

NACD Community and Voluntary Sector Research Grant Scheme



A prevalence study of drug use by young people in a mixed suburban area (2004)

Research conducted by:

The Kilbarrack Coast Community Programme (KCCP).

Aim:

To establish the patterns, trends, attitudes to and risk factors associated with drug misuse in the Kilbarrack area among young people aged 10-17 and to assess drug use among a small sample of early school leavers.

Method:

Survey conducted with 285 school leavers and 15 early school leavers. Qualitative interviews were carried out with thirty community members to elicit their opinions on the drug situation in the area.

Key Findings:

- Alcohol was the most widely used drug used by respondents. Although more boys (80%) had ever drunk alcohol than girls (72%), current drinkers reflected no gender differences (51% of boys and girls).
- Drinking became more prevalent as respondents got older: over 84% of 16 to 18 year olds were current drinkers compared to 61% of 13 to 15 year olds and 17% of 10 to 12 year olds.
- Tobacco was the second most commonly used drug: a quarter were current smokers; more girls (29%) than boys (21%) were current smokers and smoking increased with age: over 40% of 16 to 18 year olds were current smokers.

- The numbers who had used an illicit drug (cannabis, cocaine, and heroin) or an inhalant were considerably lower. Cannabis was the most widely used: the rate of current use of cannabis (21%) was slightly lower than the rate of current smoking (25%).
- The numbers reporting current use of other illicit substances were less (8% of 16-18 year olds had used inhalants; two and a half percent had used cocaine in the last thirty days). Heroin use was insignificant and a small minority had ever used prescription drugs.
- The majority of respondents recognised the harmfulness of using drugs but few regarded the regular use of alcohol as damaging.
- Young people who were involved in sport were less likely to use any drugs (alcohol, tobacco or other illicit substances) than those who were not. Those who left school early reported higher levels of drug use than those in school.

Recommendations from the Report:

- Greater efforts to enforce the law in relation to under-age drinking are required.
- Measures targeting young people should be based on harm reduction rather than prohibition.
- Given that the vast majority had negative attitudes to smoking, education programmes should target primary school children.
- Practical support to assist young smokers to quit could yield positive outcomes.
- The most effective strategy to deter drug experimentation and usage is to provide alternative things for young people to do, therefore the development of sporting and youth work provision in the community is recommended.