



GLOBAL DRUG SURVEY

Global Drug Survey
A different way of looking at drugs

**2022 Drug Trend Report:
Time, Music, Clubbing, Age, and Diet**

Adam Winstock, Rasmus Munksgaard, Emma Davies, Jason Ferris, Ahnjili ZhuParris, Monica Barratt

Help us reach one million take part now -survey closes 02 March 2022



Background

People are not defined by the drugs they use. This report is based on our non-probability data collected from 592,000 people completing our online survey, over the last 7 years of GDS (from GDS2015 - GDS2021) chooses to look at people's drug use within the context of other lifestyle characteristics such as diet and musical preference. The samples vary in how accurately or otherwise they reflect upon the experiences of the wider population from which they are drawn from, but the findings can be used to inform public health policy and better understand how drugs are simply one thing a person does. The findings here related to participants to the Global Drug Survey not the wider population from which they were drawn.

Key findings

Across the 7 years, most regions saw an increase in recent drug use including psychedelics, MDMA, cocaine, amphetamine, and ketamine. Most drug use fell with the onset of COVID-19 except for nitrous oxide and magic mushrooms.

The greatest percentage of recent drug use occurs between ages of 16-24y for all drugs except cocaine that peaks in the 25-34y old age group. The percentage of last year drug use more than halves between the age of 25 and 50 for almost all drugs. The high percentage for tobacco use among the younger drug using populations is a concern.

The highest percentages of recent drug use are seen among those who selected Electronic Dance Music (EDM) as their preferred music genre, with higher percentages of MDMA, other stimulant use, psychedelics and ketamine noted among fans of techno, trance, dubstep, hard dance and drum and bass. The lowest percentage of drug use was reported among fans of jazz and classical.

Those people who went clubbing weekly or more often reported the highest percentage of last year drug use, with about 80% having used cannabis or tobacco in the last year, more than 50% having used MDMA and more than 40% having used cocaine. About 1 in 5 reported the use of hallucinogens including LSD and magic mushrooms. Not all people who go clubbing take drugs, but the more often you do, the more likely it is that you have used drugs in the last year.

People identifying as vegan were more likely to report recent use of most drug types, compared with omnivores and vegetarians.

Commentary

While global drug trends can mask regional variations in market changes, our data support the gradual increase in the use of psychedelics globally. Consistently higher percentages of recent cannabis use are in the USA, perhaps reflecting an increasingly legal market. Increases in recent MDMA and cocaine use are consistent with increased access to precursors, production, and supply (often associated with increased purity). The rise in amphetamine use, especially in the USA may reflect ease of production and increased purity of a product that was historically often of low purity. Governments can no longer rely on supply reduction as a way of reducing drug related harm. The rise of synthetic drugs and new drug markets (darknet) mean that historical approaches to drug policy and public health need to change with a focus on building resilience in vulnerable populations and explicit support for harm reduction for all groups who use drugs, not just those who inject or who may be at risk of overdose.

While drug use peaks in those aged 16-24y, there are a significant number of people who continue to use into older age. The high percentage of tobacco use among younger people is a real concern. While frequency of use may decline, older people are more likely to have accrued chronic mental and physical health conditions placing them at a greater risk at physical harms. The falling percentage of drug use supports our view that the most important thing for governments to do is to support policies that 1) delay the onset of use 2) support people to stay healthy and well, including the avoidance of criminalization. Our data suggest the best way of addressing of drug use is not tougher drug laws but allowing people to stay safe while they grow up so they can get on with life.



Our findings suggest that of all dietary groups, those describing themselves as vegans have a higher percentage of last year drug use (aside from tobacco and alcohol) compared to other groups. It is important to note that being 'vegan' may be a proxy for some other characteristic that might be responsible for these findings. Being vegan may be associated with other lifestyle behaviours or personal beliefs. Vegans may be more spiritual, more interested in the environment or social connectedness. The higher percentage of last year use of MDMA, LSD, and Magic Mushrooms are consistent with this. It supports our belief that drug use needs to be seen as one of several lifestyle choices people make, where drug use is integrated into other aspects of a person's life. To craft optimal public health policies and harm reduction messages we need to understand the individual as much as we do the drug. Promoting safer drug use will be easiest when we seek to allow people to be internally consistent in their choices. Often the motivation for change arises when drug use behaviour becomes inconsistent with how we see ourselves.

Elevated recent drug use among fans of Electronic Dance Music will come as no surprise. But our findings again highlight that drugs are chosen by people in part, because of their other interests. This knowledge can help us target different populations in different ways when thinking about public health messages and health promotion. While the link between EDM and drugs goes back to the early 1980s, what has changed is the range of drugs available. 40 years ago, the most popular drugs were alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, MDMA and a few psychedelics. While MDMA and cannabis still dominate the market, there are many others that are now commonplace. We need to shift our messaging to address issues of polydrug use and harms that may arise from more novel drugs. Our data also shows there is a rather strong correlation between how often you are clubbing and percentage of last-12-month drug use. Not everyone who goes clubbing takes drugs though.

