

1. Life at age 14: initial findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study

The Scottish Government

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/life-age-14-initial-findings-growing-up-scotland-study/pages/7/>

6. Risky behaviours

This section presents findings on the prevalence and frequency of smoking, alcohol and drug use, as well as anti-social behaviours.

6.1 Smoking, drinking and drug use – young person

Young people were asked whether they had ever tried a cigarette (even if it was only a single puff), ever tried vaping, ever drunk alcohol (even a sip), and whether they had tried cannabis or any other drugs.

As shown in Figure 34, just over half said they had tried alcohol, whilst around one in five said they had tried smoking a cigarette or vape. Only a small minority said they had tried cannabis or other drugs.

Figure 34 – Whether young people had tried smoking, drinking alcohol or drugs [19]
This chart shows the proportions of whether young people had ever tried smoking cigarettes, vaping, drinking alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs. Over half (54.9%) of young people said they had ever tried drinking alcohol, whilst 21.5% said they had tried vaping. 16.7% of young people had ever tried a cigarette, 7.9% had ever tried cannabis, and 2.0% had ever tried other drugs.

Base: All young people (2797)

Boys were more likely to say they had tried an e-cigarette or vape (23.6%, compared with 19.4% of girls) and cannabis (9.3%, compared with 6.3% of girls).

Those in SIMD quintile 3 were more likely to say they had tried an e-cigarette or vape than those in higher quintiles (27.2%, compared with 18.7% of quintile 4 and 18.3% of quintile 5). Those in SIMD quintile 3 were also more likely to say they had tried cannabis (12%, compared with 5.6% of those in quintile 4 and 5.9% of those in quintile 5).

6.1.1 Smoking and vaping – young person

Those who had ever tried a cigarette were asked how often they smoked now. As shown in Figure 35, many young people had not continued smoking: the majority said they did not smoke now, whilst 19% of those that did smoked 'every day' or 'at least once a week' (3.2% of all young people).

Figure 35 – How often young people (who had tried a cigarette) smoked now
This figure shows the proportions of how often young people who had tried a cigarette were smoking now. 69.1% of young people said they did not smoke now, and 12.0% smoked less than once a week.

Base: All young people who ever smoked (441)

Young people who said they had ever smoked a cigarette (at the Sweep 10 interview) were asked how old they were when they first smoked a whole cigarette (that is not just a puff). Half (50.3%) said they were 13 years or older, whilst just over one third (34.6%) said they had never smoked a whole cigarette, 13.3% said they were 11 or 12 years and a very small proportion (1.9%) had first smoked a whole cigarette when they were 10 years or younger.

6.1.2 Alcohol use – young person

Those who said they had ever had an alcoholic drink (at the Sweep 10 interview) were asked how old they were when they first did so.

Over three quarters (77.8%) said they were 13 years or older when they first had an alcoholic drink; a small proportion (3.8%) said they were 10 years or younger, whilst the remainder (18.3%) were aged 11 or 12.

Girls were more likely to say they had their first alcoholic drink at an older age; 80.4% of girls said they were age 13 or over, compared to 74.6% of boys.

Those who had ever had an alcoholic drink were asked on how many days they had drunk alcohol in the last 30 days. As shown in Figure 36, over half of young people said they had not drunk alcohol in the last 30 days, while a small minority (6.6%) said they had drunk alcohol on six or more days.

Base: All young people who ever drank alcohol (1529)

Figure 36 – How many days young people had drunk alcohol in the past 30 days

This chart shows how many days young people who had ever tried alcohol had drunk alcohol in the past 30 days. 28.4% of young people said they had drunk alcohol on 1-2 days in the past 30 days, whilst 10.6% had drunk alcohol on 3-5 days.

Base: All young people who ever smoked (441)

Disabled young people were less likely to say they had not drunk alcohol in the past 30 days (61.0%) compared to non-disabled young people (53.5%).

Young people in SIMD quintile 1 were more likely to say they had not drunk alcohol in the past 30 days than those in quintile 5 (62.4%, compared to 48.3%).

Young people who had ever had an alcoholic drink were also asked whether they had 'ever had so much alcohol that they were really drunk'; around one quarter (24.1%) answered 'yes'.

6.1.3 Cannabis and other drugs – young person

Those who had ever tried cannabis were asked how often they had used cannabis. Two out of five said they used cannabis only once, whilst one in five (19.4%) used it once a week or more often.

Figure 37 – How often young people (who had tried cannabis) use cannabis

This chart shows the proportions of how often young people who had ever tried cannabis had used cannabis. 14.4% of young people had used cannabis sometimes but did not use it anymore, whilst 12.0% used it a few times a year.

Base: All young people who ever tried cannabis (191)

Young people were asked if they ever tried any drugs other than cannabis[20] – a very small proportion (2%) said they had done so. Of those, just under half (47.6%) said they had used other drugs only once or used them before but not anymore.

Around one in ten (9.2%) said they used other drugs at least once a week or most days[21].

6.2 Anti-social behaviour – parent/main carer and young person

Parents were asked whether their child had been in trouble with the police since the last interview; 2.3% reported that they had.

Young people were asked how many times they had engaged in any of the behaviours shown in Figure 38 in the last year. Seven out of ten young people (69.2%) said they had not engaged in any of these behaviours. The most commonly named behaviours were 'hit, kicked or punched someone' and 'been rowdy or rude in a public'.

Figure 38 – Whether young people had engaged in anti-social behaviours shown
This chart shows the proportions of whether young people had engaged in any of nine different anti-social behaviours. 17.1% of young people had hit, kicked, or punched someone, 14.0% had been rowdy or rude in a public, and 10.0% had stolen money or other things. Between 0.7%–5.9% had taken something from a shop or a store (5.9%), deliberately damaged or destroyed property (3.8%), written things or sprayed paint on property (3.8%), carried a knife or weapon (1.5%), used force, threats or a weapon (1.1%), and broken into a locked place to steal something (0.7%).

Base: All young people (2633-2638)

As shown in Figure 39, boys were more likely than girls to say they had engaged in all of the anti-social behaviours shown, although the majority (60.5%) had not engaged in any of these behaviours (77.8% of girls had not engaged).

Figure 39 – Whether young people had engaged in anti-social behaviours shown by gender
This chart shows the proportions of whether girls and boys had engaged in any of nine different anti-social behaviours. Higher proportions of boys had engaged in any of the anti-social behaviours than girls. For instance, boys were more likely to say they had hit, kicked or punched someone (25.0%, compared with 9.5% of girls) and to say they had been rowdy or rude in a public (17.4%, compared with 10.8% of girls).

Base: Boys (1297-1300), Girls (1324-1326)

Disabled young people were more likely to say they had carried a knife or weapon (3.7%, compared with 1.2% of non-disabled young people) and had broken into a place to steal (1.8%, compared with 0.5%).

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Scotland is worst in world for teenage boys smoking cannabis

BBC News

Nearly a quarter of boys aged 15 in Scotland said they had tried the class B drug

Fifteen-year-old boys in Scotland have the highest rate for smoking cannabis according to a new report from the World Health Organization (WHO).

The study, external found that nearly a quarter (23%) of boys aged 15 in Scotland surveyed said they had tried the Class B drug at some point.

In one of the largest studies of its kind the WHO examined data from 280,000 children aged 11, 13 and 15 from 44 countries around the world.

The survey also suggested that the UK has more of an issue with under-age vaping than many other countries.

The survey asked children living in Europe, Central Asia and Canada about their use of cigarettes, vapes, alcohol and cannabis.

It found that children in Scotland and Wales are more likely to have smoked cannabis than those in many other countries.

Both countries are in the top five globally.

From the Scottish sample, which involved 4,000 teenagers, 23% of 15-year-old boys said they had smoked cannabis within their lifetime, while 16% of girls the same age said the same.

Canadian girls ranked highest with 25% saying they had smoked the drug.

Just 13% of boys and 6% of girls in Scotland said they had used cannabis, also known as weed, in the last 30 days.

Dr Jo Inchley from the University of Glasgow, who worked as international co-ordinator for the study, said the high ranking of Scottish boys in the study is "concerning".

"We're not seeing the declines amongst regular users like we do amongst more experimental users," she said.

"Compared with other countries, we're still relatively high and 15-year-old boys in Scotland have the highest levels of cannabis use across the study as a whole.

"That's concerning. So, even though we've seen these decreases, we are still relatively high compared to other countries," she added.

Cannabis use has dropped in recent years and has stabilised, but some vulnerable children are still continuing to use it, according to Dr Inchley.

Almost 25% of 15-year-old boys in Scotland say they have smoked cannabis

Source: WHO

Almost 25% of 15-year-old boys in Scotland say they have smoked cannabis. . .

The study also looked at trends in smoking, vaping and drinking alcohol among the three age groups.

It found two-fifths of girls in England and Scotland have vaped by the age of 15. That is higher than in other countries such as France, Austria, Germany, Albania, Spain, Canada and Norway.

The study found 40% of 15-year-old girls in Scotland, and 33% of boys have used an electronic cigarette.

Of those, 30% of girls said their use was in the 30 days prior to the 2022 survey, while for boys the figure was 20%.

"Vaping in the UK is higher than the average across all the countries that took part in the survey as a whole," said Dr Inchley.

"Steep increases in vaping among young people in the UK threaten to reverse some of the positive trends we've seen in substance use in recent years with overall declines in alcohol use and cigarette smoking since the 1990s," she said.

"Rates of vaping have doubled in the last four years among girls in Scotland.

"Vapes are far too readily accessible to young people and the health risks are underestimated. New legislation to ban single use vapes is an important step forward but further action is needed to address these worrying trends," she added.

Vaping overtaken smoking

Smoking among children is must less common than it used to be - just one in five 15 year-old girls have ever smoked a cigarette - but smoking rates are still higher among girls than boys in England and Wales.

The report confirms that vaping rates have overtaken cigarette smoking in most countries, with nearly one in ten 11-year-olds saying they've used a vape at least once, rising to 26% of boys and 40% of girls by age 15.

Vaping rates in the UK are above average compared to other countries. Even though vaping is thought to be much less dangerous than smoking, the risks of children breathing chemicals into their lungs are not yet fully understood.

The UK government has already introduced measures to clamp down on the promotion and illegal sale of vapes to under 18s.

Teenagers in a park vaping and drinking Image source, Getty Images
Image caption,

The study also looked at the number of teenagers who had vaped or been drunk

In terms of drinking alcohol, the Scottish figures are marginally lower than the rest of the UK countries surveyed.

A total of 73% of 15-year-old girls and 64% of 15-year-old boys in the country said they had tried alcohol, while 32% and 26% of girls and boys respectively said they had been drunk at least twice.

Children aged 11 and 13 in England are the most likely to have ever drunk alcohol compared with youngsters in all the other countries surveyed.

Compared with other European countries, rates of drunkenness in the UK were high, particularly among girls.

The report urges countries to introduce measures that will protect young generations from harm, such as limiting the availability of nicotine and tobacco products, and alcohol, and a ban on advertising and promotion of any substances on mainstream and social media.

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This is a comprehensive study that looked at behaviour of young people in 44 countries from Tajikistan to Greenland, Canada to Belgium. It is an interesting snapshot of the sort of risky behaviours adolescents take part in while growing up.

Scotland is top of the league table for 15 year old boys having tried cannabis at some point in their lifetime (23%), but that is only marginally higher than Poland (22%).

And when it comes to those saying they have used cannabis in the last 30 days, Bulgaria showed the highest prevalence for boys (19%) and Canada for girls (15%).

England did not submit data on cannabis use. The study shows that overall, cannabis use has dropped or stabilised in recent years.

Whether it is cannabis use, vaping or drinking alcohol, understanding these trends is important for policy makers as research shows young people are particularly sensitive to substances because their brains are still developing.

It is easier for them to become addicted and can have consequences for education, physical and mental health. Identifying and targeting areas of concern should help prioritise the measures that need to be put in place to tackle them.

****Further insights from the study:****

1. **Cannabis use trends:**

* Globally, cannabis use has either decreased or stabilized in recent years.

* Among Scottish teenagers surveyed:

+ 13% of boys and 6% of girls aged 15 said they had used cannabis in the last 30 days.

+ Cannabis use was less common among younger age groups: around 2-3% of 11-year-olds and 4-8% of 13-year-olds reported using it in the last month.

* Other countries with high cannabis use prevalence:

- Boys: Bulgaria (19%) had the highest rate for past-month cannabis use among boys aged 15.

- Girls: Canada (15%) had the highest rate for past-month cannabis use among girls aged 15.

2. **Vaping trends:**

* Vaping rates have overtaken cigarette smoking in many countries surveyed.

* Among Scottish teenagers:

+ 40% of girls and 33% of boys aged 15 reported using an electronic cigarette at least once.

+ In the past month, 30% of girls and 20% of boys aged 15 said they had vaped.

3. **Alcohol consumption trends:**

* Scottish teenagers surveyed showed lower alcohol consumption compared to other countries:

- Among 15-year-olds: 73% of girls and 64% of boys reported having tried alcohol, while 32% of girls and 26% of boys said they had been drunk at least twice.

* English teenagers surveyed showed the highest prevalence of having ever drunk alcohol among 11- and 13-year-olds compared to other countries.

* Overall, rates of drunkenness were high in the UK, particularly among girls aged 15:

+ England: 42% of girls and 36% of boys reported being drunk at least twice.

+ Scotland: 32% of girls and 26% of boys reported being drunk at least twice.

4. **Cross-country comparisons:**

* When comparing risky behaviors across countries, it's clear that each country faces unique challenges:

- Some countries had high prevalence of cannabis use but low levels of vaping or alcohol consumption.

- Others showed the opposite pattern, with high rates of one behavior but not others.

****Implications for policymakers:****

* The study highlights the importance of tailoring policies to address specific risky behaviors in each country, as trends vary across regions and age groups.

* Limiting access to nicotine and tobacco products, alcohol, and banning advertising and promotion of these substances on mainstream and social media are suggested measures to protect young generations from harm.

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