

# Substance use by university students in the West Bank: a cross-sectional study

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## Abstract

**Background** Substance use has been an increasing problem in the occupied Palestinian territory for decades. The aim of this study was to describe the practice, knowledge, and attitudes associated with substance use by university students in the occupied Palestinian territory.

**Methods** This cross-sectional study was done in 2015. Male and female students from four main public universities in the West Bank were recruited to fill out a self-administered questionnaire. The Institutional Review Board approved the study, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

**Findings** 1383 (82%) of 1700 students completed the questionnaire (766 [55%] women and 617 [45%] men). The most frequent substance practices were smoking tobacco (576 [42%] students), drinking alcohol (75 [5%]), and illicit drugs (42 [3%]). 745 (54%) respondents had tried smoking, 122 (9%) had tried drinking alcohol, and 58 (4%) had tried taking illicit drugs. 24 (4%) respondents who had not yet tried a substance intended to smoke tobacco, 19 (2%) intended to drink alcohol, and nine (1%) intended to try illicit drugs use. Escaping from problems was the most frequent motivation for illicit drugs (870 [63%] respondents) and alcohol (501 [37%] respondents). Most of the illicit drugs users (71%) had tried more than one illicit drug, and hashish was the most common type of illicit drug to be used (4%). 36 (57%) respondents had used illicit drugs in the company of a friend. Most participants agreed that smoking tobacco (1209 [87%] respondents), alcohol (1253 [91%]), and illicit drugs use (1286 [93%]) is harmful, and most participants agreed that tobacco (752 [54%]), alcohol (1131 [82%]), and illicit drugs (1252 [91%]) should be banned. 1142 (83%) respondents agreed that tobacco is easily accessible in their communities, whereas 835 (60%) and 628 (45%) respondents agreed that alcohol and illicit drugs were easily accessible, respectively. Only 502 (36%) respondents were aware of the existence of drug weaning centres in their country.

**Interpretation** Substance use is common in students in Palestinian universities despite them knowing about the dangers of substance use. Escaping from problems was the most common motivation for illicit drug and alcohol use. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate an urgent need for the development of intervention and the immediate attention of local authorities and families.

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### Contributors

BRD contributed to the research idea, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, tables, figures, the writing and revision of the Abstract, data collection, and data management. HNS, EHJ, and ONY contributed to the study design, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, tables, figures, and input for data analysis. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the Abstract for publication.

### Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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