

Ukrainian Web Survey on Drugs: Prevalence and Patterns of Use – 2023

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Background information

With over 12 million displaced people due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the web survey in contrast to face-to-face method was the only way to obtain data at no significant cost in order to better understand the impact of drugs on the population and the healthcare system in a challenging environment with various social, economic, and psychological consequences. It was crucial to gather data and insights to track changes and trends in order to facilitate developing effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and treatment.

Goals

- To assess the prevalence, patterns and types of drug use among different demographic groups in Ukraine as well as changes in drug use over the past year.
- To identify the reasons and motivations behind drug use and explore the impact of the war on drug availability and distribution.
- To contribute to a better understanding of the drug issue and facilitate the development of targeted initiatives to address the challenges faced by individuals and communities affected by the war.
- To motivate national policymakers and NGOs for generating data-driven recommendations to address drug-related issues and promote harm reduction strategies during the conflict.

Methodology

The anonymous web survey on drugs was conducted by the [Institute of Psychiatry, Forensic Psychiatric Examination and Drug Monitoring of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine](#) with the support of the [EMCDDA](#) and collected data between 05 and 25 June 2023 from people aged 18 to 64 years, living in Ukraine. Respondents were self-selected, and recruitment strategies comprised a mixture of social media campaigns, shared posts, news releases along with database and personal contacts from drug-related NGOs and public agencies. As a result, 559 residents of Ukraine aged 18 to 64 years participated in the web survey.

The questionnaire was published on [EUSurvey platform](#) and consisted of 3 modules:

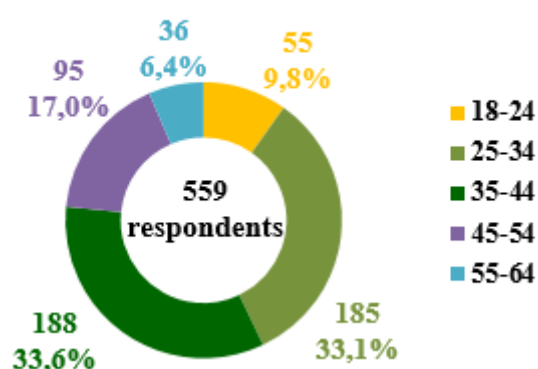
1. *respondent's profile* (including age, gender, place of residence, educational background and employment status);
2. *drug use in different time periods* (lifetime, 12 months and 30 days) regarding following substances: cannabis, cocaine, heroin, methadone, buprenorphine, amphetamine, methamphetamine, MDMA/ecstasy, hallucinogens and cathinones. Each substance was presented with its street name, e.g. powder, crack, base for cocaine while substance categories were explained with specific substance names, e.g. hallucinogens (LSD, ketamine, psilocybin, mescaline, DMT, etc.);
3. *patterns of drug use* (including motivations, settings and effects of drug use).

The questionnaire was shared in Ukrainian and it took respondents 5 to 8 minutes in average to fill-in and submit it.

Respondents

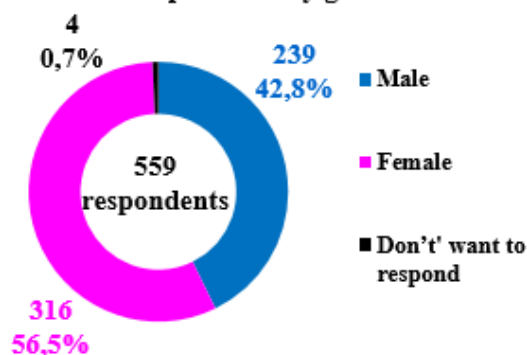
The web survey covered all target age groups with the biggest shares of people aged 25-34 (33.1%), 35-44 (33.6%) and 45-54 (17.0%).

Respondents by age group

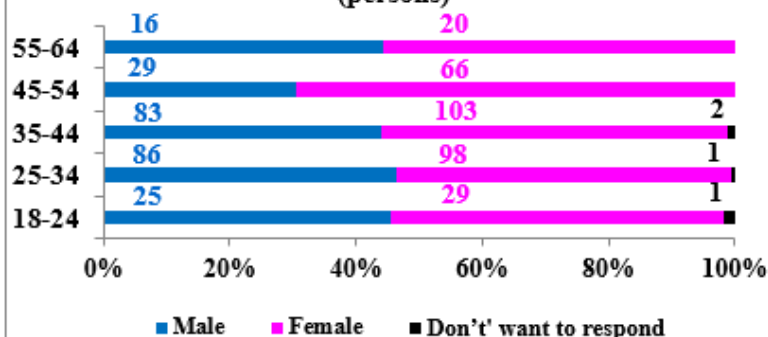


Distribution of respondents' gender (42.8% - men, 56.5% - women) corresponds to official demographic data provided by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (46.2 - men, 53.8 - women).

Respondents by gender

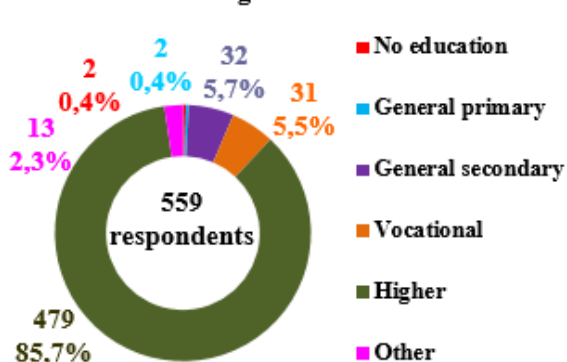


Gender of Ukrainian respondents by age group (persons)

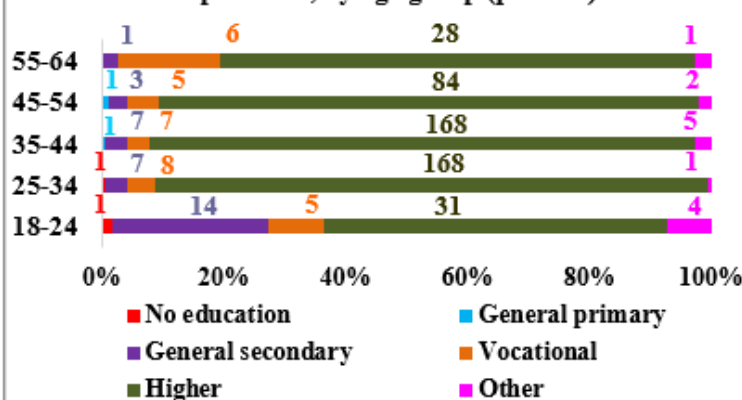


An overwhelming majority of respondents (85.7%) have higher education. In comparison, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine [states](#) above 70,0% of tertiary qualification holders among adult population in Ukraine.

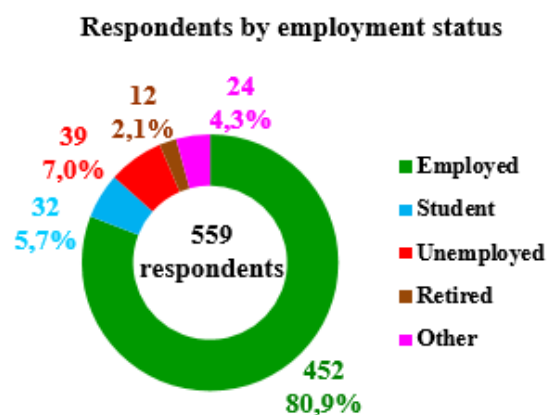
Respondents by educational background



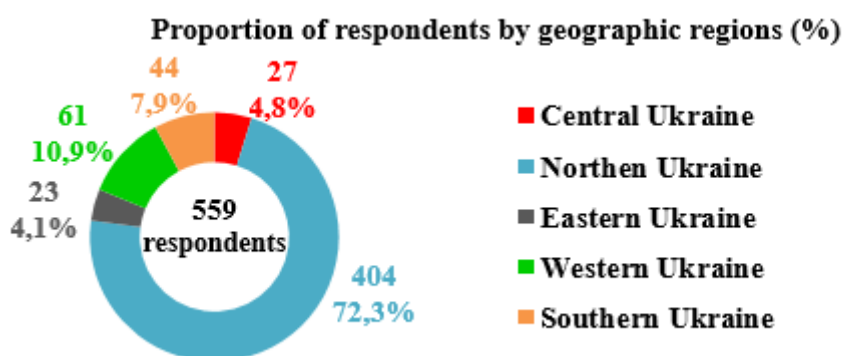
Educational background of Ukrainian respondents, by age group (persons)



80.9% of those who participated in the web survey are employed including full-time, part-time and self-employment. 50% (12 out of 24) of respondents who chose “Other” option indicated being on maternity leave.



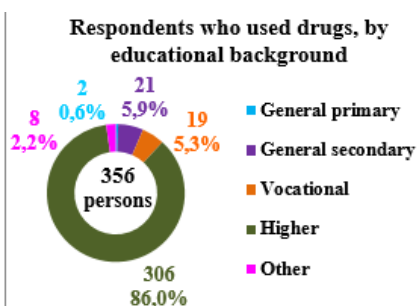
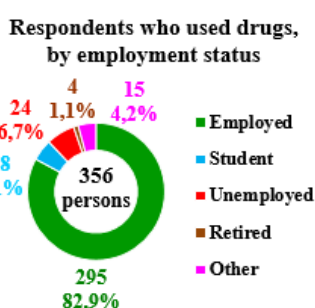
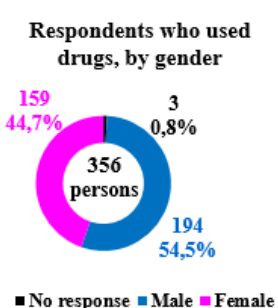
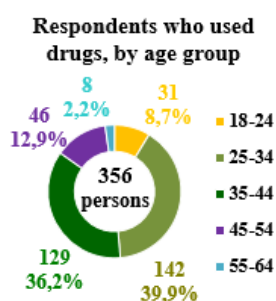
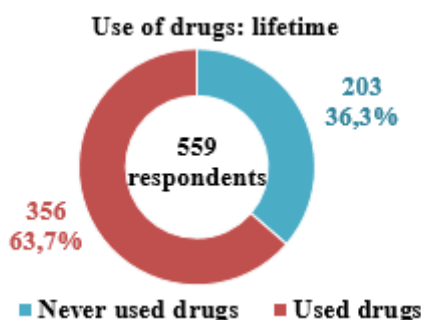
The majority of respondents (59.9%) indicated the city of Kyiv as their place of residence.



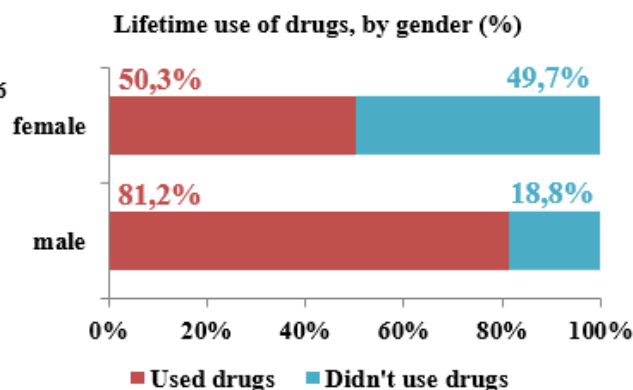
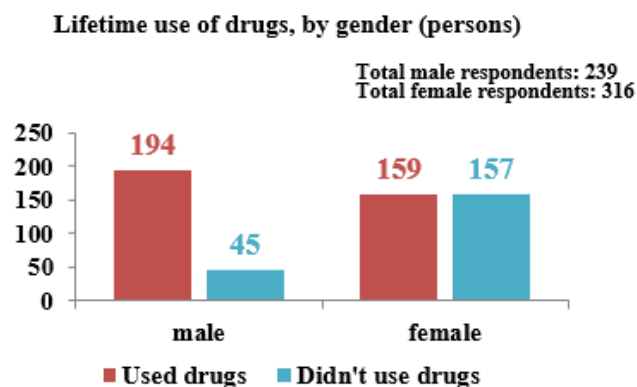
Use of drugs

LIFETIME

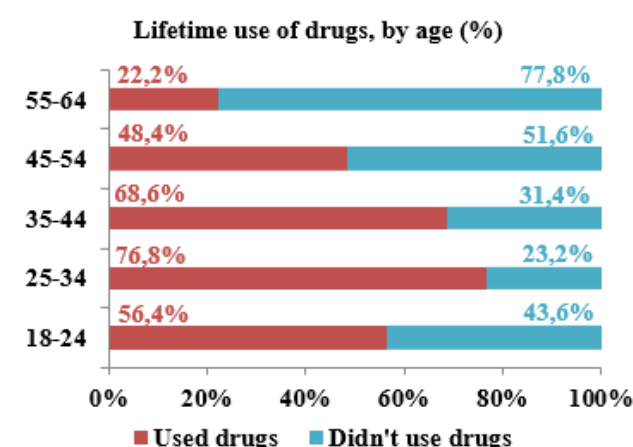
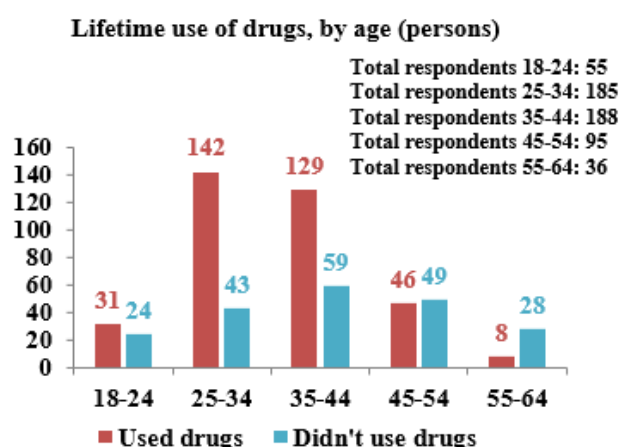
Almost two out of three respondents (63.7%) reported that they had used drugs at least once in their lives.



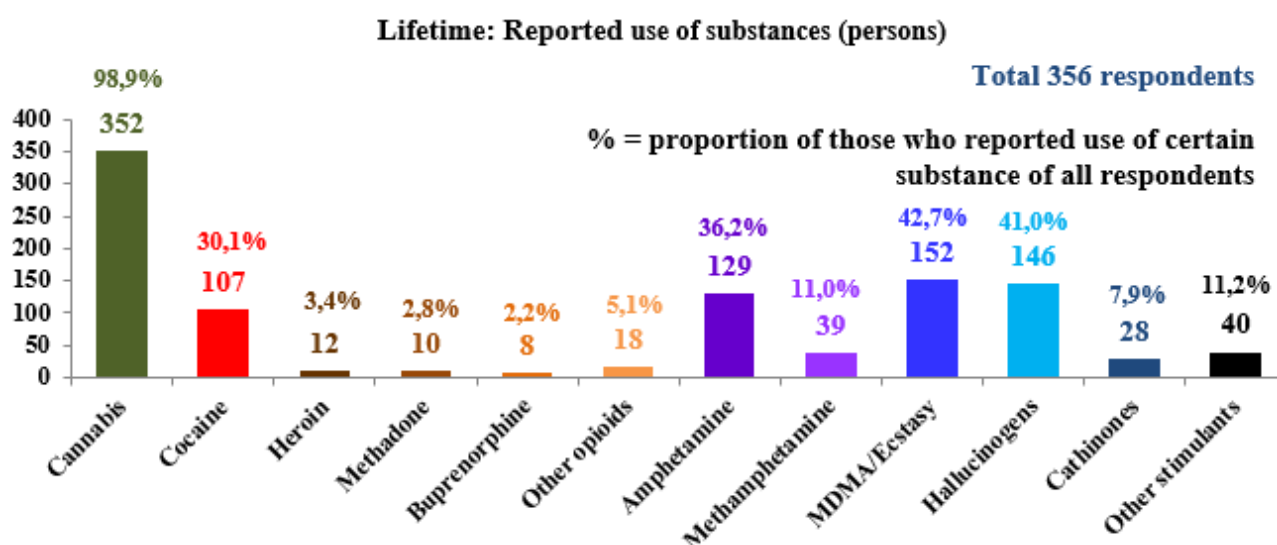
Men are more likely to use drugs than women: four out of five men (81.2%) and one out of two women (50.3%) reported that they had experience of using drugs in their life.



The biggest proportion of those who reported use of drugs in their lives is in the age group 25-34: 76.8%.

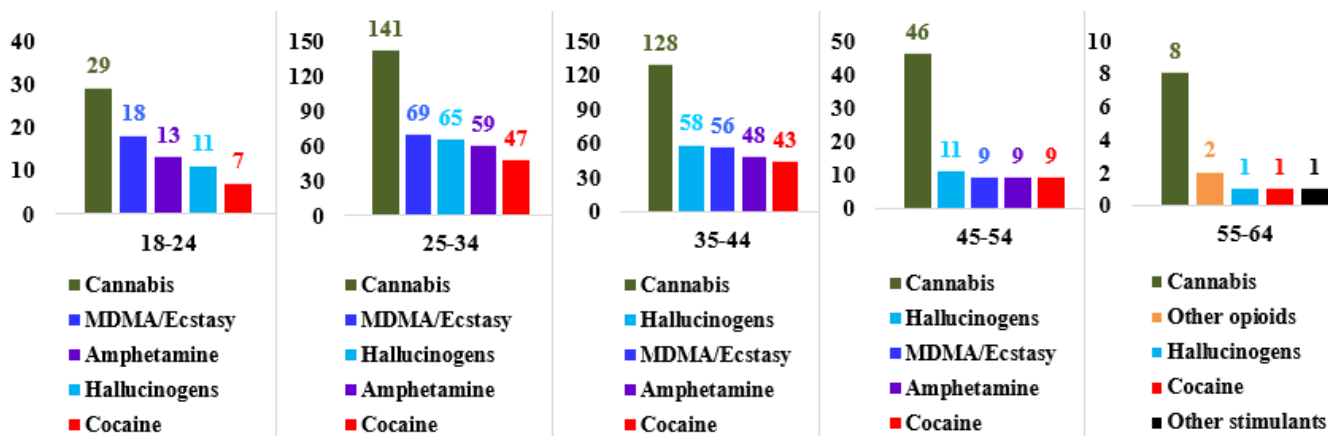


Top-5 most popular substances are: cannabis (98.9% of those who reported use of certain substances), MDMA/Ecstasy (42.7%), hallucinogens (41.0%), amphetamine (36.2%), cocaine (30.1%).



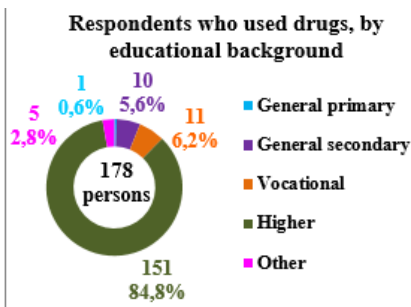
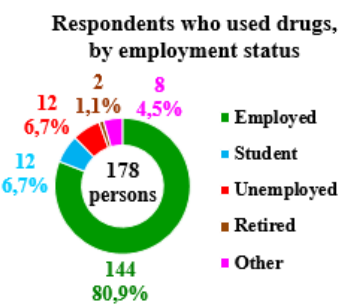
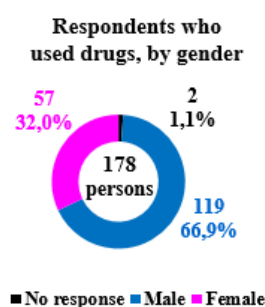
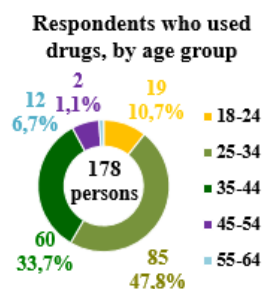
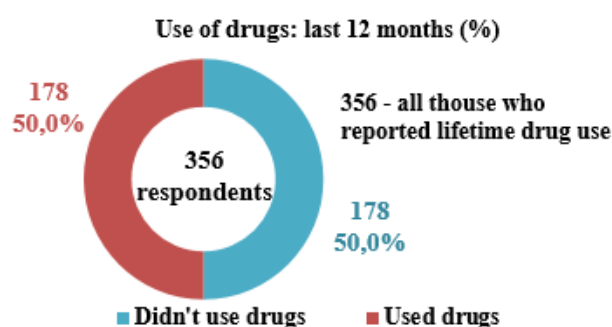
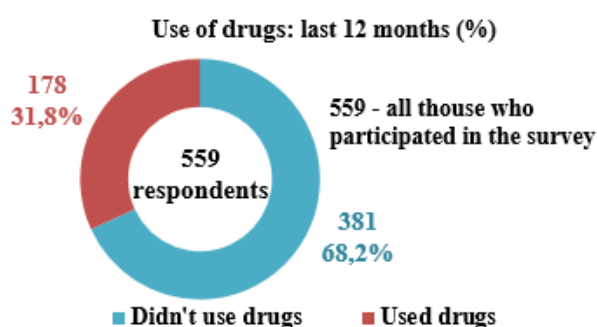
The top 5 substances differ between the age groups, although cannabis leads all with a large advantage. The second most popular drug in the age groups 18-24 and 25-34 is MDMA/Ecstasy, while the respondents in the age groups 35-44 and 45-54 favor hallucinogens in second place.

Top-5 substances in age groups (Lifetime)

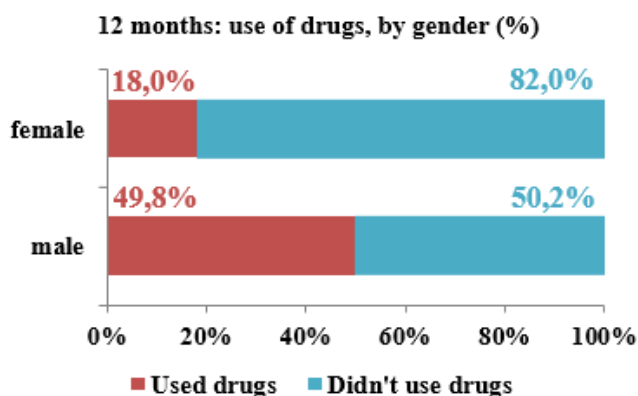
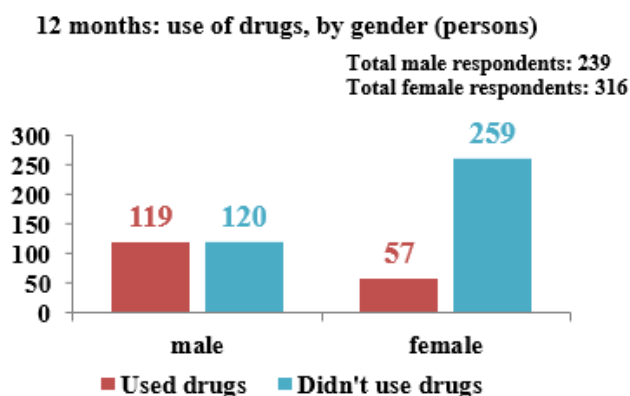


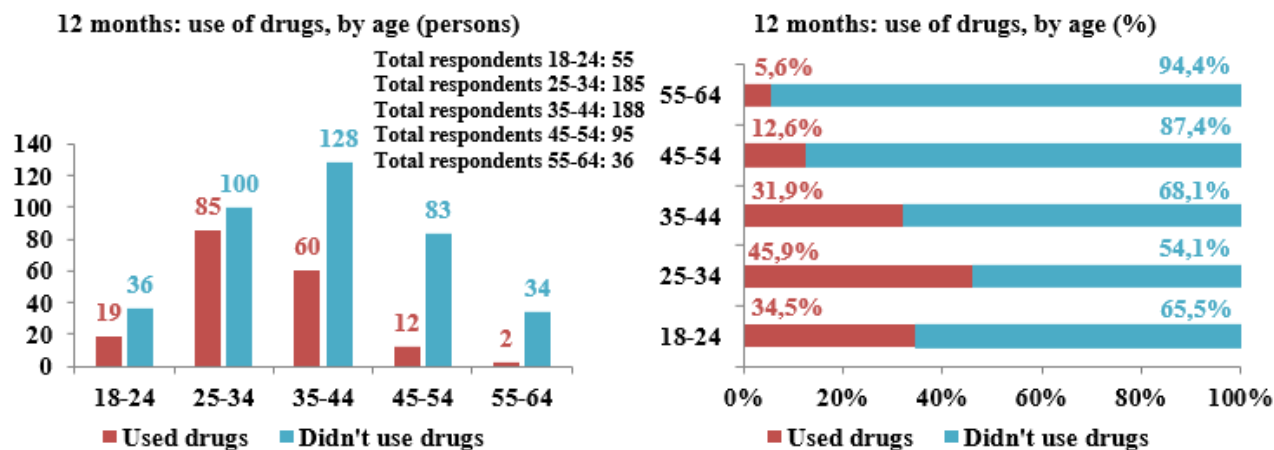
12 MONTHS

31.8% of all respondents of the survey used drugs over the last 12 months, with a half of respondents who reported lifetime use of drugs did them over the last year.

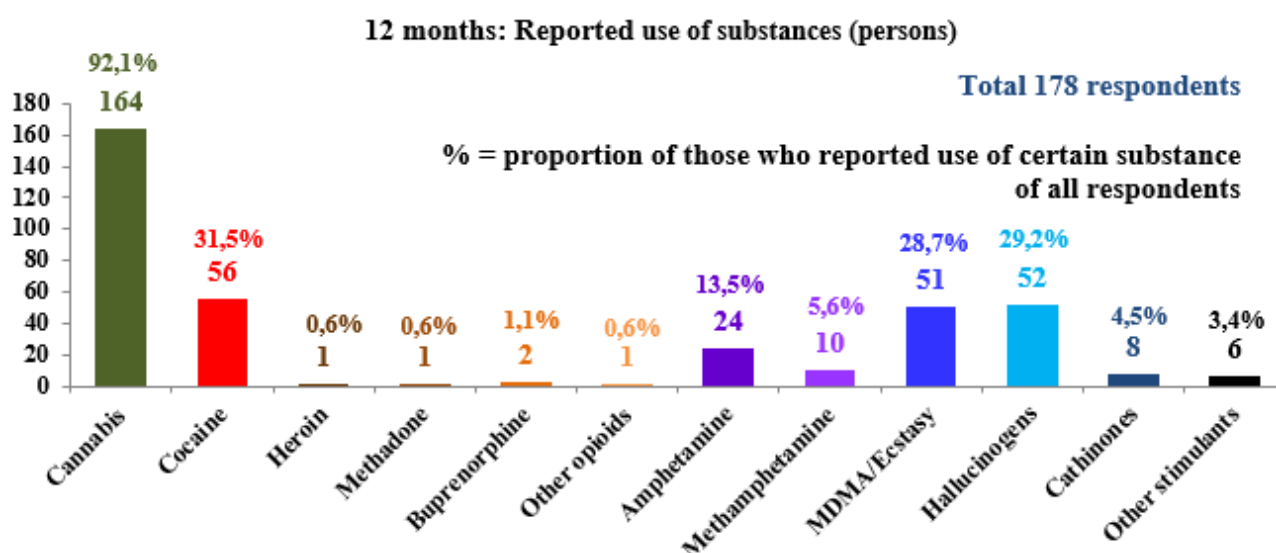


The gender and age distribution are the same as that of lifetime users.



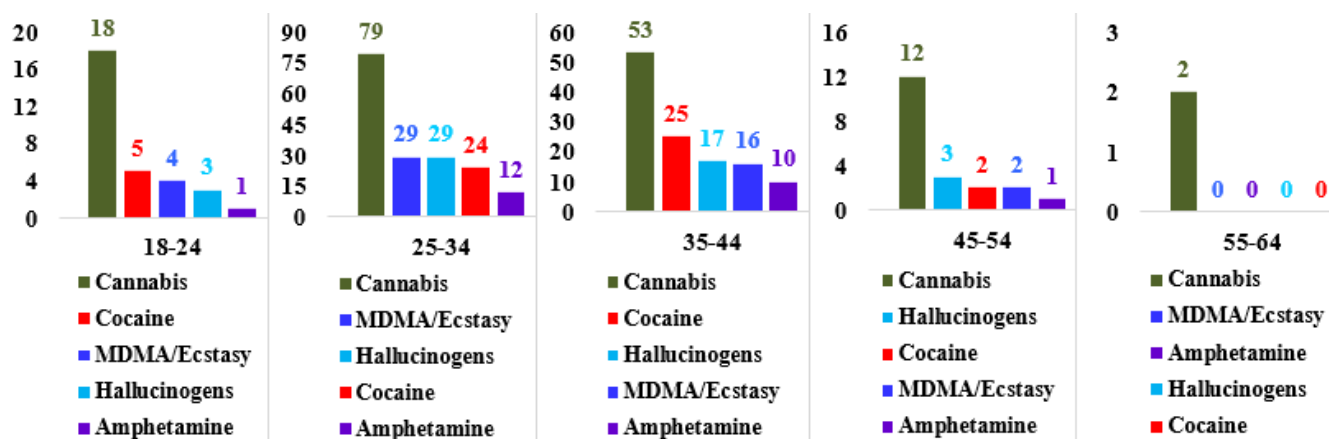


Top-5 most popular substances are: cannabis (92.1% of those who reported use of certain substances during this period), cocaine (31.5%), hallucinogens (29.2%), MDMA/Ecstasy (28.7%), amphetamine (13.5%).



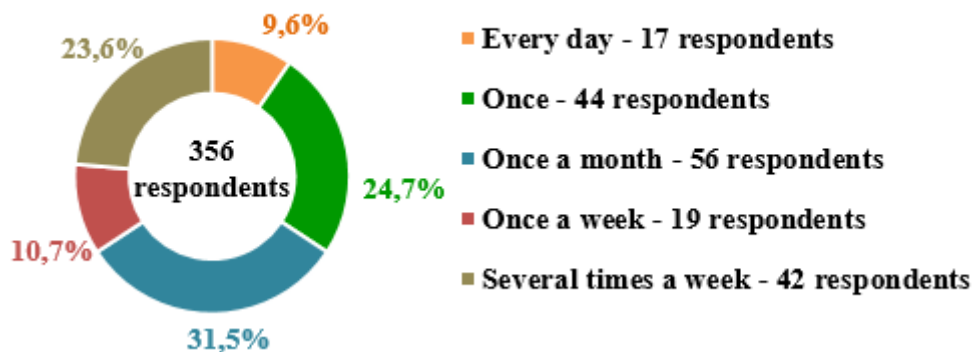
A sharp increase in the popularity of cocaine, which has become the No. 2 substance for the age groups 18-24 and 35-44.

Top-5 substances in age groups (last 12 months)



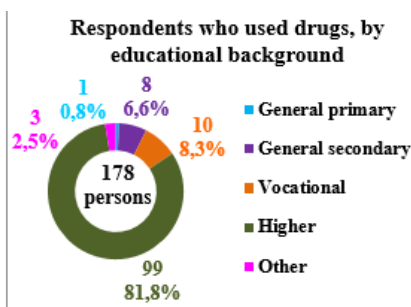
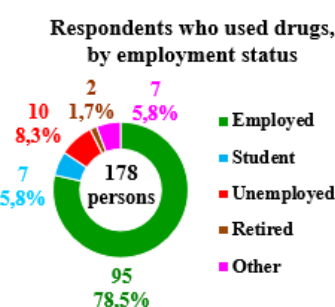
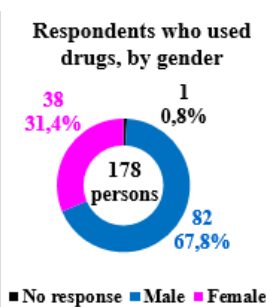
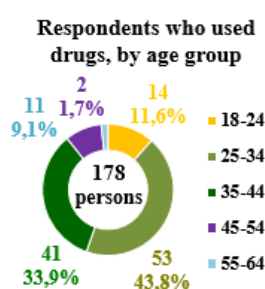
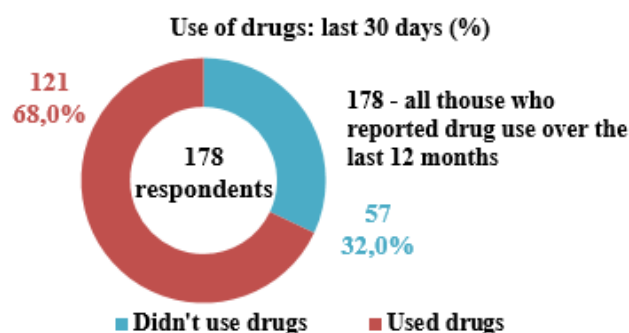
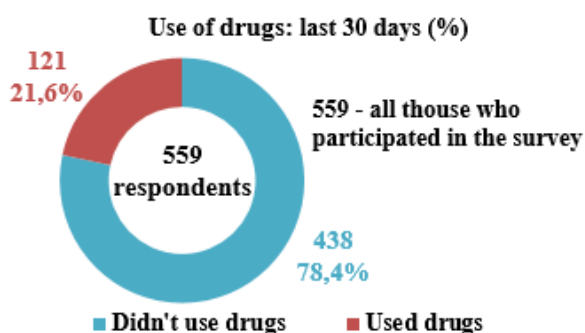
One out of four (24.7%) of those, who reported use of drugs over the last 12 months, used them only once, while one out of ten (9.6%) used them every day. 43.9% of drug users over the last 12 months used them at least once a week.

Frequency of drug use over the last 12 months



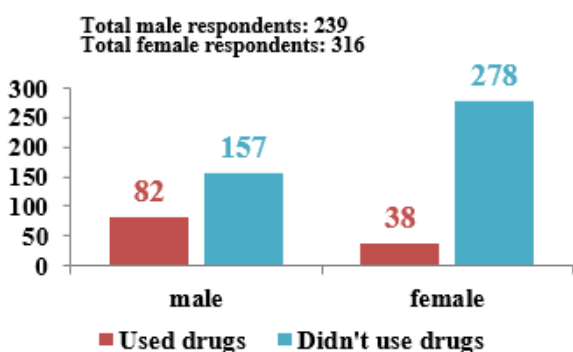
30 DAYS

21.6% of respondents reported the use of drugs over the last 30 days, which makes up 68.0% of those who reported drug use over the last 12 months.

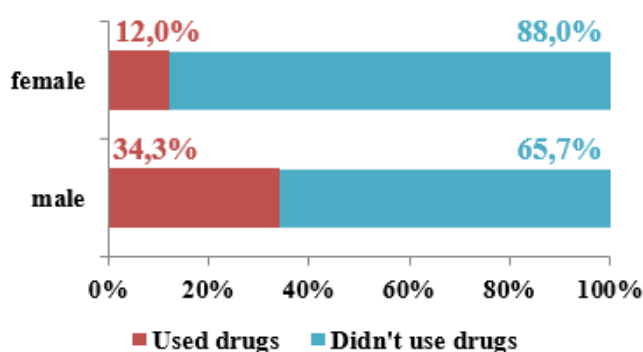


Only one out of nine women (12.0%) and one out of three men (34.3%) reported drug use over the last 30 days.

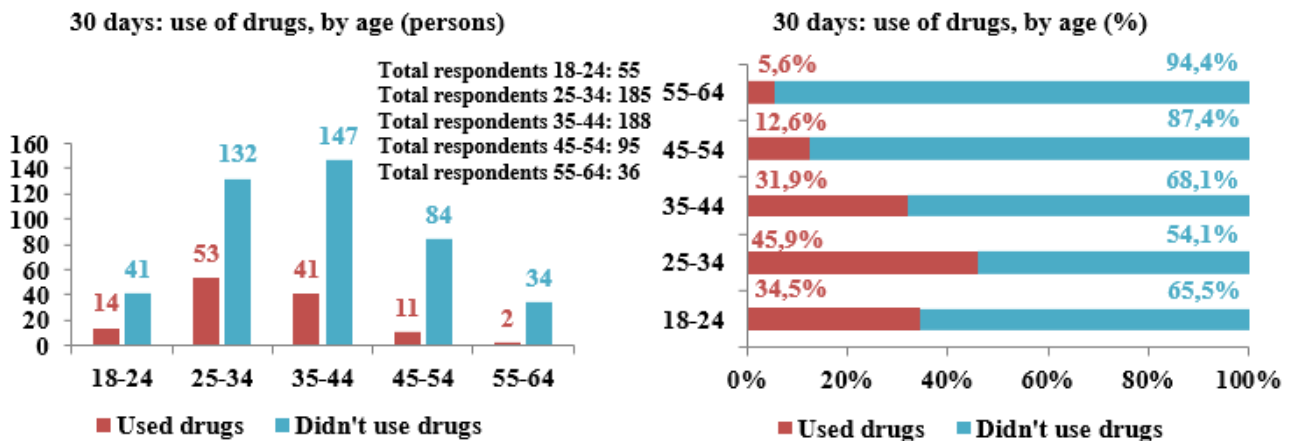
30 days: use of drugs, by gender (persons)



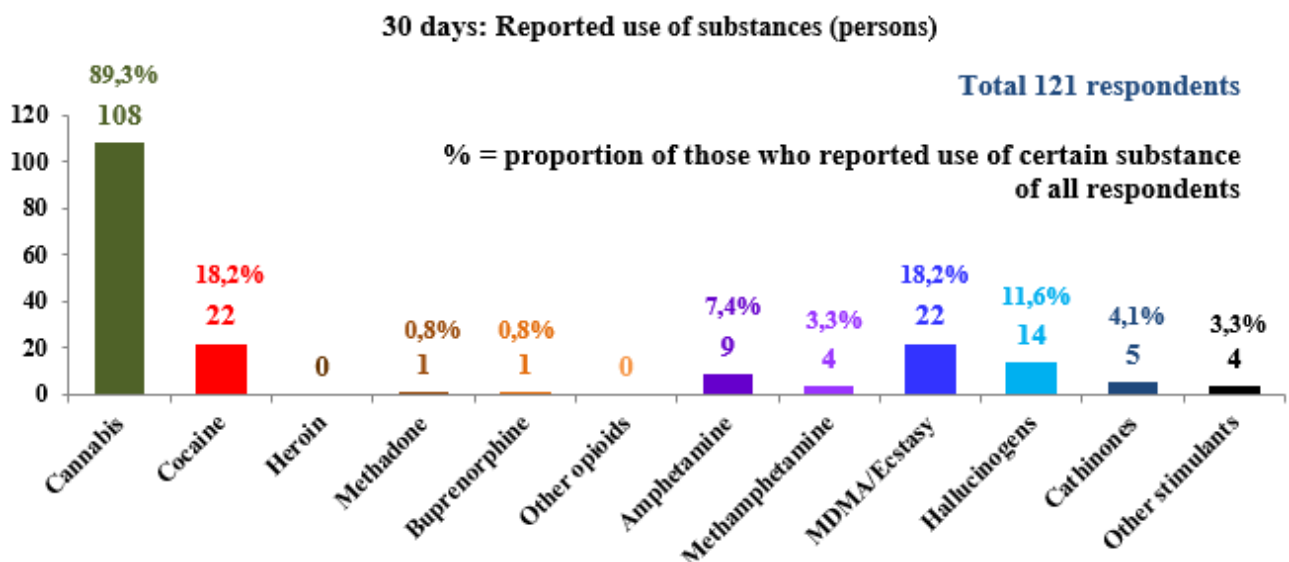
30 days: use of drugs, by gender (%)



The age group 25-34 remains the most active segment of drug users among others.

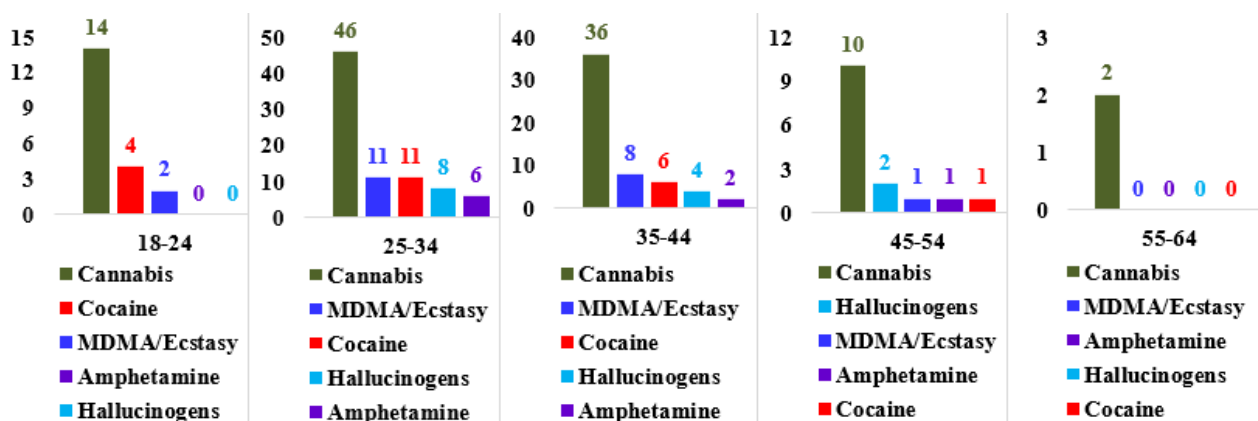


Top-5 most popular substances are: cannabis (89.3% of those who reported use of certain substances during this period), cocaine (18.2%), MDMA/Ecstasy (18.2%), hallucinogens (11.6%), amphetamine (7.4%).

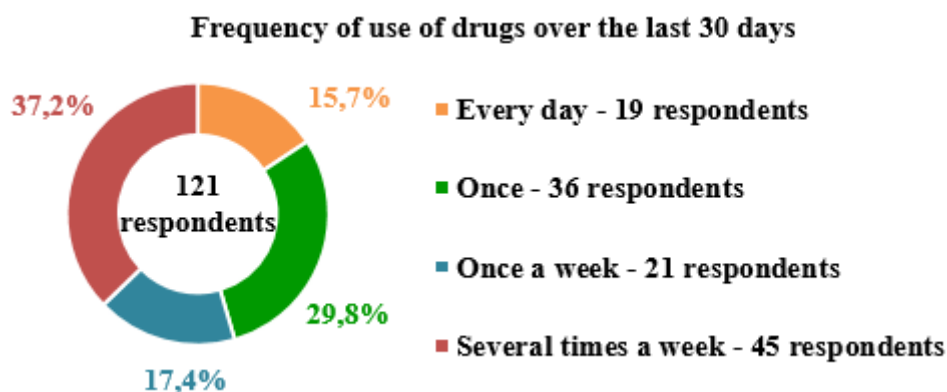


Cannabis is the undisputed leader among substances in all age groups, while the second most popular substance varies: for age groups 25-34 and 35-44 it is MDMA/Ecstasy, for age group 18-24 it is cocaine, and for age group 45-54 - hallucinogens.

Top-5 substances in age groups (last 30 days)

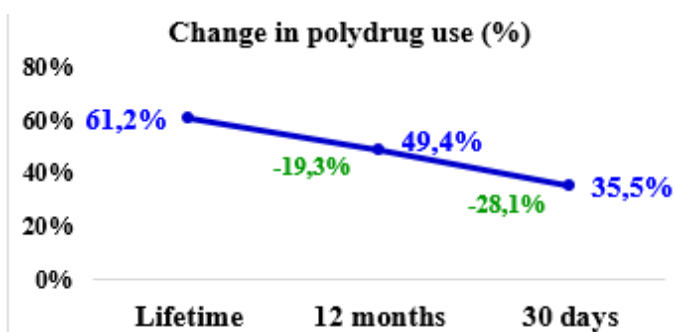
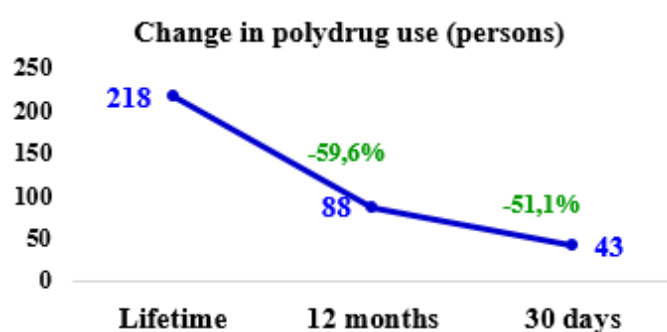
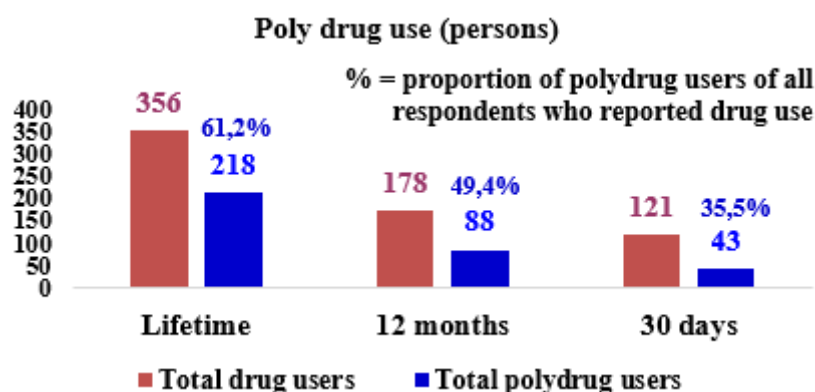


The majority of respondents who reported use of drugs over the last 30 days (37.2%) do them several times a week.



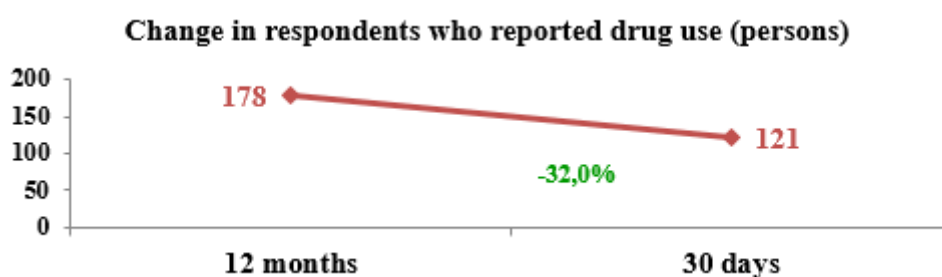
Polydrug use

61.2% of those who reported drug use over the lifetime, 49.4% of those who reported drug use over the last 12 months and 35.5% of those who reported drug use over the last 30 days are polydrug users.



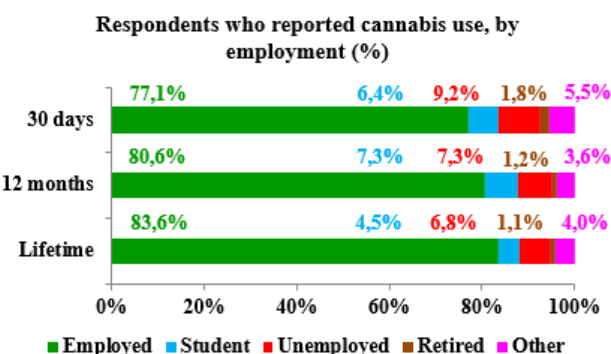
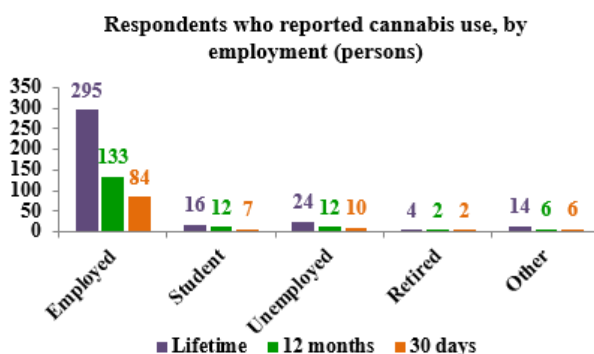
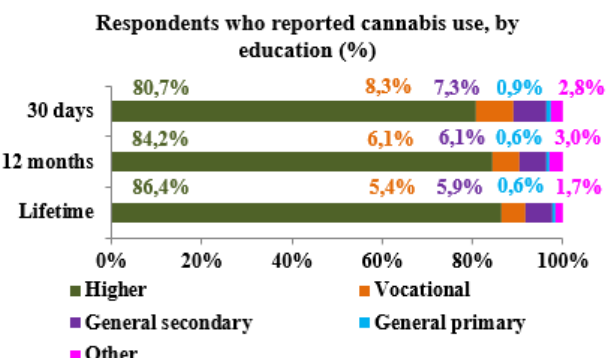
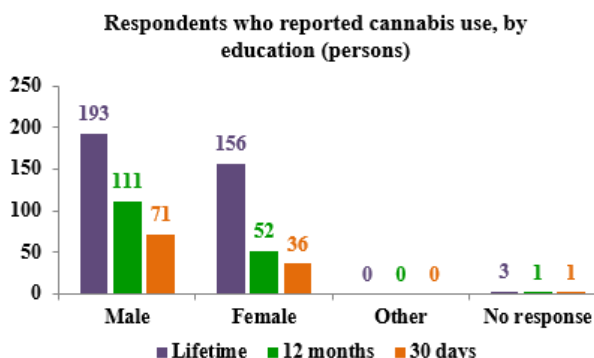
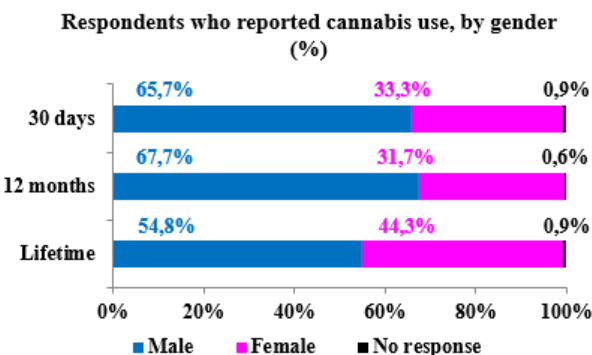
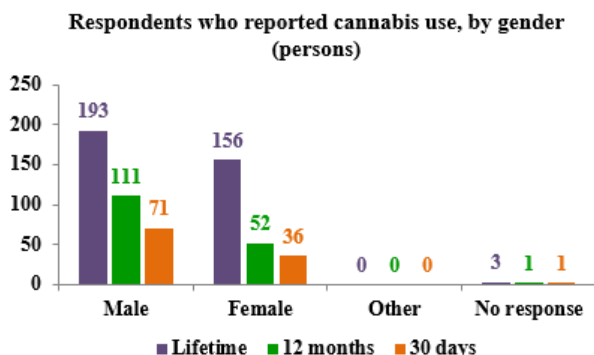
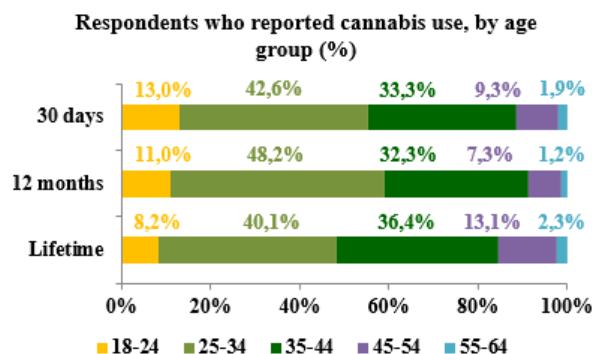
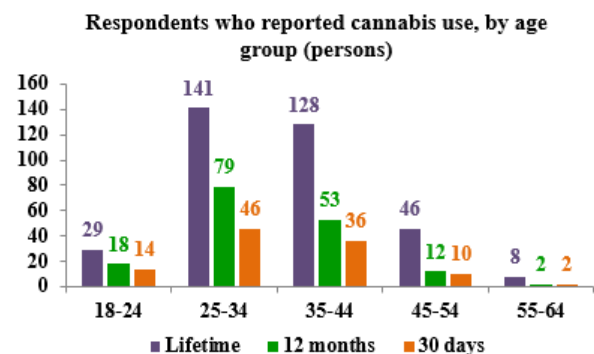
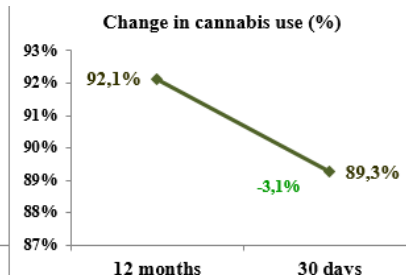
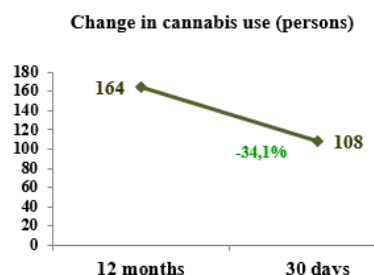
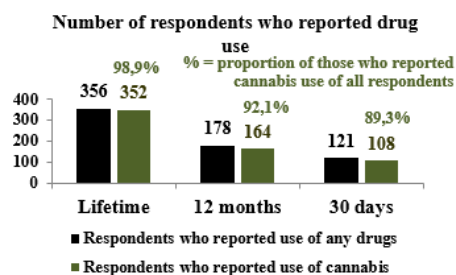
Top-5 substances used in 12 months and 30 days

Number of respondents who reported drug use over the last 30 days against the respondents who reported drug use over last 12 months dropped by 32.0%.

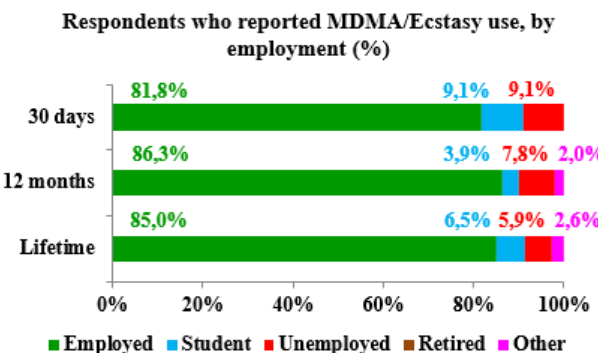
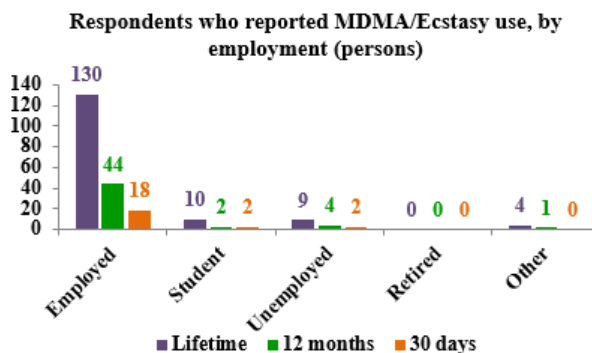
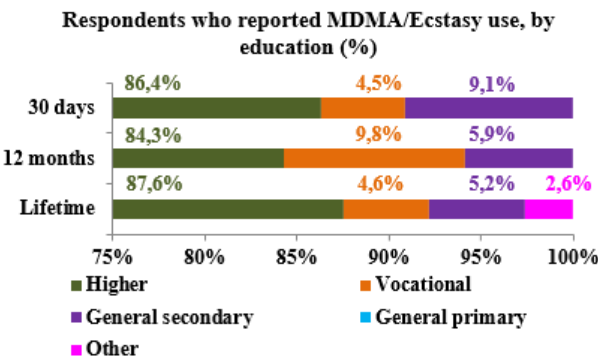
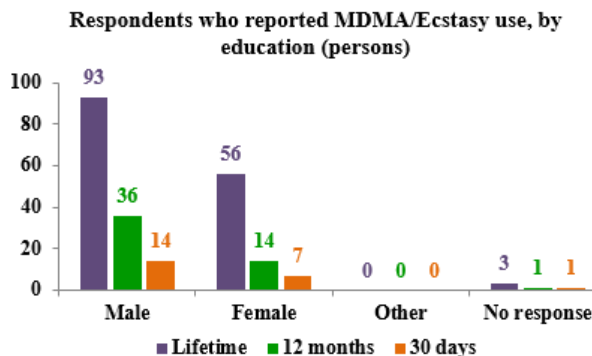
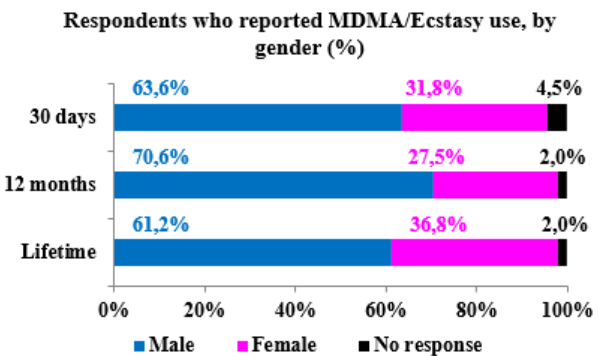
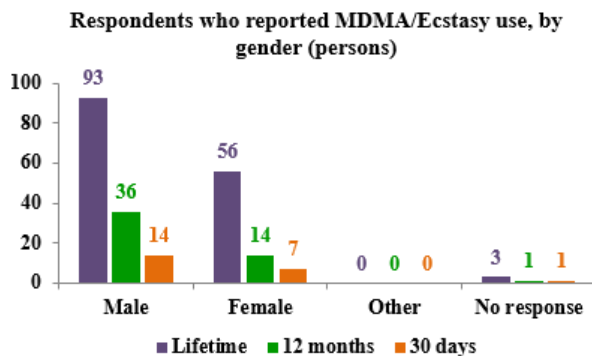
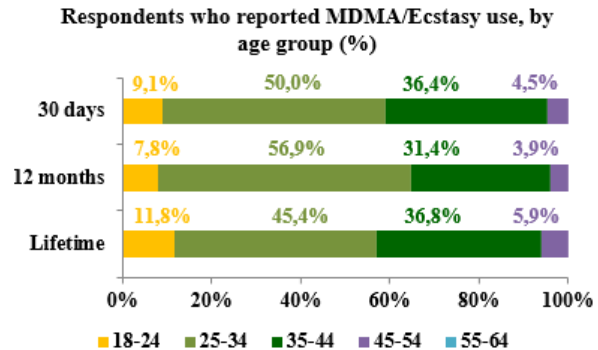
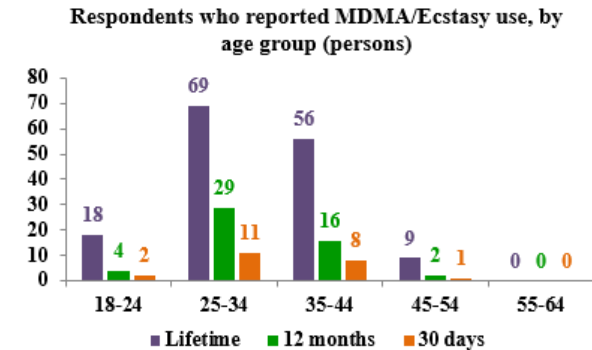
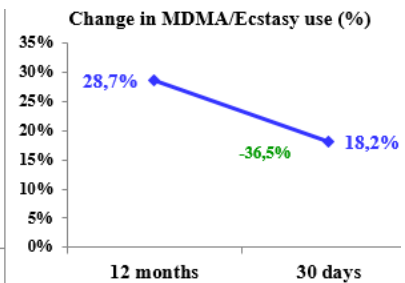
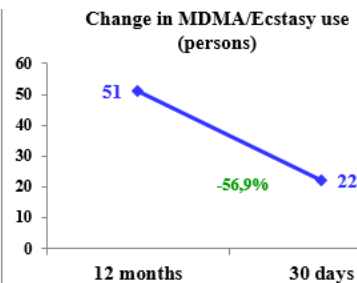
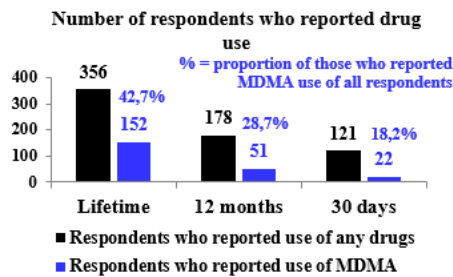


The biggest change was observed in hallucinogen use, which dropped by 60.4% in 30 days vs 12 months drug use, while cannabis use showed the smallest change - a decrease of only 3.1%.

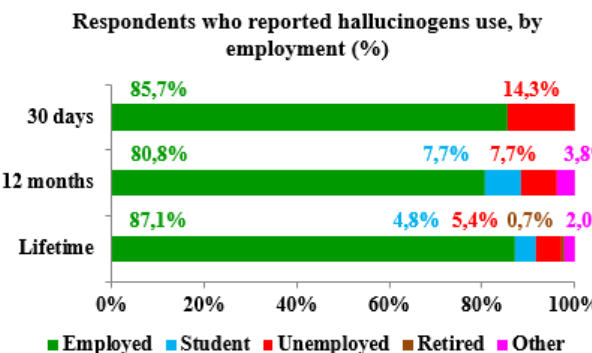
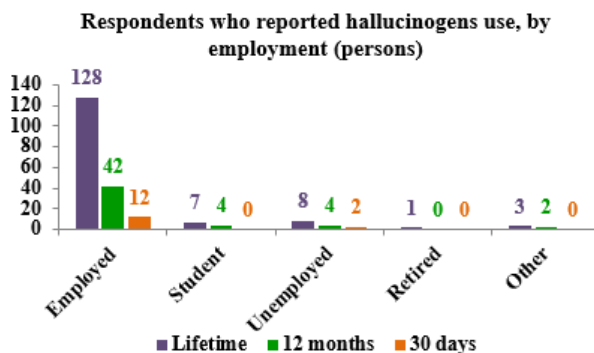
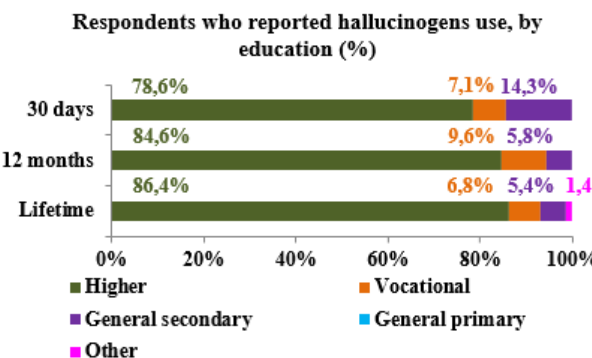
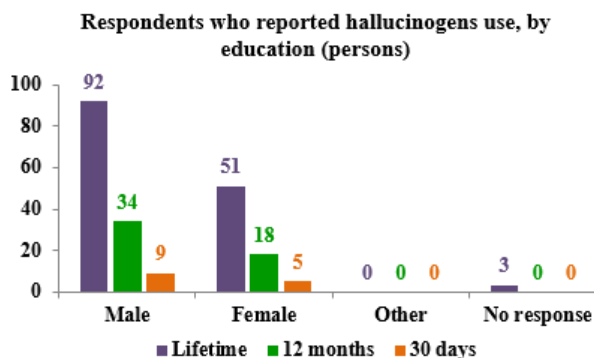
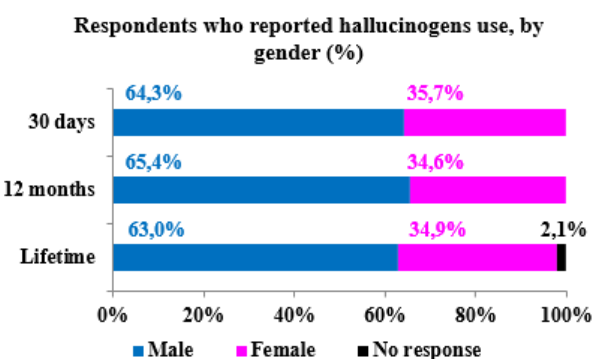
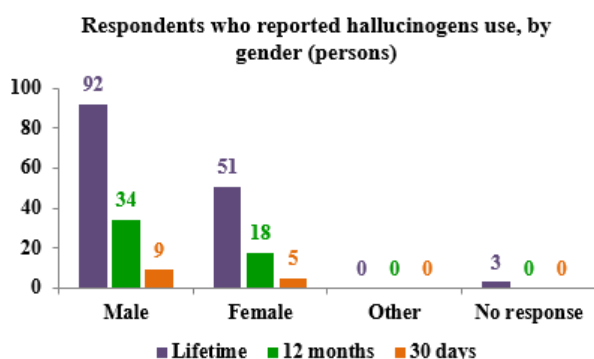
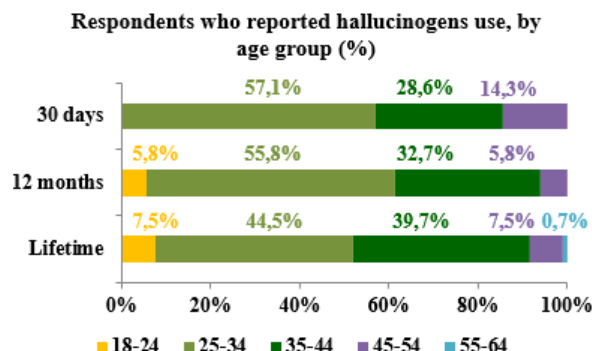
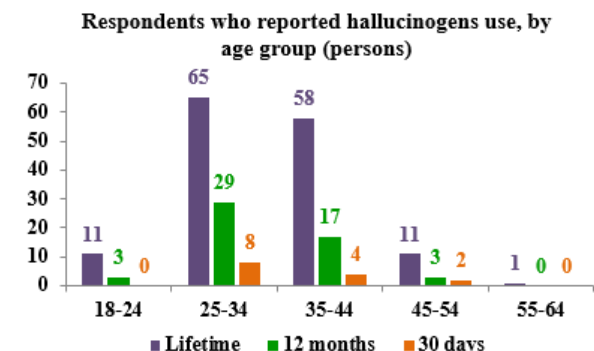
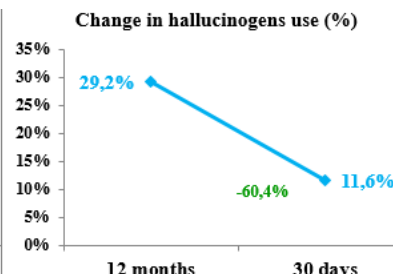
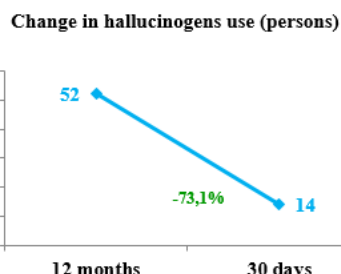
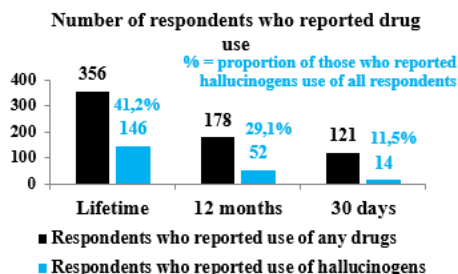
Cannabis



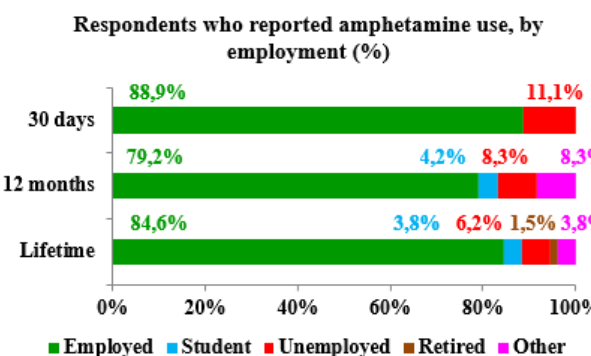
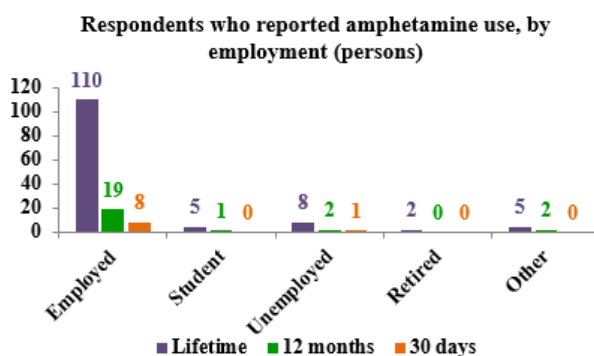
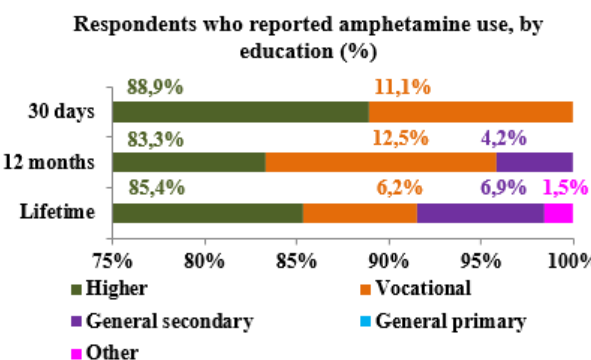
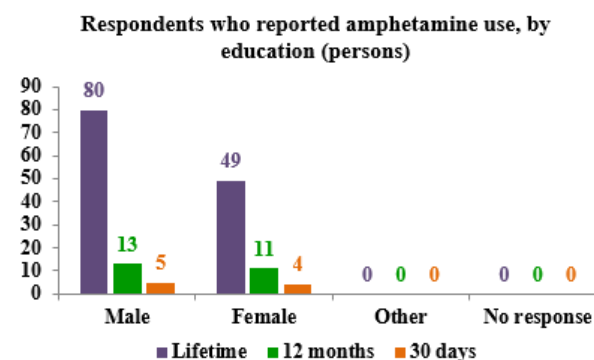
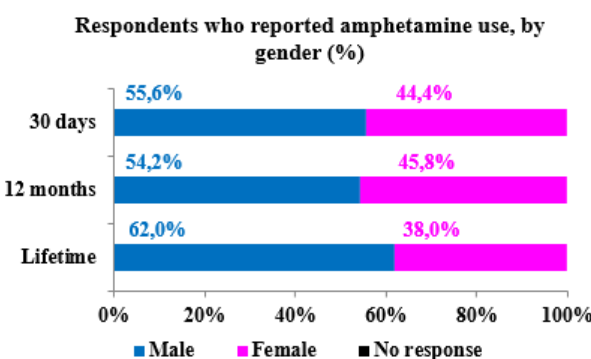
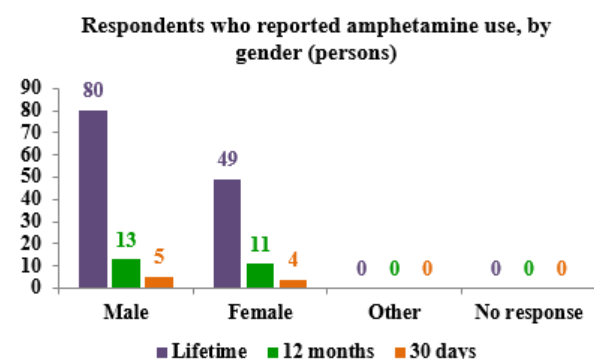
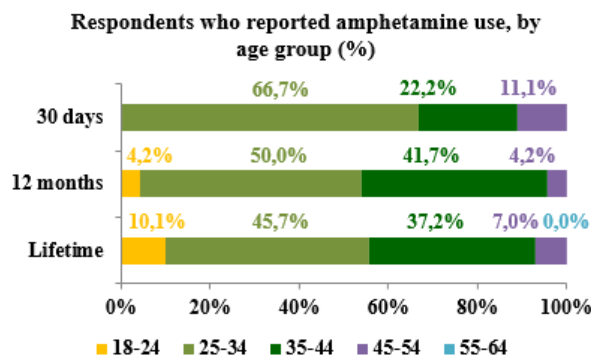
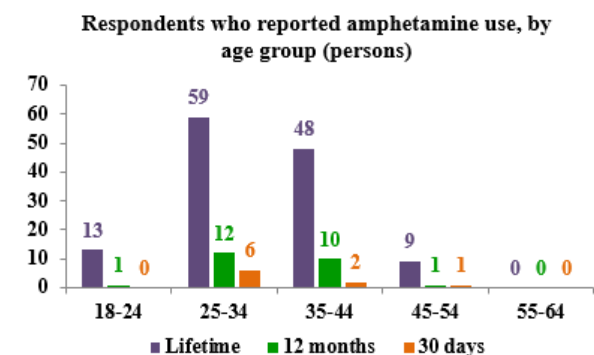
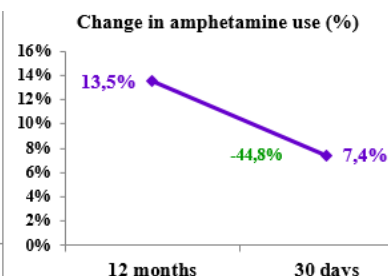
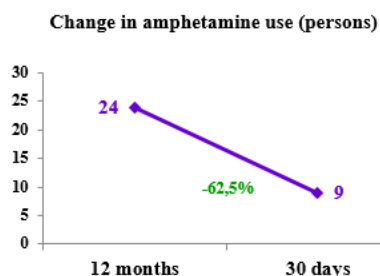
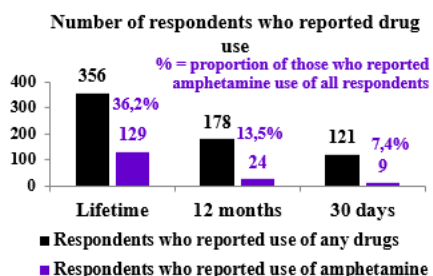
MDMA/Ecstasy



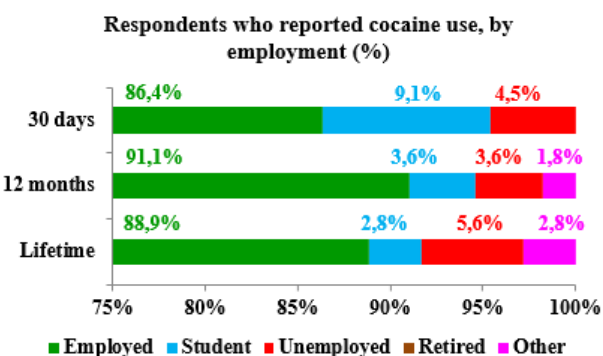
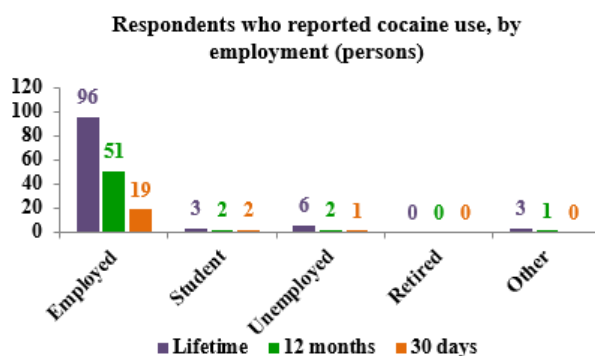
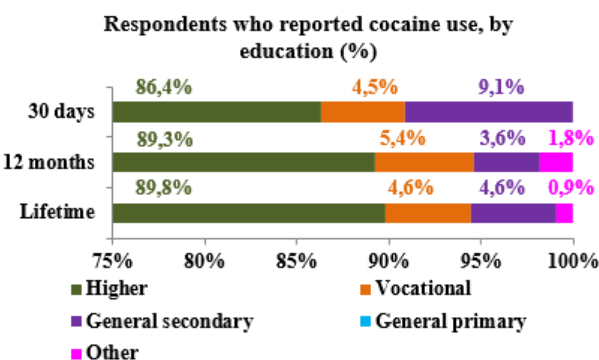
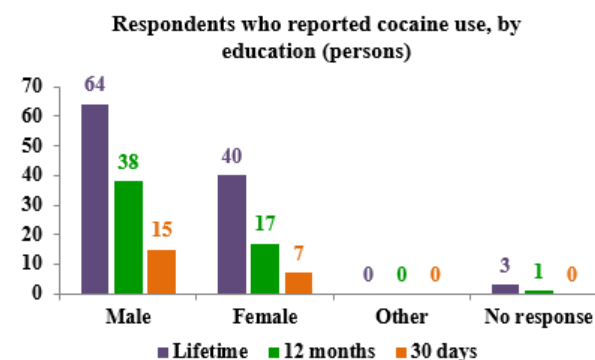
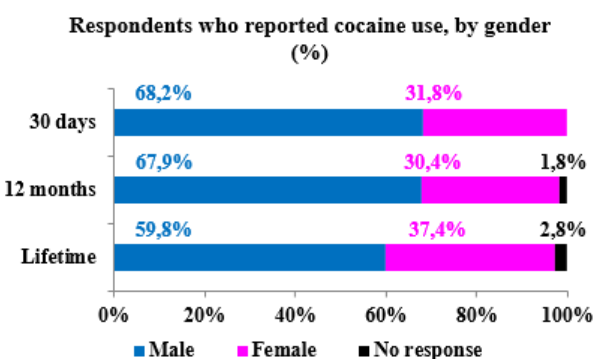
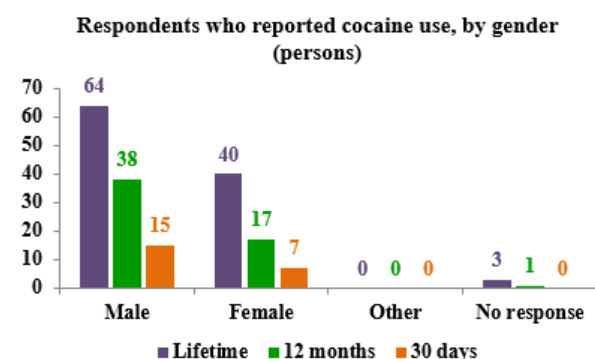
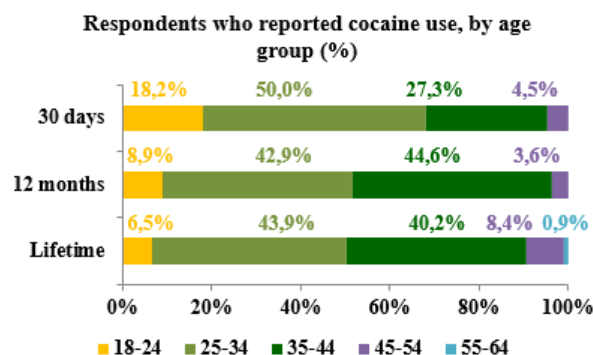
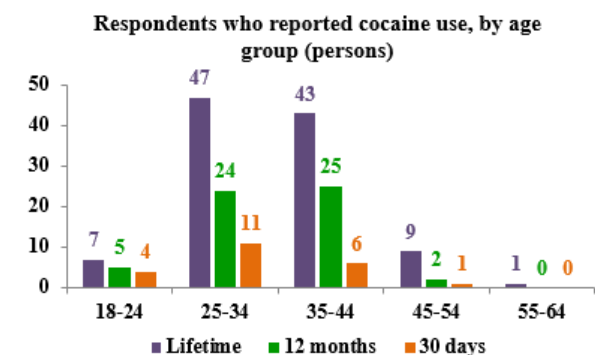
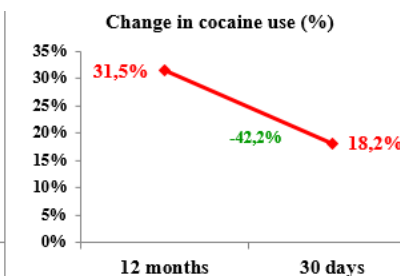
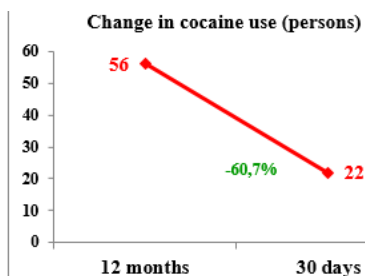
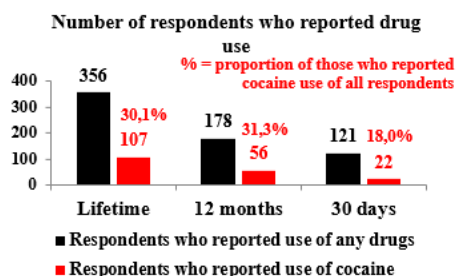
Hallucinogens



Amphetamine

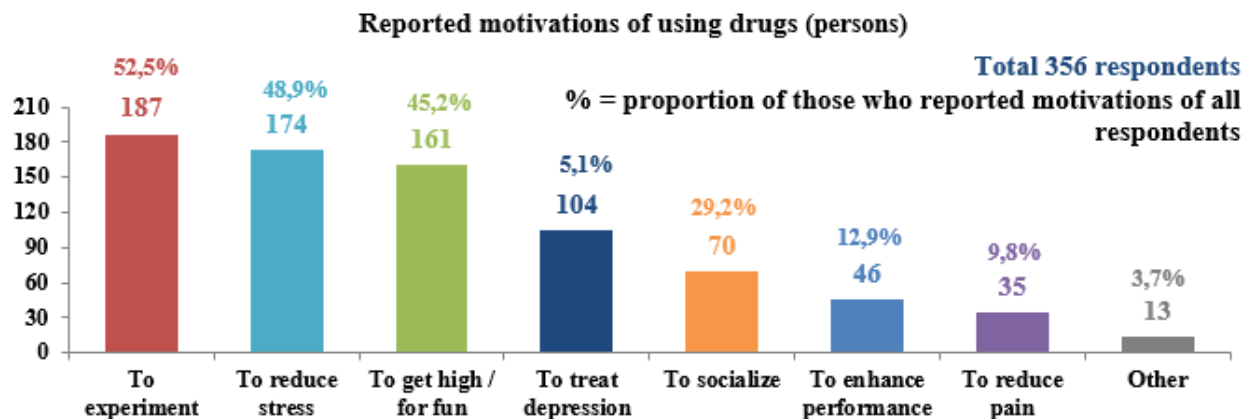


Cocaine



Motivation of using drugs

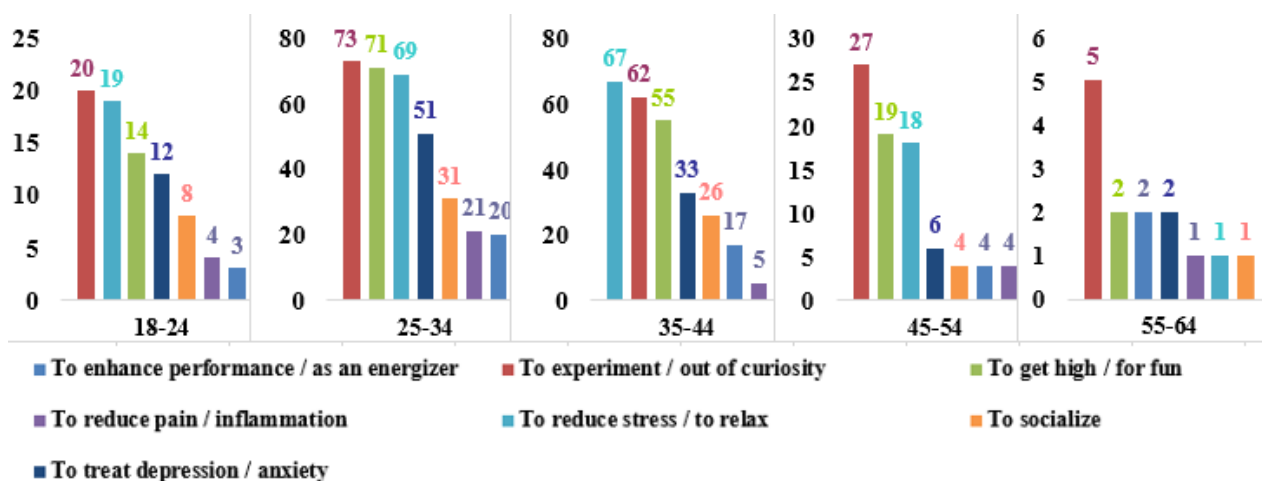
Three main reasons why people use drugs: 1) to experiment / out of curiosity), 2) to reduce stress / to relax, 3) to get high / for fun.



Primary motivations for age groups differ:

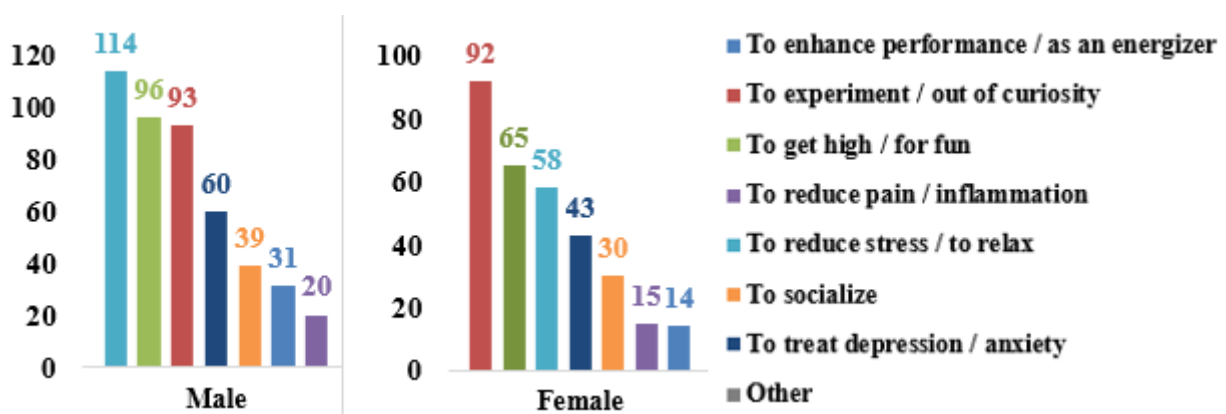
- for age group of 18-24 y.o., they are to experiment and enhance performance;
- for age group 25-34 they are to experiment and get high;
- for age group 35-44 they are to relieve stress and relax.

Top reported motivations of drug use, by age group of respondents (persons)



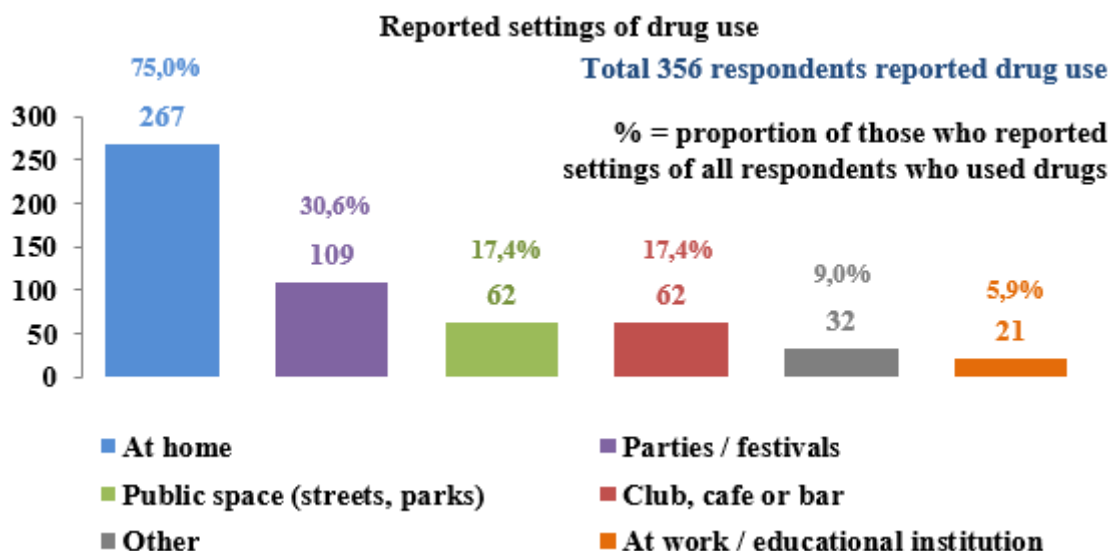
Men use drugs more often than women to enhance performance/as an energizer and reduce stress/ relax, while the primary motivation for women is to experiment /out of curiosity.

Top reported motivations of drug use, by gender of respondents (persons)

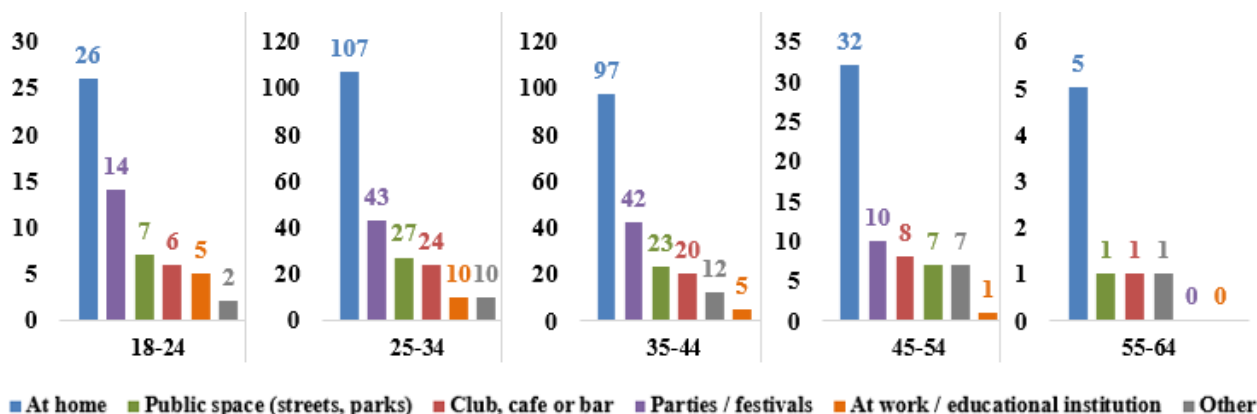


Settings of drug use

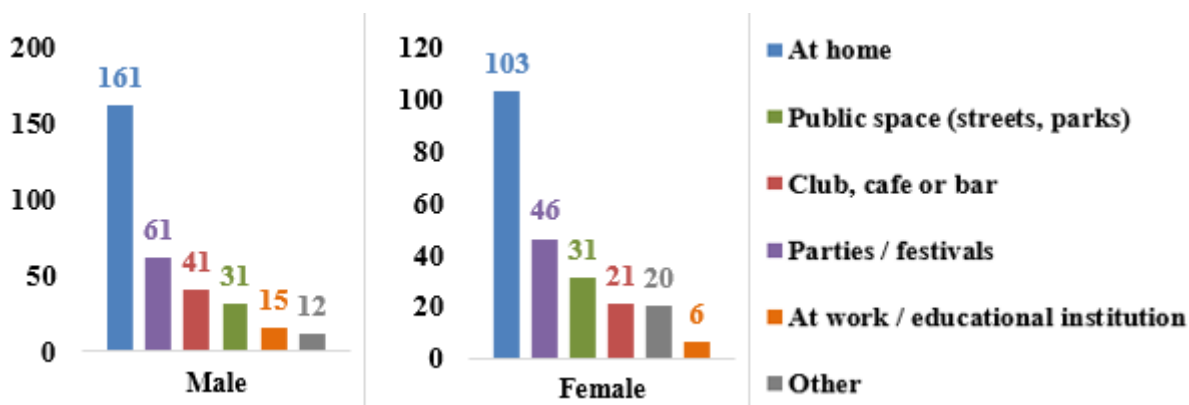
At home as a setting for drug use with 75.0% leads among other options, far outstripping them. 39.2% of respondents who chose “Other” option indicated outdoors (in the woods, in nature) as a setting of drug use.



Top reported settings of drug use, by age group of respondents (persons)

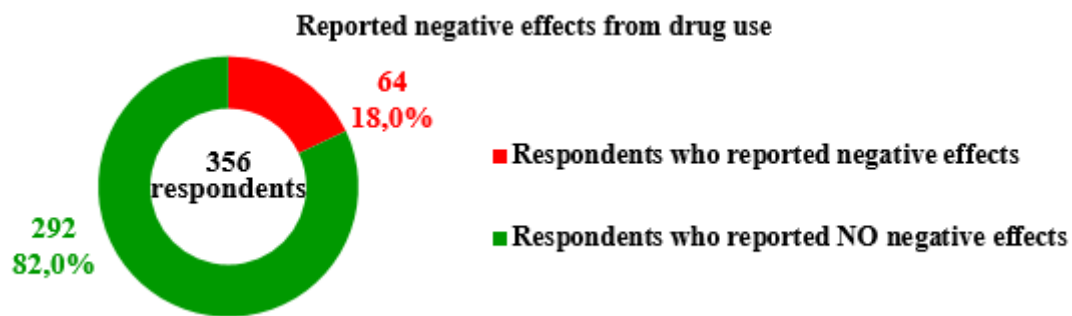


Top reported settings of drug use, by gender of respondents (persons)

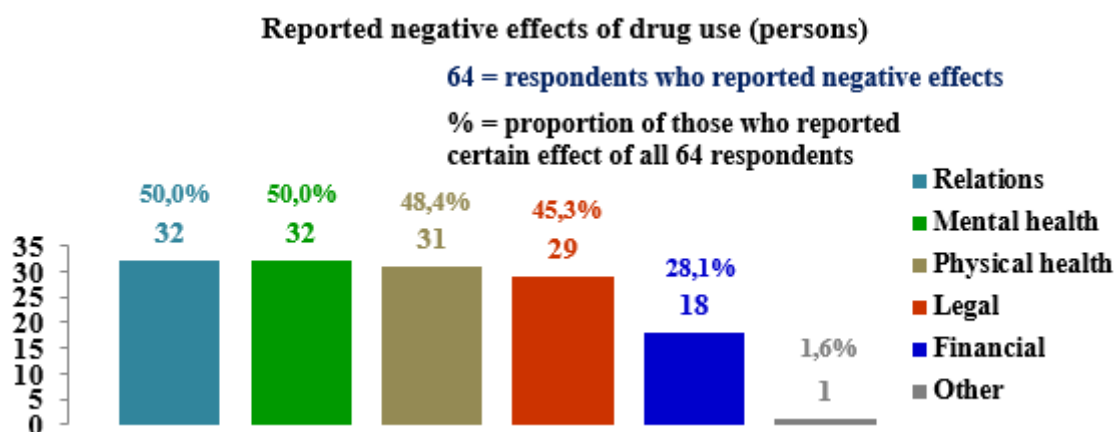


Negative effects of drug use

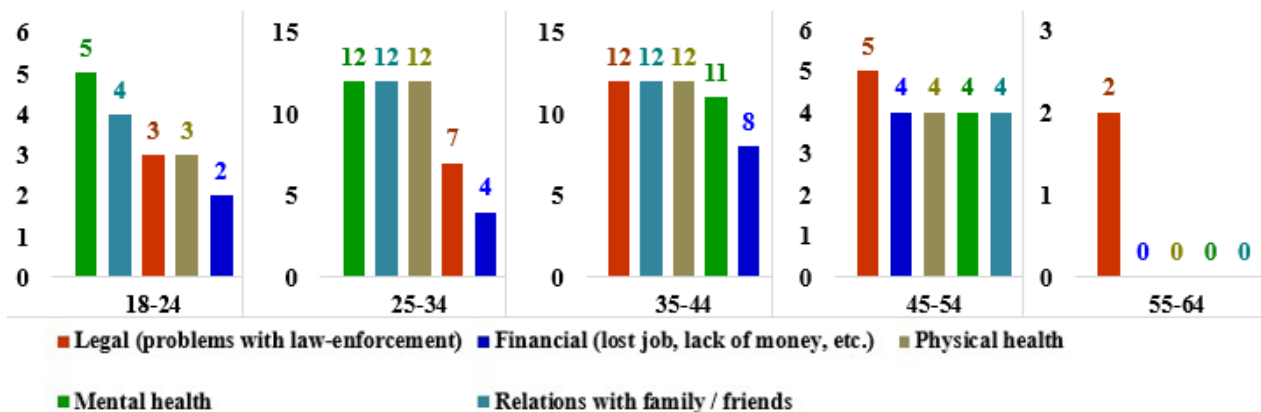
18.0% of those who reported drug use mentioned its negative effects.



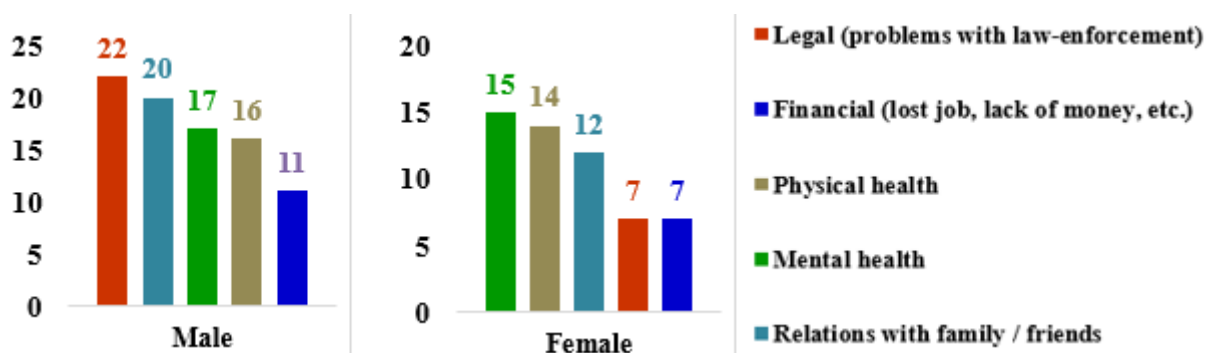
Respondents who used drugs faced a diverse range of issues, including problems with law-enforcement, deterioration in relations with family and friends, and both physical and mental health issues.



Top reported negative effects of drug use, by age group of respondents (persons)



Top reported negative effects of drug use, by gender of respondents (persons)



Key Findings

Almost 2 out of 3 respondents (63.7%) reported that they had used drugs at least once in their lives. 31.8% of all respondents of the survey used drugs over the last 12 months, with a half of respondents who reported lifetime use of drugs did them over the last year. 21.6% of respondents reported the use of drugs over the last 30 days, which makes up 68.0% of those who reported drug use over the last 12 months.

Men are more likely to use drugs than women: 4 out of 5 men (81.1%) and 1 out of 2 women (50.3%) reported that they had experience of using drugs during lifetime.

Top-5 most popular substances overall are as follows:

- 1) cannabis (98.9% of those who reported use of certain substances);
- 2) MDMA/Ecstasy (42.7%);
- 3) hallucinogens (41.0%);
- 4) amphetamine (36.2%);
- 5) cocaine (30.1%).

The top 5 substances differ between the age groups, although cannabis leads all with a large advantage. The second most popular drug in the age groups 18-24 and 25-34 is MDMA/Ecstasy, while the respondents in the age groups 35-44 and 45-54 favor hallucinogens in second place.

Cocaine's recent rise in popularity: while over lifetime cocaine is the 5th most popular drug, in the 12-month and 30-day periods it came in second place.

The number of respondents who reported drug use 12 months vs 30 days dropped by 32.0%. The biggest change was observed in hallucinogen use, which dropped by 60.4%, while cannabis use showed the smallest change, i.e., a decrease of only 3.1%.

61.2% of those who reported drug use over the lifetime, 49.4% of those who reported drug use over the last 12 months and 35.5% of those who reported drug use over the last 30 days are polydrug users.

Top-3 reasons why people use drugs are as follows:

- 1) to experiment / out of curiosity;
- 2) to reduce stress / to relax;
- 3) to get high / for fun.

Primary motivations for age groups differ:

- for age group of 18-24 y.o., they are to experiment and enhance performance;
- for age group of 25-34 y.o., they are to experiment and get high;
- for age group of 35-44 y.o, they are to relieve stress and relax.

Men use drugs more often than women to enhance performance/as an energizer and reduce stress/ relax, while the primary motivation for women is to experiment /out of curiosity.

As for the settings for drug use, “at home” far outstrips other options with 75.0%.

18.0% of those who reported drug use mentioned its negative effects.

Observations, insights, limitations

- Drug use is often accompanied by stigma, and individuals may be reluctant to disclose their drug use due to fear of judgment or legal repercussions. Anonymous web survey tackles these restrictions, creating a safe and confidential environment for respondents.

- A short, but sufficient questionnaire form proved to be effective. Only 11 drafts (uncompleted forms) vs 559 submitted forms.

- Two large disclaimers at the beginning of the survey scared off many potential respondents, significantly reducing the rate of engagement and completion of questionnaires, although ensuring the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of respondents is critical to protect their rights and ensure ethical data collection with honest and reliable answers, and the [EU Survey platform](#) was of a great help to persuade respondents to participate in the web survey.

- Seeding and communication channels used: Institute's website, government agencies' and NGOs' social media pages, e-mail, WOM (word of mouth and personal contacts), influencers, Meta ads.

- Influencers, opinion leaders and personal contacts are the most effective channel. One active influencer with 29+K followers provided around 140 submitted forms.

- Meta ads. Spent: \$51.47. People Reached: 94 011. Link clicks: 3 155. Completion rate due to two heavy disclaimers: 2.7%.

- Media relations. Unwillingness of the media to publish information about the survey for free. (E.g., a telegram channel with 1.3M subscribers charges \$1 800 per post).

- Building partnerships with relevant stakeholders could be essential to gain support, access necessary resources, and effectively implement the survey. It is a challenge to find an efficient and operational approach to involve the government agencies like the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Digital Transformation to the survey.

- Small sample size with huge geographical disproportion (59.9% of respondents are residents of city of Kyiv) is supposedly due to the internal migration and other war-related effects, mainly the military actions and the temporary occupation of Ukrainian territories.

- The percentage of web survey respondents with higher education (85.7%) exceeds the estimates of the Ministry of Education and Science (above 70,0%).

- Unexpected results in types of drug use: cocaine (30.1% (lifetime), 31.5% (12 months), 18.2% (30 days) among those who reported using drugs.

- Current recruitment strategies mainly reach people who use drugs for recreational purposes.

- The survey is not generalizable to the whole population, i.e., it is a complement, but not a replacement for traditional general population surveys.