

MORE THAN HALF OF YOUNG PEOPLE BINGE DRINK REGULARLY

HALF OF ADOLESCENTS AGED 15 - 19 YEARS HAVE TAKEN DRUGS

More than half of young people binge drink regularly and half have also used illegal drugs, according to new research on the behaviour of young people in Ireland.

The research was presented at an international conference on *Young People, Alcohol and Drugs* taking place today at University College Dublin (UCD).

The research was conducted on a sample of 462 15-19 year olds living in the South and South East region and found that 51% binge drank regularly which is defined as five or more drinks on one occasion once a month or more. 19% said they binge drink weekly while 4% said they binge drink several times a week.

The frequency of binge drinking increased with age and there was no significant overall difference between males and females in their rates of binge drinking.

Overall 86% of young people said they did drink alcohol while 14% said they did not drink. The average age for taking their first drink was 13½ years. There was no difference between males and females on use of alcohol or average age of first consumption.

The research was conducted by Dr. Deirdre Palmer and Dr. Gary O' Reilly of the UCD School of Psychology.

Young people reported that on a typical drinking occasion they consumed 5.75 drinks. Males at 6.25 drinks reported a higher level of average consumption than females at 5.36 drinks. As young people move through adolescence the average amount they consume when drinking increases from 4.14 drinks at 15 years of age to 7.36 drinks at 19 years of age.

In terms of frequency of alcohol consumption, 29% of young people surveyed drink on a weekly basis. At 15 years of age 12% of males and 20.3% of females reported they drink once a week or more. At 19 years, 50% of males and 67% of females reported they drink at this frequency.

Consequences from drinking

48% of young people who drink reported that they had not experienced any consequences as a result. Some consequences of alcohol use were reported by 38% of all participants. Getting into an argument was the most frequently reported consequence of alcohol use, experienced by 20% of young people. Trouble at home was reported as the next most frequent consequence at 18%. 13% of the sample reported that alcohol use had led to an accident or injury.

Getting into a physical fight, and causing damage to property were indicated by 13% of participants. 10% reported that alcohol use resulted in getting into trouble with the police. Performance affected at school was indicated by 7% and trouble at school as a result of alcohol use was reported by 4%.

With regard to gender similarities and differences among young people who drink males and females were equally likely to experience no consequences to their alcohol use. However, females were more likely to report that alcohol use had resulted in trouble at home while males were more likely to report that alcohol use had lead to a physical fight, damage to property, or trouble with the police.

Drug use in young people

50% of young people in the survey reported that they had ever used illicit drugs (including inhalants) with no significant difference between males and females reporting drug use. The average age of first drug use was 14½ years with both males and females reporting their first drug use at the same average age.

Cannabis was the most commonly reported drug ever used by young people at 41%. This was followed by inhalants 30%, poppers 17%, cocaine 11%, tranquilizers/sedatives 11%, amphetamines 9%, ecstasy 9%, hallucinogens 7% and opiates 2%. Females had a significantly higher rate of lifetime use of cannabis compared to males. No gender differences were found in lifetime use of each of the other drugs.

The following outlines the frequency of once a month or more usage of the five most common drugs in the survey:

- 14% reported monthly use of cannabis;
- 6% reported monthly use of inhalants;
- 4% reported monthly use of poppers;
- 2% reported monthly use of tranquilizers / sedatives.
- 1% reported monthly use of cocaine;

Consequences from drug use

38% of young people who participated in the study indicated that they had tried some form of illicit substance but not experienced a consequence from it. Consequences of drug use were reported by 11% of all young people who participated in the study. Performance affected at school at 7% was reported most often as a consequence of drug use. Getting into an argument at 4% and trouble at home (3%) were the two next most frequently reported consequences of drug use. An accident or injury, trouble with the police, property damage, physical fight and trouble at school/work were reported as consequences of drug use by 3%, 2%, 2%, 2% and 2% of the group respectively.

Categorising the alcohol and drug use of young people

In analysing the data Dr. Gary O' Reilly said they had: "Identified sub-categories of substance use within young people in the community, reflecting a continuum from non-use to heavier use, based on the alcohol and drug use behaviours endorsed by respondents in this study.

"Six categories of substance use were identified among the community group reflecting a continuum of alcohol and drug use defined by key characteristics of behaviours of participants in the study. The six categories included:

1. Young people who are non-substance users (13%);

2. Young people who drink moderately (9%);
3. Young people who binge drink regularly (13%);
4. Young people who binge drink and experiment with drugs (12%);
5. Young people who use drugs regularly (8%);
6. Young people with high-end substance use (10%).”

Dr. O’ Reilly said the research reported a comparable level of alcohol use to previous research, but a higher rate of drug use. He added that there was a clear link between substance abuse and family functioning.

“The most problematic substance users in the sample indicated poorer family functioning relative to some less problematic substance user groups. The pattern which emerged was that as the level of substance use increased the adaptive functioning of families decreased,” he said.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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Notes to the editor:

Other speakers at the conference include:

- Mr Peter Sheridan, author and film director;
- Dr. Howard Liddle, University of Miami, USA;
- Professor Tracy O’ Leary Tevyaw, Brown University, USA;
- Dr. John Howard, National Drug and Research Centre.

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