

# NATIONAL SCHOOL SURVEY ON SUBSTANCE USE AND ASSOCIATED PATTERNS IN SENEGAL, WEST AFRICA

## AUTHORS

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## QUESTION

Assess the level of tobacco, alcohol, medicines, and drugs use among 15-16 years old school children in Senegal while characterising circumstances and vulnerability to initiation, substances use and related harms.

## BACKGROUND

Africa is currently the region of the world with the highest proportion of people under 25 (60%). Knowing that drug use behaviours often begin in early adolescence, the unavailability of reliable data on the extent, patterns and trends of drug use constitutes a challenge to prevention and demand reduction efforts in the region and among young people. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has therefore conducted a national school survey in Senegal, West Africa, to estimate drug use prevalence among the youth.

## METHOD

The sample was stratified by region and school type (public, private) and schools were randomly selected. The sample retained 54 schools in the 14 regions of the country. Data collection was conducted in December 2019 through a self-administered questionnaire of 57 questions on biosocial background, drug use and associated patterns adapted to the Senegalese context. The sample size consisted of 3639 students representative of the youth population of Senegal. Although only 3303 questionnaires were used for the analysis, either because the age of the student was not mentioned (221) or due to the lack of sincerity of the answers (121). The final sample for analysis is composed of 44% of boys and 56% of girls aged 15 and 16 years old.

Figure 1: Lifetime use of psychoactive substances among 15-16 years old Senegalese (2019)

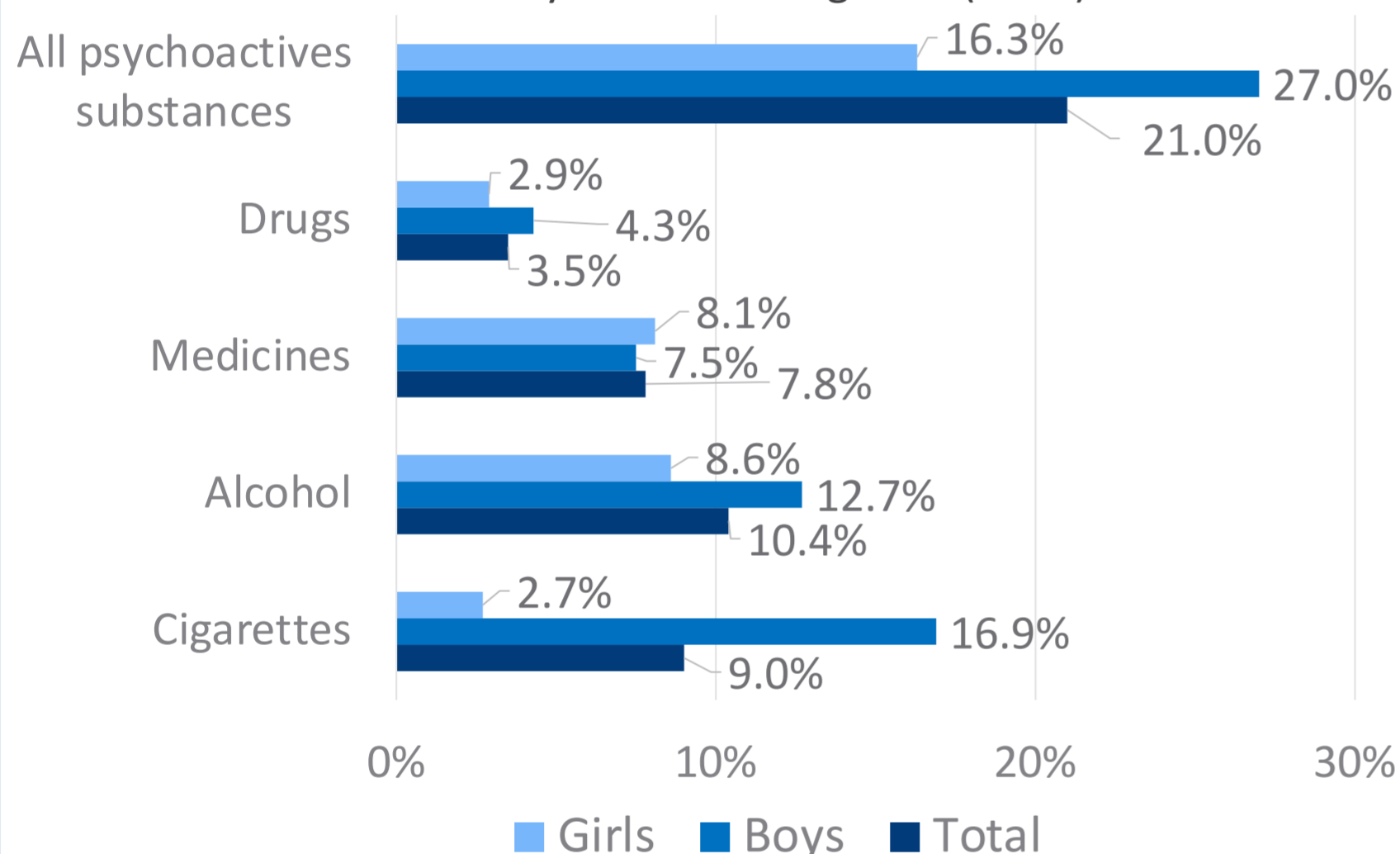
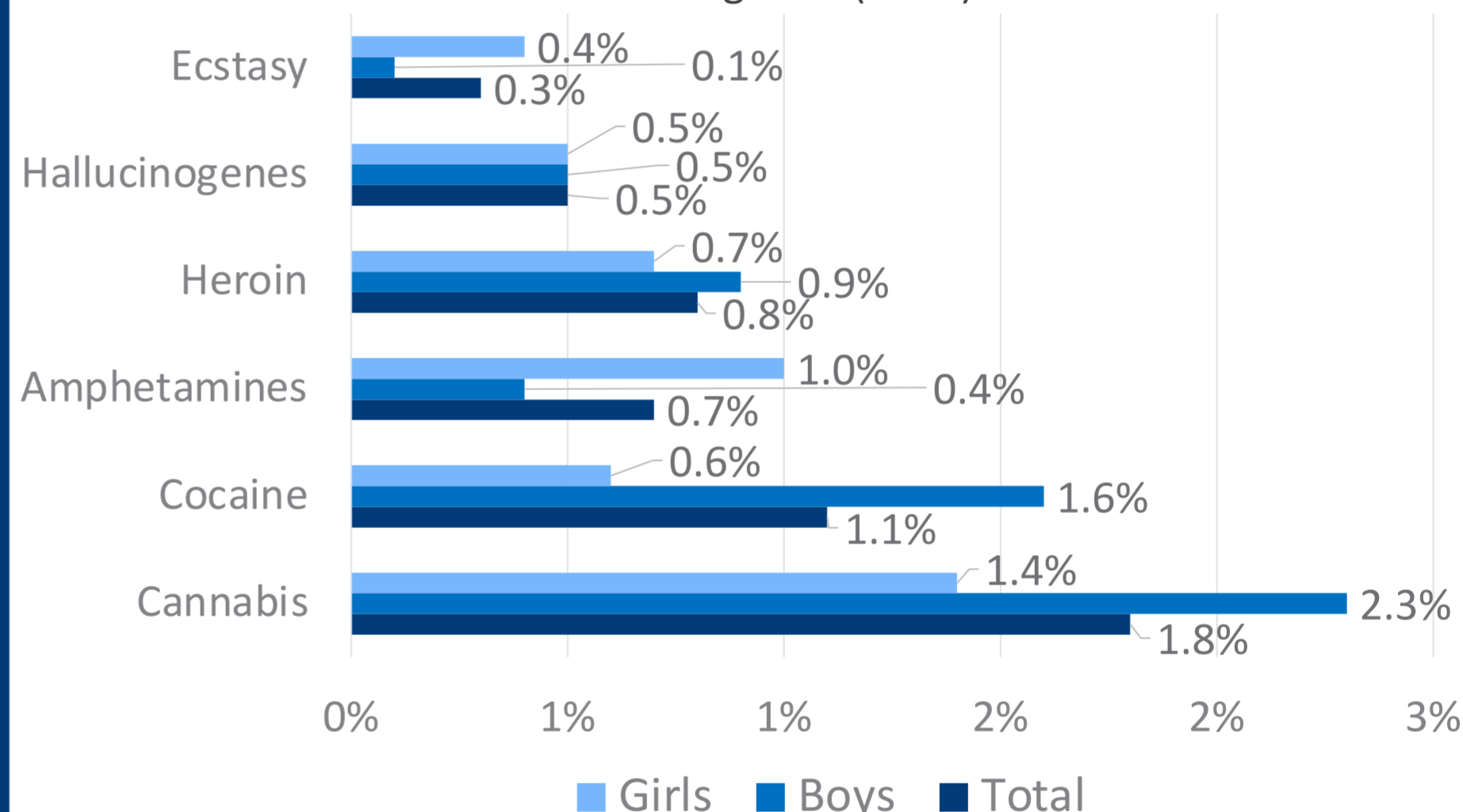


Figure 2: Lifetime use of selected drugs among 15-16 years old Senegalese (2019)



## RESULTS

Results show that 9% of students reported having smoked cigarettes and 10.4% drinking alcohol in their life, while 7.8% had taken a tranquilizer or painkiller (Figure 1). It is important to contextualise the alcohol prevalence among students: Senegal being composed of 95% of Muslim people, the consumption of alcohol is most often taboo and culturally reprehensible. Thus, it is not surprising that the prevalence of alcohol use observed in this survey is below the levels seen in other school surveys.

The use of drugs is much less frequent with 3.5% of young people reporting a lifetime prevalence of psychoactive substances other than tobacco, alcohol or prescribed medicines (tranquilizers or painkillers) (Figure 1). Boys have a higher lifetime prevalence of substance use except for prescribed medicines (Figure 1). Among the most frequently used drugs are: cannabis (1.8% of lifetime users among the sample) and cocaine (1.1%) (Figure 2). While lifetime use of the 2 later substances is above 1% for all young respondents, last year and last month uses are below. It should be noted that the numbers are extremely limited for substances such as methamphetamine, ecstasy, crack, opium, morphine, spice or hallucinogens. Lifetime, last year or last month use is below 1% for the entire sample for these specific substances (Figure 2). Girls, in general, have reported less drug use than boys, but there are notable differences when looking at the distinct drugs. Boys are more likely to use cannabis, crack and cocaine, heroin and morphine. Girls, on the other hand, are distinguished by higher use of amphetamines (Figure 2).

Bivariate and multivariate analyses were performed separately depending on the substances involved. Being a girl is a protective factor when considering the use of all psychoactive substances apart from prescribed medicines. In line with published literature on risk and protective factors for substance use among youth, the risk of substance use is higher among young people who report easier accessibility to drugs, a lower perceived risk of drug use and who reported more problems in their daily life, physical fights at school or are absent from school more often. The multivariate analysis also showed a strong influence of the use of one substance in the initiation of others: having smoked cigarettes previously translates into a 3 times higher risk of using alcohol, prescribed medicines or drugs; while having used prescribed medicine translates into a 7 times higher risk of using drugs. These results highlight the need to delay as much as possible the age of initiation.

## CONCLUSION

The drug use and health school survey provides critical insight into drug use patterns and health of 15 and 16-year-old adolescents in Senegal. Although the levels of use reported by the young people surveyed remain relatively low, a combination of factors has been identified as being elements likely to expose students to a higher risk of initiation and use of psychoactive substances.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: UNODC. (2022). Enquête sur la consommation de drogues et la santé chez les élèves des écoles secondaires du Sénégal. Vienna.

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