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Statistical News Release: Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey, England and Wales

This annual National Statistics bulletin examines the extent of, and trends in, illicit drug use among 16 to 59 year olds resident in households in England and Wales. Figures are based on self-reported drug use data from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey (BCS).

Extent and trends in illicit drug use among adults aged 16 to 59

The 2010/11 BCS estimated that 8.8 per cent of adults in England and Wales had used an illicit drug in the last year (almost 2.9 million people), not statistically significantly different from the estimate of 8.6 per cent in the previous year's survey. Overall levels of illicit drug use remained at around the lowest level since measurement began in the 1996 BCS (11.1%). The decline in drug usage has been largely due to falls in two of the more commonly used drugs; cannabis (with falls in use between the 2002/03 and 2009/10 BCS) and amphetamines (declines between the 1996 and 2007/08 BCS).

Cannabis, despite falls in levels of use over time, remained the most commonly used type of illicit drug, with 6.8 per cent of adults (around 2.2 million people) having used it in the last year. The next most commonly used drugs were powder cocaine (used by 2.1% in the last year, 0.7 million adults) and ecstasy (1.4%, 0.5 million adults).

The level of last year Class A drug use amongst adults was 3.0 per cent in the 2010/11 BCS (around 1 million adults). The trend in Class A drug use has been relatively flat since the 1996 survey (2.7%). However, this masks trends for individual types of Class A drugs. Powder cocaine use increased from 0.6 per cent in the 1996 BCS to a peak of 3.0 per cent in the 2008/09 BCS. Since then, there have been successive year-on-year falls in powder cocaine use, to 2.1 per cent in the 2010/11 BCS. The use of hallucinogens has fallen (mainly between the 1996 and 2006/07 surveys), from 1.3 per cent in the 1996 BCS to 0.6 per cent in the 2010/11 BCS.

There were small but statistically significant changes between the 2009/10 and 2010/11 BCS in last year use of the following drugs:

- Powder cocaine (down from 2.4% to 2.1%); and
- Methadone (up from 0.1% to 0.2%)

For other types of drugs, last year usage remained at similar levels to the 2009/10 BCS.

Mephedrone

Supplementary questions were added to the BCS in April 2010 about the use of mephedrone. The 2010/11 BCS showed that 1.4 per cent of adults aged 16 to 59 had used mephedrone in the last year; a similar proportion that had used ecstasy, the third most prevalent drug for this age group. For younger adults (those aged 16 to 24), mephedrone usage, at 4.4 per cent, was as at a similar level to powder cocaine, the second most used drug in this age group.

Variations in drug use by personal, household and lifestyle factors

Amongst adults aged 16 to 59, the level of any last year illicit drug use was highest among the 16 to 19 age group (23%), while last year Class A drug use was higher for 20 to 24 year olds (7.8%) than all other age groups.

As in previous years, levels of last year drug use for men were more than twice as high than those for women, for both use of any illicit drug (men 12.0%, women 5.7%) and for any Class A drug (men 4.2%, women 1.8%).

Levels of drug use increased with increasing frequency of alcohol consumption or visits to nightclubs or pubs. For example, 12.3 per cent of adults who consumed alcohol on three or more days per week had used an illicit drug in the last year, compared with 6.1 per cent of people who drank but on less than one day a week.

Attitudes to the acceptability of drinking and drug taking

The 2010/11 BCS asked adults aged 16 to 59 for their views on how acceptable it was for people their own age to get drunk or to take certain drugs (cannabis, cocaine and heroin). Findings from these questions show that only a minority of people thought that it was acceptable to ever take drugs.

- For cannabis, nearly two-thirds of adults (65%) thought that it was never acceptable to take the drug, while around a third (33%) thought it acceptable to take occasionally (just 3% thought it acceptable to take cannabis frequently).
- The proportions of people who thought it never acceptable to take cocaine and heroin were much higher; around nine in ten (91%) thought it never acceptable to take cocaine, while a vast majority (98%) thought it was never acceptable to take heroin.

In contrast, around three-quarters of adults (74%) thought it was acceptable to get drunk occasionally, while a fifth (20%) thought it was never acceptable (the remaining 6% thought it was acceptable to get drunk frequently).

Notes to editors

1. 'Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey' provides information for drug prevalence for England and Wales. Statistics on drug prevalence in Scotland and Northern Ireland are published by the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive respectively.

2. 'Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2010/11 British Crime Survey' is available online via the UK National Statistics Publication Hub and the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics website.

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb1310.pdf>

3. 'Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England 2010' is also being released on 28 July 2011, by the NHS Information Centre and is available via the UK National Statistics Publication Hub and the NHS Information Centre website.

www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/sdd10fullreport

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