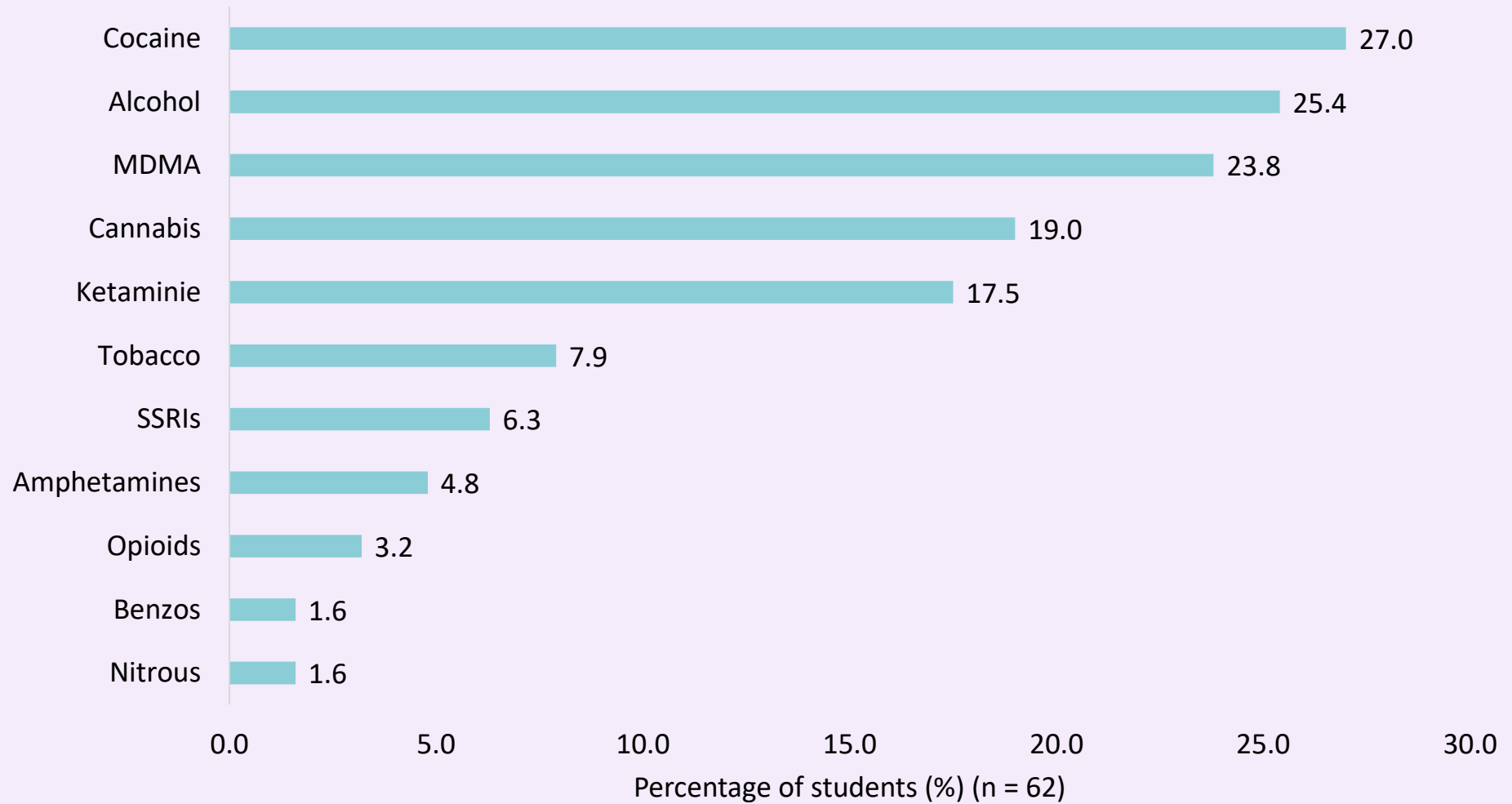
## Drug dependence

- **16.1%** of students think they are **dependent** on a drug.
- The most common drugs which were reported by those who think they are dependent were **cannabis** (38.8%), **alcohol** (32.7%) and **tobacco** (26.5%).
- **22.1%** of students wanted to quit a drug.
- **Cocaine** (27.0%), **alcohol** (25.4%) and **MDMA** (23.8%) were the most common drugs that students wanted to quit.
- **61.8%** of students think that drug use has **short-term negative effects** in their life such as not being able to do other things because of **wasting too much time** (59.8%) and **excessive spending** (55.7%).

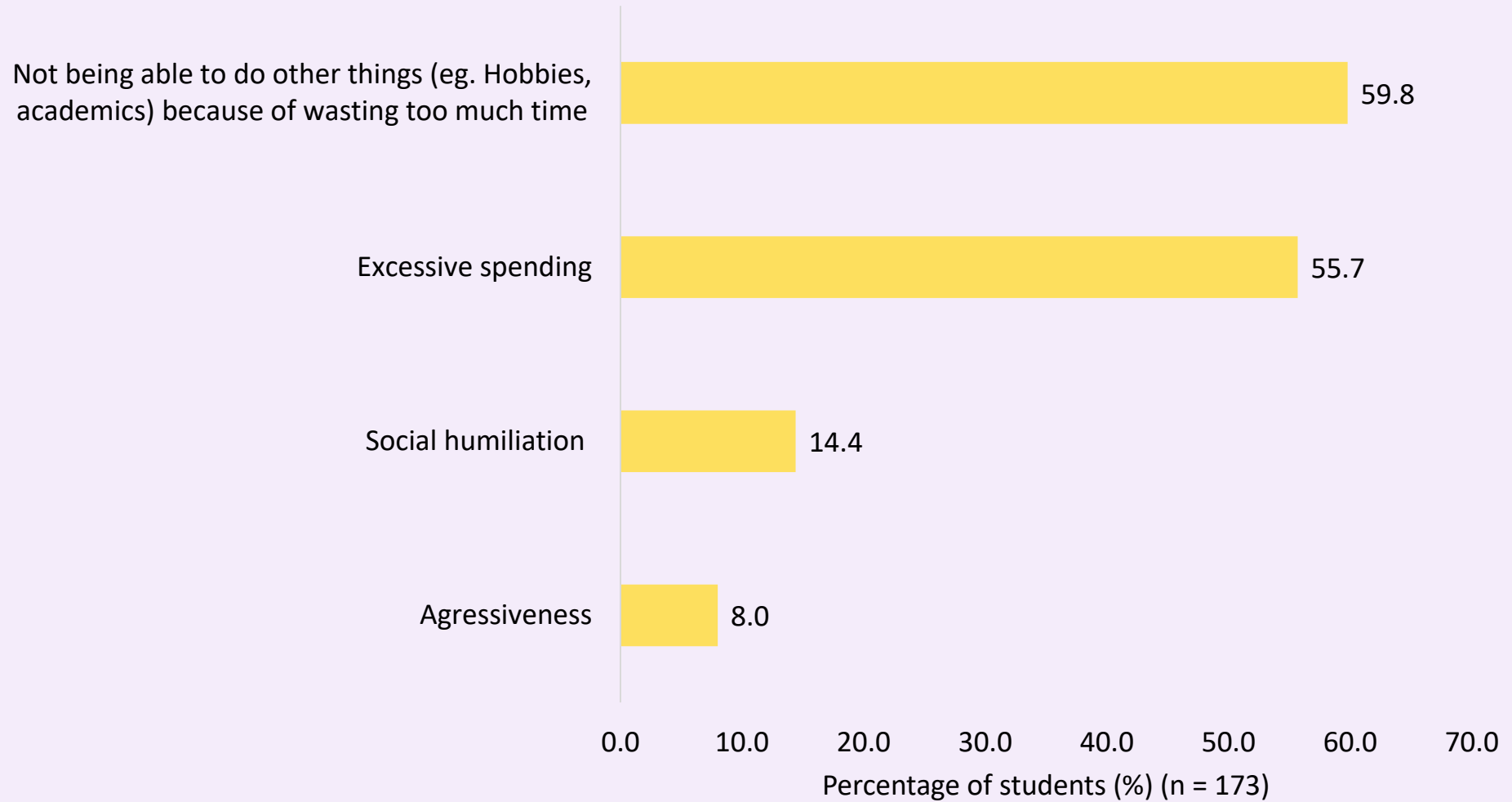
### The drugs students think they are dependent on:



### The drugs students wanted to quit:



## Short-term effects of drugs on students' life



## Polydrug use

- **82.5%** of students **combine** different drugs.
- The **most common** combination is **alcohol and cannabis** (34.1%). **MDMA** and **cocaine** are also very commonly consumed **with alcohol**, making 19.8% and 15.2% of all combinations respectively.
- **32.3%** of students combine **more than two** drugs.
- **Benzodiazepine, amphetamine** and **ketamine** are more commonly used **as an adjunct** to other drugs rather than as a main drug.

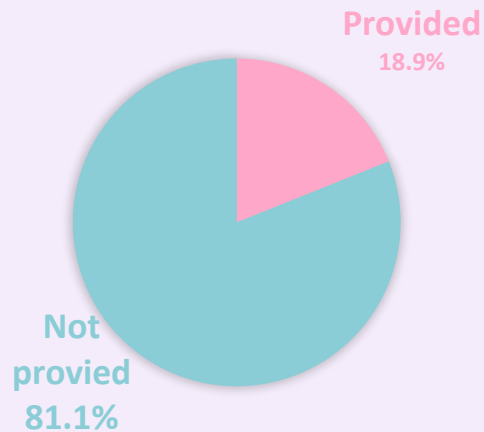
Combinations (n = 231)	Percentage of drug combination compared to all reported combinations (%)	
<b>Alcohol - Cannabis</b>	28.1	34.1
+ Other drugs	6.0	
<b>Alcohol - MDMA</b>	14.8	19.8
+ Other drugs	5.0	
<b>Alcohol - Cocaine</b>	10.8	15.2
+ Other drugs	4.4	
<b>Cannabis - MDMA</b>	6.3	9.8
+ Other drugs	3.5	
<b>Ketamine - MDMA</b>	3.1	6.4
+ Other drugs	3.3	
<b>Alcohol - Ketamine</b>	1.9	6.3
+ Other drugs	4.4	
<b>Alcohol - Amphetamine</b>	1.3	4.8
+ Other drugs	3.5	
<b>Alcohol - Benzos</b>	0.2	2.1
+ Other drugs	1.9	



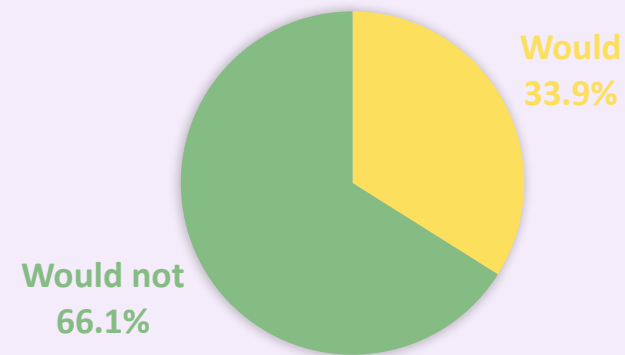
## Harm reduction

- **81.1%** of students were **not provided** with information about drugs by their university.
- **33.9%** of students would **find it helpful** to get support from their university union.
- Only **13.6%** of students **test their drugs** before taking them however **90.7%** of them **would test** their drugs if their university provided **free/cheap testing facilities**.

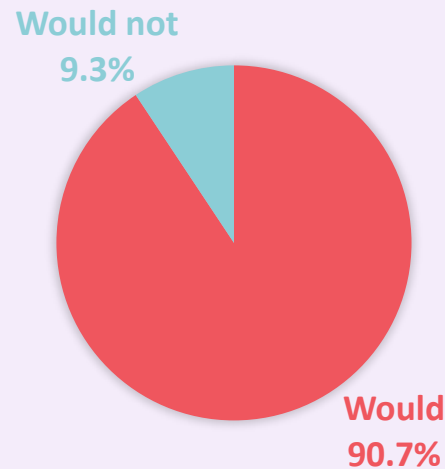
Students who were provided with drug information by their university (n = 280)



Students who would find it helpful to get support from their university union (n = 280)



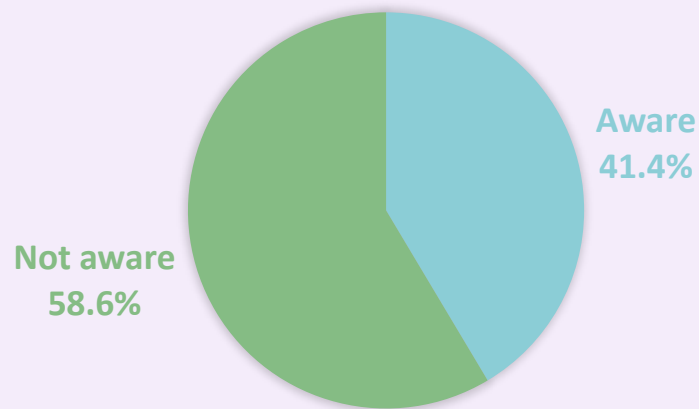
Students who would test their drugs if their university provided free/cheap testing facilities (n = 280)



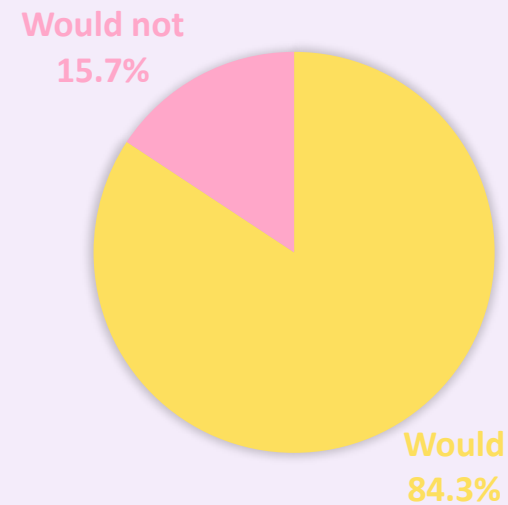
## Policy

- **58.6%** of students are **not aware** of their university's **drug policy**
- **38.6%** of students do **not understand** what the consequences are for **possessing illicit drugs on campus**.
- **35.7%** of students do **not understand** what the consequences are for **possessing illicit drugs in halls of residence**.
- **84.3%** of students **would still use** illicit drugs **despite** university policies.

Students who are aware of their university's drug policy (n = 280)



Students who would still use illicit drugs despite university policies (n = 280)

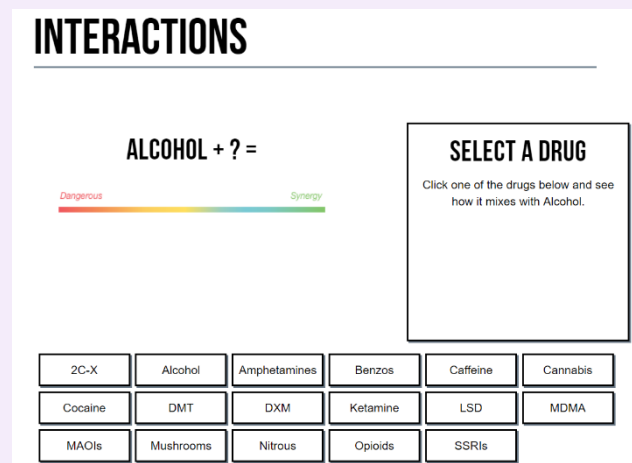


## Discussion

Most students start using illicit drugs before university, therefore drug education should target secondary school and sixth form college students.

Students are not provided with drug information even at universities where [there is no open conversation about drug use](#). However, given the opportunity, students are open to learn about drugs and willing to use testing kits if provided for cheap or free.

Drug combination profiles of students show that they are not aware of the risks and dangers of certain combinations such as alcohol-cocaine or alcohol-benzodiazepine. Tools such as our interaction table that are simple and user-friendly could have a profound impact on students' health and wellbeing if more readily available.



[Mental health problems and suicides are skyrocketing in the UK](#). Drug misuse is highly correlated with depression and other mental disorders. As shown by our survey, the majority of students do not want to quit a drug even though they experience negative side effects. They would still use a drug despite university policies and its illegal status. Unfortunately, the zero-tolerance drug policy implemented by universities results in **zero drug education**. Denying that students take drugs only aggravates the situation and exposes students to avoidable risks. Real, student-oriented measures such as alcohol and drug education are needed to ameliorate the mental illness epidemic.

## Acknowledgments

This survey would not have been possible without the support of our friends who helped us to review, edit and improve it.

Drugsand.me would also like to thank the UCL Neuroscience Society, Mindfulness Society, Society for the Application of Psychedelics and Kinesis Magazine for their help in distributing this survey.

## Contributors

[Arda Ozcubukcu](#) (Analyst) designed the survey, analysed the data and wrote the report.

[Ivan Ezquerra-Romano](#) (Co-founder and Director of Content) distributed the survey, supervised the design and analysis of the survey and wrote the report.

## Did you find this survey interesting?

If you like what [drugsand.me](https://drugsand.me) does and would like us to continue what we do, your smallest donation will help us to develop our website, conduct more surveys and organise workshops on drug education!

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