

# 12 Month Prevalence of Drug Use Among Third-Level Students in Limerick City

## Abstract:

Sir,

Drug misuse remains a crucial concern in modern Ireland. Nationally representative information on this issue among students was published in 2005 as part of the CLAN Survey. The current study was designed to provide current local information on student health and lifestyles in Limerick City. This short piece focuses on drug use and misuse. A quota sampling frame was used to distribute 1,000 questionnaires during lectures in a third level college in Limerick City. In addition to a number of other mental health questionnaires, this survey included a section on drug use and misuse. A response rate of 76% was achieved. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 63 years (mean 22.2, SD=5.65, median 20). 52% of respondents were male (386) and 48% (356) were female. Analysis excludes those (0.66%, n=5) that claimed to have taken a dummy drug named Relevinã.

Illicit drugs by injection were reported to have been used at least once in the last 12 months by just 0.5% (3) respondents, while the similar figure for heroin was 0.9% (6). 3.1% (20) of respondents reported using tranquillisers without prescription, while LSD and solvents were each reported to have been used by 3.7% (23) of respondents. 5.1% (32) of respondents reported using prescribed tranquillisers, while 7.0% (45) reported using amphetamines and 7.1% (46) magic mushrooms. 12.4% (80) of participants reported using ecstasy in the preceding 12 months, while 13% (84) stated that they had used cocaine. Although similar proportions of males (12.9%) and females (13%) reported using cocaine in the last year, heavier usage rates demonstrated gender differences. 7.3% (26) of males reported using cocaine three or more times, while among females the figure was 3.3% (9). Similarly clear gender differences were noted in ecstasy use, with males 14.3% (51) reporting having used it, while 9.7% (27) of females reported likewise. Almost a third of respondents (33.2%, 205) reported using cannabis in the last year. 11.2% (69) of respondents had used cannabis once or twice in the last year, while 22.1% (136) reported using it three or more times. Polydrug use in the last 12 months was reported by 17.8% of respondents.

The high rate of cannabis use noted in this research is a serious issue, particularly as it is thought to be a risk factor for psychosis, schizophrenia and mental ill-health among those with a genetic predisposition. Similarly the rates of use of cocaine and ecstasy are a significant concern, particularly among males who reported significantly higher rates of ongoing usage. It is clear that effective, focussed, and adequately funded interventions are required to combat the issue of drug misuse, particularly in relation to cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy.

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## References

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