

12 Month Prevalence of Drug Use Among Third-Level Students in Limerick City

Drug misuse remains a crucial concern in modern Ireland. Nationally representative information on this issue among students was published in 2005 as part of the CLAN Survey.¹ The current study was designed to provide current local information on student health and lifestyles in Limerick City. This short paper focuses on drug use and misuse.

A quota sampling frame was used to distribute 1,000 questionnaires during lectures in a third level college in Limerick City. In addition to a number of other mental health questionnaires, this survey included a section on drug use and misuse.² A response rate of 76% was achieved. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 63 years (mean 22.2, SD=5.65, median 20). 52% of respondents were male (386) and 48% (356) were female.

Analysis excludes those (0.66%, n=5) that claimed to have taken a 'dummy drug' named 'Relevin'.

Table 1. Drug Use Type and Frequency over the last 12 months by Gender

Drug Type	Never	Once or Twice	3 or More
Tranquillisers without prescription	T= 96.9% (622) M= 96.6% (344) F= 97.4% (267)	T= 2.3% (15) M= 2.2% (8) F= 2.2% (6)	T= 0.8% (5) M= 1.1% (4) F= 0.4% (1)
Tranquillisers with prescription	T= 94.9% (610) M= 95.2% (338) F= 94.5% (260)	T= 3.6% (23) M= 3.7% (13) F= 3.6% (10)	T= 1.4% (9) M= 1.1% (4) F= 1.5% (4)
Amphetamine	T= 93.0% (599) M= 91.6% (327) F= 94.9% (261)	T= 4.2% (27) M= 5.0% (18) F= 3.3% (9)	T= 2.8% (18) M= 3.4% (12) F= 1.8% (5)
LSD	T= 96.3% (620) M= 95.5% (341) F= 97.5% (268)	T= 2.0% (13) M= 2.5% (9) F= 1.5% (4)	T= 1.7% (11) M= 2.0% (7) F= 1.1% (3)
Cocaine	T= 87.0% (562) M= 87.1% (311) F= 87.0% (240)	T= 7.3% (47) M= 5.6% (20) F= 9.8% (27)	T= 5.7% (37) M= 7.3% (26) F= 3.3% (9)
Heroin	T= 99.1% (638) M= 98.6% (352) F= 99.6% (274)	T= 0.6% (4) M= 1.1% (4) F= 0.4% (1)	T= 0.3% (2) M= 0.3% (1) F= 0% (0)
Ecstasy	T= 87.6% (567) M= 85.7% (306) F= 90.3% (250)	T= 6.3% (41) M= 7.3% (26) F= 5.4% (15)	T= 6.0% (39) M= 7.0% (25) F= 4.3% (12)
Drugs by injection	T= 99.5% (642) M= 99.4% (355) F= 99.6% (275)	T= 0.3% (2) M= 0.3% (1) F= 0.4% (1)	T= 0.2% (1) M= 0.3% (1) F= 0% (0)
Solvents	T= 96.3% (619) M= 95.5% (340) F= 97.1% (268)	T= 2.5% (16) M= 2.8% (10) F= 2.2% (6)	T= 1.1% (7) M= 1.4% (5) F= 0.7% (2)
Magic Mushrooms	T= 92.9% (598) M= 91.9% (327) F= 94.2% (268)	T= 5.1% (33) M= 5.6% (20) F= 4.7% (13)	T= 2.0% (13) M= 2.5% (9) F= 1.1% (3)
Cannabis	T= 66.8% (412) M= 67.9% (226) F= 65.6% (177)	T= 11.2% (69) M= 9.9% (33) F= 13.0% (35)	T= 22.1% (136) M= 22.2% (74) F= 21.5% (58)

T= Total, M= Male, F= Female

Table 1 details drug use frequency over the preceding 12 months broken down by gender. The on-going usage of cannabis is a particular issue. On-going cocaine and ecstasy use is also an issue of concern with more than five percent of respondents reporting having used these substances 3+ times in the previous year. Gender differences were notable in the use of both of these drugs, with males once again having higher usage rates than females. Polydrug use in the last 12 months was reported by 17.8% of respondents.

The high rate of cannabis use noted in this research is a serious issue, particularly as it is thought to be a risk factor for psychosis, schizophrenia and mental ill-health among those with a genetic predisposition. Similarly the rates of use of cocaine and ecstasy are a significant concern, particularly among males who reported significantly higher rates of ongoing usage. It is clear that effective, focussed, and adequately funded interventions are required to combat the issue of drug misuse, particularly in relation to cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy.

F. Houghton,^a N. Keane,^a N. Murphy,^a S. Houghton^b & C. Dunne^c

a Limerick Institute of Technology

b University of Limerick

c University College Cork

References

1. Hope, A., Dring, C. & Dring, J. (2005) College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National (CLAN) Survey. In: Health Promotion Unit. The Health of Irish Students. Dublin: Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health & Children.
2. Morgan, K., McGee, H., Watson, D., Perry, I., Shelley, E., Harrington, J., Molcho, M., Layte, R., Tully, N., van Lenthe, E., Ward, M., Lutomski, J., Conroy, R., Brugha, R. (2008) SLÁN 2007: Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes & Nutrition in Ireland. Main Report. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.