

## CHAPTER 6

# LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DRUG-RELATED CRIME

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### 6.1 Introduction

Drug-related data from law enforcement agencies are collected and published each year by An Garda Síochána. These data reflect the activities of the Gardaí and the Customs Service. Information includes charges for drug offences committed under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, 1977 and 1984, the quantity (by weight) and the number of seizures of illegal drugs, and the types of drugs involved.

Drug product purity is determined from seizures of drugs; analysis is carried out at the Forensic Science Laboratory of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Information on the price of drugs is very scanty.

There is a dearth of research on drug-related crime in Ireland and it is an area that needs exploration. The National Advisory Committee on Drugs is planning to commission a study that will provide a preliminary overview of the issues involved in drug-related crime.

This chapter draws together available information on illicit drug offences recorded by law enforcement agencies, and on research done on drug-related crime in Ireland. Sections include:

## 6.2 Charges for Drug Offences

### 6.3 Trends in Quantities and Numbers of Drug Seizures

### 6.4 Price and Purity of Drugs

### 6.5 Availability of Different Drugs

### 6.6. Sources of Supply and Trafficking Patterns in Ireland

### 6.7 Drug-Related Crime

## 6.2 Charges for Drug Offences

The use *per se* of drugs, excluding opium, is not a criminal offence in Ireland. Possession and trafficking/dealing/supplying are illegal activities under the Misuse of Drugs Acts, 1977 and 1984. In 1999 prosecutions under Section 3 of the Misuse of Drugs Acts, relating to possession offences, made up 68 per cent of the total prosecuted; 28 per cent were prosecuted under Section 15 of the Misuse of Drugs Acts, relating to drug-related trafficking offences (see Table 6.1). A breakdown by Garda regions<sup>1</sup> shows that most offences (38%) were in the Dublin metropolitan region (N=2,719), followed by 25 per cent in the Southern region (N=1,770). The proportion of possession offences was almost the same in these two areas: in Dublin, 29 per cent (N=1,437); in the Southern region, 29 per cent (N=1,394). Over half (56%, N=1,097) of the total trafficking (supply/dealing) offences were in Dublin.

With regard to the types of drugs involved, more than half (59%) of offences were cannabis-related and, of these, slightly more were in the Southern region than in Dublin (see Table 6.2). Ecstasy accounted for 14 per cent of drug-law offences and the majority of these were in the Southern region. The vast majority of heroin offences (852 out of a total of 887, 96%) were detected in the Dublin metropolitan region.

Trends over the five-year period from 1995 to 1999 show an increase in the number of drug charges, from 4,146 in 1995 to 7,137 in 1999 (see Table 6.3). There was a particularly sharp rise in cannabis offences in 1999: in 1998 cannabis offences (N=2,190) made up 39 per cent of total drug law offences, and in 1999 this increased to 59 per cent (N=4,185). Heroin offences have been steadily increasing over the five-year period. Amphetamine offences increased more than three-fold, from 138 in 1995 to 464 in 1999. The most dramatic jump in 1999 was in relation to ecstasy offences, which had been relatively stable in the preceding four years. This may have been as a result of a combination of an increased number of large-scale dance music events, and more intensive police activity both at such events and in general.

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1 Since 1996 a regional command structure has been in place in An Garda Síochána and the country is divided into six separate regions - Eastern, Dublin Metropolitan, Northern, South-Eastern, Southern, and Western.

**TABLE 6.1**  
**Ireland 1999. Drug Law Offences by Type of Offence and Region.**  
**Numbers and Percentages.**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Possession (Section 3, MDA*)</b>	<b>Supply/Dealing (Section 15, MDA*)</b>	<b>Obstruction (Section 21, MDA*)</b>	<b>Other Offences</b>	<b>Total</b>
Eastern	616	258	0	0	874 (12%)
Dublin Metropolis	1,437	1,097	127	58	2,719 (38%)
Northern	215	56	0	4	275 (4%)
South Eastern	534	103	11	4	652 (9%)
Southern	1,394	341	14	21	1,770 (25%)
Western	687	116	12	32	847 (12%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,883 (68%)</b>	<b>1,971 (28%)</b>	<b>164 (2%)</b>	<b>119 (2%)</b>	<b>7,137 (100%)</b>

*Source:* An Garda Síochána, *Annual Report of An Garda Síochána*, 1999.

\* MDA = Misuse of Drugs Acts, 1977 & 1984.

**TABLE 6.2**  
**Ireland 1999. Drug Law Offences by Type of Drug and Region.**  
**Numbers and Percentages.**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Cannabis</b>	<b>Heroin</b>	<b>LSD</b>	<b>Ecstasy</b>	<b>Amphet- amines</b>	<b>Cocaine</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
Eastern	543	19	3	200	83	9	17	874
Dublin Metropolis	1,208	852	2	211	70	126	250	2,719
Northern	187	0	1	60	16	4	7	275
South Eastern	437	1	11	81	92	6	24	652
Southern	1,227	12	5	368	108	10	40	1,770
Western	583	3	4	103	95	14	45	847
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,185 (59%)</b>	<b>887 (12%)</b>	<b>26 (0.003)%</b>	<b>1,023 (14%)</b>	<b>464 (7%)</b>	<b>169 (2%)</b>	<b>383 (5%)</b>	<b>7,137 (100%)</b>

*Source:* An Garda Síochána, *Annual Report of An Garda Síochána*, 1999.

**TABLE 6.3**  
**Ireland 1995–1999. Drug Law Offences by Type of Drug. Numbers.**

Type of Drug	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Cannabis	2,600	1,834	2,671	2,190	4,185
Heroin	296	432	564	789	887
Other Opiates	0	0	6	0	0
Cocaine	30	42	97	88	169
Amphetamines	138	152	239	273	464
LSD	70	24	39	13	26
Ecstasy	645	340	475	439	1,023
Other Offences	385	454	65	1,839	383
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,146</b>	<b>3,278</b>	<b>4,156</b>	<b>5,631</b>	<b>7,137</b>

*Source:* An Garda Síochána, *Annual Reports of An Garda Síochána*, 1995 – 1999.

### 6.3 Trends in Quantities and Numbers of Drug Seizures

In Ireland it is not possible as yet to distinguish between Garda and Customs seizures in relation to the quantities and numbers of drugs seized. All seizures, by both agencies, are included in the annual reports of An Garda Síochána (An Garda Síochána, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). Garda and Customs authorities increasingly work on a collaborative basis and, following approaches by the Health Research Board (HRB) to both organisations, there is a willingness to provide separate information on seizures in the future.

Between 1995 and 1999 the number of seizures of all drugs, except for LSD, increased (see Table 6.4).

The number of seizures of all drugs has increased from 4,178 in 1995 to 7,318 in 1999. There are more seizures of cannabis than any other drug: the number increased from 3,205 in 1995 to 4,538 in 1999 (over the ten-year period 1990 to 1999, cannabis accounted for most of the drugs seized (see Figure 5.1 at Appendix 5)). Between 1995 and 1999, the number of heroin seizures more than tripled, from 209 to 767; cocaine increased five-fold, from 42 to 213; as did amphetamines, from 89 to 467. The number of ecstasy seizures increased quite considerably, from 571 in 1995 to 1,074 in 1999. It

should be noted that 'ecstasy' can include various substances such as MDMA, MDEA, MDA, ephedrine or ketamine.

**TABLE 6.4**  
**Ireland 1995–1999. Seizures of Illicit Drugs. Numbers and Quantities.**

Type of Drug	1995		1996		1997		1998		1999	
	N*	Q**	N*	Q**	N*	Q**	N*	Q**	N*	Q**
Cannabis	3,205	15,606.5	3,449	1,935.4	4,102	1,282.7	4,513	2,201.7	4,538	2,577.3
Heroin	209	6.4	664	10.8	599	8.2	884	38.3	767	17
Cocaine	42	21.8	93	642	157	11	151	333.2	213	85.6
Amphetamines	89	1.5	217	7.6	475	102.9	680	45	467	13.4
Ecstasy***	571	123,699	534	23,012	423	20,434	509	609,301	1,074	229,101
LSD	62	819	42	5,901	48	1,851	19	5,901	29	577
Benzodiazepines	0	0	152	7,146	219	4,942	181	2,885	175	15,393
Other Drugs	0	0	93	NA	159	NA	93	NA	55	NA
<b>Total Number of Seizures</b>	<b>4,178</b>		<b>5,244</b>		<b>6,182</b>		<b>7,030</b>		<b>7,318</b>	

*Source:* An Garda Síochána, Annual Reports of An Garda Síochána, 1995 – 1999.

\* N = Number of seizures.

\*\* Q = Quantity seized in kilograms; number of tablets in the case of ecstasy and benzodiazepines, and number of doses in the case of LSD.

\*\*\* Ecstasy can include MDMA, MDEA, MDA, ephedrine or ketamine.

NA = Data not available.

The quantities of different types of drugs seized fluctuated from year to year. Apart from the very large seizure in 1995, the quantities of cannabis have been increasing each year. There was a very large seizure of illicit benzodiazepines (15,393 tablets/capsules) in 1999. The majority of these (13,389) were diazepam and one seizure alone that year comprised 7,800 diazepam. All benzodiazepines are controlled under Section 15 of the Misuse of Drugs Acts, 1977 and 1984: it is illegal to supply or deal in them other than by prescription. However, flunitrazepam (Rohypnol) and temazepam are controlled under both Section 15 and Section 3 of the Misuse of Drugs Acts: it is illegal to supply or possess them other than by prescription. Seized quantities of other drugs have tended to fluctuate over the same period, but in general quantities have been increasing since 1997 (see Figure 5.1 at Appendix 5).

## 6.4 Price and Purity of Drugs

It is not possible from the information available to distinguish between the price of drugs at street level and trafficking level. The Gardaí collect information on the street prices of drugs (see EMCDDA Standard Table 4.7 at Appendix 4). The data available up to now do not show much change in price over the past five years – heroin Ir£150/G190 per gram; cocaine Ir£80/G102 per gram; amphetamines Ir£9/G12 per gram. The price of an ecstasy tablet decreased from Ir£18/G22 in 1995 to Ir£9/G12 in 1999. However, this does not correspond with anecdotal evidence, which suggests that the prices fluctuate according to the market forces of supply and demand. For example, the price of heroin increases when supply is limited. No information is currently available on prices at trafficking level.

Drug seizures by the Gardaí are analysed at the Forensic Science Laboratory of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to ascertain purity levels of heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. Cannabis potency is not analysed. Between 1995 and 1999 the purity levels of heroin decreased from 45 per cent to 33 per cent, and in 1999 a minimum purity level of 0.25 per cent was recorded. Purity levels of amphetamine seizures have also decreased somewhat, from 4.7 per cent in 1995 to 3 per cent in 1999. Cocaine purity levels are higher than in other drugs, but they have also fluctuated over the five-year period in a downward direction, from 47 per cent in 1995 to 41 per cent in 1999 (see Table 6.5).

**TABLE 6.5**  
**Ireland 1995–1999. Purity of Seized Drugs. Average Percentages.**

Type of Seized Drug	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Heroin	45	49	46	35	33
Cocaine	47	62	54	38	41
Amphetamines	4.7	9.8	3.5	6	3

*Source:* Forensic Science Laboratory, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, personal communication.

## **6.5 Availability of Different Drugs**

Measuring the availability of drugs is a very difficult task, given the illicit nature of the activity. Special studies would need to be undertaken in order to explore the issues involved. In the Irish context there is, to date, very limited information available, and it has mostly been arrived at by indirect means.

The ESPAD 1995 nationwide school survey of 15- to 16-year-old post-primary school pupils (Hibell *et al.*, 1997) found that ecstasy was perceived as very easy to obtain in Ireland: 54 per cent said that obtaining it was 'very easy' or 'fairly easy'. Amphetamines were reported as being easy to obtain by one-third of the respondents.

Seizures may be taken as an indirect indication of the availability of illicit drugs. However, extreme caution must be used. The number of seizures and the amounts of illicit drugs seized can be affected by factors such as the resources committed to detection, changes in the quality of intelligence on illicit drugs trafficking, etc. In short, seizures cannot be used as a reliable indicator of trends in relation to the amount of drugs available on the market. The fact also, that not all drugs seized in Ireland are destined for the Irish market, but are in transit to elsewhere, further complicates the issue (GNDU, personal communication).

In Ireland there was a sizeable increase in the quantity of drugs seized in 1995 over previous years. This can be partly attributed to the setting up of the Garda National Drugs Unit (GNDU) in 1995 and to the activities of the Customs National Drugs Team. In that year there were two major seizures of cannabis, and one seizure of ecstasy contained 40,000 tablets.

## **6.6 Sources of Supply and Trafficking Patterns in Ireland**

No research studies have been conducted in Ireland on drug supply sources or patterns of drug trafficking. The information in this section was obtained from personal contacts within the GNDU.

The sources of supply vary according to the type of drug. Cannabis comes mainly from Morocco, while some smaller seizures are known to have originated in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Lebanon (GNDU, personal communication). Some recent cannabis seizures are known to have originated in South Africa. Heroin seized in Ireland is thought to come from Asia, mainly Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Laos. Cocaine is believed to originate in South America. The main place of origin for ecstasy seized in Ireland is the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent Belgium (GNDU, personal communication).

The Gardaí report that most of the trafficking in cannabis to Ireland takes place between Morocco and the south coast of Ireland. It is transported in articulated trucks using cross-channel ferries, and on sea-going yachts. The south-west coast is a major trans-shipment point. The bulk of heroin seizures are transported to Ireland through the United Kingdom, and some through the Netherlands. Individual drug couriers, travelling by air, bring smaller amounts from Europe.

The Gardaí believe that most of the drugs seized in Ireland in recent years have been for the home market. In the case of very large shipments it is speculated that Ireland, with its long coastline, sparsely populated in many areas, is used as an access point for transit to the United Kingdom and Europe. The Gardaí also believe that the distribution of drugs within Ireland is organised by networks of criminal gangs. In some cases these gangs involve members of the same family.

Sale patterns at street level in Dublin differ from location to location, with price and purity of drugs varying according to supply and demand factors.

## **6.7 Drug-Related Crime**

The authors of the National Crime Forum Report (1998: 74) stated that they were 'deeply concerned with the impact of drug abuse on crime and the response of the criminal justice system to that issue'. The authors were impressed by suggestions to keep otherwise law-abiding young people out of the criminal justice system, for example, diverting young experimental users of cannabis and ecstasy into the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme. The aim of this programme, established by An Garda Síochána, is to prevent crime and to provide an alternative for juvenile offenders. Rather than being dealt with under criminal law, young offenders enter the programme.

The case for the decriminalisation of certain drugs was presented to the Forum, which agreed that the issue was important and required more careful study. Those against decriminalisation argued that public opinion was opposed to such a change. A general population survey (Bryan, Moran, Farrell & O'Brien, 2000), the purpose of which was to examine drug-related knowledge, attitudes and beliefs in Ireland, supported this view: 76 per cent agreed that cannabis should be against the law. Results from the same study found that drug-related crime was considered to be a major problem in Ireland by 94 per cent (n=998) of those interviewed, and three-quarters of the sample felt that the drug problem was out of control.



A study to examine the association between drug use and crime in the Dublin metropolitan region was carried out by the Garda Research Unit (Keogh, 1997). The 'population' (N=4,105) was drawn from Garda records and Gardaí's local knowledge. It included all those who had come into contact with the Gardaí through being arrested, charged or suspected of criminal activity between August 1995 and September 1996. The inclusion criterion was 'individuals involved in hard drug use'; 'hard drugs' were defined as including opiates, stimulants, hypnotics and hallucinogens. During the study period 19,046 serious crimes were detected and 7,757 individuals were apprehended for these crimes: of these, 3,365 (43%) were identified as known hard-drug users. It was deduced that the hard-drug users were responsible for 12,583 (66%) of the crimes. A sub-sample (n=351) of these drug users agreed to be interviewed to provide more detailed information. It was found that 37 per cent had left school before the official school leaving age of 15, and 84 per cent were unemployed. While three-quarters of the respondents had at some time sought treatment for problem drug use and most had received it, a number (n=81) had never sought treatment of any kind. A majority said they had a poor understanding of the effects of drug use. It was found that 51 per cent had been involved in crime before their involvement with drugs; 48 per cent said family members were involved in crime.

In 1998 a study was conducted by the Garda Research Unit to explore the links between alcohol/drug use and crime (Millar, O'Dwyer & Finnegan, 1998). Gardaí at twenty-seven stations throughout the country (twelve in Dublin, fifteen in the other five Garda divisional regions) were asked for their 'informed opinion' (Millar *et al.*, 1998: 2) as to whether alcohol or drugs were involved in offences where a person was 'arrested, charged, summonsed, or diverted under the Juvenile Diversion Programme' (Millar *et al.*, 1998: 1). Offences under the Misuse of Drugs Acts and the Liquor Licensing Acts were excluded, presumably in an attempt to explore crimes associated with drug and alcohol users while excluding offences relating specifically to illicit drug and alcohol use. A total of 4,334 offences (no indication is given as to whether these refer to individuals or incidents) were noted during the study period (March to May 1998). Of these offences, 42 per cent were considered to be related to alcohol consumption; 17 per cent to drugs; and 4 per cent to alcohol and drugs (drugs were implicated in 913 cases). Alcohol was most likely to be associated with public order offences, while drugs were most often linked to robberies. In the drug-related offences, an opiate was the type of drug associated with offending behaviour in just over two-thirds of cases (see Table 6.6). There were regional differences: in Dublin an opiate was the drug most likely to be involved (83.1 % of cases), while outside Dublin cannabis (37.4 %) and ecstasy (25.9%) were the drugs most commonly cited (see Table 6.6).

**TABLE 6.6**  
**Ireland 1998. Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme. Drug-Related Crime.**  
**Type of Drug by Area. Percentages and Numbers.**

<b>Main Drug Involved</b>	<b>Dublin</b>	<b>Other Areas</b>	<b>All Areas</b>
Opiates	83.1%	20.1%	67.7%
Cannabis	13.5%	37.4%	19.4%
Ecstasy	0.9%	25.9%	7.1%
Amphetamines	0.9%	1.1%	1.0%
Barbiturates	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Cocaine	0.2%	1.1%	0.4%
Hallucinogens	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%
Other	0.6%	13.8%	3.8%
<b>Total %</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Valid n	534	174	708
Missing n	136	69	205
<b>Total n</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>913</b>

*Source: Millar et al., 1998.*

## 6.8 Summary

Trends over the five-year period from 1995 to 1999 show an increase in the number of drug charges, from 4,146 in 1995 to 7,137 in 1999. Most prosecutions for drug offences were for possession of controlled substances and the drug most commonly involved was cannabis. In 1999 more cannabis offences were detected in the Southern region (N=1,227) than in Dublin (N=1,208). The majority of heroin offences (852 out of a total of 887) were in Dublin.

There was an increase in the number of seizures of drugs, from 4,178 in 1995 to 7,318 in 1999. Cannabis accounted for most of the drugs seized; the number of cannabis seizures increased from 3,205 in 1995 to 4,538 in 1999. During the same period the number of heroin seizures more than tripled, from 209 to 767.

According to the information available, the price of drugs has not changed much in five years except in the case of ecstasy tablets. The price decreased from Ir£18/G22 per tablet in 1995 to Ir£9/G12 per tablet in 1999.

Purity levels of drugs have fallen over the five-year period 1995 to 1999, particularly so in the case of heroin – from 45 per cent pure in 1995 to 33 per cent pure in 1999.

Special studies are needed to determine the availability of different drugs, in order to better inform prevention strategies. No research studies have been conducted in Ireland on drug supply sources or patterns of drug trafficking; neither is there any research available on the price of drugs

A Garda study to examine the association between drug use and crime in the Dublin metropolitan region found that hard-drug users were responsible for 66 per cent of the crime committed over a period of a year, between August 1995 and September 1996. Of a sub-sample of 351 respondents, three-quarters had at some time sought treatment for problem drug use and most had received it; however, a number (n=81) had never sought treatment of any kind. A majority said they had a poor understanding of the effects of drug use. Fifty-one per cent said that they had been involved in crime before their involvement with drugs; 48 per cent said family members were involved in crime.

## 6.9 References

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