

Young People into 2009

*The Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire
results for 80,548 young people between the ages of 10 and 15*

CHAPTER 5 **Legal and Illegal Drugs**

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5 Legal and Illegal Drugs



Information about the use of drugs, whether legal or illegal, is often sensationalised. It is an area where the teacher may feel handicapped by a lack of knowledge about people’s degree of use, and a confidential questionnaire offers the best chance of deriving reliable information. Although tobacco and alcohol are in a general sense ‘legalised’, some of the questions reveal the extent of under-age purchase of alcoholic beverages. Information about personal and use of ‘illegal’ drugs is presented, together with the perceived danger associated with their use. ‘Young People and Illegal Drugs in 2000’ (Balding, 2000) provides a more detailed analysis of the findings. See also ‘Trends: Young People and Smoking 1983-2005’ and ‘Trends-Young People and Alcohol 1983-2005’.

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Alcoholic drinks

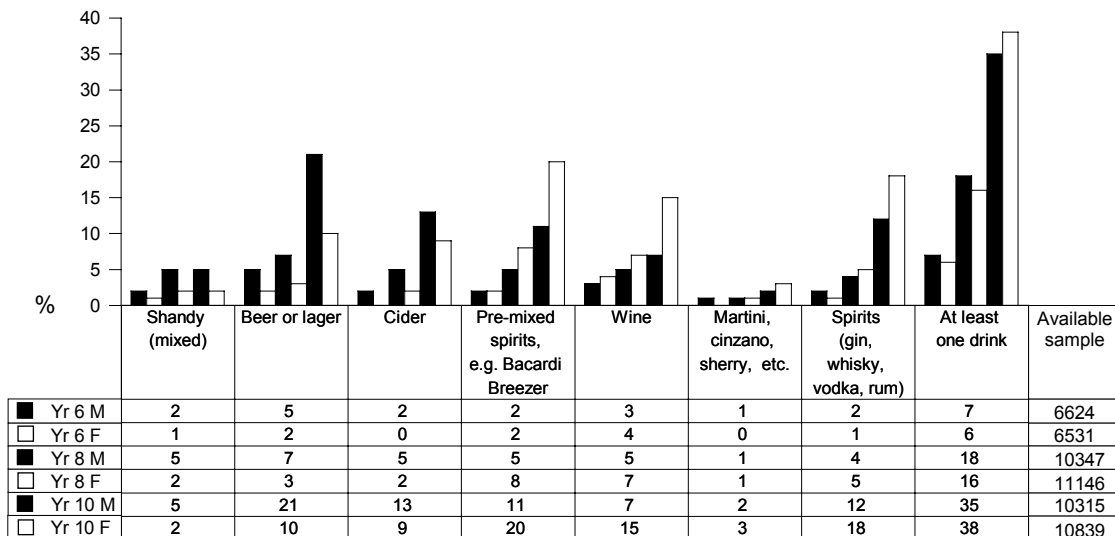
Up to 38% of the Year 10's had consumed *at least one drink*

During the last 7 days, have you had any of these alcoholic drinks?

Comments

1. *Pre-mixed spirits* is the most popular drinks group for the females, and beer or lager for the males. The table shows that at least 16% of the Year 8 pupils, and up to 38% of the Year 10 pupils, had consumed at least one of these drinks.
2. The inclusion of figures from Year 6 suggests that alcohol careers are established at an early age.
3. *Pre-mixed spirits* account for 20% and *spirits* account for 18% of the choice from Year 10 females.

1. We note that more Year 10 females than males drank *pre-mixed spirits, wine* and *spirits*.
2. As noted in the introduction, the figures seen in our studies for the proportion of young people using alcohol in the previous week have been higher than those found in other research.



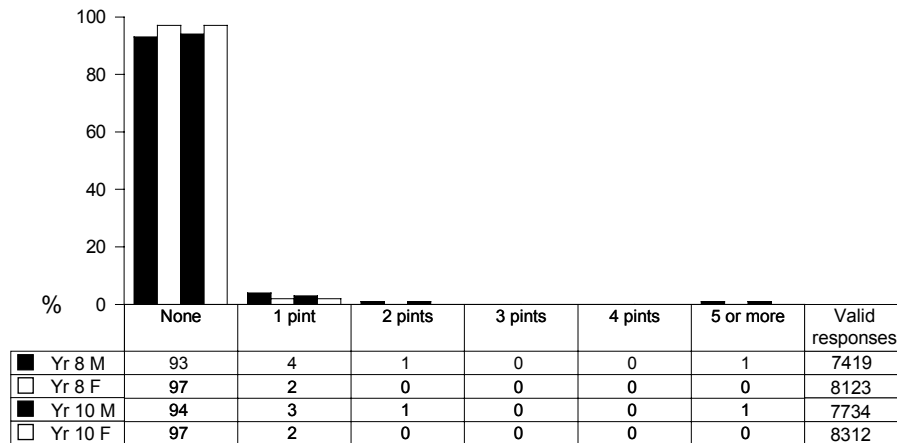
Mixed shandy

A young males' drink

During the last 7 days, how many pints of mixed shandy have you drunk?

Half-pints are rounded up to the next whole pint. One pint is taken as one unit of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake.

1. The males are the principal drinkers of mixed shandy.



Comments

1. Beer and lemonade are needed to produce a mixed shandy. The message seems to be that the Year 10s are less keen to dilute their beer with lemonade.
2. As suggested in previous volumes with data about canned shandy and supported by the decline with age, the mixing of shandy with lemonade may serve as an introduction to the taste of beer to the younger age group.

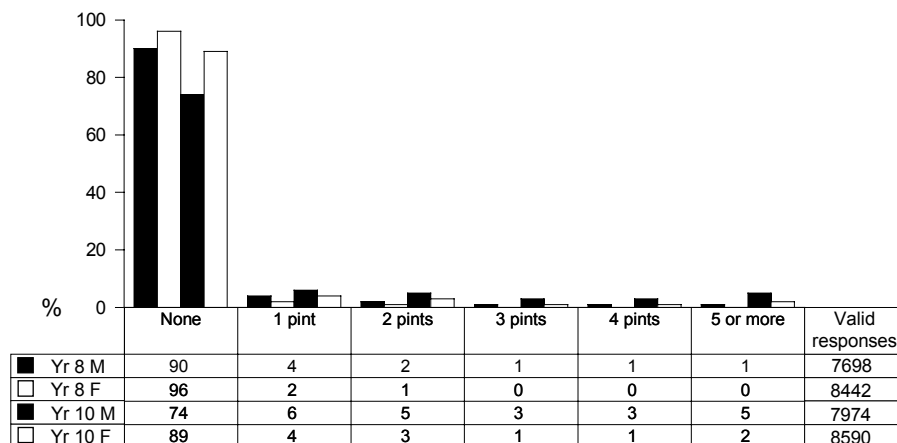
Beer or lager

26% of the Year 10 males drank at least 1 pint

During the last 7 days, how many pints of beer or lager have you drunk?

One pint is counted as two units of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake, and half a pint is counted as one unit.

1. The attraction of beer or lager is much greater to the Year 10s, and to the 21% of older males in particular, although 11% of the Year 10 females report drinking beer or lager in the last 7 days.



Comments

1. Beer or lager is a predominantly male type of drink, although in 1995 a quarter of the females had drunk some – we suspect that this may have been lager rather than beer.
2. Data from 1983 (SHEU, 'Trends-Young People and Alcohol. 1983-2005'), show there is an overall downward trend in 12-15 year olds drinking beer or lager 'in the last 7 days'. However, the following table shows a comparison between 1991 and 2008 of those 14-15 year old males that drank at least 1 pint 'in the last 7 days':

During the last 7 days, how many pints of beer or lager have you drunk?	None	1 pint	2 pints	3 pints	4 pints	5 pints+
Males 14-15yrs. (2008)	74%	6%	5%	3%	3%	5%
Males 14-15yrs. (1991)	66%	16%	7%	4%	2%	4%

Direct comparisons between years are misleading. However to gauge a trend, the data suggest that fewer report no drinking in 2008 (74%). 5% (2008) compared with 4% (1991) report drinking 5 pints or more. It would thus appear that fewer are drinking but 'drinkers' are consuming more.

Cider

16% of 14-15 year old males drank one or more pints

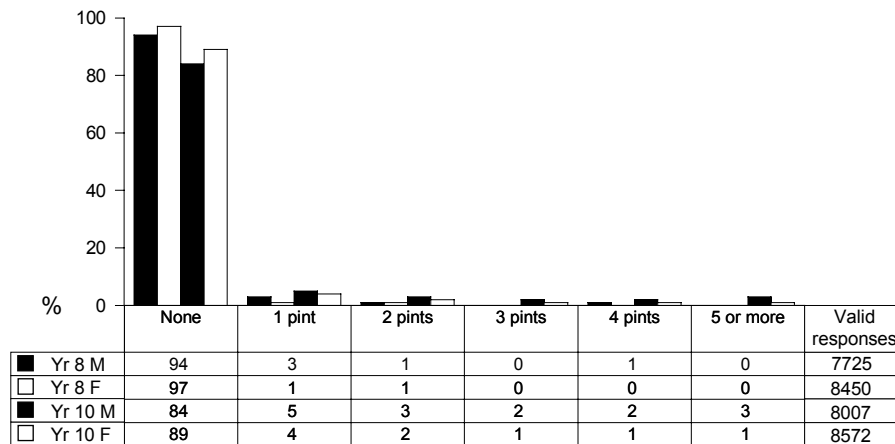
During the last 7 days, how many pints of cider have you drunk?

Comments

One pint is counted as two units of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake, and half a pint is counted as one unit.

1. Cider appeals mainly to a small percentage of older males with 16% of 14-15 year old males who reported drinking one or more pints.

1. We have noticed from our regional surveys that cider consumption does vary across the UK.



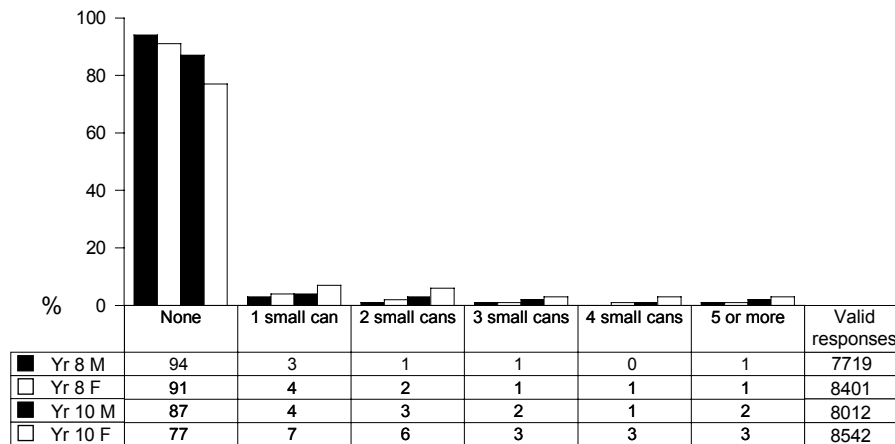
Pre-mixed spirit drinks

23% of Year 10 females drank at least 1 can/bottle

During the last 7 days, how many cans/bottles of pre-mixed spirit drinks have you drunk?

One can/bottle is taken as half a pint, and half-pints are rounded up to the next whole pint. One can/bottle is taken as one unit of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake,

1. Pre-mixed spirit drinks (e.g. Alcopops) have an appeal to Year 10 females and 23% drank at least 1 can/bottle.



Comments

1. These controversial drinks were launched with a lot of publicity, and were immediately added to the 'Young People...' questionnaire checklist in 1995.
2. A fear was voiced that 'alcopops' would be a gentle way of developing a taste for alcohol, and may have been marketed in part with that intention. In a detailed discussion of the place of 'alcopops' in young people's drinking patterns, ('Young People and Alcohol', Balding, 1997), we concluded that the consumers of alcoholic soft drinks tended also to consume a wider variety of other alcoholic drinks, which did not argue the case either way. However, we also discovered that the 'alcopoppers' were more likely to drink alcohol in places away from home compared with the others.
3. Since 1996 the figures for Year 10 females, who reported drinking at least 1 can/bottle, have ranged from 18% (1998/99) to 31% (2004) and currently stand at 23%

Wine

18% of older females drank at least one glass

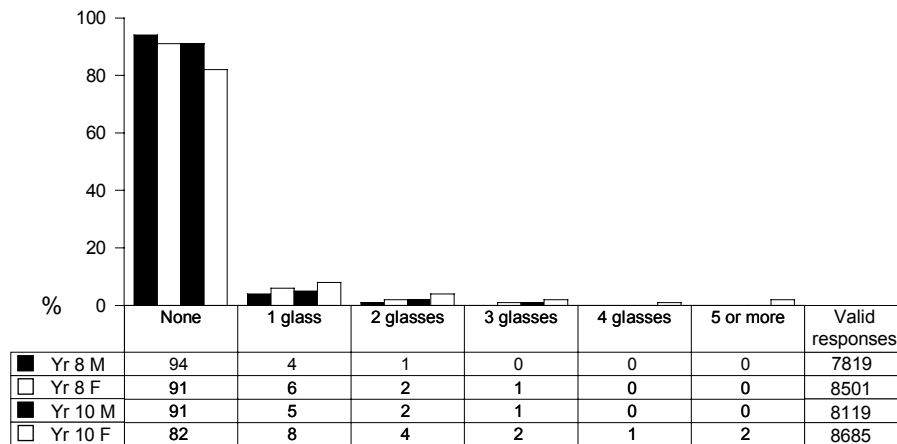
During the last 7 days, how many glasses of wine have you drunk?

One glass is taken as one unit of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake.

1. There is little gender difference in Year 8, but in Year 10 more females than males had drunk some wine in the last 7 days.

Comments

1. Our surveys have usually shown wine to be a 'female' drink'; page 51 shows that it was drunk by more females than males.
2. We suspect that most wine-drinking goes on at home and adults buying wine from supermarkets with the family shopping. Drinking with meals is one way of introducing children to alcohol 'responsibly'.
3. Figures from 1996, for Year 10 females, range from 25% (1996) to 16% (2007) drinking at least one glass during the last 7 days.



Fortified wine

Not much appeal for young people

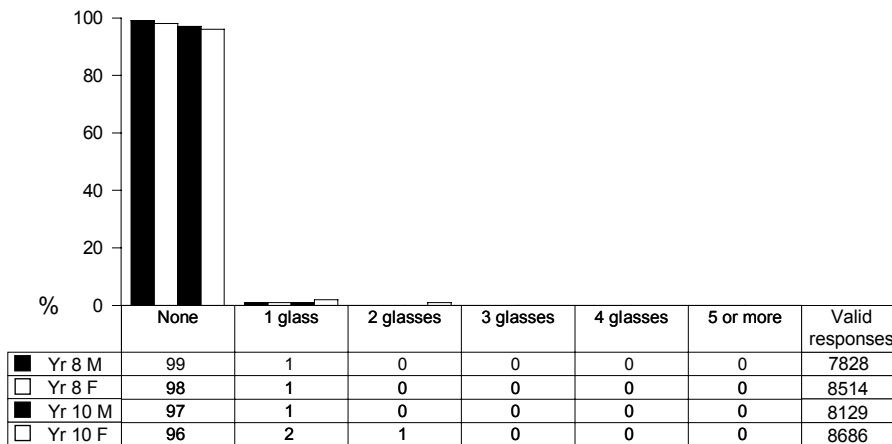
During the last 7 days, how many glasses of fortified wine have you drunk?

One glass is taken as one unit of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake.

1. Few pupils had drunk any fortified wine; it is slightly more popular with the Year 10 females.

Comments

1. The questionnaire gives *Martini, Cinzano, Sherry, etc.* as examples of fortified wine.
2. These drinks have generally declined in popularity with the exception of port.



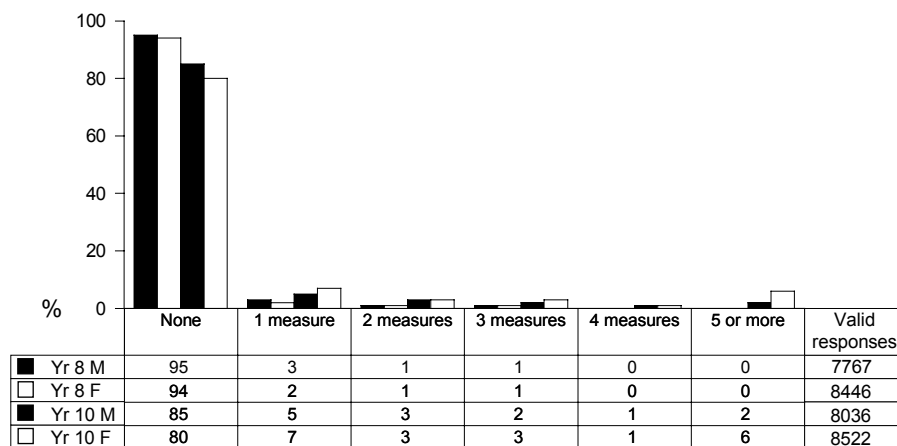
Spirits

20% of Year 10 females had drunk one or more measures

During the last 7 days, how many measures of spirits have you drunk?

One measure is taken as one unit of alcohol when assessing total alcohol intake.

1. Very little difference is noticeable between males and females with Year 10 females again consuming more than the males.



Comments

1. The Year 10 females 'overtook' the males as spirit-drinkers in 1996, although the females have always been behind the males in Year 8. Clearly they develop a taste for strong beverages around the age of 14.
2. We suspect that the amorphous nature of 'alcopops', which now include many spirit-based drinks, have enhanced the recent percentages (see page 55).
3. Data from 1983 (SHEU, 'Trends-Young People and Alcohol. 1983-2005'), show there is no overall downward trend in 12-15 year olds drinking spirits 'in the last 7 days'. However, the following table shows a comparison between 1991 and 2008 of those 14-15 year old females that drank at least 1 measure 'in the last 7 days':

During the last 7 days, how many measures of spirit have you drunk?	None	1	2	3	4	5+
Females 14-15yrs. (2008)	80%	7%	3%	3%	1%	6%
Females 14-15yrs. (1991)	87%	5%	3%	1%	1%	3%

In 2008, 20% drank at least 1 measure (13% in 1991) and 6% drank 5 or more measures 'in the last 7 days'. It would thus appear that more are drinking spirits and 'drinkers' are consuming more.

Alcohol units consumed

15% of the Year 10 males report drinking more than 10 units

The total number of units of alcohol consumed in the last 7 days

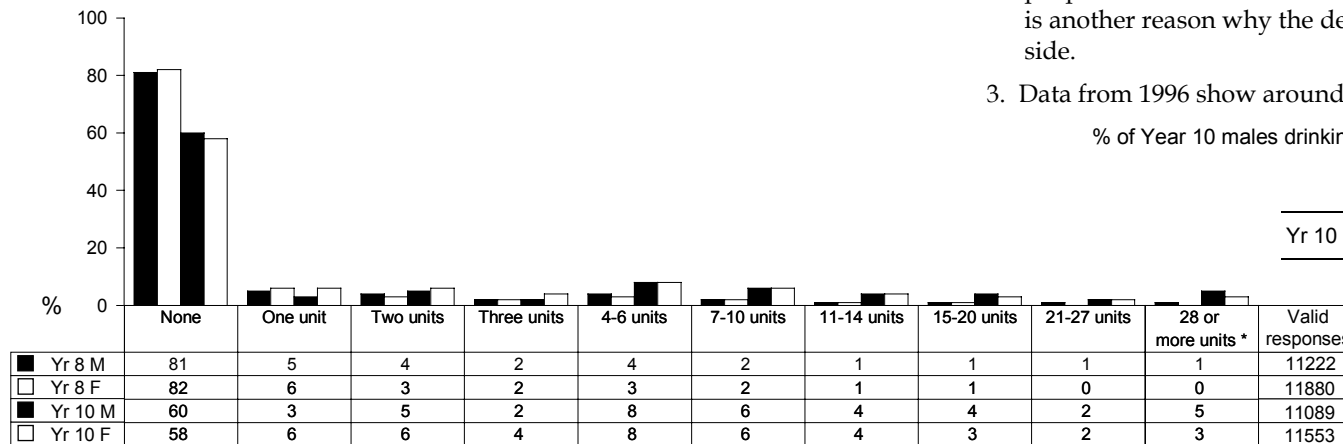
- 15% of Year 10 males drank 10 or more units of alcohol in the previous 7 days compared with 12% of older females.

Comments

- On previous pages if the recorded amount of each individual type of drink includes a half measure, this is rounded up to the next whole amount. We feel this is justified in many cases, since glasses of drink poured between friends are likely to contain more liquid than official measures. However, when calculating the units for the table on this page, the original record is referred to.
- The number of units of alcohol consumed by beer and cider drinkers is also certainly under-estimated, as the lowest alcohol levels (one unit per half-pint) are assumed for all beers and ciders drunk. The fact that young people's 'measures' of wines and spirits may in some cases be generous is another reason why the derived number of units may be on the low side.
- Data from 1996 show around 15% of older males drinking more than 10 units

% of Year 10 males drinking more than 10 alcohol units during the last 7 days

	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Yr 10 Males	20%	18%	14%	19%	16%	14%	15%



Alcohol: drinking/drunk days

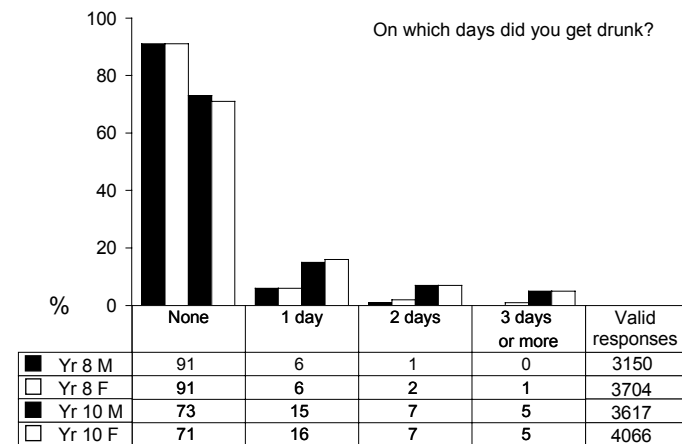
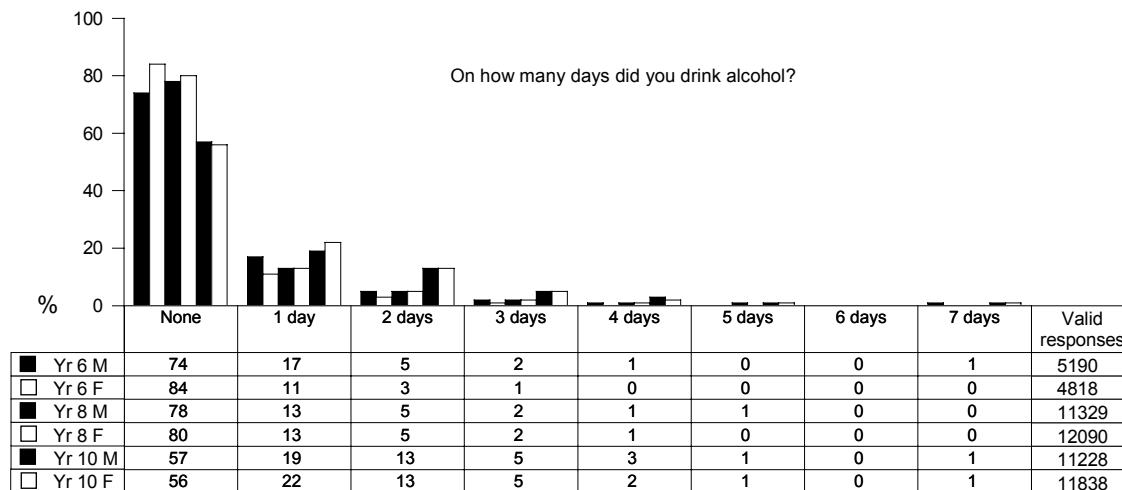
23% of the Year 10 males drank on 2 days or more and 28% of the Year 10 females got drunk

**During the last 7 days, on how many days did you drink alcohol?
During the last 7 days, on which days did you get drunk?**

Comments

1. In all year groups, the male drinkers outnumbered the females, and also tended to drink on more days. However, on average more than half the 'drinkers' drank on only one day during the past week.
2. 23% of the Year 10 males and 22% of the Year 10 females drank on two days or more.
3. Up to 28% got drunk 'during the last seven days' with older females reporting slightly higher percentages than older males

1. We see that by Year 8 at least half the potential Year 10 'drinkers' have already acquired some taste for alcohol.
2. Drinking habits of adults in general are quite regular, while that of younger adults in the 18-25 age range is more likely to feature 'binge' drinking. For young drinkers there is evidence to suggest that for some 13 - 16 year olds the figure of at least five alcoholic drinks in one session is not uncommon ('Education and Health', 2002, 20:3:46).
3. Most of those who got drunk did so on Friday and Saturday evening.



Sources of alcohol

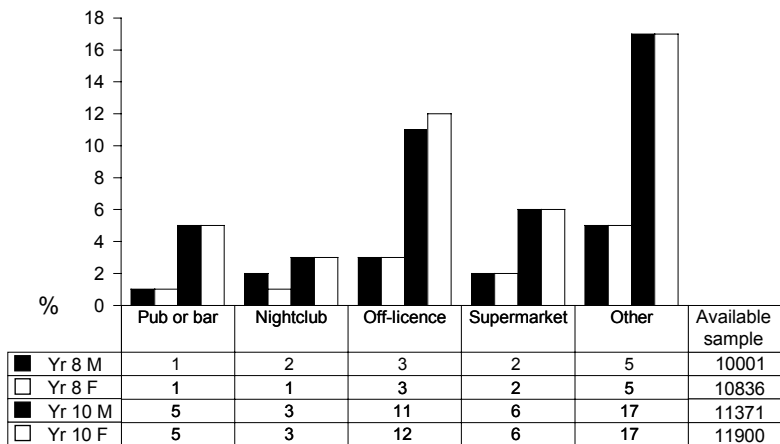
Off-licences feature strongly

Have you bought alcoholic drink at any of these places during the last 7 days?

1. The *off-licence* is clearly a most important source of purchased alcoholic drink, especially for the 14-15 year olds, with the *supermarket/pub or bar* as the next major source of alcohol purchased.

Comments

1. The sites for drinking alcohol (whether purchased or not) are given overleaf.
2. It is suspected that alcohol purchased by young people is more likely to be connected to alcohol abuse and public nuisance than alcohol supplied in the home.
3. Purchases of alcoholic drink are age-restricted, and while at 16 you may buy cigarettes, (see page 65) you must be 18 before buying alcohol.

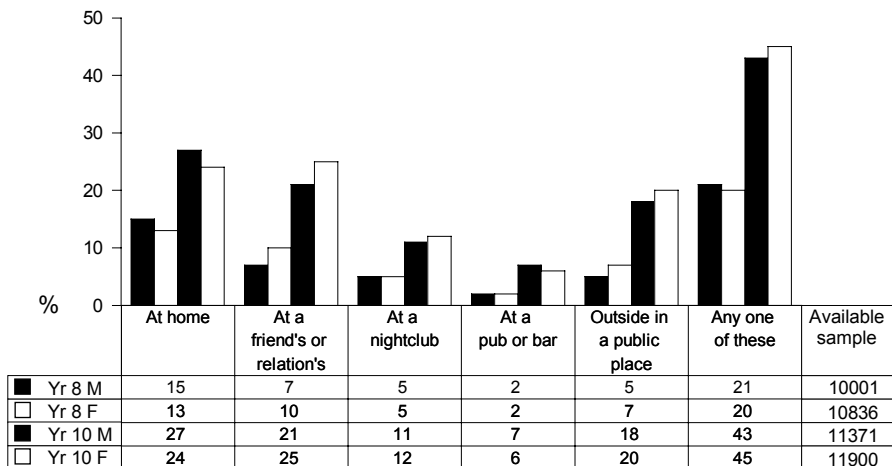


Drinking venues

More young people consume alcohol *at home* than anywhere else

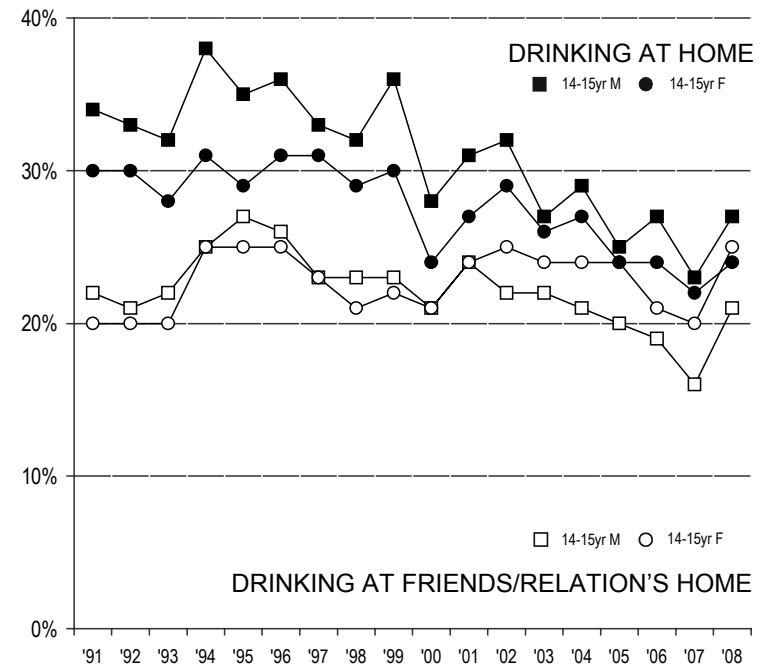
Have you had an alcoholic drink in any of these places during the last 7 days?

1. Most 'drinkers' drank at *home*.
2. Substantial numbers of 14-15 year old 'drinkers' used all the listed venues.



Comments

1. The chart below shows that since 1991 14-15 year olds consistently report drinking in a friends/relation's home. Although drinking in the pupils' own home is a more popular venue the percentages are seen to be on a general decline.



Drinking at home

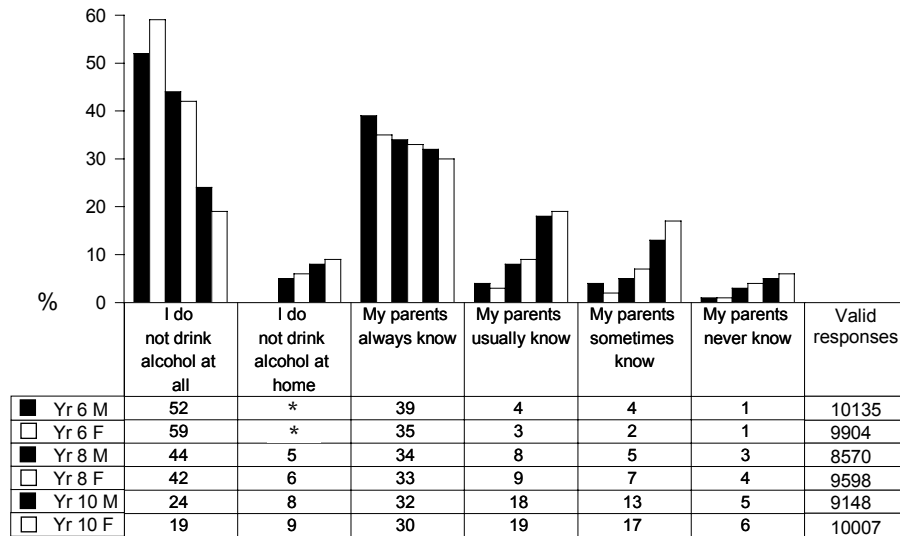
Parents of 14-15 year olds are less likely to know

If you ever drink alcohol at home, do your parents know?

1. Up to 39% say that parents always know.
2. Of those older pupils who do drink at home, about half do so with their parents always knowing about it.

Comments

1. The question was added because of interest in the amount of alcohol being drunk during the previous week at home – always the most popular venue. The answer is that there is quite a lot of clandestine drinking going on among the older pupils.
2. The young people who say they do not drink at home may contain a substantial proportion who do not drink currently at all. These figures place an upper limit on the proportion of ‘never drinkers’, as we have no routinely collected information on drinking attitudes and experience to match that with respect to illegal drugs.



* Option not available for Year 6

Cigarettes smoked

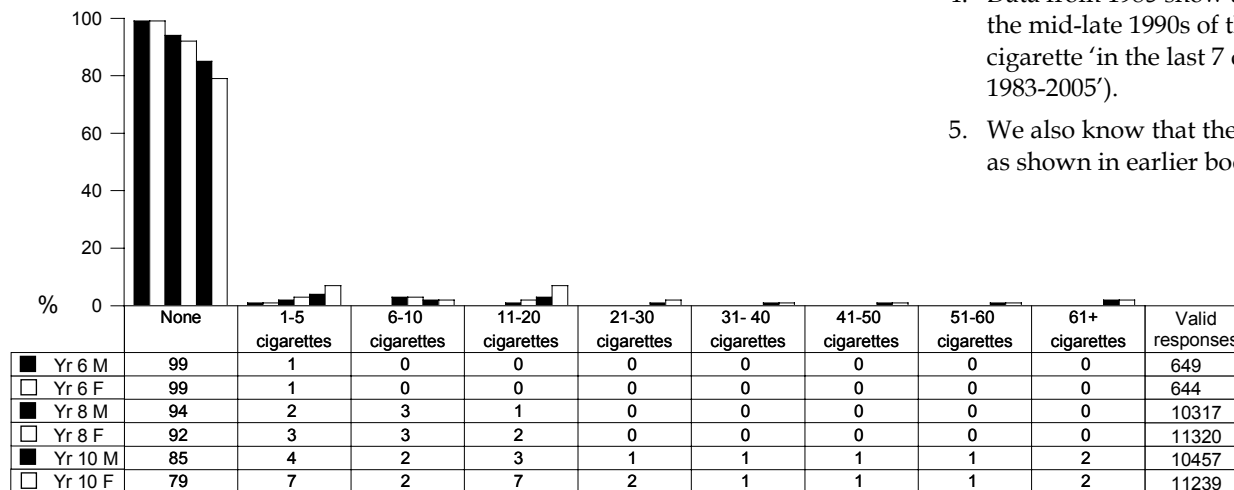
21% of the Year 10 females smoke

How many cigarettes have you smoked during the last 7 days?

Comments

1. More Year 8 & 10 females than males had smoked and there were more smokers in Year 10.
2. There is no significant gender difference in those Year 10 pupils reporting smoking more than 20 cigarettes.
3. 21% Year 10 females smoke, 18% smoke up to 30 cigarettes a week.

1. Assuming that many females may be going out with males older than themselves, it is possible that the Year 10s partners have smoking levels similar to the ones seen here.
2. Smoking levels of up to 30 a week are not thought addictive in adults; what is known about young people's addiction levels?
3. Smoking levels have increased rather than decreased since the publication of the 'Health of the Nation' targets in 1992 and 'Our Healthier Nation' in 1999.
4. Data from 1985 show an upward trend which may have peaked around the mid-late 1990s of those 12-15 years olds that report smoking at least 1 cigarette 'in the last 7 days' (SHEU, 'Trends-Young People and Smoking, 1983-2005').
5. We also know that the smoking levels vary widely from school to school, as shown in earlier books in this series.



Sources of cigarettes

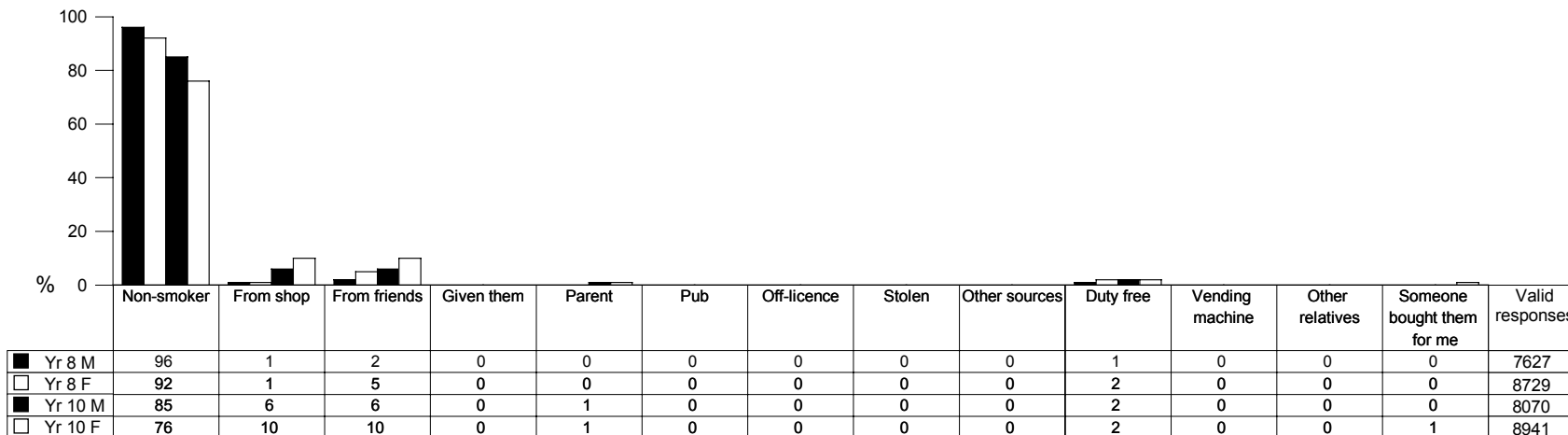
Shops and friends were the main source

If you have smoked recently, where did you get your last cigarettes from?

Comments

1. For the Year 8 smokers, *friends* were the main source. In Year 10, *shops* were the most important source.

1. Purchases by under-16s are illegal, but our sympathies are with any shop-keeper trying to judge the age of 14-15 year olds; fortunately there are age-verification cards available.
2. The friends that supplied cigarettes to the Year 8 smokers may be older than themselves.
3. The information about cigarette purchases can be related to the question on spending money (page ??). There is a very high degree of overlap – greater than 95%.



Type of smoker

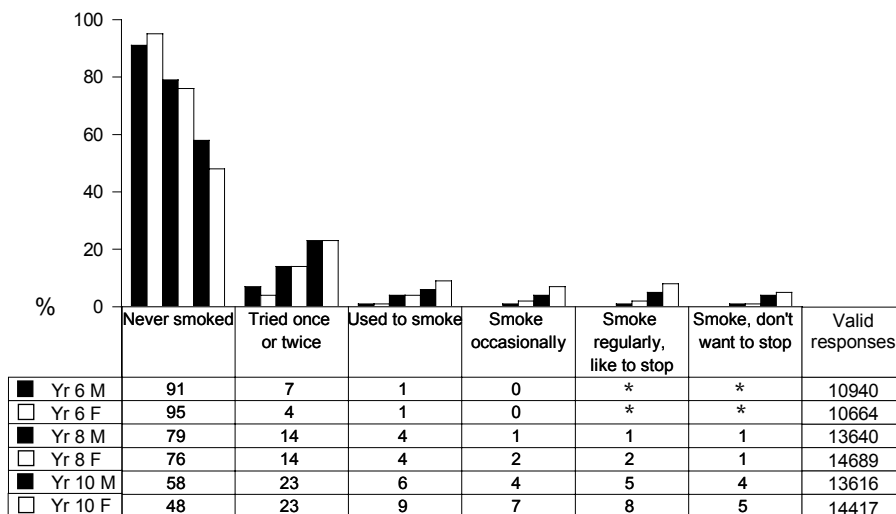
Up to 52% will have smoked by Year 10

What kind of smoker are you?

1. In Year 6 around 93% report *never smoked*. By Year 10, this number declines to 58% for males and 48% for females.
4. 52% of Year 10 females have smoked.
5. The majority of the current smokers say that they would *like to stop*.

Comments

1. Two-thirds of smokers want to give up. If addiction is not their problem, can we help them? Raw et al's (1998) publication recommends interventions shown to be effective with adults should be considered for use with young people with the content modified as necessary - this includes stop-smoking groups and the possible use of nicotine replacement therapy.
2. We used to ask *Do we believe the ones who say that they want to give up?* It's an easy claim to make, but it might be offered that if they really wanted to quit they would. We believe them more since we related their level of anxiety about smoking to their desire to give up: those that want to give up are much more worried about smoking than other smokers ('No Worries?' Balding, 1998).
3. By the time young people reach Year 10, the majority will have tried cigarettes. Is it realistic to try to discourage experimentation? The table shows that fewer than half the number of those who have experimented are currently smoking.
4. The table below shows data from 1996 of older pupils who report smoking regularly. There is a general decline in the percentages:



	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008
Yr 10 Males	20%	17%	14%	17%	14%	10%	9%
Yr 10 Females	24%	23%	22%	20%	21%	15%	13%

* Year 6 pupils were not asked about these activities

Smokers in the home

Around 45% live in a 'smoky' home

How many people smoke on most days in your home?

The question asks the respondents to include themselves and regular visitors if they smoke at home.

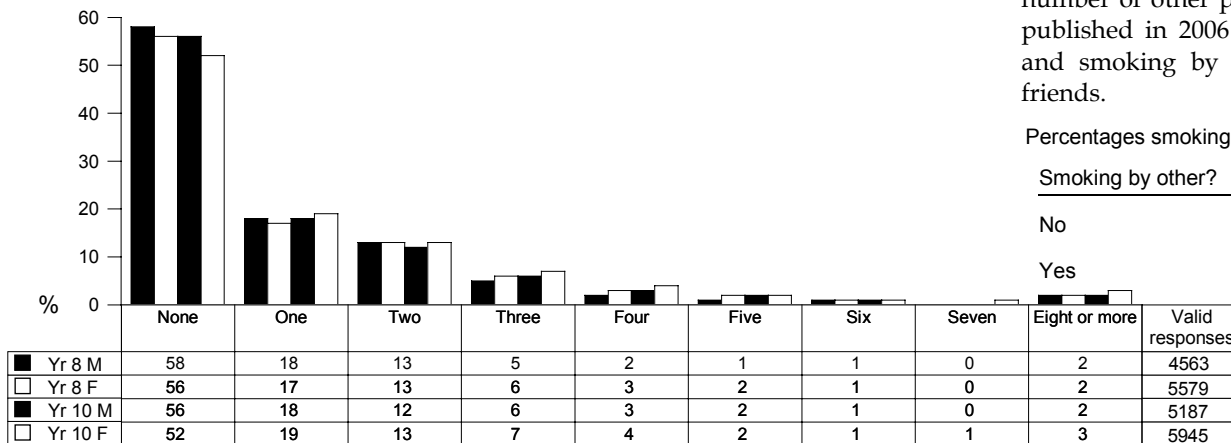
1. Non-smoking/smoking households are evenly matched.
2. These figures seem to 'clump': smokers are more likely to be found where there is another smoker.

Comments

1. 'Smoking in the home' does not necessarily mean that the house is smoky. It could be banned from communal rooms, or smokers could even be sent outside.
2. Children in 'smoking' homes may experience approval, rather than just tolerance, of smoking, and are more likely to grow up thinking that it is a normal, even expected, behaviour with important pleasures and rewards.
3. Young people's own smoking habit is strongly correlated with the number of other people smoking at home. We repeat below an analysis published in 2006 showing powerful links between the smoking habit and smoking by family and friends – especially siblings and close friends.

Percentages smoking among Year 10 females, by smoking among family and friends

Smoking by other?	Mother	Father	Brother	Sister	Friend
No	14%	15%	17%	17%	4%
Yes	37%	31%	38%	46%	38%



Beliefs about drugs

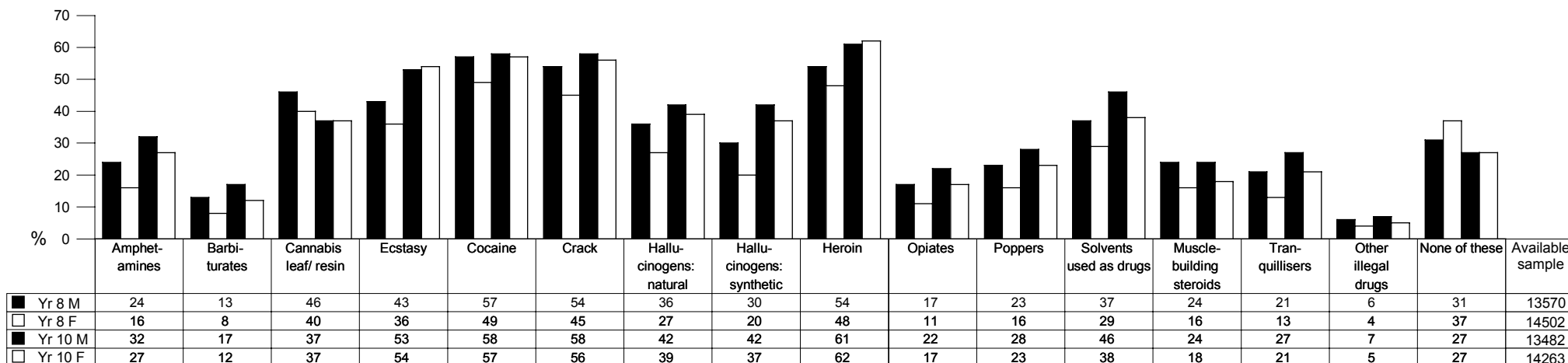
As pupils get older, fewer think that cannabis is *always unsafe*

What do you know about these drugs? Response to 'Always unsafe'

1. There is up to 9% difference between the Year 8s and the Year 10s response to the dangers of cannabis, and, uniquely, it does decline with age.
2. More older females than males think that ecstasy is *always unsafe*.
3. Up to 62% think heroin is *always unsafe*.

Comments

1. The format of this question has changed in recent years from that used in the past in the following response options: *Never heard of them; Know nothing about them; Safe if used properly*, and *Always unsafe*. Thus it is not easy to say if young people have changed their perceptions of safety of these different drugs, but we are very confident that the response of year 10 pupils are now more complacent than in previous years.
2. We report responses to *Always unsafe* and can say that the relative safety of drugs has not changed with heroin, ecstasy, cocaine and crack being thought most risky.



Contact with drug users

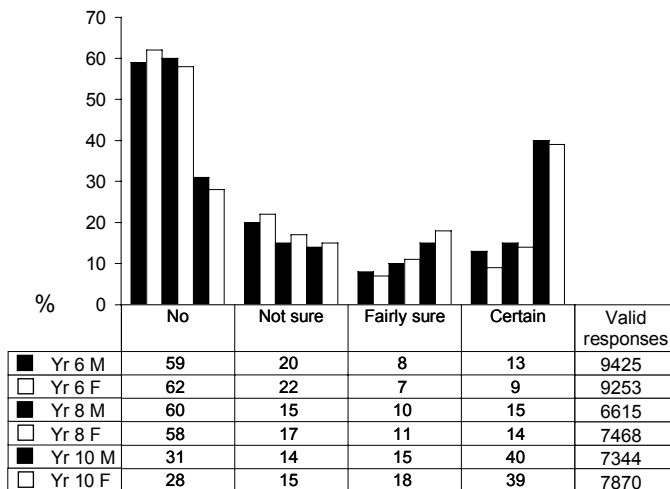
Up to 55% of the 14-15 year olds are *fairly sure* or *certain* that they know a drug user

Do you know anyone personally who you think takes any of these drugs?

1. Similar numbers of older males and females thought they knew someone.
2. Up to 21% of the Year 6s, up to 25% of the Year 8s, and up to 55% of the Year 10s, claimed to be *fairly sure* or *certain*.

Comments

1. Since knowledge of other drug users is a key to obtaining drugs, the proportion of Year 6s reporting that they think they know some one who uses at least one of the listed drugs presents concern for the potential future behaviour of these young people.
2. This does not mean that up to 21% of Year 6 pupils take drugs, since 99 pupils in a school could all be thinking of the same one person, who may not even be a school pupil. We emphasise personal knowledge to exclude depictions of drug use in the media, and give a prompt to exclude users of drugs as medicines.



Experience of drugs

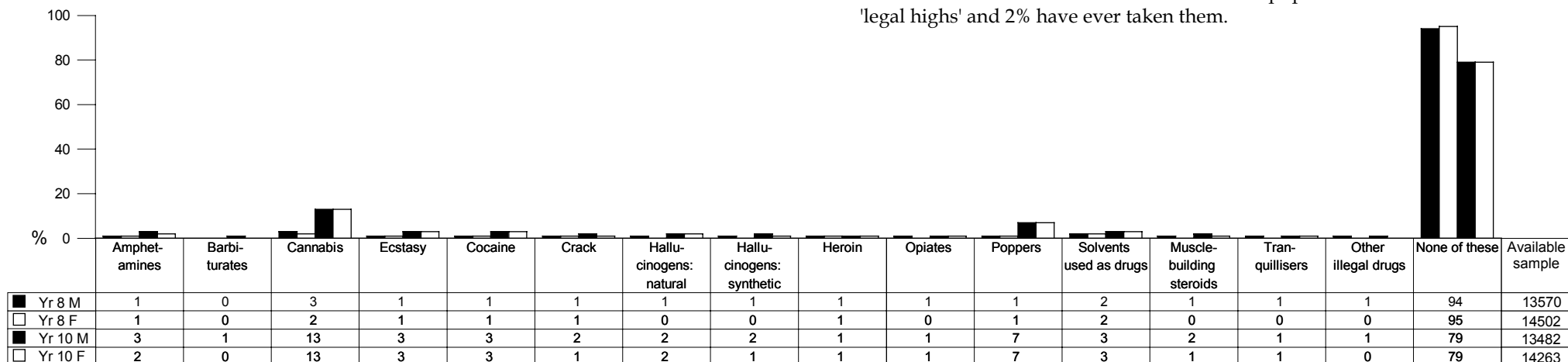
13% of the Year 10 pupils have taken cannabis

Have you ever taken any of these drugs?

1. About 1 in 5 pupils in Year 10 – four times as many as in Year 8 – have tried at least one of these drugs.
2. Cannabis is by far the most likely drug to have been tried, with 13% of males reporting having taken it. The percentage for other drugs taken are significantly lower. The use of poppers is slightly higher being taken by up to 7% of Year 10s.

Comments

1. We reported in 2000, 'Young People and Illegal Drugs' (Balding, 2000), a steady rise in reports of drug experimentation among Year 10 pupils from 1987-1995/6, levels. This was followed by a drop between 1996 and 1999. From 1999 onwards we have seen a recovery to about the same levels as the peak in 1995/6. For further discussion see page xxv.
2. Clearly the drug careers of young people expand from Year 8 - an indicator of the need to review the timing of drug education within both primary and secondary schools.
3. Around 20% of 14-15 year-olds have ever tried illegal drugs; local surveys indicate that in some areas 3% of these Year 10 pupils have been offered 'legal highs' and 2% have ever taken them.



More than one drug

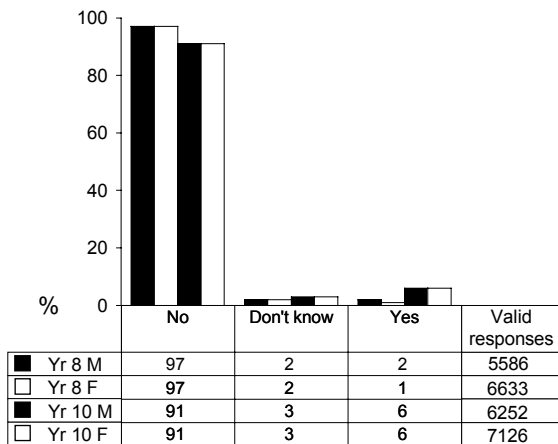
6% of the Year 10 pupils have combined more than one drug

Have you ever taken more than one type of drug on the same occasion?

Comments

1. 6% of pupils in Year 10 say they have taken one or more type of drug on the same occasion.
2. The proportion in Year 8 is much smaller.
3. There is no gender difference.

1. This was a new question in 2002 and pupils are referred to the list of drugs printed in the questionnaire. This list excludes alcohol which is the subject of the next question and reported on the following page.
2. This question tries to shift the emphasis from experimentation towards behaviour that is obviously risky.



Drugs and alcohol

Up to 15% of the 14-15 year olds have mixed drugs and alcohol

Have you ever taken drugs and alcohol on the same occasion?

Comments

1. Up to 15% of older pupils have taken drugs and alcohol on the same occasion.
2. 14% of older males and 15% of older females say 'Yes'.
3. The issue is also age related as 2% of the 12-13 year olds report mixing drugs compared with up to 15% of 14-15 year olds.

1. Drug use associated with alcohol use is not uncommon in the experience of young people who have ever taken drugs.
2. Again, we are looking at a behaviour that suggests a less cautious attitude to risk.

