

The price of popularity: Drug and alcohol consumption

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The consumption of drugs and alcohol by teenagers is not just about rebellion or emotional troubles. It's about being one of the cool kids, according to a study by led by researchers at the Université de Montréal.

"Our study highlights a correlation between popularity and consumption," says Jean-Sébastien Fallu, lead researcher and professor at the Université de Montréal's School of Psychoeducation. "The [teenagers](#) we studied were well-accepted, very sensitive to social codes, and understood the compromises that it takes to be popular."

Link between popularity, friends and consumption

The study, which is to be published during the next year as part of a collective work, was conducted on more than 500 French-speaking students at three separate moments of their lives: at ages 10 to 11, 12 to 13 and 14 to 15. It took into consideration the popularity of the child and their friends and tracked their consumption of alcohol, marijuana and hard drugs.

The findings showed an increase in consumption, as the child got older regardless of their popularity level. However, the more popular a child and their friends were, the greater this consumption was. There was a two-fold increase between ages 10 and 15 for the most popular kids who also had very popular friends. However, this trend did not apply to popular kids whose friends were not as popular.

Maintaining popularity

The results suggest that popular teenagers are more at risk if their friends are also considered popular. "Teenagers don't consume to belong to the group or to increase their popularity level, they do it to remain well-liked," says Fallu. "It's more about keeping their status than increasing it."

Teenagers who aren't considered popular are obviously also at risk of other deviant behaviors. However, other studies have shown that they are more inclined to develop violent behaviors than consume [alcohol](#) or drugs.

Provided by University of Montreal

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