

**HEALTH DISORDERS**  
**- RISK FACTORS, PROPHYLAXIS, THERAPY**

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**HEALTH DISORDERS – RISK FACTORS, PROPHYLAXIS,  
THERAPY  
CHAPTER II**

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**The use of psychoactive substances by the pupils of junior schools  
attending Youth Educational Centers as the erroneous  
understanding of well-being.**

Tomasz Orczykowski, Monika Szpringer, Lis Grażyna,  
ks. Andrzej Łuczyński

**Introduction**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health is defined as physical, mental and social well-being. Lifestyle is believed to be one of the factors that influence our health. It includes behavior favorable to health – described as health-oriented behavior or behavior creating threats for health (hazardous behavior). The style of life is one of those factors that are controlled by the individual [3].

Undertaking health-oriented behavior leads to healthy lifestyle as well as broadly defined well-being.

Mental well-being can be defined as cognitive and emotional assessment of one's life. It is a broad term which includes experiencing positive emotions, low level of negative moods and high satisfaction with life.

Theory of well-being is being developed very fast. One of the reasons for this situation is a fact that the level of wealth and health achieved by the society allows it to go beyond concerns of survival in searching for a good life. People all over the world are entering "post-materialistic" époque where the questions of the quality of live are not limited to the issues of economic well-being. The category of mental well-being has become popular also due to the fact that it is particularly democratic in its character – it respects thoughts and feelings evoked by the life itself. People does not want to be judged by the experts - they believe that only their own opinions are relevant.

It happens that the erroneous interpretation of well-being results in risk behaviors. They lead to undertaking actions that increase the probability of negative mental, health and social consequences for the individual.

Undertaking risk behaviors is a characteristic feature of the age of puberty, associated with the realization of developmental tasks in this period: searching for self-identity, autonomy, testing one's own

abilities and ways of dealing with difficulties, performing new social roles etc. [3,7].

Emotional problems, suicide attempts, neurotic symptoms as well as mood, nutrition and personality disorders can occur during the age of puberty. Hazardous behaviors are very often perceived as some kind of reaction to difficulties, conflicts and frustrations of the age of puberty [8]. These actions sometimes coexist with adaptation problems as well as personality anomalies, which appeared in the childhood [12].

Teenagers undertake many different kinds of risk behaviors, which can result in diverse health and social damages (direct and distant) to the young people and those who are around them. The use of psychoactive substances by the young takes a special interest of scientists and practitioners. In spite of taking different kind of actions, it can be observed that the use of various psychoactive substances by the teenagers is increasing both in Poland and Europe. This phenomenon is an immense challenge for the people who deal with prophylaxis as well as health promotion and it requires conducting studies that would monitor risk behaviors among children and teenagers. These studies are aimed at determining the causes and explaining the mechanisms of hazardous behaviors, and then creating more effective programs, activities and other forms of actions favorable to health-oriented behaviors. [9,13,14,15] Many researches confirm coexistence of different social, psychological and health

problems resulting from the use of drugs and other psychoactive substances [6,10]. The intervention should lead to the reorganization of mental processes as well as provide an individual with cognitive abilities helping with making decisions and solving problems [11], which in fact, lead the young to addictions.

Types of other risk behaviors: aggressive behavior, risky sexual contacts, violation of traffic regulations, antisocial behavior including crimes as well as going on diets which are often eliminating and extreme by the young and especially by the girls.

The erroneous understanding of well-being is particularly visible among inadequate teenagers.

We cannot omit the fact that they use various psychoactive substances. They do not think about the health consequences of using these substances and they erroneously perceive and describe the effects of these specifics on their organisms as a sense of well-being.

Psychoactive substances include all kinds of chemical substances that act on the organism and can alter behavior and cognition. By affecting the brain directly, they alter human psyche as well and it is impossible to foresee all the negative effects that they can have on each individual. The number of young people using drugs is constantly increasing. Hallucinogens, marijuana, hashish, amphetamine and its derivatives are becoming more and more popular [4].

Undoubtedly, all the substances which are used by the socially inadequate teenagers should be enlisted and described here. They are the following:

1. Marijuana and hashish – evoke felicity, increased sensitivity to sounds and noises, the space and time take a form of illusion, they become “wider”, the general sensitivity and impulsiveness are increased, some users may experience states of paranoia and hallucinations. Long term effects of the intoxication are the following: loss of memory, problems with concentration, emotions and orientation as well as auditory illusions, anxiety, panic, mood swing, apathy, difficulties with making decisions, depressions. Abusers are not able to critically judge the situation around them or their own behavior. They find it difficult to notice the details of their surroundings. Symptoms of depersonalization can be observed as well [1].
2. Hallucinogenic mushrooms and LSD – effects: uncoordinated movements, “crossing over” different senses, seeing details and contrasts more clearly, a heightened sense of hearing, visual hallucinations, a sense of derealization, disorders of orientation in space and time, going from felicity to depression, racing thoughts, lower ability to critical thinking, a sense of depersonalization. Sleepiness and ponderousness can appear in some cases. The scale of the effects mentioned

above depends on the dose, substance and the way of taking it [1].

3. Inhalants (glues, solvents, gases used for lighters, deodorant and hairsprays) – at first they can produce a state of euphoria, vertigo, racing thoughts. Abusers are lightheaded and may have hallucinations and fantasies. They are very often excited and reckless. However, these are short-term effects and they disappear after few hours. Repeated and intensive inhaling and sniffing can cause disorientation, lack of self-control, hallucinations, loss of consciousness and collapse [1].
4. Amphetamine – it can cause psychomotor agitation, euphoria, sexual arousal, racing thoughts, talkativeness, exophthalmos, loss of appetite, photophobia, higher pain tolerance, hunger and tiredness.
5. Cocaine and crack (cocaine containing sodium bicarbonate) – short-term using causes decreased appetite, no natural desire for sleep, dilated pupils, the initial state of euphoria can change into hyperactivity, anxiety and excitement. Long-term using of cocaine may lead to excitement, sensory hyperactivity and hallucinations as well as sleep disorders, gastrointestinal problems and sexual dysfunctions [1].
6. Ecstasy – openness, excitement, euphoria, empathy, intensification of sensory perception, perception of music and movement is more intense, change in the sense of time, very

often subjective sense of unity with the whole world (as described by the Ecstasy abusers), the awareness of touch is strongly heightened.

7. Designer drugs include variety of psychoactive substances which are created to get around drug laws and sold in special stores or on the Internet as a collector's products. These drugs produce very similar narcotic effects to the popular psychoactive substances.

Youth is very interested in the drugs and continue to experiment inventing new methods of taking psychoactive substances such as:

- taking sedatives together with alcohol
- mixing marijuana and alcohol,
- mixing nicotine with amphetamine,
- preparing Cannabis sativa decoction with milk, cocoa or honey,
- eating marijuana leaves pickled (in ammonia or LSD acid) ,
- smoking "skunks" moistened with Polish heroin,
- taking syrups such as Tussipect or Gripex and painkillers together with energy drinks [4].

It was interesting to get to know socially maladjusted teenagers and their reasons for using psychoactive substances as well as their self-assessment of physical and mental state after using these specifics.

## **Purpose of the study**

The aim of the study was to assess the causes and extent of the use of psychoactive substances by the socially maladjusted adolescents, and to analyze their perception of well-being.

## **Material and Method**

The research was conducted among students from the Youth Educational Centers in the Mazovian Voivodship.

Youth Educational Centers are public rehabilitation institutions for socially inadequate children and teenagers.

Boys and girls aged from 13 to 18 can attend such centers. In cases justified by the school situation, adult students are allowed to stay there as long as it is necessary to complete their education. The students of such centers suffer from behavioral disorders that could not be handled neither by their families, nor traditional public schools. The students get there on the basis of the court's ruling. The assessment of students' behaviors is based on the fact that their actions very often go beyond the frames of social and legal norms. The examples of behavioral disorders mentioned above are the following: refusal to attend school, aggression towards others, physical violence, taking part in fights, bullying, cruelty to humans and animals, risky

sexual behavior, destruction of objects, arson, stealing, lying, serious disobedience.

It is a group of socially maladjusted youth who, apart from the behaviors listed above, is characterized by using various psychoactive substances.

The method used was a diagnostic poll with the survey questionnaire directed to the pupils of the Youth Educational Centers . It concerned the problem of using drugs by the youth and the issues of well-being in the lives of the young people.

The research was conducted at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. It was conducted among 171 students, including 94 boys and 77 girls aged from 14 to 18.

Tab. I Age diversity and sex of the respondents

Age	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
14	8	10,39	0	0	8	4,67
15	21	27,28	14	14,89	35	20,47
16	26	33,76	19	20,21	45	26,32
17	22	28,57	40	42,56	62	36,26
18	0	0	21	22,34	21	12,28
Total	77	100	94	100	171	100

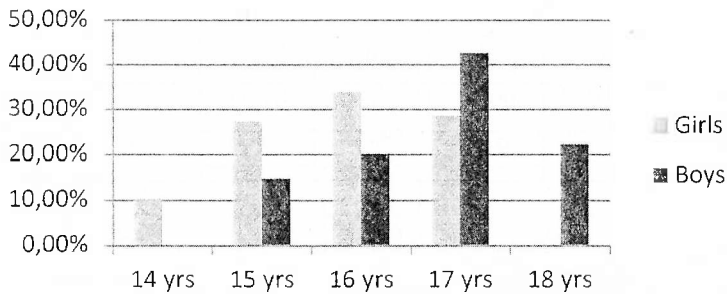


Fig. 1 Age diversity and sex of the respondents

The method used was a diagnostic poll with the survey questionnaire directed to the pupils of the Youth Educational Centers. It concerned the reasons for using psychoactive substances by the students as well as self-assessment of physical and mental state after using these specifics.

## Results and Conclusions

The use of psychoactive substances is very popular among teenagers. Up to 90,91% of girls and 87,23% of boys polled admitted to having used psychoactive substances.

The following analyses concern those students who came into contact with psychoactive substances.

Tab. II The use of drugs by the teenagers

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	70	90,91	82	87,23	152	88,89
NO	7	9,09	12	12,77	19	11,11

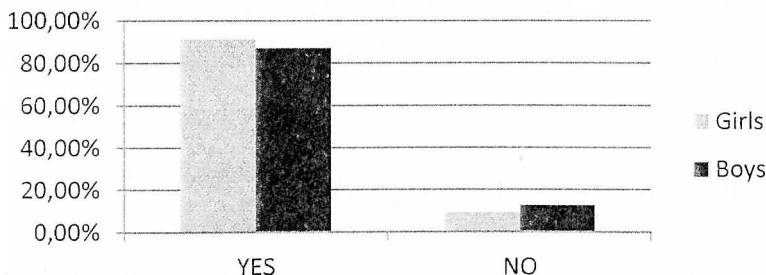


Fig. 2 The use of drugs by the teenagers

The largest number of students, regardless of sex, use drugs to relax (34,88% of all respondents). The other reason for using drugs among girls is that they believe that using such substances is fashionable (22,85% ) whereas boys came into contact with drugs out of curiosity (21,95% ). The least number of respondents said that they had other reasons for taking drugs or that they did not think of them at all.

Detailed findings are presented in table III and figure 3rd.

Tab. III Reasons for taking drugs

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Out of curiosity	15	21,44	18	21,95	33	21,71
For company	5	7,14	7	8,54	12	7,89
To relax	23	32,86	30	36,58	53	34,88
Because they are trendy	16	22,85	13	15,86	29	19,08
To forget about troubles	5	7,14	12	14,63	17	11,18
I did not think about the reasons	4	5,71	1	1,22	5	3,29
Other	2	2,86	1	1,22	3	1,97

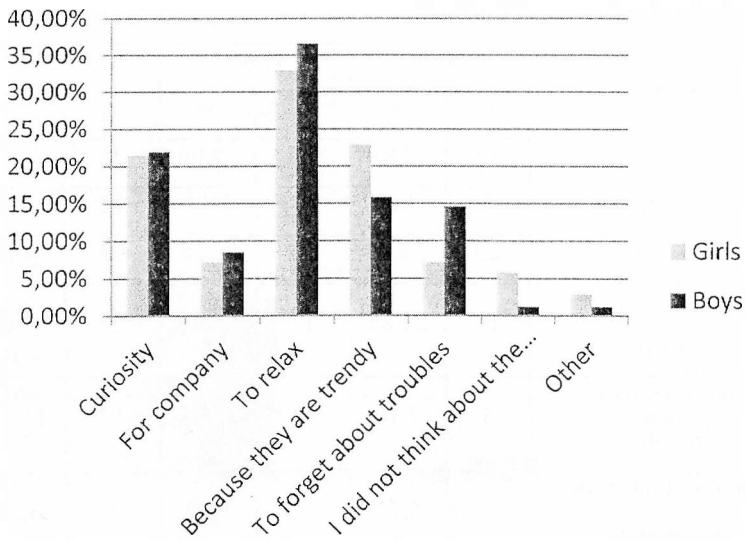


Fig. 3 Reasons for taking drugs

When analyzing the influence of the family environment on the use of psychoactive substances, the contact with drugs among family and friends was taken into consideration. Among all the respondents 70,4% said that their relatives have come into contact with drugs. 12,86% of girls and 21,95% of boys said that none of their relatives had contact with drugs whereas 12,86% of girls and 7,32% of boys did not want to talk about this.

Tab. IV The influence of the family environment on the use of psychoactive substances by the respondents.

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	49	70,00	58	70,73	107	70,40
NO	9	12,86	18	21,95	27	17,76
I don't know	3	4,28	0	0,00	3	1,97
I don't want to talk about this	9	12,86	6	7,32	15	9,87

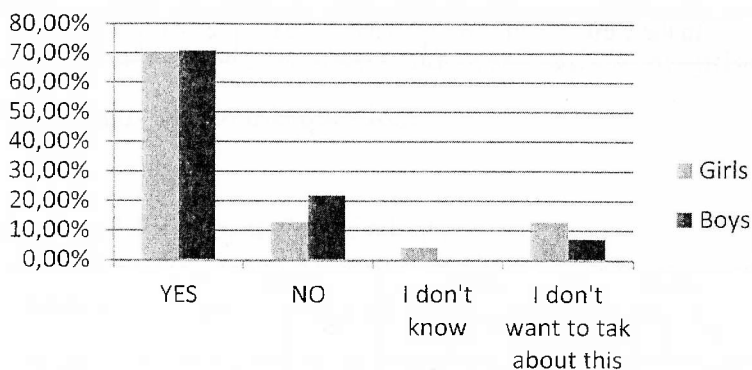


Fig. 4 The influence of the family environment on the use of psychoactive substances by the respondents.

The girls very often came into their first contact with drugs during house parties – 44,29% Boys often said that the first place where they

took drugs was at the discos – 30,48%. The similar rate (34.28%) can be observed in the group of girls who also started taking drugs at the discos. Nearly 22% of the boys started taking drugs at school which is surprising.

Tab. V The first place of initiation into drugs

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
During a party	31	44,29	6	7,33	37	24,34
At the disco	24	34,28	25	30,48	49	32,24
At school	6	8,57	18	21,95	24	15,79
At home	3	4,29	12	14,63	15	9,87
In the yard	6	8,57	21	25,61	27	17,76

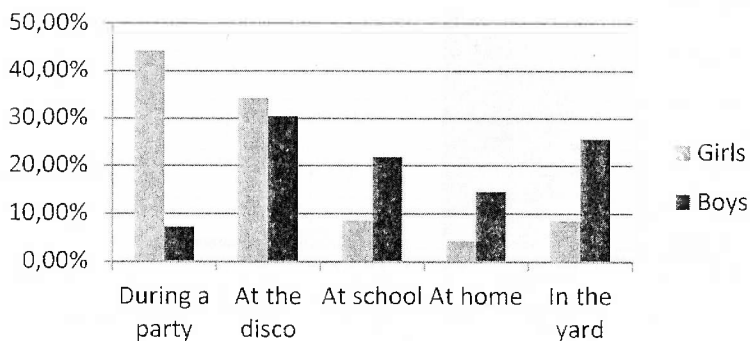


Fig. 5 The first place of initiation into drugs

When asked if they decided to use psychoactive substances again, 91,43% of girls and 96,34% of boys said “yes”. 8,57% of girls and 3,66% of boys said “no” to this question.

Tab. VI Re-use of drugs by the respondents

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	64	91,43	79	96,34	143	94,08
NO	6	8,57	3	3,66	9	5,92

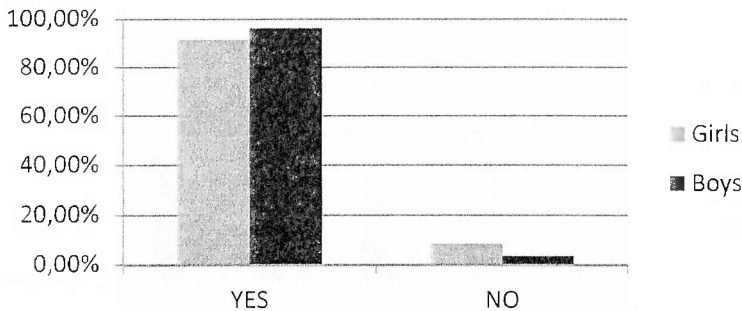


Fig. 6 Re-use of drugs by the respondents

Pupils took various and dangerous psychoactive substances. They repeatedly used widely available specifics such as lighter fuel, deodorants or hairsprays (inhaled substances were used by 44.74% of respondents). Most students, regardless of sex, used marijuana and hashish (approximately 90% of respondents). Further in terms of frequency of use are very trendy and popular recently substances such as designers drugs and amphetamine – approx. 70% of all respondents confirmed the use of these substances.

Detailed results of the use of each psychoactive substance by the students are presented in Table VII and Figure 7th

Tab. VII Psychoactive substances used by the respondents

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Marijuana or hashish	61	87,14	81	98,78	142	93,42
LSD	12	17,14	19	23,17	31	20,39
Amphetamine	53	75,71	53	64,63	106	69,74
Psilocybin mushrooms	24	34,29	30	36,59	54	35,52
MDMA (Ecstasy)	21	30,00	21	25,61	42	27,63
Cracks	12	17,14	9	10,98	21	13,82
Cocaine	25	35,71	26	31,71	51	33,55
Heroin	12	17,14	0	0	12	7,90
Polish heroine – poppy straw extract	6	8,57	0	0	6	3,95
Inhalants	27	38,57	41	50,00	68	44,74
Pharmaceutical drugs	24	34,29	33	40,24	57	37,5
Designer drugs	51	72,86	59	71,95	110	72,37

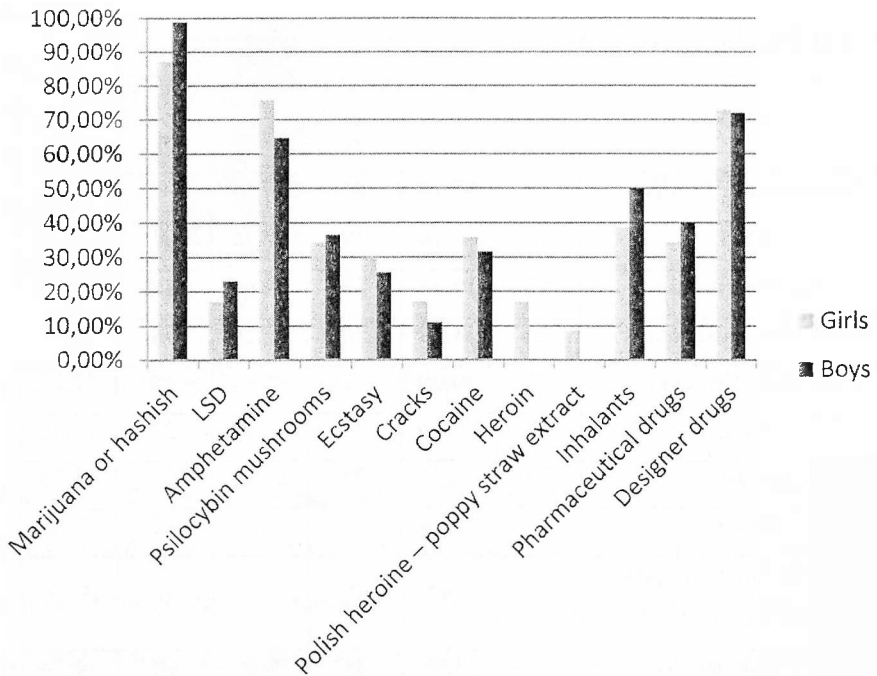


Fig. 7 Psychoactive substances used by the respondents

With this question, the answers cannot be totaled because it was a multiple choice question.

The study shows that awareness of the surveyed girls and boys differs significantly. When answered if taking drugs from time to time is dangerous, 54,28% of girls and only 18,29% of boys said “yes”. Whereas the negative answer was given by 28,57% of girls and 70,73% of boys. The scale of these differences is meticulously presented in Table VIII and Figure 8th

Tab. VIII Is occasional use of drugs dangerous?

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	38	54,28	15	18,29	53	34,87
NO	20	28,57	58	70,73	78	51,32
Hard to say	12	17,15	9	10,98	21	13,81

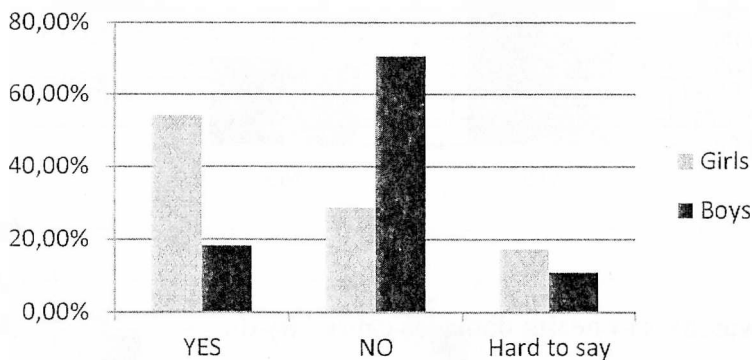


Fig. 8 Is occasional use of drugs dangerous?

Teenagers gave very similar answers when asked about health damages caused by the use of psychoactive substances. Both boys and girls declared that they are aware of the damages in the organism caused by the drugs - 70% of all respondents.

Tab. IX Awareness of health damages caused by drugs

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	49	70	55	67,07	104	68,42
NO	21	30	27	32,93	48	31,58

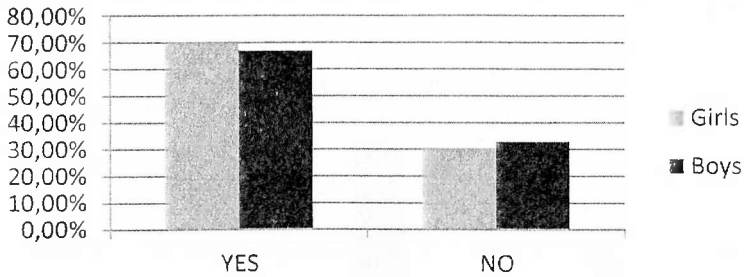


Fig. 9 Awareness of health damages caused by drugs

The young people use drugs to put themselves in a certain state - positive or negative. According to 80% of respondents regardless of sex, joy and relaxation are the most frequent sensations that occur after using of psychoactive drugs. In a very negligible extent, there is sadness (5.92%) and stress (3.95% of respondents).

Tab X Feelings and mental states after taking drugs according to the young people

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Joy	58	82,86	65	79,27	123	80,92
Sadness	6	8,57	3	3,66	9	5,92
Bliss	15	21,43	27	32,93	42	27,63
Relaxation	61	87,14	65	79,27	126	82,89
Stress	0	0,00	6	7,32	6	3,95
Other	3	4,29	15	18,29	18	11,84

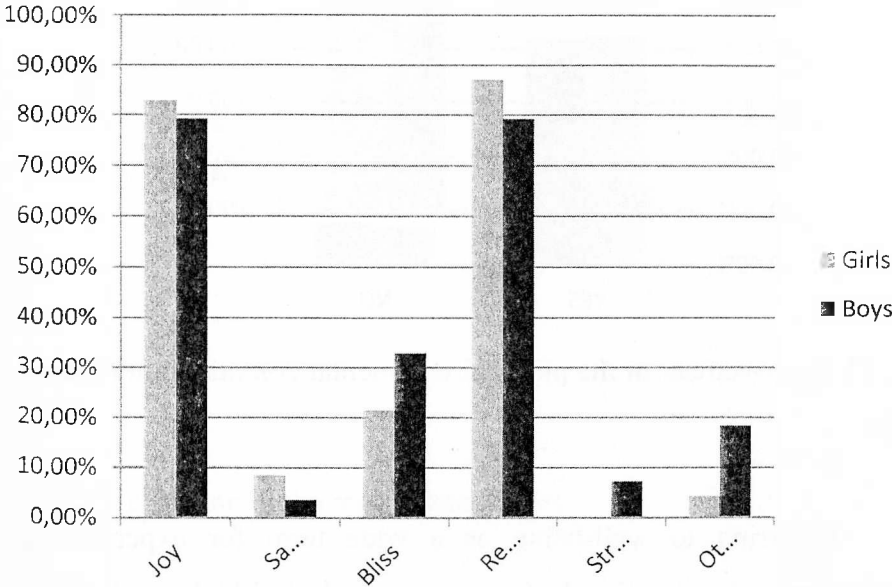


Fig. 10 Feelings and mental states after taking drugs according to the young people

Putting themselves in certain mental states after using psychoactive substances, we cannot omit their mental and physical condition at that time. Nearly 85% of the surveyed students said that the drug improves their mood. It is meticulously illustrated in Table XI and Figure 11th

Tab. XI Improvement in the mood after taking drugs

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	60	85,71	69	84,15	129	84,87
NO	10	14,29	13	15,85	13	15,13

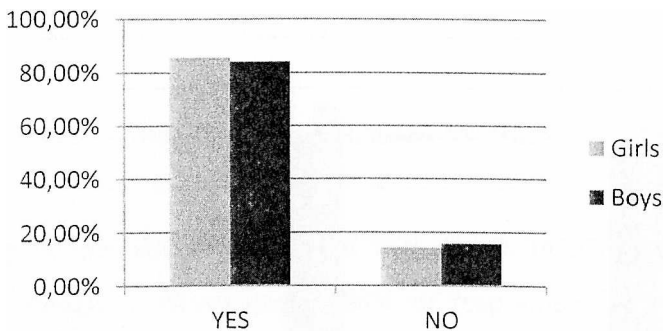


Fig. 11 Improvement in the physical and mental condition after taking drugs

Referring to well-being as a wide term for experiencing positive emotions, low level of negative moods and high level of life satisfaction also due to the use of the psychoactive substances, over

90% of students, regardless of sex think that they live in a mental well-being.

Tab. XII Well-being in the respondents' lives

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	65	92,86	74	90,24	139	91,45
NO	5	7,14	8	9,76	13	8,55

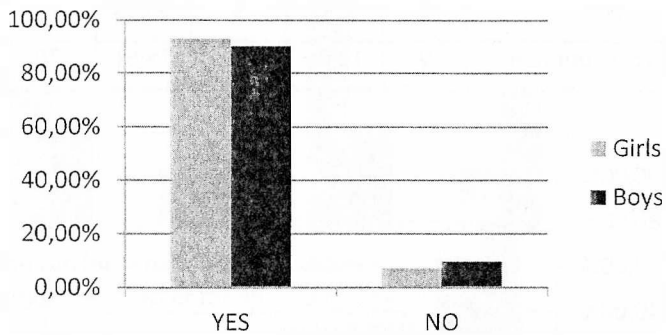


Fig. 12 Well-being in the respondents' lives

Thinking about well-being in the context of psychoactive substances, we have to mention the attractiveness of those specifics to the young people. The results of this study show that 78.57% of girls and 63.41% of boys believe that drugs are attractive to young people. Table XIV and Figure 14<sup>th</sup> explain why teenagers believe that drugs are attractive

Tab. XIII Attractiveness of drugs according to respondents

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
YES	55	78,57	52	63,41	107	70,40
NO	6	8,57	9	10,98	15	9,87
I have no opinion	9	12,86	21	25,61	30	19,73

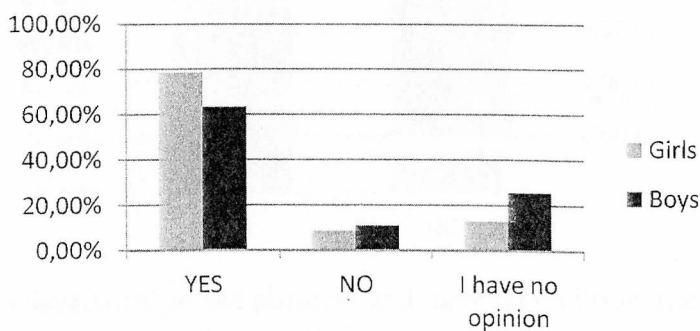


Fig. 13 Attractiveness of drugs according to respondents

Tab. IV Why do you think that drugs are attractive?

Answer	Girls		Boys		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
You can be someone else	22	31,43	19	23,17	41	26,97
Provide acceptance among peers	9	12,86	15	18,29	24	15,79
Allow to distance oneself from problems	33	47,14	18	21,95	51	33,55
They are trendy	9	12,86	24	29,27	33	21,71

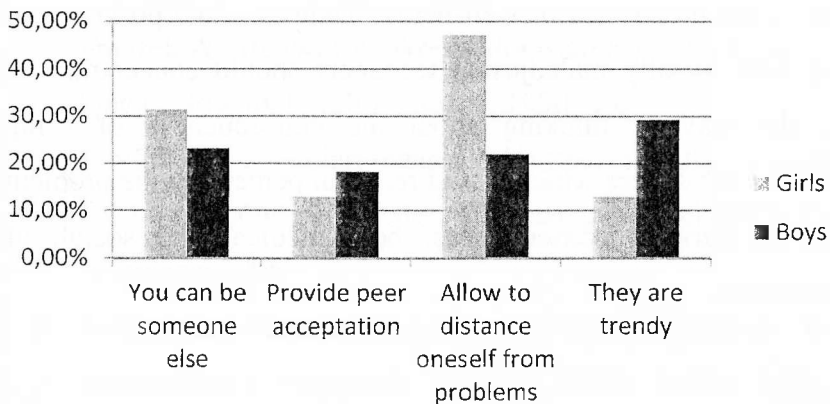


Fig. 14 Why do you think that drugs are attractive?

## Conclusions

After analyzing the results of this survey the following conclusions have been drawn:

Teenagers, who took part in the survey, use very dangerous psychoactive substances claiming that they are aware of the consequences of such behavior, but in fact they are not. They concentrate on the short-term effects such as seemingly pleasant reality caused by narcosis. This is a group of young people who are at high risk of drug addiction.

They misunderstand the idea of well-being. They perceive it as a temporary feeling of pleasure evoked by the use of psychoactive substances. Taking drugs is a hazardous behavior and has adverse health, psychological and social consequences. In fact, it is the opposite of the broad idea of well-being. Therefore, the programs of working with socially maladjusted teenagers should concentrate on altering the way of thinking about the consequences of using psychoactive substances which would result in perceiving the problem in terms of harmful consequences, both medical and social, of different nature.

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## **Abstract**

Teenagers undertake many different kinds of risk behaviors, which can result in diverse health and social damages (direct and distant) to the young people and those who are around them. The use of psychoactive substances by the young takes a special interest of scientists and practitioners. In spite of taking different kind of actions, it can be observed that the use of various psychoactive substances by the teenagers is increasing both in Poland and Europe. This phenomenon is an immense challenge for the people who deal with prophylaxis as well as health promotion and it requires conducting studies that would monitor risk behaviors among children and teenagers. These studies are aimed at determining the causes and explaining the mechanisms of hazardous behaviors, and then creating more effective programs, activities and other forms of actions favorable to health-oriented behaviors. Many researches confirm coexistence of different social, psychological and health problems resulting from the use of drugs and other psychoactive substances.