

Drug Use in Ireland and Northern Ireland

2002/2003 Drug Prevalence Survey: Cocaine

Results Bulletin 4

Research Conducted by:

The NACD in Ireland and DAIRU (Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit) in Northern Ireland commissioned MORI MRC to carry out the survey on the whole island.

Aim:

To determine the prevalence of cocaine powder and crack use on a lifetime (ever used), last year (recent use), and last month (current use) basis; to provide detailed information on a range of variables including age of first use, regular use, method of taking cocaine, ease of obtaining cocaine, reasons for stopping use, perceptions of risk and to present a profile of cocaine users. The following findings only relate to Ireland although the complete Bulletin 4 provides data for Northern Ireland and these can be downloaded from the NACD website below or DAIRU at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk.

Method:

A representative sample (8,434) of people between 15-64 years of age in Northern Ireland (3,516) and Ireland (4,918) were surveyed following the guidelines from EMCDDA. Questionnaires were administered using face to face interviewing of people residing in private households between October 2002 and April 2003.

Key Findings:

The bulletin found that over one-in-thirty people (3%) have used cocaine at some point in their life, just 1.1% in the last year and as little as 0.3% in the last month. Twice as many men (4%) as women (2%) reported using the drug at least once in their lives. The lifetime use among young people aged 15 and 34 (4.7%) was more than three times the rate of use among those aged 35 and 64 (1.4%).

Cocaine powder accounted for the majority of cocaine use. Current users overwhelmingly snorted cocaine as a method of taking the drug. When examined by social group, it is clear that cocaine use crosses all social classes and was not associated with one social group above another.

Lifetime use was much higher in the three former health board areas around Dublin than in other areas (former East Coast Area Health Board (6%), former Northern Area Health Board (5%) and former South Western Area Health Board (5%) confirming that cocaine use is primarily an urban problem.

According to the survey, the average age at which respondents first used cocaine is 20 for men and 21 for women. The survey also finds that for those who became regular users, the period of time between first using cocaine and becoming a regular user was only one year. For those who had used the drug regularly, the average age at which they first used cocaine was 19 years for males and 21 for females.

Of those people surveyed who said that they had ever taken cocaine, one-in-five (19%) said that they had used it regularly. Of these, 62% said they had stopped using cocaine and gave a variety of reasons. The main reason for quitting related to cost (42%). After cost, the other main reasons for quitting included: not wanting to take it anymore (35%); due to health concerns (32%); being persuaded by friends and family (32%); and because of the impact of their cocaine use on their job, friends and family (22%).

The survey provides insights into the social context in which the drug is used. Over three-quarters (77%) of recent users (used in the last year) obtained their drugs from someone known to them. One third (33%) were given cocaine by a family member or friend. A quarter (25%) had bought cocaine from a friend. Only 8% bought the drug from a contact not known to them personally or accepted the drug from a stranger. The majority of current users (83%) took cocaine less than once a week.

Regardless of whether people had or had not previously used cocaine, the majority felt there was a great risk associated with use of the drug.