

YOUTH AND DRUGS IN SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTRIES: A PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGE

First Comparative Study of Drug Use in the Secondary School Student Population in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

September 2006

Sub-Regional Drug Information and Research System in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay

Complete Spanish version can be found at www.cicad.oas.org/oid

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To obtain information, please consult the following websites: www.sedronar.gov.ar; www.sinaltid.rree.gov.bo; www.conacedrogas.cl; www.consep.gov.ec; www.devida.gob.pe; www.infodrogas.gub.uy; www.onudd.org.pe; www.cicad.oas.org.

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Chile: María Teresa Chadwick, Executive Secretary of the National Council for Narcotics Control (CONACE)

Ecuador: Oswaldo Montalvo, Executive Secretary of the National Council for the Control of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances (CONSEP)

Peru: Rómulo Pizarro, Executive President of the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (DEVIDA); Nils Ericsson, former Executive President (DEVIDA)

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The *First Comparative Study of Drug Use in the Secondary School Student Population* was considerably enriched and gained greater regional relevance with the inclusion of equivalent information on Brazil, Colombia and Paraguay, for which reason we are deeply grateful to the authorities in those countries.

FOREWORD

Since it began in 2000, the Subregional Drug Abuse Information and Research System, comprising the national drug commissions of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay, has been sharing experiences and generating scientific and up-to-date information on the status of drug consumption in the six countries, with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Its work has included conducting over 20 national studies among the general population, schoolchildren, and labor.

The Subregional Drug Information and Research System entered a new phase in its development in 2004, when it was joined by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) of the Organization of American States (OAS); more specifically, its Inter-American Observatory on Drugs (OID). In the framework of a broader strategic partnership, and with the express desire to address common challenges, while sharing the costs and avoiding duplication, the Subregional System embarked on new activities designed to boost national capacities for epidemiological surveillance, as well as to enhance the scientific rigor of national studies and to achieve comparability of the data from the different countries.

True to its international vocation, the Subregional Drug Information and Research System agreed in 2005 to carry out a program of national studies of drug use among the secondary school student population, simultaneously and using the same model in each country. It was also decided to produce, in 2006, a comparative study of drug use in the six countries, based on the findings of the national surveys: the first such study in South America. Thanks to the interest triggered in other countries in the region, and with a view to making the comparative study an even more representative tool for the region, the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs incorporated the findings of equivalent studies in Brazil, Colombia, and Paraguay. The Subregional Drug Information and Research System aims to include more countries in Latin America in similar studies in the coming years.

This First Comparative Study of Drug Use among the Secondary School Student Population provides information on nine South American countries, based on an extensive sample of 347,771 students representing a universe of 9,376,203 schoolchildren. Apart from providing a diagnostic assessment of the extent of drug use in the nine countries, the study lists the drugs for which demand is greatest and the risk and protection factors associated with their use. The information is broken down by sex, age, and type of educational establishment, as well as other data and categories.

We trust that the First Comparative Study of Drug Use in the Secondary School Student Population will help stimulate greater interest and broader knowledge in our societies regarding the dangers of drug use in adolescents and, in particular, among secondary school students in the region.

We also hope that this study will further promote international cooperation and become an important input for national authorities, civil society organizations, and academic circles when it comes to developing policies, programs, and new research projects geared to improving prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society.

ALDO LALE-DEMOZ
Representative in Ecuador and Peru
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UNODC

FRANCISCO CUMSILLE GARIB
Coordinator of the
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on Drugs
CICAD-OAS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

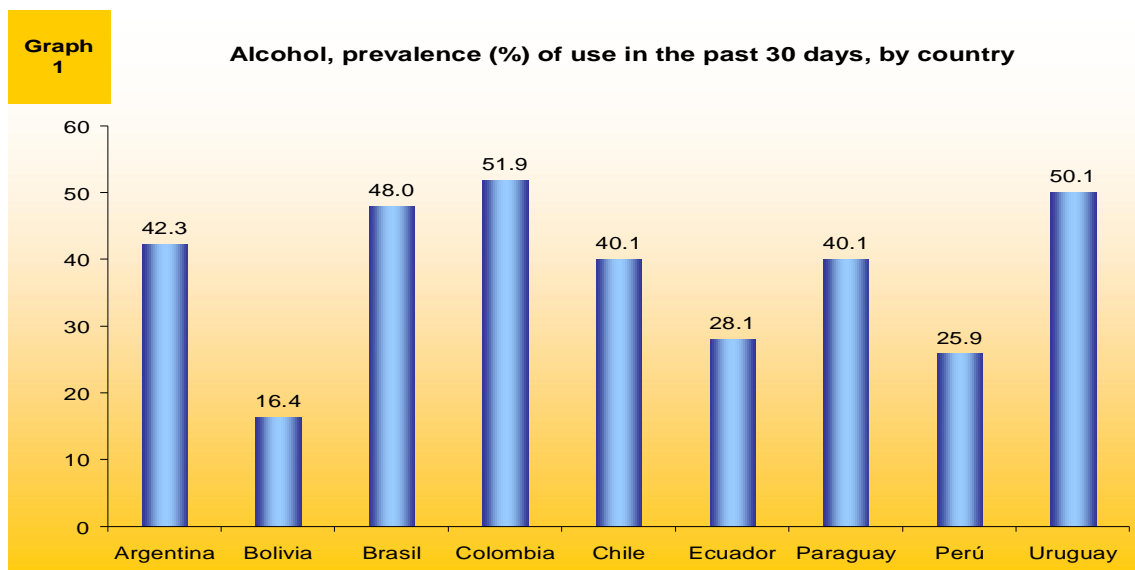
The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Inter-American Observatory on Drugs of CICAD/OAS, and the national anti-drug commissions in each country included in this report, present the *First Comparative Survey of Drug Prevalence in the Secondary School Student Population in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay*. It should be noted that six of these countries are part of a UNODC sub-regional project carried out with support provided by CICAD/OAS, which, over successive technical meetings, by consensus adapted methodologies so as to ensure scientific rigor in comparing results. The other three countries, which used equivalent methodologies, were incorporated in this report subsequently. Accordingly, the results of this survey provide an account of the scale of drug use and of a number of associated factors in secondary school students mostly between 14 and 17 years of age. Following are the key findings of this survey.

EXTENT OF DRUG USE AMONG STUDENTS

LICIT DRUGS

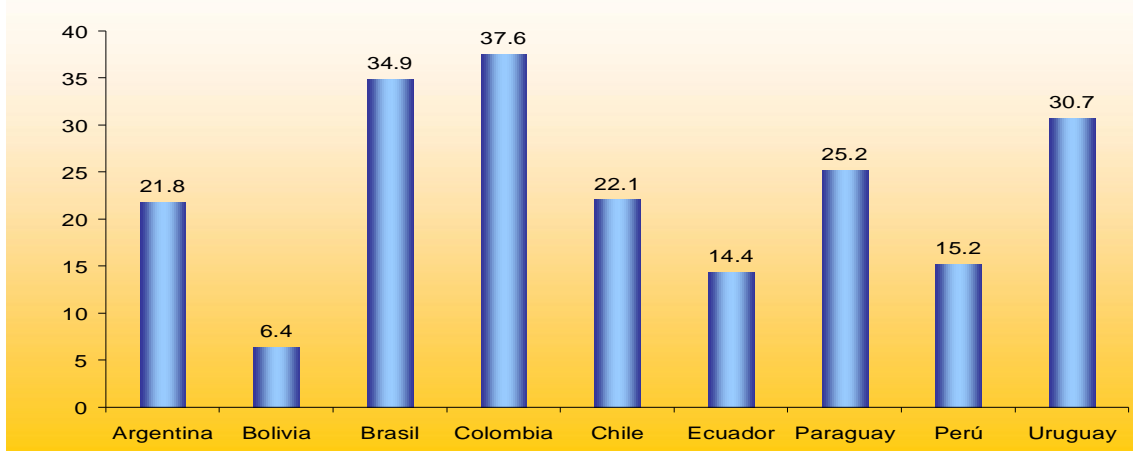
Alcohol and tobacco

Alcohol is the most widely consumed drug among secondary school students in the nine countries covered by this survey (Graph 1). The highest rate of current use, or past-month prevalence of alcohol was recorded in Colombia, with 51.9%, followed by Uruguay with 50.1%; in other words, one in two students consumed an alcoholic beverage in the month prior to the study. In those countries alcohol use, both in boys and girls, is higher compared to other countries. In Colombia and Brazil the average starting age for alcohol use in students is lower than in the other countries, with prevalence rates of 37.6% and 34.9%, respectively, in students aged 14 years or under (Graph 2). The lowest alcohol prevalence was found in students in Bolivia, with 16.4%, where the rate of use among the youngest age group was also lowest at 6.4%.



Graph 2

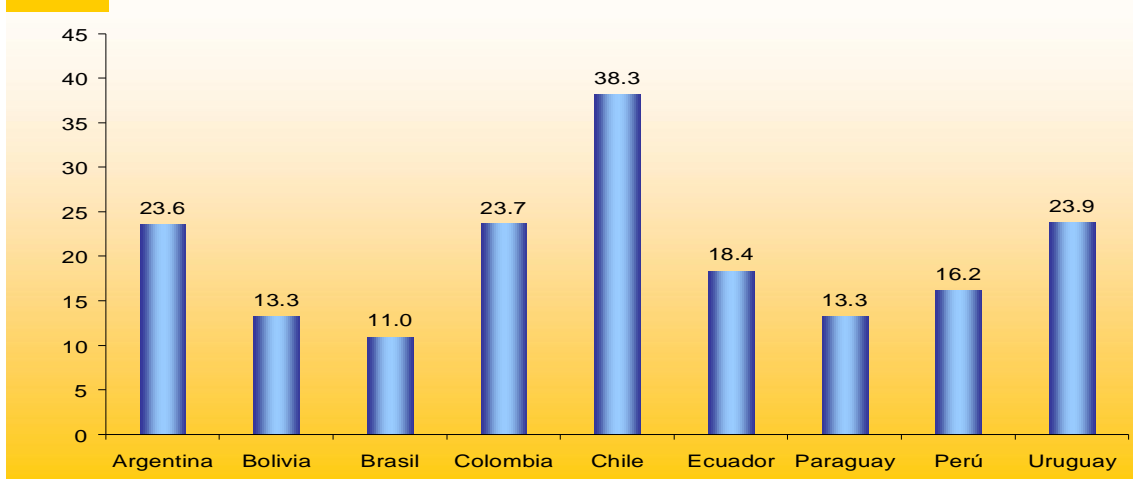
Alcohol, prevalence (%) of use in the past 30 days by students aged 14 or under, by country



As regards tobacco use, students in Chile were the clear leaders with a past-month prevalence of 38.3% (Graph 3); also Chile showed a higher rate of use among girls (41.3%) than boys (35.4%). The starting age for tobacco use among Chilean students is very low with past-month prevalence as high as 25.5% in students age 14 years or under. In other words, one in four students smokes tobacco before they turn 15 (Graph 4). The lowest past-month prevalence for tobacco was recorded in students in Brazil, at 11%, where use among the youngest age group was also lowest, at 4.8%.

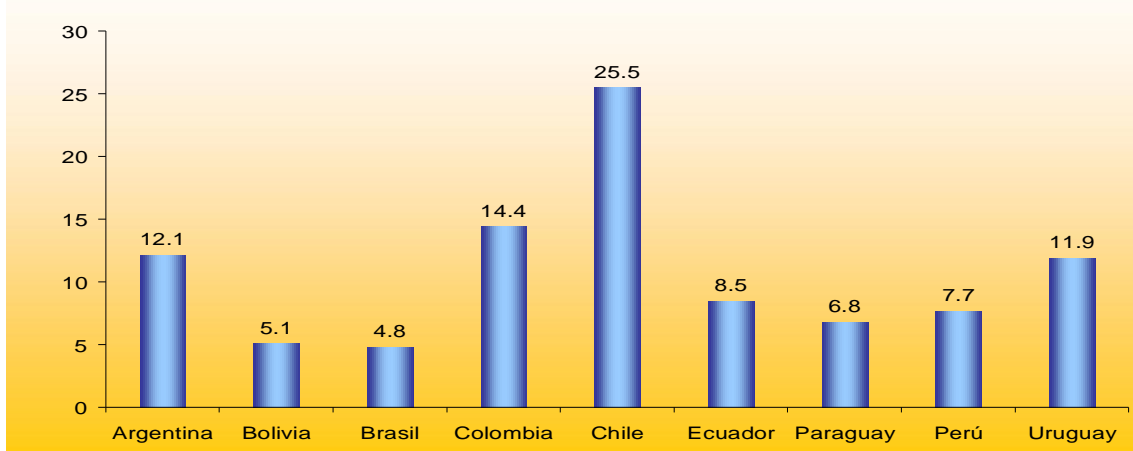
Graph 3

Tobacco, prevalence (%) of use in the past 30 days, by country



Graph 4

Tobacco, prevalence (%) of use in the past 30 days by students aged 14 or under, by country

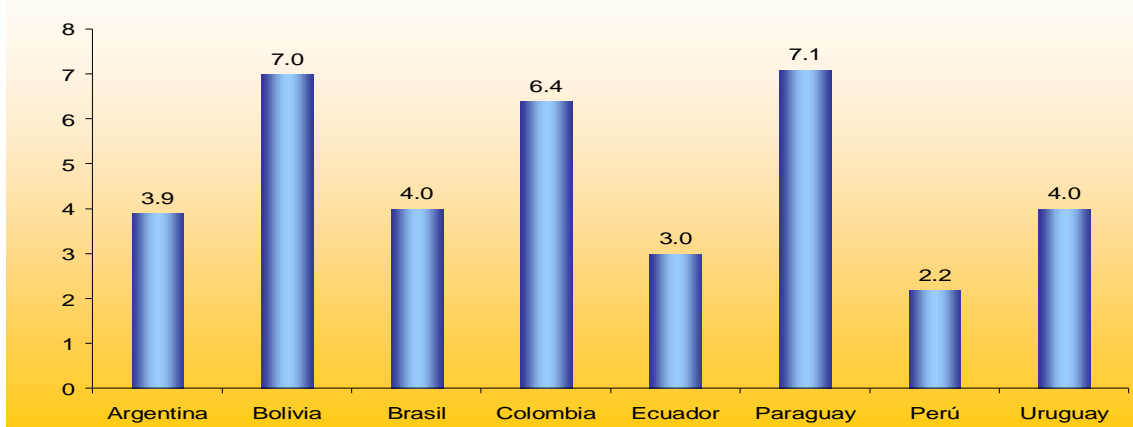


Use of Pharmaceuticals without a Medical Prescription

Use of benzodiazepine tranquilizers, such as diazepam and alprazolam, and of synthetic stimulants, such as amphetamines and methamphetamines, without a medical prescription, is also alarmingly high in South American secondary schools. The past-year prevalence for tranquilizer abuse (Graph 5) was found to be 7.1% in Paraguay, 7.0% in Bolivia, and 6.4% in Colombia. For its part, past-year prevalence for amphetamine-type stimulants was recorded at 3.5% and 3.4% in Colombia and Brazil, respectively, and 3.1% in Bolivia. In view of these results there is an urgent need for more education against self-medication along with the application of more effective policies to restrict access to psychotropic drugs for persons without a medical prescription. It should be mentioned that the lowest level of tranquilizer use without a medical prescription was documented in students in Peru, at 2.2%. The lowest prevalence of stimulant misuse was also noted in students in Peru at 0.7%, followed by Ecuador and Uruguay at 1.3% and 1.6%, respectively (Graph 6).

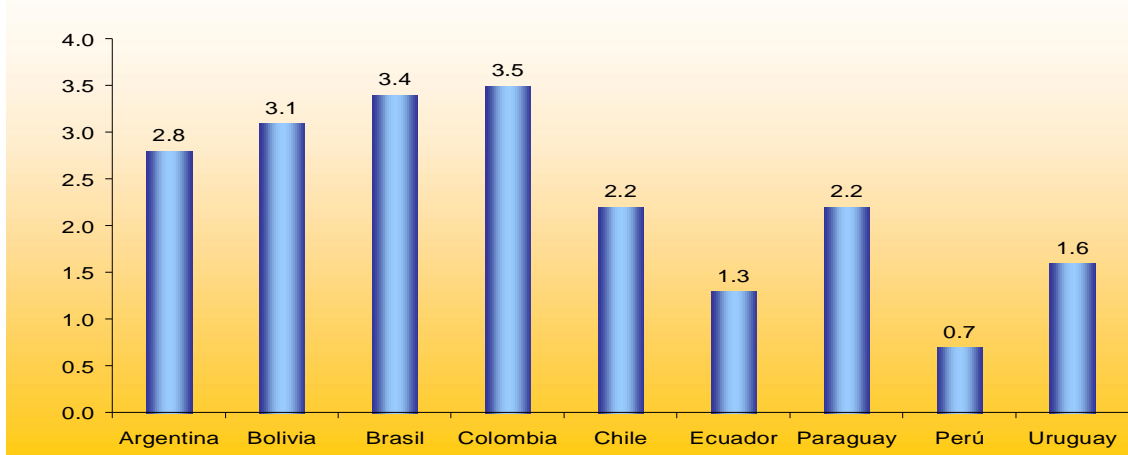
Graph 5

Benzodiazepine tranquilizers without a medical prescription, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country



Graph 6

Amphetamine-type stimulants without a medical prescription, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country



ILLICIT DRUGS

Marijuana

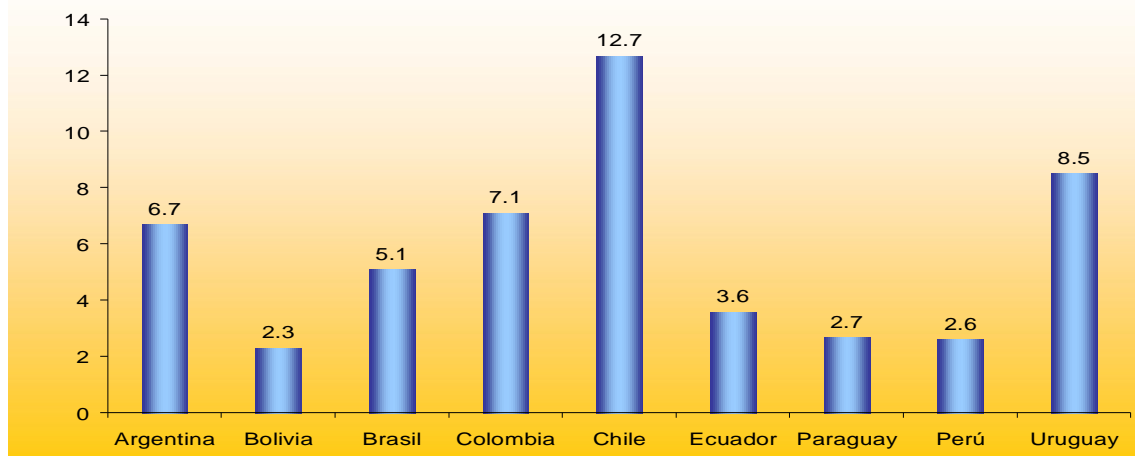
The findings on illicit drug use among secondary school students, according to past-year prevalence or recent drug use, show that marijuana is the illicit drug of choice among South American students, with the sole exception of Brazil, where inhalants are unquestionably the most widely consumed drug.

The highest past-year prevalence for marijuana use (Graph 7) was found among Chilean students at 12%, followed by Uruguay, at 8.5%. However, there is a unique situation in both countries that sets them apart from the rest: in both Chile and Uruguay more than 60% of students use marijuana exclusively; 62.3% in the case of Chile and 74% in Uruguay. Furthermore, among students in Chile, 24% use marijuana and only one other drug, leaving no more than 13% of secondary school students who use only drugs other than marijuana. With respect to students in Uruguay, 19% use marijuana and one other drug, while only 7% of students use only drugs other than marijuana. In all the other countries the proportion of students that use only drugs other than marijuana is higher: 20% in the case of Argentina, 35% in Paraguay, and over 35% in the other countries. The country with the highest prevalence for use of a drug other than marijuana is Brazil, where 71% of secondary school students use other drugs, in particular inhalants.

Marijuana use is consistently higher among male students than among female students in all countries, a situation that is repeated for all other illicit drugs with the sole exception of recent use of ecstasy and inhalants in Chile, where the prevalence among girls is approximately the same as for boys for ecstasy, and slightly higher for inhalants.

Graph 7

Marijuana, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country

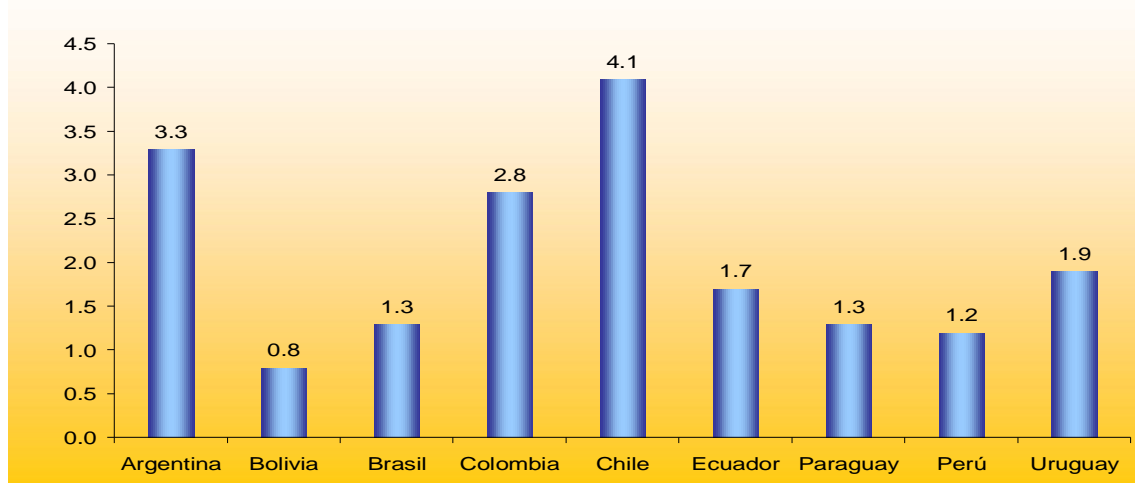


Returning to the findings for marijuana, the highest level of use among the youngest age group for this drug occurs among students in Chile, with past-year prevalences of 4.1% in students aged 14 years or under, followed by Argentinean students with prevalences of 3.3% (Graph 8).

The lowest rates of recent marijuana use were found in students in Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay, at 2.2%, 2.6% and 2.7%, respectively (Graph 7). These three countries, together with Brazil, also register the lowest prevalences of marijuana use in students aged 14 or under, at 0.8% and 1.2% in Bolivia and Peru, and 1.3% in the both Paraguay and Brazil (Graph 8).

Graph 8

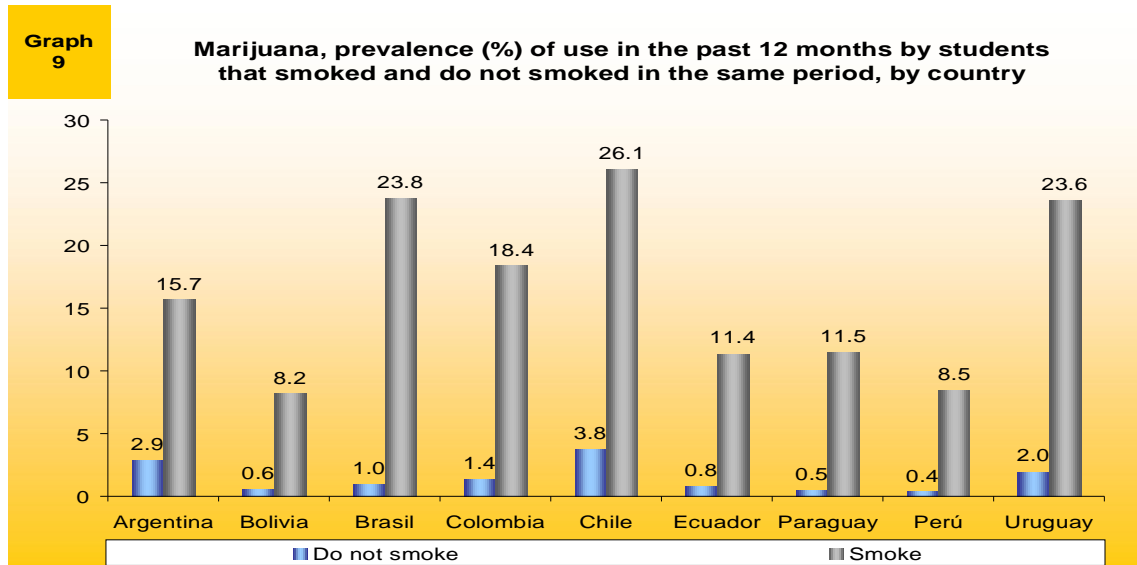
Marijuana, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months by students aged 14 or under, by country



Association between Tobacco, Alcohol, and Illicit Drugs

This study highlights the notable association between the use of licit drugs, such as alcohol and tabaco, with that of illicit drugs. In each of the countries, the prevalences of marijuana are much higher among those students that smoke tobacco as compared to those who do not smoke. Examples that stand out are Chile, with an annual prevalence rate of 3.8% among those who do

not smoke, and 26.1% among those who do smoke; while in Bolivia and Paraguay the annual rate of marijuana use is around 0.5% among those who do not smoke, but rises to 8.2% and 11.5% respectively for those who do smoke (graph 9). This association is repeated in the case of tobacco with coca paste and with tobacco and cocaine, clearly demonstrating that the likelihood of using illicit drugs increases in those students that smoke tobacco. The association between the use of alcoholic beverages and illicit drugs is as strong as that which was described in the case of tobacco and illicit drugs. The past year prevalences for marijuana in Colombia are 1.4% among those who do not drink alcohol and rise to 18.4% compared with those who drink. In all the countries, the past year prevalence rates for marihuana, pasta base, and cocaine increased rapidly among those students who also drank alcohol during the same period.

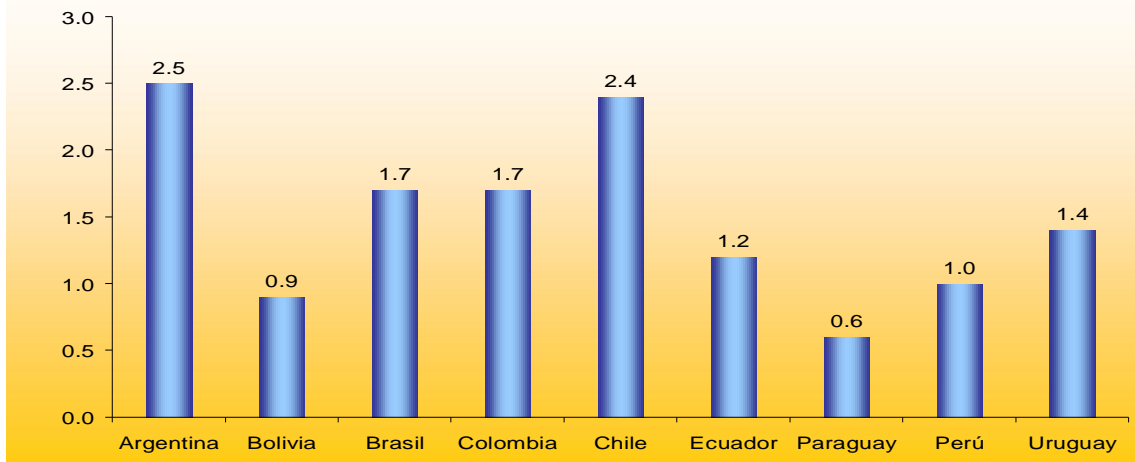


Cocaine and Coca Paste

The highest rates of recent consumption of cocaine and coca paste occur among students in Argentina and Chile. The levels of cocaine use are similar in these two countries: 2.5% in Argentina and 2.4% in Chile. Nevertheless, in the case of coca paste, the past year prevalence in Chile is 2.1% and among Argentinian students, 1.6% (graphs 10 and 12). Both countries also demonstrate high use among the youngest age group. Still, in this last case, the rates of recent use are higher among Argentine students at 2.1% for cocaine and 1.6% for coca paste, while in Chile, use among the youngest age group showed rates of 1.4% and 1.5% for cocaine and coca paste respectively (graphs 11 and 13).

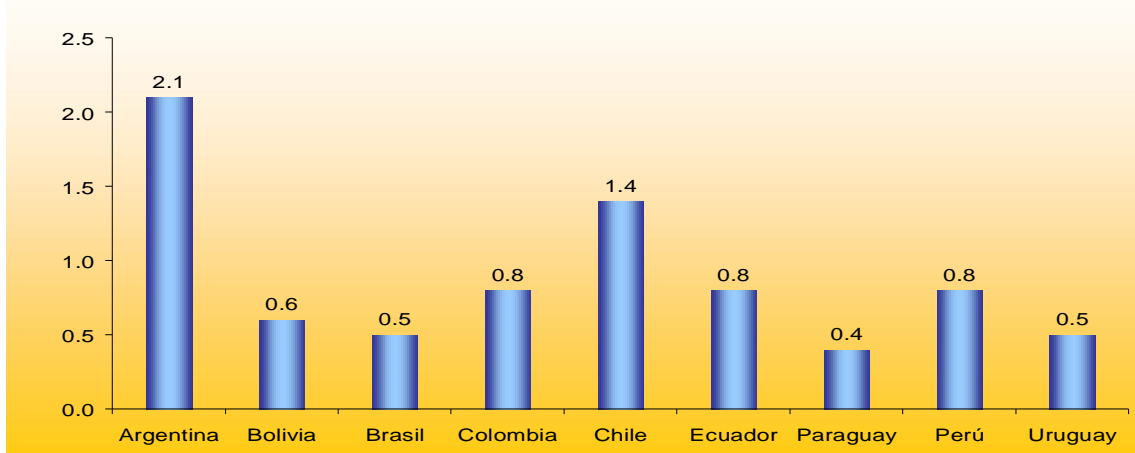
Graph 10

Cocaine, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country



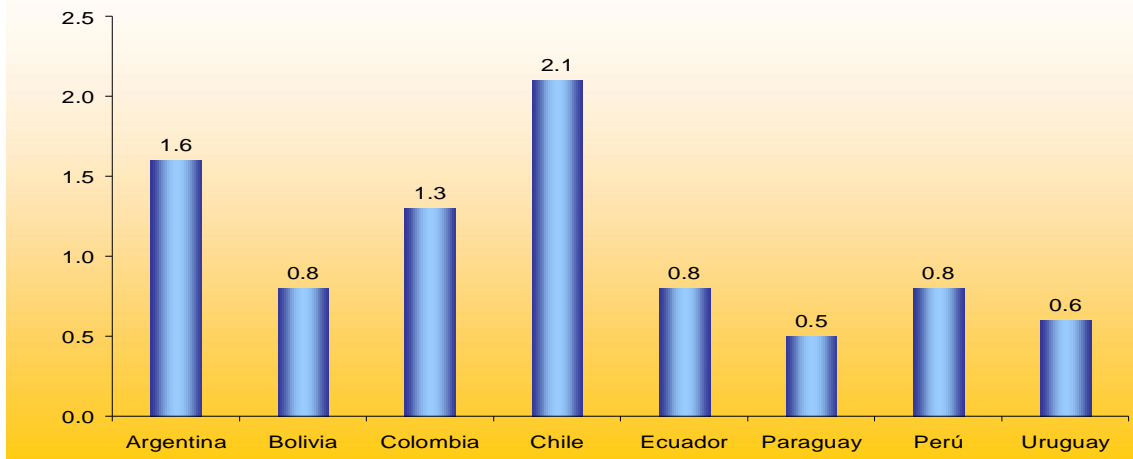
Graph 11

Cocaine, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months by students aged 14 or under, by country



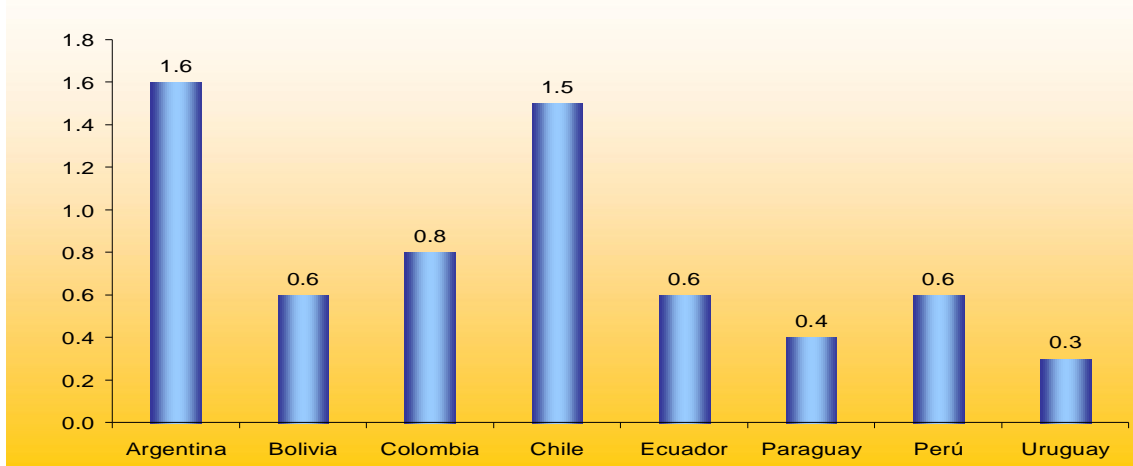
Graph 12

Coca paste, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country



Graph 13

Coca paste, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months by students aged 14 or under, by country

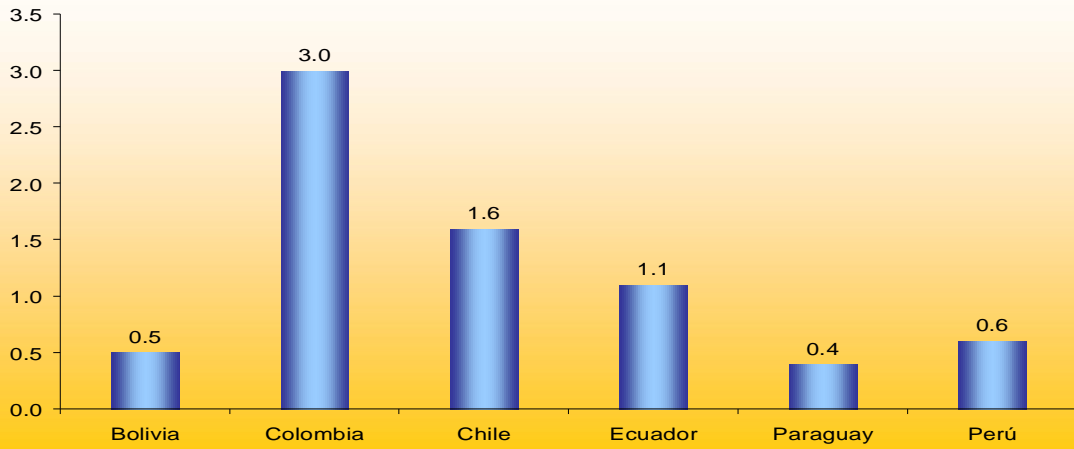


Ecstasy and Inhalants

Students in Colombia record the highest past-year prevalence for ecstasy at 3%, followed by students in Chile, at 1.6% (Graph 14). It should be borne in mind that Brazil did not measure abuse of this drug, and Argentina and Uruguay only measured lifetime prevalence, for which reason recent ecstasy abuse is only compared in six countries. Inhalant use in Brazilian students is the highest by far, with past-year prevalence at 15.3%, four times higher than the country that comes next, Colombia, which records a rate of 3.5% (Graph 15).

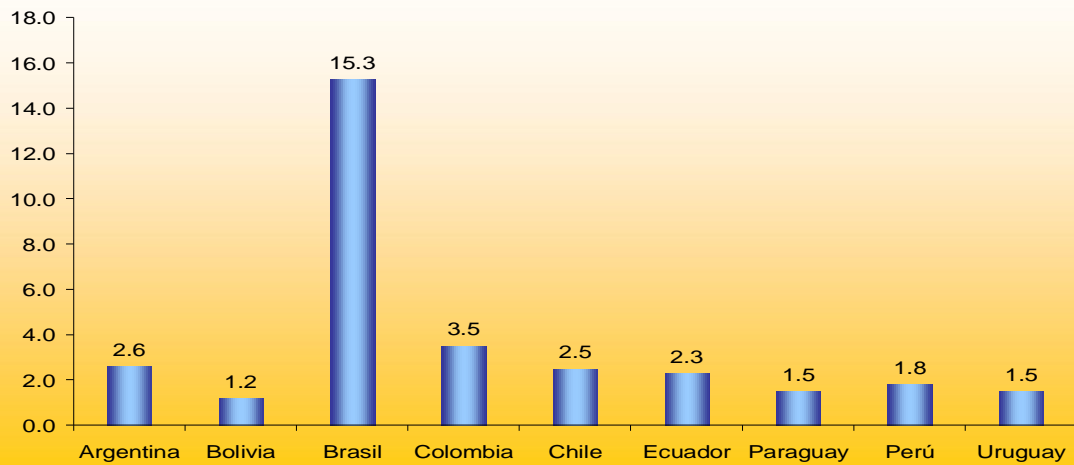
Graph 14

MDMA-Ecstasy, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country



Graph 15

Inhalants, prevalence (%) of use in the past 12 months, by country

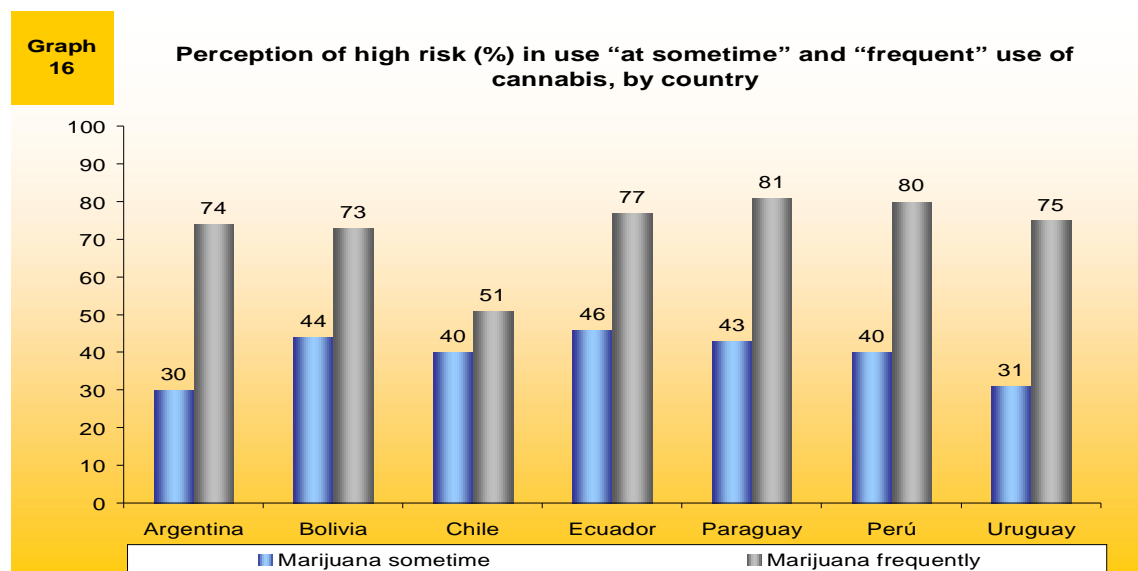


FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH DRUG USE

Perception of High Risk

Perception of the risks associated with drug use is a very important factor to bear in mind for demand reduction policies in all countries. International studies confirm that a higher perceived risk reduces drug prevalence and, conversely, a low perceived risk increases it.

This survey confirmed a low proportion of students perceived high risk associated with experimental or occasional marijuana use: the proportion of students in the different countries who regard any marijuana use as a high-risk activity ranges from 30% to 45%, which leaves at least 55% who do not perceive it as a high risk behavior; in other words, overall, the majority of students do perceive that using marijuana puts a person at risk of harm. Nevertheless, the proportion of students who perceive frequent marijuana use as a high risk is over 70% in most of the countries. The case of Chile is not comparable with the other countries because the question asked was if the students perceived the use of marijuana once or twice a week as a high risk. In this case only 51% of students in Chile perceived its use as a high risk; Chile is the country with the highest prevalence rates for this drug. The largest proportion of secondary school students who perceived frequent marijuana use as a high risk was in Paraguay, at 81%; Paraguay is one of the two countries with the lowest marijuana prevalence rates (Graph 16).

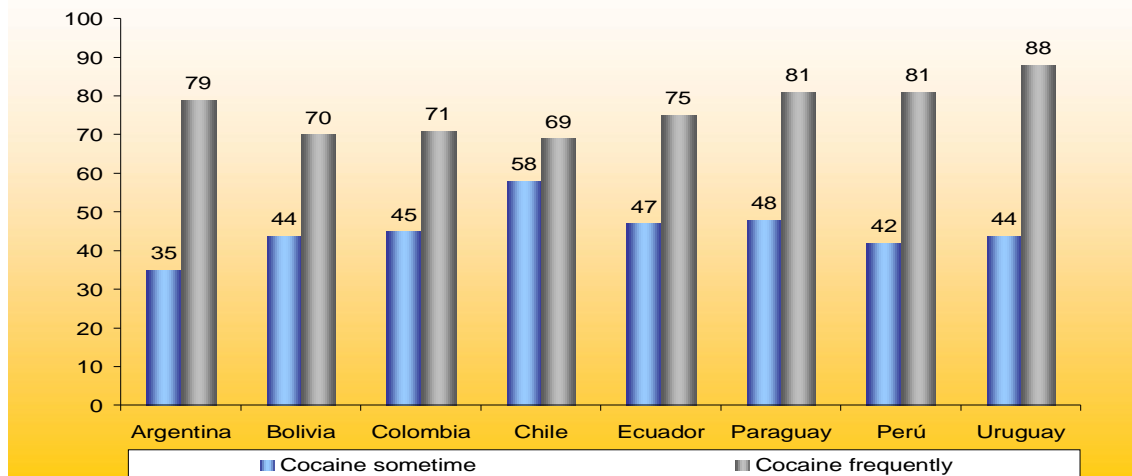


**Chile: Figures correspond to perception of high risk in use of marijuana "tried once or twice" (at one time) and "smoked once or twice a week" (frequently).*

Similar to the case of marijuana, the perception that there is high risk associated with cocaine, coca paste or crack use (at some time) is low among students in the different countries and is less than 50% in all of them except Chile, where the perception of high risk for cocaine abuse was 58%, although this finding arose from a different question: "use of cocaine on one or two occasions". That said, the lowest student perception of frequent cocaine use as a high risk in all the countries was 69%. The highest risk perception for frequent cocaine use was found in Uruguayan students, at 88% (Graph 17) and, in addition, this country records the lowest prevalence rates for use of this drug. The perception of high risk in the frequent use of coca paste or crack in students in almost all the countries was consistently above 70%, the only exception being Ecuador, where only 58% of students associated a high risk with the frequent use of these drugs.

Graph 17

Perception of high risk (%) in use "at some time" and "frequent" use of cocaine, by country



*Chile: Figures correspond to perception of high risk in use of cocaine "tried once or twice" (at one time). The datum for risk in frequent use is the same as for other countries.

Occassions of Having Been Offered Drugs for use or for purchase

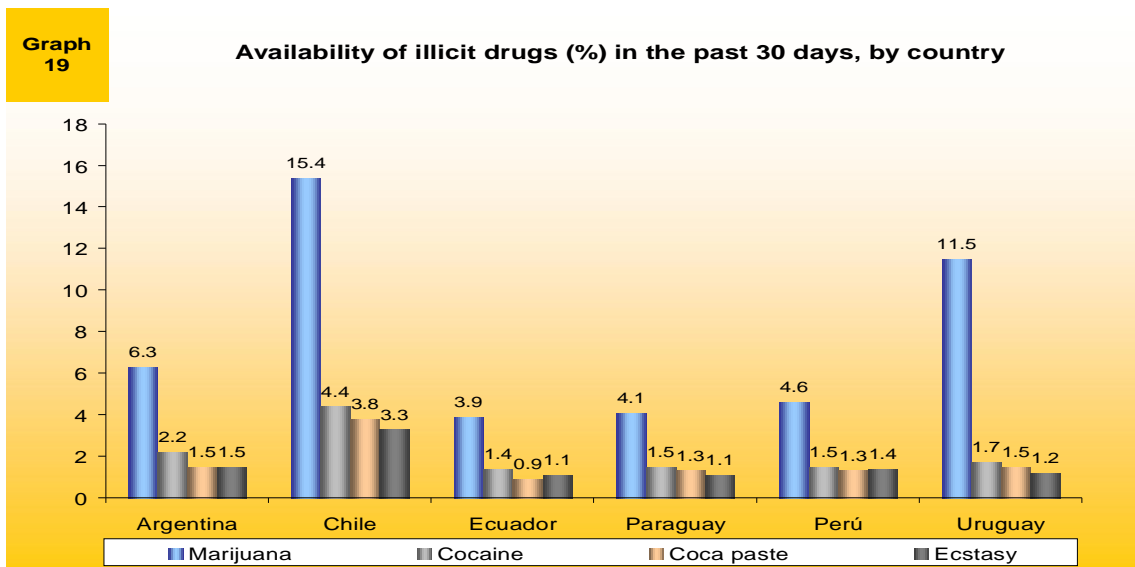
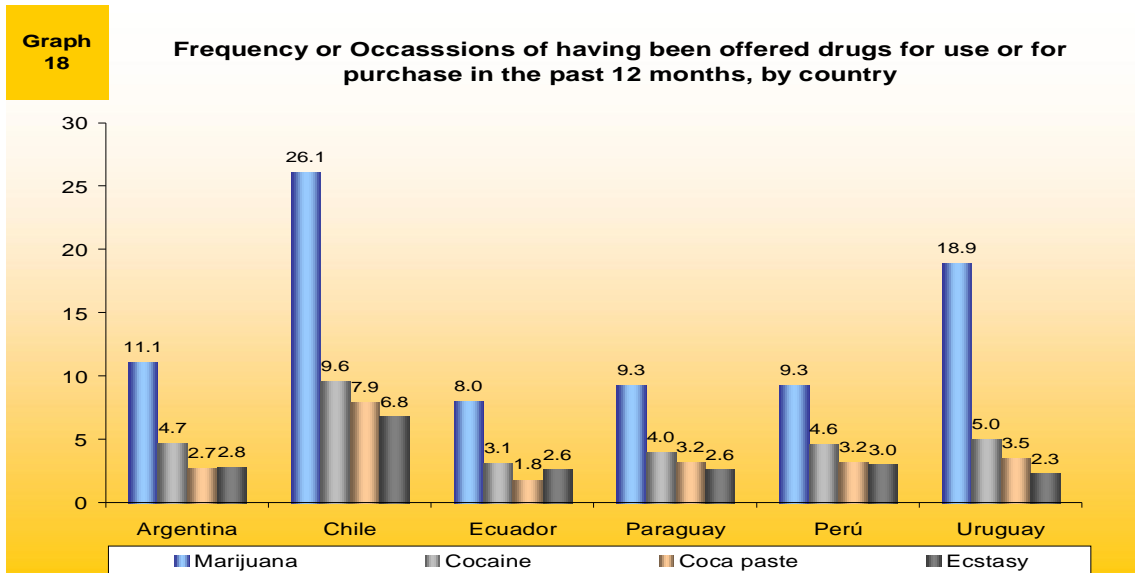
Another important indicator for programs on demand reduction, and on supply reduction, is provided by data the availability of drugs. The measure of occasions of having been offered drugs arises from the question: "When were you last offered a particular drug to purchase or use?" It should be noted that no comparable information is available on occasions of having been offered drugs among students in Bolivia, Brazil and Colombia, for which reason they are not mentioned in this section.

The highest rate of having been offered marijuana during the past year was among Chilean students, at 26.1%. Accordingly, one in four students in that country was offered marijuana to purchase or try. It is not surprising, therefore, that this situation, coupled with a low risk perception are compelling indicators to explain the high prevalence of marijuana use in Chilean students. The country with the second-highest rate of occasions where students were offered drugs was Uruguay at 18.9%, which has the second-highest prevalence of marijuana use among secondary school students compared to the other countries.

The highest rate of students having been offered cocaine was also found in students in Chile (9.6%), followed by Uruguayan students (5%). That high rate of occasions of being offered cocaine among students in Chile coincides with a high prevalence of abuse of this drug in that country. However, Argentina, which had half the proportion of cocaine offers as in Chile (4.7%), has the same prevalence of cocaine use as Chile. The highest rate of having been offered coca paste during the past year was among secondary school students in Chile, at 7.9%. This rate of offers to use or to buy coca paste among Chilean students also coincides with a high prevalence of coca paste use in that country. In the other countries the rate of occasions of having been offered coca paste fluctuates between 2.7% and 3.5%, the exception being Ecuador where average availability is 1.8%.

Chilean students also admitted the highest percentage of offers of ecstasy (6.8%), as well as the second highest prevalence for use of that drug (Graph 18). In all the other countries the availability of ecstasy ranges from 2% to 3%. It should be mentioned that the highest prevalence

of ecstasy use was recorded among students in Colombia, which does not have information on frequency of occasions that students are offered drugs either for use or for purchas.

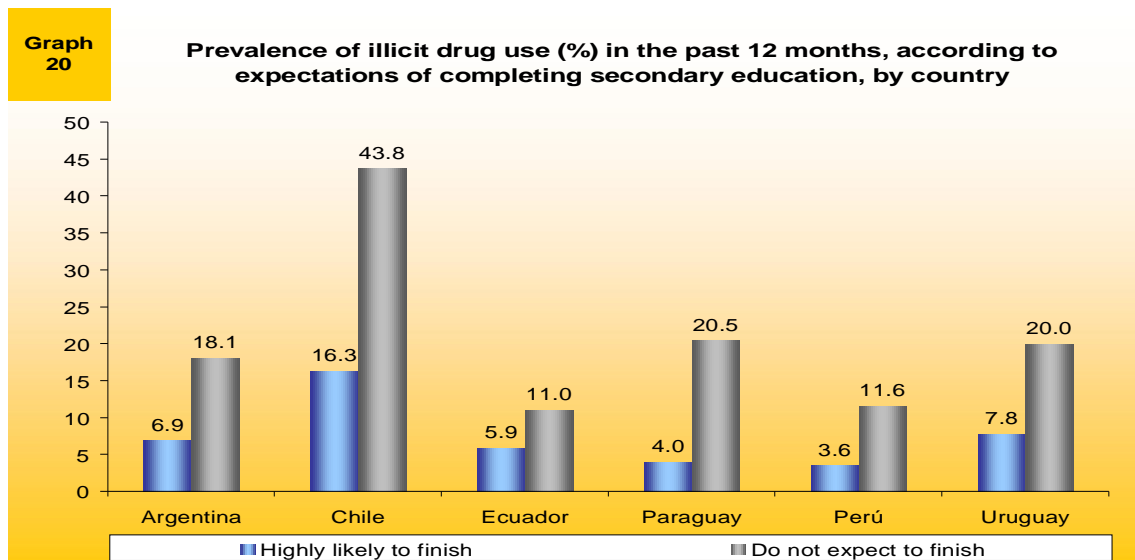


The information in all the countries on the occasions that drugs were offered to students, both for the past year and the past 30 days, consistently shows a higher level in Chilean schools compared to the other countries. It seems to merit further study to determine whether the patterns followed by the illicit drug market are indeed similar to those of legitimate business, inasmuch as the higher the purchasing power the greater the supply. For example, emerging economies like the Czech Republic, whose economic growth in 2005 outstripped most of the other countries in the EU by three times, also experienced rapid growth in drug supply and dramatic increases in drug use. Data from the most recent ESPAD survey in 2003 revealed that

the Czech Republic has the highest lifetime prevalence rates for marijuana use in 15 and 16 year-old students (44%).¹

Future expectations

Surveys in schools show the important correlation between drug use and the future expectations of adolescents. Although it is not possible to establish a causal relationship, international studies consistently show that drug use prevalence is higher in young people with little expectation of completing secondary education and going on to higher education. In the case of Argentina, the past-year prevalence of use of any illicit drug is 6.9% among students who consider it highly probable that they would complete their secondary education, compared at 18.1% among those who felt certain they would not finish secondary school. Those Chilean students who considered it highly probable that they would finish secondary school show past-year prevalences of use of any illicit drug averaging 16.3%, as compared to 43.8% who said they were certain that they would not finish. Among students in Ecuador, drug use prevalence was 5.9% among those who considered it highly likely that they would finish their secondary studies, and 11% among those students who were certain they would not. In the case of Paraguay this relationship is even more pronounced, with a 4% prevalence rate among students who expressed a high probability of finishing secondary school, and a prevalence rate of 20.5% among students who were sure they would not. Those Peruvian students who considered it likely that they would complete secondary school had prevalence rates for any drug of around 3.6%, which leaped to 11.6% among those who were sure they would not complete secondary school. In the case of Uruguay, past-year prevalence is 7.8% among those who clearly expect to complete secondary school and 20% among those who do not expect to do so (Graph 20). In every country, drug use prevalence among those who do not expect to complete their secondary education was at least twice as high as it was among those who expected to finish. Student expectations of entering university confirmed this association between low expectations for the future and drug abuse.

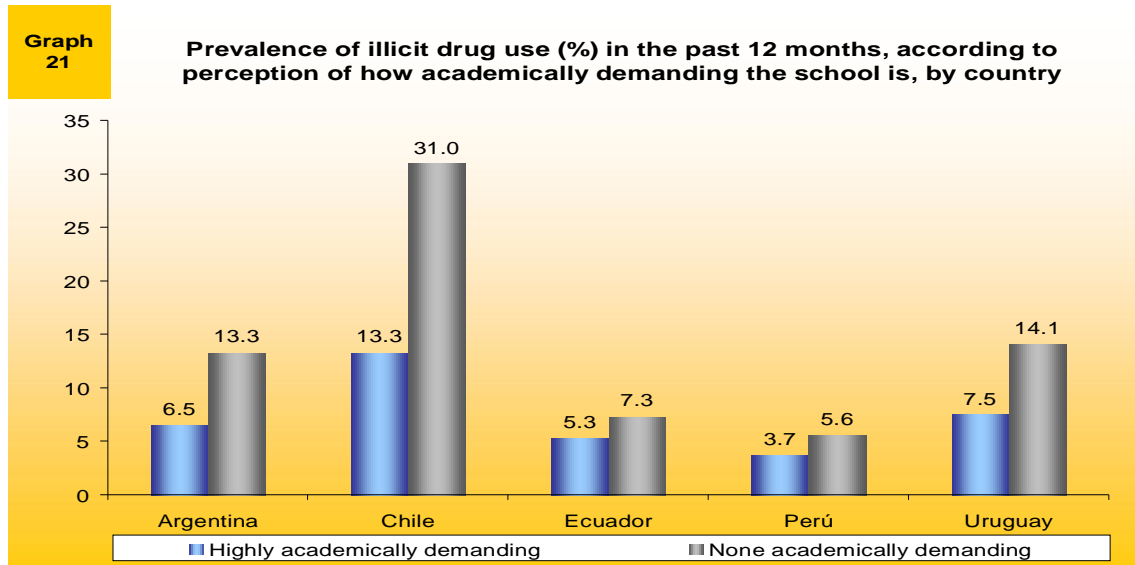


¹ European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). Annual Report, 2005, Ch. 2; schools, youth and drugs, p. 27.

School Discipline

Academic discipline, standards and performance have an impact in determining whether drug prevalence is higher or lower.

In the majority of the countries past-year prevalence for use of any illicit drug doubles at educational establishments where students consider the academic requirements to be undemanding. Such is the case of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. In the case of Peru and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Ecuador, while not double, drug use prevalence increases when the educational establishment is considered academically undemanding. Furthermore, in the majority of the countries past-year prevalences for use of any illicit drug doubles when the students perceive discipline at the educational establishment to be lax (Graph 21).

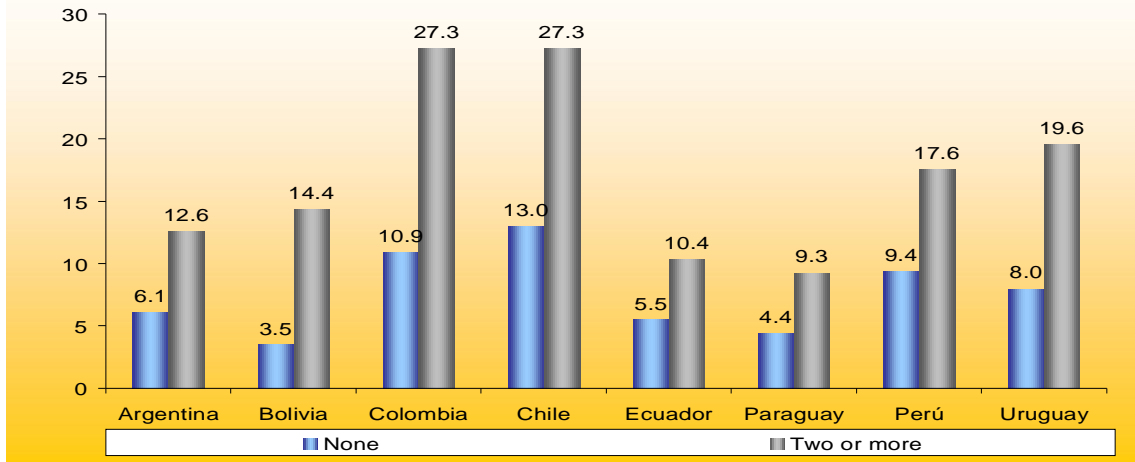


Academic Performance

Academic performance is also a key risk/protection factor in drug abuse prevention. Students who have repeated a school year have a higher prevalence of drug use than those who have not. In the case of Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, the prevalence of use of any illicit drug is at least twice as high when comparing students who have never repeated a year with those who have repeated at least two years in the course of their school careers. The findings of this survey indicate that prevalence of drug use in students with a history of repetition is higher in all countries, which must be borne in mind as an important risk factor for demand reduction programs (Graph 22).

Graph 22

Prevalence of illicit drug use (%) in the past 12 months, according to grade or course repetition rate, by country



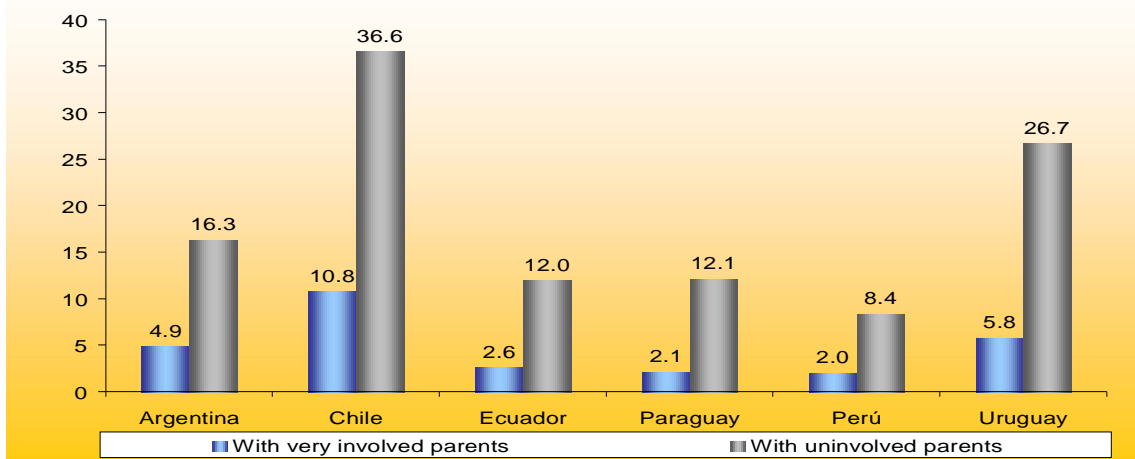
Parent Involvement

Finally, these studies have also examined the importance of parents or care providers in their children's education and in the development of conduct that protects against drug use. The fact that parents are more involved in the lives of their adolescent children should reduce the probability of drug use or at least reduce the probability of more abusive patterns of drug use.

In the case of Argentina, the recent use of any illicit drug increases from 4.9% in students with highly involved parents to 16.3% among those whose parents have no involvement. In the case of Chile, the average prevalence rises from 10.8% among children with highly involved parents to 36.6% among those who consider that their parents are uninvolved in their lives. In Ecuador, average prevalence increases from 2.6% to 12% in students whose parents are very involved and uninvolved, respectively. Among students in Paraguay, average prevalence goes from 2.1% in students with very involved parents to 12.1% among those whose parents have no involvement. In Peru, average prevalence increases from 2% to 8.4% in students with parents who are very involved and uninvolved, respectively. Among students in Uruguay, recent consumption rates increase from 5.8% in those with very involved parents to 26.7% among those whose parents show no involvement (Graph 23).

Graph 23

Prevalence of illicit drug use (%) in the past 12 months, according to level of parent involvement, by country



BACKGROUND

In 2000, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continued the Subregional Drug Information and Research Project. This project is designed to consolidate the sub-regional uniform drug information system in the six signatory countries of the Southern Cone memorandum of understanding that comprise it. This information system will enable governments to design and steer their policies and programs on prevention and treatment based on up-to-date information on drug use in the general population, schools, and at-risk groups.

The project proposed to expand the information system by carrying out uniform studies on prevalence, patterns and trends in drug use in each of the six countries.

In 2005, UNODC formed a strategic partnership with the Organization of American States through CICAD to strengthen technical and financial support to carry out epidemiological studies in the countries. In parallel, each country has also provided human and financial resources to implement the respective national surveys.

Implementation of the project entailed holding technical, administrative, and coordination meetings presided over by UNODC and CICAD/OAS, with the participation of teams of experts from the six signatory countries, in order to standardize methodologies and so ensure comparable results. The first joint survey held consisted of a national drug prevalence survey in secondary schools conducted in each country, in which the same basic questionnaire, sampling frameworks, and data-processing methods were applied.

Based on the foregoing, directly comparable figures on prevalence of drug use in schools will be available for the first time in the second half of 2006 and be published as official data by the respective national observatories on drugs.

OBJECTIVES

Broad Objectives

- To describe the scale of licit and illicit drug abuse in secondary schools and its distribution in South American countries in 2005 according to socio-demographic variables;
- To determine the perceived risk associated with drug use and a number of other key determinants, such as ease of access and availability of drugs, parent involvement, and other matters of interest;
- To describe the risk and protection factors associated with drug use and drug trafficking in schools.

Specific Objectives

- Determine the prevalence of drug use in the school population targeted by the survey: lifetime, last 12 months, and last 30 days.
- Determine prevalence of drug use in schools according to socio-demographic variables: sex, age, and type of administrative dependence of the educational establishment.
- Describe the association between drug use and environmental characteristics: perception of drug availability, opinion and attitude with respect to drugs.
- Description of other aspects connected with the use and sale of drugs including, inter alia, age at first use, frequency and intensity of use, intravenous drug use, synthetic drugs, and new drugs.
- Described the association between licit and illicit drug use.
- Described risk and protection factors connected with the main illicit drugs of choice in secondary schools.

METHODOLOGY

Sample, Population Represented, and Collection of Data

The sample at each of the schools was selected from the student roll for the school year in which the study was carried out. Based on the directory of educational establishments a random selection was made of schools – and within those schools, courses. With the exception of the sample in Chile, where 20 students were selected from each course², in order to ensure comparability with previous versions of studies of this type within each country, and across the other participating countries, the questionnaire was given to all the students present in the classrooms for the courses selected.

In five of the countries the data were collected in the second half of the 2005 school year. The exception was Bolivia, where the data were collected in 2004. In Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay the fieldwork was carried out by staff hired for that purpose under the supervision of experts from the national anti-drug commissions in those countries. In Chile and Peru the information was collected by external institutions hired through competitive selection processes and supervised by experts from the respective national anti-drug commissions. The courses selected corresponded to students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grade (or the equivalent thereof) in each country during the survey year. In order to standardize the students selected by courses in each country, they were arranged into three age groups for comparison purposes: 14 years old or under; 15 to 16 years old; and 17 years old or over. Furthermore, the population represented also corresponds to students in 8th, 10th, and 12th grade, or their equivalent, in public and private schools selected in different provinces, departments, or municipalities in each country.

As mentioned, Colombia and Paraguay implemented their surveys in 2005 outside of the framework of the sub-regional project but used the same methodologies (including the same type of questions to estimate prevalence rates) and coverage, and therefore, their findings are wholly comparable. In the case of Brazil, a survey was carried out on a sample of nearly 50,000 secondary school students in 27 state capitals in the country, using a methodology similar to that employed by the other countries. Although the survey is not nationally representative strictly speaking due to the characteristics of the country (unlike the other eight countries), owing to its broad coverage it seems appropriate to incorporate its findings in this report. The results shown for Brazil were not expanded to the entire population. However, they are very similar to the expanded results. Table 1 provides a detailed description of the size of the sample in each country, the population represented, and the proportion of students in each age group.

² Before the study was implemented in the various countries, Chile and Peru conducted a pre-experimental study to determine possible differences in results by means of two types of survey: i) Covering all of the courses selected with a questionnaire based on a dichotomic variable (uses drugs/does not use drugs) to measure lifetime, last-year, and last-month prevalence: and, ii) with 20 students selected per course and questions to determine type of drug use, such as: "When was the last time you took drugs?: In the last 30 days; more than a month but less than a year ago; more than a year ago." The survey findings in both countries suggest that there are no significant differences between the two research modalities.

| Table 01 | | Sample sizes, population represented, and percentage distribution by age group, by country | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Country | Sample Size | Represented Population | Age group (%) | | |
| | | | 14 or less | 15-16 | 17 and more |
| Argentina | 39.961 | 965.435 | 51,37 | 28,84 | 19,79 |
| Brasil | 48.155 | 4.681.856 | 57,82 | 21,65 | 20,53 |
| Bolivia | 20.386 | 139.963 | 32,00 | 34,66 | 33,35 |
| Colombia | 100.059 | 1.198.690 | 50,39 | 31,08 | 18,53 |
| Chile | 36.108 | 988.149 | 37,94 | 35,92 | 26,14 |
| Ecuador | 13.912 | 339.738 | 41,84 | 32,87 | 25,30 |
| Paraguay | 20.420 | 80.983 | 36,70 | 33,40 | 29,90 |
| Perú | 60.285 | 727.992 | 36,57 | 48,37 | 15,06 |
| Uruguay | 8.033 | 265.255 | 37,74 | 34,89 | 27,38 |
| TOTAL | 347.771 | 9.388.323 | 44,38 | 34,55 | 21,07 |

Questionnaire

This survey has collected statements on use of tobacco, alcohol, prescription tranquilizers and stimulants, in addition to illicit drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, coca paste, and ecstasy, as well as inhaled substances, in a very large number of secondary school students, using a self-applied questionnaire, which is the most efficient method for estimating scale of drug use because it assures anonymity. The questionnaire is based on the schools survey form used by the Inter-American Uniform Drug Use Data System (SIDUC) of the CICAD/OAS Inter-American Observatory on Drugs, the schools survey form of the National Council for Narcotics Control (CONACE) applied in five previous studies in Chile, and specific questions posed in previous studies in a number of the other countries. Consensus was reached on a basis questionnaire (sub-regional model questionnaire) through technical coordination meetings attended by representatives of each of the countries taking part in the sub-regional project. This was the definitive questionnaire that was used in all the countries to collect the information used to prepare this comparative report. In the case of Bolivia, given that the study had been carried out beforehand, there were a number of questions that were not included at the time and, therefore, those findings have not been included in this report. A similar situation occurred in the cases of Colombia and Brazil. With respect to the latter, specific questions were not included on ecstasy, for example, and, as regards cocaine and coca paste, the two drugs were included in a single question so that disaggregated data was not recorded for those drugs.

Adjustments to compare findings

This report contains the principal findings about the scale of drug use, expressed in terms of lifetime, last-year, and past-month prevalence of both licit and illicit drug use, together with a number of risk/protection factors associated with drug use in schools. The "lifetime use" concept can offer an internal vision of patterns of use (continuation or interruption of drug use). "Use in the last 12 months or last year" provides an indication of recent drug use, and "use in the last 30 days or last month" offers information about more recent use, which could include frequent drug users. Owing to the differences in the structures by age of the samples in the different countries

(as observed in Table 1) and in order to ensure greater comparability between prevalences, rates have been adjusted using a standard population, which in this report is the sum of the country samples. ***The foregoing has very important implications because the findings shown here will deviate somewhat from the same data shown in the individual country reports or in the respective executive summaries presented at the end of this report.*** It is very important to bear this in mind when examining the results in order to avoid confusion.

In this study validation procedures were incorporated, in keeping with international standards generally used in studies of this type, which analyzed the consistency and veracity of statements about use in order to ensure highly reliable estimates.

Data quality

Great efforts were made to standardize the methodology of the schools survey carried out in each country. However, as is inevitable in a study that compares information from nine countries, certain methodological differences have arisen. Nonetheless, this is not necessarily indicative of major differences in willingness to answer truthfully. Some countries have experienced moderate validity problems, but those are not big enough to pose a serious threat to the comparability of the results. For several reasons it was not possible to obtain exact levels of statistical significance in this report. Therefore, small differences in estimates on specific points between the countries should be interpreted with caution. However, given the size of the country samples and the sampling methods used, larger differences in certain specific estimates could be regarded as significant