

# THE FORUM FOR LONGFORD

***"WORKING TOGETHER WE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE"***

## **FIRST REPORT ACTION FOR YOUTH**

**LONGFORD AGAINST DRUGS -  
AN ACTION PLAN TO COMBAT SUBSTANCE  
ABUSE IN LONGFORD**



This report was funded by Longford Urban District Council,  
Longford Community Resources Ltd and  
The Midland Health Board



*Each of us must come to care about everyone elses children.*

*We must recognise that the welfare of our children and grandchildren is intimately linked to the welfare of all other peoples children. After all, when one of our children needs life saving surgery someone elses child will perform it.*

*If one of our children is threatened or harmed by violence, someone elses child will be responsible for the violent act.*

*A good life for our own children can be secured only if a good life is also secured/or all other peoples children*

**LILLIAN KATZ**

## **THE MEMBERS OF THE FORUM FOR LONGFORD**

**Councillor Alan Mitchell (chairperson)**

**Councillor Denis Glennon**

**Councillor Mae Sexton**

**Rosemary Keegan (secretary)**

**Superintendent Tom Murphy**

**Garda Gerry Naughton**

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**Longford Urban District Council**

**Longford Urban District Council**

**Longford Urban District Council**

**An Garda Siochana, Longford**

**An Garda Siochana, Longford**

**Longford Neighbourhood Watch**

**Longford Chamber of Commerce**

**Midland Health Board.**

**Longford Youth Development**

**Co. Longford Youth Service**

**Longford Community Resources**

**Longford Community Resources**

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**Superintendent Finbar O'Brien**

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**Mary Toher**

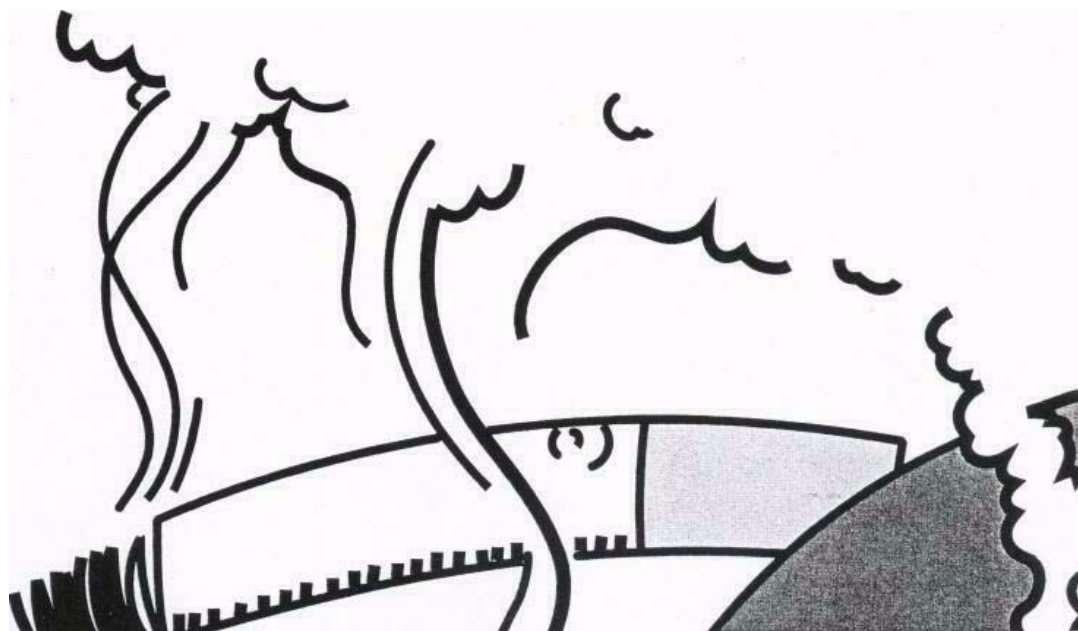




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By Enda Fallon.

# DON'T TOUCH

PRISON  
Criminal Record  
SPEED EFFECTS EVERYONE DIFFERENTLY!  
DEATH!  
VIOLENCE

UNWANTED PREGNANCY...  
CRIME.

POVERTY.  
PANIC ATTACKS.  
LONG TERM SCORE.

SPEED... know the score.

SPEED 5%  
PURE only 95%  
Amphetamine  
RAT POSITION...

FLASHBACK...  
ANXIETY  
PARANOIA...

Depression  
permanent Brain Damage.

INSOMNIA

A.I.D.S.

SUSCEPTIBLE TO hepatitis!  
BROKEN HOMES  
SUICIDE

Internal Bleeding.

SKIN, HAIR & physical APPEARANCE SUFFER.

Failure of vital Organs..

CANCER...

# WHAT YOU CAN'T AFFORD

THE UNBORN CHILD???

YOUR LIFE...  
YOUR choice...

MISERY

TORMENT.

This poster by Enda Fallon was a winning entrant in a Longford Drugs Awareness Art Competition



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Forum for Longford was established in 1997 to provide a co-ordinated inter-agency approach to identify and help tackle social problems in Longford through the preparation of a strategic plan of action. Ideas, expertise and experiences were brought to the Forum through the members of the various organisations and agencies involved. Many of the social problems in Longford can be related to problems of alcohol and drug abuse. The Forum's first initiative focuses on tackling these problems as they relate to Longford's Youth.

The Plan recognises the considerable work being undertaken by the various agencies, identifies the need to identify the current situation in Longford and examines why the problem exists locally. A survey was administered to 1,551 students in 10 post-primary schools throughout County Longford. This figure represents almost 80% of the total senior student population with the exception of students absent from school on the day.

### FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY:

#### 1. INFORMATION ON ILLEGAL DRUGS.

- 47% received information from school authorities.
- 16% believed enough information was given.
- 40% believed information was inadequate, with a lot more needed.

#### 2. EXPERIENCES OF ALCOHOL AND SMOKING.

- 64% had an alcoholic drink at age 15 or younger.
- 73% had their first alcoholic drink between the ages of 12 and 15
- 51% drank several times a week or every day.



In relation to the quantity consumed:

- 68% had 3 or more drinks
- 53% had 4 or more
- 38% had 5 or more:

#### **The results show:**

67% had smoked a cigarette, 52%, smoked a cigarette in the last year, 8% smoked 5 or more daily. 47% first smoked between the ages of 11-14.

#### 3. ACCESS TO ALCOHOL:

The main sources revealed were pubs (74%), discos (59%), friends (19%), off-licences (18%) and home (16%). 93% agreed "it was too easy to obtain alcohol", 97% agreed that "young people drink alcohol nowadays". 72% agree that "young adults drink to keep up with their friends", 59% disagreed that "drinking alcohol makes you feel bad". 80% disagreed with the statement "I will never drink alcohol in my life".



#### 4. EXPERIENCES OF ILLEGAL DRUGS:

On usage of the following drugs respondents indicated that

- 27% had used cannabis - 20% had used inhalants
- 10% hallucinogens - 9% amphetamines
- 7.4% had used ecstasy

#### 5. MAIN SOURCES OF SUPPLY OF ILLEGAL DRUGS

The main sources of supply were indentified by the survey as Friends - 5%, drug suppliers - 51%, funded through earnings - 47%, pocket money - 51%.

#### 6. REASONS FOR TAKING DRUGS

The main reason for taking illegal drugs identified were, boredom -15%, curiosity - 24%, relaxation -14%, to feel better - 14%, fun - 20% and energy - 9%. 62% agreed that “drugs are taken to keep up with their friends”.

The results of the survey are disturbing and indicated that alcohol is predominantly the major problem in the county. Illegal drugs, while being a problem, are not a major problem. The use of cigarettes by young people is also a cause of concern. This report puts in place a pro-active strategy to promote healthy social development to deal with alcohol and drug abuse which will also impact on other problematic adolescent behaviour.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ACTION PLAN:

- Formation of a Community Task Force to operate and implement the Action Plan, comprising all relevant agencies and organisations.
- A Schools Programme to prevent alcohol tobacco and drug abuse with tailor made courses devised locally to address the local situation.
- Parenting programmes to be further developed and continued provision of information to deal with problems before they arise. These programmes to be provided in conjunction with schools, Health Board, Community groups, etc.
- Education back-up - facilities to be provided for early school leaving, in pre-school and remedial education and the need for a Home School Liaison Officer.
- Garda Response - the Gardai to continue: To implement existing legislation relating to alcohol tobacco and drug abuse; to liaise with the community enabling effective responses to the problems when they arise.
- Role of the local Authority: Longford UDC, through the housing legislation, to use its powers in seeking to make Longford drug-free, and acting as a facilitator to the Task Force. Through its financial support, to assist and support organisations implementing the Action Plan. As Housing authority to implement effective Estate Management practices.
- Needs of Young People - Formation of a Youth Council in Longford giving the Youth a voice in their

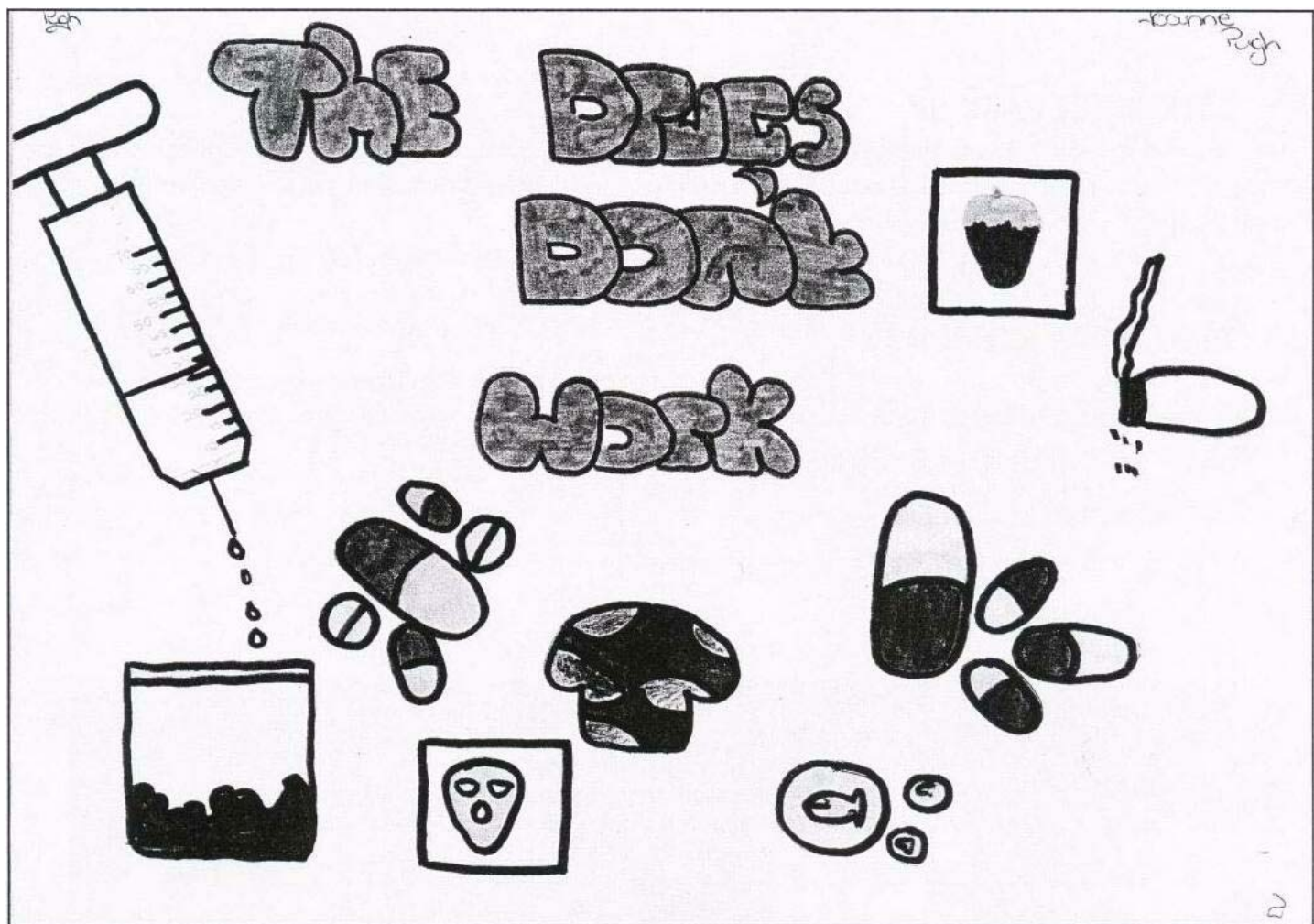


future and in the Community. To provide various supports to involve youth in the development of sporting, artistic and cultural interests and to encourage their inclusion in clubs, and the expansion of services at the newly established youth centre.

- Dissemination of information locally regarding alcohol and illegal drug use.

The multi-agency approach proposed in this Action Plan assists in effectively co-ordinating the work and services of the agencies concerned, including parents and young people in the process in order to help bring about positive change.

The Action Plan recognises that the Youth of today are the future and the leaders of tomorrow. "Working together we can make a difference".



This poster by Joanne Pugh was a winning entrant in a Longford Drugs Awareness Art Competition

# **THE PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **1. A COMMUNITY TASK FORCE**

We *recommend* that a Community Task Force be established for Longford Town initially, to oversee this action plan over a minimum period of three years and to evaluate the effects of this action plan on the locality and to make whatever changes are necessary to make the Action Plan more effective. This Task Force should report in the first instance to the Forum for Longford and thereafter to the Longford Urban District Council and the Midland Health Board.

## **2. SCHOOLS PREVENTION.**

We recommend that the schools in our locality continue to provide a comprehensive course of alcohol and drug education as part of their curriculum and that courses specific to Longford be drawn up by local teachers and implemented in the schools in the locality in a co-ordinated fashion in consultation with the Statutory agencies.

## **3. THE ROLE OF PARENTS.**

We recommend that information and parenting programmes continue to be made available and, further developed in Longford, and that Community/Special interest groups would take the responsibility for the implementation of such programmes.

## **4. EDUCATION BACK UP**

We recommend that education back up including facilities be provided to early school leavers, in preschool education and remedial education and that greater liaison takes place between schools to deal with the problem of early school leavers.

## **5. THE GARDA RESPONSE**

We recommend that the Gardai continue to implement existing legislation relating to alcohol tobacco and illegal drugs in our locality and continue to liaise with the community to provide an effective response to dealing with problems when they arise.

## **6. THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

We recommend that Longford Urban District Council play an active role in the fight against drug abuse in Longford Town by using its powers under Housing Legislation and *as a* housing authority to implement effective Estate Management Practices, by implementing a policy to make Longford drug free, by acting as facilitators to the Task Force in its duties, and through its financial support system to promote organisations implementing the work of the Action Plan.

## **7. THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

We recommended that a mechanism be put in place to give young people a voice in the future of their community by the formation of a Youth Council in Longford.



## 8. COORDINATION OF FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

We *recommend* that resources be provided locally to ensure the proper use of facilities beneficial to young people, the establishment of a sport forum to co-ordinate the activities of the various sports groups and organisations in the town, promote the involvement of young people in arts and drama and the encouragement and promotion of youth clubs and organisations for young people.

## 9. A YOUTH CENTRE

We recommend that the newly established Youth Centre be developed to cater for the needs of young people in the locality.

## 10. INFORMATION

We recommend that information on the abuse of alcohol tobacco and illegal drugs be made widely available locally together with information on the support services available both locally and nationally to assist young people and their families.



## **INTRODUCTION**

**T**he Forum for Longford is a voluntary organisation formed in 1997 by Longford Urban District Council to provide a co-ordinated inter agency approach to identify and help tackle social problems in Longford. In recognising the important contribution being made by many organisations in our Community it was felt that there was a need to co-ordinate the efforts of these organisations to help achieve more effective results.

Following a number of preliminary meetings the Forum for Longford was established. A number of local organisations were requested to nominate members to assist in carrying out a detailed examination and discussion of the social problems in Longford with a view to preparing an action plan. The Organisations requested to nominate members were An Garda Síochána, Longford Chamber of Commerce, Longford Neighbourhood Watch, Midland Health Board, Longford Community Resources, Longford Youth Development and Longford Urban District Council.

While members of the Forum may have been nominated to represent an organisation each person brought his/her ideas and experiences which enriched the discussions as to how the problem might be tackled and also served to confirm that a co-ordinated approach is the only effective way forward. Each organisation had been making its contribution to dealing with problems in Longford. However it was recognised at an early stage that working together in a co-ordinated manner would provide the greatest benefit for our community. We do believe that working together we will make a difference.

In Ireland long ago the concept of MEITHEAL was known where the community came together to achieve some specific purpose. This not only got the work completed it also ensured completion effectively. As a consequence it created a community spirit and a renewed commitment by people to their community. This community spirit is now needed more than ever.

The Forum for Longford identified the need to undertake an assessment of the current situation in tackling the problem of alcohol tobacco and illegal drugs particularly as it related to young people in Longford. Action Plans to deal with other social problems in Longford will follow in due course. However it was felt that many of these problems can, in many instances, be related to the problems of alcohol and illegal drugs.

The Forum set itself a task of identifying the current situation in Longford, of examining some of the critical reasons as to why the problem exists locally and to preparing an Action Plan of positive steps to help tackle the problem.

There can be no greater threat to the future of our young people than the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs. This report can not provide a solution to these problem but it does provide an action plan which if implemented will greatly improve the situation locally. A concerted effort is needed by everyone to tackle this issue. Everyone has his/her part to play.

In preparing this report the Forum for Longford consulted with young people and their concerns are reflected in our findings.

A work shop was held in March 1996' to which various schools and community organisations were invited and the results of this workshop have also formed an important part of this report.



We are very grateful *to* all the people who gave of their time in helping to prepare this report and action plan. We are particularly grateful for the assistance received from the Principals and staff of the secondary schools in the County and from Youthreach in administering the survey on young peoples attitude to alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs. We believe the findings of this survey were of major assistance in identifying some of the problems locally.

The financial assistance of Longford Community Resources Ltd, Longford Urban District Council and the Midland Health Board in the preparation of this report is acknowledged.

The two key questions which this report seeks to answer are:

- Why are some young people having such serious problems with alcohol tobacco and other drugs?
- What can be done to shield young people from substance abuse problems?

While this Action Plan focuses on Longford Town *we* believe that it may also serve as a model for the entire County.

Our community cannot afford to be complacent. No parent can definitely say that their child will not abuse alcohol or tobacco or try illegal drugs. The problem of alcohol tobacco and illegal drug abuse cannot be solved overnight. This Action Plan will provide a positive response and will help in the fight against these problems but unfortunately is not an instant solution. However positive action by our community in implementing this Action Plan will help ensure that substance abuse is less likely.

## **THE PROBLEM?**

It is an undoubted fact that the abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs is one of the main social problems in Ireland to day. The problem is not confined to any particular sector in our society but has been seen to affect all of our community.

The Forum in preparing an action plan felt that the first stage would be to identify the extent of the problem in County Longford as this would assist in formulating an action plan to help tackle this problem in Longford Town.

A survey on young peoples attitudes to alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs was carried out in April 1998 in all the second level schools (post Junior Cert Students) in the County. This survey, previously prepared by the Garda Research Unit, Templemore College, Co. Tipperary had been administered previously in County Tipperary and County Donegal.

With the permission and co-operation of the local second level schools the survey was administered in the following education institutions;

Ballymahon Vocational School, Ard Scoil Padraic Granard, Lanesboro Community College, Oliver Plunkett Vocational School, Moyne Community School, Youthreach Lanesboro, Convent of Mercy Ballymahon, Cnoc Mhuire Convent of Mercy, Granard, Scoil Mhuire Longford, St. Josephs Secondary School, Newtownforbes and St. Mels College, Longford.

A total of 1,331 students in senior cycle participated in the survey which represents almost 50% of the total senior student population. To create as accurate a picture as possible all questionnaires were included for analysis. The results of the survey are published with this report.

It is important to caution that such surveys are open to exaggeration by participants and this survey may be no exception. While there are a number of inconsistencies in the findings, we believe that the results give a reasonably accurate picture of the current situation in County Longford and are consistent with similar surveys carried out in other parts of the country.

The results of the survey indicate that underage drinking of alcohol and tobacco smoking is the major problem in County Longford. Illegal drugs while a problem are not a major problem. However, experience has shown that there can be no room for complacency and unless action is taken now the situation could deteriorate further. This report and action plan aims to do just this.



## **REVIEW OF THE SURVEY**

In reviewing the survey we wish to highlight a number of major issues as follows;

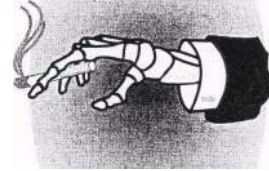
Underage drinking

Illegal drugs

Cigarette smoking

More focused information should be provided

The results of the Survey are contained in Appendix 1 of this report.



## **IMPORTANT FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY.**

The following are some of the more important findings;

### **Information about illegal drugs:**

47% of respondents indicated that they had received information directly from school authorities with only 16% of respondents believing that enough information was being given compared to 40% who believe that the information was inadequate. This contrasts with the level of awareness of the dangers to health among the second level, post junior certificate students in Co. Longford. Teachers play the largest role in the education of respondents in drugs awareness at schools.

### **Experiences of alcohol and smoking:**

64% of respondents indicated that they had an alcoholic drink at 15 years of age or younger while 73% had their first alcoholic drink between the ages of 12 and 17.

51% of the participants indicated that they consumed alcohol several times a week or daily.

Asked how much alcohol they consumed at one time 65% indicated they had three or more drinks, 55% had four or more drinks and 53% had five or more drinks.

67% of respondents had smoked a cigarette with 52% indicating that they have taken a cigarette in the last 12 months. 18% of respondents smoke five or more cigarettes a day.

47% of respondents took their first cigarette between the ages of 11 and 14.

### **Access to alcoholic beverages:**

Participants indicated that the main sources of alcohol were pubs at (74%) and discos at (59%). These main sources were well ahead of others such as friends (19%), off licences (18%), and home (16%).

93% of participants agreed that it was easy to obtain alcoholic drink with 97% agreeing that most young people drink alcoholic beverages nowadays.

72% of respondents agreed that people start drinking alcohol just to keep up with their friends. 59% of respondents disagreed with the statement that "drinking alcohol makes you feel bad".

80% of respondents disagreed with the statement "I will never drink alcohol in my life".

## Experiences of illegal drugs.

In response to the question Have you ever used any of the following drugs the main finding were as follows.

Cannabis	(27%)
(27%) Inhalants	(20%)
Hallucinogens	(10%)
Amphetamines	(9%)
Ecstasy	(7.4%)



The main supply sources for illegal drugs are friends, (58%) and drugs suppliers (31%) from those who responded. The funds for drug supply was mainly from earnings (47%) and pocket money (31%).

The main reasons indicated as to why people take illegal drugs were boredom (13%), curiosity (24%) relaxation (14%) to feel better (14%), fun (20%), energy (9%).

In response to the statement that “people start taking illegal drugs to keep up with their friends” 62% of respondents agreed.

80% of respondents agreed that “a lot of young people take illegal drugs now a days”.

In response to the statement “I will never take illegal drugs in my life time” 59% of respondents agreed while 22% of respondents disagreed.

In response to the statement that “it is easy to obtain illegal drugs” 70% of respondents agreed, 4% of respondents disagreed and 20% being unsure.

When asked their views on the statement “If I know someone taking drugs I would report him/her to the appropriate authorities” 60% of respondents disagreed while only 8% agreed.

## **IDENTIFYING THE FACTORS AND LOCAL PROBLEMS LEADING TO ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE**

The abuse of alcohol tobacco and other drugs is a major problem in Ireland and is also a problem in Longford. It has been identified that young people are more vulnerable to problems associated with alcohol and drug abuse than any other group in society. Starting to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs early in a young persons development has been shown to increase the risk of later drug abuse.

There are many theories as to why young people abuse drugs but there are few agreed answers. Among the obvious factors suggested are unemployment, social, economic and environmental factors including poor planning and lack of recreational facilities. These may contribute to the problem but the answer is not that simple since drug abuse affects all sectors of our society.

Controlling the supply of illegal drugs is a constantly growing effort. However, these efforts cannot eliminate drug abuse because they cannot control the demand for drugs. The supply of drugs cannot be eliminated so long as demand is strong. For example the sale of alcohol to children under eighteen years of age is illegal yet adolescents in Longford have little difficulty finding access to alcohol as the survey results confirm. As long as the demand for alcohol remains young people will find ways to obtain it.

The solution to our problem is to reduce the demand for alcohol and illegal drugs. The question which we must ask ourselves is how can we reduce the demand for alcohol and other drugs before problems develop. Treatment is a strategy to reduce demand among those with most serious drug and alcohol problems. While treatment is necessary and important it comes at a point where considerable damage has already been done to the user, their family and to society.

In order to prevent a problem one must find out what factors increase the chances of these problems arising and then find ways to reduce these risk factors. The more risk factors present in the community the greater the likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse in that community.

**In this report we have identified the following as the main reasons why young people in Longford are taking alcohol and illegal drugs;**

**Curiosity fun and the feel good factor.**

**Peer pressure.**

**Family and Community attitudes.**

**Boredom**

**Availability.**

**A sense of alienation from the Community.**

**Low self esteem.**

Research has demonstrated that young people who are strongly bonded to parents, school, non drug using peers and their community are less likely to engage in damaging behaviours. Today's families and schools and communities need clear and stated guidelines on alcohol and other drug abuse thereby letting young people know what is or is not acceptable for people their age.

The risk and environmental factors for abuse can be allied to many adolescent problems other than substance abuse. Other teenage health and behavioural problems are currently the focus of concern



including school drop out, teen pregnancy and crime. While the focus of this action plan must be to deal with substance abuse we believe that the social development strategy which promotes healthy pro social development will also provide a means of assisting in a wide range of adolescent problems.

We believe that the involvement of the whole community is essential to tackling the problem of substance abuse among young people.

It is recognised that the most successful method of tackling the problem is school based education together with a Community based approach. This Action Plan is based on this model.

# THE ACTION PLAN

## INTRODUCTION

**The Action Plan makes recommendations under a number of key areas namely;**

1. The formation of a Community task force
2. Schools prevention
3. The role of parents
4. Education backup
5. Garda/Neighbourhood watch response
6. The local authority response
7. The needs of young people
8. Facilities for young people
9. Information



### 1. THE FORMATION OF A COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

**We recommend that a Community task force be established for Longford Town to oversee this action plan over a minimum period of three years and to evaluate the effects of this action plan on the locality and to make whatever changes as are necessary to make the Action Plan more effective. This task force should report in the first instance to the Forum for Longford and thereafter to the Longford Urban District Council and The Midland Health Board.**

Members of the Community task force should include representatives from schools, law enforcement, the health board, parents groups. County Longford Youth Service, youth groups, local businesses, service and civic organisations, religious organisations, recreational organisations, community groups and the communications media. This task force will be given over-all responsibility for operating and implementing this action plan.

An administrator should be appointed by Longford UDC to co-ordinate the activities of the task force, to guide and monitor its progress and achievements, and help the task force with solving community problems.

The Urban District Council and the Midland Health should make a commitment to support the programme, be involved in the selecting of the community Task Force and hold it accountable for progress and keep the programme in the public domain for an initial period of 5 years. The Midland Health Board has a statutory role in this whole area and is at present developing a drugs education policy Statement which will form the basis of a Development Strategy. The support of the Health Board will be essential to the successful implementation of this Action Plan.

To properly implement the action plan it will be necessary for the Community task force to assign specific roles and responsibilities to its members and form committees for each programme in the Action Plan. The Task Force shall be given formal responsibility for carrying out the work and members asked to make a commitment for a minimum of three years at which time the action plan will be reviewed. Reports will be given to the Urban District Council and the Midland Health Board

and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan be made on an annual basis.

**The evaluation of the action plan will involve the following;**

How well is the Action Plan working? Are we getting the participation we want and need? Are the participants learning the skills we are teaching? Are we delivering the services we said we would deliver? Are people most at risk participating?

We believe that an effective Task Force will ensure the co-ordination of the services and agencies concerned and will provide for the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the action plan. The Task Force will seek to maximise the use of existing resources, assist in the optimal use of these resources and it also will co-operate with the Midland Health Boards Regional Intersectoral Drugs Group and in the implementation of its policies.

## **2. SCHOOLS PREVENTION**

**We recommend that the schools in our locality continue to provide a comprehensive course of alcohol and drug education as part of their curriculum and that courses specific to Longford be drawn up by local teachers and implemented in both primary and secondary schools in the locality in a co-ordinated fashion.**

The Forum recognises that the schools in our locality are already doing excellent work in providing education about substance abuse.

A number of teachers in secondary school have indicated their willingness to meet to prepare a programme specific to Longford which might be implemented in both primary and secondary schools. The Midland Health Board Health Education officer will be of benefit in the design and implementation of a programme at both primary and secondary school level. Discussions will take place with the Health Education Officer to ascertain what role the Midland Health Board will play in the provision of such courses.

The Forum believes that to be truly beneficial school programmes should be provided from primary school to leaving certificate level. The Department of Education has prepared guidelines for both primary and secondary schools and every encouragement should be given to implementing these programmes in the schools in our area.

## **3. THE ROLE OF PARENTS**

**We recommend that information and parenting programmes continue to be made available in Longford, be further developed and that local community/special interest groups will take responsibility for the implementation of such programmes.**

Parents are a key factor in a child's development. The focus of parent training programmes is on primary prevention by providing parents with effective ways to handle their families, support their children's academic progress and prevent drug use and related problems later on. Parent training can



also be an effective strategy for families with young people who have already begun using drugs or alcohol.

A programme is to be implemented in the locality which help parents develop family management skills and provide support at home for their childrens education. Extensive research has shown that where parents were taught skills to improve family management practices which clarify and create consistency in rewards and punishment for behaviour and which promote family bonding the results provide long terms gains for children. It is important to stress childrens attitudes towards education are shaped by their parents attitudes and student achievement increases when parents are actively involved in supporting their childrens learning. The support offered at home for a childs work at school can be an important factor in a childs academic success.

A programme could be identified which teaches parents to reinforce at home what the child is learning at school and develop consistency between home and school.

Parenting programmes should be offered to schools, community groups, work settings by The Health Board and other agencies. A number of parent training programmes are available for communities and it will be the responsibility for the Task force in co-operation with the Longford Drugs Awareness Group and the Midland Health Board to identify which programmes might be implemented in the locality and to focus on the groups to which the programmes might be made available. The challenge must be to ensure the parents at greatest risk are involved in these parenting programmes. The Midland Health Board have given a commitment to provide assistance in provision of these programmes.

A properly co-ordinated series of programmes will also help in the organisation of parent groups which may provide back up and support to other parents who may be experiencing difficulties with their children. Very often parents feel helpless in difficult situation where they do not feel they have any support or a place to turn to for assistance.

The provision of information is also of vital importance and will be discussed later.

#### 4. EDUCATION BACK UP

**We recommend that education back up(including facilities) be provided to early school leavers, and in pre-school and remedial education and that greater liaison take place between schools to deal with the problem of early school leavers.**

There must be greater liaison between schools to highlight young people most at risk of leaving school early. Facilities must be provided to assist early school leavers. We welcome the recent appointment of schools liaison officers for some schools in County Longford. The provision of this service in all schools in our County must be a priority.

The Forum believes that early childhood education programmes offer support for parents and children at a critical point in a childs life, the pre school years. Such programmes would deal with poor family management practice, problems such as academic failure, early anti social behaviour and low commitment to schools. Such early childhood education would further provide support for children and their parents between the ages of 2 and 5 before the children begin primary education, It will be necessary to identify key areas in the Town which might benefit from such services being

provided. The Midland Health Board intends to play an active role in the provision of education back up.

## **5. THE GARDA RESPONSE**

**We recommend that the Gardai continue to implement existing legislation relating to alcohol tobacco abuse and illegal drugs in our locality and continues to liaise with the community to provide an effective response to dealing with problems when they arise.**

The Garda authorities have indicated that they intend taking the findings from the survey into account when planning garda policy for the Longford Area.

The problem of underage drinking will be approached by liaising with vintners representatives and through the enforcement of existing laws. A new identity card scheme “the age card” has been launched recently in Longford. This scheme will be fully implemented in cooperation with publicans and other licence holders. Licensees of premises which are found to supply alcohol to young people under 15 years of age will have an objection lodged to the renewal of their licence either by the garda authorities or by the Task Force. All Publicans in our area must comply with their legal responsibilities and those who do not will face the consequences.

The illegal sale of tobacco products to young people must be tackled by the implementation of existing legislation.

The Gardai intend to visit every secondary school to give advice and information on drug abuse and ways and means of preventing same. Talks and information will also be given to guardians through neighbourhood watch and community alert meetings and to any other groups or associations who request assistance. A number of large meetings are planned by the local neighbourhood watch groups.

In tackling the drugs problem the Garda authorities have indicated that persons known to be dealing in the Longford area will be targeted with a view to taking successful prosecutions against them.

Community policing formed the basis of operation Dochas which was so successful in the Dublin area in the tackling of the drugs problem. The Neighbourhood Watch has been operating most more successfully in Longford Town and we recommend that this be further developed in conjunction with the Gardai to form the basis of implementing a programme which will assist in seeking to prevent alcohol and drug abuse in the town.

It is necessary that there be full co-operation with the Garda authorities to tackle the problems in our area. For many people in Longford this will be most positive contribution which they can make in tackling the problem. Turning a blind eye does not solve the problem in a community and the garda authorities cannot solve the problem on their own.

## **6. THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

**We recommend that Longford Urban District Council continue to play an active role in the fight against drug abuse in Longford Town by using its powers under Housing Legislation and as a**

**Housing Authority to implement effective Estate Management practices to implement a policy of seeking to make Longford drug free, by acting as facilitator to the Task Force in its duties, and through its grants system promote organisations implementing the work of the Action Plan.**

Recent legislation has given local authorities greater powers to evict individuals who were found guilty of anti social behaviour (including dealing in drugs). We recommend that Longford Urban District Council make full use of its powers under this legislation in circumstances where individuals have been convicted of offences and where illegal drugs have been found in council dwellings.

The Council can play a proactive role as a Housing Authority in Longford Town in implementing effective Estate Management Practices. The Forum will be examining this area further in a later report.

We believe that in order to send a positive message that Longford is against illegal drugs that the Urban Council will become a member of the European Cities against Drugs and sign the declaration committing the town to a drugs free environment.

The Urban Council will further have a positive part to play in its role as administrators to the drugs community task force and in providing the necessary facilities and back up to this organisation.

In providing financial assistance to Local Organisations we believe that priority can be given by the Urban Council to Organisations dealing with young people who demonstrate a policy in keeping with this Action plan and who are actively engaged in its implementation locally.

## **7. THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

**We recommended that a mechanism be put in place to give young people a voice in the future of their community by the formation of a Youth Council in Longford.**

It is clear from meetings with young people that they wish to be involved in and play their part in the future of Longford Town. Many young people feel that their concerns are not been adequately addressed and feel that as they are not of voting age they have no opportunity to influence decisions which will have an effect on the future on their town.

Taking these concerns into account we recommend the formation of a Youth Council in Longford. Youth Councils have been organised successfully in towns such as Bray and Navan. The purpose of such Council will be to consider Youth affairs generally and to make recommendation to the Urban Council in this regard. The Junior Council in these other towns meet on a regular basis and have a liaison committee with the Senior Council to put forward proposals and recommendations relating to youth affairs to the senior council. The Council will comprise three representatives from each of the secondary schools in the locality. Membership will comprise students from fourth year or transition year.

The Forum believes that such a body, if successful, will play an important role in increasing the involvement of young people in their community which as a result will have a positive effect on young peoples attitudes to their area.



Further discussion should take place with the Urban Council, young people and their schools to implement this recommendation.

## 8. FACILITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**We recommend that resources be provided locally to ensure the proper use of facilities beneficial to young people, the establishment of a sport forum to co-ordinate the activities of the various sports groups and organisations in the town, the involvement of young people in arts and drama and the encouragement of youth clubs and organisations for young people.**

In the meetings which the Forum held with young people it clearly identified need for proper facilities and resources to be made available for young people in our town. Many young people take the view that there is nothing to do in Longford and there are no facilities for them to meet and socialise apart from discos and public houses. Many young people feel alienated from sports clubs particularly where they are not gifted at sports.

Identifying these concerns the Forum believes it appropriate to consider the establishment of a sports forum in the County which will form the basis of co-ordinating the activities of the various sports groups and organisations in the town. This would optimise the use of facilities. In line with current government thinking it would be appropriate if funding becomes available to appoint a local authority sports and leisure officer. Youth clubs and organisations dealing with young people have a vital role to play and every effort should be made to co-ordinate the role of these Youth Clubs and Organisations in the provision of courses and facilities locally.

The Involvement of young people in the Arts has also been highlighted as an important factor in facilitating their development. It is a generally held view that where young people are involved in sports and Arts they are less likely to become involved in alcohol and other drug abuse. We believe that the arts and drama should be explored further with a view to developing courses and projects to benefit young people in the town and that these projects should be accessible to all. An excellent example is Ashling Childrens Festival, which this year has involved over two thousand children. The further development and promotion of this and similar events will be encouraged.

The need for a youth news paper for the Town has been highlighted by young people as a means of keeping them informed of activities in the town. Such a newspaper might well be published in the local news media on a regular basis.

It must be a policy of all sports and youth organisations to provide information on the abuse of drugs and alcohol and to have policies in place which are pro active in promoting this action plan in our locality and ensuring the message to young people is clear and unambiguous. It will be necessary to identify means whereby sports clubs and youth organisations will be in a position to give this information to young people in an non educational environment and to ensure that the message which is given in schools is also consistently applied by these organisations.

The Midland Health Board are in the process of establishing a Regional Youth Health Forum to coordinate and look at training and development to deal with the health needs of young people. Local liaison with this Forum will be encouraged. The Health Board has important role to in the non institutional education needs of young people and will provide back up to youth organisations and groups in the area.

## 9. YOUTH CENTRE

**We recommend that the newly established Youth Centre be developed to cater for the needs of young people in the locality.**

Various reports and studies have identified the importance of a Youth Centre in Longford. The young people themselves have confirmed there is a need for such a facility to be made available for young people. Such a Youth Centre has now been established which will provide recreational and developmental courses for young people. Boredom and inactivity have been highlighted as reasons why young people may engage in alcohol and the abuse of drugs. The Youth Centre will be available to young people in the Town and will play an important role in focusing on the positive aspect of the development of young people and will help co-ordinate activities for young people. Maximum usage by as wide cross section of young people as possible is needed for the success of this facility.

Every encouragement should be given by all the agencies to this development and every effort must be made to obtain financial resources from every available source.

## 10. INFORMATION

We recommend that information on the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs be made widely available locally together with information on the support services available both locally and nationally to assist young people and their families with the problems of alcohol and illegal drugs.

Many people complain that they do not have adequate information about the problem of alcohol and illegal drugs. Many parents feel helpless and do not know where to turn for help.

The Midland Health Board does provide an important back up service in the locality to assist in dealing with Alcohol and drug problems through their Community Alcohol and Drugs Services.

The Task Force will on an on going basis prepare literature and documentation on the problems of alcohol and illegal drugs and we will be requesting the local news media to provide facilities for the dissemination of this information. A leaflet "Drugs Longford Style - A Guideline for Families" has been produced and is being distributed throughout the county.

## **CONCLUSION**

Research both nationally *and* internationally has indicated that a co-ordinated approach is essential in dealing with the drugs and alcohol problem. The supply of drugs cannot be eliminated as long as the demand exists. Strong law enforcement cannot of itself solve the problem and it is recognised that strategies are needed to combat the misuse of drugs and alcohol. The multi agency approach proposed by this action plan and the implementation of the recommendations will bring positive benefits to Longford.

This report has identified the extent of the problems in the Longford Area and has sought to outline a strategy for the effective co-ordination of the services and agencies in the locality and to maximise the use of existing resources. The establishment of a local community task force to implement the action plan, to refine and make further recommendations and implement positive action will have further beneficial effects in our locality.

However the success of this Action Plan will require the support of all our Community. Everyone has their part to play. Now is the time for Action.

Let us hope that this Report is a first step in improving the position for young people and in helping them to avoid abusing alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs. Remember working together we will make a difference.

# DRUGS - ARE YOU GOING TO SIGN YOUR LIFE AWAY?



Andrew Corkery

This poster by Andrew Corkery was a winning entrant in a Longford Drugs Awareness Art Competition

# **DRUGS SURVEY**

## **REPORT ANALYSIS**

### **DEMOGRAPHICS AND INFORMATION SOURCES**

This survey was commissioned by The Forum for Longford. It was conducted in a variety of schools across the county of Longford. The participants range from fifteen to eighteen years old (see fig. 1) and were equally split between male and female students (49.7% female, 50.1% male, with 0.2% non-respondent). The majority of the participants (80.3% to be exact) were attending fifth and sixth year when they partook in the survey. Also, a majority of 76% of the participants were rural dwellers. (See fig. 2)

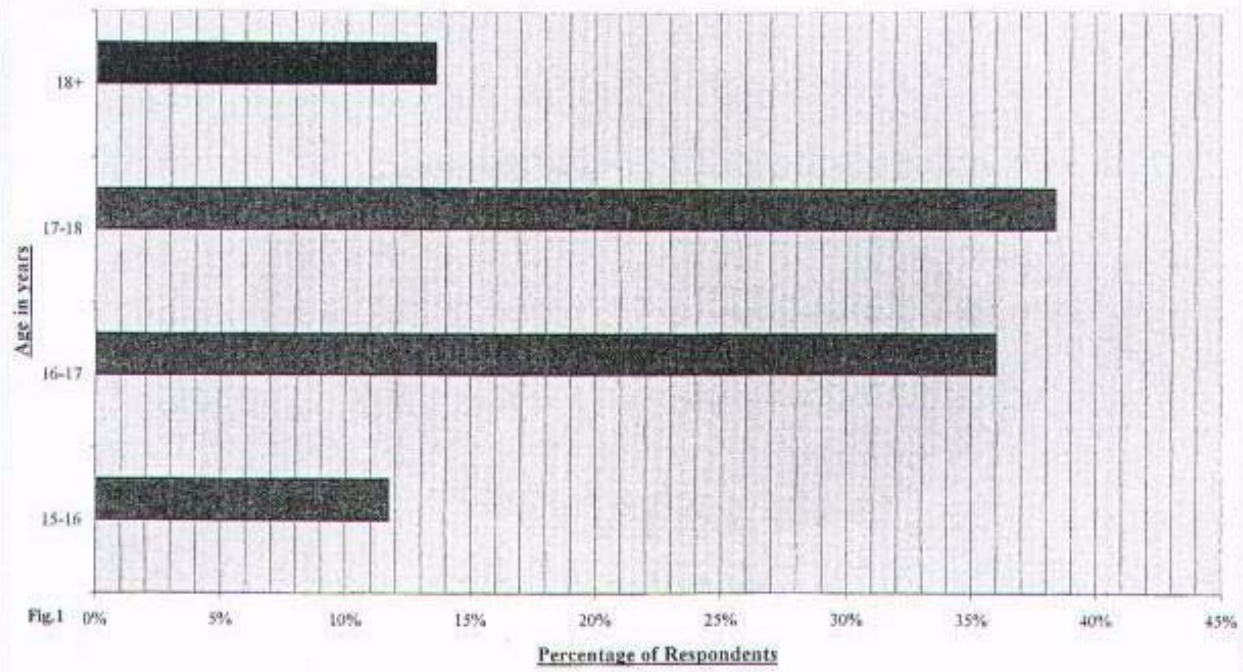
Out of all of the participants, only a small number did not have the opportunity to avail of classes in school on illegal drugs. Also, less than 50% of the participants (42.8% to be exact) have received some sort of information on illegal drugs or alcoholism.

This report shows that only 46.2% (fig. 3) of the participants received information direct from their school authorities, and overall only 15.9% (see fig 4.) of the participants felt that the information the school provided (either directly or indirectly) was sufficient. This figure is compared to 39.6% of the participants who believed that the information received was inadequate.

This report shows that teachers play the largest part in the education of the participants in drug awareness at school (see fig. 5). Moreover, 60% of the participants thought that the lectures given by teachers, the Gardai, the Health Board, etc. were fairly useful to very useful (fig. 6)



### Age Profile of Respondents



### Location of Participant

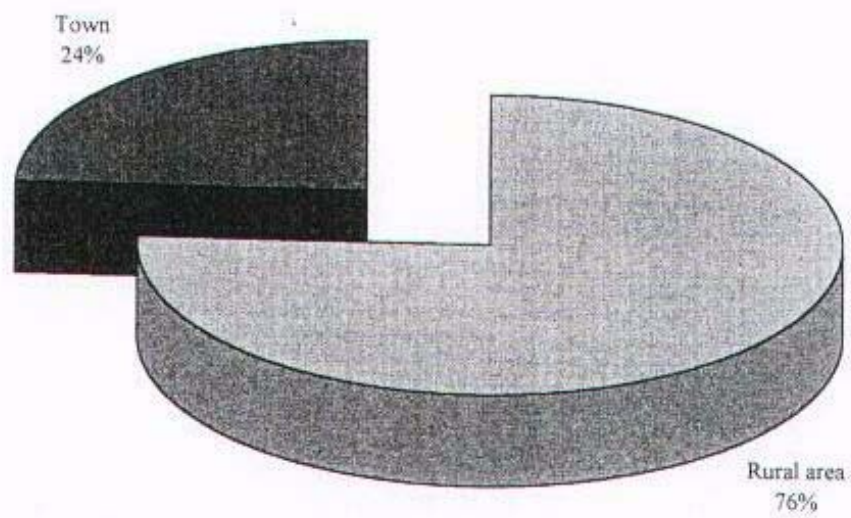


Fig. 2

Information from School Authorities

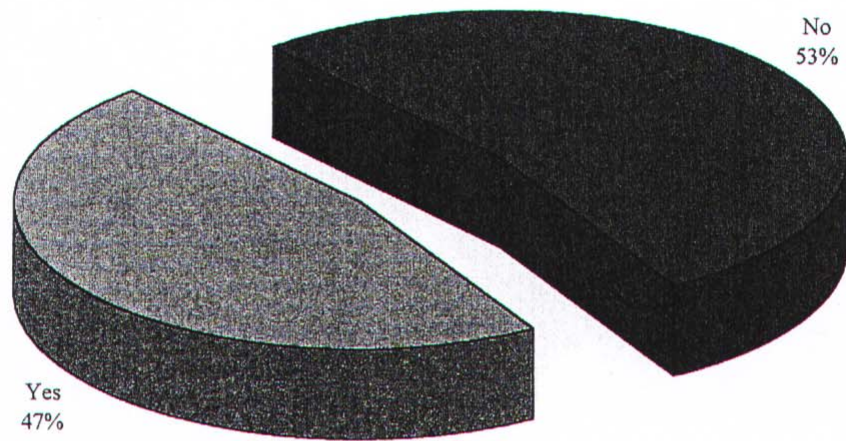


Fig. 3

Did the schools provide enough information about illegal drugs?

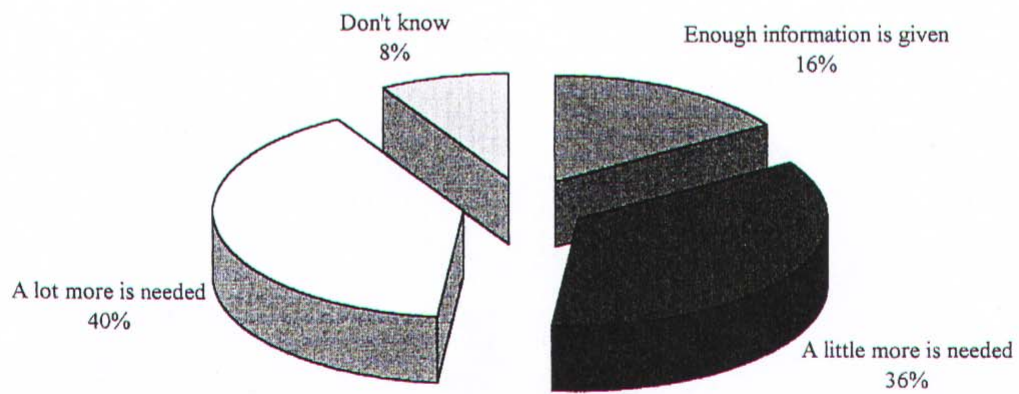


Fig. 4



Lessons/ classes about drugs at School taught by

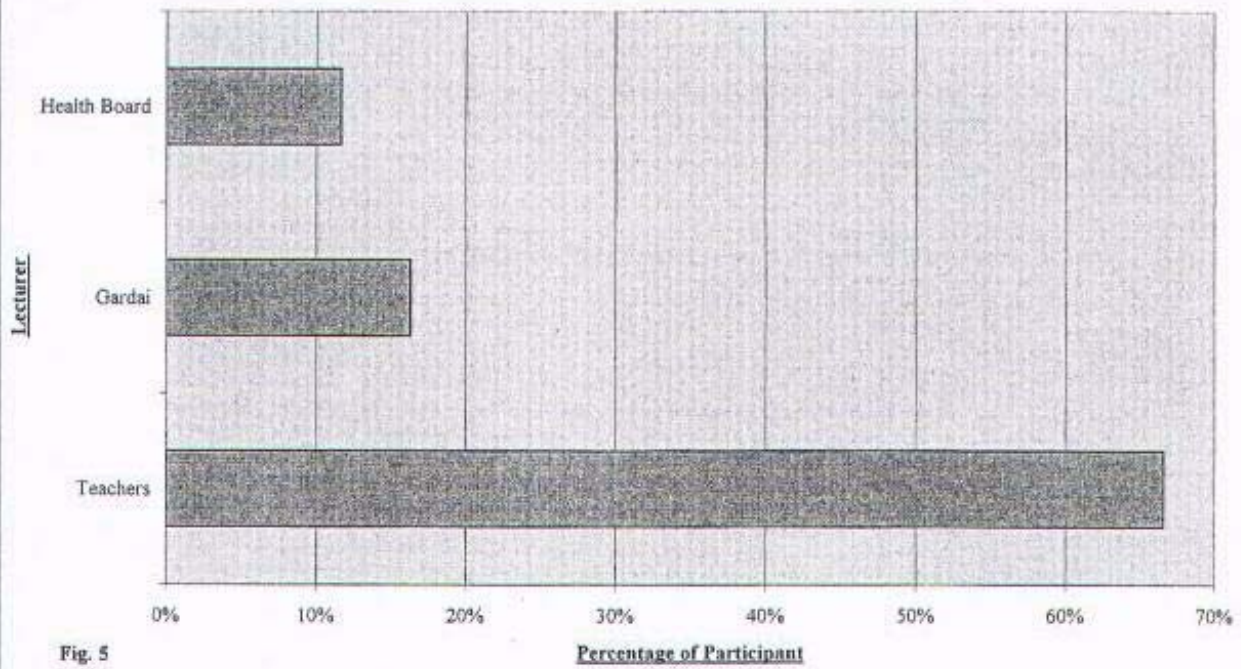


Fig. 5

Lessons/ classes about drugs at school

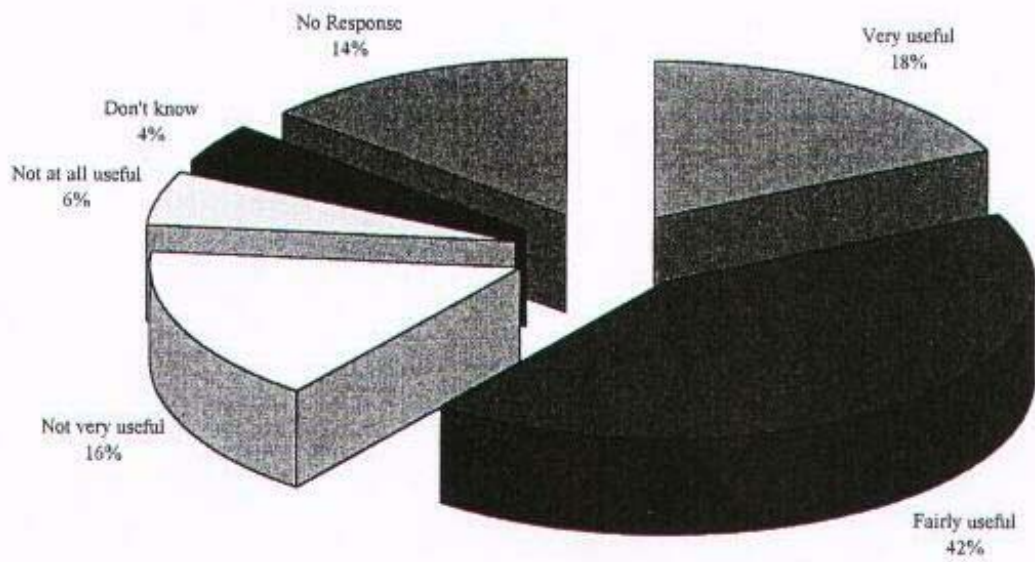


Fig. 6

## **KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF ALCOHOL, SMOKING, AND DRUGS.**

The participants indicated that the best forms of information on drugs were magazines, teachers at school, and friends their own age. 70.5 % of the participants indicated that TV & radio programmes were the most informative of all sources.

The Participants were asked to state, in their opinion, the ease to which they could get a number of illegal drugs and alcohol. Fig. 8 illustrates their response quite well. The graph is structured so that legal drugs, such as alcohol and cigarette, appear at the bottom, with illegal drugs appearing above them. It is surprising to see that the participants believed they could get inhalants easier than beer or cider, or any of the alcohol's.

This report shows that a majority (67.6%) of the participants have smoked a full cigarette, with almost 50% of the participants (47.1 % to be exact) taking their first cigarette between the ages of eleven and fourteen (see Fig. 9). The participants indicated that 52.1% of them have taken a cigarette in the past twelve months, and that 18.5% (Fig. 10) of the participants smoke 5 or more cigarettes a day.

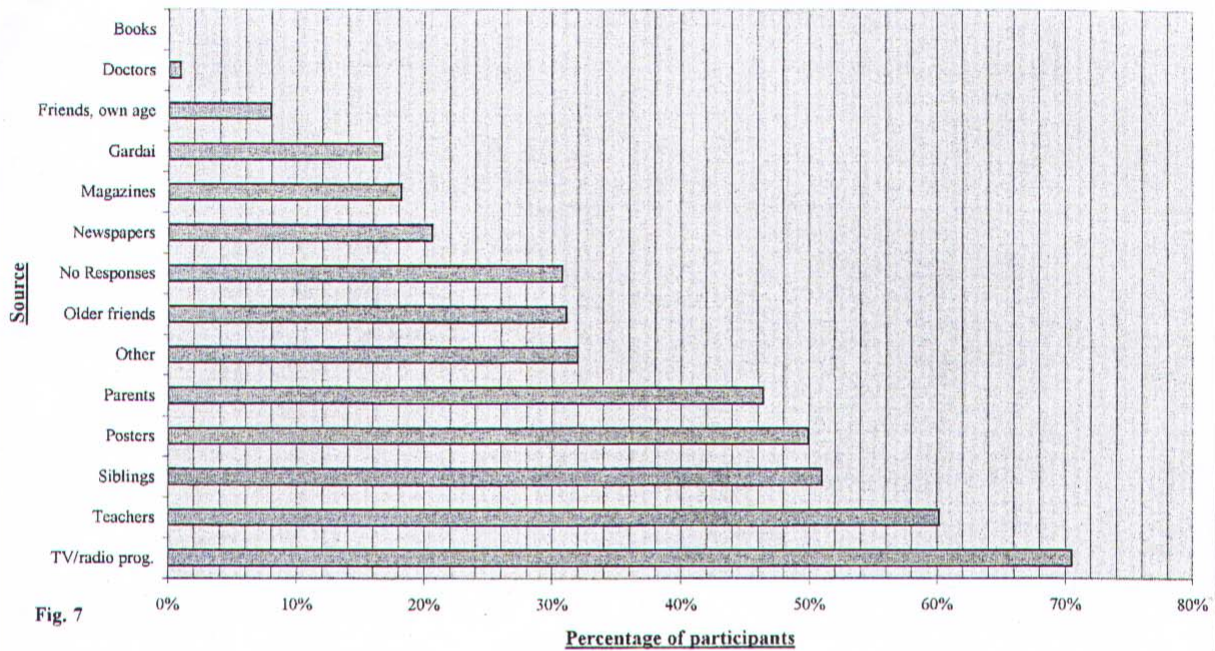
In this report, the participants indicated that over fifty percent (64.2% to be exact) have had a full alcoholic drink at the age of 15 or younger, while 72.7% of the participants had their first alcoholic drink between 12 and 17 years of age. Fig. 11 illustrates the percentages of participants who had their first drink between the ages of 3 and 18.

A startling fact is that fifty percent of the participants (51.1 % to be exact) said that they drink either several times a week or everyday. This is compared to only a very small fraction (5.6% to be exact) of the participants who did not drink at all.

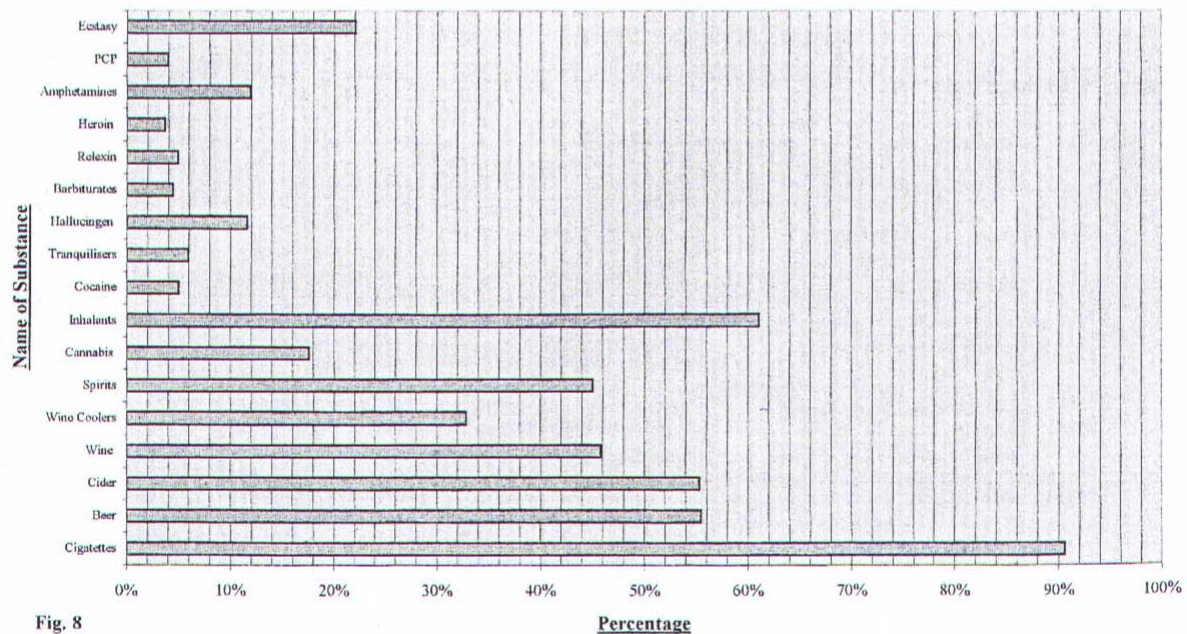
To elaborate the Survey asked the question, 'in the past 12 months, those times when you drank alcoholic beverages, about how much did you consume?' The response was that 67.8% of the participants had three or more drinks, 53.4% of the participants had four or more drinks, and 38.1% had five drinks or more. Fig. 12 illustrates the point.



### Other sources of Illegal drug information

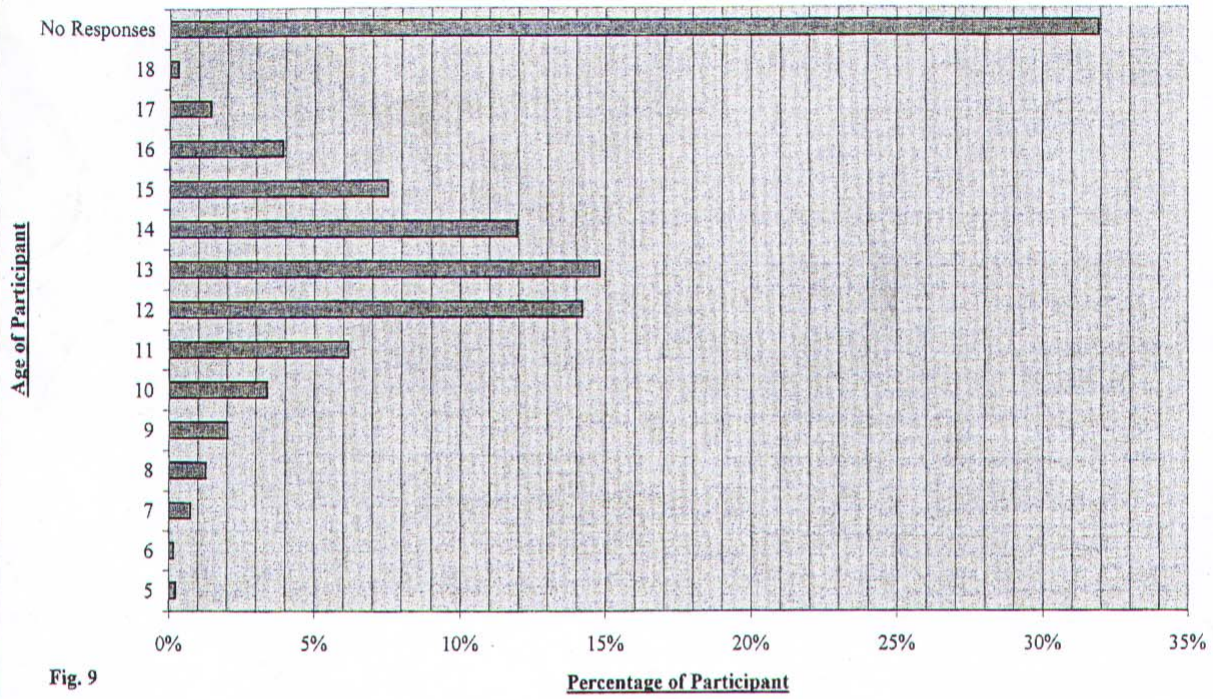


### Appraisal of Ease of Access

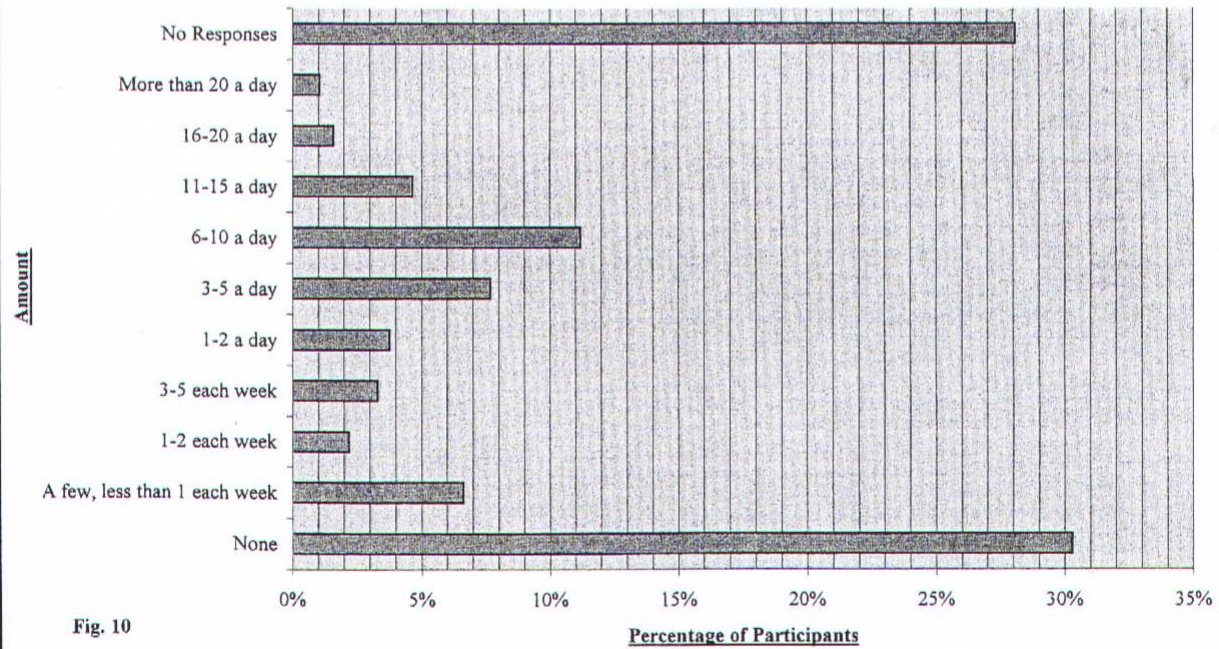




### Age of Participants when they first smoked a cigarette

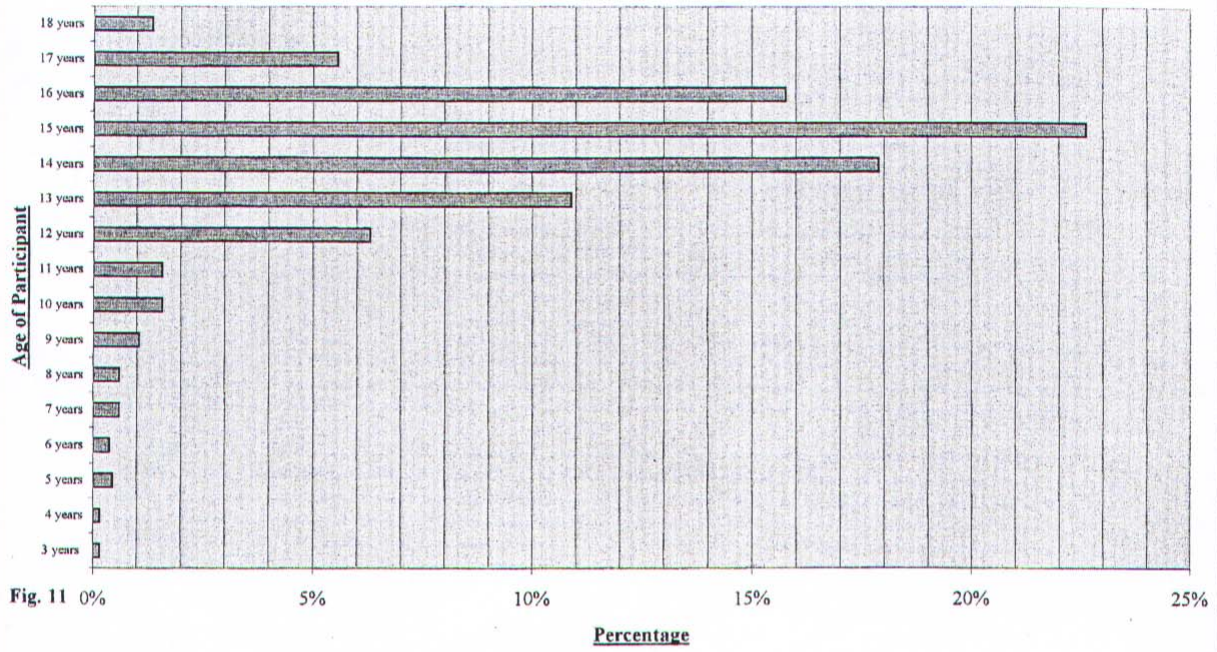


### The Quantity of cigarettes smoked in the last month





The Age of participant when first drinking alcohol



"When drinking, how many drinks do you have?"

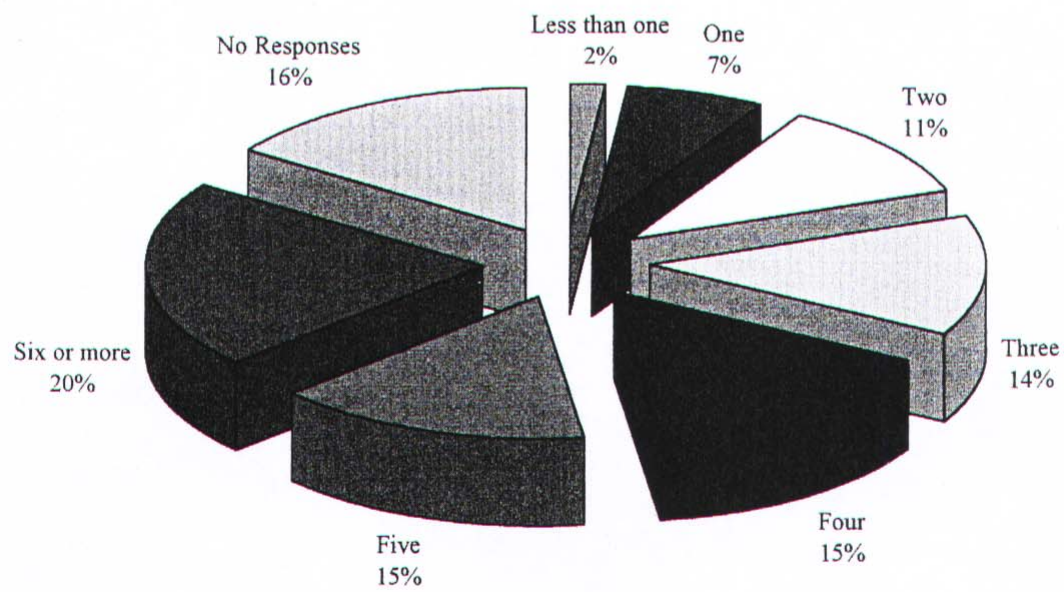


Fig. 12

The participants said that Pubs and Discos were the best source of alcohol, at 73.8% and 58.6% respectively. Fig. 13 shows which locations the participants frequent for alcoholic beverages.

The drugs survey asked a number of questions with five possible answers; agree a little, agree a lot, disagree a little, disagree a lot, and not sure. Figs. 14a to 14g illustrate the participant responses.

Fig. 15 shows the percentage of participants who tried illegal drugs and which drugs they sampled, while Fig. 16 shows the percentage of participants who first sampled the drug in question, between the ages of 12 and 16.

The participants were then asked if they had never used certain named drugs. Fig. 17 illustrates their response, with almost 35% of all participants never using heroin, PCP, ecstasy, barbiturates, and amphetamines. Fig. 18 compares those participants who have stated that they did not use illegal drugs to those who used them frequently, i.e. between 1 and 2 times a week to every day.

The Drugs survey then asked two important questions for those who do use illegal drugs: "Where do you get them from?" & "How do you pay for your supply?" Fig. 19 illustrates the source question, comparing the sources of friends, siblings, dealers, and medicines. Fig. 20 illustrates the question of funds, comparing pocket money, earnings, savings and theft.

The participants were asked the reasons for people, in general, to either sample or use illegal drugs. They were given a set number of answers to pick from, and the result is illustrated on Fig. 21. Again, the report stated a number of remarks, which the participants were asked to agree with or disagree with, to some extent. Fig. 22a through to 22m illustrates the participant's answers.

The participants were asked to state whether they thought certain behaviour, involving drugs, was not dangerous, a little dangerous, or quite dangerous. Fig. 23a through to Fig. 23q illustrates the participant's answers.



### Access to alcoholic beverages

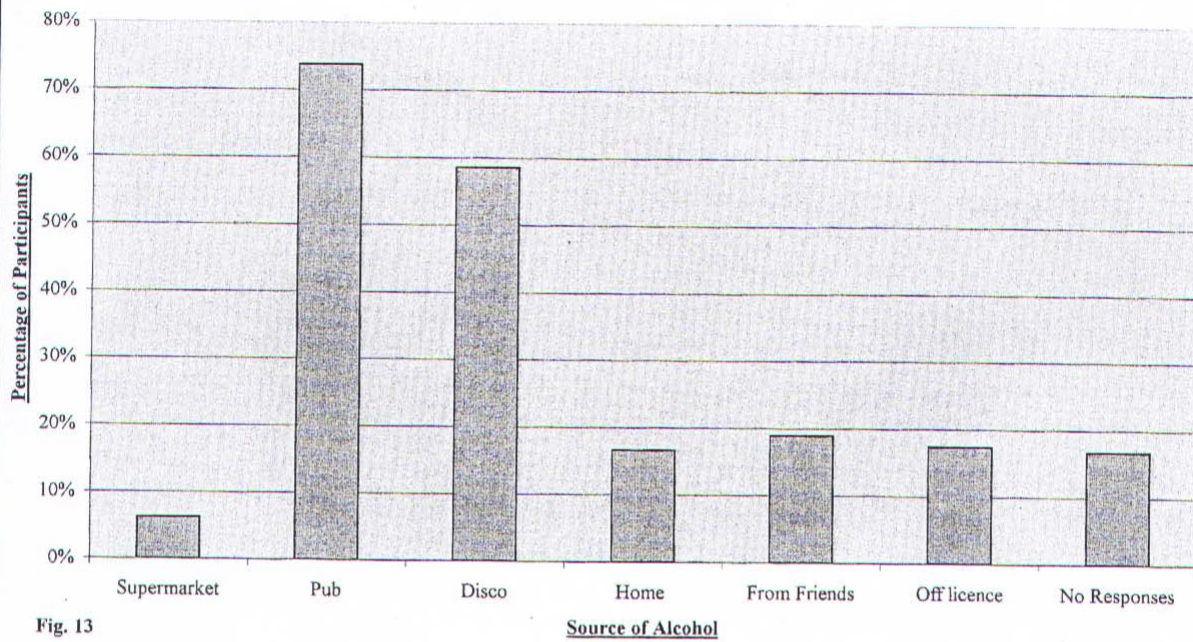


Fig. 13

### "It is easy to obtain alcoholic drink"

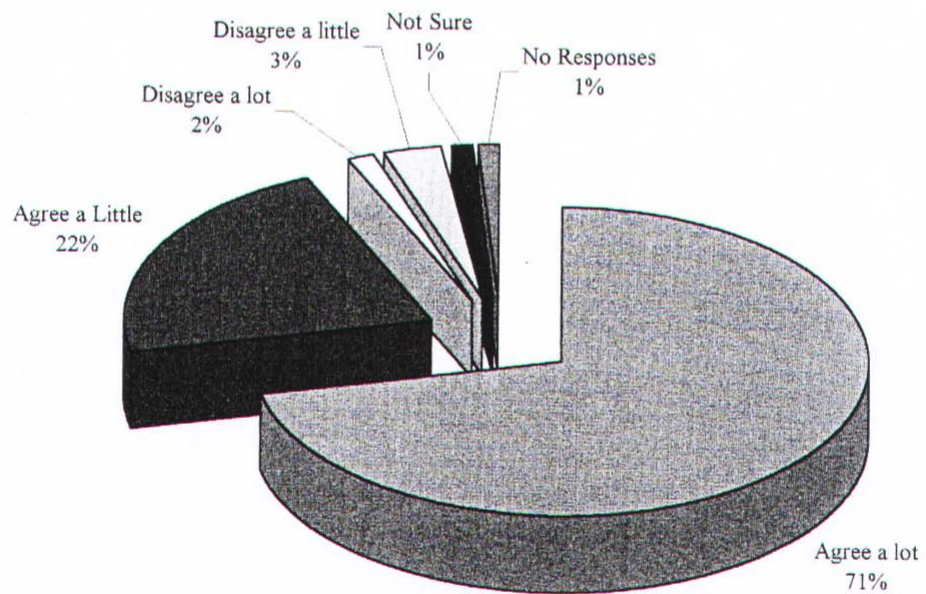


Fig. 14a



**"A lot of young people drink alcoholic beverages nowadays"**

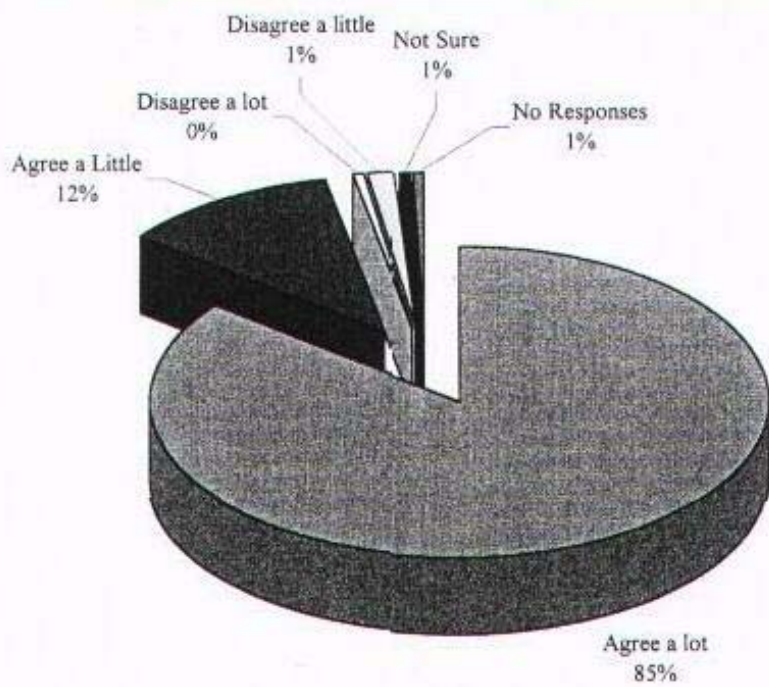


Fig. 14b

**"People start drinking alcoholic beverages just to keep up with their friends"**

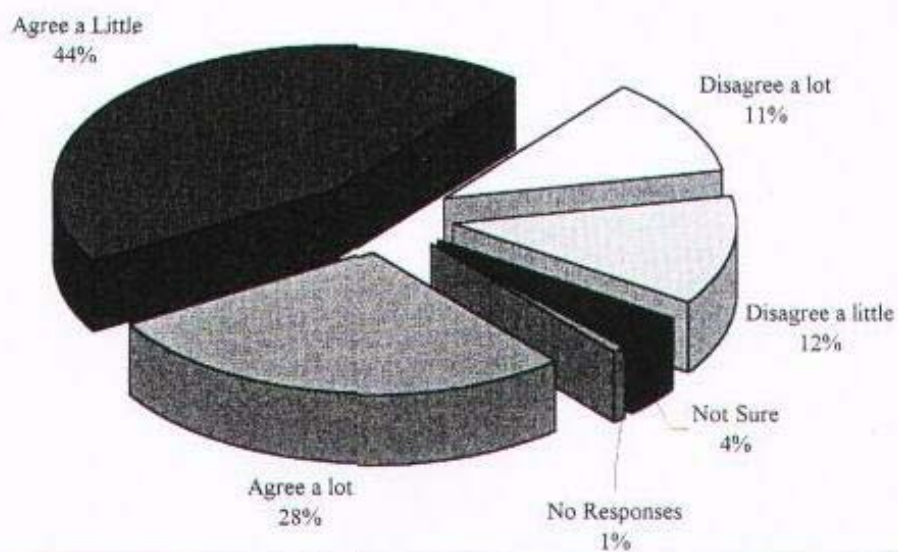


Fig. 14c



**"Drinking alcohol can be harmful to your health"**

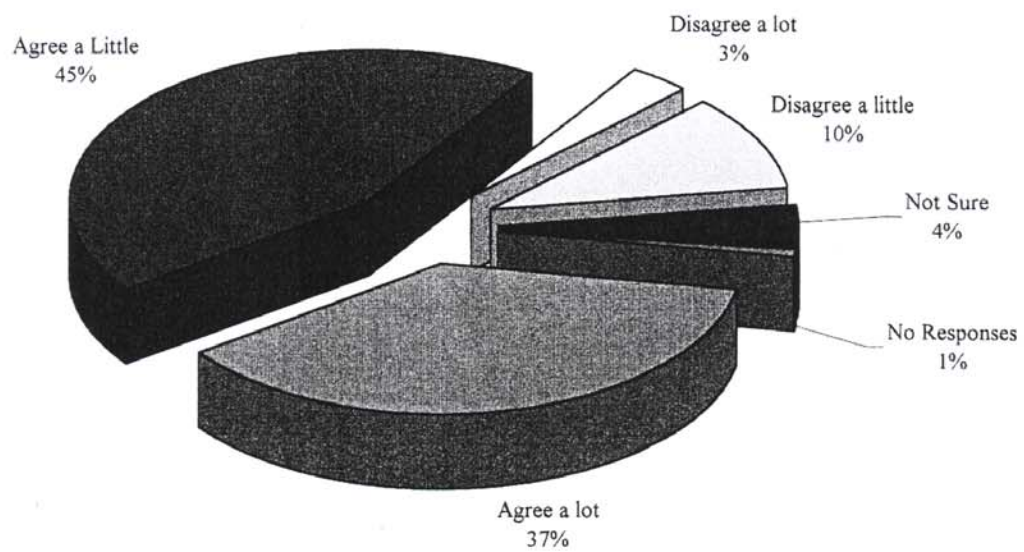


Fig. 14d

**"Drinking alcohol makes you look older"**

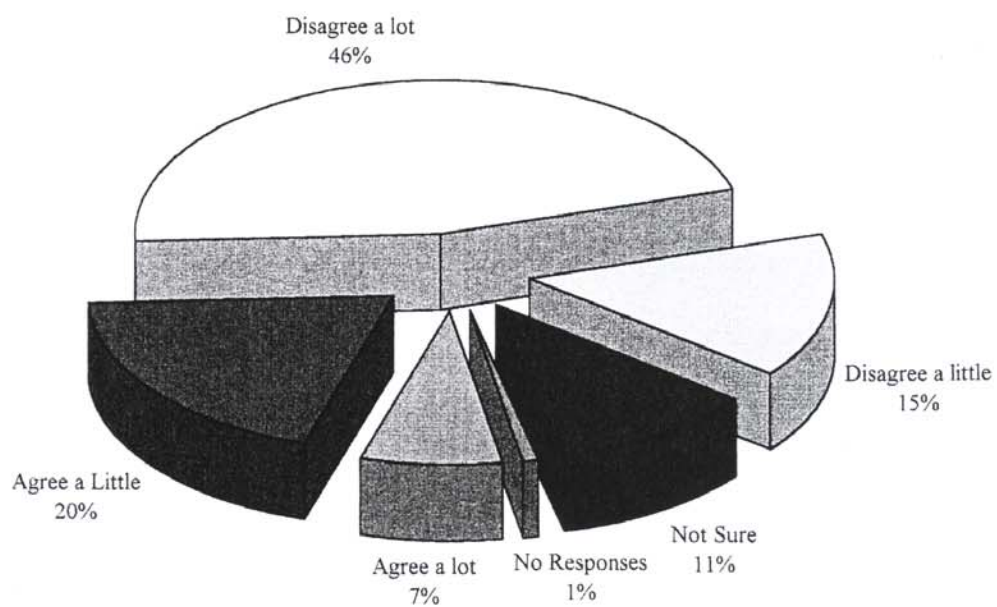


Fig. 14e

**"Drinking alcohol makes you feel bad"**

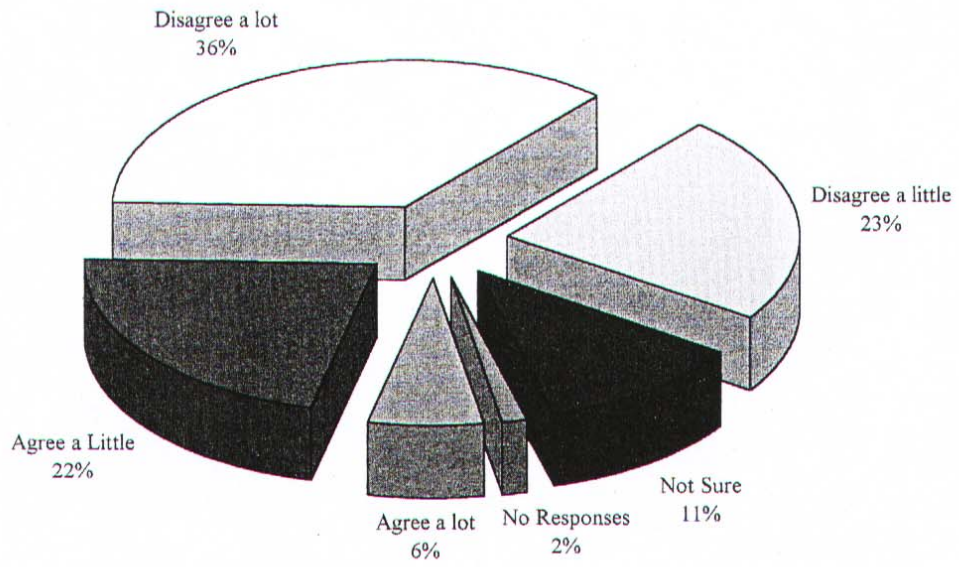


Fig. 14f

**"I will never drink alcohol in my life"**

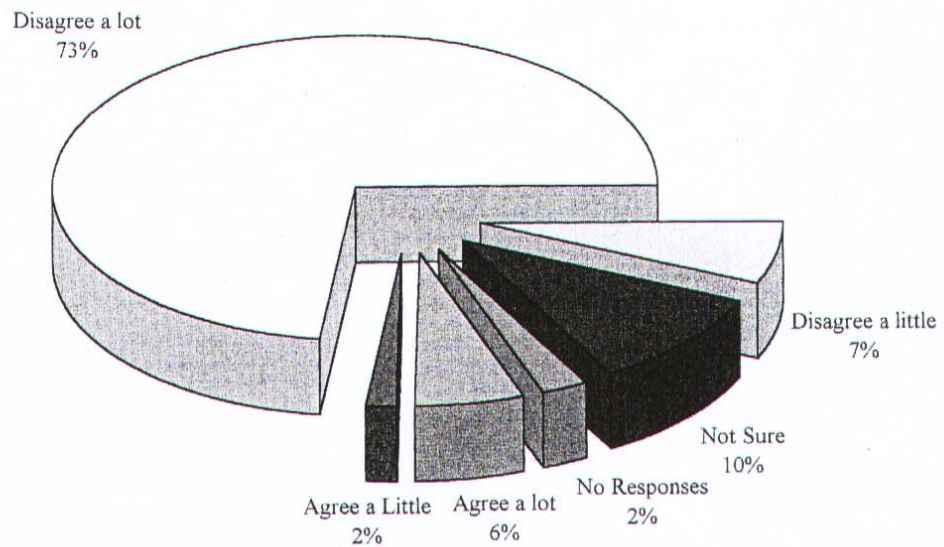


Fig. 14g



**"Have you ever used any of these drugs?"**

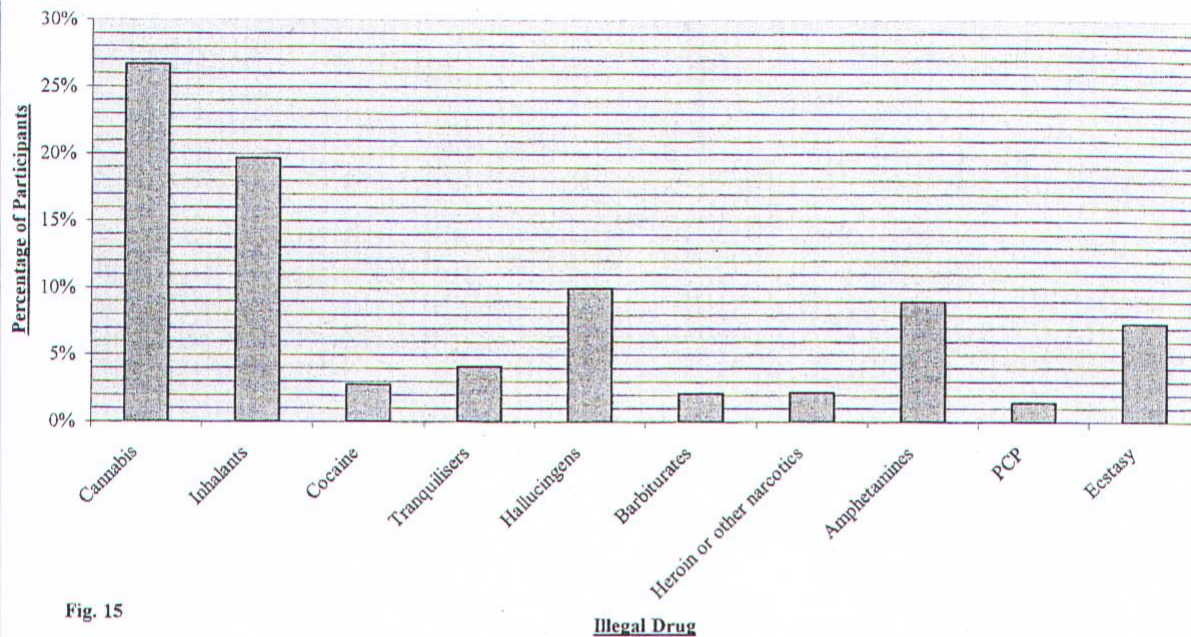


Fig. 15

Illegal Drug

**"How old were you when you first sampled the following illegal drugs?"**

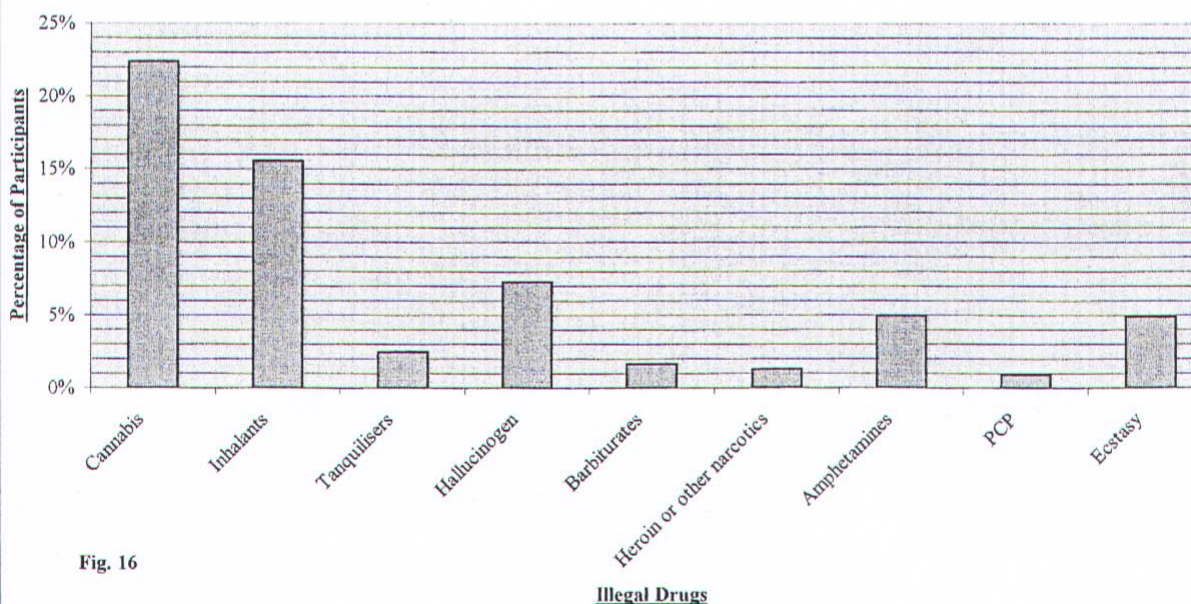


Fig. 16

Illegal Drugs



**"State if you have never used the following illegal substances"**

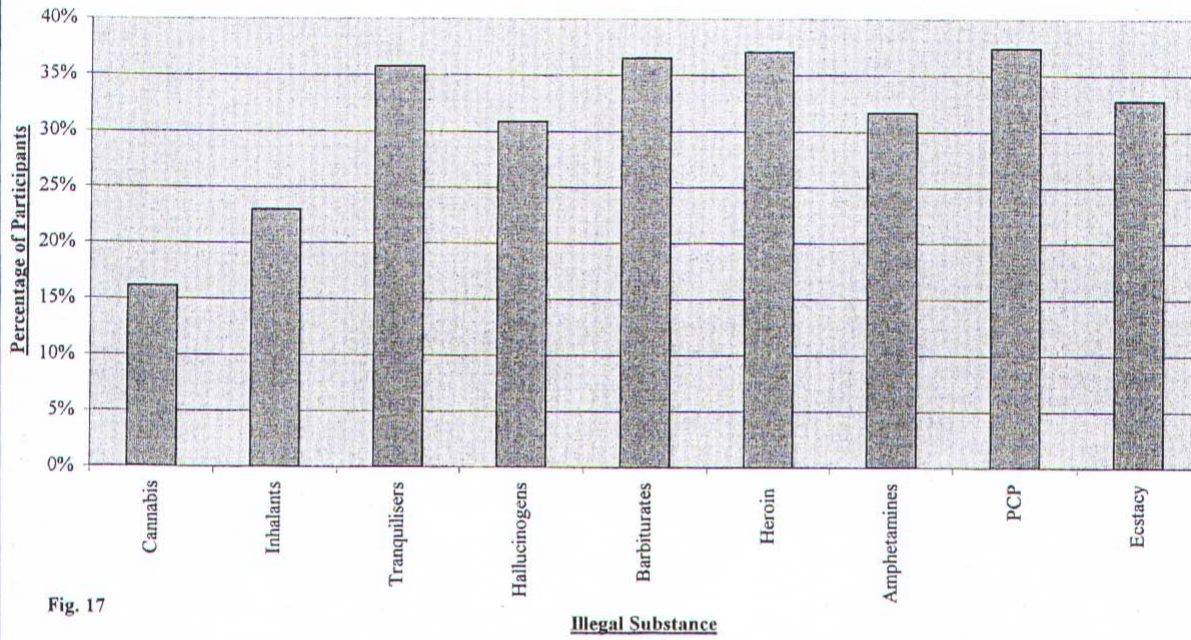


Fig. 17

**Comparing those participants who use illegal drugs frequently and those who never have**

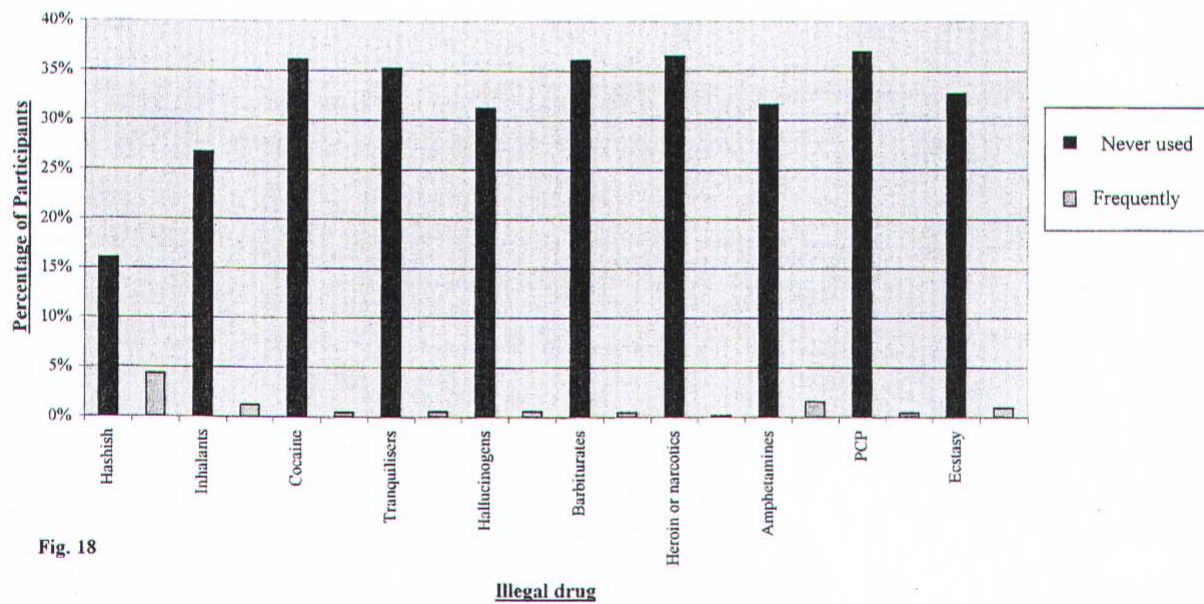


Fig. 18



"If you do take drugs, from where would you get them?"

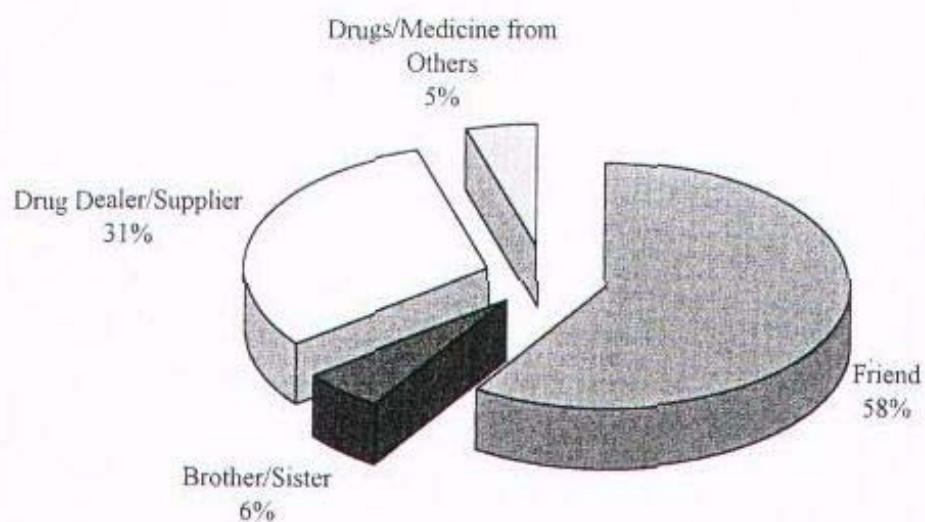


Fig. 19

"Where do you find the funds for your drugs supply?"

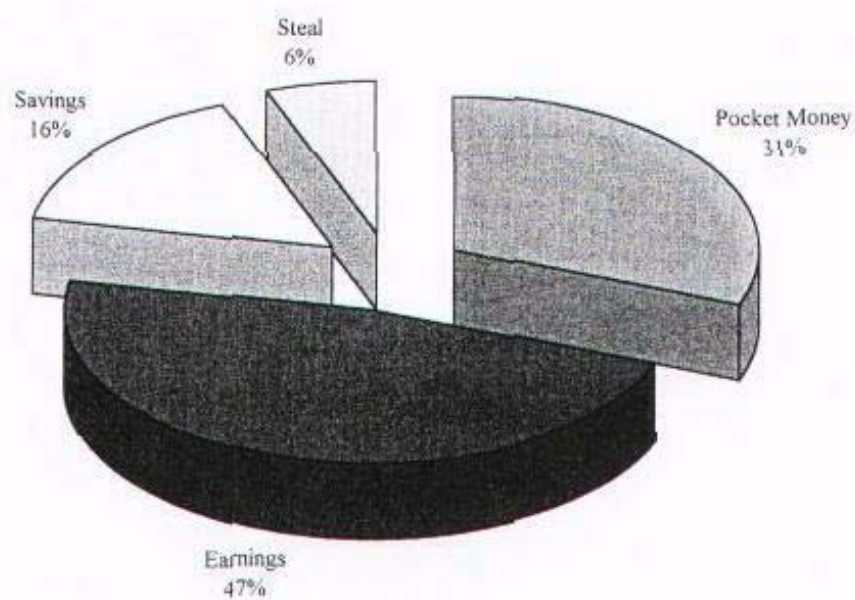


Fig. 20

**Reasons why people take illegal substances**

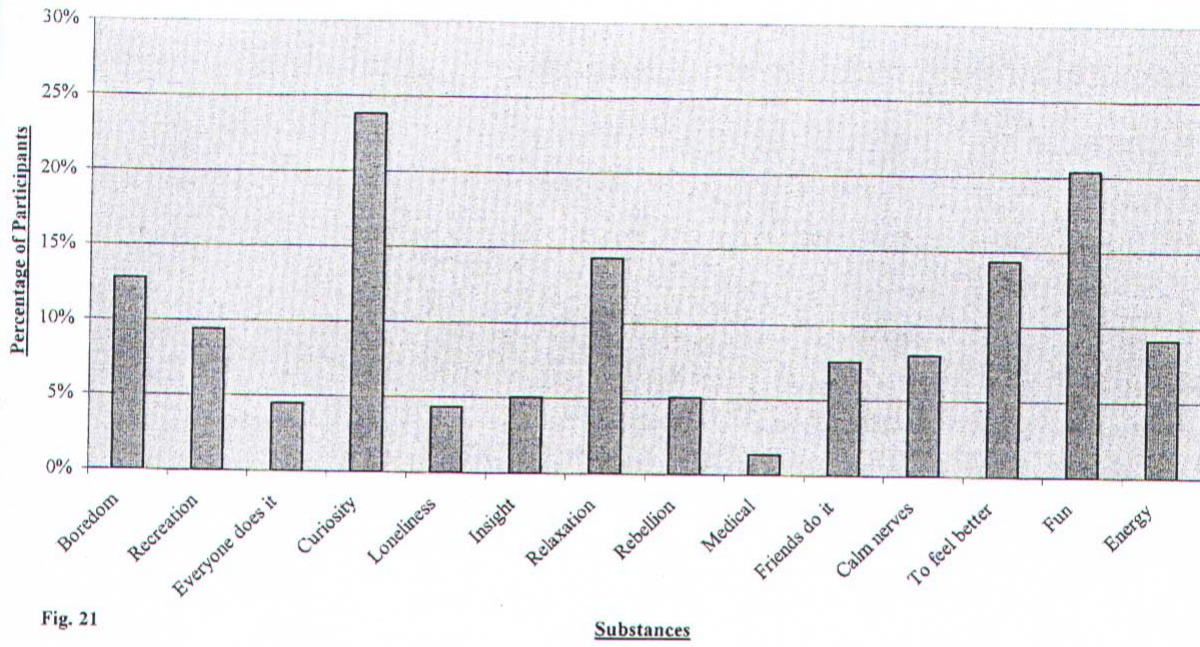


Fig. 21

**"Taking an illegal drug once won't do you any harm"**

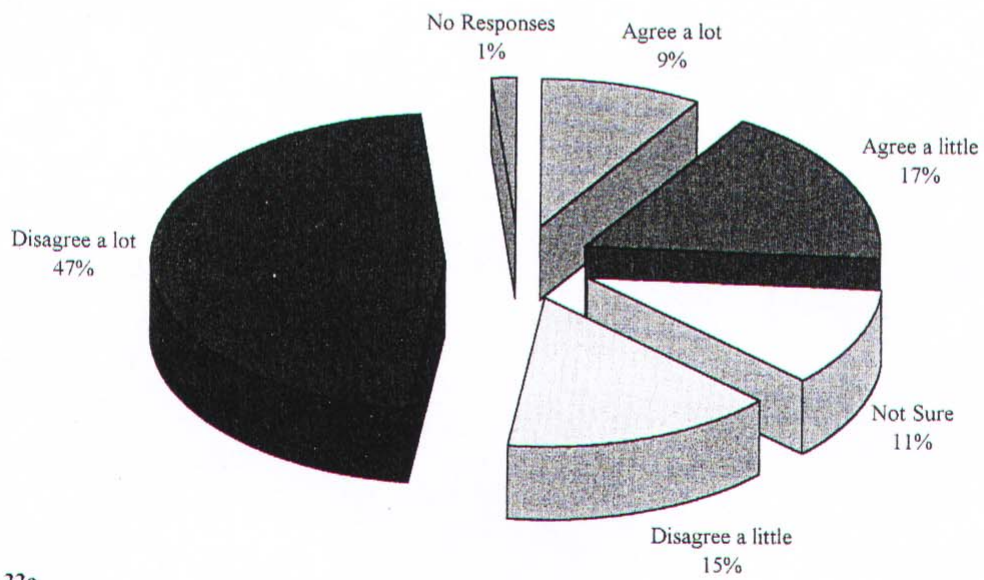


Fig. 22a



**"Taking drugs you know are illegal is half the fun"**

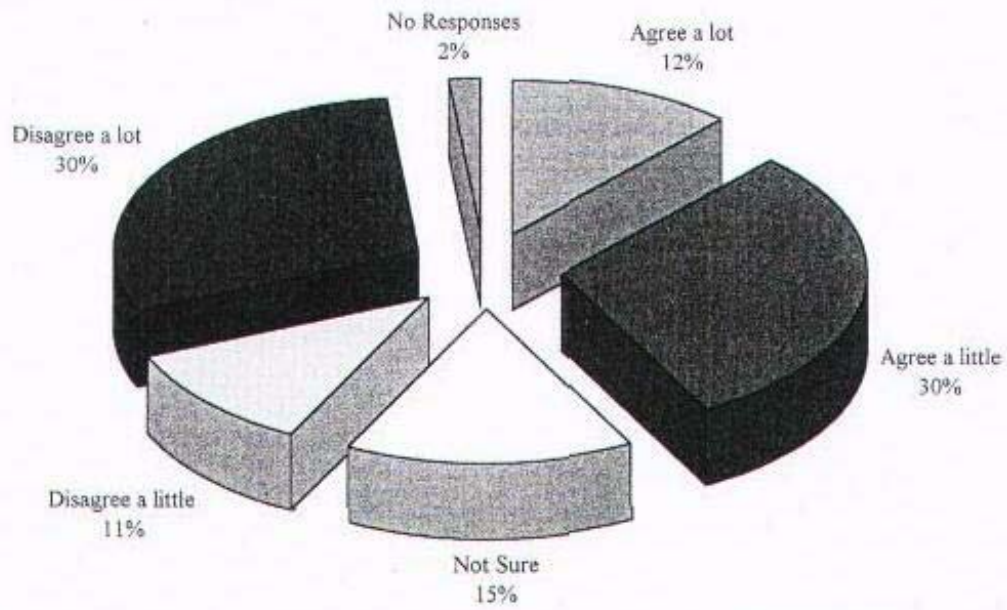


Fig. 22b

**"People start taking illegal drugs just to keep up with their friends"**

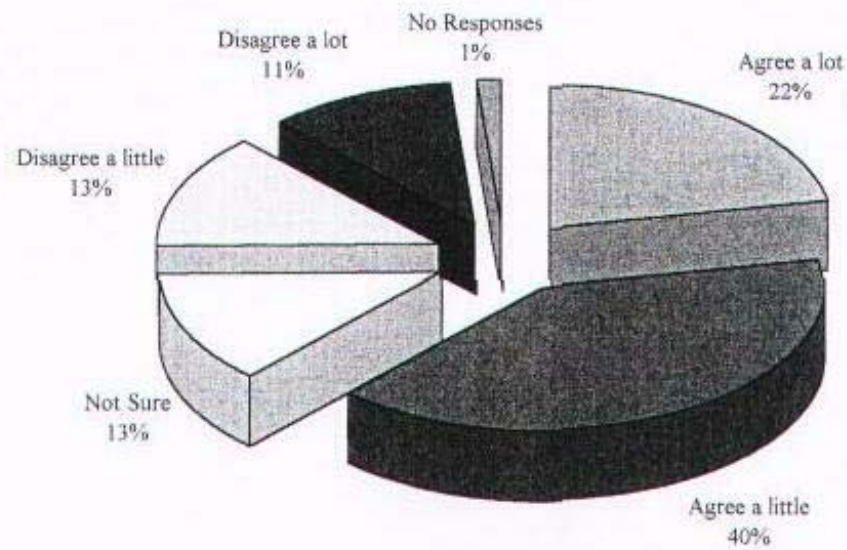


Fig. 22c

**"People who have a drug problem need help not punishment"**

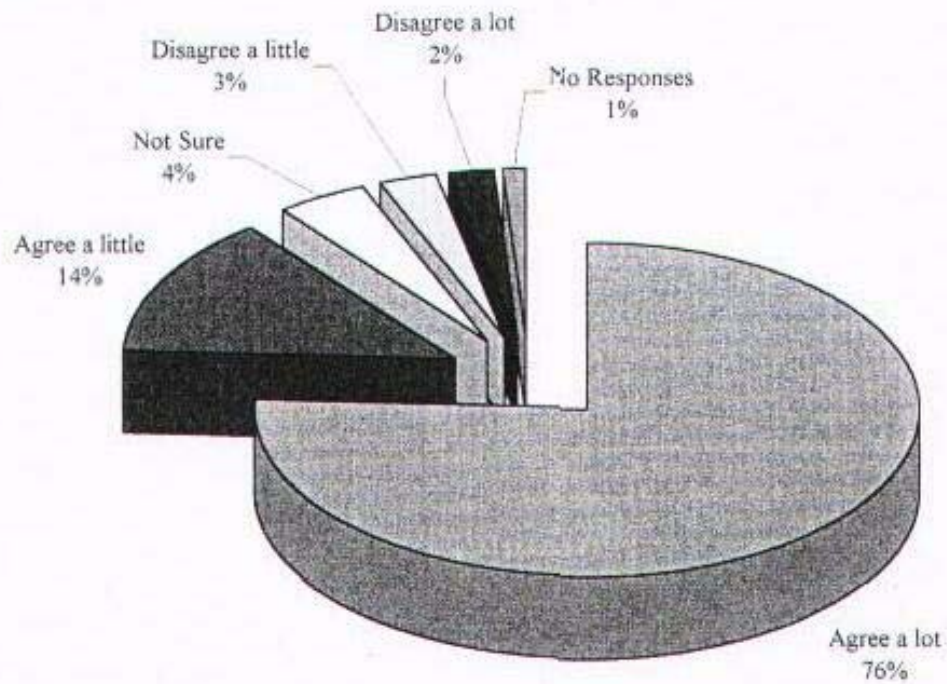


Fig. 22d

**"A lot of young people take illegal drugs nowadays"**

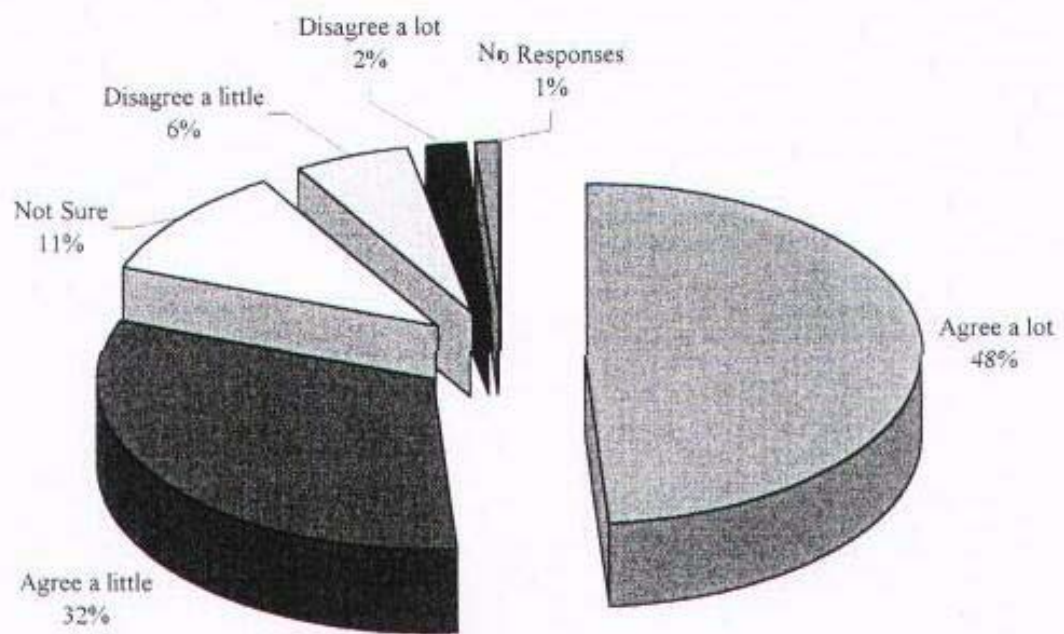


Fig. 22e



**"Injecting drugs is very dangerous"**

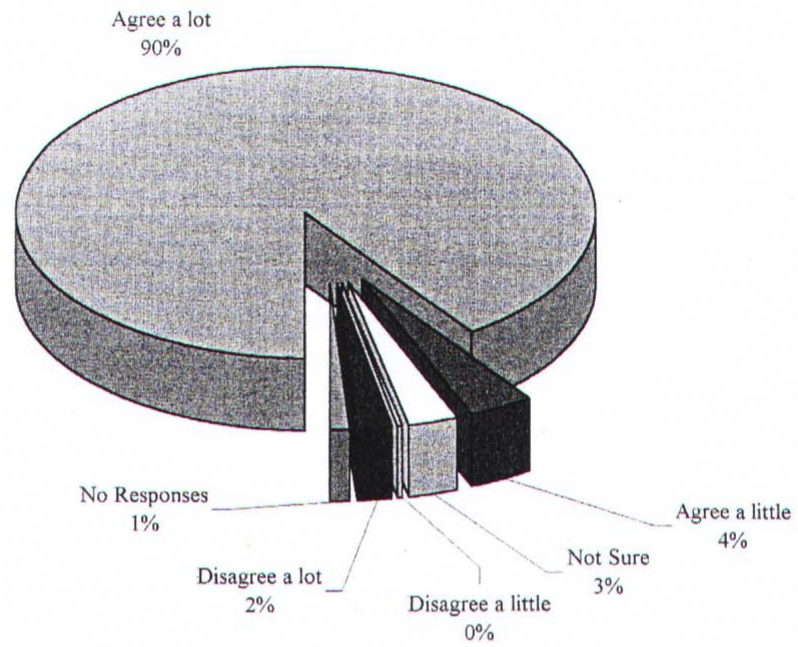


Fig. 22f

**"Drugs can be harmful to my health"**

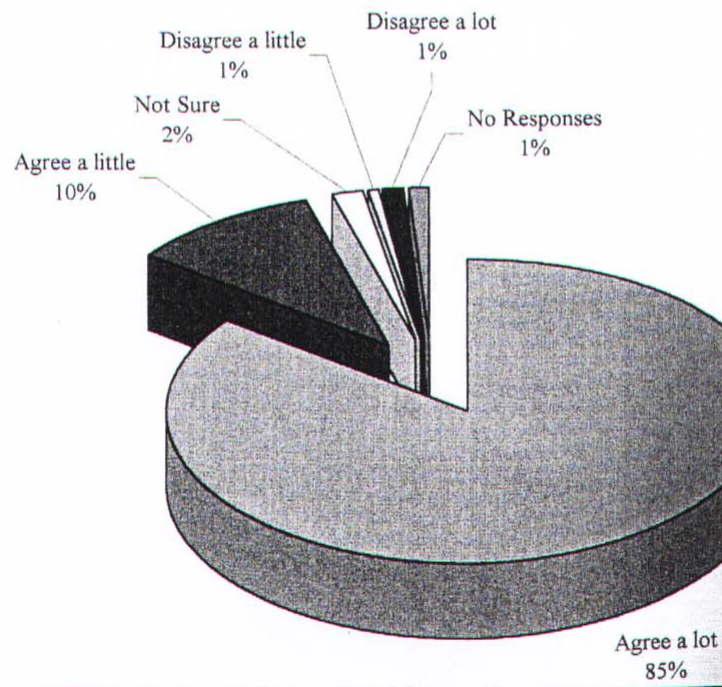


Fig. 22g



**"Drugs make you look older"**

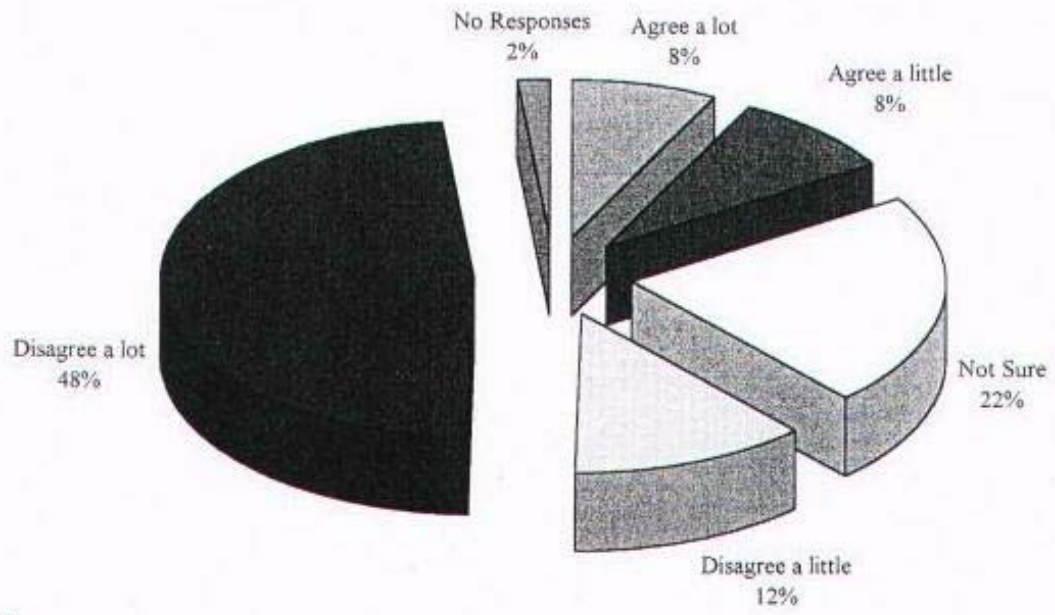


Fig. 22h

**"Drugs make you feel bad"**

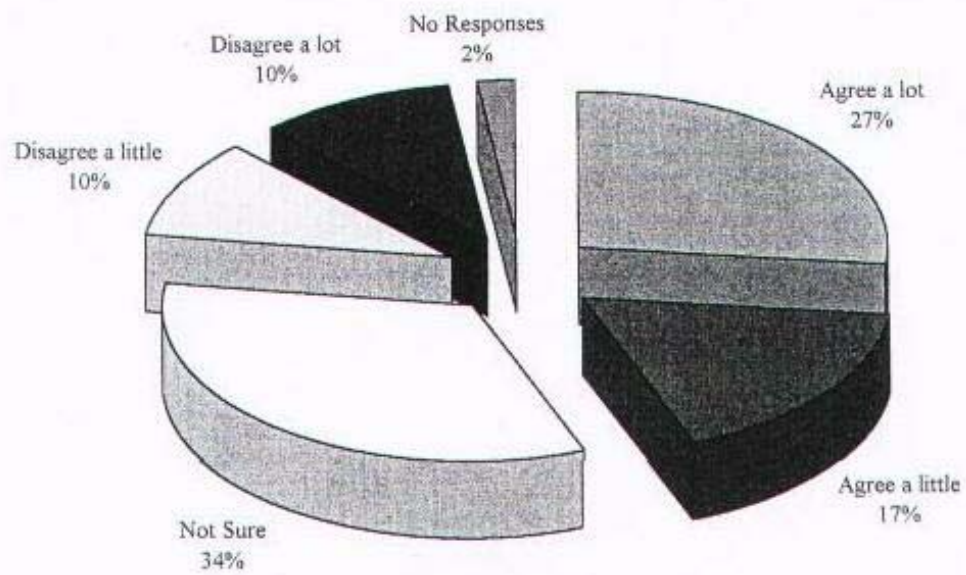


Fig. 22i

**"I will NEVER take illegal drugs in my lifetime"**

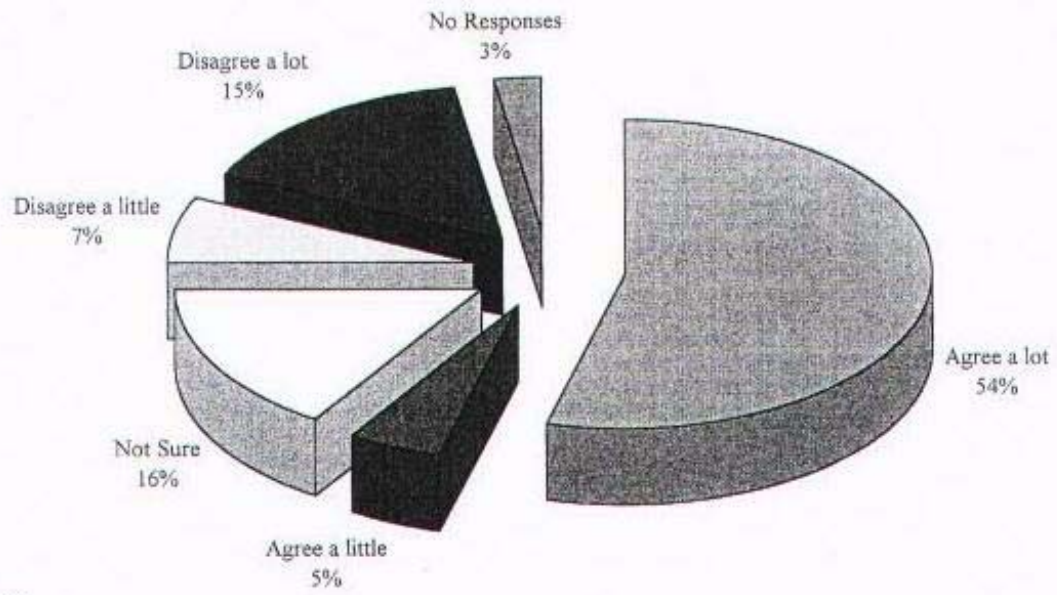


Fig. 22j

**"It is easy to obtain illegal drugs"**

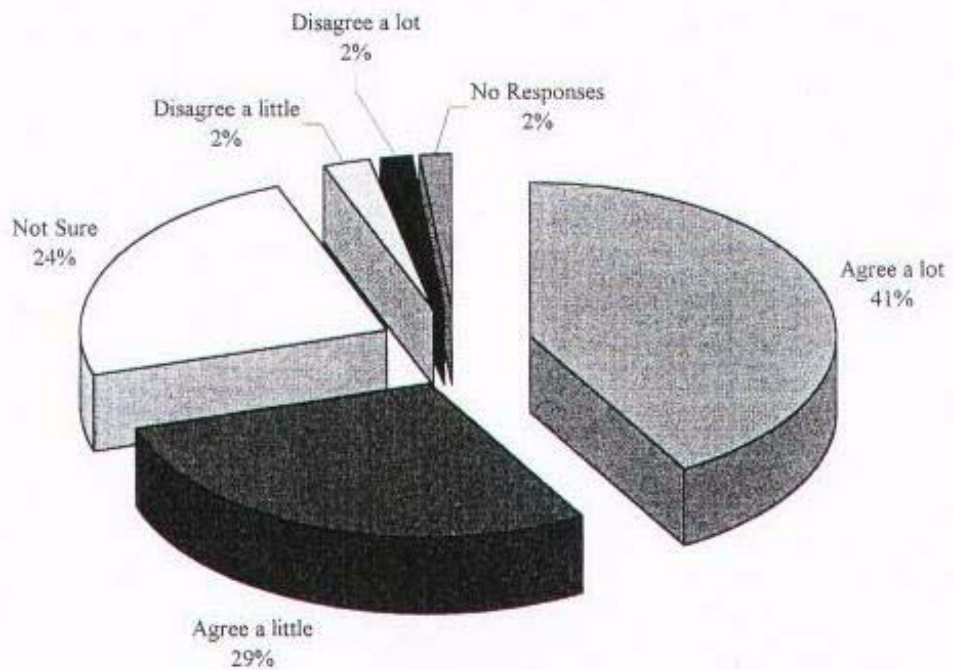


Fig. 22k



**"I hope to attend a third level institution/college when I complete my leaving certificate"**

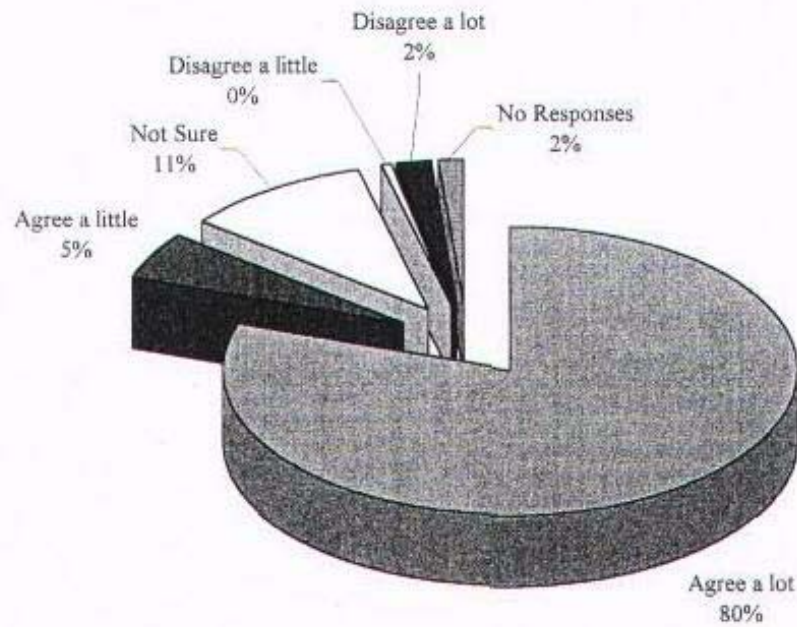


Fig. 22L

**"If I know someone taking drugs I would report him/her to the appropriate authorities"**

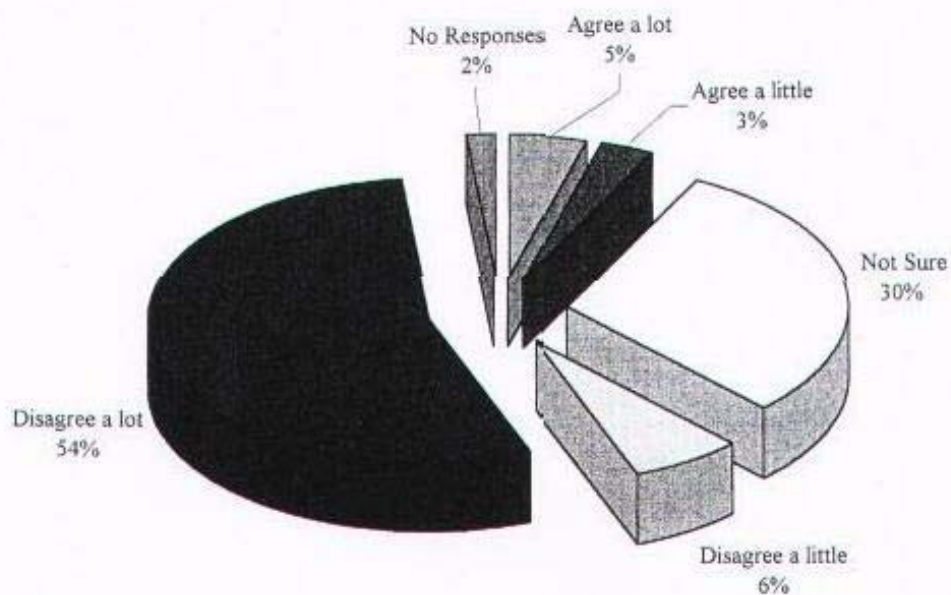


Fig. 22m



The Fig. 23 group shows the following key points.

## **SMOKING**

The participants indicated that 71% felt that occasional, or social smoking was acceptable and not dangerous, but that only 9% and 2%, respectively, felt that smoking less than 10 cigarettes and smoking more than 20 per day was not dangerous. The participants, transversely, indicated that 26%, 84%, and 94%, respectively, felt that smoking was dangerous whether one smokes socially, less than 10 a day, or more than 20 a day.

## **DRINKING**

The participants were given two opposing statements. They were asked to evaluate the danger level of “Having one or two drinks of beer, wine, or spirits” and “Having four or five drinks of beer, wine, or spirits, nearly every day”.

The responses stated that while 74% of the participants saw no danger in occasional drinking, only 5% saw no danger in excessive drinking. Transversely, the participants indicated that 22% and 91%, respectively, felt that occasional drinking and excessive drinking were dangerous.

## **SOFT DRUGS**

### **GRASS, HASH, MARIJUANA.**

The participants indicated that 30% felt that smoking ‘soft drugs’ occasionally was not dangerous, while only 9% felt that smoking ‘soft drugs’ regularly was not dangerous.

On the other hand, 59% and 82%, respectively, of the participants indicated that smoking ‘soft drugs’ occasionally or regularly was dangerous.

## **ECSTASY**

The participants indicated that they felt it was dangerous to use Ecstasy at all. 91% of the participants felt that trying Ecstasy was dangerous, and 93% felt that regular use of the Ecstasy drug was dangerous.

In both statements there were 2% of participants who didn’t respond to either question, and 5% and 3% of the participants, respectively, responded as “didn’t know” to the dangers of Trying Ecstasy once or twice, or Taking Ecstasy regularly.

## **SNIFFING GLUE, ETC.**

The participants were asked to evaluate the danger level of sniffing glue or spray and sniffing petrol. 89% of the participants felt that sniffing glue or spray was dangerous, while 76% of the participants felt that sniffing petrol was dangerous.

On the other hand, 5% of participants felt that there was no danger in sniffing glue, spray, or petrol.

## STIMULANTS (SUCH AS SPEED)

83% of the participants indicated that trying speed once or twice was dangerous, while only 8% felt that it wasn't dangerous at all. 92% of the participants felt that using speed everyday was dangerous (86% of participants felt that it was a very dangerous practice indeed), with only 1% of the participants seeing no danger in using speed everyday.

## ACID, LSD, ETC.

The participants indicated that 83% felt trying acid or LSD was dangerous (53% of them believed it was very dangerous), and 88% felt using acid or LSD regularly was dangerous (70% of them believing it was very dangerous).

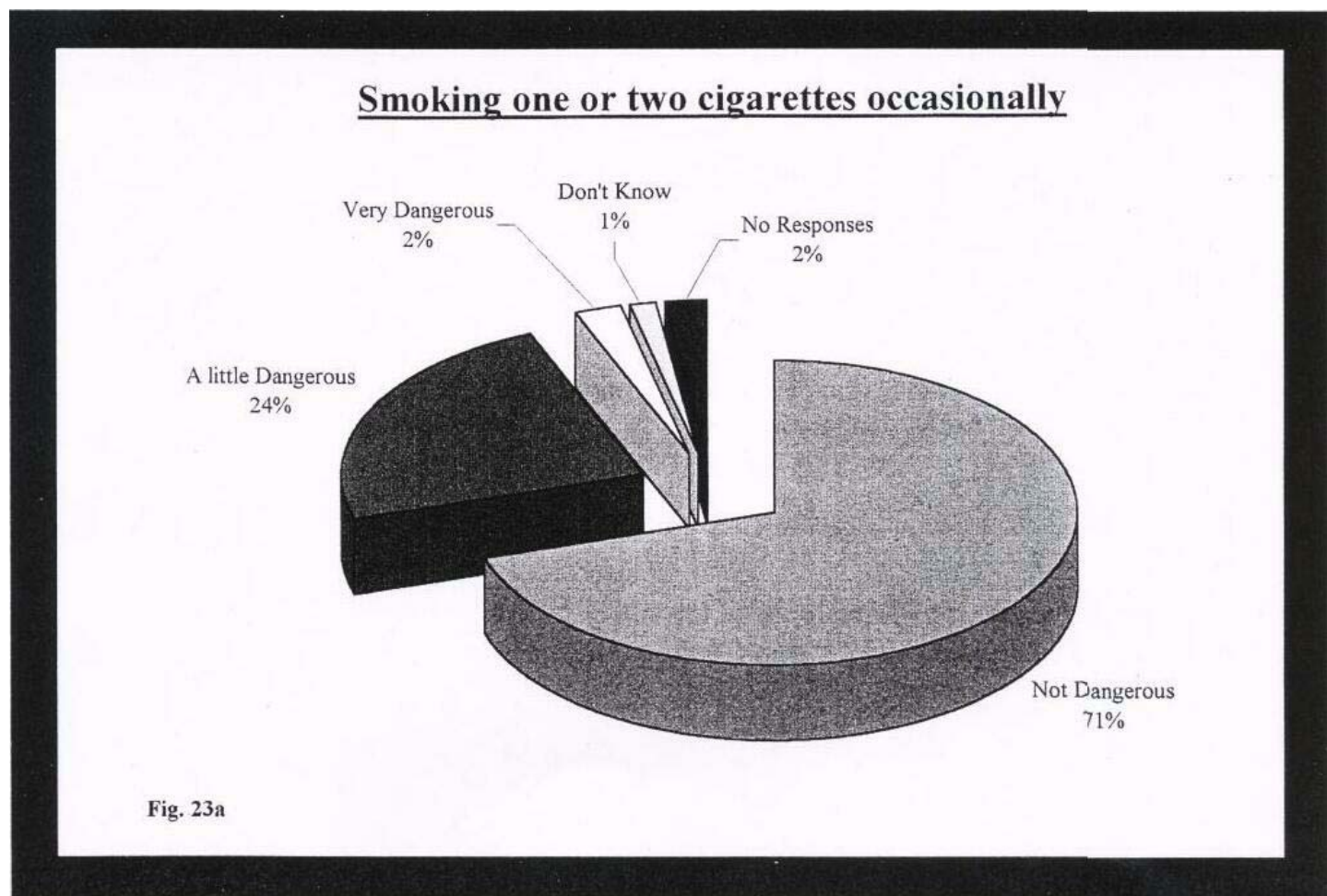
Transversely, 6% of the participants saw no danger in trying LSD or acid and 2% saw no danger in using it regularly.

## HARD DRUGS

### HEROIN AND MORPHINE

90% of the participants felt that taking these 'hard drugs' was dangerous (78% of them believing it was very dangerous), while only 2% more (at 92%) of the participants felt that regular use of heroin and morphine is dangerous (87% of them believing it was very dangerous).

Transversely, only 1% of the participants believed that either sampling hard drugs or regular use of them was not dangerous.



Smoking less than 10 cigarettes everyday

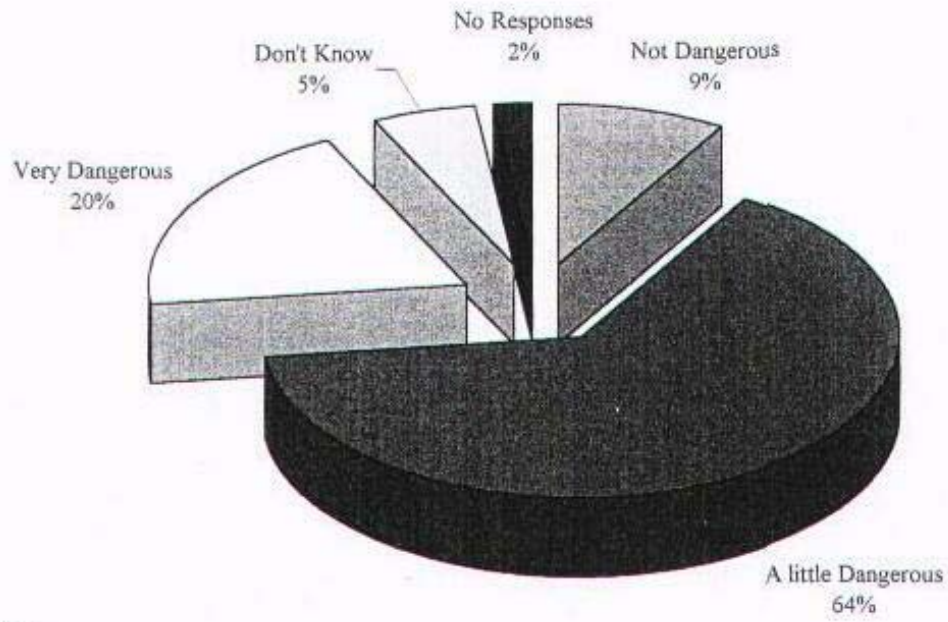


Fig. 23b

Smoking more than 20 cigarette everyday

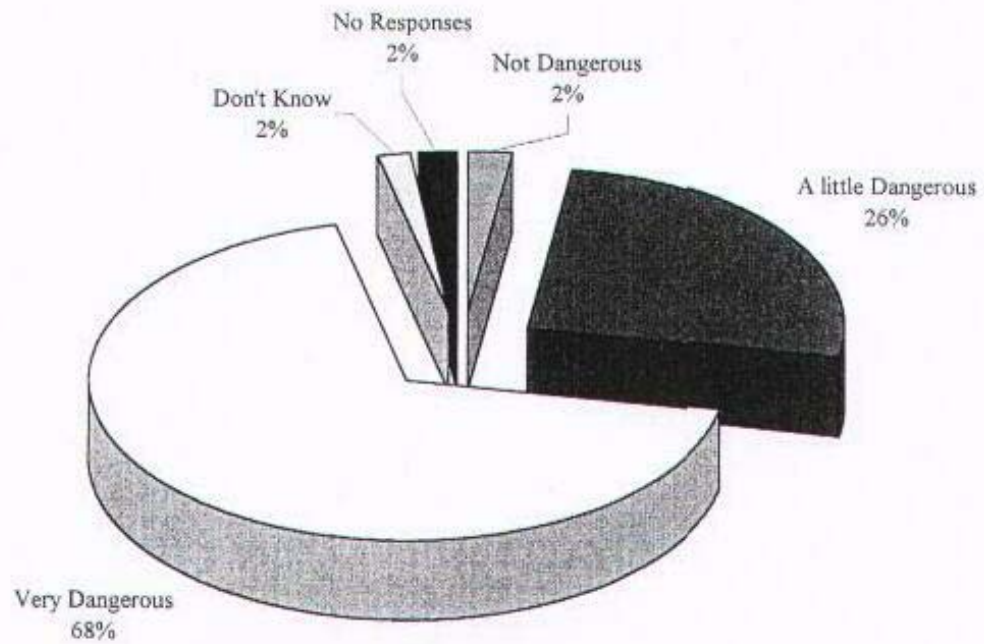


Fig. 23c



**Having one or two drinks of beer, wine, or spirits**

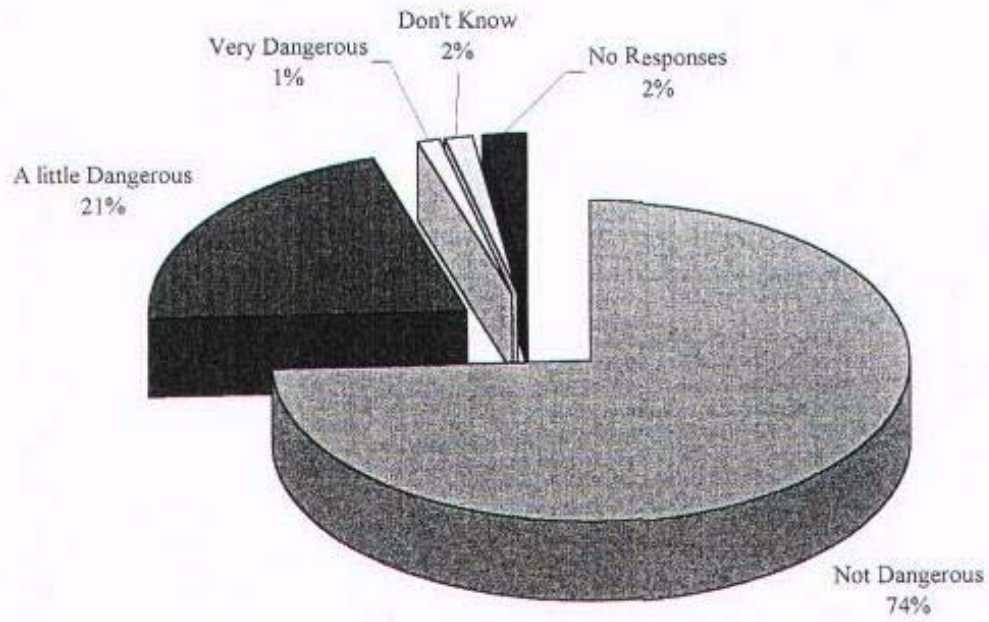


Fig. 23d

**Having four or five drinks of beer, wine, or spirits nearly every day**

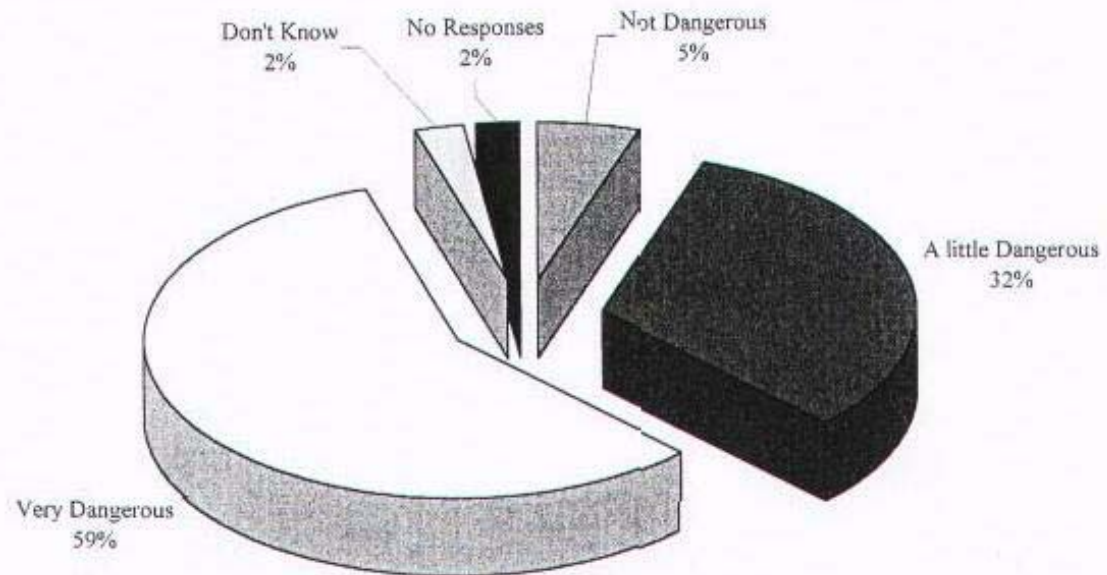


Fig.23e

Smoking grass, hash, or marijuana occasionally

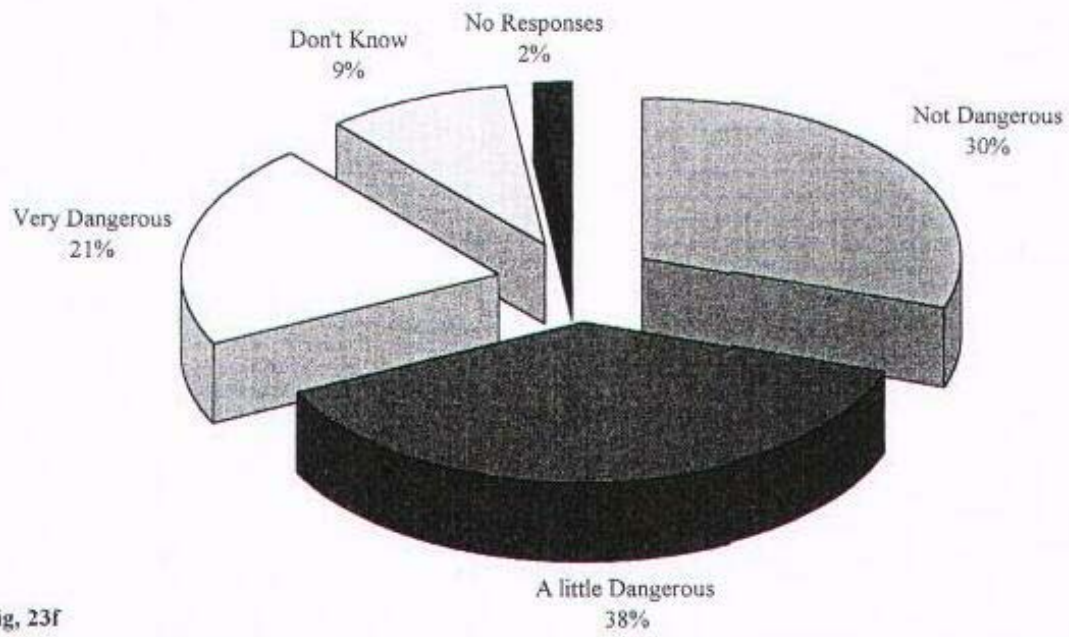


Fig. 23f

Smoking Cannabis regularly

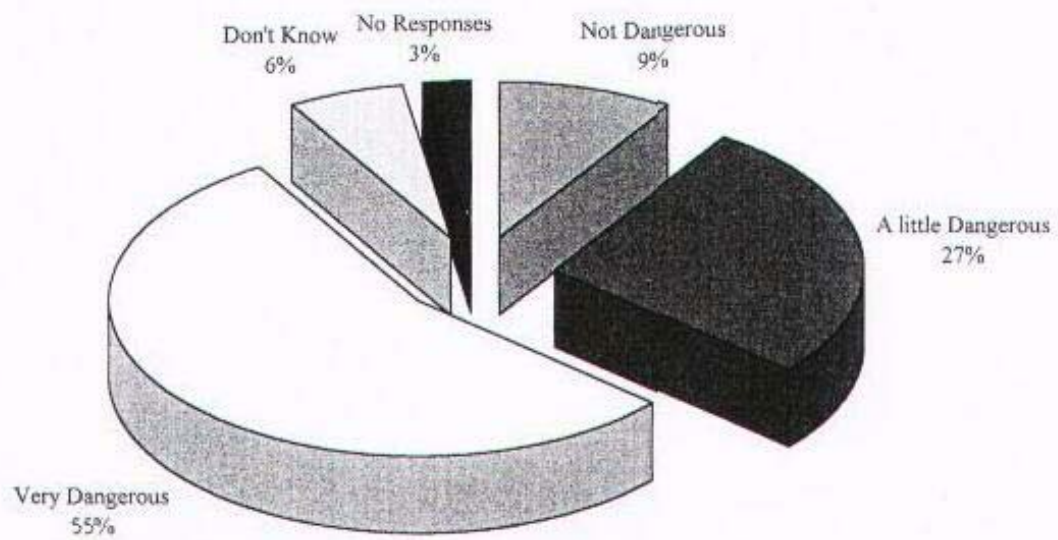


Fig. 23g



### Trying Ecstasy once or twice

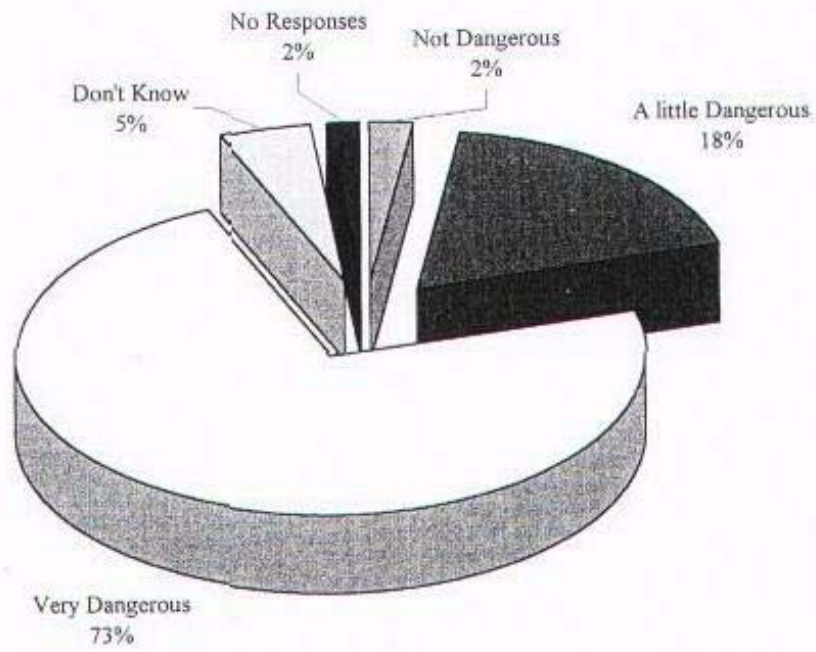


Fig. 23h

### Taking Ecstasy regularly

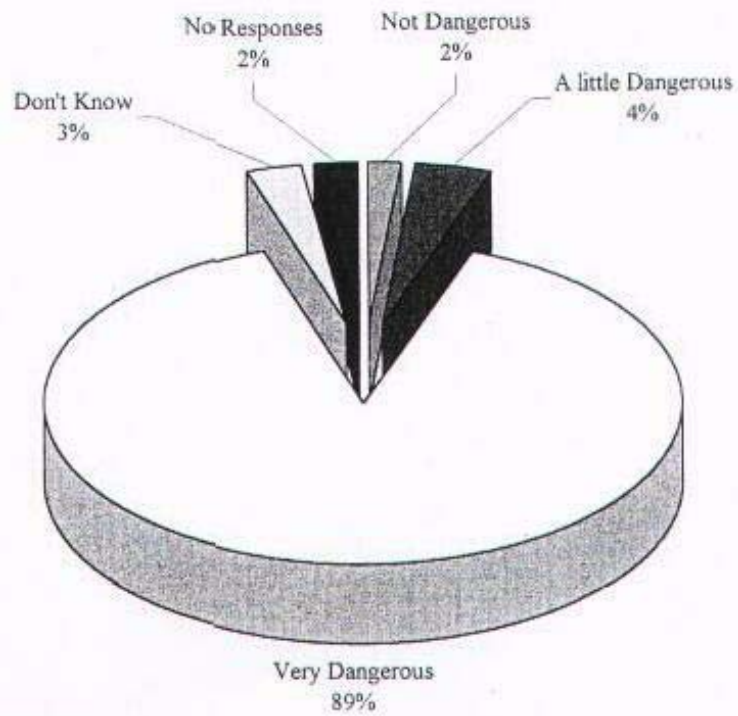


Fig. 23i



### Sniffing glue or spray

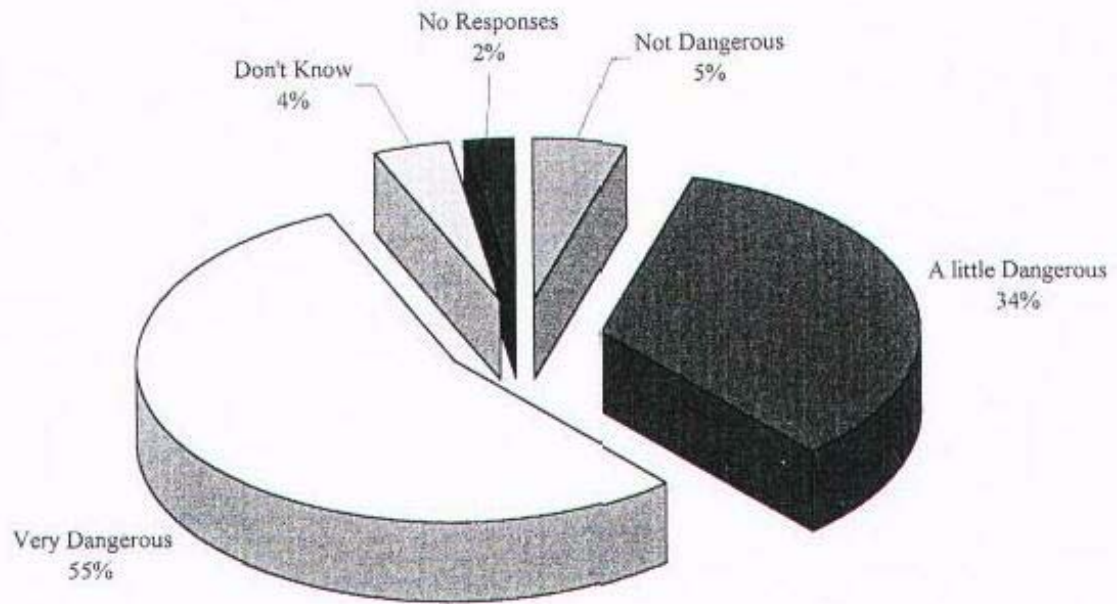


Fig. 23j

### Sniffing Petrol

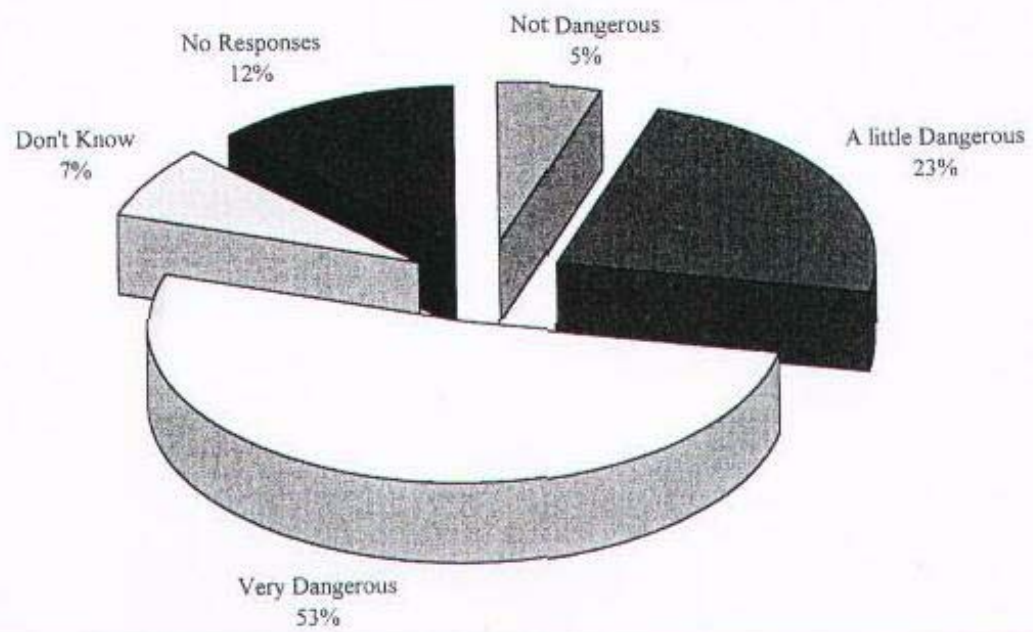


Fig. 23k

Using Speed (and other stimulants) everyday

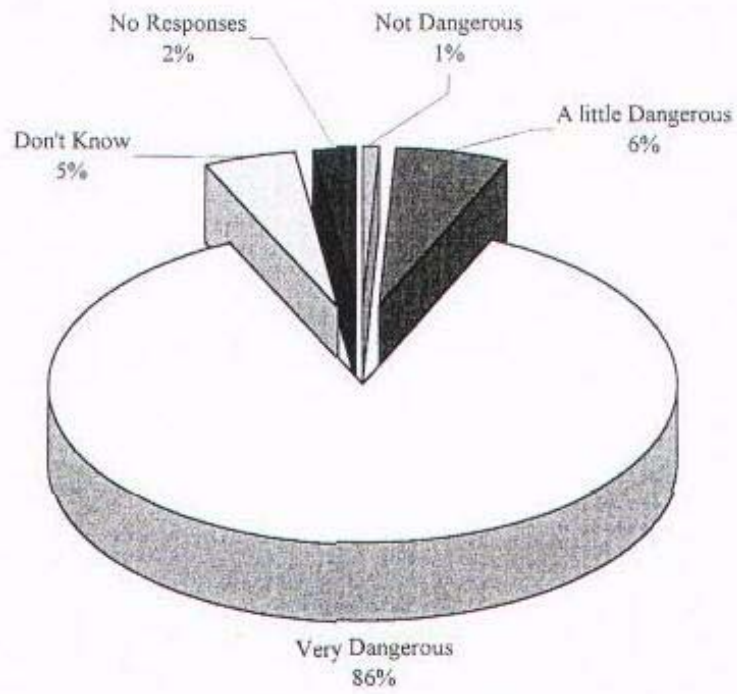


Fig. 23l

Trying stimulants once or twice

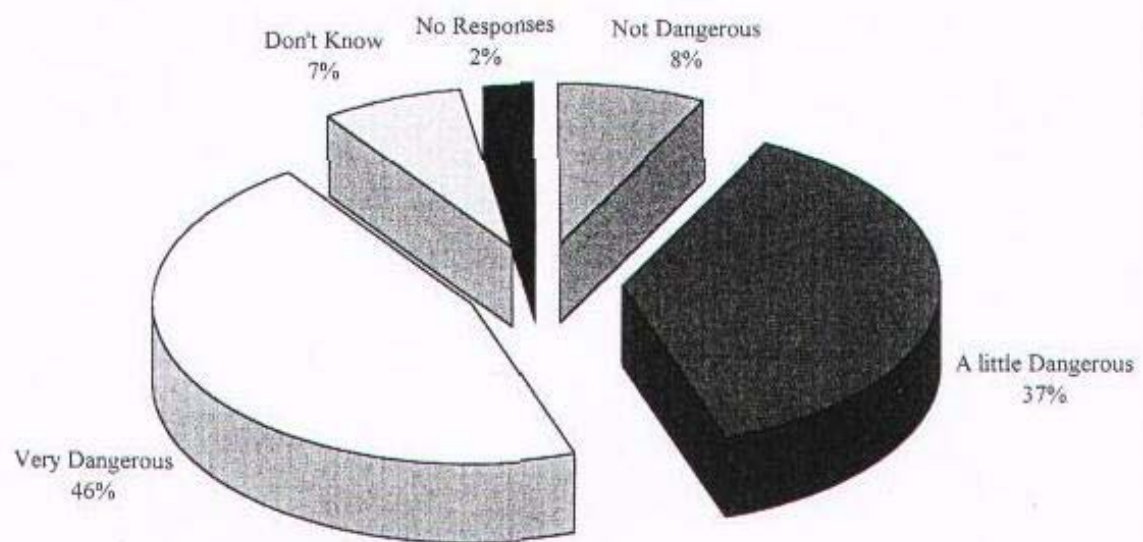


Fig. 23m



Trying acid, LSD, or magic mushrooms once or twice

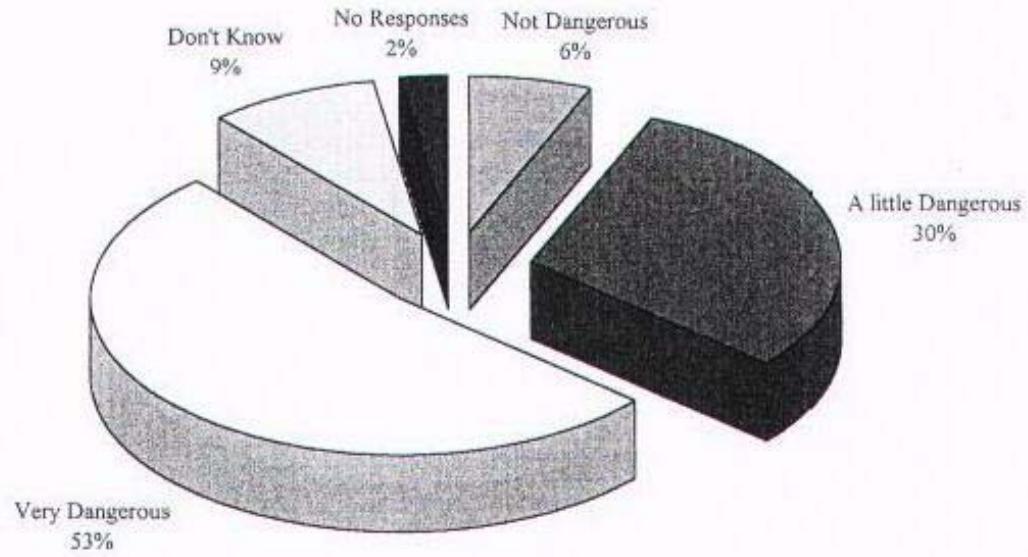


Fig. 23n

Using acid, LSD, or magic mushrooms regularly

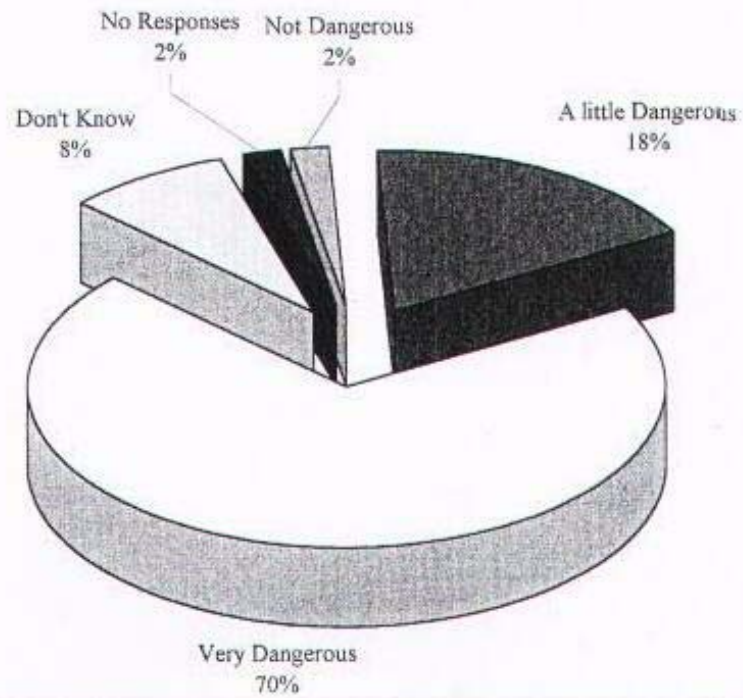


Fig. 23o



**Trying drugs like Heroin and morphine once or twice**

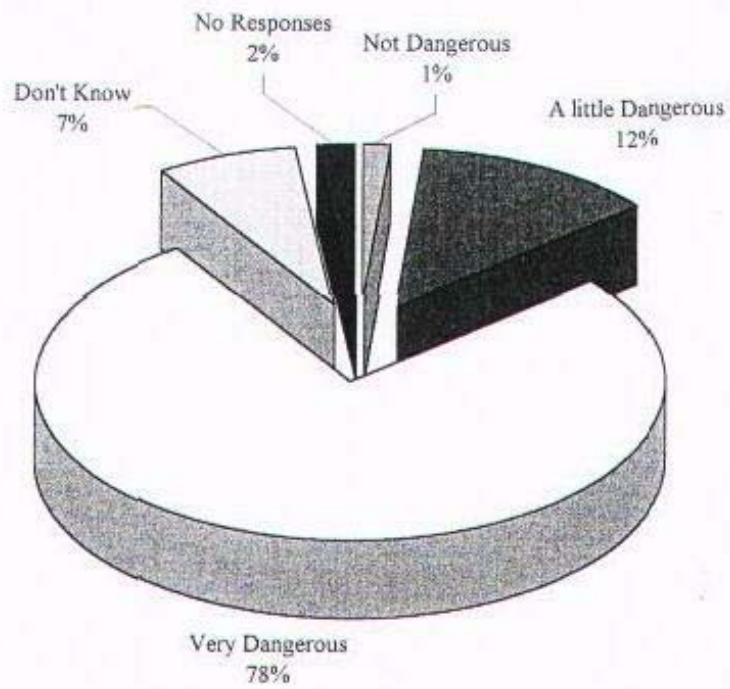


Fig. 23p

**Taking Heroin or morphine regularly.**

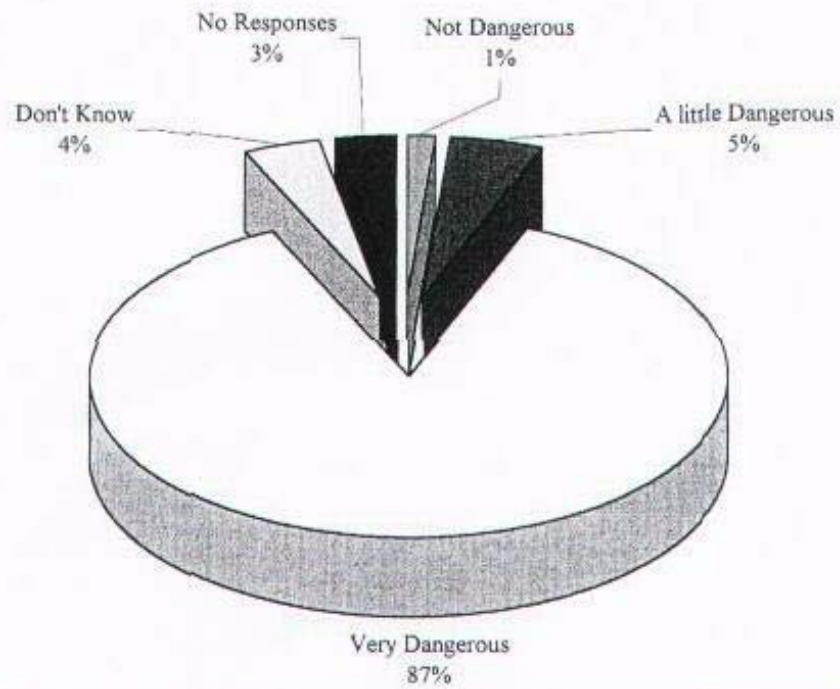


Fig. 23q