

**A Report From A
Local Initiative Concerning Alcohol/Drug
Use Among Teenagers**

1998 - 1999

Presented by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the people who contributed to this report. We own an enormous debt of gratitude to Marion Gleeson, M. Psch. Sc. (Dept. of Health, Mid-Western Health Board). Her expertise and assistance were invaluable to us.

A special thanks to the Management and staff of North Tipperary Community Services for their time, patience and office space.

We are most grateful to the principals and staff of all the schools who participated.

Thanks to Brid Buckley and Catherine Creagh for their help in inputting the data and to Des Me Clafferty, Head of the Geography Dept., Mary Immaculate College Limerick, for his advice on report writing.

Last but not least we would like to extend our gratitude to all the students who participated in the survey.

INTRODUCTION

In January 1998, North Tipperary Community Services, with the support of Bishop Willie Walshe of the Diocese of Killaloe organised a course for adults on drug / alcohol awareness and group facilitation skills.

Subsequently, some of the course participants set up a research group to ascertain the extent of the problem of drug and alcohol use among our teenage population, specifically second-level students under the age of 18 years.

As concerned adults, we put together a 13- question survey.

We tried to keep it as concise as possible while still gathering enough relevant information to achieve our objectives.

Our objectives were:

1. To get a clear picture of drug and alcohol awareness among our second-level students under the age of 18 years.
2. To find out the extent of under-age drinking.
3. To find out the extent of the use of illegal substances as well as stimulants such as glue and solvents in this age group.
4. To use this information to develop educational programmes for parents and students.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was structured in such a way as to gather as much information as possible on alcohol / drug use in each age group.

Questions included age, gender, types of variables, frequency of consumption, use and preferred choice.

1,500 students participated representing four second-level schools in the catchment area.

These students ranged in age from 12 years to less than 18 years on the 1/1/1999.

The questionnaires were distributed to all the students in each school during one class period, with the exception of one group of transition year students who were surveyed at a later date.

All the respondents were told in advance that their answers would be treated in confidence and that anonymity would be preserved.

The data was then cleaned and coded in Microsoft Excel and SSPS for Windows.

Fig. 1(a)

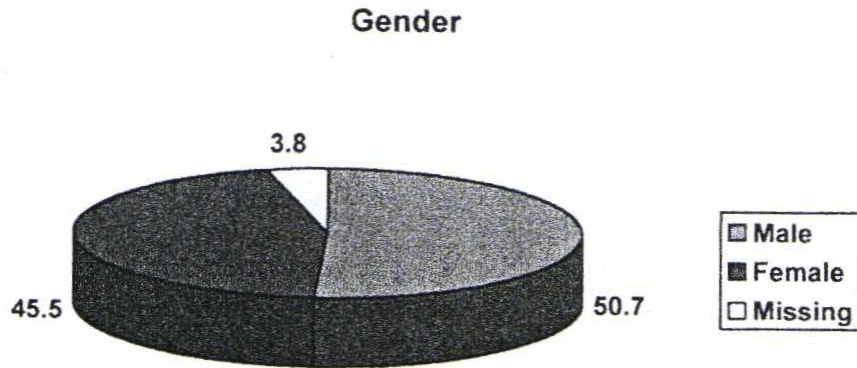
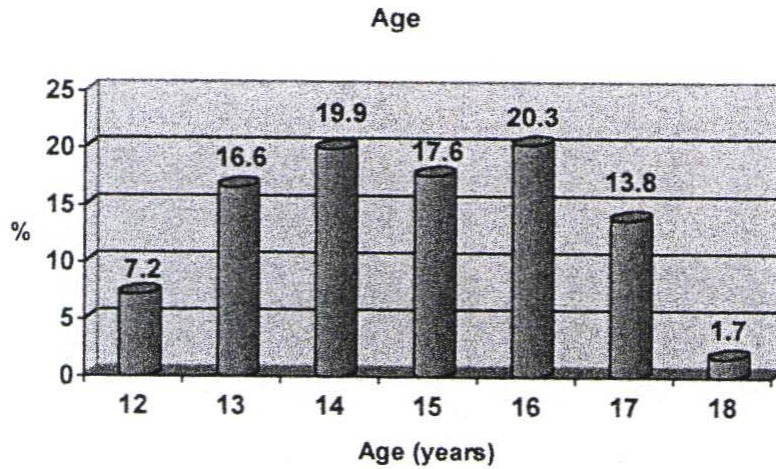


Fig. 2



The majority of students ranged between age 13 -16 and were almost equally divided between male and female.

Have you ever tasted alcohol?

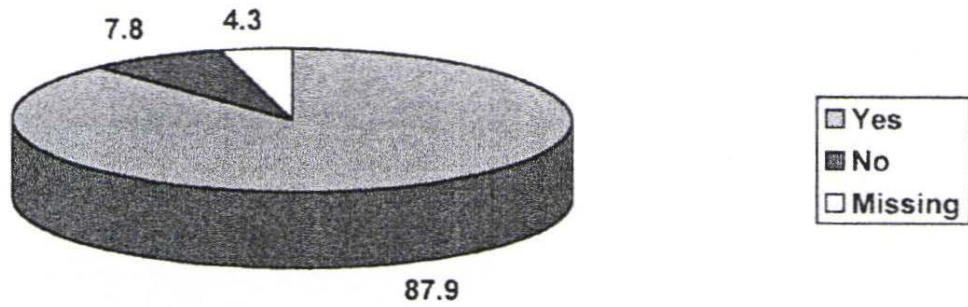


Fig.3

Nearly 90% of the teenagers surveyed have tasted alcohol

At what age did you have your first full drink?

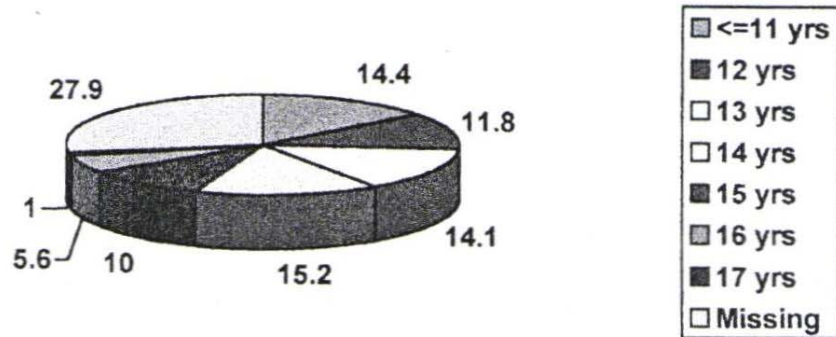
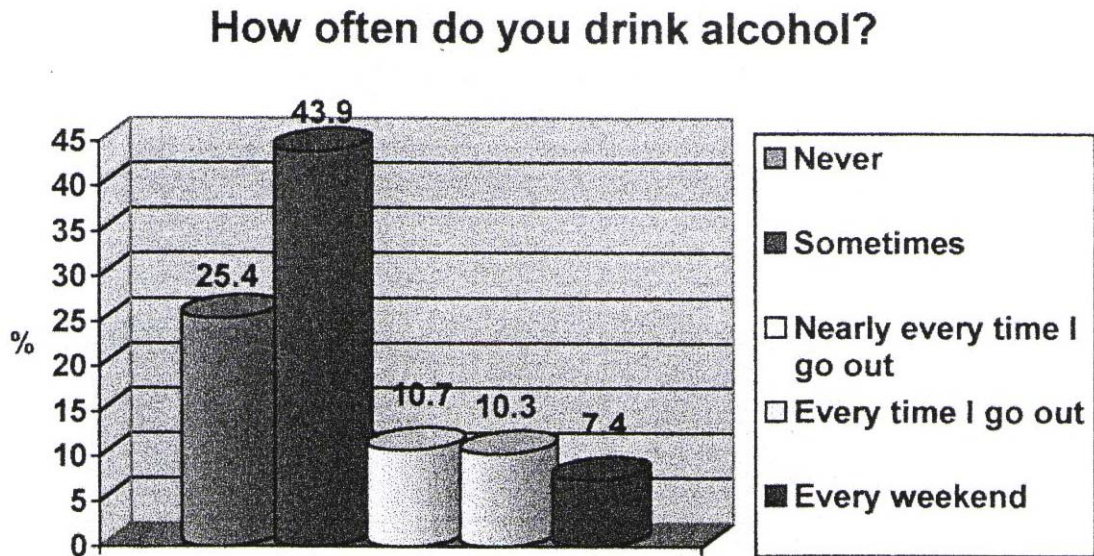


Fig. 4

40% of respondents have had a full drink before age 13

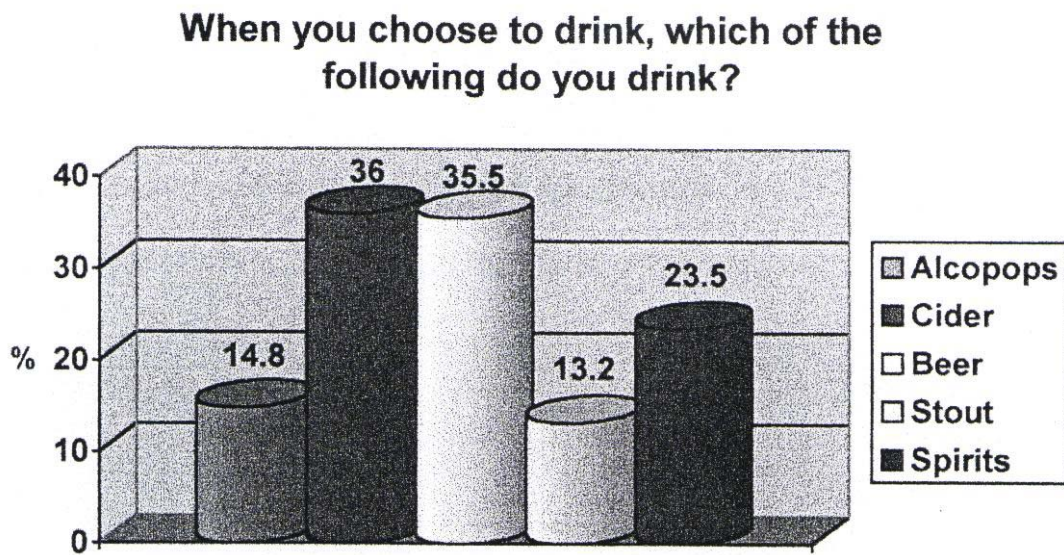
Fig.5



*1/4 of the teenagers surveyed has never sampled alcohol.
3/4 do drink alcohol at various times.*

Comments:

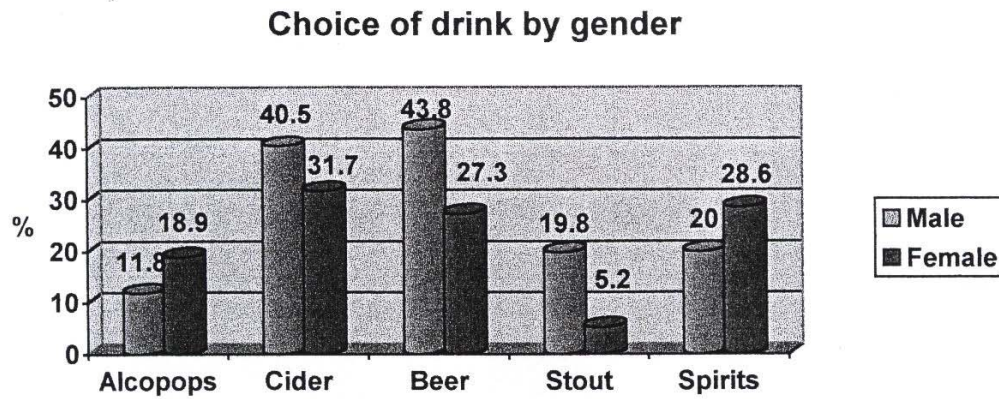
Fig.6.



Cider and beer are clearly the preferred drink.

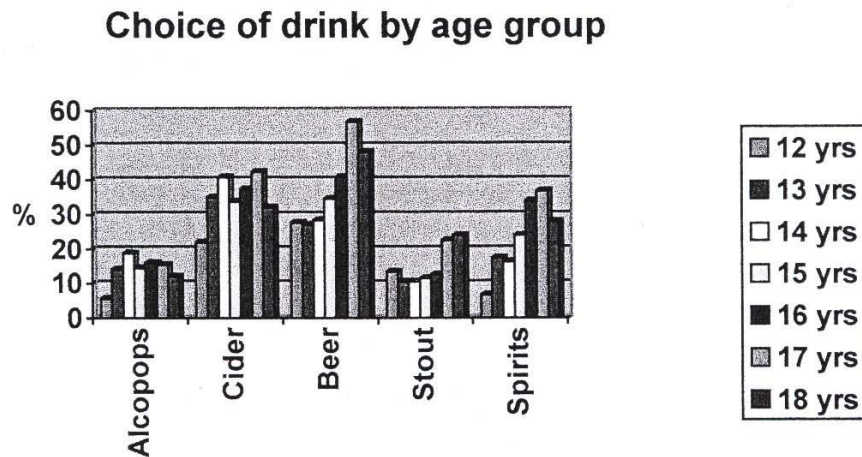
Comments:

Fig 7



Spirits rate almost equally with cider and beer with our female participants.

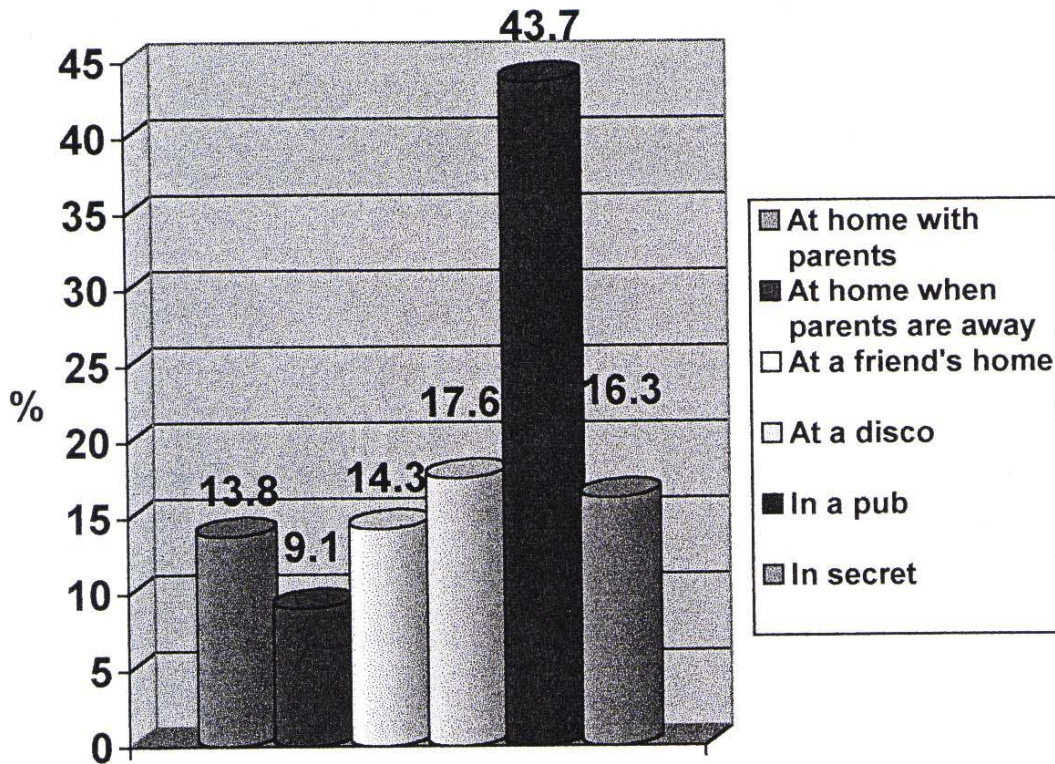
Fig. 8



Generally, drinking habits increased with age, the older the participants are the more likely they are to drink.

Fig. 9

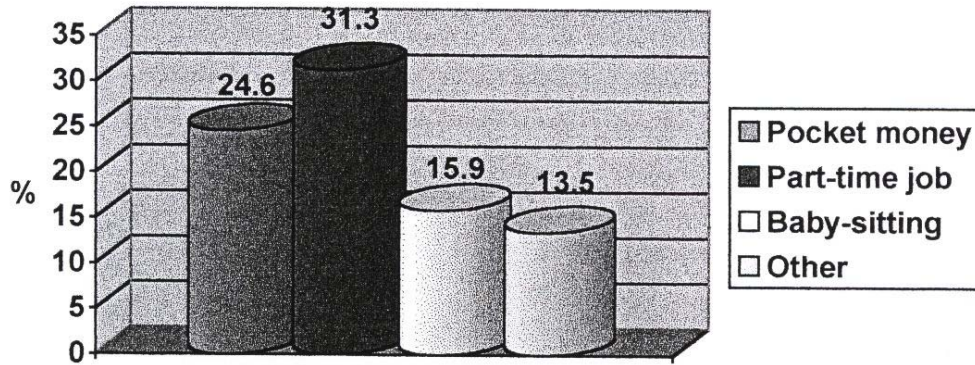
Where do you drink?



When asked, respondents answered that they were more likely to drink in a pub. 43.7% is significantly more than any other location.

Fig.10.

Where do you get the money for drinking?



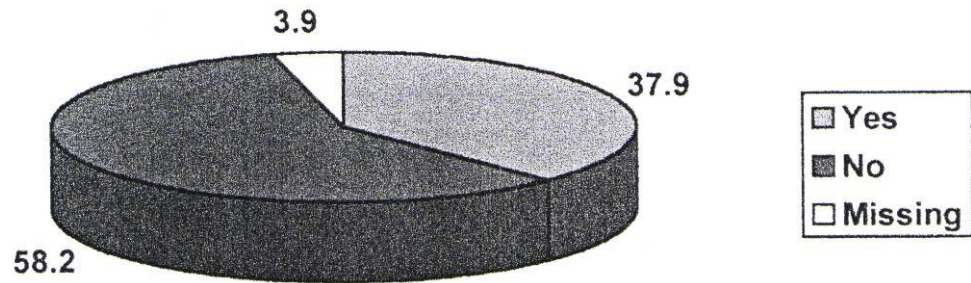
Almost 1/3 of those surveyed get their money for drinking from a part-time job.

Nearly 25% of respondents get it from pocket money.

Comments:

Fig.11.

Do you consider alcohol to be a drug?



Almost 60% do not consider alcohol to be a drug.

Comments:

Have you ever been offered drugs?

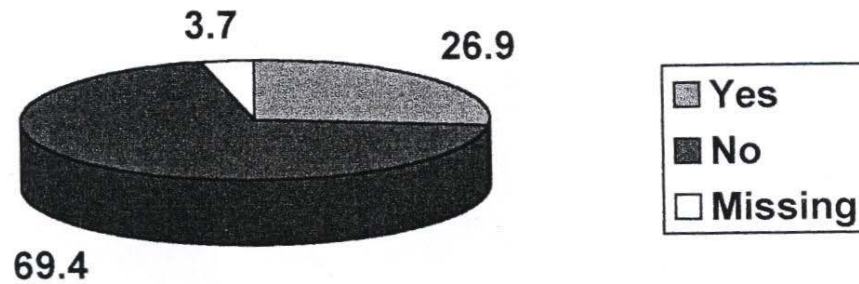


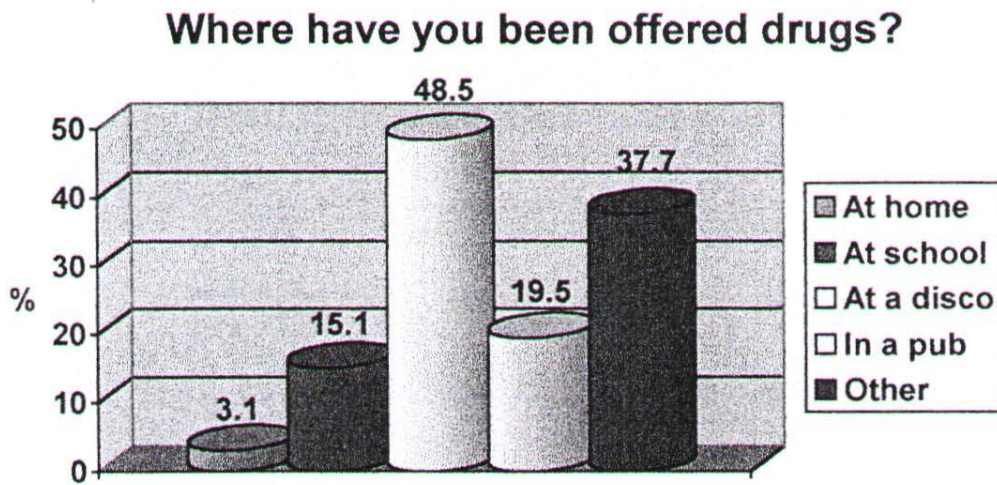
Fig. 12.

Over ¼ of our respondents stated that they had been offered drugs.

(This may be an over estimation as we have no method to detect over reporting)

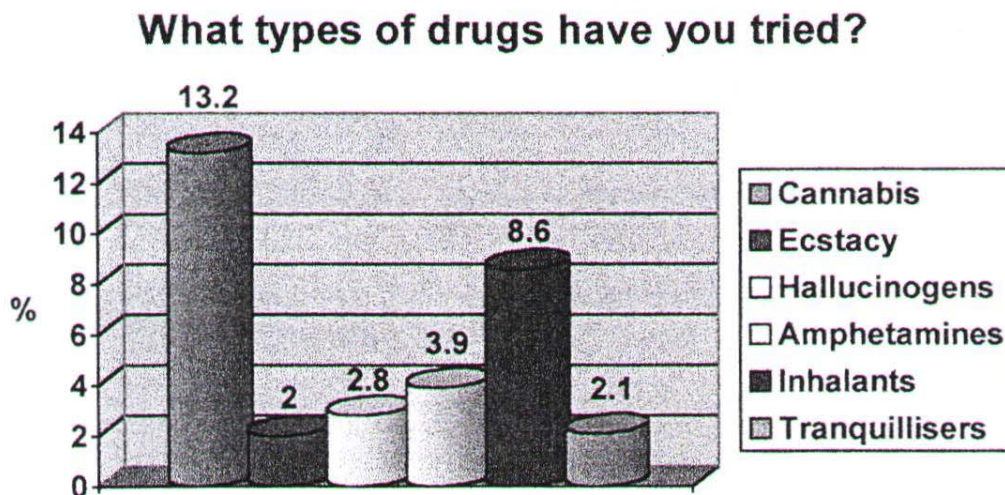
Comments:

Fig. 13



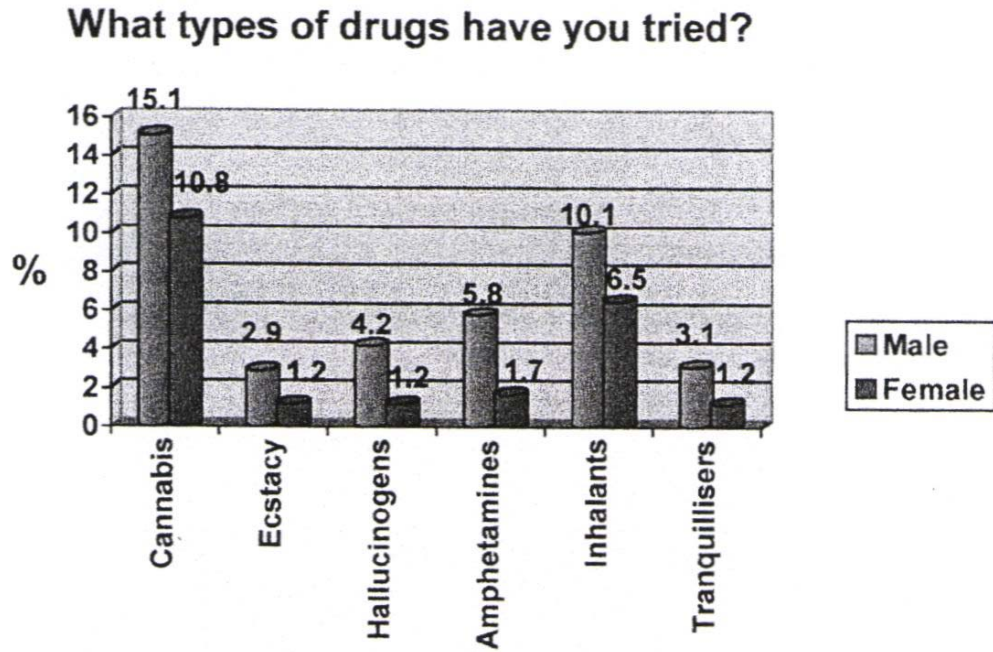
Most respondents had been offered drugs at a disco. "Other" included "downtown" or on "the street."

Fig. 14.



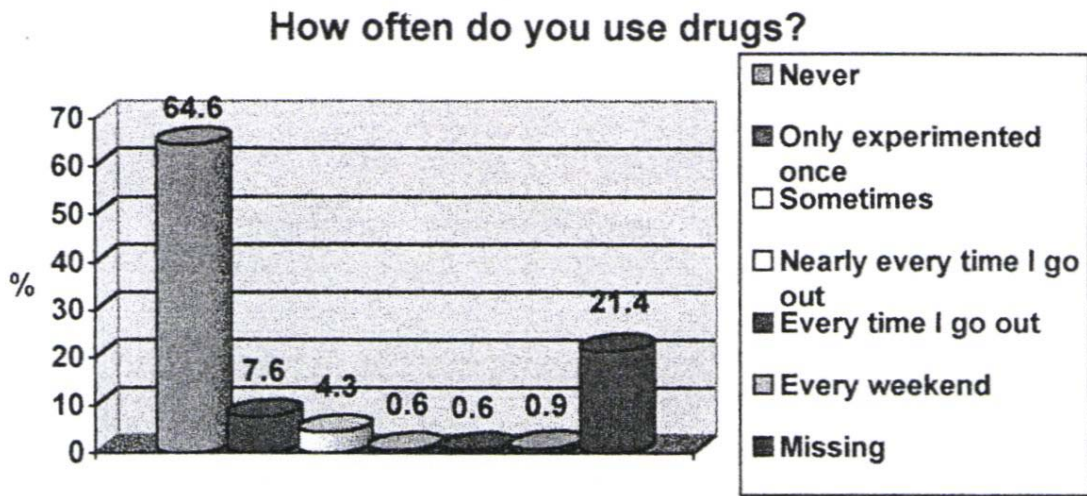
Cannabis has the highest reported rate of use at 13.2%. Inhalants have the second highest with 8.6% admitting use.

Fig. 15.



When asked by gender what drugs they had tried, males reported higher rates across all drugs.

Fig. 16.

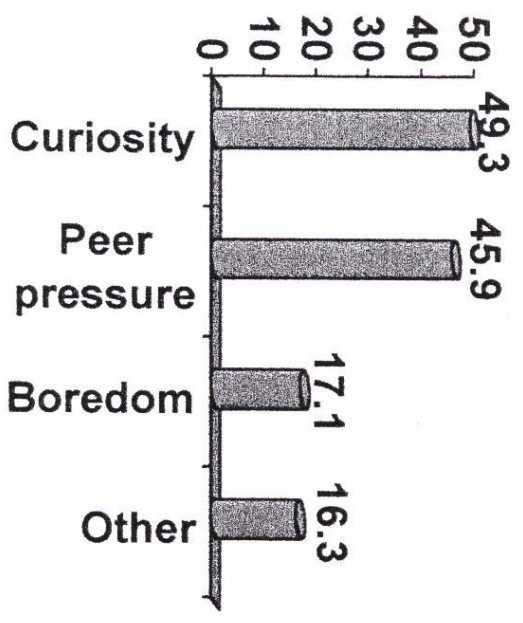


Nearly 65% of respondents who answered this question have never used drugs.

Comments:

Fig. 17.

In your opinion, why do young people take drugs?



The overall opinion is that curiosity and peer pressure are the main reasons that young people take drugs.

Comments:

AGE: _____ years.

MALE () FEMALE ()

1. **HAVE YOU EVER TASTED ALCOHOL?** Yes () No () *(Please tick as appropriate)*
2. **AT WHAT AGE DID YOU HAVE YOUR FIRST FULL DRINK? (NOT JUST A TASTE)**
_____ years
3. **HOW OFTEN DO YOU DRINK ALCOHOL?**
 - a. Never ()
 - b. Sometimes ()
 - c. Nearly every time I go out ()
 - d. Every time I go out ()
 - e. Every Weekend ()
4. **WHEN YOU CHOOSE TO DRINK, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU DRINK?**
 - a. Alcopops e.g. Mugshoot ()
 - b. Cider e.g. Bulmers ()
 - c. Beer / Lager e.g. Heineken ()
 - d. Stout e.g. Guinness, Beamish ()
 - e. Spirits e.g. Vodka, Whiskey, Bacardi ()
5. **WHERE DO YOU DRINK?**
 - a. At home with parents ()
 - b. At home when parents are away ()
 - c. At a friend's home ()
 - d. At a disco ()
 - e. In a pub ()
 - f. In secret ()
6. **WHERE DO YOU GET THE MONEY FOR DRINKING?**
 - a. Pocket money ()
 - b. Part-time Job ()
 - c. Baby-sitting ()
 - d. Other _____
7. **DO YOU CONSIDER ALCOHOL TO BE A DRUG?** Yes () No ()
8. **HAVE YOU EVER BEEN OFFERED DRUGS?** Yes () No ()
9. **IF YES, WHERE?**
 - a. At home ()
 - b. At school ()
 - c. At a disco ()
 - d. In a pub ()
 - e. Other _____

10. WHAT TYPES OF DRUGS HAVE YOU TRIED?

- a. Cannabis e.g. 'marijuana' - 'grass', 'hash'
- b. Ecstasy e.g. 'E', 'XTC', 'love doves'
- c. Hallucinogens e.g. 'LSD', 'acid', 'magic mushrooms'
- d. Amphetamines e.g. 'ice', 'speed'
- e. Inhalants e.g. sniffing glue, paint, petrol
- f. Tranquillisers e.g. valium, Librium

11. HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE DRUGS?

- a. Never
- b. I've only experimented once
- c. Sometimes
- d. Nearly every time I go out
- e. Every time I go out
- f. Every weekend

12. IN YOUR OPINION, WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

- a. Curiosity
- b. Peer pressure
- c. Boredom
- d. Other _____

13. DO YOU FEEL YOU NEED MORE INFORMATION ON ALCOHOL / DRUGS?

Yes () No ()

Note: If you wish to add any other comments, please feel free to do so:

Thank you for your co-operation.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Loreto House, Kenyon Street, Nenagh, Tel: 067 31800

DISCUSSION

This survey has provided a current picture of the drug and alcohol awareness amongst our teenage population.

We aimed to determine the level of use/abuse in our locality.

We also wanted to gauge the need for further education.

ALCOHOL

According to our respondents, 40% of them have had a “full” alcoholic drink before the age of 14.

This finding was the same as the Heywood survey done in 19996.

Our survey showed beer to be the most popular choice of drink for boys.

This is a very common result also found in the Mid-Western Health Board survey (Gleeson et al.) 1998.

While beer is preferred by 43.8% of males, cider is a close second at 40.5%.

Spirits, cider and beer are almost equal in popularity amongst females.

An alarming 28.6% of girls tend to drink spirits.

We speculate that they may do so for three reasons:

1. The smell of spirits can be easily disguised. Vodka and Gin are odourless when mixed with soft drinks.
2. Girls may perceive spirits (i.e. Short drinks) to be less calorific than beer or stout,
3. Girls may not want to make a public statement that they are drinking alcohol and so they conceal this by mixing it with soft drinks.

Generally, the older the students are the more likely they are to drink.

Our teenagers are twice as likely to drink in a pub as anywhere else.

Whilst just over 17.5% said they drank at a disco, over 43% reported that they drank in a pub.

DRUGS

Over 69% of students surveyed stated that they had offered drugs. This may be over estimation as there was no method to detect over-seventh of respondents have reported actually trying cannabis.

Only 8.6% or approximated one twelfth of those surveyed have used inhalants (sniffing glue, paint, petrol).

Of those who have actually tried drugs, cannabis has the highest report use while inhalants are the second choice.

This is common finding, as in the Mid-Western Health Board survey (Gleeson et al.) 1998.

Our local survey showed that out of those who have actually used drugs about 15% of males and nearly 11% of females tried cannabis.

Inhalants have been used by about 10% of males and 6.5% of females.

In 1996, Heywood survey 12% reported using cannabis. Our survey showed a slightly higher percent of use. Again, these rates may be over-reported.

It must be noted that 64.6% never use drugs.

Curiosity and peer pressure was almost equal in the opinion of respondents as the reason why young people take drugs.

One of the most interesting points to emerge form the survey was the fact that over half the teenagers surveyed, 58.2% do not consider alcohol to be a drug.

Yet the majority, 47.9% do not feel they need any more information on alcohol/drugs.

SUMMARY

There is a very high level of underage drinking in our local area.

Though the common perception may be that drug use/abuse is widespread, our survey disputes this.

Perhaps the easy accessibility and relaxed attitudes to alcohol in Irish society present the major risk to our children now.

The preference of alcohol to drugs is quite common but the risk of addiction is just as great.

This should be addressed through education.

The reality of alcohol addiction as well as drug addiction should be highlighted and presented to teenagers.

Perhaps the questions could be looked at once again, for instance in a year's time to see if patterns have changed.

It would be important to keep in touch with these trends.

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