

Uses of Psychoactive Substances Among Young French: a Regional Approach

Exploiting the 2002-2003 ESCAPAD Survey in Metropolitan France and French Overseas Départements

Ever since it has been set up in 2000 the ESCAPAD Survey, which evaluates the uses of psychoactive substances among the 17-18 years-old French, has significantly enabled strengthening the monitoring system of drug uses in France. Thanks to its yearly periodicity, ESCAPAD has become an efficient gauge for these behaviours.

With the *Atlas régional des consommations de produits psychoactifs des jeunes Français (Regional Atlas for the uses of psychoactive substances among the Young French young)*, which data presented here are stemming from, the OFDT illustrates another application of that survey. The purpose is to supply a systematic analysis of these figures on a regional level through detailed files for all local actors involved: the drug addiction project managers, the CIRDD's (Centres for Information and Resources on Drug and Drug Addictions), the ORS's (Regional Health Monitoring Centres), or the DRASS's (Regional Directorates for Health and Social Affairs).

As the ESCAPAD methodology relies upon a large sample covering the whole French territory, it allows an infra-national analysis while offering a more precise comparability framework than in regional surveys carried out separately, with different periods of time, methods, populations, and questionings.

This survey enables drawing a map of the uses in Metropolitan France and in its overseas départements and communities (Dom's and Com's). The data presented here are issuing from the surveys carried out in 2002-2003 for Metropolitan France, and in 2003 for French overseas territories. The results include the 17 year-olds in Metropolitan France, the 18 year-olds in the Dom's (except for French Guiana: 17-18 year-olds), and the 17-18 year-olds in the Com's. In addition to the maps displayed here, the Regional Atlas supplies a similar description and pointers for the twenty-seven regions surveyed¹.

Survey Methodology

Set up by the OFDT in partnership with the DSN (*Direction du Service national*; National Service Directorate), the ESCAPAD* Survey is based on a questionnaire supplied to all the

¹ Corsica numbers (200 individuals) actually preclude all statistical analysis for that region; however in 2005 the size of the national sample (over 35,000 individuals) should allow a study for that area.

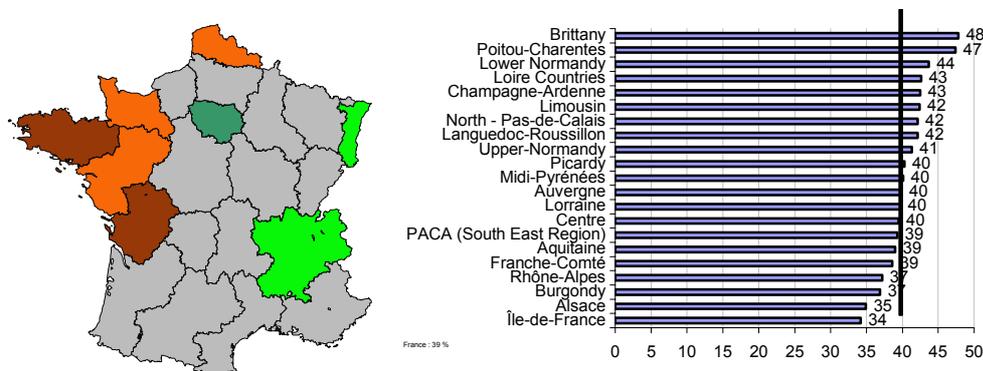
youth attending the JAPD (*Journée d'appel de preparation à la Défense*; Call-Up and Preparation for Defence Day). It gives information about the emerging tendencies in terms of substances, and brings in a very responding follow-up on the evolutions of that particularly concerned population. It has the advantage of questioning a sample representative of all the French youngsters, including those out of the school system or working. This survey has been extended to the overseas départements in 2001, and communities (French Polynesia and New Caledonia only) in 2003.

In Metropolitan France, the 2002 and 2003 sample to be used immediately amounts to 27,354 teenagers of 17 years of age (actually being over 17 years of age, that is to say accounting for the month of birth): 14,515 individuals questioned in 2002 and 12,839 in 2003. In the Dom's and Com's, only the 2003 figures have been used, yet ages are not considered strictly over 17 but in full years (year of the survey – year of birth). Only the individuals of 18 years of age have been selected, except for Guiana, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, where the 17 year-olds have been included to make up for the small numbers of 18 years-old youngsters. Therefore the Dom-Com sample that has been used involves 3,955 individuals.

**Survey on Health and Consumption on Call-Up and Preparation for Defence Day*

Indicators used: Experimentation refers to having already used at least one substance in one's lifetime. Other pointers apply to the last thirty days prior to the survey: use during the previous month, regular use of alcohol or cannabis (at least 10 occurrences), daily use (at least one intake a day). Lastly regular drunkenness is defined as 10 intoxications at least during the last 12 months.

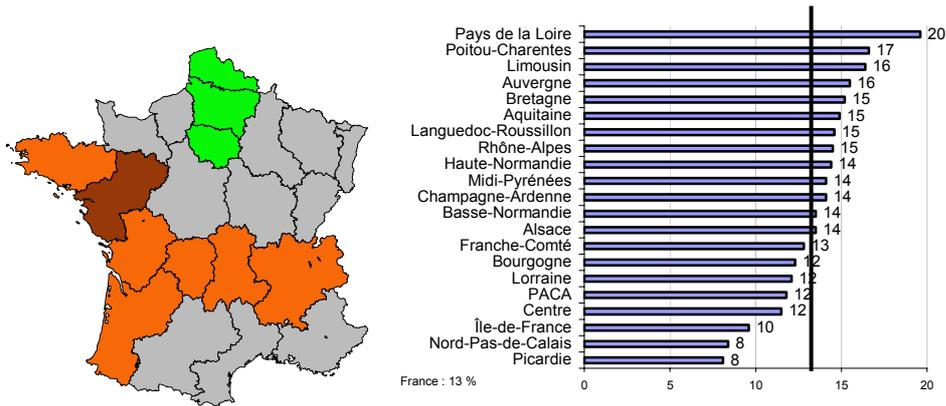
Daily Tobacco Use at 17



Average in Metropolitan France: 39%

Source: 2002-2003 OFDT ESCAPAD, regional exploitation

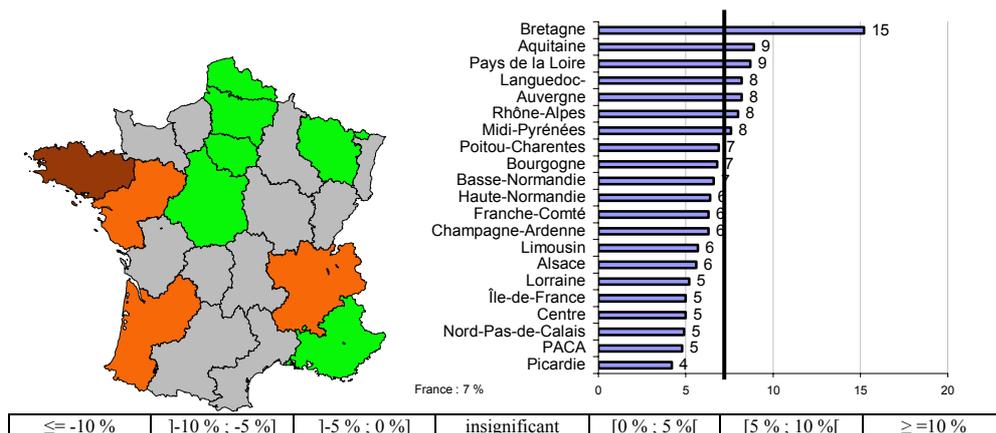
Regular Alcohol Use at 17



Average in Metropolitan France: 13%

Source: 2002-2003 OFDT ESCAPAD, regional exploitation

Regular Drunkenness at 17



Average in Metropolitan France: 7%

Source: 2002-2003 OFDT ESCAPAD, regional exploitation

Interpretation: A colour reveals that the disparity between a specific region and the rest of France is significant; the intensity of the colour accounts for the extent of the gap.

E.g.: The daily tobacco use in Brittany proves notably higher than in the rest of France, the gap is included between 5 and 10%.

Tobacco

Tobacco daily use appears more widespread in North-Western France, particularly in the following regions: Lower Normandy, Brittany, the Loire Countries and Poitou-Charentes. North-Pas-de-Calais also ranks higher than the rest. Only three regions seem to stand out for a

tobacco use more uncommon than elsewhere: Île-de-France, Alsace and Rhône-Alpes.

On a national level, as in nearly all regions, no significant disparity can be observed between girl and boy behaviours as far as tobacco use is concerned: 39.5% of them acknowledge smoking on a daily basis.

Alcohol

Alcohol regular use among 17 years-old teenagers proves more prevalent along the French Atlantic shoreline, from Brittany down to Aquitaine, as well as in Limousin, Auvergne and Rhône-Alpes. But the Loire Countries region is the heaviest user by far: its ratio of regular drinkers nearly amounts to 20%. Therefore there are twice as many drinkers in the Loire Countries as in the French Northern regions: Picardy and North-Pas-de-Calais remain the lowest users, alongside Île-de-France.

While daily drinkers represent a minority among the 17 years-old population (1.0% all over France), four regions significantly stand apart from such a value: they rank either lower than the rest of the country, as Brittany (0.4%) and Île-de-France (0.6%), or higher, as Rhône-Alpes (1.4%), and more particularly the Loire Countries (2.5%). Yet such disparities remain slight.

In every region the gap between genders is important when it comes to regular use (19% among boys vs. 6% among girls over the whole French territory) or daily use (1.8% vs. 0.2%).

Drunkenness

Whereas half the respondents declare at least one drunkenness incidence in the last twelve months (45% for both genders, that is 54% among boys and 36% among girls), regular intoxications prove notably fewer: only 7% acknowledge having been intoxicated at least ten times during the year (10% among boys vs. 2.9% among girls). Dissimilarities between regions are nevertheless significant, as six of them rank lower than the rest of France: Picardy, North-Pas-de-Calais, Île-de-France, Centre, Lorraine for Northern France, and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur for Southern France, while four regions rank higher: Rhône-Alpes, the Loire Countries, and Aquitaine (close to 9%), and mainly Brittany (15%). Therefore the regions situated along the Atlantic shoreline show an alcohol use profile rather turned towards drunkenness. The Poitou-Charentes region stands apart from that drunkenness gathering along the Atlantic shoreline as its regular intoxications appear quite average.

Psychotropic medicines

Among the 17 year-olds, the intake of psychotropic medicines (prescribed or not) during the last thirty days prior to the survey always involves more girls, and proves notably steady in Metropolitan France: only Alsace and Auvergne register a lower level of use, while Burgundy stands out for its slightly higher degree during the previous month. Besides the disparities observed are comparatively low (under 5%). The distribution of regular uses is even more unvarying: Auvergne is the only region registering an underconsumption, while the Loire Countries region shows an overuse yet exclusively among boys, the disparities from the national average being again below 5%.

Cannabis

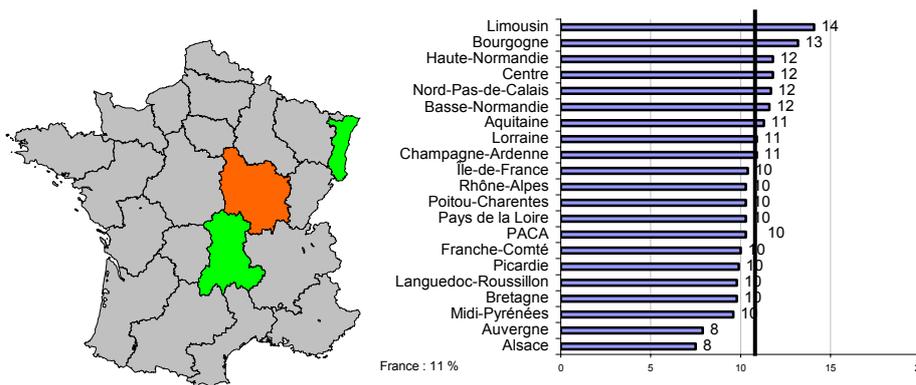
Despite some regional characteristics, cannabis appears rather largely spread all over Metropolitan France. Its levels of use do not reveal a very coherent geographical distribution, as the regions standing out for their higher or lower uses are not close to each other. Brittany and the Mediterranean region (notably in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur) include the most widespread uses during the month. Otherwise such uses prove more uncommon in North-Pas-de-Calais, Picardy, Île-de-France, Centre, and Auvergne.

As for regular use, its distribution is quite consistent: more infrequent in North-Pas-de-Calais, Burgundy, and Limousin; more prevalent in Brittany and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Disparities in comparison with national average appear trivial and do not exceed 5%.

As the uses of other illicit substances are much lower, only the experimentation levels — often below 5% — are described. As far as hallucinogenic mushrooms are concerned (4.2% on average), only Brittany registers a higher experimentation level (5.8%) than the rest of France, and Picardy (2.4%) is the only region to rank below. When it comes to poppers, two regions only (Île-de-France 5.6%, and especially Upper Normandy 7.8%) show a higher level, whereas four regions (North-Pas-de-Calais 3.6%, Picardy 2.9%, Champagne-Ardenne 3.0%, and Rhône-Alpes 3.6%) rank lower. As regards inhalants (6.0% on average), Brittany (7.6%), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (7.4%), and Languedoc-Roussillon (7%) are situated higher, unlike Picardy (2.5%) and Île-de-France (3.5%). As for ecstasy, North-Pas-de-Calais (5.7%), Franche-Comté (6.1%), and Languedoc-Roussillon register higher experimentation levels than the rest of France; a crescent shape including Île-de-France (3.6%), Centre (2.7%), Auvergne (2.3%), and Rhône-Alpes (3.3%) reveals on the contrary lower ones. When it comes to LSD, Languedoc-Roussillon (2.3%), Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (2.0%), and

Brittany (2.3%) rank higher, whereas Centre (0.5%) and Picardy (0.5%) show lower levels. Experimenting cocaine proves a little more frequent in the Mediterranean region (3.1%), and a little more uncommon in Centre (1.0%). Experimenting heroine appears slightly higher in North-Pas-de-Calais (1.4%) and lower in Midi-Pyrénées (0.2%). LSD over-experimentation level in the Mediterranean region can be compared with those concerning cocaine and ecstasy.

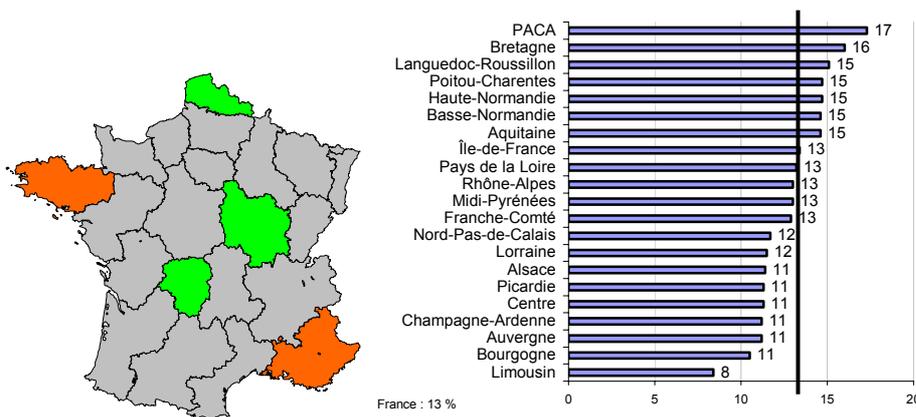
Psychotropic Medicines during the month at 17



Average in Metropolitan France: 11%

Source: 2002-2003 OFDT ESCAPAD, regional exploitation

Cannabis Regular Use at 17

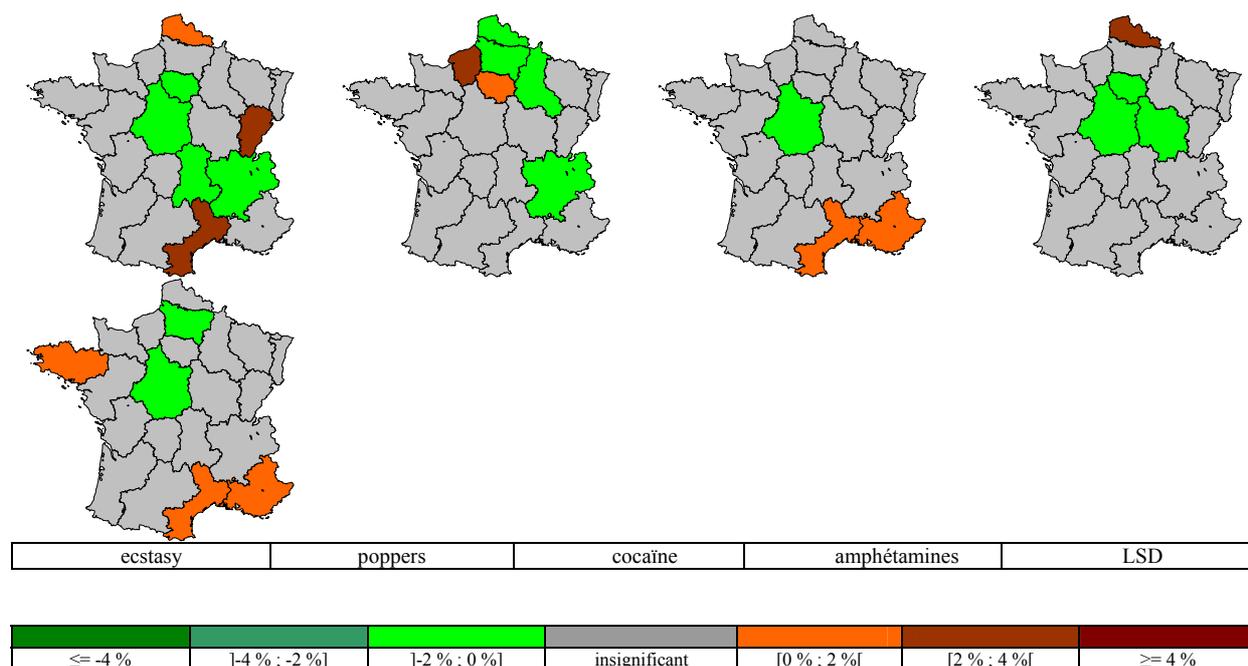


Average in Metropolitan France: 13%

Source: 2002-2003 OFDT ESCAPAD, regional exploitation

≤ -10 %] -10 % ; -5 %]] -5 % ; 0 %]	insignificant] 0 % ; 5 %]] 5 % ; 10 %]	≥ 10 %
---------	-----------------	---------------	---------------	--------------	---------------	--------

Other Illicit Psychoactive Substances Being Experimented at 17



Ecstasy

Average in Metropolitan France: 4.1%

Poppers

Average in Metropolitan France: 4.6%

Cocaine

Average in Metropolitan France: 2.4%

Amphetamines

Average in Metropolitan France: 2.1%

LSD

Average in Metropolitan France: 1.7%

Source: 2002-2003 OFDT ESCAPAD, regional exploitation

Experimentation and Regular Uses for Tobacco, Alcohol, and Cannabis in the Dom's and Com's

	Tobacco		Alcohol		Cannabis	
	Experimentation	Daily Use	Experimentation	Regular Use	Experimentation	Regular Use
Réunion	71 %	26 %	90 %	5 %	41 %	7 %
Guadeloupe	64 %	11 %	95 %	7 %	32 %	7 %
French Guiana*	60 %	13 %	96 %	7 %	31 %	6 %
Martinique	63 %	12 %	95 %	7 %	31 %	3 %
New Caledonia*	78 %	39 %	91 %	8 %	51 %	8 %
French Polynesia*	76 %	36 %	90 %	11 %	47 %	9 %
Metropolitan France	78 %	42 %	92 %	14 %	56 %	15 %

In the Com's and French Guiana, the age-bracket includes the 17-18 year-olds

Source: 2003 OFDT ESCAPAD

Overseas

The uses pertaining to the most common psychoactive substances (tobacco, alcohol, psychotropic medicines, and cannabis) appear generally less developed among overseas teenagers. Many disparities can be observed among the Dom's and Com's surveyed, the latter including most of the time more users, notably French Polynesia, whose levels of use prove sometimes close to those registered in Metropolitan France. When it comes to other illicit substances save for cannabis, the Dom's show low levels of uses which are close to each other. New Caledonia can also be compared with the Dom's, as far as these substances are concerned, and French Polynesia still stands out for its notably higher levels, nearing those observed in Metropolitan France.

Rather few disparities appear among the overseas départements. Réunion stands quite apart from the others for its tobacco use nearly half as high, its cannabis experimentation more widespread, yet also for its alcohol use profile turning a little more towards drunkenness. As for Martinique, it shows the lowest ratio of cannabis regular users (half as low as the figures observed in Guadeloupe and Réunion).

When it comes to other illicit psychoactive substances, acknowledging their uses during one's lifetime proves much more uncommon in the Dom's than in Metropolitan France, and such statements still remain very close to each other without revealing significant disparities.

Discussion

Representative surveys of general population make possible the description of behaviours among all the youth, and not only those adopting the most obvious ones. This geographical survey does not claim to explain the disparities observed between regions: theories likely to be put forward in order to attempt to understand them would only have a general meaning, as regions often include several distinctive contexts in terms of urban behaviours or socioeconomic profile. Besides only the differences in the statistical sense of the word are being shown and commented: so in sparsely populated regions as Limousin, significant gaps from the rest of France may prove irrelevant, unlike what can be observed in the most densely inhabited regions.

Some regions reflect images close to common sense, as they exemplify well-known cultural particularities. That is the case with those having a specific alcohol use tradition, as

Aquitaine, a great wine-growing region, or Brittany, where drunkenness appears comparatively widespread and valued, or even border or coastal regions, for some substances, like Midi-Pyrénées and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur for cannabis, and North-Pas-de-Calais for heroine. Conversely, the seeming understatement relating to alcohol use in Northern France could express an answering bias in the surveys, yet also a real strategy to avoid the alcoholic stigma likely to encourage youngsters to drink less. While the depiction of uses may actually affect statements, the recruiting process and the strictly anonymous context in which questionnaires are filled out erase these cultural effects to some extent. Overseas, when compared with Metropolitan France, the notably low figures refute common prejudices towards those territories, yet prove from now on well-established by the recurrence of local surveys about the subject. The levels observed in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, significantly higher (for the latter mostly), put these areas a little apart and require some confirmation by the 2005 ESCAPAD Survey.

François Beck, Stéphane Legleye, Stanislas Spilka

For more information

Beck (F.), Legleye (S.), Spilka (S.), *Atlas régional des consommations de produits psychoactifs des jeunes Français, analyse de l'enquête ESCAPAD 2002/2003*, OFDT, 2005, 220 p.

Beck (F.), Legleye (S.), Spilka (S.), *Drogues à l'adolescence. Niveaux et contextes d'usage de cannabis, alcool, tabac et autres drogues à 17-18 ans en France - ESCAPAD 2003*, OFDT, 2004, 251 p.

Beck (F.), Legleye (S.), *Drogues et adolescence, Usages de drogues et contextes d'usages de 17 à 19 ans, évolutions récentes : ESCAPAD 2002*, Rapport OFDT, 2003, 220 p.

The ESCAPAD Survey has been granted suitability by the CNIS (*Conseil national de l'information statistique*; National Commission of Statistical Information) and the guarantee of general interest of public statistics from the Label Commission, as well as the approving notice from the CNIL (*Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés*, National Commission on Data Processing and Individual Rights).