

Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland

First Results (Revised) from the 2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey Bulletin 1

Research conducted by:

The NACD and the Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (DAIRU) within the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland commissioned MORI MRC to carry out this survey.

Aim:

To obtain prevalence rates for illegal drugs such as cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, heroin etc. in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Respondents were asked about lifetime prevalence (ever used a drug), last year prevalence (recent use) and last month prevalence (current use). Respondents were also asked about the use of sedatives, tranquillisers or anti-depressants.

Method:

A representative sample (8,434) of people between 15-64 years of age in Northern Ireland (3,516) and Ireland (4,918) was surveyed following guidelines from the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. Questionnaires were administered using face to face interviewing of people residing in private households between October 2002 and April 2003.

Key Findings:

- Almost one in five (19%) people on the island of Ireland reported ever taking an illegal drug. The proportion was similar in Ireland (19%) and Northern Ireland (20%).
- Cannabis was the most commonly used illegal drug in Ireland:
 - 17% had ever used cannabis (17% Northern Ireland)
 - 5% had used cannabis in the last year (5% in Northern Ireland)
 - 2.6% had used cannabis in the last month (2.9% in Northern Ireland).
- For all other illegal drugs lifetime prevalence rates were 4% or less in Ireland. The most common other drugs ever used were ecstasy (4%), magic mushrooms (4%), LSD and poppers (each 3%), amphetamines (3%), cocaine (3%), solvents (2%), heroin (0.5%) and crack (0.3%).
- In Ireland more men than women used any illegal drugs: almost twice as many men (24%) than women (13%) reported ever using an illegal drug: Cannabis (males 22%, females 12%); Cocaine (males 4%, females 2%); Ecstasy (males 5%, females 3%); Magic Mushrooms (males 6%, females 2%); Solvents (males 2%, females 1%) and Amphetamines (males 4%, females 2%).
- Young people reported highest rates of illegal drug use in Ireland.
 - Lifetime prevalence was 25% for those aged years 15-24 compared to 18% for 35-44 year olds;
 - Last year prevalence was 13% for those aged 15-24 compared to 3% for 35-44 year olds;
 - Last month prevalence was 7% for years 15-24 compared to 2% for 35-44 year olds.
- In Ireland older people (55-64) reported highest lifetime prevalence (22%) of sedatives, tranquillisers and anti-depressant use.
- Lifetime ecstasy use was higher in Northern Ireland (6%) compared to Ireland (4%). Lifetime prevalence of cocaine was greater in Ireland (3%) than in Northern Ireland (1.6%).
- Higher rates for the use of sedatives, tranquillisers or anti-depressants in the last month were reported in Northern Ireland: 15% of those aged 45-54 and 14% of those aged 55-64 compared with Ireland (6% for years 45-54 and 10% for years 55-64).