

Alcohol and Drug Use in Students Attending a Student Health Centre

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Introduction

In the academic year 2002/2003, UCC and 20 other Irish 3rd level institutions took part in the first national lifestyle survey (CLAN) among undergraduate full-time students³.

The results for each individual participating institution were not published as a matter of policy. We undertook this study to determine the alcohol and illegal drug use of students attending the health centre of University College Cork (UCC), and to explore the adverse consequences experienced by students as a result of their own drinking and that of others.

Methods

Students aged 18 and over, who attended University College Cork's Student Health Department, were invited to complete an alcohol and drugs use questionnaire. 198 questionnaires were distributed. 181 were returned.

Data were analysed using SPSS Statistics 17.0 package.

Results

Illegal drugs

Cannabis was the most common illegal drug used by students, 49.2% (n= 89) of students had used cannabis at some stage in their lives.

Cocaine was the second most common illegal drug used by students, 6.9% (n=12) reporting use in the previous year with ecstasy in 3rd place at 4.0%. See Table 1.

Alcohol Use overall

A high percentage, 98.3% (n=178) had ever drank alcohol and students began drinking at an average age of 15.9 years. (Range 1 - 30 years). Just over three quarters (n=138) had consumed an alcoholic drink in the last week.

The order of preference for females was spirits 95.6% (n=131), beer/cider 77.4% (n= 106) and wine 75.2% (n= 103). The male order of preference was beer/cider 95.5% (n= 42), spirits 93.2% (n= 41) and wine 72.7% (n= 32).

Binge drinking was a frequent occurrence, 83.4% (n=151) of students admitted to having had a binge in the previous 12 months. A significant number of students binge drink once a week or more, 44.8% (n=81) had a binge once weekly.

The reasons students drink are outlined in Table 2.

All students who drank reported suffering at least one adverse consequence as a result of their own drinking, with the mean number of 3.4 reported (3.4 male v 3.3 female).

Results

Table 1		Illegal drug use in the past year							
Drug	Males		Females		Total		No Reply		
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	
Cannabis	35.3	(16)	23.4	(32)	26.5	(48)	13.3	(24)	
Cocaine	12.2	(5)	5.3	(7)	6.9	(12)	4.4	(8)	
Ecstasy	0		5.3	(7)	4	(7)	4.4	(8)	
Magic Mushrooms	4.9	(2)	3	(4)	3.5	(6)	4.4	(8)	
Tranquilisers/Sedatives	2.4	(1)	.8	(1)	1.2	(2)	4.4	(8)	
Amphetamine	0		1.5	(2)	1.2	(2)	4.4	(8)	
LSD	0		1.5	(2)	1.2	(2)	4.4	(8)	
Solvents	2.4	(1)	0		.6	(1)	4.4	(8)	
Stimulant drugs	2.5	(1)	0		.6	(1)	5	(9)	

Table 2		Reasons for Drinking					
Reasons for drinking	Males		Females		Total		
	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	
More positive							
Sociable	72.7	(32)	70.8	(97)	71.3	(129)	
Enjoy it	65.9	(29)	59.1	(81)	60.8	(110)	
Relax	40.9	(18)	35.0	(48)	36.5	(66)	
Drink with a meal	20.5	(9)	19.0	(26)	19.3	(35)	
More negative							
Forget worries	4.5	(2)	8.8	(12)	7.7	(14)	
Anxious/Depressed	4.5	(2)	5.1	(7)	5.0	(9)	
Lonely	4.5	(2)	3.6	(5)	3.8	(7)	
Be polite	4.5	(2)	2.9	(4)	3.3	(6)	
Need to	0		2.2	(3)	1.7	(3)	
Other	2.3	(1)	0.7	(1)	1.1	(2)	

Conclusions

Some concerning patterns emerged from the study.

UCC students report a lifetime ever use of cannabis of 49.2% compared to 20% of the 15-34 age group in the drug prevalence study of 2006-2007⁴, with 26.5% of UCC students reporting use in the past year compared to 8.6% of the young adults in the general population. The level of cannabis use reported amongst UCC students was less than reported for all students in the national 2002-03 CLAN survey³ however, where 37% of students had reported cannabis use in the previous year.

Cocaine was the second most common illegal drug used in the past year, in this study, reflecting national trends⁴.

Our study found that more students drank spirits in the past year, than any other drink. The CLAN survey found beer to be the most popular drink³.

A number of concerning trends appear to have emerged for the female students in this UCC study.

The female students appear to be binge drinking at least as often as their male counterparts, unlike in the CLAN survey³ where male students reported bingeing at a 60:40 ratio compared to females. Females are drinking similar numbers of measures of drinks as males which is a particular concern..

References

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³ Hope A, Dring C, Dring J (2005). College Lifestyle and Attitudinal National (CLAN) survey. In *The Health of Irish Students*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.

⁴ National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD) & Public Health Information and Research Branch (PHIRB). Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland 2006/2007 .

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