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**THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONG  
UKRAINIAN YOUTH (BASED ON THE MATERIALS OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL PROJECT “MENTAL HEALTH AND  
RISKY BEHAVIOUR OF ADOLESCENTS”)**

THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONG UKRAINIAN  
YOUTH (BASED ON THE MATERIALS OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
PROJECT “MENTAL HEALTH AND RISKY BEHAVIOUR OF ADO-  
LESCENTS”)

**Keywords:** adolescents, psychoactive substances, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes.

The article focuses on the use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances (PAS) among young people (using the example of ninth-grade students in the cities of Lviv, Drohobych, and the Drohobych Raion). The paper reports on the results of the project “Mental Health and Risky Behaviour of Adolescents”, conducted in 2020 by a joint team of Ukrainian and Polish researchers (from Ivan Franko Drohobych State Pedagogical University,

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Lviv Polytechnic National University, as well as the State Agency for the Prevention of Alcohol Related Problems (PARPA) and the Institute of Neurology and Psychiatry (Warsaw), using the methodology of the Mokotów Study. Differences in substance use according to gender and location were identified. The results indicate that the alcohol abuse is more common among young people living in rural areas and small towns. Girls were found to be a higher risk group than boys and need special prevention programmes to avoid risky behavior. It has been demonstrated that the highest risk of psychoactive substance use among Ukrainian adolescents is shaped by their peer environment.

#### STOSOWANIE SUBSTANCJI PSYCHOAKTYWNYCH PRZEZ UKRAIŃSKĄ MŁODZIEŻ (NA PODSTAWIE MATERIAŁÓW MIĘDZY- NARODOWEGO PROJEKTU “ZDROWIE PSYCHICZNE I RYZYKOWNE ZACHOWANIA MŁODZIEŻY”)

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, substancje psychoaktywne, alkohol, narkotyki, papierosy.

W artykule podjęto problematykę używania alkoholu i innych substancji psychoaktywnych wśród młodych ludzi (na przykładzie uczniów dziewiątych klas ze Lwowa, Drohobycza i rejonu Drohobycza). Praca bazuje na wynikach badania “Zdrowie psychiczne i ryzykowne zachowania młodzieży” przeprowadzonego w 2020 roku przez zespół naukowców z Ukrainy (z Państwowego Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego im. Ivana Franki w Drohobyczu i Narodowego Uniwersytetu Politechnika Lwowska we Lwowie) i z Polski (z Państwowej Agencji Rozwiązywania Problemów Alkoholowych oraz Instytutu Neurologii i Psychiatrii w Warszawie) z wykorzystaniem metodologii Badań Mokotowskich. Zostały zidentyfikowane różnice w stosowaniu substancji w zależności od miejscowości i płci. Wyniki wskazują, że nadużywanie alkoholu jest częstsze u młodzieży mieszkającej w obszarach wiejskich oraz małym mieście. Ustalono, że dziewczęta stanowią grupę większego ryzyka niż chłopcy i wymagają szczególnych programów profilaktycznych w celu uniknięcia ryzykownych zachowań. Wyniki badań wskazują, że największe ryzyko stosowania substancji psychoaktywnych przez ukraińską młodzież jest ukształtowane przez ich środowisko rówieśnicze.

## Introduction

Ongoing social transformations give rise to a number of serious problems and contradictions in the Ukrainian society. On the one hand, conditions are being created for the development of a free and active personality. On the other hand, the expansion of democratic freedoms and opportunities for self-realisation in an unstable and crisis-ridden society leads to new risks, especially for young people. Globalisation and the growth of cultural tolerance towards drugs and alcohol use provide the foundation for the popularisation of psychoactive substance use among young people. The economic instability in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russian military aggression are deeply exacerbating social problems, making it impossible for the state to address the problem of youth substance use.

The findings of some sociological projects indicate a high level of substance use by schoolchildren (Balakireva et al. 2019; *ESPAD Report 2019 2020*; *Youth of Ukraine 2019*; *Youth of Ukraine 2021*). Monitoring studies within the ESPAD project have shown that alcohol is the most commonly used psychoactive substance among children and adolescents in Ukraine (*ESPAD Report 2019 2020*). Based on the latest data from the 2019 research wave from 35 European countries, it was found that 85% of Ukrainian adolescents have consumed alcoholic beverages at least once in their lives. This is higher than the average indicator of 79% in ESPAD countries (*ESPAD Report 2019 2020*, pp. 46-47). In the past 30 days, 44% of Ukrainian adolescents reported consuming alcohol, with higher rates were among girls (48%) than boys (39%) (*ESPAD Report 2019 2020*, p. 47). Smoking of both traditional and electronic cigarettes is also prevalent among Ukrainian adolescents, with 50% reporting use, compared to the average of 41% in ESPAD countries (*ESPAD Report 2019 2020*, pp. 42-45). As for drug use, 8.6% of Ukrainian students reported using illicit drugs at least once, which is lower than the average of 17% of ESPAD countries (*ESPAD Report 2019 2020*, pp. 48-49). The results of the All-Ukrainian sociological monitoring “Youth of Ukraine” show similar results: based on the 2019 data, 53.9% of adolescents consumed alcohol in the last 30 days and 52.2% smoked cigarettes; 5.3% reported using drugs in the last 12 months (*Youth of Ukraine 2021*, pp. 67-69).

The relevance of this problem is indicated by a significant number of foreign and domestic studies. The contributions of the following Polish researchers are of fundamental importance: Krzysztof Ostaszewski (2017), Agnieszka Pisarska et al. (2016) has been studying the risky behavior of young people for decades and the influence of family ties on its manifestations, Katarzyna Okulicz-Kozaryn has researched the risk factors

and prevention of risky behaviour as well as the influence of the school environment on manifestations of risky behaviour among school youth (2013; Okulicz-Kozaryn, Bobrowski 2008), Pisarska et al. (2016) has published works on the role of the family and the use of psychoactive substances by adolescents. Krzysztof Bobrowski (2017) studied mental disorder symptoms in adolescents, while Anna Borucka and Krzysztof Ostaszewski (2009) studied the influence of mental health and family on student behaviour. Several studies have been conducted on the development of preventive programmes to limit manifestations of risky behaviour, including those by Wioletta Junik (2019, 2020) and Maria Deptuła et al. (2018).

Among Ukrainian researchers, Balakireva's scientific work is noteworthy, as she heads the European project of ESPAD in Ukraine. The use of narcotic substances among Ukrainian teenagers is studied by Alexey Serdyuk (2019). The monitoring the use of psychoactive substances by students is carried out by Halyna Herasim et al. (2017). There is relevant research devoted to the study of factors that influence the risky behaviour and the mental health of adolescents. Specifically, the works of Svitlana Shchudlo (2017), Shchudlo and Maria Futysh (2019), Shchudlo et al. (2020) and a collective Ukrainian-Polish study (Shchudlo et al. 2022) examine the influence of family factors and the pandemic on alcohol use among Ukrainian schoolchildren.

Based on the scientific studies, the Ukrainian government is trying to implement anti-alcohol and anti-drug policies. In particular, it includes the development of the State Drug Policy Strategy for the period up to 2020, the draft Law of Ukraine "On Ukraine's accession to the Partial Agreement Establishing the Group of States Parties to the Convention against Drug Abuse and Illicit Traffick" (Pompidou Group), the draft Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Criminal Liability of Persons Committing Offenses Related to the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs or Other Psychotropic Substances", as well as the organisation of the rehabilitation of those persons. However, these are only partial actions of the state, and the number of people, especially adolescents and youth who consume alcohol, use drugs and smoke remains quite high (this is confirmed by ESPAD data provided above). Therefore, it is important to continue studying the issues surrounding psychoactive substance use, to identify risk factors, and develop prevent and management strategies.

## Methodology

The empirical basis of the study includes the results obtained from the Ukrainian-Polish survey titled “Mental Health and Risky Behaviour of Adolescents”. It was conducted between October and December 2020 among adolescents from Ukraine and Poland. It is based on the methodology of an authoritative study on adolescents’ mental health that is more commonly known as the Mokotów Study in Poland and has been regularly conducted since the late 1980s (Ostaszewski 2017).

In Poland, the study was carried out by specialists from the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology led by Prof. Krzysztof Ostaszewski. In Ukraine, a team of sociologists from Ivan Franko Drohobych State Pedagogical University and Lviv Polytechnic National University took part as well. The project was initiated in Ukraine by the State Agency for Prevention of Alcohol-Related Problems (PARPA, Poland), which provided all organizational support for the survey.

The Ukrainian survey covers the territorial boundaries of one region, Lviv Reion, which is adjacent to Poland and the European Union. To represent three types of locations, 9th-grade school classes were randomly selected from a large city (Lviv), a small city (Drohobych), and rural areas (Drohobych district). The sample size in 2020 was 2038 students (Lviv – 1085 respondents, Drohobych – 499, the rural Drohobych district – 454), including 47.6% (971) boys and 52.4% (1067) girls (see table 1). The survey data were collected online in Lviv, and offline using a paper questionnaire in Drohobych and rural areas.

The research was cross-sectional, meaning that it cannot be used for analyzing the cause-and-effect relationships. In turn, the use of a survey in which the respondent describes his or her behaviour may result in measurement errors due to imperfections of this research method. Some of the survey questions addressed ‘sensitive’ issues such as substance abuse. To encourage open-ended responses, participants were assured of the complete anonymity of the survey, voluntary participation and confidentiality.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the use of psychoactive substances among Ukrainian adolescents based on their place of residence, gender and social environment, using empirical data. For the scientific analysis, a number of questions were selected to examine the level of alcohol consumption among Ukrainian adolescents and to establish correlations based on the environment in which they consumed alcohol. Additionally, questions were included to examine the level of drug use and tobacco smoking among schoolchildren. The results are presented descriptively, using univariate analysis and group comparisons.

### Sample characteristics

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample in three locations. Although the gender structure was balanced throughout the sample, the percentage of rural-area male participants was significantly higher than in Lviv. Respondents in Lviv were slightly older than those in the other study locations.

Table 1

Profile of respondents

Factor		Drohobych, rural area ( <i>N</i> = 454) %	Drohobych, town ( <i>N</i> = 499) %	Lviv ( <i>N</i> = 1085) %	Totally ( <i>N</i> = 2038) %
Gender	Boys	56.4	49.3	43.2	47.6
	Girls	43.6	50.7	56.8	52.4
Age	13-14	79.7	83.7	72.4	76.7
	15+	20.3	16.3	27.6	23.3

*Source:* compiled by the authors.

### Results

We divided our scientific intelligence into three blocks. The first section presents the results of respondents' answers to questions regarding teenage alcohol consumption. It includes information on whether they have ever consumed alcohol, whether they have consumed alcohol and felt intoxicated in the last 30 days before the survey, and details on the types of drinks consumed and with whom. The second section presents the results of drug use by Ukrainian schoolchildren, including whether they used drugs in groups during the last twelve months before the survey and where narcotic substances were used. The third section presents the results of smoking of traditional and electronic cigarettes by teenagers during the last year. In addition, we will present all the results through the prism of location and gender.

We started the study of the problem of alcohol use by teenagers with the question, "Have you ever drunk alcohol in your life?" (table 2). The analyses show that the vast majority of teenagers indicated that they drank alcohol, and this indicator is the highest in the villages and the lowest in Lviv. It is also worth noting that the gender analysis showed that the percentage of girls who have ever consumed alcohol is higher than the percentage of boys.

Table 2

Alcohol use among males and females in three locations, data in %

Place of residence/ gender/ Category	place of residence			Total	gender		Total
	Lviv	Drohobych	rural		male	female	
Never used	36.2	17.4	15.6	27.0	33.6	21.1	27.0
Alcohol use	63.8	82.6	84.4	73.0	66.4	78.9	73.0

*Source:* compiled by the authors.

The following questions are related to students' alcohol consumption during the last 30 days before the survey and the feeling of alcohol intoxication during the same period (table 3). Regular alcohol consumption is more prevalent in villages, with slightly lower rates in Drohobych, and the lowest rates in Lviv. The percentage of girls who regularly consume alcohol is higher than that of boys. The incidence of reported drunkenness is similar across all areas, although a higher percentage of boys reported feeling drunk compared to girls.

Table 3

Alcohol consumption and intoxication in the last 30 days, data in %

Place of residence/ gender/ Category	place of residence			Total	gender		Total
	Lviv	Drohobych	rural		male	female	
Alcohol use	22.4	37.7	50.7	32.4	28.0	36.5	32.4
Intoxication	4.5	11.0	13.2	8.0	9.3	6.9	8.0

*Source:* compiled by the authors.

This study also examines the types of alcoholic drinks consumed by Ukrainian teenagers in the 30 days before the survey. The findings indicate that wine is the preferred choice over beer and low-alcohol beverages, contrary to common assumptions. Of those surveyed, 27.6% (64.8% boys, 81.1% girls) chose wine, while 18.3% (54.2% boys, 59.7% girls) drank beer. Additionally, 10.7% (29.2% boys, 41.5% girls) consumed low-alcohol drinks and 7.8% (24.4% boys, 23.5% girls) consumed vodka. This trend is evident in all of the settlements, including Lviv, Drohobych, and the rural areas of Drohobych district.

Our objective was to determine the most common drinking companions among schoolchildren for various alcoholic beverages such as beer, soft

drinks, wine and vodka. The respondents were asked to choose an answer from among the options: did not drink, drank with parents, drank with other adults, drank in youth companies, or drank alone (table 4).

The results show that the majority of adolescents consume beer in a youth group. Drohobych students drink beer with their parents most often, while among Lviv students there is no difference between usage in a youth group or with parents. The percentage of girls who drink beer with their parents is significantly higher than the percentage of boys.

The data also show that students most often consume low-alcohol drinks in youth groups. It applies primarily to rural students. Lviv students most often consume these drinks with their parents. A gender analysis shows that girls drink twice as much low-alcohol drinks with their parents than boys.

We have previously noted that wine is the most popular drink among teenagers. However, the data shows that students most often drink wine with their parents, not in a youth group. This is primarily true for Drohobych teenagers, while the lowest percentage is among rural teenagers. The percentage of girls who drink wine with their parents is significantly higher than among boys.

Although vodka is the least popular alcoholic beverage among schoolchildren, it is most often used in youth groups. Students from Drohobych are twice as likely to drink vodka with their parents than students from Lviv or rural areas. The percentage of boys who drink vodka is higher than the percentage of girls who drink this strong alcoholic beverage both in youth groups and with their parents.

We studied drug use and smoking among schoolchildren asking whether 15-year-old students had attended a party where drugs were used, whether they had used drugs themselves, and what kind of cigarettes they smoked in the last year before the survey (table 5).

The results show that the rural youth and youth from Drohobych used drugs more often than youth from Lviv. This was most common among girls from Drohobych and Lviv and among boys from rural areas. A small number of respondents admitted to using illegal drugs and smoking cigarettes in the last year. This behaviour was more common among boys than girls, but the proportion of e-cigarette smokers was higher among girls. Regarding the settlement data, Drohobych students outperformed Lviv and rural adolescents in almost all research categories.



Table 4

Consumption of various alcoholic beverages in the last 30 days before the survey in various social environments, data in %

Place of residence/gender/ Category		place of residence			Total	gender		Total
		Lviv	Drohobych	rural		male	female	
beer	Never drank	61.2	35.1	32.8	43.0	45.8	40.3	43.0
	Drank with my parents	16.7	24.0	10.1	16.9	14.0	19.9	16.9
	Drank with other adults	2.3	5.8	2.1	3.4	7.4	5.2	6.3
	Drank with youth company	16.9	35.3	45.4	32.5	31.8	33.0	32.4
	Drank alone	2.9	2.8	6.4	4.0	4.7	3.5	4.1
low alcohol drinks	Never drank	67.5	61.5	59.9	62.9	70.8	58.5	64.7
	Drank with my parents	12.4	8.6	2.9	8.0	6.2	12.3	9.3
	Drank with other adults	2.1	2.4	3.3	2.6	1.8	3.1	2.5
	Drank with youth company	16.0	25.5	30.4	24.0	19.1	23.8	21.5
	Drank alone	1.9	2.0	3.5	2.5	2.3	2.3	2.3
wine	Never drank	42.4	20.6	17.2	26.7	35.2	18.9	27.0
	Drank with my parents	40.2	41.3	28.4	36.6	32.1	40.3	36.2
	Drank with other adults	4.0	4.8	10.8	6.5	7.4	5.2	6.3
	Drank with youth company	10.7	30.7	42.5	28.0	23.1	33.2	28.2
	Drank alone	2.8	2.6	2.1	2.5	2.1	2.2	2.2
vodka	Never drank	67.5	61.5	59.9	63.0	70.8	58.5	64.7
	Drank with my parents	12.4	8.6	2.9	8.0	6.2	12.3	9.3
	Drank with other adults	2.1	2.4	3.3	2.6	1.8	3.1	3.4
	Drank with youth company	16	25.5	30.4	24.0	19.1	23.8	21.5
	Drank alone	1.9	2	3.5	2.5	2.3	2.3	2.3

Source: compiled by the authors.

Table 5

Risky behaviours among males and females in Lviv, Drohobych and rural areas, data in %

Place of residence/ gender/ Category	place of residence			Total	gender		Total
	Lviv	Drohobych	rural		male	female	
Participation in parties with drugs (in the last year)	3.3	5.0	5.1	4.1	3.4	4.8	4.1
Illicit drug use (any in the last year)	0.8	2.2	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.3
Cigarette use (any in the last year)	6.2	9.2	8.1	7.4	7.6	7.1	7.4
E-cigarette use (any in the last year)	9.4	14.2	6.2	9.9	8.3	11.2	9.9

*Source:* compiled by the authors.

We believe that the problem of substance use among young people is based on the low economic and financial capacity of society, as well as the commercialisation and closure (especially in rural areas) of leisure facilities, which leads to the fact that teenagers have no possibilities to spend their time in a meaningful way. At the same time, substance use is becoming a part of leisure activities at so-called ‘teenage parties’ and is becoming an identification feature. Using alcohol, drugs or smoking gives young people the opportunity to look like adults and to assert themselves in youth groups. It creates a favourable environment for the spread of various forms of deviance, which society is often unable to counteract effectively.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it has to be underlined that the results of our study show that the problem of substance use among young people remains acute, and that the rates of substance use among Ukrainian adolescents are reported to be high. The overwhelming majority of adolescents indicated that they had consumed alcohol. Thus, the level of use is the highest in the villages of Drohobych district, and lowest in Lviv (the percentage of regular alcohol consumption among rural youth is also the highest, while the percentage among Lviv students is twice lower).

Smoking and drug use in youth groups are more common in rural areas and small towns. Overall, just over one percent of respondents admitted to having used illegal drugs in the last year, as well as smoking traditional and electronic cigarettes.

Our analysis by gender shows that girls are in a higher risk group for the use of various types of psychoactive substances. They have a higher percentage of alcohol consumption than boys. It is noteworthy that the highest rates of substance use among young people were found among friends.

Consequently, prevention of substance use among school youth should be aimed at building students' resilience to negative environmental influences, including peers, and strengthening parents' control over teenagers' behaviour.

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