
THE ESPAD
NORTHERN CYPRUS
STUDY, 2025/2026
SCHOOL YEAR

Substance Abuse in Northern Cyprus:
Trends, Risks, and Responses

Edited by:

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Dedication

This book belongs to the young people of Northern Cyprus who answered honestly when they did not have to. Every figure in these pages began as a student sitting in a classroom, trusting that what they said would be treated with care. We hope this work repays that trust by turning their answers into decisions that protect them.

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Foreword

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The 2026 North Cyprus Anti Drug Commission ESPAD report achieved two important goals this year, a major advancement in the sophistication of the statistical evaluation of the survey data, and the initiation of comparing substance use and behaviour results across years. These robust improvements increase data reliability and provide a framework for evaluating prevention efforts, a key outcome for improving the lives of North Cypriots. The value of conducting the ESPAD survey and increasing its validity enables focusing substance use prevention efforts on the most valuable targets and maximizing the effectiveness of limited resources.

Substance use and negative behavioural patterns are currently low in North Cyprus adolescents compared to Europe and much of the world. However, it is essential to prevent the prevalence of these adverse activities from increasing and resulting in poorer health outcomes and possible addiction in the children, lower educational achievements, and effects on North Cyprus' economy and future.

The landscape of substance abuse in Northern Cyprus is marked by unique challenges and evolving trends. This ESPAD report aims to shed light on these issues, offering a comprehensive analysis of the patterns, risks, and responses associated with substance use in the region. The collaborative efforts of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers culminated in this extensive volume, which not only highlights the current state of substance abuse but also explores potential strategies for prevention and intervention. We hope that this report serves as a valuable resource for anyone dedicated to addressing the complexities of substance use in Northern Cyprus and beyond.

The report describes the findings of the survey and provides specific guidance on prevention efforts based on North Cyprus data. This guidance and the resources needed to implement the recommendations should reduce expected increases in substance use and negative behaviours. We congratulate

the North Cyprus Anti Drug Commission for all their efforts to treat and prevent substance use.

This report was written and published by a collaboration between the North Cyprus Anti-Drug Commission, and Professor Dr. Dr. (h.c.) Marilyn A. Huestis.

Editor

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Preface

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Protecting the health and wellbeing of children and young people is one of the highest priorities of the Northern Cyprus Prime Minister's Anti Drug Commission. Effective prevention begins with reliable evidence. Sound policies and meaningful interventions must be informed by accurate, high quality research that enables us to understand emerging patterns of substance use and respond with confidence and responsibility.

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs is one of the most respected international research programmes examining adolescent substance use. By implementing the ESPAD methodology in Northern Cyprus, our Commission committed to producing evidence that is scientifically rigorous, internationally comparable, and directly relevant to the needs of our country.

This publication represents the third consecutive annual implementation of the ESPAD study in Northern Cyprus. Our decision to conduct this research every year reflects a long-term commitment to establishing a sustainable national surveillance programme capable of monitoring trends, evaluating prevention efforts, identifying emerging challenges, and supporting evidence based policy development. Annual monitoring enables us to move beyond isolated observations and develop a clearer understanding of how adolescent substance use changes over time. The Commission remains committed to continuing this important work in the years ahead.

The success of a project of this scale depends upon strong scientific leadership and close collaboration between researchers, institutions, schools, and public authorities. Since the establishment of the ESPAD programme in Northern Cyprus, Dr. Zafer Bekiroğulları has served as Principal Investigator and Project Coordinator. Under his scientific leadership, the programme was developed into a nationally significant research initiative conducted according to internationally recognised scientific and ethical standards. His direction of

the project’s scientific, organisational, and operational components ensured the consistent delivery of reliable evidence capable of informing national prevention strategies and public policy.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Professor Dr. Dr. (h.c.) Marilyn A. Huestis for her distinguished editorial leadership and scientific guidance, which made an invaluable contribution to the quality of this publication. My gratitude extends to Melis Yağmur Minas for her dedication throughout the project, to the staff of Dr. Zafer Bekiroğulları Psychological Services Ltd. for their professional and organisational support in implementing this research on behalf of the Commission, and to every member of the Northern Cyprus Prime Minister’s Anti Drug Commission whose commitment and professionalism contributed to the successful completion of this work.

Most importantly, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the school principals, teachers, parents, and students who participated in this research. Their willingness to contribute created a body of evidence that will support stronger prevention policies and promote the health and wellbeing of future generations.

It is my sincere hope that this publication serves as a valuable resource for researchers, policymakers, educators, healthcare professionals, and all organisations committed to protecting young people from substance related harm. The Northern Cyprus Prime Minister’s Anti Drug Commission remains committed to strengthening prevention through scientific research, national collaboration, and international partnership, ensuring that public policy continues to be guided by evidence and dedicated to the wellbeing of our society.

Teyfide Tecel Hatipoğlu

President

Northern Cyprus Prime Minister’s Anti Drug Commission

17 August 2026

Message from the Project Manager

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Adolescence is the stage of life in which the most enduring patterns of substance use take shape, and it is also the stage in which prevention can be the most effective. For Northern Cyprus, however, the evidence required to design and target such prevention is incomplete. This book was written to help close that gap. It presents the findings of the Northern Cyprus wave of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD): a study of 1,049 tenth-grade students, aged 15 to 16, surveyed during November and December 2025 using the standardised ESPAD 2019 Master Questionnaire under fully anonymous conditions.

The picture that emerges is both reassuring and instructive. Alcohol is by far the most prevalent substance among adolescents in Northern Cyprus, while cannabis and other illicit substance use remains rare. Across every outcome we examined, two factors stand out with remarkable consistency as the dominant proximal correlates of adolescent substance use: peer substance use and the perceived availability of substances. Truancy emerges as an independent marker of risk, and the apparent protective role of parental monitoring weakens once peer influence is included. These convergent patterns carry a clear and actionable message: prevention in Northern Cyprus should focus on the social environment of young people, their peers and their access, rather than on individual exhortation alone.

The book is organised as a single, cumulative argument across nine chapters. It moves from the research governance and ethical framework that underpin the study, through its theoretical foundations, sampling, and measurement, to a detailed descriptive epidemiology of adolescent substance use. It then presents substance-specific analytical models for nicotine and e-cigarettes, alcohol and intoxication, and other behaviours, before drawing the evidence together in an integrated synthesis that includes population-attributable fractions and a risk-ranking framework designed to inform

prevention policy. Throughout, we distinguished clearly what the data confirm, what they suggest, and what they cannot yet answer.

This research was conducted under the ethical approval and continuing oversight of the Northern Cyprus Prime Minister's Anti-Drug Commission, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the General Data Protection Regulation. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with written informed consent obtained from parents and guardians and informed assent obtained from every student. The full ethical and governance documentation is provided in the annexes to this volume.

A work of this scope is never the achievement of one person. I owe particular and heartfelt thanks to my co-authors, Teyfide Tecel Hatipoğlu and Melis Yağmur Minas, whose analytical care, dedication, and steady commitment were indispensable at every stage of this project; without their contributions this book could not have been completed. I am profoundly grateful to our editor, Professor Dr. Dr. (h.c.) Marilyn A. Huestis, whose scientific authority, generosity, and editorial guidance immeasurably strengthened this volume and sharpened its arguments.

I extend my sincere thanks to the staff of the Northern Cyprus Prime Minister's Anti-Drug Commission for their institutional support, ethical stewardship, and shared commitment to safeguarding young people; and to the staff of Dr. Zafer Bekiroğulları Psychological Services Ltd. for their sustained professional, organisational, and logistical support throughout the study. I am likewise grateful to the members of the International Cognitive and Behavioural Psychotherapies Society (CBPis) for their collegial encouragement and the intellectual community they provide.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to the school principals, teachers, parents, and, above all, the students of Northern Cyprus, whose participation made this research possible. It is my hope that the evidence gathered here will serve them, and the generation that follows, well.

Dr. Zafer Bekiroğulları

Principal Investigator and Project Coordinator

On behalf of the Northern Cyprus Prime Minister's Anti-Drug Commission

Acronyms

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ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AIC	Akaike Information Criterion
AME	Average Marginal Effect
ARD	Absolute Risk Difference
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BH-FDR	Benjamini-Hochberg False Discovery Rate
BIC	Bayesian Information Criterion
CI	Confidence Interval
CR	Composite Reliability
DAG	Directed Acyclic Graphs
ESPAD	European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
LSD	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide
MNAR	Missing Not at Random
MSPSS	Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support
OR	Odds Ratio
PBT	Problem Behavior Theory
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SMH	Self Medication Hypothesis
SSSL	Social Structure Social Learning Theory
STROBE	Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology
US	United States
USA	United States of America
VE	Variance Explained
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor