

CHANGING THE FUTURE

Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland



REPORT 3:
ALCOHOL & DRUGS

unicef 

CHANGE THE FUTURE

UNICEF is a global organisation working in more than 190 countries to help build a world in which children's rights are respected, their needs are provided for and to ensure they have a voice in shaping the world around them. We believe in changing the world for children in Ireland too. UNICEF advocates for all young people to ensure that they have every opportunity to grow, develop and contribute to our society. We are working to ensure that young people in Ireland are heard and that their rights are realised.

This is why we believe the *Changing the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland* report series is vitally important – because it is founded exclusively on the views of young people. *Changing the Future* is about the voice of young people living in Ireland, telling us their story in their own words.

This Research Project was coordinated by UNICEF Ireland.

The research, data and findings reported in *Change the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland: Alcohol and Drugs* was completed and compiled in December 2010. UNICEF would like to express our gratitude to our research partners MCCP, and The Base Ballyfermot. Further details of the methodology and background to the report are available through the offices of UNICEF Ireland: www.unicef.ie

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Photography: The photographs of young people used within this report for illustration are images posed by models and do not depict actual situations, or reflect the themes of the report.



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**UNICEF Ireland strongly advises
any individual who is experiencing
difficulties related to drug or alcohol
misuse, or who knows someone else
experiencing such difficulties to
contact the National HSE Drugs hotline
on 1800 459 459 or visit www.drugs.ie
for confidential advice and support.**

This third report in UNICEF Ireland's *Changing the Future* series addresses the very pertinent themes of drugs and alcohol, the different levels of consumption that the young respondents to UNICEF Ireland's survey report and, most critically, the roles that drugs and alcohol seem to be playing in the lives of young Irish people today.

Throughout the *Changing the Future* report series, UNICEF has presented both the quantitative results of the survey itself, but also the qualitative responses of the young respondents to the various issues that have been raised by the survey.

As is evident throughout this third report *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Alcohol and Drugs*, it is very apparent that drugs and alcohol play very influential roles in the manner in which most young Irish people navigate through adolescence.

This report should leave the reader in no doubt as to how widespread drug and alcohol consumption can become among young Irish people, and how central a role these substances can come to play in young peoples' lives. In the words of one respondent to this survey when asked to describe their first drug use –

"I fitted in."

The picture that the respondents paint is one in which the use of drugs and alcohol during adolescence can be understood better as the norm – rather than the exception, and that the majority of respondents report the use of substances like alcohol as something first undertaken during adolescence, rather than in adulthood.

Drugs and Alcohol can assume very harmful roles in young peoples' lives – both can be highly addictive and both can be highly destructive. The prevalence of drug and alcohol use reported by the participants to this survey illustrate the point that for Ireland to successfully promote and defend young peoples' right to the highest attainable standard of health, the normative relationship which it seems young Irish people share with these substances, must be challenged.

That is a challenge which cannot rest with any one stakeholder or individual, but rather must be assumed by us all. This report suggests the emergence of a dangerous orthodoxy in which drugs and alcohol are accepted as a normal part of adolescence in Ireland.

If that is the case, then we all must do more to ensure the protection of young people who are exposed to these substances, to impart appropriate and timely information upon the risks and, crucially, to provide alternatives to which young people can relate. Young people need to be able to make informed decisions about the potential implications of the habits and experiences to which they are being exposed every day.

If Ireland is to achieve the objective of developing a comprehensive framework, then young people themselves must be given a place at centre stage and their opinions must be afforded due weight.

UNICEF Ireland

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Why now?

The *Changing the Future* report series was initiated with the clear purpose of giving young people in Ireland the opportunity to identify and explore the social issues that they identify as most significant in their own lives. The prevalence of alcohol and drug consumption that the respondents to UNICEF's survey have reported suggests that those themes pervade throughout adolescence in Ireland and, as such, have to be given precedence in a comprehensive exploration of that experience.

There was a unanimity of understanding and purpose achieved in the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child when it recognised in Article 33 the very specific risks to young people associated with drugs abuse –

“(State Parties)... shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties...”

As noted in the *National Drugs Strategy (interim) 2009 – 2016*, the Irish Government has given approval for the development of a combined *National Substance Misuse Strategy* to address the misuse of both alcohol and drugs. UNICEF Ireland welcomes this decision and agrees that the policy framework governing drug and alcohol misuse in Ireland should come together under the same scope.

The argument for the inclusion of alcohol into a combined national substance misuse strategy is compelling and has been made consistently. Alcohol is an intoxicant that has been identified by the World Health Organisation as the world's third leading cause of ill health and premature death. It is important to consider the links between alcohol consumption and other high-risk behaviours to which young people in Ireland are exposed.

The misuse of alcohol can and often does lead to a variety of challenges for young people – physical, mental, behavioural and social – and UNICEF Ireland believes that this is particularly true in the case of adolescents and young people.

If the findings outlined in this report reflect wider trends in alcohol and drugs use amongst adolescents in Ireland then the need to include young people themselves in discussions that will form the basis of a stronger, more cohesive and more effective national policy on drugs and alcohol becomes self-evident. The role that alcohol and drug consumption have come to play in the lives of young people in Ireland cannot be fully documented, understood or responded to unless young people themselves are given the opportunity to relate to policy-makers their own experiences and perspectives.

The rights of children and young people to both form and express an opinion on the matters that affect them are enshrined as core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. At this critical point in the formulation of Ireland's policy response to the challenges presented by alcohol and drug consumption amongst young people UNICEF Ireland strongly argues that young people must be given the opportunity to fulfil those rights, to have their voice heard and to imprint their perspectives upon those policies. If Ireland is to create a policy environment which is better equipped to protect and promote the health of its young citizens; then those young citizens themselves must be given the opportunity to participate.

The discussions that will come to define Ireland's policy response to the challenges presented by alcohol and drug consumption are already taking place. Failure to include young people in these discussions, as much as any other that relates to their lives may come at a high cost indeed to the many young people in Ireland to whom alcohol and drugs present serious, complicated and persistent challenges.

How did we do it?

Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Drugs and Alcohol is the third in a series of four reports that will be published by UNICEF Ireland in 2011. The purpose of this series is to present the results of primary research that we carried out at the end of 2010, and to combine the findings of those four reports into a single holistic snapshot of adolescent wellbeing in Ireland.

The first of these four reports – *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness*, published in April 2011, has already outlined the methodology employed in this research in some detail. For that reason, *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Drugs and Alcohol* will only restate the broadest elements of that methodology:

- The research includes respondents from all four Provinces – Leinster, Munster, Ulster and Connaught;
- The results include male and female respondents;
- The research featured the responses of young people aged 16 to 20 years;
- The survey used youth-friendly language;
- All information gathered on the pages of the survey website remains confidential;
- No information gathered will be shared with any other party;
- No IP addresses or other technical information was captured by our software or within the research;
- No contact information that could identify any respondent for this survey - including emails, phone numbers, pictures, videos, sound files or names and addresses or other information was gathered by this research;

- The only demographic information gathered was: age, sex and county of residence. This is not considered sufficient to identify the location or identity of any respondent and ensures that respondents can give full and frank replies to questions without any worry of being identified at a later date by any individual, group or body;
- Questions were both prompted and unprompted, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative results to emerge from the data collected;
- The survey asked the participants to tell us 'in their own words' as often as possible;
- Throughout this Report, we have presented those responses exactly as they were told to us by the young people themselves.

Further details of the conceptual framework and methodology employed in this research project can be gained from the series' first report *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness*, or by contacting the offices of UNICEF Ireland.

UNICEF Ireland will go on to complete the *Changing the Future* report series with the fourth and final report - *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour* later in 2011.

PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL

What did we find?

This report presents the findings of a research survey conducted by UNICEF Ireland in late 2010.

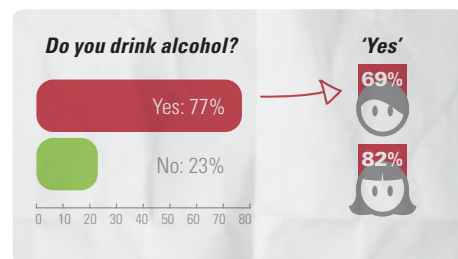
The participants were asked to answer questions on a wide variety of subjects and to comment upon a variety of experiences and perspectives including those related to drugs and alcohol. In responding to this survey and answering these questions the respondents have given us an honest and forthright account of the roles these substances can come to play in their lives.

Changing the Future offered all respondents the opportunity to relate their experiences and opinions in their own words and in so doing to describe to us in vivid detail their views on drug and alcohol consumption.

In presenting the findings of its' research, UNICEF Ireland asks readers to pay specific attention to the quotes of the young respondents themselves, and to reflect upon the way in which those statements reflect on Irish society and its' attitude towards drugs and alcohol as a whole.

Alcohol: How many respondents drink?

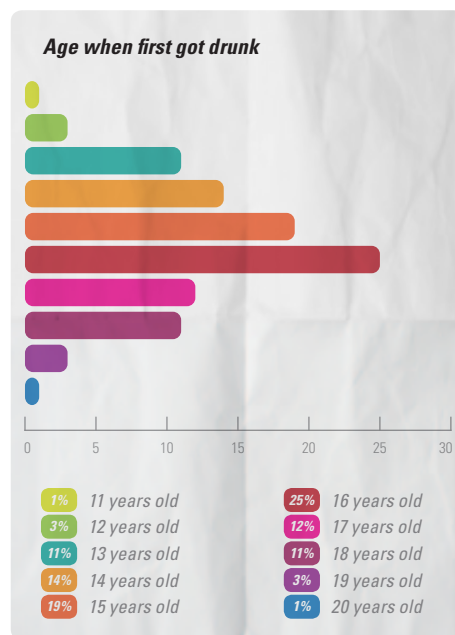
There is considerable evidence to say that drinking is a "taken-for-granted" activity amongst Ireland's younger population as such an overwhelming majority responded that they do drink alcohol.



More than 4 in 5 female respondents reported that they drink alcohol. Just less than 7 in 10 male respondents reported the same.

Over three quarters (77%) of all respondents claim to drink alcohol.

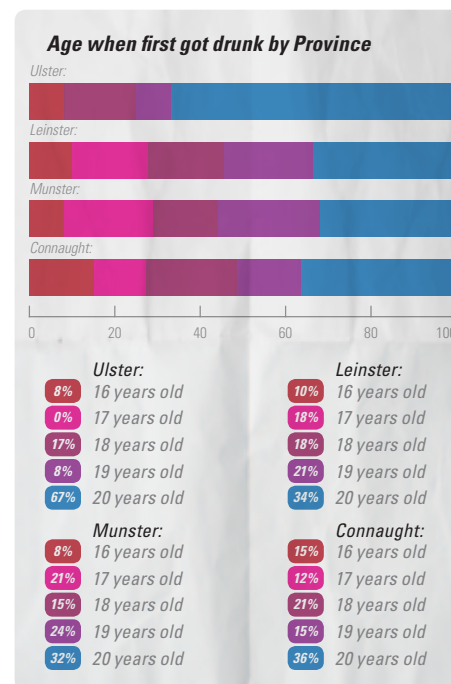
Of those who report that they do drink 92% stated that they have been drunk on occasion, so UNICEF also asked the respondents to tell us what age they were when they first got drunk. Just under half (48%) of the respondents who reported that they had been drunk, state that they first got drunk before the age of sixteen, with more than 1 in 10 (15%) getting drunk for the first time by the time they had reached fourteen.



15% of respondents got drunk for the first time before they were fourteen years old.

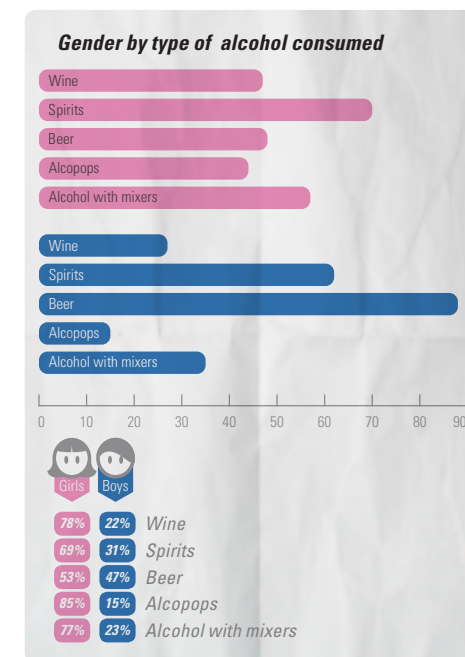
Provincial Breakdown

There are observable differences in the reporting of alcohol consumption across the four provinces; however, most distributions of alcohol consumption across the different ages are similar. There appears to be significantly more drinkers aged 20 in Ulster than for the other provinces – for which there is no significant statistical difference in drinking habits. In Ulster 10% report drinking by the age of sixteen, while this rises to 35% of those aged nineteen years old.



'Types of Alcoholic Drink: What are young people drinking?

The types of alcoholic drinks consumed differ between the two genders, girls preferring alcohol with mixers or alcopops; while boys report that they prefer to drink beer. 7 in 10 girls claim to drink spirits on occasion while nearly 80% report that they drink wine. There is no statistical difference in the types of drink consumed for the different provinces in our sample.



Girls report significantly higher consumption of alcoholic products with higher alcohol content such as wine, spirits and mixed alcoholic drinks.

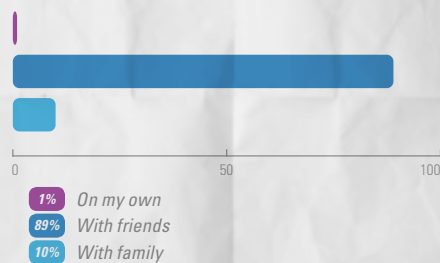
BEHAVIOUR

Drinking Behaviour:

How do young people describe their drinking habits?

The consumption of alcohol, in most cases, can be seen as a social activity engaged in with others. This is borne out by the respondents to this research; only a tiny minority reported that they were alone the first time that they got drunk.

Who were you with when you first got drunk?



A significant 10% reported that they were with family the first time that they got drunk, however the vast majority (89%) reported that they were with friends. However, there are differences in the way the young respondents described their own drinking habits.

Many of the respondents reported they were likely to get drunk for the first time with friends, but 16 year olds report that it would take place within the family.

Drinking to get a little or very drunk (binge drinking) appears to peak at the age of eighteen.

Age by Drinking Behaviour

I like to get a little drunk:



Drinks in the pub:



Drinking out of doors with friends:



Binge drinking (drink to get very drunk):



Just one or two:



Wine with a meal with family or friends:



Drinks while watching TV etc.:



Drinking while playing video games:



Problem drinking (I think I have a drink problem):



Age	16	17	18	19	20	(Age)
I like to get a little drunk	40%	51%	67%	44%	43%	
Drinks in the pub	10%	33%	45%	48%	55%	
Drinking out of doors with friends	40%	47%	36%	31%	30%	
Binge drinking (drink to get very drunk)	7%	28%	42%	27%	30%	
Just one or two	37%	30%	15%	33%	26%	
Wine with a meal with family or friends	13%	23%	15%	19%	19%	
Drinks while watching TV etc	3%	11%	16%	12%	7%	
Drinking while playing video games	7%	7%	5%	3%	6%	
Problem drinking (I think I have a drink problem)	0%	2%	2%	0%	2%	

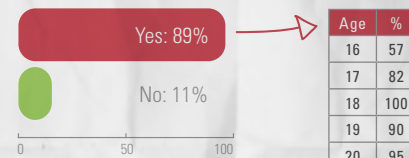
As young people mature drinking out of doors drops off as drinking in the pub becomes a preferable option. 'Drinking out of doors' reduces from 47% at seventeen to 30%, or just under a third, by age twenty. Drinking to 'get a little drunk' is also highest at eighteen, before falling again by age twenty.

Only 1% of the young people who took part in UNICEF Ireland's survey reported that they viewed their drinking to be a problem.

Only 1% of respondents reported that their drinking might represent a problem.

Also, it seems that for the great majority of young respondents the consumption of alcohol is not something that is hidden from the view of parents.

Are your parents aware of your drinking?



The great majority (89%) of respondents report that their parents are aware of their drinking.

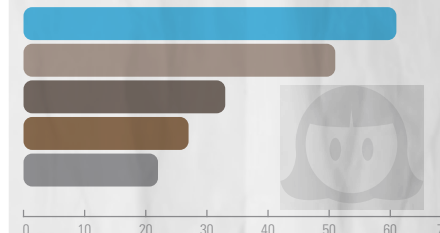
Sources of Alcohol:

Where are the respondents getting the alcohol they consume?

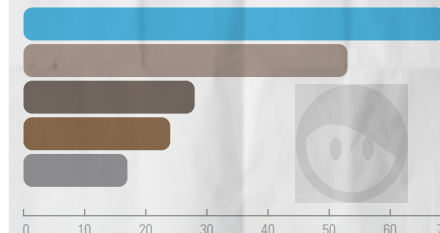
It is apparent that the majority of respondents to this survey access alcohol before they reach the age of eighteen years. It is therefore important to ask where young people source the alcohol that they consume.

Source of alcohol purchase by gender

Female:



Male:

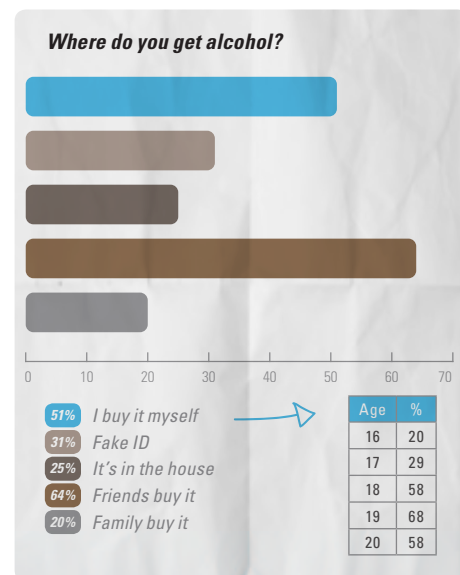


Girls Boys

61% 69% Friends buy it
51% 53% I buy it myself
33% 28% Fake ID
27% 24% It's in the house
22% 17% Family buy it

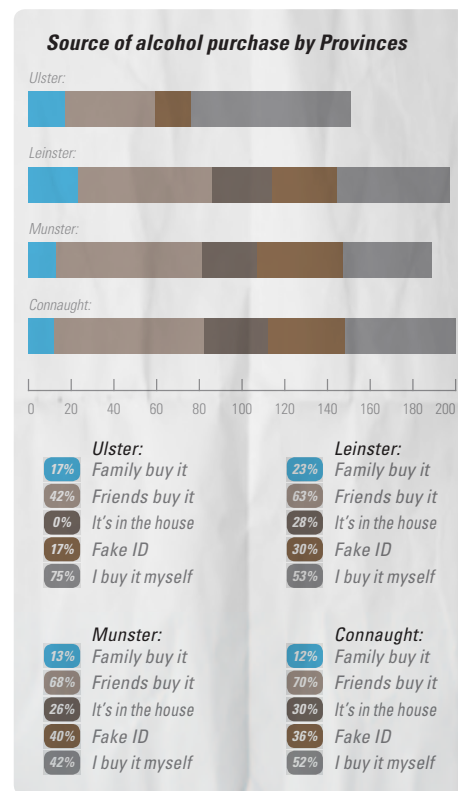
SOURCES OF ALCOHOL

More than 50% of the respondent to our survey reported that they purchase the alcohol that they consume themselves. As our sample included young people who have reached the legal age to purchase alcohol this should not come as a great surprise however, 1 in 5 sixteen year olds and 29% of seventeen year olds also claim that they purchase the alcohol they consume themselves.



1 in 5 sixteen year old respondents report that they purchase the alcohol they consume themselves.

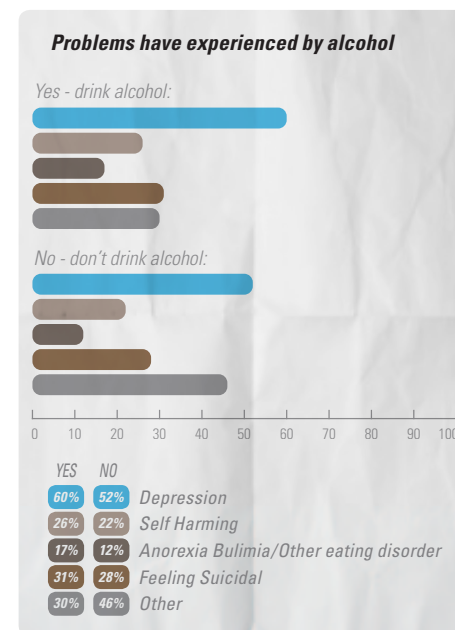
31% buy alcohol using a fake ID – females are more likely to do this than males. A quarter of the survey's respondents find alcohol in their own house. However, if not bought by friends or found at home, 1 in 5 sixteen year olds report that their family buy alcohol for them.



The highest proportion of respondents who report that buy alcohol themselves are from Ulster, although this proportion is not differentiated by age.

Other Problems: Overlap with Alcohol

We have seen in *Change the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Mental Health*, the very real and serious mental health issues that the respondents to this survey reported. By comparing the reporting of these mental health difficulties between the young respondents who drink to those who do not, a noticeable distinction emerges.

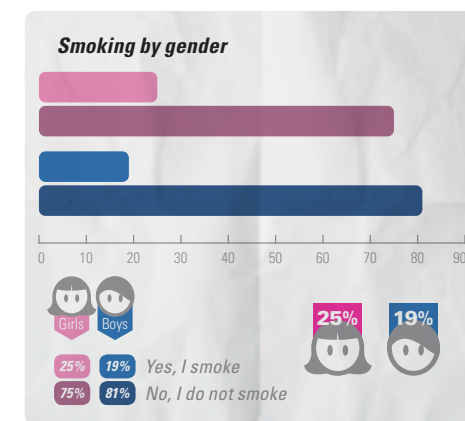


From our survey, UNICEF Ireland cannot say that alcohol causes these problems, but we can say the consumption of alcohol seems associated with a broad range of serious issues and also that these issues are reported significantly less by non-drinkers.

Of those who reported the experience of depression in our sample, 60% drank alcohol, as opposed to 52% of non-drinkers. Those who self harmed were at 26% as opposed to 22%; those with eating disorders were at 17% as opposed to 12% of non-drinkers; but those who felt suicidal on occasion were almost on a par with 31% and 28% respectively. This report cannot say that alcohol has a causal relationship in these regards, however the relationship between the experiences and behaviours warrant further exploration and research.

Smoking: How many respondents smoke?

23% of the young people who answered our survey smoked, with slightly more females smoking than males.



1 in 4 female respondents smoke, while 1 in 5 male respondents report that they smoke.

Age	%
16	10
17	24
18	20
19	23
20	30

PREVALENCE OF DRUGS

Other Drugs:

How prevalent is the use of other types of drugs?

Apart from the consumption of alcohol, the respondents to this survey also reported wide and varied consumption of other substances, and crucially those respondents (by their own comments) reveal a very vivid picture of the role those other substances play in their lives.

Have you ever taken drugs?

Yes: 35%

No: 65%

Age	%
16	15
17	33
18	38
19	35
20	44

More than one third of respondents claimed that they had taken drugs.

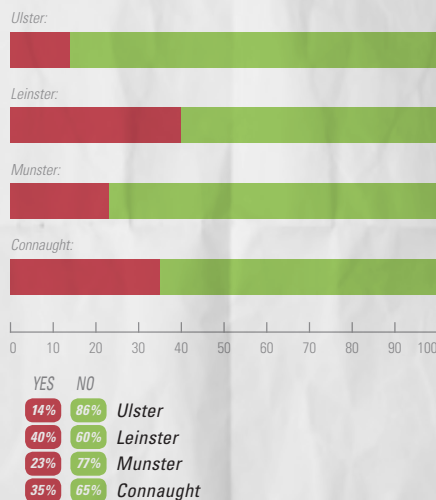


"I did it because I smoked and decided I wanted to see what the big thing was about drugs so I smoked grass."

"It's not such a big deal now. It's turned into a rite of passage now which is not necessarily a good thing."

More than one third of the young respondents who took part in our survey reported that they had taken drugs at some point, with 15% of sixteen year olds reporting that they had done so. There was no significant difference in the reporting of drug consumption between the two genders.

Ever taken drugs by Provinces



There is, however, a significant divergence between Ulster and Munster, and the other two Provinces.

The lowest proportion of respondents who reported drug taking was in Ulster (14%), followed by Munster (23%), while this proportion increases to 35% in Connaught and 39% in Leinster, where the greatest proportion report that they have taken drugs.

Currently 'Taking Drugs

There is of course a distinction between those respondents who have ever taken drugs and those who are currently taking drugs, so UNICEF Ireland also asked the respondents to tell us if they were currently taking drugs. Some respondents reported that while they had taken drugs in the past they were not continuing to do so. In fact 7% less respondents were still taking drugs than the proportion that had used drugs at some point.

Are you taking drugs?

Yes: 28%

No: 72%

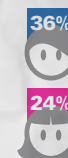
Age	%
16	0
17	42
18	29
19	28
20	28

"Good at the time, but it was a terrible habit that left me with no money for important things."

A greater proportion of respondents reported that they had taken drugs, than reported that they smoke cigarettes.

Some of the respondents gave UNICEF an insight into why they had stopped taking drugs, citing; the cost, the health concerns, the habitual nature of drug taking and the self-image associated with drugs. A significant proportion of the respondents reported that they continued to take drugs and related that drug taking as a positive experience.

28% of the young respondents reported that they are taking drugs.



"I have had wonderful experiences with recreational soft drug use. I don't believe that they are anymore harmful than alcohol or tobacco most probably less so."

While 35% report that they have taken drugs at some point, 28% claim to be taking drugs now. This means that more respondents to this survey have taken drugs, or are taking drugs, than smoke cigarettes. In fact, 2 in every 5 seventeen year olds report that they are taking drugs.

TYPES OF DRUGS

Drugs:

What types of drugs are being used?

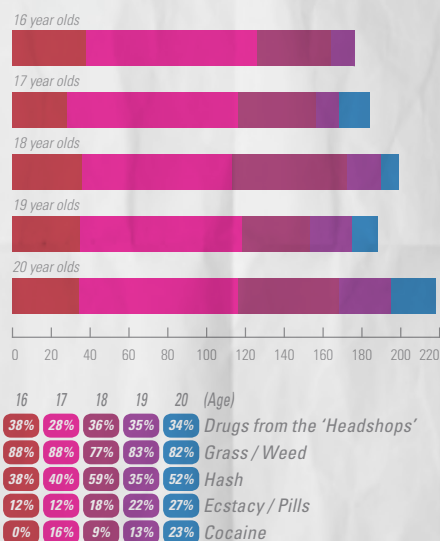
The young respondents to UNICEF's survey who reported that they were taking drugs also reported that they were using a variety of different substances, each with different properties and each with different effects on the user.

The consumption of 'grass' or 'weed' was by far the most reported substance with over 80% reporting its use.

Nearly half of the respondents (46%) reported the use of 'hash', while a further 34% reported the use of drugs from the so-called 'headshops'. One in five reported the use of 'ecstasy' or 'pills' while 15% reported the use of Cocaine.

"So, you're home by about 10 in the morning (that is, if the session doesn't last longer - once one of our sessions lasted for 3 days and 4 nights), get some sleep till about 4 and then you leave your house and do the same again."

Type of drug by age

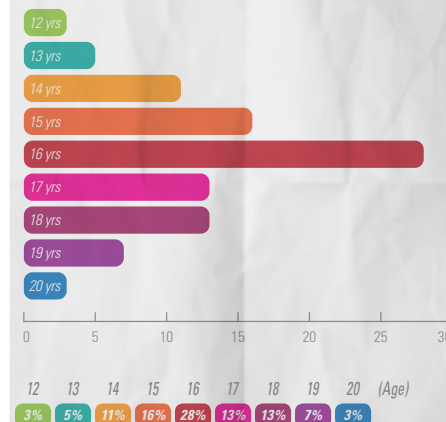


"I used to take an awful lot of drugs. Anything except Heroin and Crack Cocaine. I used to snort awful amounts of Ketamine. I was really into GHB for about half a year, Mephedrone Coke Acid 2c-b - all kinds of pills, MDMA, Speed... I used to take anything I could get my hands on, but recently I kinda gave up and I only smoke weed."

Drug Consumption: At what age does drug consumption begin?

A significant majority (64%) of the respondents who have taken drugs had done so by the age of 16.

What age were you when you first took drugs?



"Taking drugs made me feel happy at the time because i thought i was great because smoke weed and hash with my friends... But now when I look back, I think to myself: I'm stupid for doing that why did i smoke that stuff its bad for my health, nowadays I hate drugs."

A significant majority of the young respondents who report that they have taken drugs report that they were 16 or younger when they first did so.

OVERLAP OF ISSUES

Overlap of Issues:

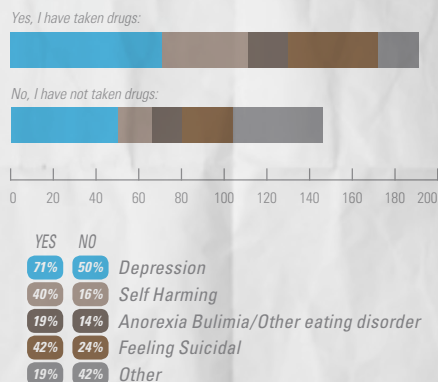
Are Mental Health difficulties more prevalent amongst respondents who report consumption of drugs?

In *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Mental Health*, the respondents to our survey reported the experience of complex and difficult mental health issues such as feelings of depression, suicide, eating disorders and self harm.

The survey that UNICEF undertook does not clearly demonstrate a casual relationship between the consumption of drugs and the experiencing of these mental health issues, however, it is noteworthy that the reported prevalence of the experiences is observably higher amongst those respondents who report the use of drugs, compared to those that did not report the use of drugs.

EVER TAKEN DRUGS:			
Reported Mental Health Concerns	Total	Yes	No
Total	100%	35%	65%
Depression	57%	71%	50%
Self harming	24%	40%	16%
Anorexia Bulimia / other eating disorder	16%	19%	14%
Feeling suicidal	30%	42%	24%
Other	34%	19%	42%

Problems have experienced by taking drugs



The reported prevalence of mental health difficulties such as depression, self harm, eating disorders or feeling suicidal was noticeably higher amongst those respondents who also reported the use of drugs.

A lot of my friends developed serious health problems because of their lifestyle and amounts of drugs they were taking so i decided to call it a day with the aul drugs. And also, I felt really depressed. There's really no point in doing it - it's the same routine day-to-day - me and my friends buying drugs in bulk."

Mapping overlaps between reported Mental Health Issues and Drug Use

The manner in which the respondents have reported the experience of certain mental health concerns and reported the use of drugs is also mapped out in the final graph below.

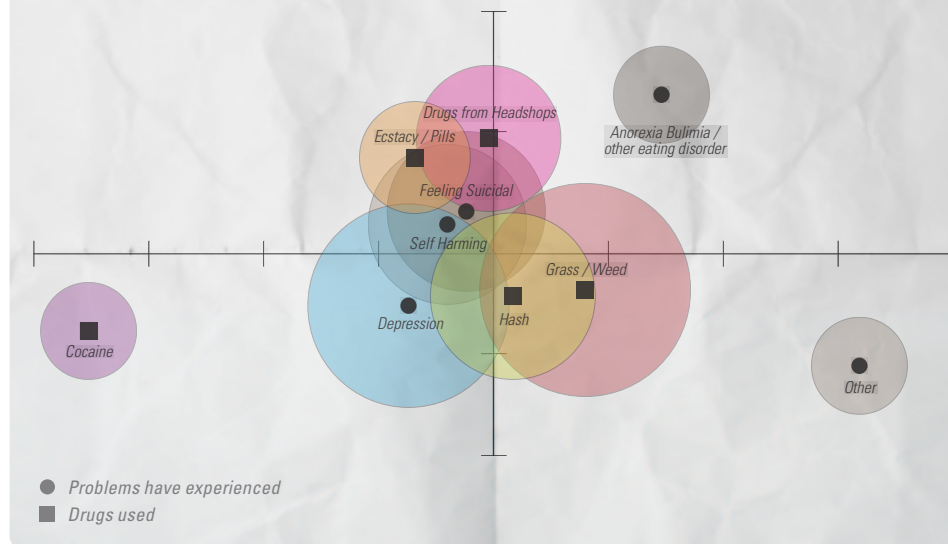
The graph illustrates the mental health problems reported by those who take drugs. The size of each bubble represents the number of people who reported the experience in question. Within the sample there is an overlap between those who take 'ecstasy' or 'pills' and those who get drugs from so-called 'headshops', for example.

There is considerable overlap in the centre of the graph, where people who take drugs report the experience of several mental health concerns.

There is also a noticeable overlap between those who take 'grass' or 'weed' and those who take 'hash'.

Amongst our sample, hash takers are more likely to suffer from depression and there is also a significant overlap with the bubbles associated with self harm and feeling suicidal. Those who report that they take 'grass' or 'weed' are most likely to have other un-specified concerns not recorded by the survey.

Problems have experienced by drugs used



SUMMARY

Concluding Summary:

What are young people telling us about Drugs and Alcohol?

Once again, UNICEF Ireland would like to thank the young people who took part in our *Changing the Future* survey and were willing to share with us their experiences and perspectives to better inform us as to the reality of their lives. The use of alcohol and drugs are not experiences that are easy for young people to share but are clearly issues which could be better addressed in Ireland by opening up the discussion with young people themselves. It is crucial that we learn to engage young people more meaningfully as we seek the means to address these challenges, offer young people appropriate alternatives to drugs and alcohol, and also assist the great many young people whom, through their responses to this survey, have illustrated the difficulties that alcohol and drugs can present to them.

The principal and most important conclusions that UNICEF Ireland draws from the findings of this survey are related to the prevalence of alcohol and drug consumption among the young respondents to it.

More of the respondents reported that they drink alcohol than did not, with 82% of the female respondents reporting that they drank compared to 69% of male respondents to the survey. 48% of those who had reported that they had drunk alcohol claimed to have done so by the age of sixteen or younger. In fact only 15% of those respondents who had been drunk reported that they were eighteen years or older the first time that they were drunk. Of the four provinces, Connaught had the highest proportion of sixteen year old respondents who reported that they drank alcohol.

The respondents to the survey reported the consumption of different types of alcohol including beer, wine, alcopops and alcohol with mixers.

While the male respondents reported greater consumption of beer, the female respondents reported higher consumption of wine and alcohol with mixers.

The young people who took part in this survey clearly perceived the consumption of alcohol as a social activity, with 89% reporting that they first got drunk with friends, and a further 10% reporting that they first got drunk with their family. Only a very tiny proportion reported that they were alone the first time that they got drunk. The proportion of young people who characterised their drinking as binge drinking (drinking to get drunk) peaked at the age of eighteen, with only 1% of the total respondents who drink describing their consumption of alcohol as a problem.

The young respondents reported a variety of sources for the alcohol that they consume including – purchasing it themselves, the use of fake identification, the availability of the alcohol in the home and the purchase of alcohol for their consumption by friends and family members.

Of all the respondents who report that they drank, 20% claim that their family buy the alcohol that they consume, while a further one in five of the sixteen year old respondents who drink alcohol report that they purchase the alcohol themselves.

In *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Mental Health* some of the survey respondents identified the experiences of depression, feeling suicidal, self-harm and eating disorders. Importantly, the reporting of all four of these mental health concerns was higher among that proportion of the sample that also reported drinking.

While *Changing the Future* cannot go so far as to suggest a direct casual relationship between the consumption of alcohol and the experience of mental health issues such as these, the higher proportion of these experiences amongst young people who drink alcohol cannot be ignored.

In the case of alcohol, the majority of the respondents reported that they drink, however this was not the case in the reporting of smoking cigarettes and the use of other drugs.

In terms of cigarettes, just under one quarter of the respondents claimed to smoke with a slightly higher proportion of those who do smoke cigarettes being girls. In fact, one in four female respondents smoke, compared to one in five male respondents.

A significant proportion of respondents reported that they had taken illegal drugs. More than one third (35%) of the respondents to *Changing the Future* reported that they had tried drugs at some point, with 28% of the total sample reporting that their drug use was ongoing.

It is therefore the case that more of the respondents to *Changing the Future* reported that they take drugs than reported that they smoke cigarettes.

The young respondents reported that the types of drugs that they take vary and differing proportions reported the use of various substances. Of those young people that reported that they were taking drugs on an on-going basis, more than 80% reported the use of 'grass' or 'weed' 46% reported the use of 'hash', 34% reported the use of drugs from 'headshops', 20% reported the use of 'ecstasy' or 'pills' and 15% reported the use of 'cocaine'.

Most of the respondents who claimed to have taken drugs had done so by the time they were sixteen years old.

In the case of the consumption of alcohol the reported prevalence of mental health concerns such as depression, feeling suicidal, self-harm or eating disorders was significantly higher amongst that proportion of the sample that reported the use of drugs.

Once again, this research does not prove a casual relationship between the two experiences, but the markedly higher proportion of young people who use drugs and alcohol and also experience mental health difficulties is – in the view of UNICEF Ireland – something that must be explored further in research and policy-making.

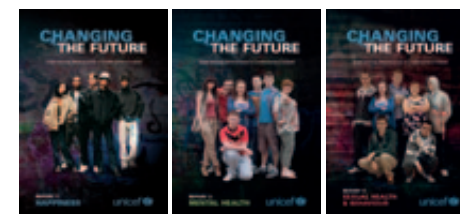
What is absolutely clear from the responses to this survey is that drugs and alcohol are both widely available and widely used amongst young people in Ireland.

Knowing, as we do, the potentially devastating roles that drugs and alcohol can play in young peoples' lives, it is imperative that we address this prevalence openly and bring it into the crucial discussions that will shape the future experiences of young people in Ireland.

If in the case of the use of drugs and alcohol part of the solution lies in understanding the scale and nature of the problem, UNICEF Ireland would like to thank the young people who came forward to share their experiences of drugs and alcohol, and help us understand their points of view.

They have helped us, once again, to *Change the Future*.

Also available in the 'Changing the Future' series:



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