Introduction

Welcome to a summary of the fourth AYPH research update. The full research update is available to AYPH members. The focus of this issue is on the latest research developments into young people’s use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal substances. To source the latest developments in this area, we have reviewed current research in peer reviewed journals and consulted members on their current research activities. We have found that a lot of research has been done on young people’s use of alcohol but slightly fewer recent studies on the smoking habits and substance use of young people.

The theme of this research update is important given the high levels of drinking, smoking and drug use by young people in the UK. According to a report published in 2009, children in England are more likely to drink alcohol than children in many other countries and by the age of 15, most young people have drunk alcohol (Donaldson, 2009). Alcohol misuse greatly impacts health services, and each year over 7,600 children aged 11–17 are admitted to hospital as a result of a condition specifically due to alcohol consumption. The impact of substance use on young people is equally concerning. The latest statistics from the NHS Information Centre show that 22 per cent of 11-15 year olds reported having ever taken drugs. Although the statistics show that the prevalence of regular smoking by young people is in decline, almost one third (29 per cent) of 11 – 15 year olds have tried smoking at least once.

This summary focuses on the key statistical trends of alcohol, tobacco and drug use by young people. The full research update also includes a range of links, resources and summaries of research papers focusing on alcohol and substance use amongst young people.

Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England in 2009

A recent report published on 22nd July 2010 by the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care contains results from an annual survey of secondary school pupils in years 7 to 11 (mostly aged 11 to 15) on smoking, drinking and drug use. The survey report presents information on the percentage of pupils who have ever smoked, tried alcohol or taken drugs. The report explores the attitudes and beliefs of school children towards smoking, drinking and drug use and where children obtain cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. Relationships between smoking, drinking and drug use are explored along with the links between smoking, drinking and drug use and other factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, previous truancy or exclusion.
The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) carried out the survey on behalf of The NHS Information Centre for health and social care, the Home Office and the Department for Education (formerly the Department for Children, Schools and Families). In total 7,674 pupils in 247 schools in England completed questionnaires in the autumn term of 2009. This is the most recent survey in a series that began in 1982.

The survey sample represents an estimated population of 3.1 million young people aged between 11 and 15. Findings indicate that in England in 2009 around 180,000 11 to 15 years olds were regular smokers, around 540,000 drank alcohol in the last week, around 250,000 had taken drugs (including glue, gas and other volatile substances) in the last month and around 450,000 had taken drugs in the last year. The full report is available to download at: http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/Health%20and%20Lifestyles/sdd2009/SDD_2009_Report.pdf

### The key findings of the report show that:

- 22% of 11-15 year old pupils reported having ever taken drugs, 15% had taken drugs in the last year and 8% had taken drugs in the last month, a decrease from 29%, 20% and 12% respectively in 2001 (the first year in which the current method of measuring drug use was used).
- Less than one in ten pupils thought that it would be OK for someone of their age to try drugs or take them regularly.
- Pupils were slightly more tolerant of cannabis use (9% thought it OK to try once, 5% to take once a week) than sniffing glue (9% once, 3% once a week) and cocaine was seen as the least acceptable of the drugs (3% thought it OK to try once, 1% to take once a week).
- Almost all pupils thought their families would either try to stop them from taking drugs (84%) or would try to persuade them to stop (15%). There was a strong relationship between drug use and families’ attitudes: those who thought their families would try to stop taking drugs were less likely to have taken drugs than those who thought their families would take a more lenient view.
- Three in ten (29%) pupils have tried smoking at least once, the lowest percentage since the survey began in 1982 when 53% of pupils had tried smoking. The prevalence of regular smoking has declined from its peak of 13% in 1996 to 6% in 2007 and has remained at 6% in 2008 and 2009.
- 51% of pupils have tried alcohol at least once and 18% drank alcohol in the last week, a decrease from the peak of 26% in 2001. The percentage of pupils between 11 and 15 who have never drunk alcohol has risen in recent years from 39% in 2003 to 49% in 2009.

### Data from the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) is a cross-national research study conducted in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The study aims to gain new insight into, and increase our understanding of young people's health and well-being, health behaviours and their social context.

The report of the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey (HBSC) 2009 explores young people’s alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland based on 2006 data (note: Northern Ireland is not included in this study).
Smoking
Overall girls (7.4%) were more likely than boys (5.4%) to report that they smoked daily. Differences between England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland in smoking were minor, ranging only from 5.1% to 7.1%; although both 13-year-old girls in Wales and 15-year-old boys in Ireland were more likely to report daily smoking than their peers in the other countries. Young people with low family affluence (10.3%) were more likely to report that they smoked daily compared to those with medium (6.3%) and high family affluence (5.1%). This was particularly clear among girls.

Drinking Beer, Wine and Alcopops
There were significant differences between age groups in the percentages of young people who reported that they were drunk more than 4 times, with 15-year-olds most likely to report drunkenness (25.9%) followed by 13- (8.6%) and 11-year-olds (1.6%). Significant age differences were found in both genders in each country. The highest percentage of young people who have been drunk at least 4 times were found in Wales (14.1%) and Scotland (14.0%) followed by England (12.0%) and Ireland (8.6%). Overall boys (12.9%) were significantly more likely than girls (3.7%) to report that they drink beer weekly; gender differences were significant in every country and at all age groups, except for 11-year-olds in Ireland. Young people in England were most likely to report drinking beer at least weekly (11.2%), followed by Wales (10.2%), Scotland (8.0%) and Ireland (3.8%). Overall there were significant differences between age groups in the percentages of young people who drink wine weekly; it was highest among 15-year-olds (5.8%), followed by 13- (3.1%) and 11-year-olds (1.2%). Overall significantly more girls (10.2%) than boys (7.7%) reported that they drink Alcopops weekly; within countries girls were more likely to report weekly Alcopop drinking in England, Scotland and Wales at age 15, and boys were more likely than girls to report weekly Alcopop drinking at age 11 in Scotland. Young people with low family affluence were, in general, more likely to report daily smoking and weekly consumption of beer, cider, wine and Alcopops.

Cannabis
The percentage of young people who reported that they had used cannabis at least once in the last 30 days was highest in Scotland (12%), followed by Wales (11.3%), Ireland (9.6%) and England (9.2%). Only Scotland and England differed significantly from one another; young people in Scotland were more likely to report cannabis use than those in England. Young people with low family affluence (15.9%) were more likely to report that they had used cannabis at least once in the last 30 days than those with medium and high family affluence (both 9.6%). These patterns were clearest among boys in Ireland and girls in England.

To download the full report, see: http://www hbsc.org/downloads/YoungPeoplesHealth_GB&Ireland.pdf

Parental Guidance about Drinking
A recent paper in the Journal of Adolescence looks at the role of parental guidance as a mediating factor in the consumption of alcohol and substance use by adolescents. The study looks at adolescents’ accounts of what their parents said to them concerning alcohol. Data was used from a 2007 survey of 2,179 UK school students (1,004 boys and 1,175 girls) aged 15 and 16 years attending 99 schools.
Over one fifth of the overall sample said they received no guidance about alcohol from their parents while, at the other end of the scale the two smallest groups (both under one tenth of the sample) asserted either that their parents were totally unfavourable and controlling towards alcohol or that they were highly permissive towards it. Cannabis and other illegal drug use were least common amongst those whose parents discouraged drinking and those who claimed to have received no parental guidance. The heaviest substance users were
from families with more favourable, tolerant attitudes to alcohol and intoxication and among students who failed to answer the questions about parental guidance. For the full article see: Miller, P and M. Plant (2010) Parental guidance about drinking: Relationship with teenage psychoactive substance use. *Journal of Adolescence* 33, 55–68

**Impact of Alcohol Consumption on Young People: A Review of Reviews**

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2009 published a review of reviews relating to the impact of alcohol consumption on young people.

The report identifies some key themes in reducing the risk of harmful drinking amongst young people including:

- Children who first use alcohol in a home environment and learn about its effects from parents are less likely to misuse alcohol than those who begin drinking outside the home and experiment with peers.
- Delaying the time of a young person’s first drink may reduce the risk of harmful drinking.
- Having adults who retain good relationships with a young person, characterised by appropriate levels of support and control, is likely to be protective.

The review identifies significant evidence gaps in the area of alcohol use by, and its consequences in, children and young people. For the full report see: Newbury-Birch, et al. (2009) Impact of Alcohol Consumption on Young People; A Review of Reviews - Department of Children, School and Families

http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Review%20of%20existing%20reviews%20(Full).pdf

**Substance use among young people with disabilities**

According to the UK Drug Policy Commission (2010), a number of factors may increase drug use among disabled young people and adults. Young people with a disability may find it difficult to participate in school culture or have communication issues leading to drug use to deal with distress, frustration, isolation, exclusion and bullying. They may experience social pressure and drugs may be used as a means of ‘fitting in’ and gaining acceptance by non-disabled contemporaries. Mental health problems and poverty may increase risks for disabled young people to use substances. Communication difficulties and lack of accessible information may aggravate drug problems and inhibit help-seeking for some disabled young people. Young people may use substances as a form of self-medication to alleviate the symptoms of long term illnesses. For the full briefing paper see: http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/resources/disabled_policy_briefing.pdf

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