



National Institute  
of Public Health

**THE USE OF ILLICIT DRUGS, CANNABIS  
FOR HEALTH PURPOSES AND ABUSE OF  
PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES AMONG  
THE POPULATION OF SLOVENIA –  
ABSTRACT**



# **THE USE OF ILLICIT DRUGS, CANNABIS FOR HEALTH PURPOSES AND ABUSE OF PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES AMONG THE POPULATION OF SLOVENIA – ABSTRACT**

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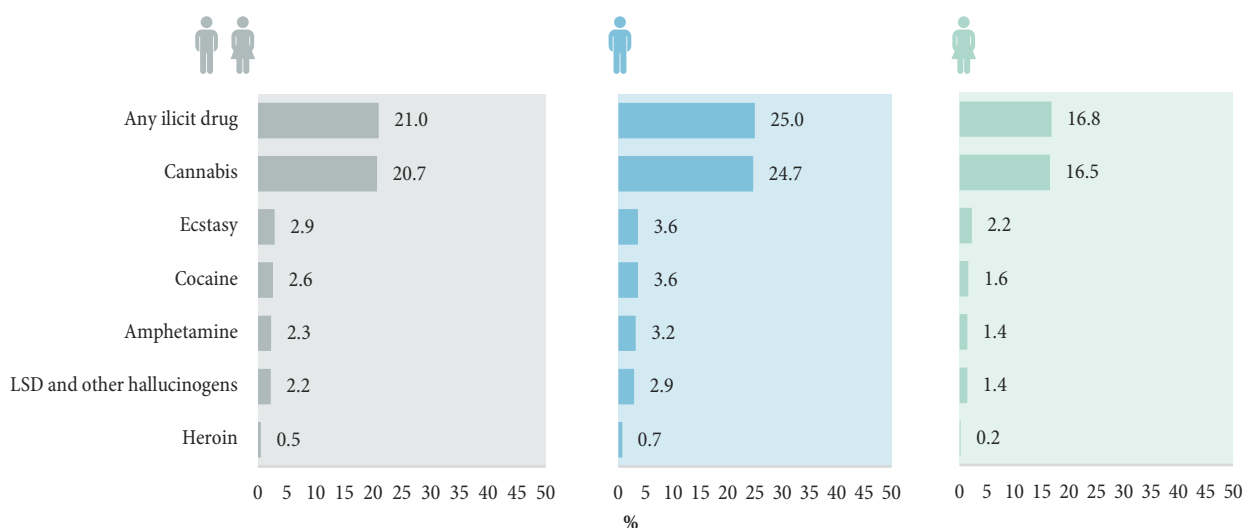
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## ILLICIT DRUG USE INCREASED IN THE 2012–2018 PERIOD

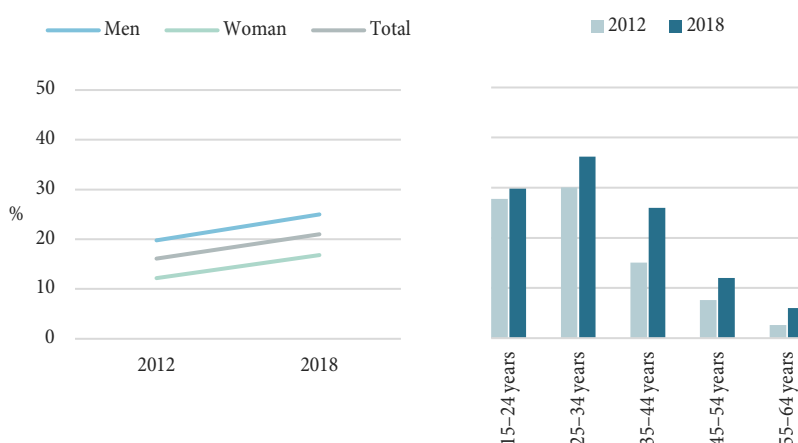
The results of the latest National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs show that one in five people in Slovenia aged 15 to 64 has ever used one of the illicit drugs. Cannabis is still the most widespread illicit drug among the population of Slovenia, followed by ecstasy, cocaine, amphetamine, LSD and other hallucinogens and heroin. As three of the most common reasons for using illicit drugs, residents of Slovenia stated: out of curiosity, to improve their mood, and because of the environment or society in which I am. Most residents who have ever used illicit drugs have stopped using them. Cocaine and cannabis are the most common drugs the users continue to use. Between 2012 and 2018, we recorded an increase in the percentage of illicit drug users among the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64; this finding also applies to users of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, amphetamines, and users of several drugs on one occasion. Otherwise, Slovenia ranks below the EU average in terms of the prevalence of illicit drug use at any time in life.

Figure 1: Lifetime prevalence of any illicit drug use among the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, total and by sex.



Source: National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Among the Population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, NIJZ 2018.

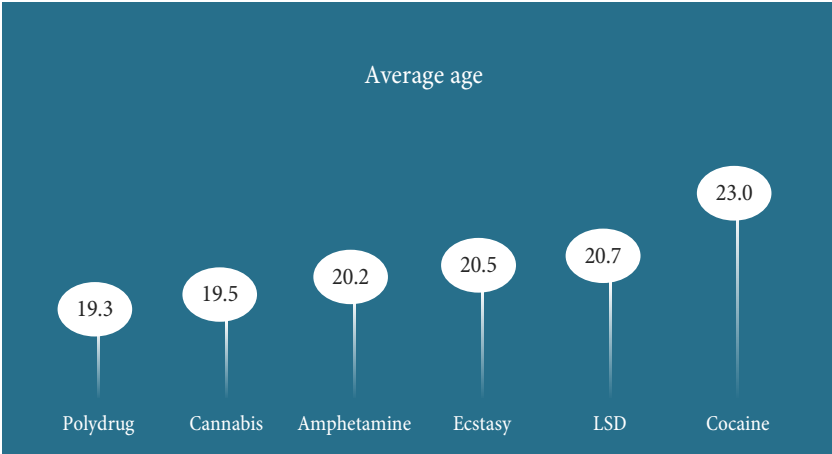
Figure 2: Comparison of the percentage of lifetime prevalence of any illicit drug use between 2012 and 2018 among the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, total and by sex and by 10-year age groups.



Source: National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Among the Population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, NIJZ 2018.

The use of illicit drugs at any time in life is more prevalent among men than among women. Among young people (15–24 years), young adults (25–34) and adults aged 35 to 44, there is a higher lifetime prevalence of illicit drug use than among those over 45 years of age. The age period for initiating illicit drugs is from 19 to 23 years. The lowest average age at first use was recorded for cannabis and the highest for cocaine. In 2018, we recorded higher average ages with the first use of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and amphetamines than in 2012. In addition, in the age group 35–44, we recorded higher percentages of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and amphetamine users in 2018 than in 2012.

Figure 3: Average ages at the first use of an illicit drug among the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64.

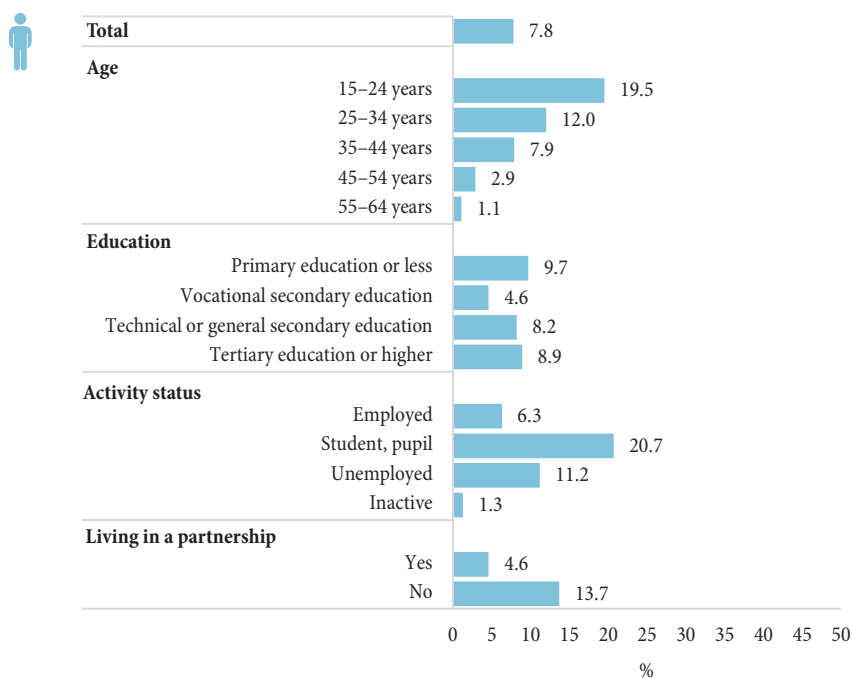


Source: National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Among the Population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, NIJZ 2018.

**CANNABIS IS MOST COMMONLY USED ILLICIT DRUG IN SLOVENIA**

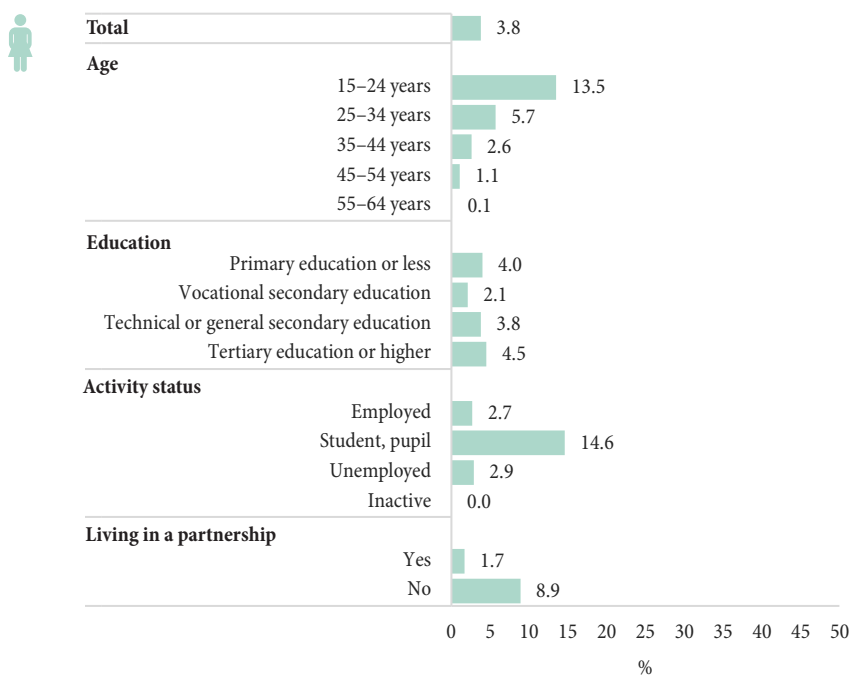
Cannabis has been used by more than a fifth of the population of Slovenia at least once in their lifetime. Cannabis use is particularly prevalent among young men who are in the process of education or unemployed and not living in a partnership. Slightly less than one percent of the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64 years reported daily cannabis use. The three most common health problems that people have suffered from cannabis use are the following: anxiety, difficulty concentrating and depression. The three most common social problems are: problems with parents or a partner, problems with the police or the judiciary, and problems with friends. Slovenia ranks below the EU average in terms of the lifetime prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population and ranks above the average of the countries covered by the HBSC and ESPAD surveys in terms of prevalence of cannabis use among adolescents. The majority of the population of Slovenia, that reported cannabis use in the last year, estimates that access to cannabis could be easy or very easy in the next 24 hours, and a good third of inhabitants of Slovenia aged 15 to 64 years agree with the full legalization of cannabis.

**Figure 4: Percentage of the last year cannabis users among men aged 15 to 64 years, by age group, education, activity status and living in a partnership.**



Source: National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Among the Population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, NIJZ 2018.

**Figure 5: Percentage of the last year cannabis users among women aged 15 to 64 years, total, by age groups, education, activity status and living in a partnership.**



Source: National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Among the Population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, NIJZ 2018.

## POLYDRUG USE IS MOST WIDESPREAD AMONG YOUNG MEN WHO ARE IN EDUCATION PROCESS AND NOT LIVING IN A PARTNERSHIP

As many as 8.9% of the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64 years have used several drugs on one occasion. Alcohol and cannabis are the most commonly used combinations of polydrug use on one occasion, followed by a combination of cannabis and alcohol and at least one other stimulant drug. Polydrug use is particularly prevalent among young men who are in the education process and not living in a partnership.

## CANNABIS USE FOR HEALTH PURPOSES IS MORE COMMON AMONG WOMEN THAN MEN

As many as 6.7% of the population of Slovenia has ever used cannabis or cannabis-derived products for health purposes. 15.5% of the population of Slovenia has not yet used cannabis-derived products for medical purposes, but they are considering it. The use of cannabis or cannabis-derived products is especially widespread among women and among those residents who also use marijuana or hashish more often. Residents over the age of 24, who are employed, with higher education, living in a partnership and use marijuana or hashish more often, are more likely to consider using cannabis or cannabis-derived products. Chronic pain and insomnia are the most common reasons that have led residents to use cannabis or cannabis-derived product, and the most commonly used products are cannabis oil, cannabis resin and cannabis cream.

Figure 6: Health reasons for the use of cannabis or cannabis-derived product, among the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64 years who have used such products.



Note: Multiple answers were possible.  
 Source: National Survey on the Use of Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drugs Among the Population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64, NIJZ 2018.

## PAIN IS THE MOST COMMON REASON FOR PRESCRIPTION MEDICINES ABUSE

Prescription psychoactive medicines have been abused by 2% of the population at least once in the last 12 months. They were more often used by residents not living in a partnership. In the highest percentage, residents abused painkillers and sedatives. Pain was the most common reason for prescription medicines abuse. The medicines they abused, however, were mostly obtained by prescription from their doctor.

## CONCLUSION

The data from our national survey showed that illicit drug use in Slovenia is increasing, especially the use of cannabis, which is already the most widespread illicit drug. The prevalence of cannabis use is of particular concern among young people, as Slovenia ranks above the international average in this indicator. In addition, more and more research is pointing to the link between cannabis use and mental health problems. Furthermore, the increase in the polydrug use on one occasion and the perceived abuse of prescription medicines as well as cannabis use for non-medical purposes are also a matter of concern. In connection with illicit drug use, we observe several changes, namely changes in accessibility, in the context of use, in the age of first use and the attitude of society in general. Thus e.g., illicit drugs, especially cannabis, are becoming more accessible. Drug use is also often linked to relieving various afflictions and health problems. In the past, there has been a noticeable decline of the illicit drug use in the transition to the early middle years, but now we are not seeing a significant decline. Society is also becoming increasingly liberal regarding illicit drug use, especially cannabis, as reflected in the growing percentage of people in favour of its full legalization. Cannabis use for medical purposes and the abuse of prescription medicines bring new challenges. We can find that drug use is becoming an increasingly complex area that requires well-thought-out policies and measures, and certainly enhanced action in the field of prevention.

Links:

The monograph, entitled The use of illicit drugs, cannabis for health purposes and abuse of prescription medicines among the population of Slovenia is available at:

[https://www.nijz.si/sites/www.nijz.si/files/publikacije-datoteke/atadd\\_26\\_8\\_21.pdf](https://www.nijz.si/sites/www.nijz.si/files/publikacije-datoteke/atadd_26_8_21.pdf)

National reports on the drug situation of the Republic of Slovenia are available at:

<https://www.nijz.si/sl/podrocja-dela/moj-zivljenjski-slog/prepovedane-droge>



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