



Executive summary: Recreational drug use during COVID-19

We conducted a survey in response to the COVID-19 outbreak titled: 'Recreational drug use during COVID-19'. The aim of the survey was to understand how recreational drug use changed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The full report can be found [here](#) and the appendix figures [here](#). In this document, we provide a summary.

Participant demographics

Our survey was conducted in April 2020. Around 2000 participants from 79 different countries completed the survey. 52.8% of participants were between 18 and 25 years of age. 65% of participants were male, 35% female. 73.9% of participants lived in a household of 2-4.

Alcohol use

1755 participants reported consuming alcohol. 4.6% of them had not been drinking before the pandemic. Most commonly, participants reported no change in their drinking. Overall, more participants reported an increased alcohol consumption than a decreased use. 10.7% of participants drank 2 glasses (175 ml) of wine in one session. 8.7% of participants drank 2 cans of beer (330 ml) and 8.3% of participants drank 2 pints of beer (568 ml) in a drinking session.

Nicotine use

1121 participants reported consuming nicotine, 74.2% of whom reported to smoke and 32.0% reported to vape. When asked about their changes of nicotine use during the pandemic, both groups most commonly reported no change. Similar amounts of participants reported increase and decrease in their smoking habits. When asked about their nicotine consumption before the pandemic, 4.1% of people who smoked reported they had not been smoking before. Among people who vaped, this number was 8.1%.

Frequently used drugs (except for alcohol and nicotine)

1348 participants reported consuming cannabis during the first weeks of the pandemic. LSD (351), cocaine (338) and MDMA (328) were also popular. The most frequently used drugs were cannabis (used weekly or more often by 88% of participants), opioids (used weekly or more often by 73% of participants) and crystal meth (used weekly or more often by 63% of participants).

Changes in drug use (except for alcohol and nicotine)

51% of participants consuming cannabis reported an increased or greatly increased use. 49% of participants consuming benzodiazepines reported an increase or great increase. 43% of participants using opioids reported a great increase in their consumption.

33% of participants consuming cocaine reported a decreased or greatly decreased consumption. 29% of participants consuming ketamine reported a decreased or greatly decreased consumption. 28% of participants consuming amphetamines reported a decreased or greatly decreased consumption.



246 participants tried at least one new drug since the start of the pandemic. 48 participants took LSD for the first time. Psilocybin was tried for the first time by 33 participants. Benzodiazepines were tried by 24 participants for the first time.

Reasons for using drugs (except for alcohol and nicotine)

People consumed drugs 'to have fun' (51.6%), 'to increase creativity' (46.5%), 'to relax, or on a night out' (44.5%), 'to cope with stress' (35.9%), and 'to escape reality' (33.7%). 700 participants reported using drugs to self-medicate. Participants were self-medicating 'to sleep' (66.4%), 'to heighten mood or to alleviate symptoms of depression' (61.7%), 'to reduce anxiety' (55.9%), and 'to improve concentration' (33.7%).

Problematic drug use

From the participants combining drugs, 50.9% of participants reported combining alcohol and cannabis. 12.5% reported to combine alcohol and cocaine. 10.3% reported to combine cannabis and LSD.

340 participants reported to feel dependent on a drug. 380 were potentially dependent on a drug. The most common drugs participants felt dependent on were cannabis (461), nicotine (176), and alcohol (114).

426 participants claimed there was at least one drug they wanted to stop taking. Among them, cannabis was common (116), followed by alcohol (74) and cocaine (63). 226 participants reported to have some unintended withdrawal symptoms.

Barriers to support

1072 participants had not been offered sufficient support in their organisations regarding drug use. This number rose to 1497 during the pandemic. 1419 participants claimed they would not consult their university/workplace/school about drug-related problems. The most common reason why participants would not consult their organisations included 'fear of punishment' (40.3%), 'fear of judgement' (36.0%), 'fear of getting the police involved' (26.6%), and 'lack of awareness of what is available' (16.6%).

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