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A quantitative exploration of attitudes out of line with the prevailing norms toward alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis use among European students.

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Abstract

The study examines groups of 15-16-year-old students whose attitudes toward drug use are out of line with the prevailing norms. It analyzes data from eight countries from the 2003 European School Survey on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD): Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, France, Malta, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. In those countries, 22,900 15-16-year-old pupils answered the ESPAD questionnaire. Groups of subjects whose responses are far removed from the modal value are sought and studied. The aim is to explore "rare answers" compared to what is perceived by the majority of students. In order to explore what can lead a pupil to an atypical perception of risk, a cluster analysis, based on the risk perceptions of alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis use, was run to isolate the groups in which pupils tend to answer differently. Six clusters were established classifying students into those who failed to respond, deny the risks, do not know about the risks, see any drug use as great risk, see regular use as great risk, and who see a moderate risk for most frequencies of use. The nonresponders, risk deniers, and those ignorant of the risks are infrequent making up, in all, only 16.9% of the total sample. Gender, country, alcohol use, cannabis use, tobacco use, and friends' consumption were used to describe both the individual risk perceptions and the clusters based on them. Both global context (country) and "micro" context (frequencies of drug use, peers lifestyle, and parental permissiveness) appear to play a major role in the risk perception of drug use.

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