

# Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use Amongst 18 - 24 Year Olds in Post-Secondary and Tertiary Education

National Commission on the Abuse of Drugs, Alcohol and Other Dependencies  
National Focal Point for Drugs and Drug Addiction  
sedqa National Agency Against Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Following the successful ESPAD<sup>1</sup> and HBSC<sup>2</sup> surveys in secondary schools, in 2006 the first ever study on the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs amongst students in post-secondary and tertiary education in Malta was conducted. Between February and March, self-administered questionnaires were completed by 1,226 (39% male and 61% female) full-time, 18-24 year old students. Here we present the number of users, frequency of use and age of first use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

## ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO: NUMBER OF USERS AND FREQUENCY OF USE

Alcohol was the most commonly used substance amongst students, with 96% having consumed alcohol during their lifetime, 95% in the last year and 79% in the last 30 days. Just over half of the students (54%) had ever smoked cigarettes, 42% of students smoked in the last year and 30% in the last 30 days (Figure 1). There was no difference in the use of alcohol and tobacco between males and females (Figure 2).

Amongst the 79% of students who had consumed alcohol in the last 30 days, 10% had drunk twice a week or more. Binge drinking (here defined as consuming 6 glasses of an alcoholic drink on the same occasion) was reported by 64% of students, with 33% of such students binge drinking at least once a week. Amongst the 30% of students who had smoked tobacco in the last 30 days, 61% smoked twice a week or more.

Figure 1  
Percentage of students using alcohol and tobacco

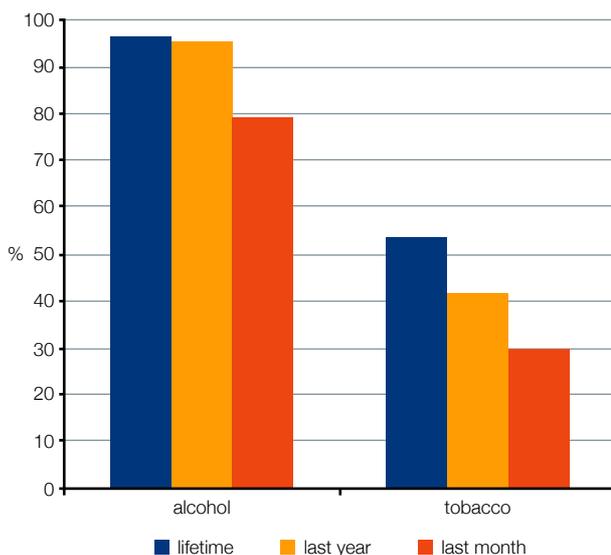
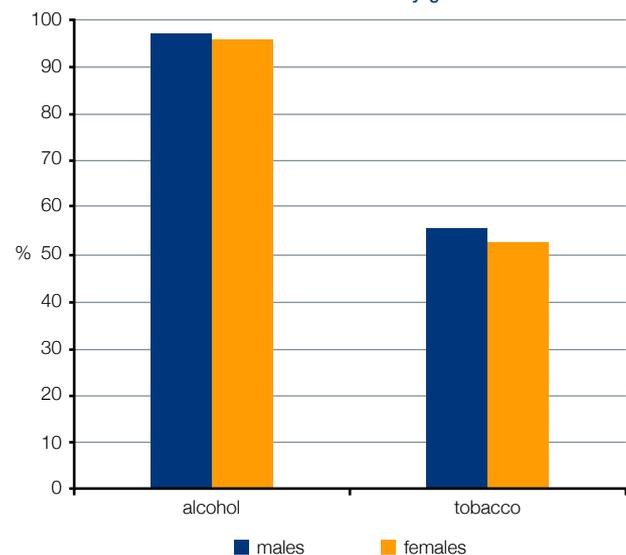


Figure 2  
Percentage of students who had ever used alcohol and tobacco by gender



### ALCOHOL & TOBACCO

- Alcohol is the most commonly used substance.
- 64% of students binge drink.
- 33% binge drink weekly.
- 30% of students are current smokers.
- There are no gender differences in alcohol and tobacco use.

<sup>1</sup> The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs.

<sup>2</sup> Health Behaviour in School-aged Children.

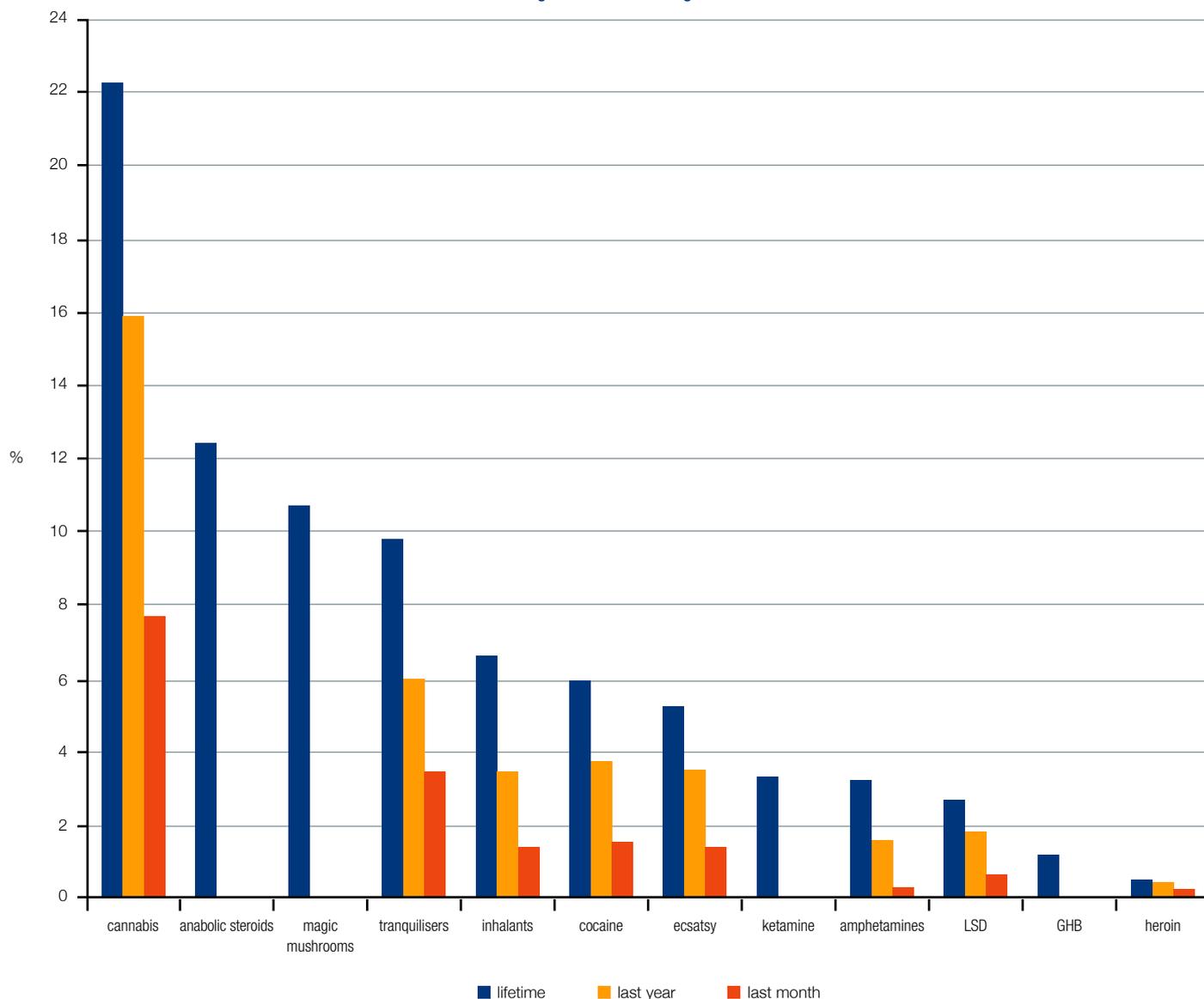
<sup>3</sup> The percentage of male and female students attending post-secondary and tertiary education is 43% and 57% respectively. Source: National Statistics Office.

## OTHER SUBSTANCES: NUMBER OF USERS AND FREQUENCY OF USE

Cannabis was the most widely used illicit drug with 22% of students having ever used this substance. Some 16% of students had taken cannabis in the last year and 7% in the last 30 days. Following cannabis, the substances most commonly used were anabolic steroids<sup>4</sup> (12%), magic mushrooms<sup>4</sup> (11%) and tranquillisers (10%). Inhalants, cocaine and ecstasy had ever been used by 7%, 6% and 5% of the sample, respectively (Figure 3). A greater proportion of males had used each

illicit substance. Tranquillisers on the other hand, had been used by a slightly greater proportion of females than males. Most students who had taken cocaine and ecstasy in the last 30 days, used once a week or less, with only 6% using twice a week or more. A higher percentage of students currently using cannabis (30%) and tranquillisers (51%) had taken the substance twice a week or more.

Figure 3  
Percentage of students using other substances



### OTHER SUBSTANCES

- 22% of students had used cannabis.
- 12% had used anabolic steroids.
- 11% had used magic mushrooms.
- 10% had used tranquillisers.
- 7% had used inhalants.
- 6% had used cocaine.
- 5% had used ecstasy.

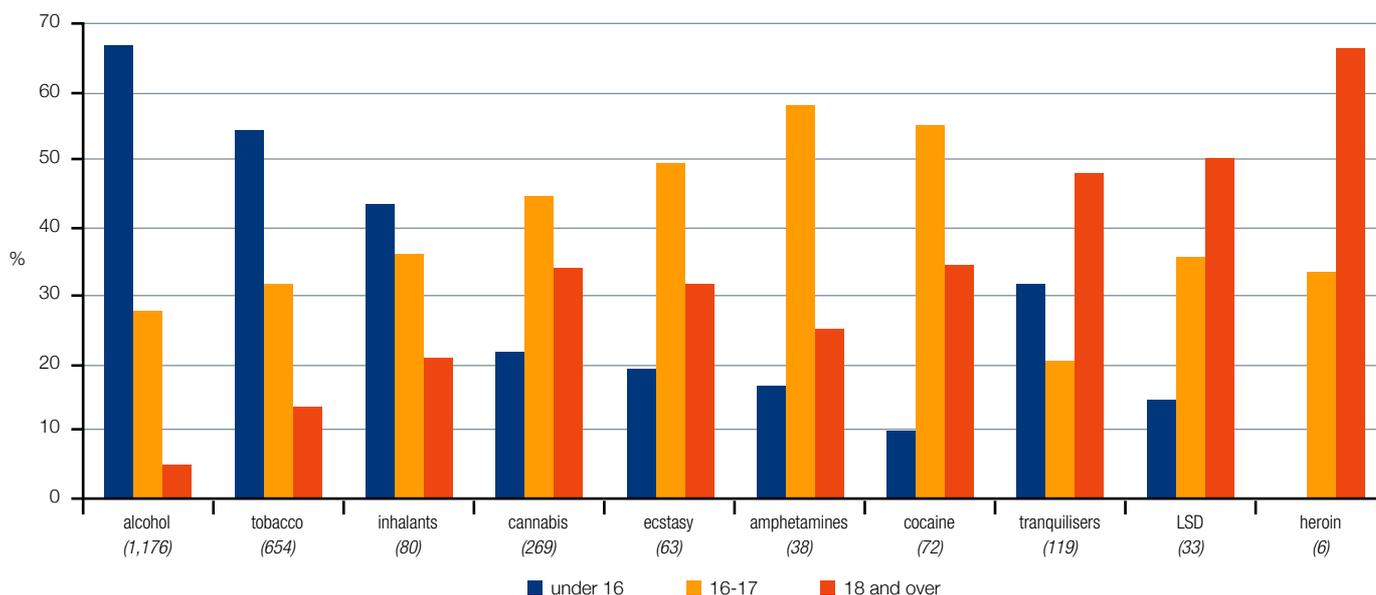
<sup>4</sup>Students were not asked about their use of anabolic steroids and magic mushrooms in the last year and last 30 days.

## AGE OF FIRST USE

Amongst students who had used alcohol, 67% reported that they had first drunk an alcoholic beverage before the age of 16. 54% of smokers and 43% of inhalant users also reported first use of these respective substances before the age of 16. The majority of students who had used

amphetamines, ecstasy, cannabis and cocaine, initiated use between the ages of 16 and 17. More than 25% of students who had used amphetamines, ecstasy, cannabis, cocaine, tranquilisers, LSD and heroin had done so for the first time when they 18 years or older (Figure 4).

Figure 4  
Age of first use amongst users  
(values within brackets refer to the number of students who had ever used the substance)



## AGE OF FIRST USE FOR THE MAJORITY OF USERS

Under 16: alcohol, tobacco, inhalants.

16-17: cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines, cocaine.

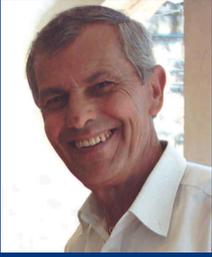
18 and over: tranquilisers, LSD, heroin.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident from the results of this study that alcohol, tobacco and other drug use is prevalent among young students, aged 18 to 24, attending post-secondary and tertiary educational establishments.

Laws regulating alcohol use amongst under 16s, tobacco use amongst under 18s, and a total ban on any drug use, are in place. National

policies concerning alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are now on the threshold of being introduced. Consequently, the time is ripe for the introduction of a substance use policy for the post-secondary and tertiary education sector, which may compliment that already in place for primary and secondary educational establishments.



## DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF PAUL PACE

For a number of years, Paul Pace insisted on the need for a more holistic preventive education approach that included post-secondary and tertiary educational institutions. With this in mind, in late 2005, he presented a proposal to research the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco and drug use amongst 18-24 year olds in post-secondary and tertiary education.

This proposal was accepted and a collaborative study between *sedqa*, the National Focal Point on Drugs & Drug Addiction and the National Commission on the Abuse of Drugs, Alcohol & other Dependencies was initiated. Undoubtedly this survey would not have been possible without Paul's charisma, his vision and commitment to young people and preventive education.

Paul Pace occupied various roles within *sedqa*, from its inception in 1994, including those of Consultant and Primary Prevention Manager. He passed away in January 2007 at the age of 60 years.

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