

Abstract

Background

The period of adolescence is typical for first experiments and initiation of substance use. The onset of experiments emerges between 11 and 15 years of age according to different authors. Although many adolescents end with experiments, there is still a group of those who proceed to regular use. Frequent, regular and especially heavy substance use represents various risks in many aspects of individual's life. According to various studies earlier onset of substance use may predict serious difficulties in adult stages of life. Important and currently widely discussed question is differences in substance use between boys and girls.

Aims

To identify the age of cigarette, alcohol and cannabis use onset according to gender. To find out prevalence of use among boys and girls. To find out whether incidence of substance use is higher during school year or summer holidays.

Methods

The ESPAD questionnaire was used for data collection, which was realized in the period of 34 months from August 2007 until June 2010. Indicators were defined for categories of cigarette smoking, alcohol drinking and experience with cannabis. For clarification of the given hypothesis statistical analyses in Microsoft Office Excel 2007 were used – descriptive statistics, contingency tables, Fisher's F-test and (Student) t-test. Analyses were carried out at the level of the whole sample with respect to gender.

Sample

6th to 9th grade pupils of 34 elementary schools from different regions in the Czech Republic, in total 434 boys and 417 girls at baseline.

Results

Alcohol and cigarettes are the first most prevalent substances at the age of 11 and earlier among boys and girls. The pattern of alcohol use is similar at lower age in all followed indicators; statistically significant difference appears at the end of the study in more frequent use in boys. Significant difference was also found in all follow-ups except for the fifth one. Among boys there was higher representation of daily and heavy smoking than among girls in

all follow-ups. The use of cannabis/hashish shows a significant difference among girls and boys in all follow-ups. Boys state earlier first experience than girls and also higher prevalence of any experience than girls overall. However, girls are more prevalent in the last follow-up in the indicator of frequent use of marihuana/hashish. Smoking cigarettes, alcohol use and experiments with marihuana/hashish are more likely during holiday period, especially for boys. Among girls more frequent smoking, drinking of alcohol and frequent use of marihuana/hashish occurs more likely during school year.

Key words

substance use – prevalence – adolescents up to 15 years of age – prevention – gender difference