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Drug use, smoking and drinking among young teenagers in 1999

Drug use had increased slightly, but smoking had decreased, and drinking remained at the same level in 1999 as in 1998, according to key results from the first major national survey focusing principally on drug use among secondary school children aged 11-15, published today by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Key performance indicators in the government's 10 year strategy for tackling drug misuse are the proportions of young people who have used drugs in the last month and in the last year.

There was no change between 1998 and 1999 in the proportion of 11-15 year olds who had used drugs in the month before the survey: seven per cent - about one in fourteen - had done so. However, in 1999, 12 per cent of pupils aged 11-15 had used drugs in the last year, compared with 11 per cent in 1998. Although this difference is not statistically significant, the general picture is a fairly consistent one of small increases among both boys and girls, particularly among those aged 14 and 15 (among younger pupils, the proportions using drugs are much smaller, and differences are harder to detect). There was also a statistically significant increase from 13 per cent to 15 per cent in the proportion who had used drugs at some time in their lives, though not necessarily in the last year.

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The survey was carried out among more than 9,000 pupils in about 340 schools in England in the autumn of 1999, and also included questions about smoking and drinking. The study was commissioned by the Department of Health, on behalf also of the Home Office and the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit. The main report on the survey will be published in Autumn 2000.

Other key findings are as follows:

Drug use

The pattern of differences according to sex and age was the same in 1999 as in 1998: for both sexes there was marked variation in relation to age: only one per cent of 11 year olds had used drugs in the last year, but as many as 30 per cent of 15 year olds had done so.

Boys were a little more likely to have used drugs in the last year than were girls, (13 per cent compared with 12 per cent) and although this difference was not statistically significant, the fact that a similar difference between the sexes was also evident in 1998 suggests that it may be a real one. (*Table 1*)

Cannabis was by far the most likely drug to have been used – 11 per cent of pupils aged 11-15 had used cannabis in the last year. The three next most commonly used substances - glue, gas and poppers - had each been used by only two per cent of pupils.

Another key performance indicator for the government's strategy relates to the use of heroin and cocaine, as these are considered the drugs which cause the greatest harm: fewer than 0.5 per cent of 11-15 year olds had used opiates (heroin or methadone) in the last year, but three per cent had used stimulants (a group of substances which includes cocaine and crack as well as ecstasy, amphetamines and poppers). There were no statistically significant changes in the use of individual drugs between 1998 and 1999. (*Table 2*)

Not surprisingly, the use of cannabis and of most other drugs was considerably more prevalent among older than among younger pupils: only one per cent of those aged 11, but 28 per cent of those aged 15 had used cannabis in the last year. Even among 15 year olds, however, hardly any had used opiates, crack, tranquillisers or steroids. (*Table 3*)

Many more pupils had been offered drugs than had tried them: more than one third (35 per cent) had been offered one or more drugs, and boys were more likely to have been offered them than were girls (36 per cent compared with 33 per cent).

Again, cannabis was the drug most likely to have been offered (27 per cent said they had been offered cannabis) but as many as 16 per cent said they had been offered stimulants, 13 per cent that they had been offered glue, and 11 per cent gas. A small (but not negligible) proportion of pupils, five per cent, said they had been offered heroin or methadone. (*Table 4*)

As would be expected, the likelihood of having ever been offered drugs increased sharply with age. Almost two thirds of 15 year olds (62 per cent)

had been offered drugs at some time. Although the figure was much lower among 11 year olds, even so, about one child in eight (13 per cent) said they had been offered drugs. (*Table 5*)

Smoking

The proportion of pupils who were regular smokers (defined as usually smoking at least one cigarette a week) fell significantly from 11 per cent in 1998 to nine per cent in 1999. Since the 1998 figure was also lower than that for 1996 (13 per cent) it seems likely that the fall is a real one.

However, because of the fluctuations in smoking behaviour since 1982, it would be unwise to predict that the prevalence of smoking among this age group will remain at this level or continue to fall in future surveys. The recent reduction appears to have occurred mainly among 14 and 15 year olds – age groups which had shown a marked increase in prevalence in the mid 90s.

As previous surveys have shown, boys are less likely than girls to be regular smokers (eight per cent compared with 10 per cent), and there is a sharp increase in prevalence with age: only one per cent of 11 year olds smoke regularly, but almost one quarter of 15 year olds do. (*Table 6*)

Drinking

Following a fall between 1996 and 1998 in the proportion of pupils who had had an alcoholic drink in the previous week, there was no further change between 1998 and 1999: in both surveys, 21 per cent said that they had had a drink in the previous week.

Boys continued to be slightly more likely than girls to have drunk alcohol in the last week, and, as with cigarette smoking and drug use, there was a sharp increase with age: only six per cent of those age 11 had had a drink

in the last week, but 45 per cent of 15 year olds had done so. (*Table 7*)

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. This is the latest in a series of national surveys of secondary school children aged 11-15 in England, and the first to focus mainly on drug use, rather than on smoking and drinking. The first survey in the series was carried out in 1982 to provide estimates of the proportion of pupils who smoked and to describe the smoking behaviour of those who did smoke. Similar surveys were carried out every two years until 1998 to monitor trends in the prevalence of cigarette smoking. Questions on alcohol consumption were included for the first time in the 1988 survey, and the 1998 survey was the first to include questions on the prevalence of drug use. Surveys are now being carried out every year, with emphasis likely to alternate between drugs and smoking and drinking.
2. The government's ten year drugs strategy is set out in *Tackling drugs to build a better Britain*, Cm 3945, Stationery Office (1998).
3. Details of the policy governing the release of data, including a description of the release categories featured on the front page of ONS releases, are available from the press office.
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Table 1 Percentage of pupils who had used drugs (a) in the last month, (b) in the last year (including in the last month) and (c) ever, by sex and age: 1998, 1999

<i>All pupils</i>		<i>England</i>					
		11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	Total (all ages)
Percentage who had used drugs in the last month							
Boys	1998	0	2	4	10	19	7
	1999	1	2	4	12	21	8
Girls	1998	0	2	3	9	16	6
	1999	1	2	5	9	17	7
Total	1998	0	2	4	10	18	7
	1999	1	2	5	11	19	7
Percentage who had used drugs in the last year (including those who had done so in the last month)							
Boys	1998	1	4	7	16	29	12
	1999	2	4	7	17	31	13
Girls	1998	1	3	6	14	26	10
	1999	1	4	9	16	28	12
Total	1998	1	4	7	16	28	11
	1999	1	4	8	17	30	12
Percentage who had ever used drugs							
Boys	1998	1	4	10	19	33	14
	1999	3	5	11	22	38	16
Girls	1998	1	4	9	16	30	12
	1999	1	5	12	18	33	14
Total	1998	1	4	9	18	31	13
	1999	2	5	11	20	35	15
<i>Bases (=100%)</i>							
Boys	1998	305	352	304	610	757	2328
	1999	864	997	913	872	969	4615
Girls	1998	305	373	388	671	674	2411
	1999	877	881	892	901	864	4415
Total	1998	610	727	692	1281	1431	4741
	1999	1741	1878	1805	1773	1833	9030

Table 2 Percentage of pupils who had used individual drugs in the last year, by sex: 1998,1999

All pupils

England

Type of drug	Boys 1998	1999	Girls 1998	1999	Total 1998	1999
<i>Percentage who had used the drug in the last year</i>						
Cannabis	11	11	9	10	10	11
Stimulants						
Cocaine	1	1	0	1	1	1
Crack	0	1	0	1	0	1
Ecstasy	1	1	0	1	1	1
Amphetamines	2	1	2	1	2	1
Poppers	2	2	1	1	1	2
Psychedelics						
LSD	1	1	1	1	1	1
Magic mushrooms	1	1	1	1	1	1
Opiates						
Heroin	0	0	0	0	0	0
Methadone	0	0	0	0	0	0
Glue	1	2	1	2	1	2
Gas*	-	2	-	2	-	2
Tranquillisers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Steroids	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other drugs	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total who had used any drug in the last year	12	13	10	12	11	12
Base (=100%)	2287	4625	2360	4428	4647	9053

* not included in the 1998 survey

Table 3 Percentage of pupils who had used individual drugs in the last year, by age: 1999

All pupils

England

Type of drug	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	Total (all ages)
Cannabis	1	3	7	15	28	11
Stimulants						
Cocaine	0]	1]	0]	1]	2]	1]
Crack	0]	1]	0]	1]	1]	1]
Ecstasy	0] 0	0] 1	0] 2	1] 3	2] 9	1] 3
Amphetamines	0]	0]	1]	1]	4]	1]
Poppers	0]	0]	1]	2]	5]	2]
Psychedelics						
LSD	0]	0]	0]	1]	2]	1]
Magic mushrooms	0] 0	0] 0	1] 1	1] 2	3] 4	1] 1
Opiates						
Heroin	0]	0]	0]	0]	1]	0]
Methadone	0] 0	0] 0	0] 0	0] 0	0] 1	0] 0
Glue	0	1	2	2	5	2
Gas	0	1	2	3	4	2
Tranquillisers	0	0	0	0	1	0
Steroids	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total who had used any drug in the last year	1	4	8	17	30	12
Base (=100%)	1745	1878	1811	1773	1846	9053

Table 4 Percentage of pupils who had been offered individual drugs, by sex: 1998, 1999

All pupils

England

Type of drug	Boys		Girls		Total	
	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
Cannabis	28	28	23	25	26	27
Stimulants						
Cocaine	6	7	5	6	6	7
Crack	4	5	2	4	3	5
Ecstasy	7	6	5	6	6	6
Amphetamines	8	7	7	6	7	7
Poppers	6	7	5	5	6	6
15		16	13	15	14	16
Psychedelics						
LSD	7	6	5	4	6	5
Magic Mushrooms	6	7	5	6	6	6
9		10	7	8	8	9
Opiates						
Heroin	4	4	3	4	4	4
Methadone	2	1	1	1	1	1
5		5	3	4	4	5
Glue	8	12	9	13	8	13
Gas*	-	11	-	11	-	11
Tranquillisers	3	3	2	2	2	2
Steroids	2	2	1	1	2	1
Other drugs	6	1	5	0	6	0
Total offered any drug	36	36	32	33	34	35
Base (=100%)	2335	4510	2416	4285	4751	8795

* not included in the 1998 survey

Table 5 Percentage of pupils who had been offered individual drugs, by age: 1999

<i>All pupils</i>						<i>England</i>
Type of drug	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	Total (all ages)
Cannabis	6	11	21	35	57	27
Stimulants						
Cocaine	4	4	5	8	13	7
Crack	2	3	4	5	9	5
Ecstasy	1	2	4	7	15	6
Amphetamines	2	2	4	8	19	7
Poppers	1	1	4	8	16	6
	6	7	11	20	33	16
Psychedelics						
LSD	2	2	3	6	13	5
Magic Mushrooms	2	3	5	7	15	6
	3	4	7	11	20	9
Opiates						
Heroin	2	2	3	5	8	4
Methadone	1	1	1	2	2	1
	3	3	4	6	9	5
Glue	4	8	13	17	21	13
Gas	3	5	9	14	21	11
Tranquillisers	1	1	2	3	5	2
Steroids	1	1	1	2	2	1
Other drugs	0	1	0	1	1	0
Total offered any drug	13	19	31	44	62	35
Base (=100%)	1637	1810	1791	1746	1811	8795

Table 6 Percentage of pupils who were regular smokers* by sex and age; 1982 to 1999

All pupils											England	
Age	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	1998 base (=100%)	1999 base (=100%)
<i>Percentage who were regular smokers</i>												
Boys												
aged 11	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	300	870
aged 12	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	349	1011
aged 13	8	10	5	5	6	6	4	8	5	4	302	946
aged 14	18	16	6	8	10	14	14	13	15	10	612	948
aged 15	24	28	18	17	25	21	26	28	19	21	754	1046
Total	11	13	7	7	9	9	10	11	9	8	2317	4791
Girls												
aged 11	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	303	870
aged 12	1	2	2	0	2	2	3	4	3	3	375	892
aged 13	6	9	5	4	9	9	8	11	9	8	390	924
aged 14	14	19	16	12	16	15	20	24	19	15	670	933
aged 15	25	28	27	22	25	25	30	33	29	25	673	923
Total	11	13	12	9	11	10	13	15	12	10	2411	4542
All pupils												
aged 11	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	603	1740
aged 12	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	724	1903
aged 13	7	10	5	5	7	7	6	9	7	6	692	1870
aged 14	16	17	11	10	13	14	17	18	17	12	1282	1851
aged 15	25	28	22	20	25	23	28	30	24	23	1427	1969
Total	11	13	10	8	10	10	12	13	11	9	4728	9333

* smoking at least one cigarette a week, on average

Table 7 Percentage of pupils who drank last week, by sex and age: 1988 to 1999

<i>All pupils</i>								<i>England</i>	
Sex and age	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	1998 base (=100%)	1999 base (=100%)
<i>Percentage who drank last week</i>									
Boys									
11 years	7	8	8	8	7	4	7	285	882
12 years	12	9	13	10	12	14	10	336	1017
13 years	20	17	15	22	27	16	16	293	947
14 years	25	32	32	34	37	28	28	597	921
15 years	45	42	49	52	50	48	48	745	1049
Total	24	22	24	26	27	23	22	2256	4816
Girls									
11 years	4	4	5	4	6	2	4	291	881
12 years	7	6	7	9	9	6	8	365	896
13 years	11	19	11	16	22	14	17	383	925
14 years	19	32	25	26	35	29	28	657	933
15 years	36	39	40	48	55	40	41	666	923
Total	17	20	17	22	26	18	20	2362	4558
All pupils									
11 years	5	6	6	6	7	3	6	577	1763
12 years	9	8	10	9	11	10	9	702	1913
13 years	16	18	13	19	24	15	16	675	1872
14 years	22	32	29	30	36	29	28	1254	1854
15 years	40	40	45	50	53	44	45	1409	1972
Total	20	21	21	24	27	21	21	4617	9374