

Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland 2002/2003

Drug Prevalence Survey: Cannabis Results Bulletin 3

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 determine the prevalence of cannabis use on a lifetime (ever used), last year (recent use) and last month (current use) on the island of Ireland; to provide detailed information on a number of variables including age of first use, regularity of use, the type and method of cannabis used, obtaining cannabis, stopping use and attitudes to cannabis use in general. The following findings only refer to data collected in Ireland although the bulletin provides an analysis for Northern Ireland. Findings for Northern Ireland can be downloaded from the NACD website.

Method:

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

Key Findings:

- Prevalence rates were higher among younger respondents – the lifetime prevalence rate for those aged 15 to 34 (24%) was more than double that for those aged 35 to 64 (11%).
- Male respondents reported higher prevalence rates than females across all time periods. The lifetime prevalence figure for males was 22% compared to 12% for females.
- The average age respondents reported that they had first used cannabis was 18 years for both males and females. The average age of first regular use was 18 for males and 17 for females.
- Almost a quarter (22%) of current users had used cannabis on a daily or almost daily basis. However, when broken down by gender, more than a quarter of males (27%) compared to one tenth of females (11%) reported using cannabis on a daily or almost daily basis.
- Hash was the most commonly used form of cannabis – used by 68% of current users.
- The majority of current users (98%) smoke cannabis in a joint.
- Nearly one third of recent users (31%) were given cannabis by a family member or friend, a further 27% said that they had shared cannabis amongst a group of friends.
- The vast majority of respondents (79%) considered it 'very easy' to obtain cannabis within a 24 hour period.
- Over a quarter (27%) of respondents who said that they had ever taken cannabis said that they had used it regularly. Of these, almost three in five (58%) said that they had stopped taking cannabis, one in eight (12%) said that they had tried to stop and failed, whilst three in ten (30%) respondents said that they had never tried to stop.
- A large majority (72%) of those surveyed felt that cannabis use should be permitted for medical purposes.
- Only 21% agreed that cannabis use should be permitted for recreational purposes. Thirteen percent of those who had never used cannabis agreed to its recreational use compared to 61% of those who had ever used the drug.