

Prevalence of ever-use of drugs and the associated factors among adolescents in Malaysia



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Introduction

- Drug abuse is detrimental, and excessive drug usage is a worldwide problem.
- Drug usage typically begins during adolescence and this group are most prone to addiction.
- They have a strong inclination toward experimentation, curiosity, susceptibility to peer pressure, and poor self-worth, which makes them vulnerable to drug abuse¹.

Objective

The study aimed to determine the prevalence of ever-use of drugs and the associated factors among adolescents in Malaysia.

Methodology

- A sub-analysis study of the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2022: Adolescent Health Survey was conducted among secondary school students in Malaysia.
- Self-administered interview using a structured and validated questionnaire was used to obtain data from adolescents aged 13-17 years.
- Multivariate binary logistic regression was used to determine factors associated with the ever-use of drugs.

Results

- The prevalence of ever-use of drugs was 5.2% (95% CI: 4.7-5.7%).
- Among 33,523 adolescents, most of them were 13 years old (21.3%), females (53.8%), Malays (69.0%), living together with married parents (80.0%), and in Form One (21.5%).
- Around 27.2% had depression, 12.1% ever smoked tobacco, and 15.8% ever drank alcohol. (Table 1)
- Multiple logistic regression analysis revealed that sex, ethnic groups, and parental marital status were associated with the outcome.
- Those who had depression, ever smoked tobacco, and ever drank alcohol were more likely to have ever-use of drugs. (Table 2).

Table 1: Characteristics of Respondent by Socio-demographic (N=33,523)

Socio-demographic Characteristics	n	%
Age		
13	7,131	21.3
14	6,902	20.6
15	6,502	19.4
16	6,738	20.1
17	6,042	18.0
18	208	0.6
Sex		
Male	15,493	46.2
Female	18,030	53.8
Ethnicity		
Malay	23,125	69
Chinese	5,085	15.2
Indian	1,556	4.6
Bumiputera Sabah	1,722	5.1
Bumiputera Sarawak	1,241	3.7
Others	794	2.4
Parent Marital Status		
Married and living together	26,806	80
Married but living apart	1,264	3.8
Divorced	2,484	7.4
Widow o Widower	1,788	5.3
Separated	572	1.7
I do not know	595	1.8
Form		
1	7,216	21.5
2	6,902	20.6
3	6,460	19.3
4	6,756	20.2
5	6,189	18.5
Depression		
Yes	9,103	27.2
Ever smoke		
Yes	4,047	12.1
Ever drink		
Yes	5,270	15.8

Table 2 : Factors associated of ever drugs use among Adolescent in Malaysia (N=33,523)

Characteristics	Odds ratio	95% CI		P Value
		Lower	Upper	
Sex				
Male	1.00			
Female	0.61	0.51	0.72	<0.01*
Ethnicity				
Melayu	1.00			
Chinese	0.51	0.36	0.71	<0.01*
Indian	1.79	1.24	2.59	0.02*
Bumiputera Sabah	0.63	0.40	1.00	0.05
Bumiputera Sarawak	0.31	0.20	0.48	<0.01*
Others	0.60	0.38	0.92	0.02*
Parent Marital Status				
I do not know	1.00			
Married and living together	0.58	0.42	0.82	0.02*
Married but living apart	0.71	0.49	1.05	0.09
Divorced	0.45	0.30	0.66	<0.01*
Widow o Widower	0.57	0.38	0.87	0.01*
Separated	0.46	0.26	0.81	0.08*
Depression	1.88	1.62	2.18	<0.01*
Ever smoke	3.46	2.98	4.03	<0.01*
Ever drink	2.96	2.24	3.93	<0.01*

*significant different at $\alpha=0.05$

Analysis was done using complex sample logistic regression analysis.

Discussion

- This study showed that the prevalence of ever-use of drugs among adolescents' respondents was 5.2% (95% CI:4.7,5.7) (N=33,523).
- Our study showed a relatively low prevalence of ever-use of drugs among adolescents compared to a similar adolescents in Brazil (17.1%)³ and England (25%)⁴.
- There were significant associations between ever-use drugs among adolescents with sex, ethnic groups and parental status; which concurred with finding from in Brazil³ and previous study in Malaysia⁵.
- Our study also showed those who had depression, ever smoked tobacco and ever consumed alcohol were more likely to have ever used drugs; similar with previous studies^{6,7,8}

Conclusion

- The prevalence of ever-use of drugs among adolescents in Malaysia is alarming.
- Relevant holistic approaches should be strengthened not only by relevant government agencies but also by the private sector and non-governmental organizations by promoting protective factors while reducing risk factors in programs involving adolescents prevent and control drug abuse.

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