

FACT SHEET 12 INTRODUCTION TO SMOKING, ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

1 CONTEXT

Numerous studies have indicated that the introduction to psychoactive substances such as tobacco, alcohol and cannabis at an early age can foster usage and consumption, and indeed addiction in adulthood, and lead to behaviours putting one's health at risk. Such substances can affect motivation and academic performance, and lead to dropping out of school.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following article: NANHOU, Virginie, Amélie DUCHARME and Hadi Eid (2013). "L'initiation au tabac, à l'alcool et aux drogues: un aperçu de la situation lors du passage de la 6^e année du primaire à la 1^{re} année du secondaire," *Profiles and Pathways. Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development – QLSCD Series*, Institut de la statistique du Québec, No. 16, February, (in French only).

<http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/sante/bulletins/portrait-201302.pdf>

Note that the QLSCD has been following a cohort of children who were born in Québec in 1997-1998.

2 HIGHLIGHTS

In Secondary 1 in 2011, 12% of the students had already tried smoking cigarettes, 25% had tried alcohol, and 3.5% drugs.¹

The transition from elementary to high school marked a significant increase in the proportion of adolescents who had already engaged in these behaviours. Two thirds of the students who had already tried smoking and had already consumed alcohol and 90% of students who had already tried drugs had done so in their first year of high school.

Among the students in Secondary 1 who had already consumed alcohol in their lifetime, 40% reported having drunk five or more standard drinks on the same occasion (i.e. drinking to excess) in the 12 months preceding the round of data collection. They comprised 10% of the entire cohort.

Among students in their first year of high school who had already tried drugs in their lifetime:

- The main drug of choice was cannabis
- Nearly 90% had used drugs in the 12 months preceding the round of data collection
- Approximately 50% had used drugs more than once in the aforementioned period of time.

The introduction to smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use comprised behaviours associated with one another. High school students who had already tried smoking were proportionally more likely to consume alcohol or use drugs, or to consume alcohol to excess.

1. This percentage is not as precise as the others because of the small numbers of students in this category.



2 HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

Secondary 1 students most likely to have tried smoking or drinking alcohol in their lifetime:

- Were male
- Were from a low socioeconomic status household
- Were not living in a household with both biological parents
- Were exposed to second-hand smoke at home (with regards to having tried smoking)
- Showed little attachment to school
- Had low educational aspirations
- Had lower marks in their main language class and in mathematics.

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www.iamillbe.stat.gouv.qc.ca

3 OF NOTE

The results cover children born in Québec having followed the regular stream in school, namely they were in Grade 6 of elementary school in 2010, and in Secondary 1 of high school in 2011.

INTERVENTION PATHS

At the very beginning of adolescence, children are fairly vulnerable, so it would be recommended to conduct interventions targeting potential risk behaviours. Given the association between smoking, alcohol and drugs, developing prevention programs for students in the first year of high school (Secondary 1) addressing all of these simultaneously would seem to be particularly important.