

Do male and female adolescents differ in the effect of individual and family characteristics on their use of psychotropic drugs?

E. Spitz¹, N. Chau^{2,3}, R. Prédine³, M. Baumann⁴

¹University Paul Verlaine - Metz, Laboratoire Lorrain de Psychologie, 2LP, EA 4165, Metz, France;

²INSERM, U669, University Paris-Sud, University Paris Descartes, Paris, France;

³INSERM, U420, WHO Collaborative Centre, Faculté de Médecine, Vandoeuvre-lès-Nancy, France;

⁴University of Luxembourg, Integrative research unit on Social and Individual DEvelopment (INSIDE), Luxembourg

Objectives

In Europe and the USA, general practitioners routinely prescribe psychotropic drugs. Several studies have reported increased prescription rates to adolescents. The use of such medication represents a major public health problem. Its potential consequences include morbidity, injuries, mortality, deleterious effects on quality of life, and the cost of remedial treatments

Individual and family characteristics may influence psychotropic drug use. In the literature few studies have investigated their concurrent effects in boys and girls. A better understanding of this issue would be expected to help target preventative measures appropriately, and may have relevance to clinical practice and health promotion.

The study assessed the effects of individual and family characteristics on frequent “psychotropic” drug intake during the previous 12 months (for headache, tiredness, nervousness, anxiety, insomnia) among male and female adolescents.

Results

Of the 3,294 pupils contacted, 2,396 (73%) participated in the study

Table 1. Characteristics of subjects (2,396 pupils): %

Boys	42.1
Age (yr)	
<12	15.6
13-14	16.8
15-16	36.6
>17	31.0
Body mass index (kg/m ²)	
<18	21.5
18-21	61.9
≥22	16.6
Current smoker	20.5
Alcohol consumption (sometimes or frequent)	37.6
Illicit drug use (sometimes or frequent)	7.2
Lives with both father and mother	94.7
Father or mother often away	12.7
Poor family atmosphere	28.7
Frequent tiredness during the daytime	44.1
Self-reported personality	
Worried	48.1
Easily irritated	38.3
Not organized	39.0
Solitary	27.7
Not serious	23.9
Frequent psychotropic drug use during the previous 12 months	43.0

Design and methods

The study population comprised all 3,294 subjects attending two middle schools and two high schools in an urban area of Nancy in north-eastern France.

The investigation was approved by relevant personnel at the schools involved: the Nancy-Metz regional education authority, the Meurthe-et-Moselle school inspectorate, and the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés. Parents gave written consent.

The study protocol was as follows: a letter requesting participation was sent to parents or guardians, and three weeks later, subjects completed a self-administered anonymous questionnaire (during school time and under the supervision of their sports or physical training teachers) covering gender, age, body mass index, smoking, alcohol use, illicit drug use, tiredness during the daytime, self-reported personality traits, family conditions, and frequent psychotropic drug intake.

Data were analysed using adjusted odds ratios (ORa) computed with logistic models.

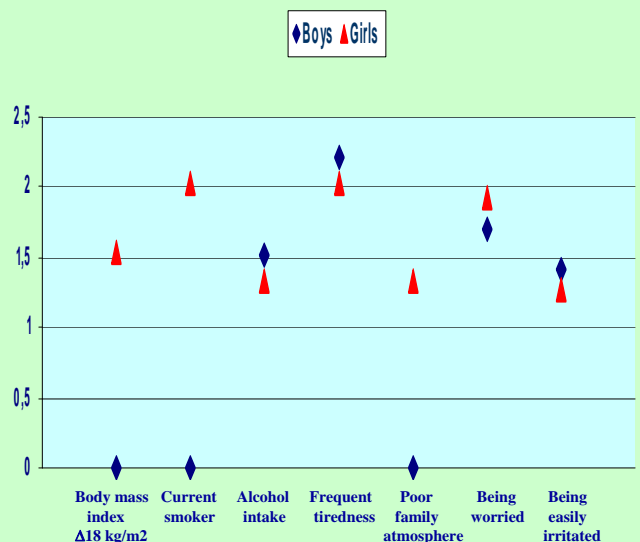


Fig. 1: Relationships between individual and family characteristics and frequent psychotropic drug use: Adjusted ORa and 95% CI

Conclusions

Individual and family characteristics have marked influences on psychotropic drug use among both male and female adolescents.

The adolescents and their parents, the staff at the schools and the practitioners concerned, should be informed about the problem. The adolescents should be helped to improve their living conditions, paying particular attention to tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use, tiredness, satisfaction with body image, and family atmosphere.

Pupils with certain personality traits warrant more attention and more help to address their problems and to limit psychotropic drug use. When young people are prescribed psychotropic drugs, they should be informed about how to optimize the benefit/risk ratio.