

2015

# National Student Drug Survey

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The research Team would like to thank SSDP Chapters, SpunOut.ie and the Student Unions for their assistance in promoting the survey and to those students who participated in the survey.

### **Introduction**

Participants of various third level institutions around Ireland took part in a national online anonymous and randomised survey about their substance use between October and December 2014. 2,701 surveys were completed (52% Male and 47% female; 1% identified as other).

It was increasingly evident that there was a clear lack of information pertaining to the nature and frequency of substance and alcohol use in among third level students in Ireland. Third level participants represent a useful body of participants that are meaningfully accessible. Therefore the genesis of the current survey was to access this body of potential respondents in order to ascertain both a baseline of information regarding drug and alcohol use and changes in trends in Ireland. This also provides the opportunity to gain greater insight into the nature of these behaviours amongst this population.

It is hoped that this data will assist the knowledge of Health Promotion Departments and Student Unions in developing services, policies and information campaigns.

### ***To cite this research:***

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The following outlines the descriptive statistical findings of the survey:

### **Alcohol**

Results show that 98% of respondents have ever had an alcoholic drink (fig 3). This figure is made up of those who answered the question as to whether or not they drink.

78% of respondents report having a drink containing alcohol more than 2 times a week. 31% of respondents report having six or more drinks containing alcohol on a monthly basis.

35% of respondents report having six or more alcoholic drinks on one occasion on a weekly basis. The World Health Organisation defines binge drinking as drinking six or more standard drinks.

More than half of respondents had an alcoholic drink in the previous week (Fig 13).

### **Drug Use Prevalence**

82% of students have tried illegal drugs (fig 3). This shows that it is common for some students to try illegal drugs at least once in their lifetime; however, recurring drug use is lower for illegal drugs compared to alcohol.

The survey shows that there has been a significant decline in the use of synthetic substances (Fig 10).

Respondents are choosing to purchase the more traditional substances such as Cannabis and MDMA (Ecstasy) (Fig 11).

When taken over the past 12 months, 49% of all respondents have consumed normal strength cannabis compared to 44% who have used high potency cannabis (Fig 12).

34% of respondents who have ever used drugs have purchased a mystery white powder, however, this has decreased to 9.52% who have purchased a mystery white powder within the past 12 months (Fig 22).

### **Why people do not use illegal drugs**

Respondents reported that the common reason why they do not use illegal drugs is 16% health consequences and 9% due to criminality (Fig 14).

### **Why people use illegal drugs**

The most common reason why students are consuming drugs is fun (27%), curiosity (19%) and "switching off" (13%). Among the lowest is peer pressure at 6% (Fig 15).

### **Selling and sharing drugs**

35% of people that have used illegal drugs in their lifetime have sold illegal drugs (Fig 20 and Fig 22).

94% of people that have used drugs in their lifetime have shared drugs with another person. Under the law in Ireland this is contrary to Section 15 Misuse Of Drugs Act.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended to investigate the link between third level students selling drugs to fund their drug use.

### **Harm Reduction**

Respondents that have ever used illegal drugs report that take a multitude of harm reduction precautions when using a new substance. 23% ask friends, 22% research through the internet and 15% ask a sober friend to watch out for them (Fig 17).

Respondents take precautions to try and know the contents of a pill or powder and research online harm reduction warnings (Fig 23).

### ***Recommendation***

Health Promotion Units and Student Unions should aim provide relevant information relating to drug and alcohol use that is non-judgemental and relevant

### **Purchasing and accessing illegal drugs**

47% of respondents purchase drugs from friends, 32% from dealers and 4.5% usually purchase from the darknet (Fig 18).

18% of respondents that have ever used illegal drugs have purchased via the internet. 10% purchase themselves and 8% purchase via a friend (Fig 19).

12% of all respondents have suffered intimidation and violence purchasing illegal drugs. Of those 0.89% of respondents purchased via the dark web (Fig 22).

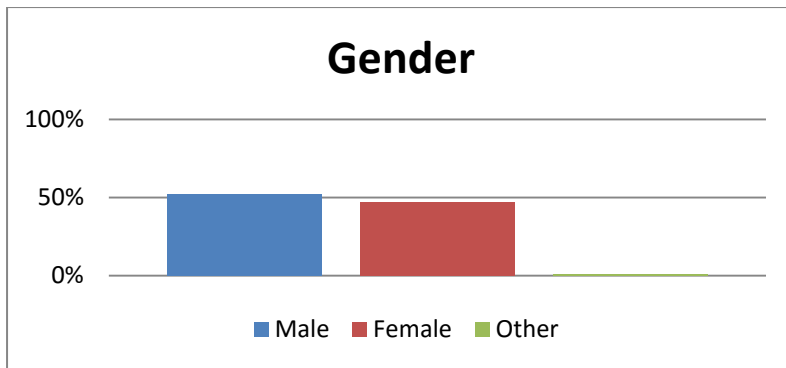
### **CPR and recovery Position**

53% of respondents know how to put someone in the recovery position. 43% know how to do CPR and 38% know how to check the airway. 46% would like CPR training (Fig 28).

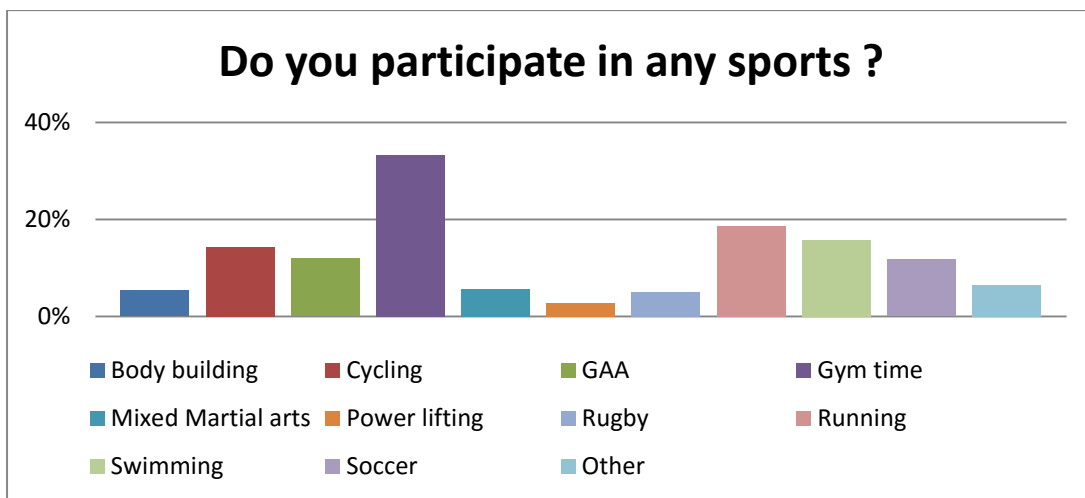
***Recommendation***

To offer CPR training to all third level students

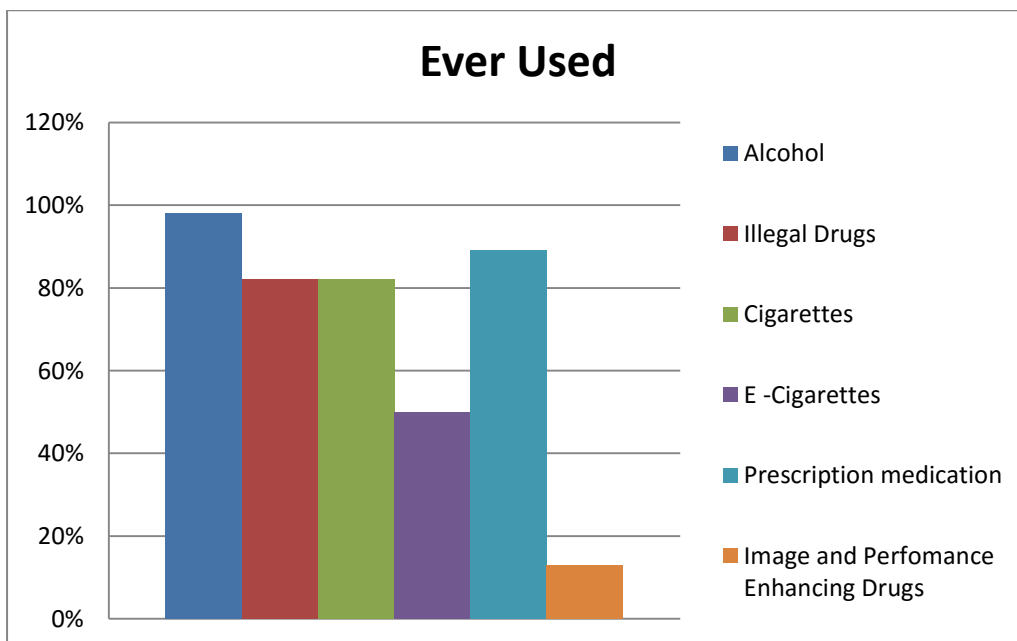
This evidence suggests that students are taking precautions around their drug use and therefore they want to be safe when taking drugs. In general students are risk averse rather than risk prone. For example, students do tend to seek help when concerned about their drug use and the drug use of their friends. There are a large number of students that take precautions when trying new drugs and researching information online (Figs 17, 24 & 25).



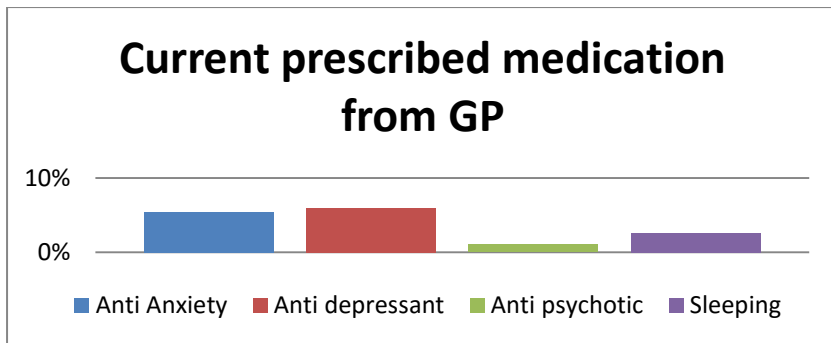
**Fig 1. Gender percentage of overall respondents.**



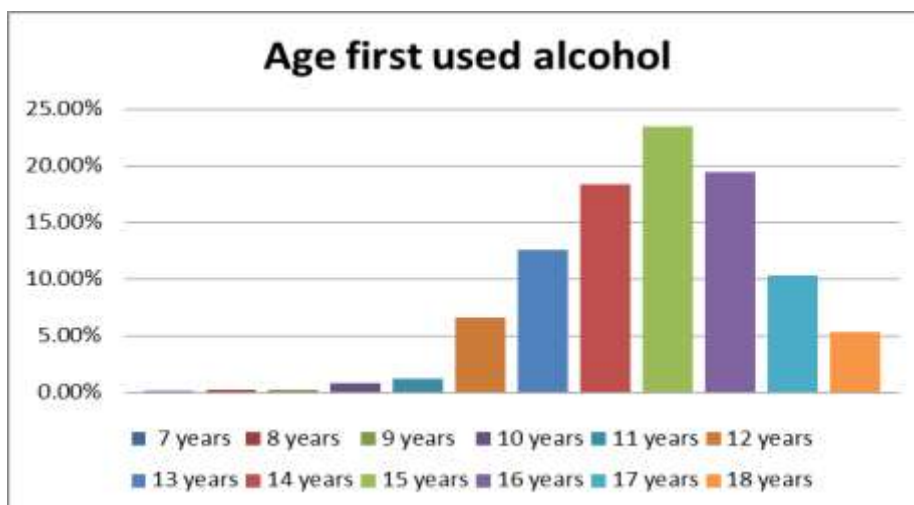
**Fig 2. Respondents partaking in sporting activities.**



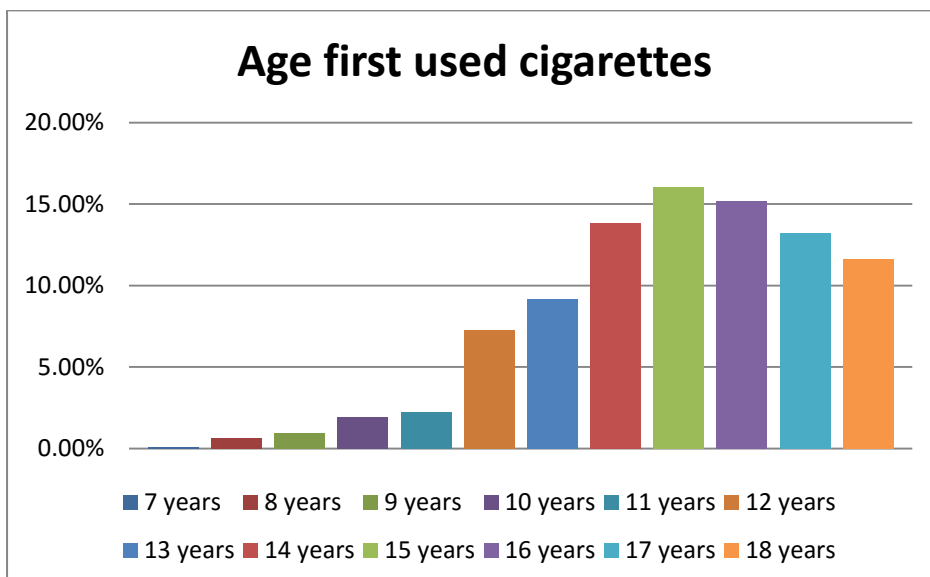
**Fig 3. 98% of respondents have ever used alcohol 82% of respondents have ever used illegal drugs 82% have ever used cigarettes**



**Fig 4. 15% of respondents who are currently prescribed medication excluding physical ailments.**



**Fig 5. The percentage of respondents who first used alcohol by age.**



**Fig 6. Respondents, who reported to have first used cigarettes by age.**

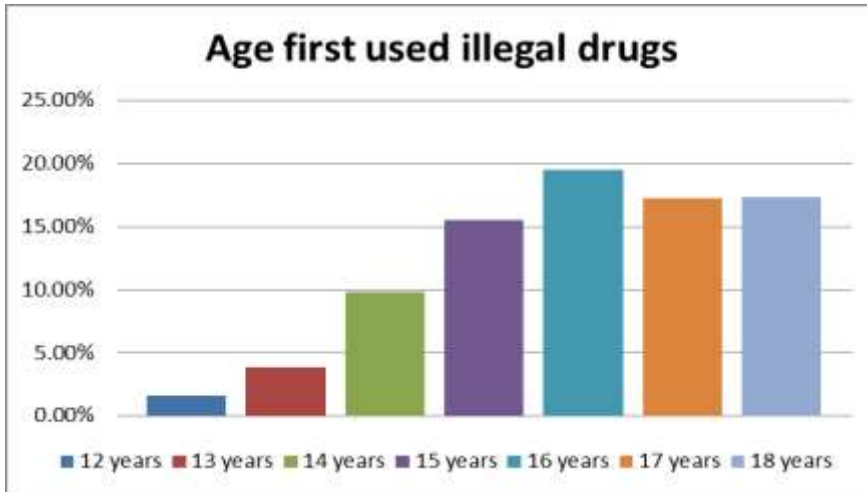


Fig 7. Respondents, who reported to have first used illegal drugs by age.

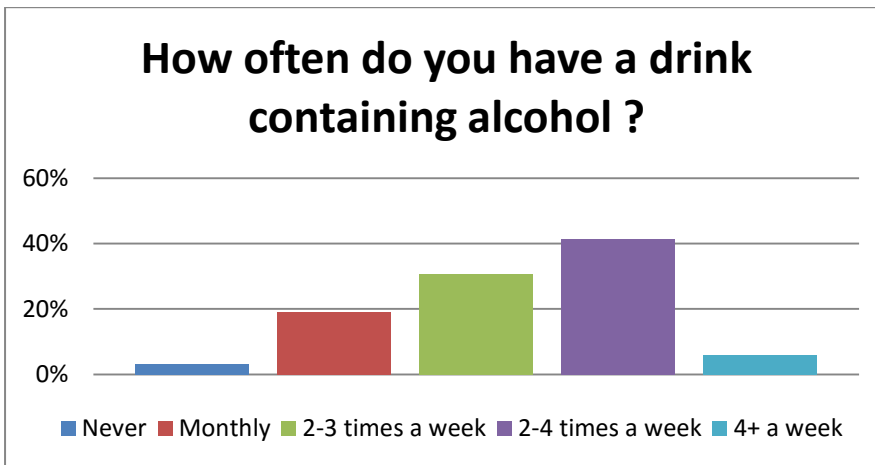


Fig 8. 78% of respondents report having a drink containing alcohol more than 2 times a week.

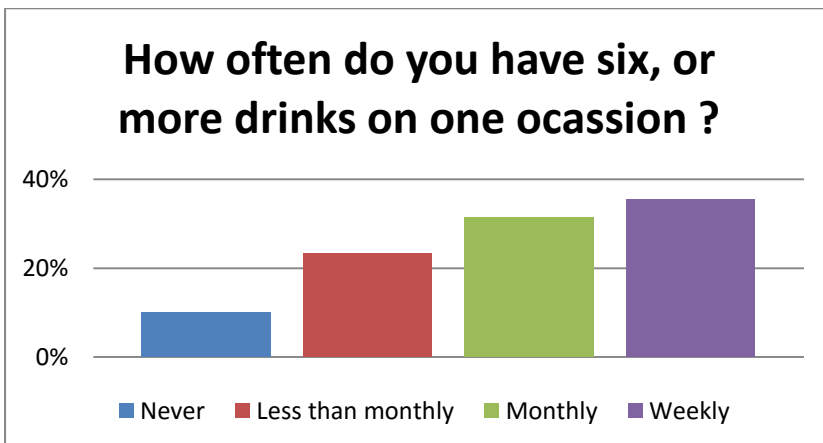


Fig 9. 31% of respondents report having six or more drinks containing alcohol on a monthly basis. 35% of respondents report having six or more drinks containing alcohol on a weekly basis.



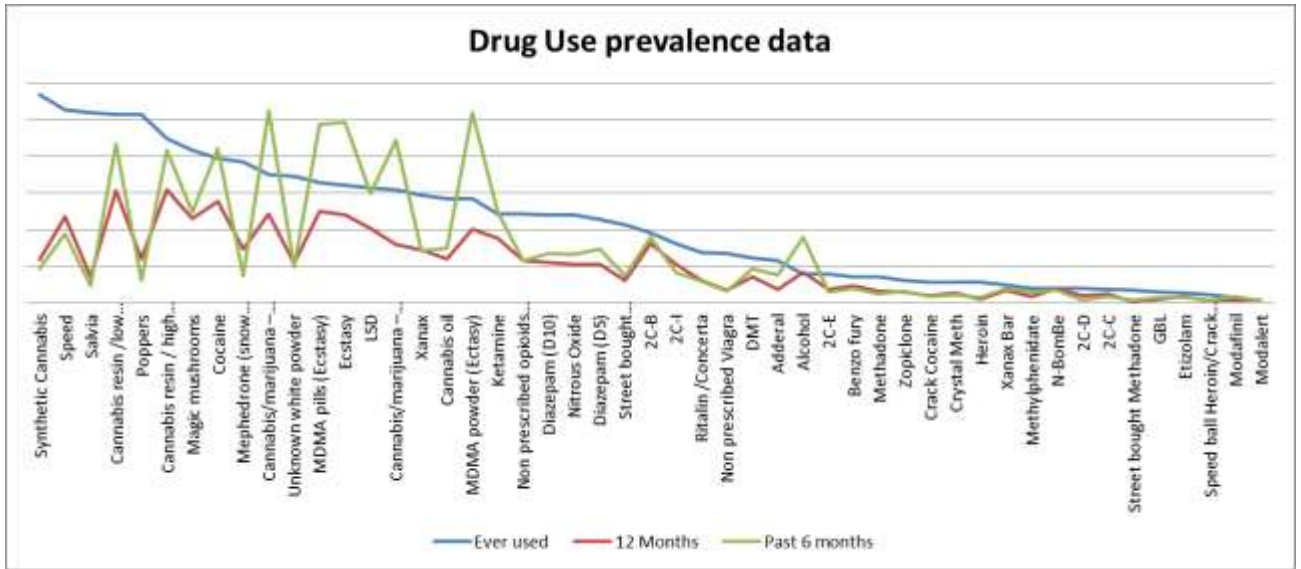


Fig 10. Reported drug use prevalence data by respondents.

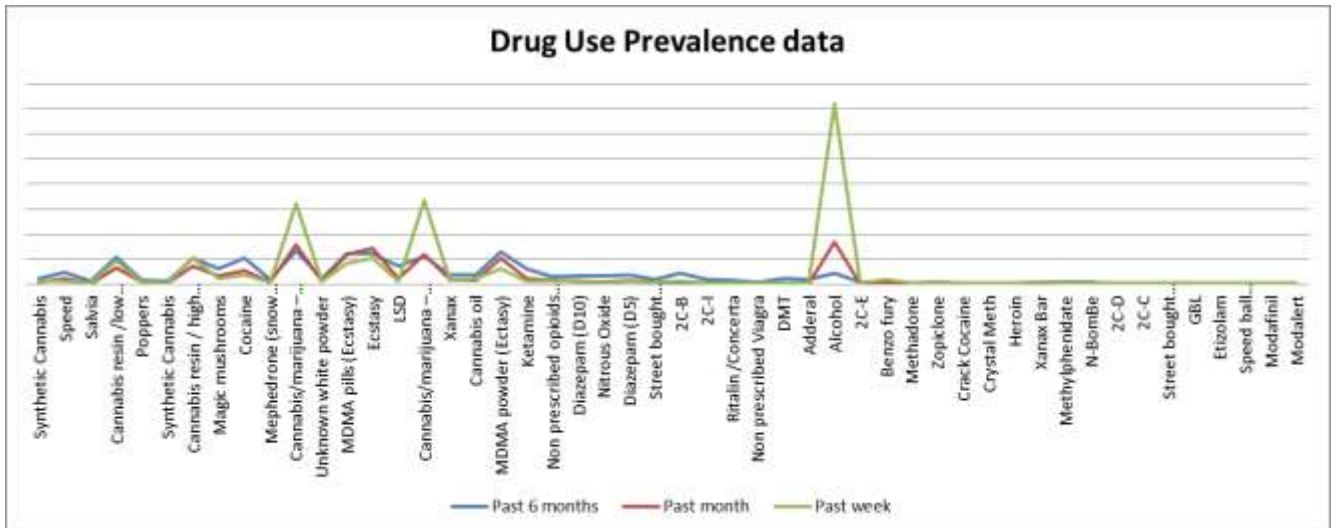
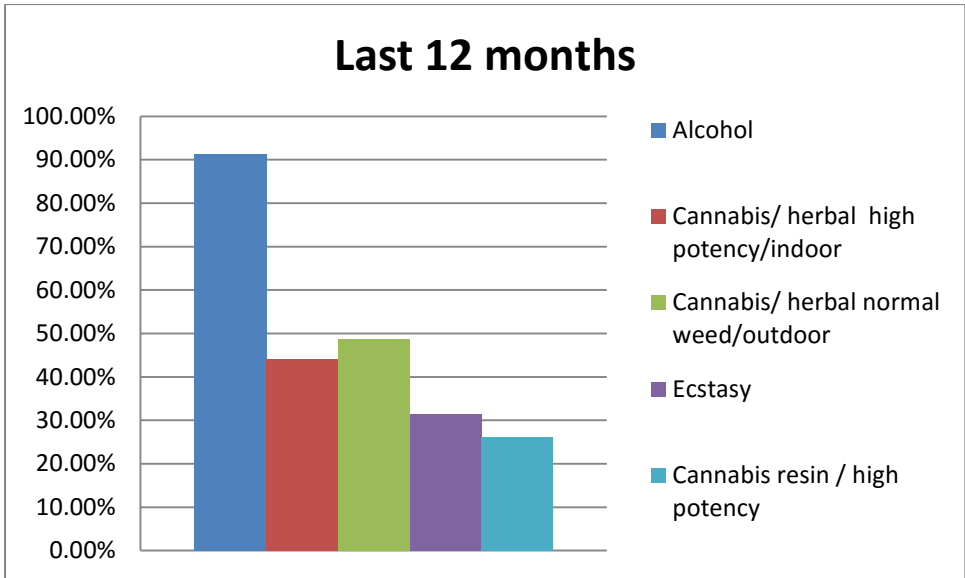
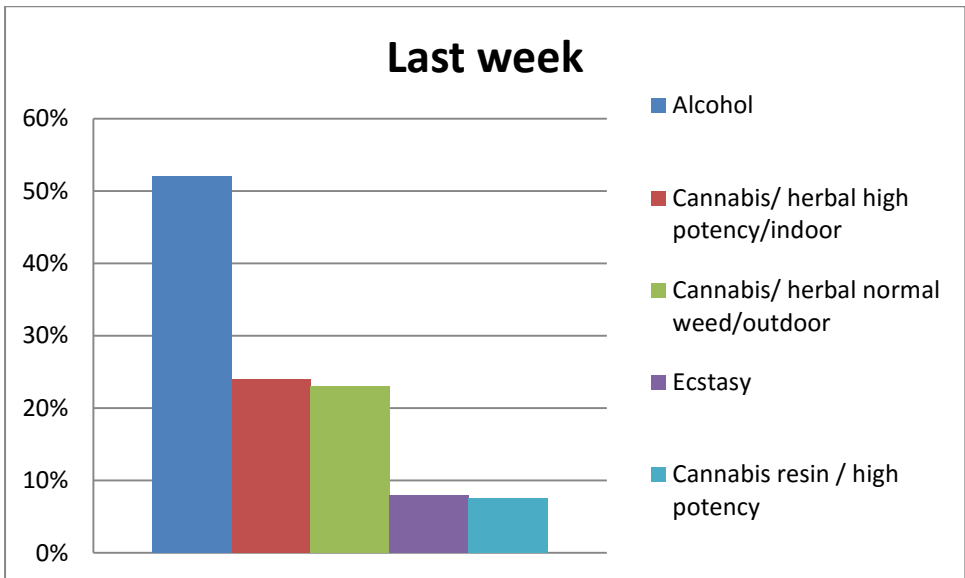


Fig 11. Reported drug use prevalence data by respondents.



**Fig 12. Last 12 months top 5 substances reported.**



**Fig 13. Top 5 drugs used in the last week. 52% of respondents have had an alcoholic drink in the last week 24% of respondents have used Cannabis.**

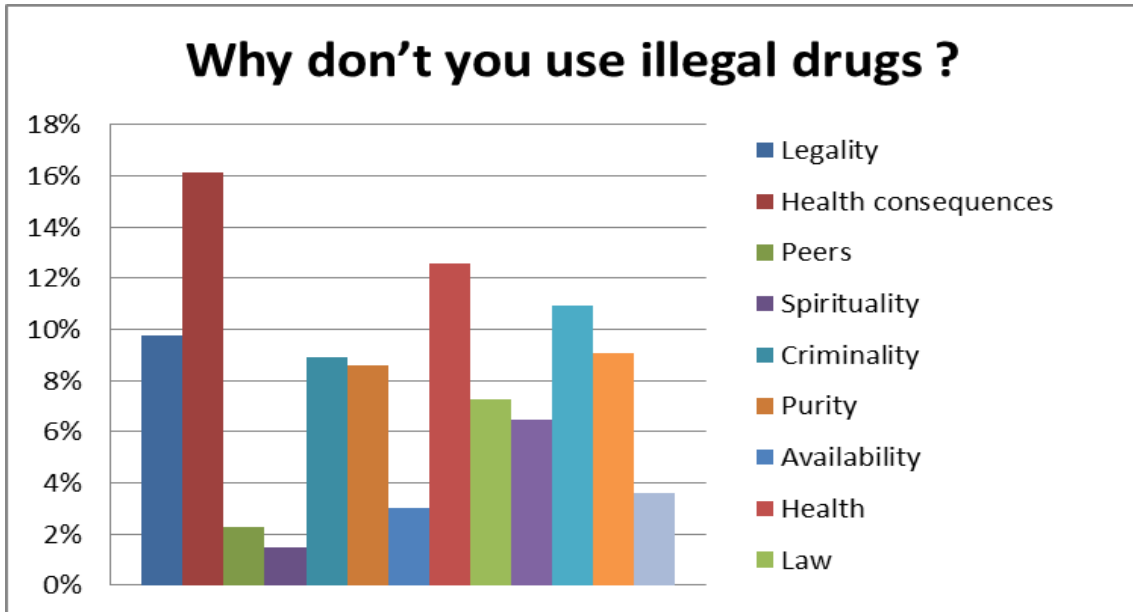


Fig 14. Reasons reported by respondents why they do not use illegal drugs.

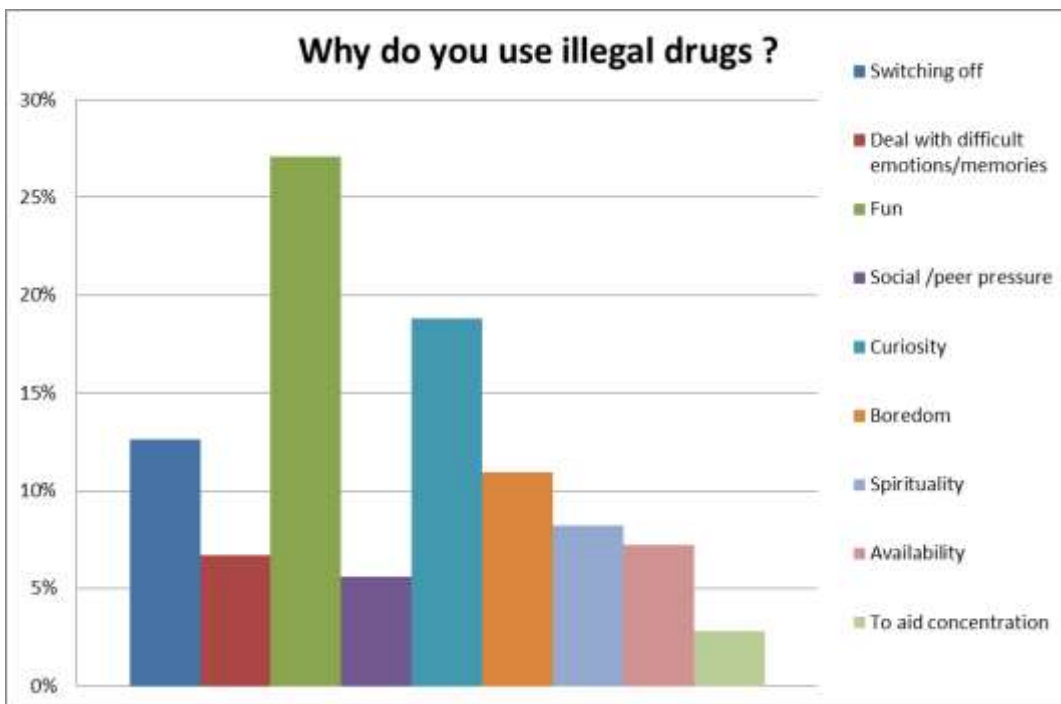
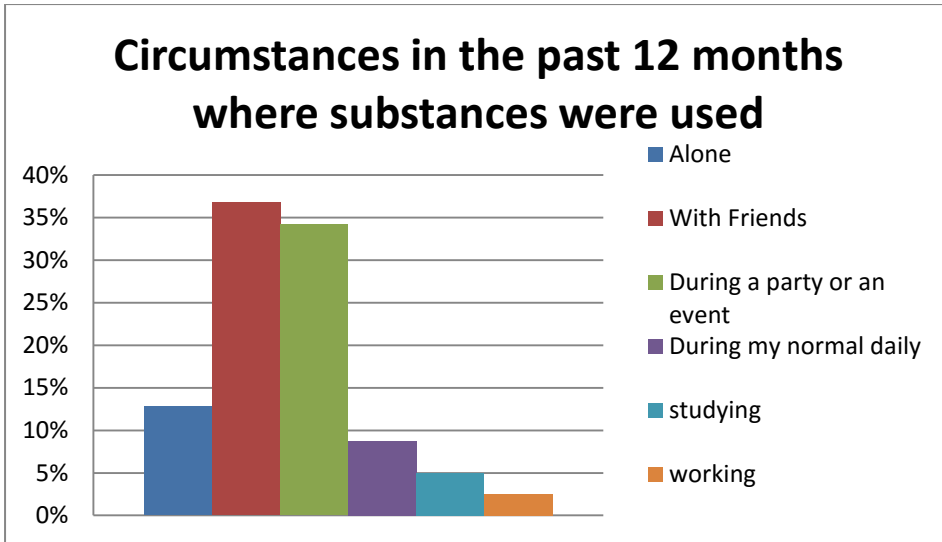
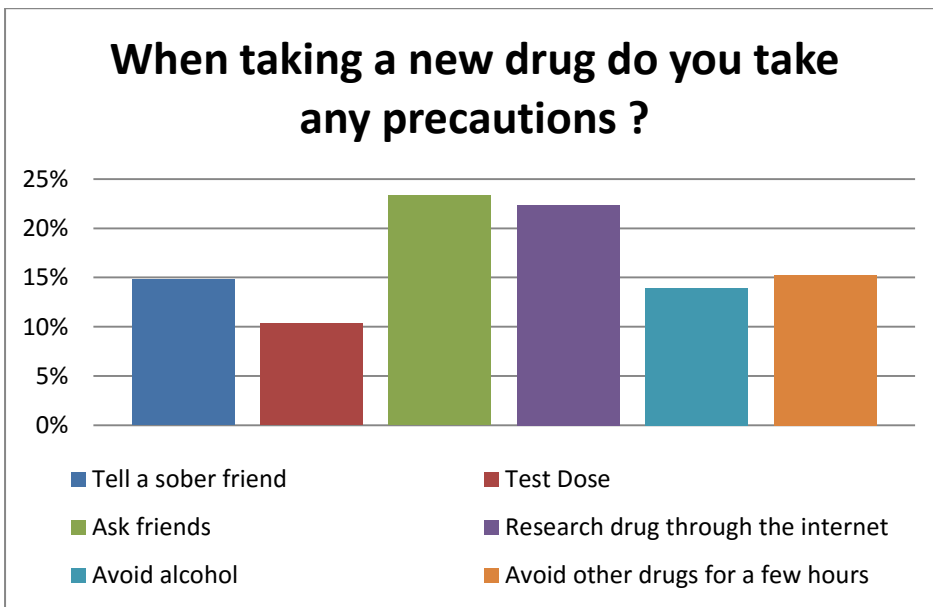


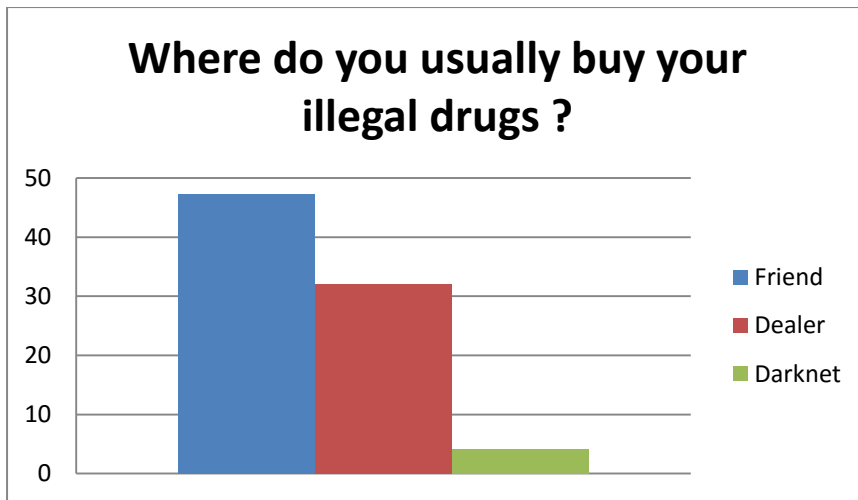
Fig 15. Reasons reported by respondents why they use illegal drugs.



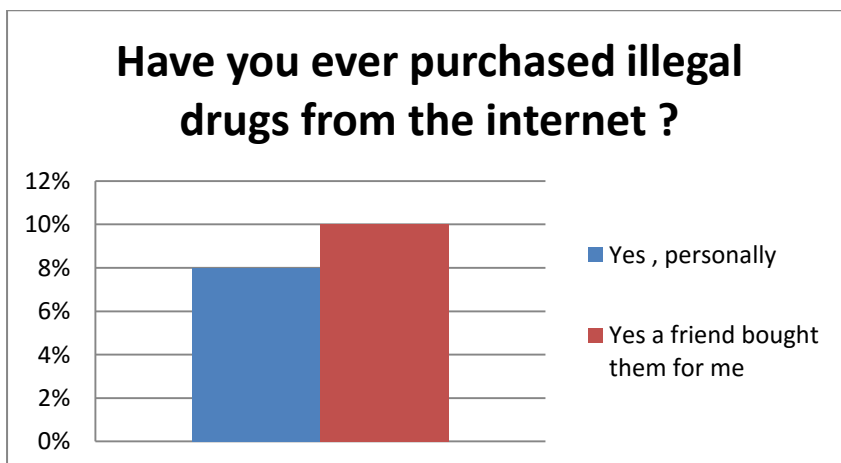
**Fig 16.** The circumstances which respondents reported using substances.



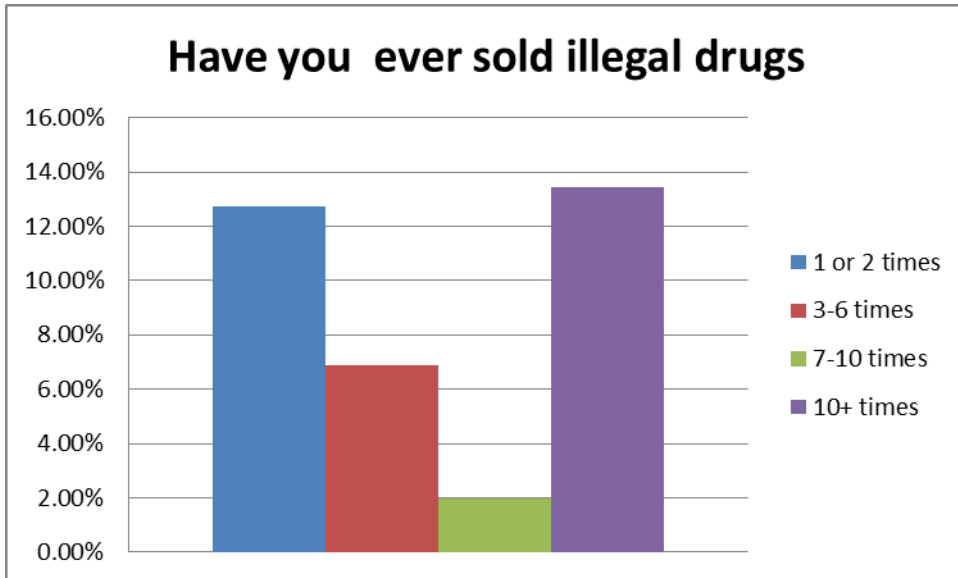
**Fig 17.** The precautions respondents reported to take when taking a new drug.



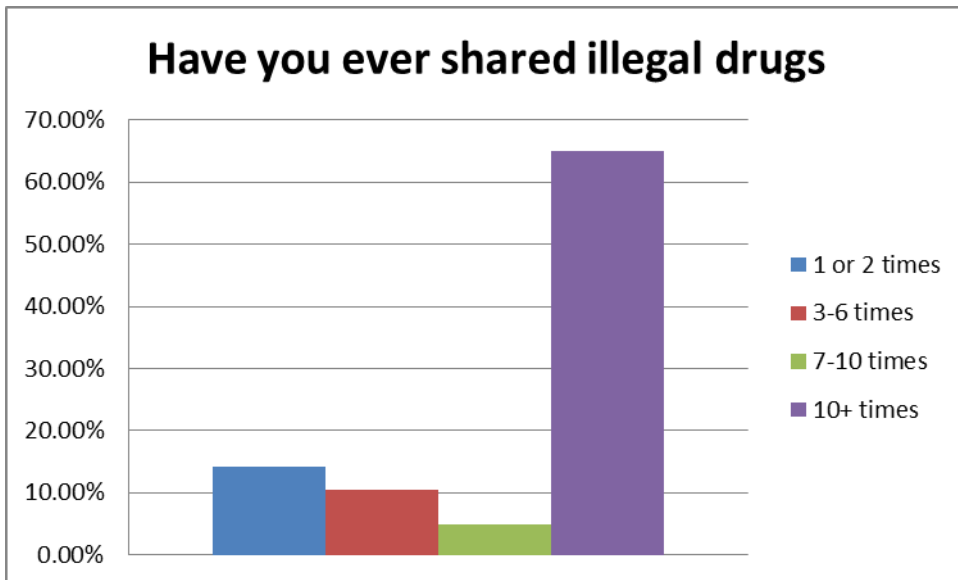
**Fig 18.** Respondents, who have ever used drugs who reported where they purchase their illegal drugs.



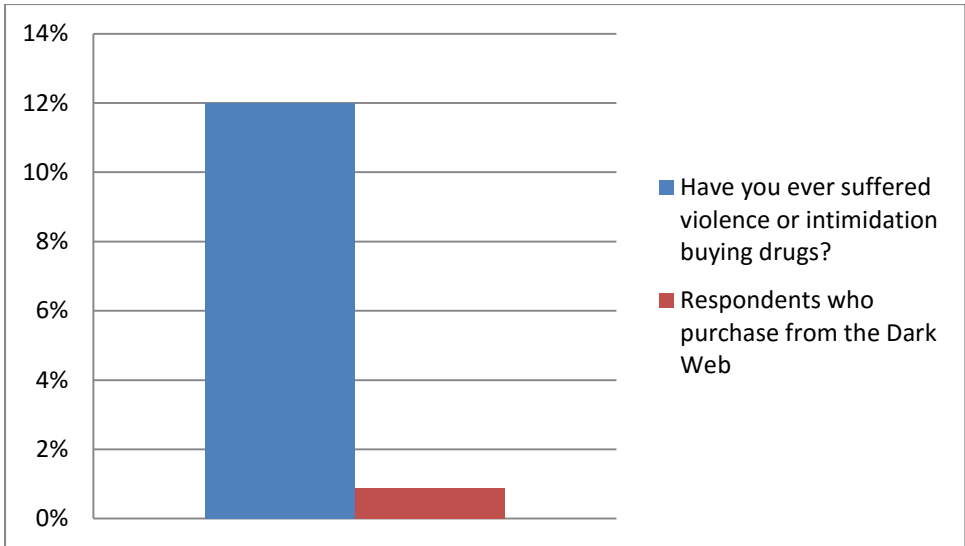
**Fig 19.** 18% of respondents who have ever used illegal drugs reported purchasing from the internet.



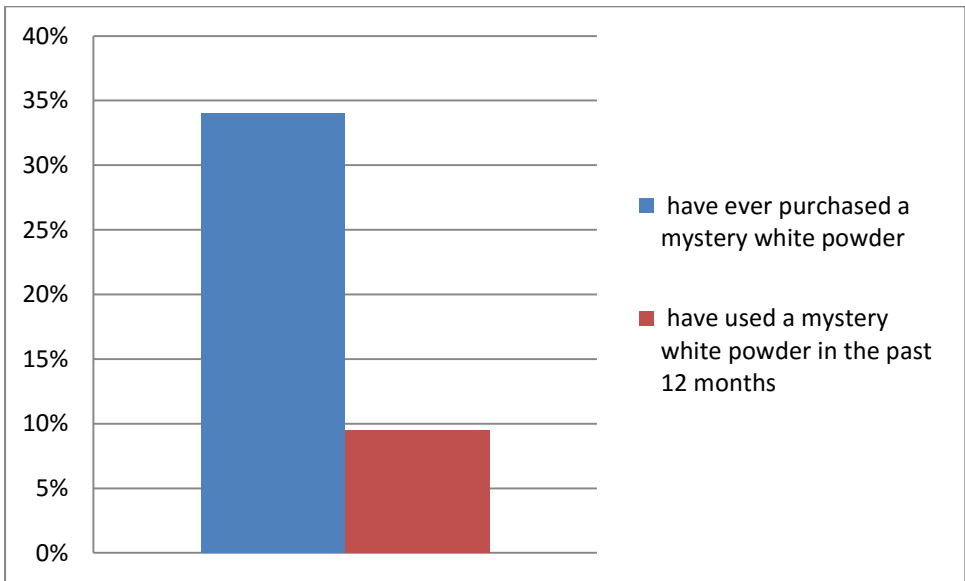
**Fig 20. 35% of people that have ever used illegal drugs have ever sold illegal drugs.**



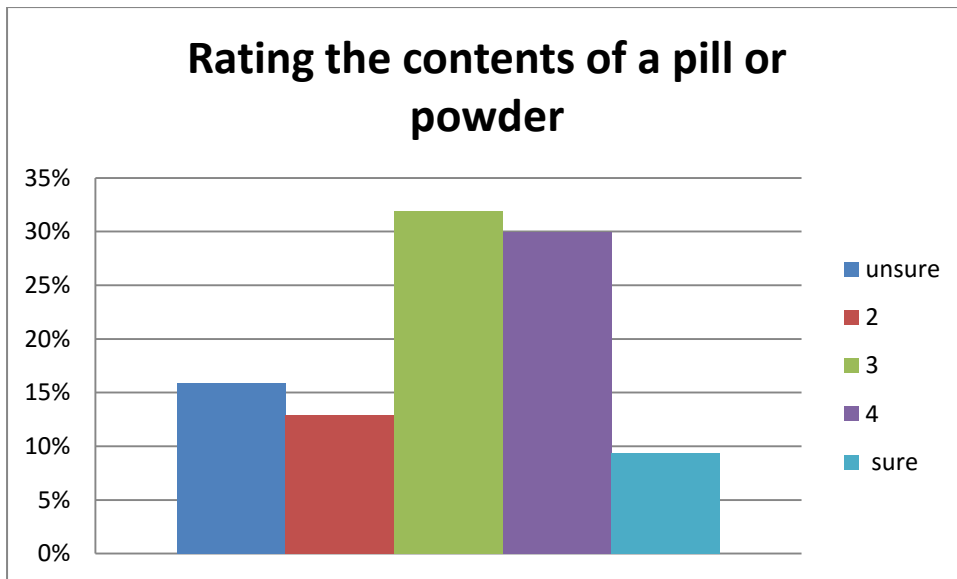
**Fig 21. 94% of respondents who have ever used illegal drugs have shared illegal drugs.**



**Fig 22. 12% of respondents have suffered intimidation and violence purchasing illegal drugs and of those 0.89% of respondents who purchase via the dark web have suffered intimidation and violence.**



**Fig 23. 34% of respondents who have used illegal drugs have ever purchased a mystery white powder. 9.52% of respondents who have used illegal drugs have bought a mystery white powder in the past 12 months.**

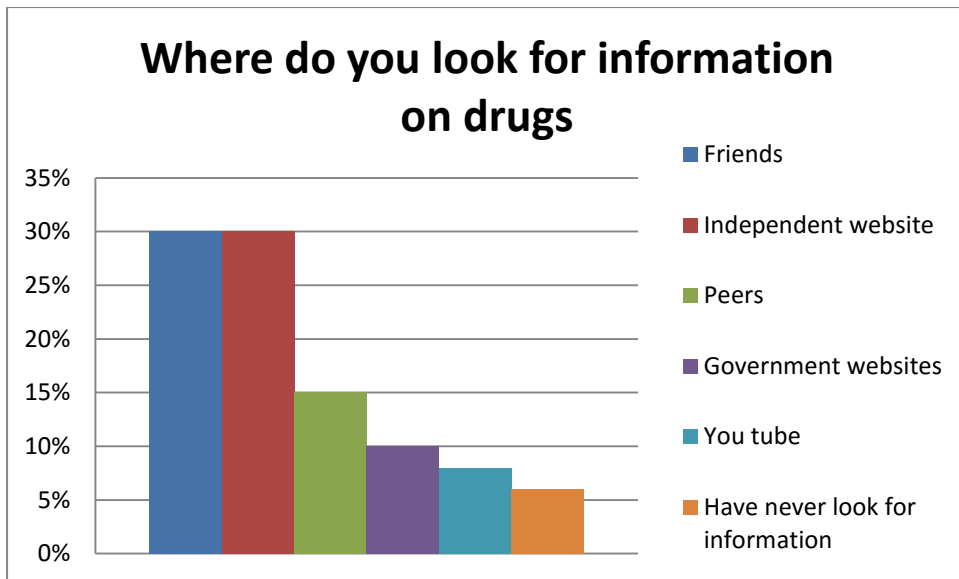


**Fig 24.** Rating the contents from 1 – 5 how sure are you about the contents of a pill or powder that you consume.

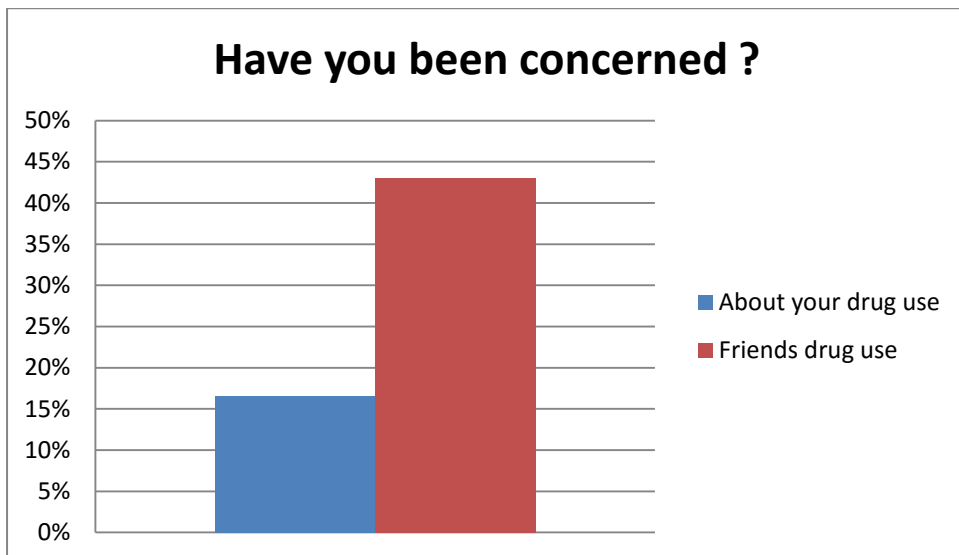
**Comments relating to precautions respondents take regarding the contents of a pill or powder:**

- *It's generally gotten from the likes of Silk Road, if the ratings are good, then the seller is reliable, plus there are reviews. And generally, I wait for someone else to try one from the same batch so that I know that they're safe to take.*
- *You can tell by the look/smell/taste but sometimes it can be mixed with other stuff.*
- *The friend tried it from is a consistent drug user and thus would know the content of the powder and I trusted him.*
- *Test your drugs kits, test kits available online. Also buying drugs online is safer, cleaner, and cheaper.*
- *A friend has always used it before me.*
- *I never take anything friends of mine haven't used before.*
- *The majority of the time I would trust exactly what I'm taking, there is a network of warnings for anything seen as dangerous I would never take anything if I wasn't absolutely sure.*

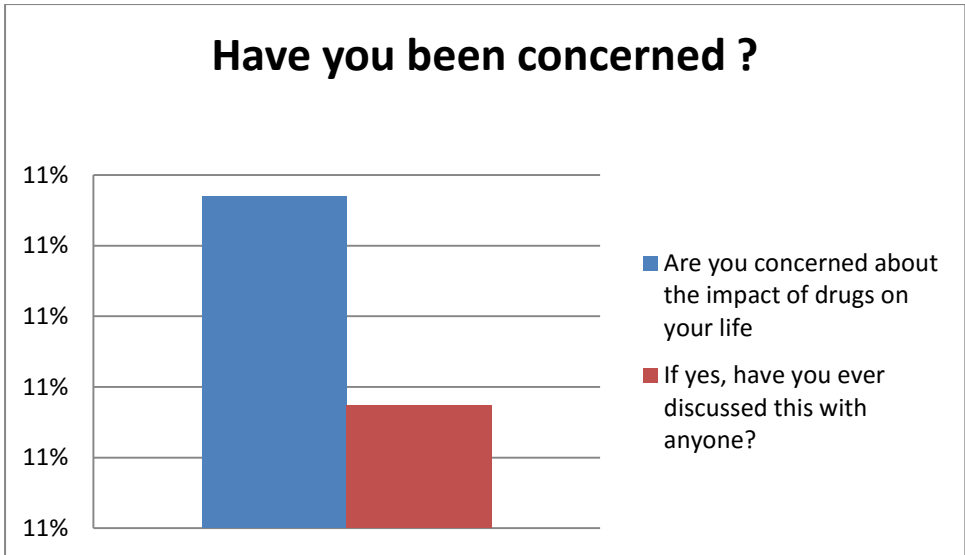




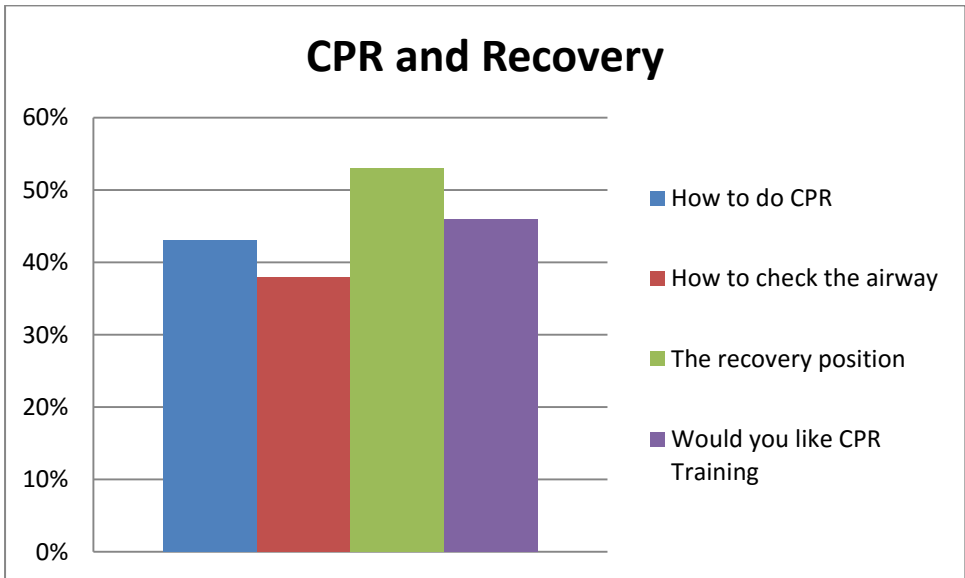
**Fig 25. Respondents report where they access information on drugs**



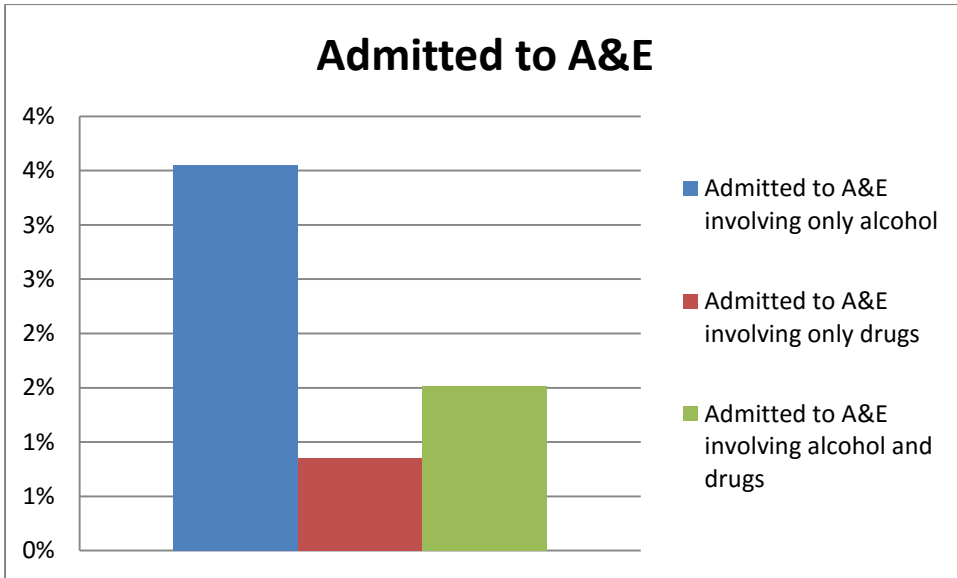
**Fig 26. Respondents who reported being concerned about their own drug use or a friends drug use.**



**Fig 27.** Respondents who reported being concerned about the impact drugs were having on their life.



**Fig 28.** 53% of respondents know how to put someone in the recovery position. 43% know how to do CPR and 38% know how to check the airway 46% would like CPR training



**Fig 29. Respondents who have been admitted to A&E in the past 12 months 4% have been admitted due to alcohol. 2% for alcohol and 1% for illegal drugs.**



“The breakdown of the results of Trinity College Students that were presented to the Students Union from the Student Drug Survey were extremely useful for our planning for the year in relation to harm reduction and drugs campaign.

It was especially useful for understanding how students are using drugs and what they are using. As my experience is in the main stream addiction sector it was startling to see how little students know about the impact of drugs on their every day life.

It was very clear students were lacking information on harm reduction methods. As students will continue to use drugs it was agreed by the Student Union team that harm reduction campaigns and information campaigns to keep those using drugs safe was the first port of call for the Student Union this can be seen in the successful campaign what's in the pill that the Student Union welfare officer Conor Clancy was hugely involved in. This was in conjunction with Ana Liffey Drug Project , UCD and DIT.”

***Lynn Ruane, President of Trinity Students Union***