

Survey on Addictive Behaviours in Young People in Custody 2023 - Executive Summary



SUBJECT	Characterization of addictive behaviours of young people in custody. Perspectives for the intervention
TARGET GROUPS	Specialized Professionals, Decision-Makers, Students, Academia
KEY-WORDS	Alcohol, Illicit Substances, Gambling, Gaming, Custodial Facilities for young people
FORMAT	PDF

TITLE

Survey on Addictive Behaviours in Young People in Custody 2023 - Executive Summary

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GRAPHICS

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COVER

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INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes the results of a national study applied in the context of the Custodial Facilities for Young People in partnership with the General Directorate of Reintegration and Prison Services, replicating the study previously carried out in 2015. For more detail of what is exposed, it is advisable to consult the scientific report of the study.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to characterize addictive behaviours in young people in Custodial Facilities, the main problems and intervention needs. In particular:

- **OBJ1:** To characterize addictive behaviours (related to alcoholic beverages, illicit drugs, gaming, gambling) in the population of young people complying with correctional sentences in Custodial Facilities.
- **OBJ2:** To identify profiles of association between addictive behaviours and behaviours that justified the adoption of the correctional sentence.
- **OBJ3:** To diagnose the main problems and needs for intervention in the field of addictive behaviours and dependencies, with these young people.

METHOD

This is a national study with a mixed approach (quantitative and qualitative), including a component of a survey by self-completed questionnaire to all young people admitted to Custodial Facilities in October 2023, a qualitative self-completed questionnaire to professionals of Custodial Facilities (specialized technicians and professional technicians) and a component of semi-structured interviews with the directors of Custodial Facilities.

96 young people participated in the study (response rate of 86%), 37 professionals and the directors of Custodial Facilities (6). This participation was voluntary and anonymous.

RESULTS

YOUNG PEOPLE

SOCIODEMOGRAPHY

The overwhelming majority of young people are male (88%) and identify with the male gender (87%). Their ages range from 13 to 20. The largest proportion is between 15 and 17 years old: 17% are 15 years old, 33% are 16 years old and 22% are 17 years old, with a mean/median age of 16 years. 78% have Portuguese nationality, 17% have another nationality and the remaining 5% have dual nationality. The majority of young people (57%) declared that they lived in Lisbon before entering the Educational Centre, with this district standing out very clearly in relation to the others. The vast majority lived in a house or apartment (71%) when they entered the Educational Centre, although it should be noted that 20% were in an institution (shelter or institution for children or youth), 2% in an annex or improvised house, 2% lived in a rented room, hotel or pension and 1% on the street.

RISK PERCEPTIONS

- Among the psychoactive substances considered (alcoholic beverages, tobacco, cannabis, ecstasy/amphetamines, cocaine, opiates and smartdrugs/New Psychoactive Substances), cannabis seems to be considered the least harmful.
- 44% agree/strongly agree that sporadic cannabis use does not bring major problems.
- 35% have this opinion about regular consumption.

FAMILY, ADDICTIVE BEHAVIORS AND CRIMINAL PRACTICES

- 21% of young people stated that at least one of the people they lived with the longest used to use drugs, 17% that they used to get drunk and 7% that they have or have had problems with games.
- The majority of young people considered that their family members would not accept them drinking alcohol intensively, "getting drunk" (84%), smoking cannabis (71%), taking ecstasy or amphetamine pills (92%) or using other drugs (92%).
- About a third of young people (35%) stated that one or more people in their family with whom they have lived longer are or have been imprisoned.

SCHOOL

- All young people have been retained at least once, most between 3 and 5 times.
- Practically all of them used to miss classes (88%) or had already been suspended or expelled from school at least once (82%) before admission in the Custodial Facility.
- The school attended in the Custodial Facility tends to be more appreciated and considered more useful than the school attended before.

PEERS

- Smoking cannabis is the third most performed activity when socializing with friends in the community (often or always: 46%), the first being walks (often or always: 61%) and the second going to parties/concerts (often or always: 55%).

ACCESSIBILITY TO ILLICIT SUBSTANCES

- The majority of young people considered very easy to obtain cannabis (58%) in the community, within 24 hours, if they wished, with a lower percentage of young people who consider very easy to obtain other drugs: 27% for cocaine, 30% for other stimulants.

PATH IN JUSTICE

- 62% of young people declared that they were serving a sentence due to offense to physical integrity, followed by those who declared that they were serving a sentence due to robbery (56%), theft (45%), threat or coercion (33%) and drug trafficking (32%).
- Of the reasons given for adopting these behaviours, those directly related to the consumption of psychoactive substances are marginal: 9% because they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol, 3% to have money to buy drugs or alcohol.
- 53% of the young people were in a semi-open regime, 30% in a closed regime and 17% in an open regime.

CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

- Practically all the young people surveyed have had an alcoholic beverage at least once in their lives (85%). This prevalence is higher in the case of girls, who in total report this experience of consumption (100%) and a little lower in the case of boys (83%). It is also verified that the consumption experience is progressively more common as older age groups are considered, 67% between 13 and 15 years old, 90% between 16 and 17 years old and 100% between 18 and 20 years old.
- 77% drank an alcoholic beverage at least once in the 12 months prior to custody and 63% in the 30 days before.
- In the 12 months prior to custody, the most mentioned type of beverage is spirits (64%), followed by alcopops (62%), beer (46%) and wine (19%).
- The predominant frequency of consumption in the 30 days prior to custody is 1 to 3 days. In turn, the prevalences of daily or almost daily consumption are: 11% for spirits, 8% for alcopops, 3% for beer and 1% for wine.
- In this time period, 42% were, at least once, binge drinking, 41% slightly intoxicated and 28% severely intoxicated.

CONSUMPTION OF ILLICIT SUBSTANCES

- Around three-quarters (76%) of young people have used an illicit substance at least once in their lifetime. This prevalence is 73% among boys and 100% among girls and is progressively higher as more advanced age groups are considered: 58% between 13 and 15 years old, 79% between 16 and 17 years old and 94% between 18 and 20 years old.
- 66% had used an illicit substance at least once in the 12 months prior to custody, with 58% reporting that they had used it in the 30 days before.
- The most consumed substance is cannabis, with its prevalence in the 12 months prior to custody also being 66%. In turn, the prevalence of use of illicit substances other than cannabis (which includes cases of cannabis use along with that of other illicit substances) is 32% in this time period.
- After cannabis, the most reported substances are ecstasy (31%), volatile inhalants (9%), hallucinogenic mushrooms (8%), hydrochloride cocaine (6%), LSD (4%), non-prescription hypnotics/sedatives (3%), amphetamines (3%), New Psychoactive Substances or smartdrugs (2%), crack cocaine (2%) and hallucinogens other than those identified in the questionnaire (1%).
- According to the Cannabis Abuse Screening Test, 17% of young people have a moderate-risk consumption pattern and 37% high-risk consumption.
- None of the young people mentioned having experience of injecting illicit drugs.

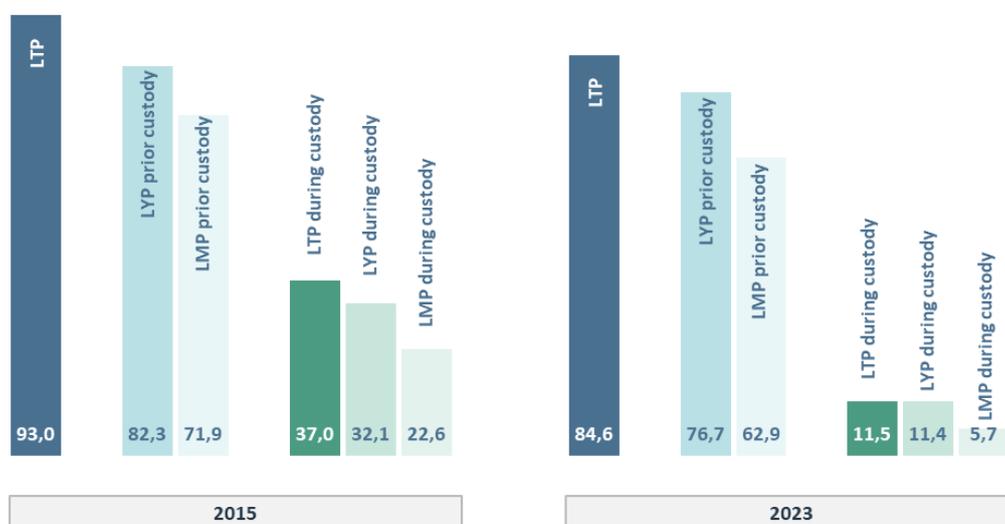
REASONS FOR USING ILLICIT SUBSTANCES

- The top three reasons given were: to forget about problems (55%), because I like the feeling (52%), to have fun with my friends (46%).

CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES IN CUSTODY

- 12% of young people declared that they had already had an alcoholic drink at least once during custody, 11% in the previous 12 months (11% outside the Custodial Facility and 1% inside) and 6% in the 30 days prior to the survey. These are much lower prevalences than those recorded in 2015 (Figure 1).
- The beverages concerned, in the previous 12 months, are spirits (6%), alcopops (3%), beer (1%) and wine (1%).

Figure 1. Consumption of alcoholic beverages before and during custody, in 2015 and 2023



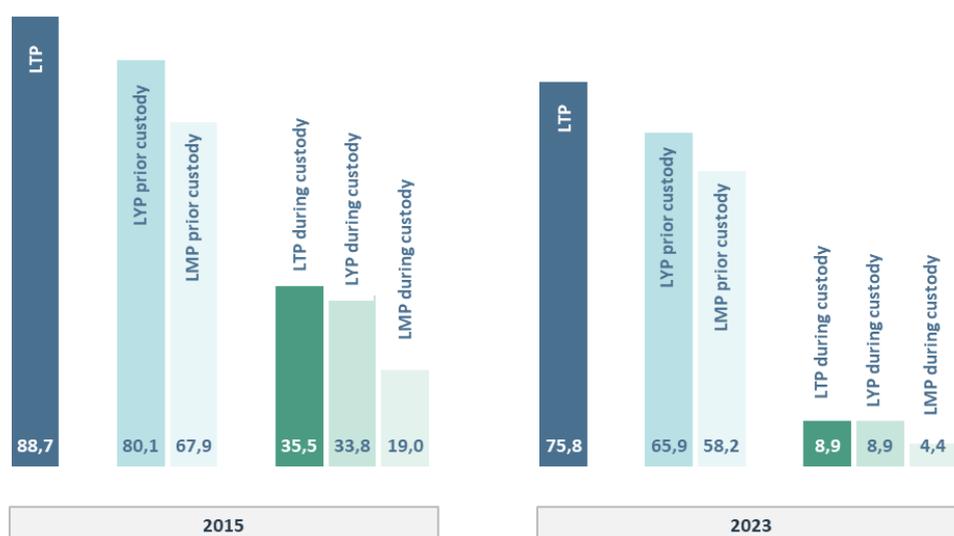
LTP – Lifetime prevalence, LYP – Last year prevalence and LMP – Last month prevalence.

Source: National Survey on Addictive Behaviours in Young People in Custodial Facilities 2015; 2023

CONSUMPTION OF ILLICIT SUBSTANCES IN CUSTODY

- 9% of young people declared that they had already used an illicit substance at least once during custody, 9% in the previous 12 months (4% outside the Custodial Facility and 6% inside) and 4% in the 30 days prior to the survey. These are much lower prevalences than those recorded in 2015 (Figure 2).
- 8% marked cannabis as the most commonly used substance, followed by non-prescribed hypnotics/sedatives (2%), stimulants other than cocaine (1.1%), hallucinogens (1.1%) and inhalants (1.1%).
- The use of the smoked route predominates (8%) in terms of consumption during custody.

Figure 2. Use of illicit substances before and during custody, in 2015 and 2023



LTP – Lifetime prevalence, LYP – Last year prevalence and LMP – Last month prevalence.

Source: National Survey on Addictive Behaviours in Young People in Custodial Facilities 2015; 2023

POLICONSUMPTION

- 52% of young people report that they usually consume more than one psychoactive substance (alcoholic beverages and/or other products) at the same time.
- Referring to the most common associations identified by young people, the following stand out: the mixture of different types of alcoholic beverages with or without juices (39%), the association of alcohol and cannabis derivatives (39%), the mixture of several cannabis derivatives (26%).

GAMING AND GAMBLING PRACTICES

- Practically all young people (96%) declared having gamed in the 12 months prior to custody and about half (57%) declared having gambled.
- Both types (gaming and gambling) are mentioned more by boys than by girls, with the discrepancy being much greater in the case of gambling (98% of boys gamed, for 82% of girls, and 60% of boys gambled, for 36% of girls). The practice of gaming is high in all age groups (100% between 13 and 15 years old, 98% between 16 and 17 years old and 94% between 18 and 20 years old), being, in turn, higher in the 13-15 age group (73%) than in the following ones (54% between 16 and 17 years old and 56% between 18 and 20 years old) in the case of gambling.
- Most players spent 1 hour or more playing, either gaming or gambling, on a typical play day.
- 64% played for 1 hour or more per day on a weekday – on average, 4 hours or more per day (median 3 hours).
- 67% played 1 hour or more per day on a weekend day – on average, 5 hours or more per day (median of 4 hours).
- The majority indicated gaming at least 4 times a week (63%).
- The most played gaming games are: shooter games (74%), sports games (73%), action and adventure games (60%).
- The largest share indicated gambling less than 4 times a week (36%). 21% gambled 1 time a month or less, 1% gambled 2-4 times a month, and 14% gambled 2-3 times a week.
- The most played gambling games are: card or dice games (39%), sports betting games (38%), lotteries (25%) and slot machines (21%).

MOTIVES FOR PLAYING GAMES

- The most common reasons for playing were: to pass the time (55%), and for pleasure (53%). In second place are references to conviviality (35%), money (35%) and challenge (35%).

PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AND/OR PLAYING GAMES

- 59% have experienced at least one of the problems presented in the questionnaire in their lifetime, due to the consumption of alcohol, illicit substances and/or playing games.
- 41% due to alcohol consumption, 36% due to illicit substance use and 20% due to playing games.
- The most mentioned problems related to the consumption of alcoholic beverages are: involvement in acts of violence (32%), situations of emotional discomfort (13%), behavioural problems at home (9%).
- The most mentioned problems related to the consumption of illicit substances are: involvement in acts of violence (26%), problems with performance at school/work (14%), situations of emotional discomfort (11%).
- The most mentioned problems related to playing games are: behavioural problems at home (12%), performance problems at school/work (8%), situations of emotional discomfort (8%), involvement in acts of violence (7%).

CONSUMPTION OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AND BEHAVIOURS CONFIGURED BY LAW AS A CRIME

- 42% have committed at least once the situations for which they are serving a sentence under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs. 37% with illicit substances and 30% with alcoholic beverages. In either case, this association was not the norm.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2015 AND 2023

- In general, young people surveyed in 2023 have lower prevalence of psychoactive substance use than in 2015, especially in the younger group (13-15 years old), which in 2023 is proportionally larger.
- The main exception refers to binge drinking and severe drunkenness, most reported by alcohol consumers in 2023.
- Reasons for committing offences directly linked to psychoactive substance use (needing the money to consume, being high or because of abstinence syndrome) are less mentioned in 2023.
- Compared to young people surveyed in 2015, they appear to have a higher perception of the risk of cannabis and other illicit substance use, but a lower perception of the risk of ecstasy/amphetamine use.

- The perception of easy access to illicit substances in the community decreased significantly between 2015 and 2023.
- The experience of problems attributed to the use of psychoactive substances is much lower in 2023 compared to 2015.

KEY POINTS FOR THE INTERVENTION: BEFORE CUSTODY

- Early surveillance and signaling in the community.
- Effective articulation of the various agents of the community.
- Close monitoring of the family, namely for the development of knowledge and skills.
- Development of environmental conditions in the community that promote social integration and the adoption of healthier lifestyles.

KEY POINTS FOR THE INTERVENTION: DURING CUSTODY

- Initial evaluation of consumption to adapt the educational project.
- Adequacy of the intervention to the level of risks of consumption.
- Articulation with the community regarding ongoing interventions prior to custody, as well as new interventions (e.g. addiction treatment teams).
- Sufficient and valued professionals, with specialized training.
- Specialized prevention interventions, structured, continued over time and systematically replicated.

KEY POINTS FOR THE INTERVENTION: AFTER CUSTODY

- Continuity of the specialized dependencies intervention after leaving the Custodial Facility.
- Close monitoring of the young person with a view to their reintegration.
- Election of a reference figure for the young person based on an effective articulation between community structures.
- Creation of conditions for this reference figure to be able to effectively carry out this close monitoring.



Empoderar. *Empower.*
Cuidar. *Care.*
Proteger. *Protect.*



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