
Prevalence Study: Young Adult Experiences of Substance-Related Harm

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OVERVIEW

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

Scottish Families affected by Alcohol and Drugs is one of the national organisations commissioned by the Scottish Government to deliver its drug and alcohol strategies, 'The Road to Recovery'¹ and 'Changing Scotland's Relationship with Alcohol'². In both strategies the importance of families in the recovery process is recognised. The 'Road to Recovery'³ states, "*families play an important role in the treatment, care and support for those using drugs,*" and that "*families can contribute to the assessment process and provide support, from attending appointments to helping loved ones turn their lives around*". It also recognises that "*the level of intensive commitment can come at a heavy price for the family*" and that "*ongoing support for families is vital*".

We use a broad, inclusive and sensitive definition of 'family' – Anyone who may be affected by or concerned about someone else's substance use or Concerned Significant Other (CSO).

Ayrshire College & NHS Ayrshire and Arran

Ayrshire College aims to inspire learners to achieve their full potential by playing a lead role in the development of skills, economy and community life. In support of Ayrshire College vision of *Raising Aspirations, Inspiring Achievement, and Increasing Opportunities*⁴, the college prides itself on providing sector leading learning opportunities and support services which meet the needs of our students and the wider community including the most vulnerable groups.

The college considers student wellbeing as a key aspect of successful outcomes and Student Services offer a holistic approach to support, enabling students to make good life choices which enhance their wellbeing. Partnership working allows for further enhancement of this support and education for students, including the joint post between Ayrshire College and NHS Ayrshire and Arran's Addiction Services. This role allows for the development of education on topics such as alcohol, drugs and mental health, as well as the provision of specialised support to students, for enhancing the range of support.

Information gathered from the survey will be used to inform future health and wellbeing initiatives, partnership working with external agencies, education and support provisions available within Ayrshire College as well as contributing to NHS Ayrshire and Arran's vision of working together to achieve the healthiest life possible for everyone in Ayrshire and Arran.

¹ Scottish Government (2008) The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem.

² Scottish Government (2009) Changing Scotland's Relationship with Alcohol: A Framework for Action.

³ Scottish Government (2008) The Road to Recovery: A New Approach to Tackling Scotland's Drug Problem.

⁴ Ayrshire College (2014) Ayrshire College Strategic Plan 2014-17.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a definitive shift in recognising the need for adopting family inclusive practices. Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (Scottish Families) mission is to support families impacted by alcohol and drug use across Scotland, raise awareness of their needs and ensure that these needs are widely recognised and addressed.

Through the work carried out by Scottish Families we know that the evidence-base is still relatively limited in Scotland in relation to the experiences of young adults (those of post-compulsory school age, 16-25) when it comes to the impact of another's drinking and/or drug use. Many young people, living with someone who uses alcohol to problematic levels, take on additional caring responsibilities within the family unit which can often be detrimental to their life opportunities and choices for the future. This is often under-reported or undisclosed to those outside the home.

Anecdotally, we know that young people (16-25) may not always recognise that they themselves have been affected by another's alcohol misuse therefore this study will seek to identify the scope and reach of harms experienced, if any.

THE EVIDENCE

At a conservative estimate approximately 134,000 adults in Scotland are significantly affected by substance use in their family. Recent evidence published by Alcohol Focus Scotland suggests that 1 in 3 people know a heavy drinker with 1 in 2 being negatively affected⁵. It has been widely acknowledged that families/concerned significant others (CSOs) can be impacted in a number of ways as a direct result of a significant other's alcohol use. These can include:

- Experiencing anxiety/depression;
- Guilt or feelings of responsibility for another's behaviour;
- Shame and isolation;
- Breakdown in relationships with support networks; and
- Financial difficulties.

When accessing appropriate help and support in their own right, family members/CSOs participating in evidence-based interventions are instrumental in their loved one's recovery. Families/CSOs have a crucial role to play in the recovery journey which is recognised in existing alcohol and drug frameworks and more recently in the *Quality Principles: Standard Expectations of Care and Support in Drug and Alcohol Services*⁶.

⁵ Alcohol Focus Scotland (2013). Unrecognised and under-reported: the impact of alcohol on people other than the drinker in Scotland.

⁶ Scottish Government (2014) The Quality Principles - Standard Expectations of Care and Support in Drug and Alcohol Services.

AIMS

To provide an insight into students' experiences of the harms associated with a significant other's alcohol & drug use.

Engage with the student population to examine the impact of significant other's substance use.

Develop our understanding of students' own substance use.

OBJECTIVES

Identify the number of students affected by a significant other's substance use.

Recognise the extent, frequency and context of harms experienced.

Determine the number of young people (16-25) accessing support, in their own right, to cope with another's substance use.

Explore the impact of another's substance use on a young person's opportunities.

Recognise the variety, frequency and range of substances used by students across Ayrshire College networks.

METHODOLOGY

The scope for student engagement provided a potential reach of up to 14,000 students across 8 college campuses as such a survey format was identified as the most appropriate method for the prevalence study in keeping with the following constraints:

- Resources and staff available to support the study;
- Timescales available to gather evidence; and
- Method available to engage with the student population.

The survey was available electronically via Survey Monkey with paper-based copies available to prospectively engage with a representative sample of the whole student population. Confidentiality was crucial due to concerns expressed in eliciting open and honest responses, in keeping with the potentially sensitive nature of the survey contents. Sample demographic monitoring information provided was optional in order to respect participants' right to anonymity.

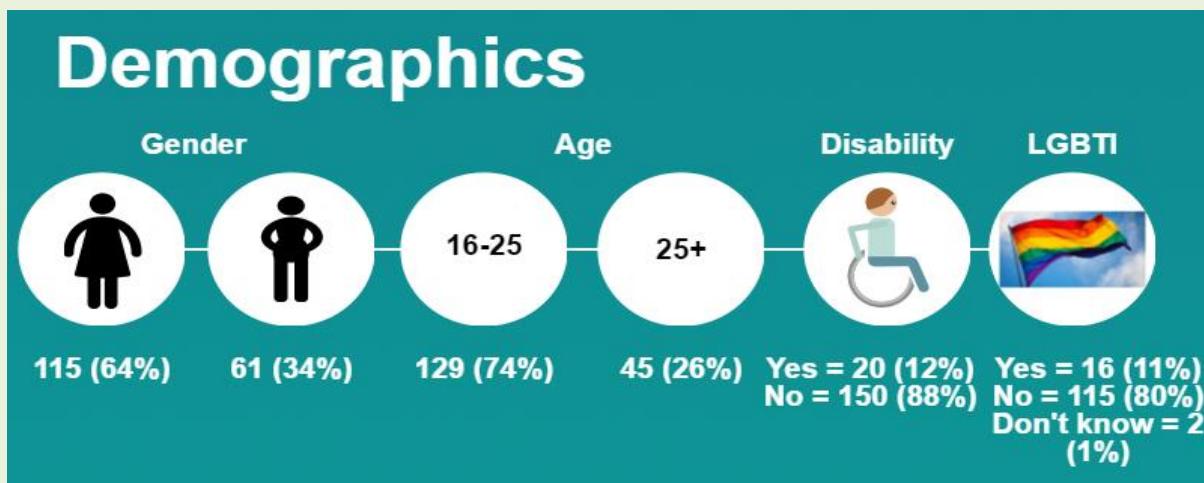
The survey was promoted across campuses using Alcohol and Drug Officer's links throughout the college network including the Student Association, Learning Resource Centre staff and Student Services. Posters were designed with a participation incentive offered in the form of Amazon vouchers. A day of action was also hosted at one of the busiest campuses in the final week of the survey with paper copies available to all participants on the day. This was supported by Alcohol and Drug Officer (Ayrshire college/NHS Ayrshire & Arran) and Alcohol Liaison Officer (Scottish Families)

IMPACT

The whole-population approach to this study is a testament to Ayrshire College's commitment to ensuring that everyone recognises the need for wider discussion and action to reduce substance-related harm and demonstrates the progressive attitudes towards challenging stigma, involving families in the recovery process and reducing harms in a whole-systems approach to recovery.

Having engaged with over 200 people across Ayrshire College networks to conduct this study (inclusive of staff and students), there has already been an initial impact of increased awareness of the challenges associated with substance misuse for those who have participated or promoted this survey. This has already brought the issues raised into scope for the first time for many who had never considered these previously. For many however this study will reinforce existing awareness of how problematic substance use can impact children, families and young people – perhaps giving hope that progress is being made to recognise, tackle and reduce the negative effects.

RESULTS

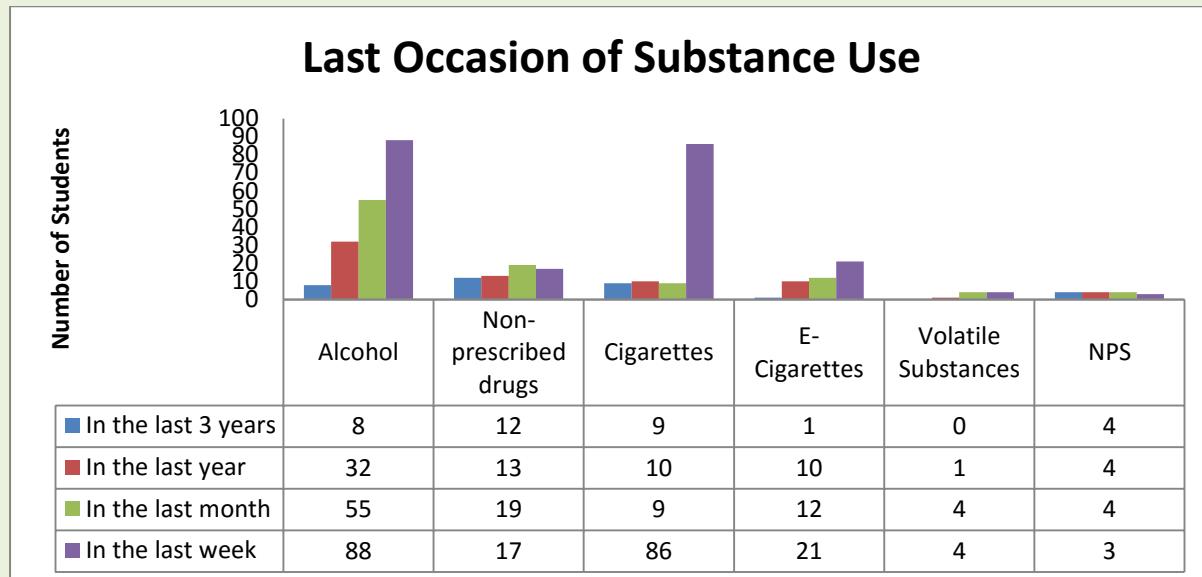
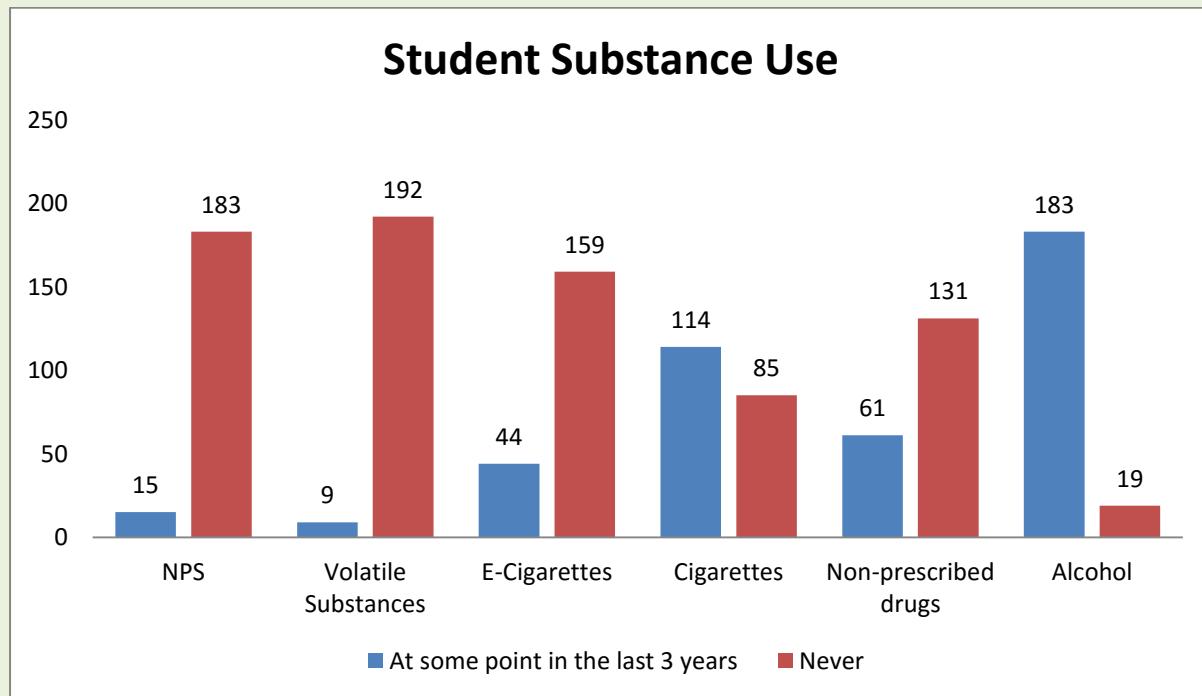


Harms Experienced as a result of another's substance use

Have you ever experienced any of the following due to someone else's alcohol or drug use?



OWN SUBSTANCE USE



Substance use in the last month (including in the last week figures):



Alcohol -
143 (69%)

Cigarettes -
95 (46%)

Non-
prescribed
drugs - 36
(17%)

E-Cigarettes -
33 (16%)

Volatile
Substances -
8 (4%)

NPS -
7 (3%)

TYPES AND BRANDS OF SUBSTANCES USED

Alcohol



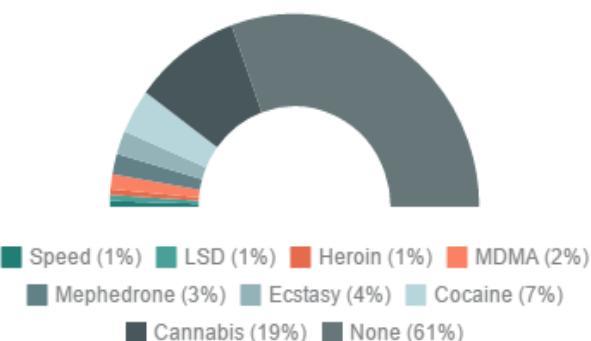
Tobacco & Volatile Substances

75 participants listed what type of Tobacco product they used. From this group of students, 88% listed Cigarettes and/or 15% listed bags of Tobacco.

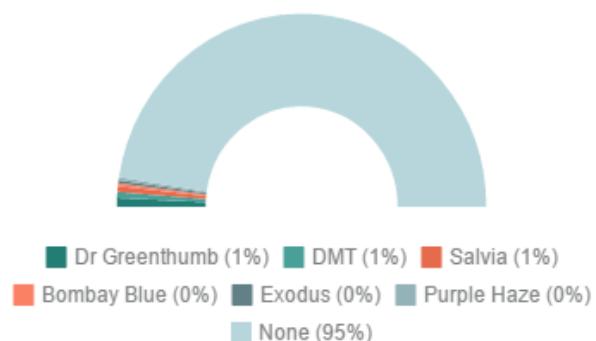
9 (4%) of students stated that they had used Volatile Substances in the last three years. Products used included glue and lighter fluid.

NON-PRESCRIBED /NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)

Number of students who use non-prescribed substances



Number of students who use NPS

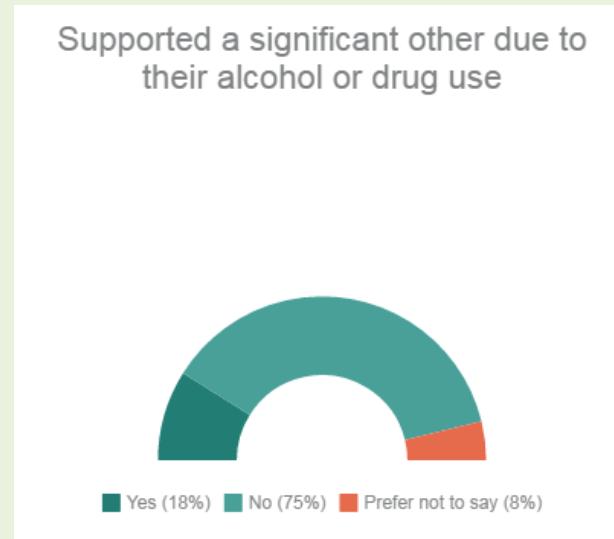


Drug	Number of students
Diazepam	1
Speed	2
LSD	2
Heroin	2
MDMA	5
Mephedrone	7
Ecstasy	8
Cocaine	15
Cannabis	38
None	124

NPS	Number of students
Dr Greenthumb	3
DMT	2
Salvia	2
Bombay Blue	1
Exodus	1
Purple Haze	1

*Mephedrone included under non px drug rather than NPS by students
 **MDMA and Ecstasy were listed as separate substances by students
 *** Diazepam is a prescribed substance. Inclusion here implies acquired/used illegally.

SUPPORTING OTHERS



Person supported



Friend

77 (61%)

Parent

26 (21%)

Partner

23 (18%)

Sibling

16 (13%)

Other

13 (10%)

Child

11 (9%)

Support provided

72 (40%)

31 (15%)

24 (12%)

19 (9%)

13 (10%)

6 (3%)



Emotional



Help with domestic/
personal tasks



Help with
accessing
services



Financial
Assistance



Purchase
alcohol or
other
substances



Help to meet
their
work/learning
or benefit
commitments

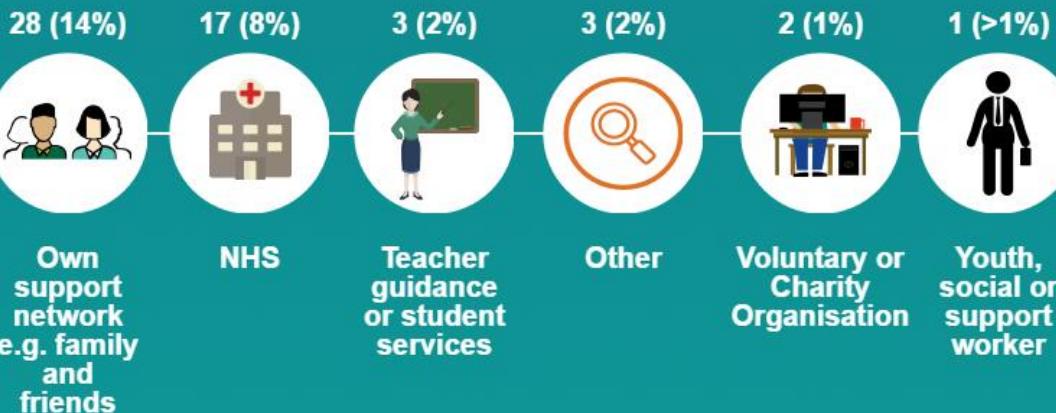
YOUNG ADULTS ACCESSING SUPPORT TO COPE

Accessed support to help cope with someone else's alcohol or drug use



■ Yes (7%) ■ No (89%) ■ Prefer not to say (5%)

Where support was accessed



Missed opportunities due to a significant other's alcohol or drug use



Social or leisure activities



School or college



Personal Appointment



Work

OVERALL FINDINGS

Harms experienced



Over one third (40%) of participant had witnessed aggressive behaviour in the last month due to someone else's alcohol or drug use.



36 participants (18%) reported feeling unsafe at home at some point in the last 3 years.



41 participants (19%) said that they had been a passenger of someone using alcohol, drugs or both.



Alcohol was the highest contributing factor in 4 out of the 7 harms experienced.

Support for others



Over one third (37%) of participants have supported a significant other within the last 3 years due to problematic substance use.



Parents and friends were the most commonly supported significant other where this was disclosed.

Impact of another's substance use



More than one quarter of participants missed opportunities to learn, work, and socialise due to another's alcohol or drug use.

Support in their own right



17 respondents (8%) had accessed support in their own right to cope with supporting a significant other due to problematic substance use.

When support was accessed own support networks (13.7%) came first which was followed by NHS services (8.3%)

Own substance use



Alcohol was the most commonly used substance in the last week (43%) and was used more frequently than tobacco (42%).



E-cigarettes (21%) were the third most prevalent substance used by participants.



References to NPS were lowest in comparison to other substances referenced throughout the study ranking lower than the use of volatile substances within the last week or month.



When participants voluntarily gave details of their own substance use, cannabis (19%) was the most frequent illegal drug reported.



Cannabis use was cited more than double that of any other illicit drug, with cocaine (7%) cited as the next most commonly used substance.



Spirits (61%) were three times more common than any other alcohol-type, followed by wine (21%) and beer (18%).



30% of survey respondents noted non-prescribed drug use in comparison to 7% NPS [10% including the substance Mephedrone].

Examples of missed opportunities

"Too tired to go to school because of lack of sleep at night"

"When Dad needed help with my brothers."

"Dad was hungover and couldn't take me to school."

"University, due to father's alcohol addiction."

"If my father needed to be in contact with me over the phone - to stop him drinking."

MOVING FORWARD

College Actions

Development of a Cannabis Awareness Week for students which promotes support services and challenges the normalisation of this drug, explore attitudes and educate on short and long-term effects.

Promotion of family support services such as Scottish Families national helpline for those affected by another's alcohol and substance use.

Development of e-learning modules for college staff which include support services information and the effects of alcohol and drug use on significant others as well as individuals.

Focus groups to be considered by the PLO in order to establish public safety aspects of others' substance use. This was identified as a major issue in this report in relation to young people.

Use aspects of this report's findings to inform future Respect Week campaign planning e.g. drink driving.

SFAD and Ayrshire College Student Association to consider the development of peer support groups for those affected by significant others substance use as well as the promotion of diversionary activities available for young people throughout Ayrshire.

ACROSS AYRSHIRE

The East⁷, North⁸ and South⁹ Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership's (ADPs) identify common key priorities outlined in their strategy documents. These include:

- A whole population approach to education and prevention;
- Improving community safety: enforcement, availability and safer environments;
- Promoting recovery: Recovery Orientated System of Care;
- Children and Families affected by substance use; and
- Workforce development.

⁷ East Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (2011) Commissioning Strategy 2011-2015.

⁸ North Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (2011) A Strategy for the Future 2011 – 2015.

⁹ South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (2015) Strategic Commissioning & Delivery Plan..

RECOMENDATIONS

1. The prevalence of substance-related harm suggests that a whole population approach to harm reduction should be considered for future areas of work.
2. Promote a wider strengths-based approach drawing on social capital, lived experience and local knowledge and assets to continue to reduce alcohol-related harm in keeping with regional ADP priorities.
3. Significant trends have emerged suggesting public safety is a significant concern amongst the student population. Joint action between student campus/community police could explore crime rate vs public perception as well as public safety initiatives and keeping safe initiatives.
4. Health-promotion in relation to substance use should highlight the wider benefits of physical, mental health & well-being. Diversionary activities should be encouraged working with partners/stakeholders to negotiate and secure subsidised rates/membership for activities. Incentivise a wider range of outdoors activities/social opportunities that do not involve substance use.
5. Emerging evidence should be used to inform suitable training opportunities for college staff, young people and the wider workforce to raise awareness of substance-related harm demonstrating the prevalence and limiting impact this may have on life opportunities.
6. Scottish Families welcomes the opportunity to replicate this study to build understanding of student experiences of substance-related harm and support needs to develop a collective response. Variations of this study have already been extended to Argyll & Bute, Forth Valley, and Highlands and across Young Adult Carers networks nationally with plans to publish full a combined report later in 2016.

Copies of the full study including survey data can be accessed at:
<http://www.sfad.org.uk/policy/reports>

