

2025 Monitor

Mental health and substance use among students in higher education



This fact sheet presents some of the findings of the 2025 Monitor on mental health and substance use among students in higher education. It also discusses changes compared with previous measurements, in 2021 and 2023. For a comprehensive description and discussion of the findings, plus recommendations, please refer to the accompanying [report](#).

Key findings

Students' mental health has slightly improved since 2021. The improvement mainly took place between 2021 and 2023, after the COVID-19 crisis. Even so, a substantial group of students is still struggling with relatively poor mental health. They experience for example feelings of anxiety and depression, stress or performance pressure. Substance use has largely remained unchanged. Risky alcohol use remains as common among students as it was before. Cannabis remains the most commonly used drug. The majority of students with psychological problems receive counselling or support, compared with only a minority of students with problems due to substance use. The number of students who received counselling or support in connection with substance use issues has increased relative to 2023.

About the methodology

A total of 27,488 students at 23 educational institutions (12 universities of applied sciences and 11 research universities) participated in the survey in April and May 2025. This represents 5.9% of students enrolled at these institutions. Students were invited by their institution to complete a digital questionnaire. The survey used 10 measures for mental health and 16 measures for substance use. In the analyses, responses were weighted to adjust for selective non-response. However, this does not entirely eliminate potential bias in the outcome measures. This survey therefore gives an impression of mental health and substance use among higher education students, rather than a precise picture. The figures are compared with measurements from 2021 and 2023. The 2021 survey was held during the COVID-19 crisis.

Slight improvement of mental health

The study shows that students' mental health has slightly improved compared with 2021: 5 out of 10 measures show a better score than in 2021 (Figure 1). For three of these measures, the improvements were already visible in 2023. For four of the other five mental health measures, the differences over the years are not large enough to be considered as an improvement (Table 1). The amount of students that are tired of life (range from occasionally to (almost) always) remained stable.

Despite the slight improvement in mental health, a substantial group of students is not doing well in terms of their mental health in 2025, as was the case in 2021 and 2023. For example, more than half of the participating students had experienced symptoms of emotional exhaustion, and almost a third had been strongly or very strongly affected by psychological problems such as dejection, anxiety or nervousness.

Figure 1. Five measures for mental health showing a change in the period between 2021 and 2025

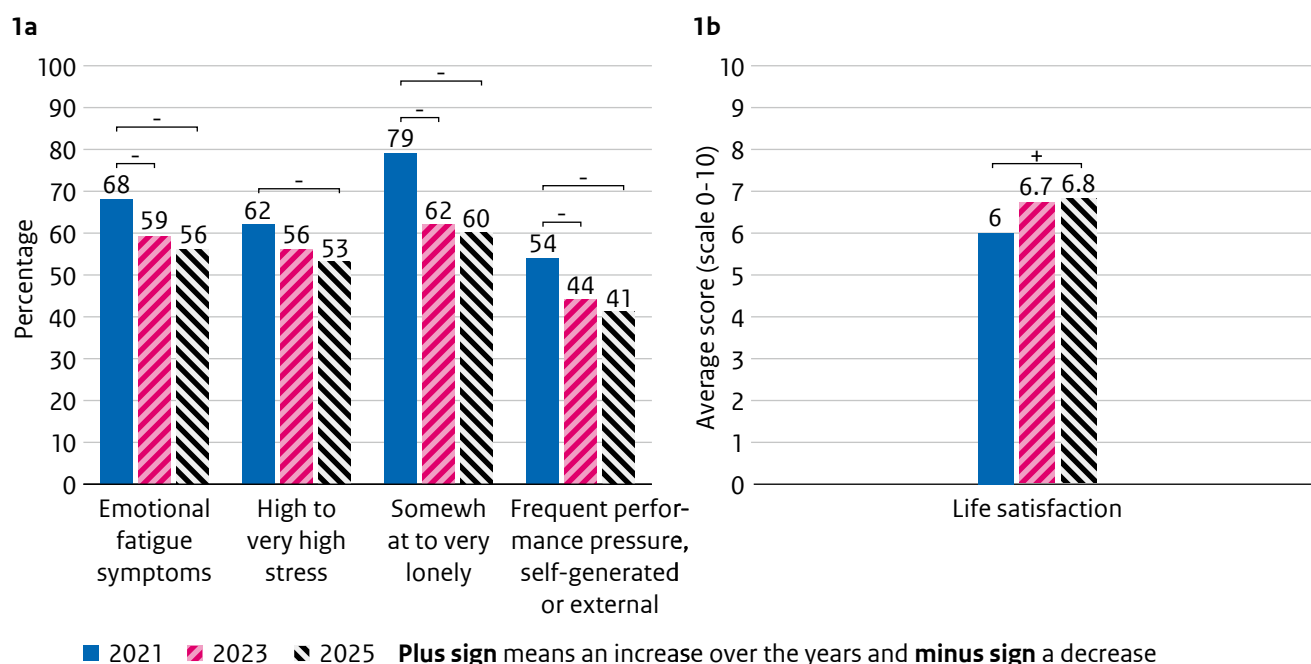


Table 1. Five measures for mental health (%) with differences in the period between 2021 and 2025 too small to consider as an improvement

	2021	2023	2025
Resilience (average to high)	51	54	57
Flourishing (above-average positive mental health)	18	20	23
Feelings of anxiety or depression	85	84	83
Tired of life (occasionally or repeatedly)	25	26	25
Affected by psychological complaints (strongly or very strongly)		32	29

Substance use has largely remained unchanged

For most substances, use statistics have remained (fairly) stable in the period between 2021 and 2025 (see Table 2). For five out of 16 measures improvements are visible over the years (see Figure 2). Recent ecstasy use (past month) has decreased compared with 2023. Frequent cannabis use, recent use of psychedelics and use of non-

prescription sleep-inducing drugs and tranquilisers (past twelve months) have fallen compared with 2021, caused by a decrease between 2021 and 2023. In contrast, in 2025, the percentage of students who vape on a regular or daily basis has increased compared to 2021. This can be attributed to an increase between 2021 and 2023.

Figure 2. Five measures for substance use (%) showing a change in the period between 2021 and 2025

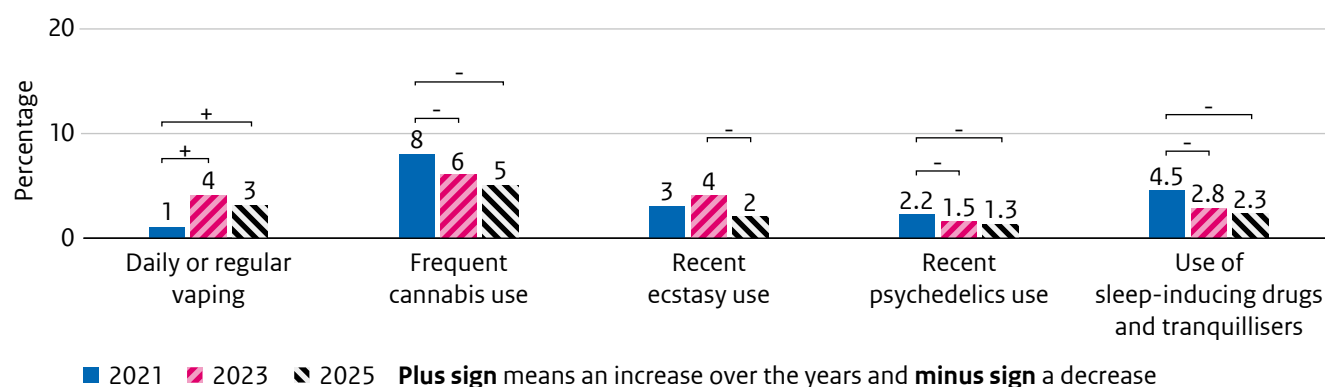


Table 2. Eleven measures for substance use (%) with differences in the period between 2021 and 2025 too small to consider as an improvement

	2021	2023	2025
Alcohol use: heavy	16	16	13
Alcohol use: excessive		10	7
Alcohol use: increased risk of an alcohol use disorder		33	30
Alcohol use: highly increased risk of an alcohol use disorder		4	3
Smoking: daily	8	6	5
Cocaine use: recent (past month)	2	2	1
ADHD medication: use of non-prescription medications (past twelve months)	4	3	3
Affected by alcohol use		2	2
Affected by drugs use		1	1
Affected by medicine use		0	0
Affected by substance use		3	3

Mental health and substance use are associated with personal and contextual factors

We conducted research into the factors associated with mental health and substance use among students. The factors concerned are some students' personal characteristics and factors in the social context, educational context, and societal context. Several of the personal and contextual factors studied appear to be associated with mental health or substance use. Some factors are associated with both. For example (severe) stress due to societal issues is associated with *reduced* mental health and *increased* substance use. Having a job (or sideline) is associated with both *better* mental health and *more* (risky) substance use. A final example is that women and those who do not identify as either male or female tend to have poorer mental health and engage in *less* (risky) substance use than men.

Received counselling or support

In 2025, more students receive counselling or support for both psychological problems and problems related to substance use than in 2021. This applies to counselling or support from within and outside the university of applied sciences or research university. The increase in received counselling or support for psychological problems occurred mainly between 2021 and 2023, but for substance use problems, the increase also took place between 2023 and 2025 (see Figures 3 and 4). The majority of students with psychological problems receive counselling or support, compared with only a minority of students with problems due to substance use. The most frequently mentioned reason for not receiving counselling or support within the institution is that the students concerned have no need for it (68% of students with substance use problems) or prefer to solve their problems on their own (53% of students with psychological problems).

Figure 3. Counselling or support received for psychological problems (%) in the past 12 months in the period between 2021 and 2025

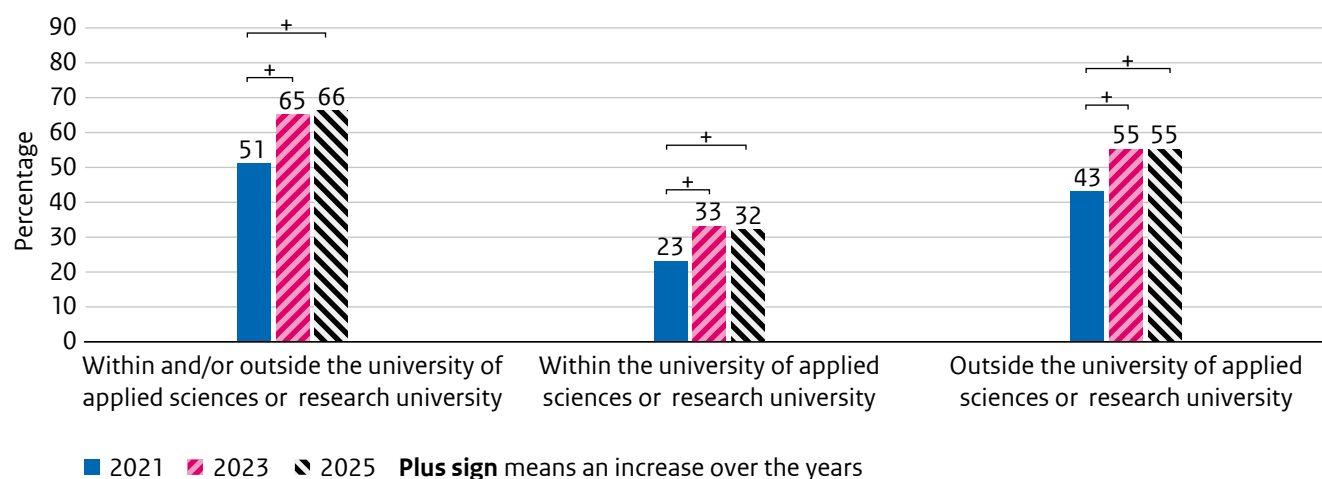
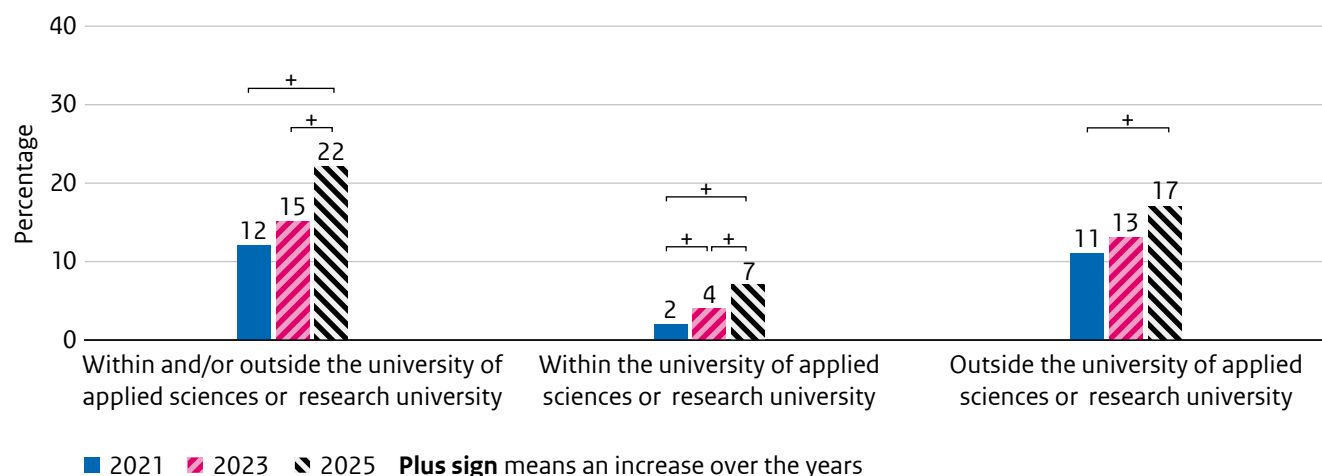


Figure 4. Counselling and support received for substance use problems (%) in the past 12 months in the period between 2021 and 2025



About the monitor

The Monitor on mental health and substance use among students in higher education first took place in 2021 and is repeated every two years. The survey is carried out by RIVM, the Trimbos Institute and the Netherlands Municipal Public Health Services and Medical Assistance in Accidents and Disasters on behalf of the Ministries of Health, Welfare and Sport and of Education, Culture and Science.

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