

# Drug use in Ireland – prevalence and patterns of use

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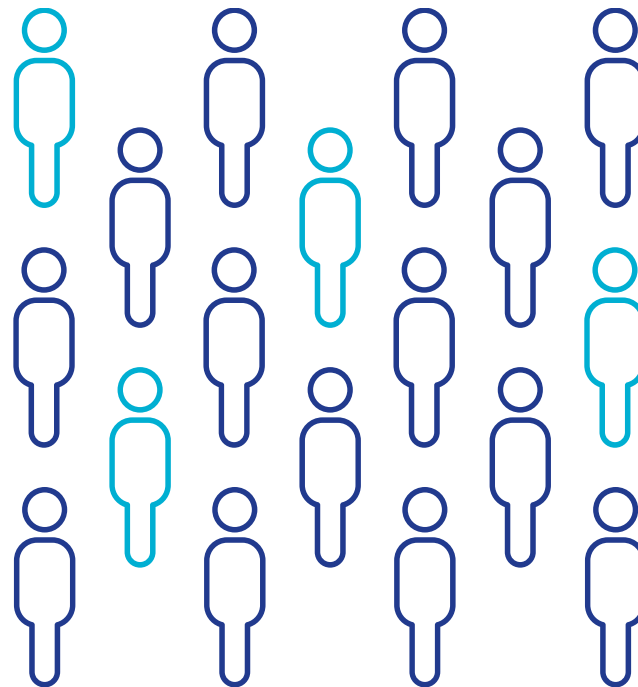
# Definitions

## Prevalence

% of the population who use drugs

## Patterns of use

How people use drugs, How often? How much?  
Harmful patterns of use



# How do we measure drug use in the population?



## National Drug and Alcohol Survey

~6,000 adults (15+) every 4 years since 2002



## European School Project on Alcohol and Drugs (ESPAD)

~1,900 15–16-year-olds every 4 years since 1999

## Health Behaviour in School-Children (HBSC)

~10,000 2<sup>ND</sup> Level schoolchildren 11–18-year-olds since 1998

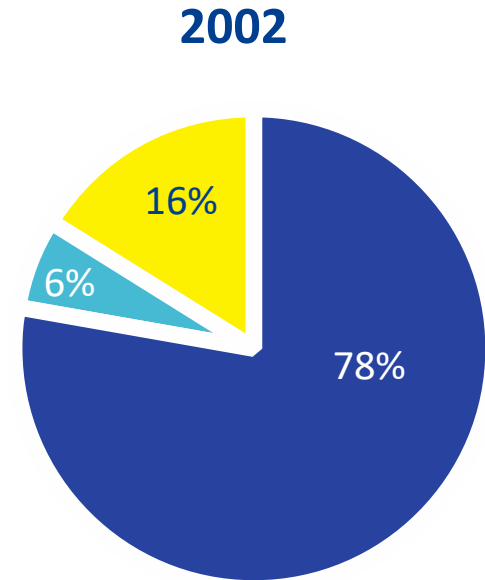
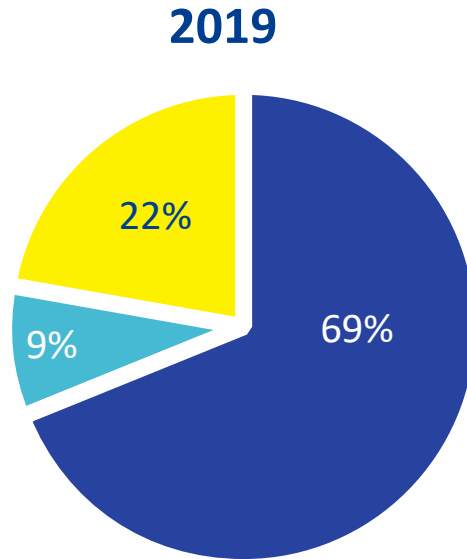


## European Web Survey on Drugs 2021

~5,800 adults (18+) who had used drugs in the last year

# Drug use in Ireland and trends over time

# Last year substance use – (15-64 years)



# What drugs do Irish people use?

In 2019 **9%** or **287,000 people** used an illegal drug in the previous year

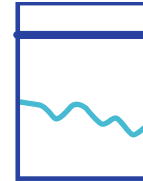
The most commonly used drugs were:



**Cannabis** ↑  
**7.1%**  
(5.1% in 2002)



**Ecstasy** ↑  
**2.7%**  
(1.1% in 2002)

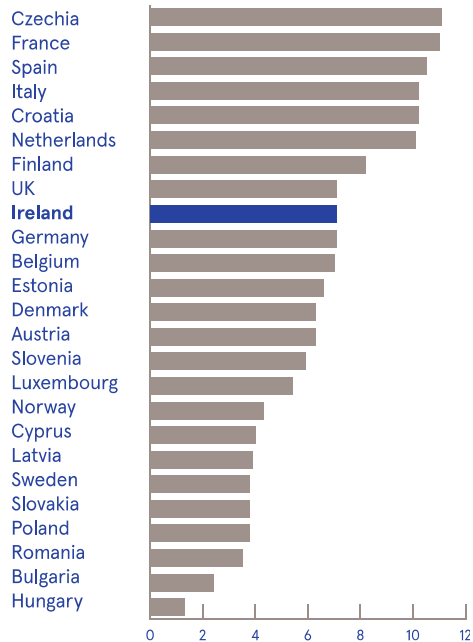


**Cocaine** ↑  
**2.3%**  
(1.1% in 2002)

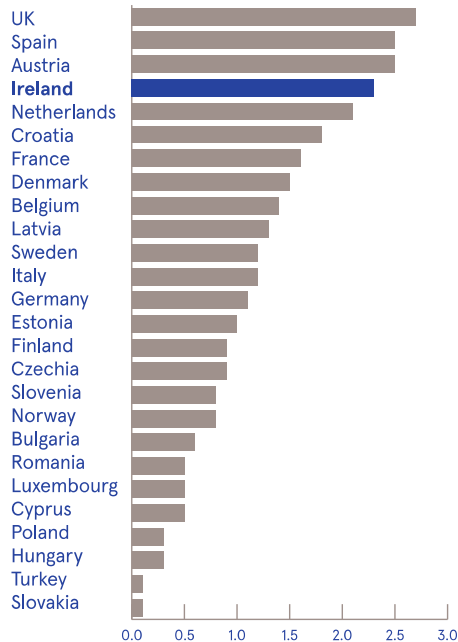
# How does Ireland compare to other European countries?



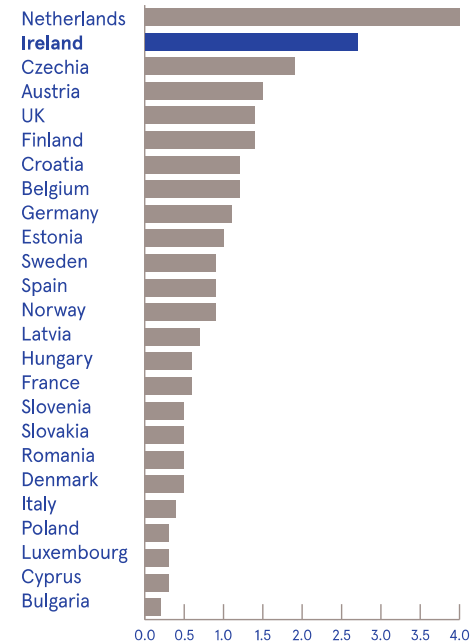
## Cannabis



## Cocaine

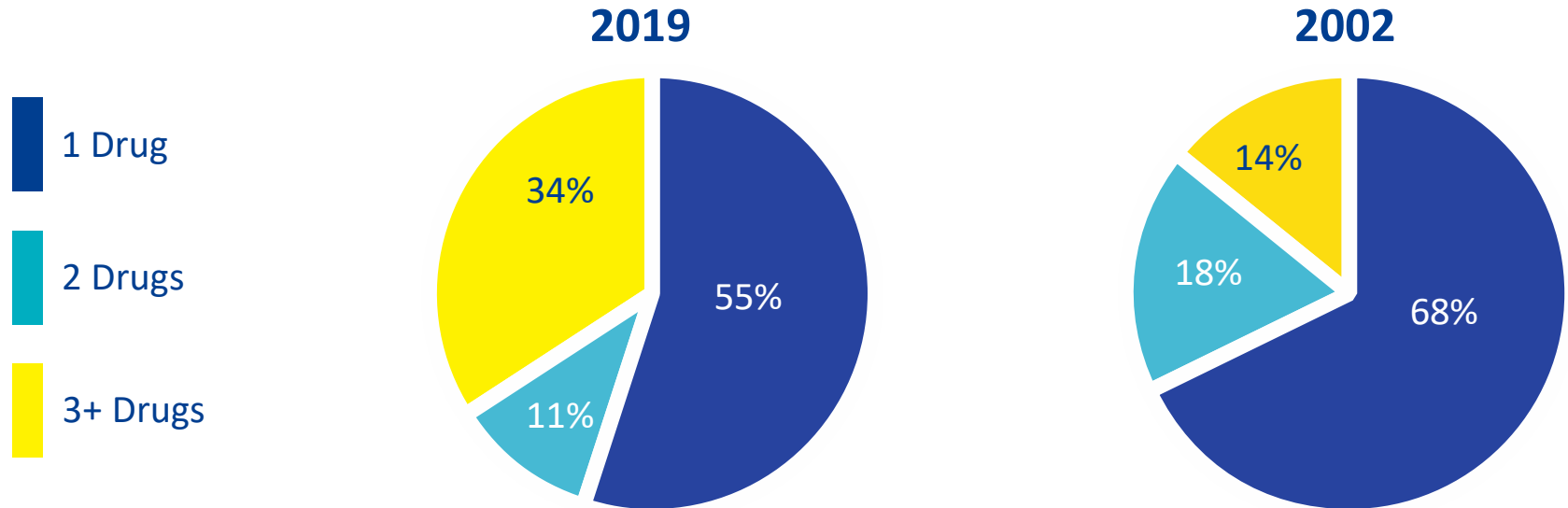


## Ecstasy



# Trends in polydrug use

People using more types of drugs





# Patterns of cannabis, ecstasy, and cocaine use

# Types of cannabis used in Ireland



**96%**  
used cannabis  
herb



**47%**  
used cannabis  
edibles



**23%**  
used cannabis  
oil/extract



**20%**  
used cannabis  
resin

# Patterns of cannabis herb use

Frequency of use in last year



**23%**

**Infrequent**

(<11 days)



**19%**

**Occasional**

(11-50 days)



**35%**

**Frequent**

(51-250 days)



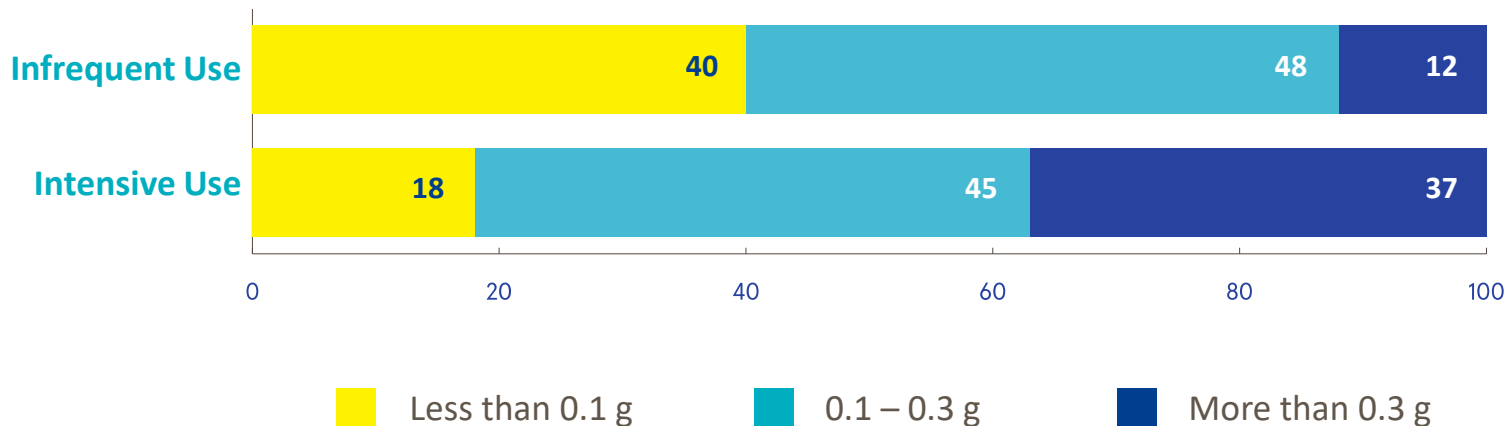
**24%**

**Intensive**

(251+ days)

# Patterns of cannabis herb use

Amount of cannabis herb normally used



# Cannabis use disorder



**1.4% (or 45,000)**  
**of the Irish**  
**population**  
have **cannabis use**  
**disorder** (cannabis  
abuse or dependence)



Most common  
among **males**  
**aged 15–34**  
**years**



Of those who had  
used cannabis in the  
past year, **1 in 5**  
met the criteria for  
**Cannabis Use**  
**Disorder**

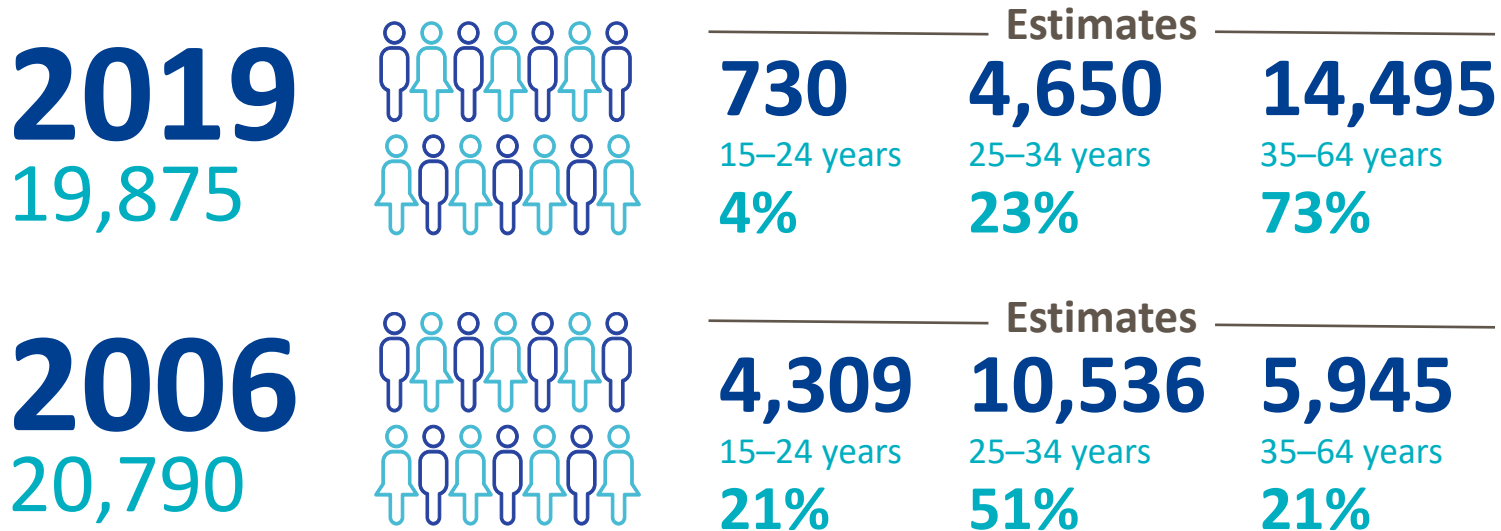
# Patterns of cocaine and ecstasy use



# Problem opioid (heroin) use in Ireland

# Problem opioid (heroin) use

Problem opioid use predominantly seen among older adults





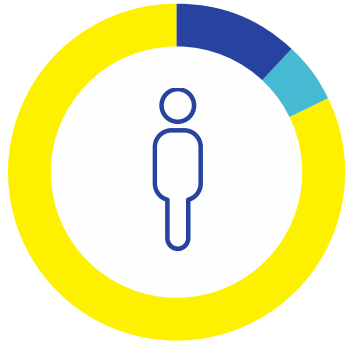
# Who uses drugs in Ireland

Building a profile

Anne Doyle  
Research Officer

# Drug use – sex and age differences

# Drug use – age and sex differences



**Males** more likely  
than females to use drugs

**12%**  
Males vs. **6%**  
Females

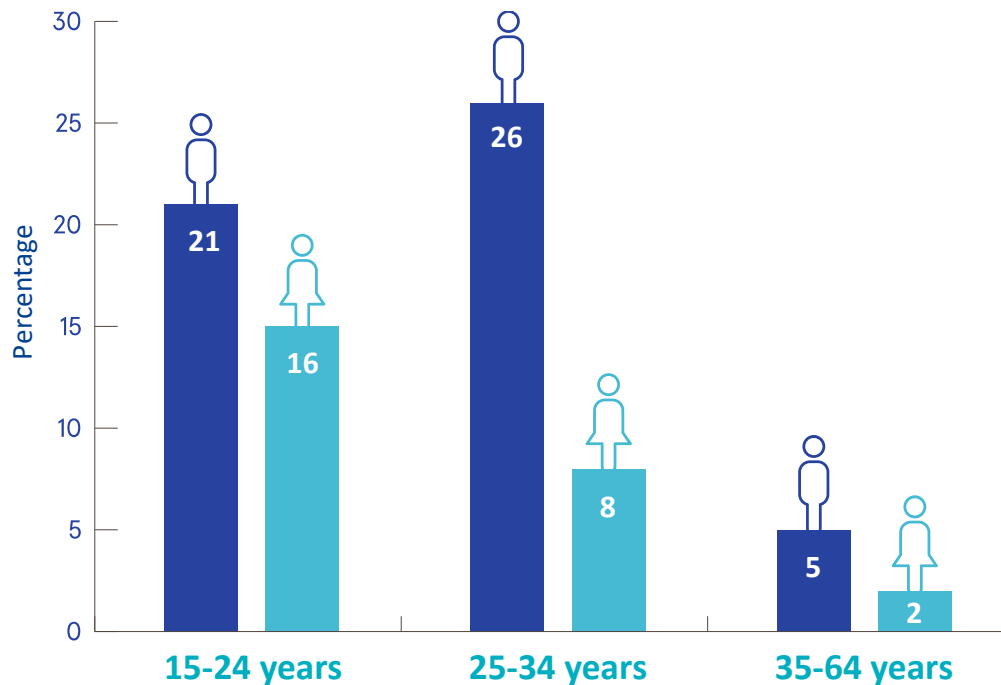
Gap much closer in  
**15–24-year-olds**  
(21% vs 16%)

# Drug use – age and sex differences

**15–24 year olds** most likely to use drugs (19%)



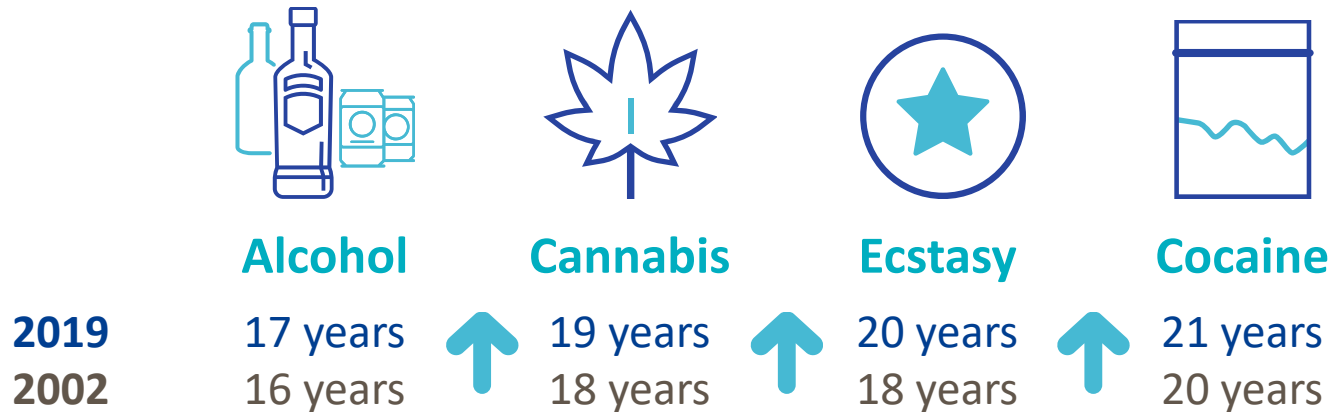
Drug use remains high among **males aged 25–34 years** (26%) but tails off for females (8%)



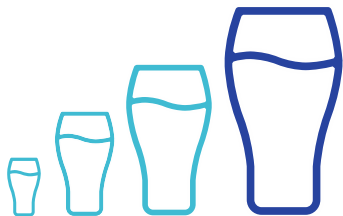
# Age drug use starts

# Age of initiation

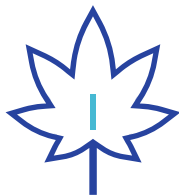
Delay in age of starting drug use



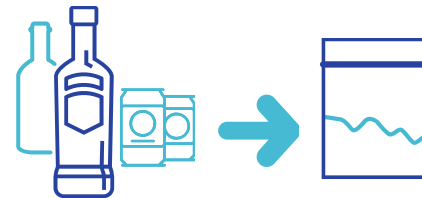
# Why age matters?



If start drinking alcohol at 15 years or earlier, **4 times more likely** to develop alcohol use disorder than someone who starts at 19 or later



**Early cannabis use** a predictor for cannabis use disorder



**Earlier alcohol and cannabis use** a predictor of future cocaine use



# Sociodemographic information about people who use drugs



# Percentage of people who use drugs, by area

People living in **Dublin**  
more likely to use drugs

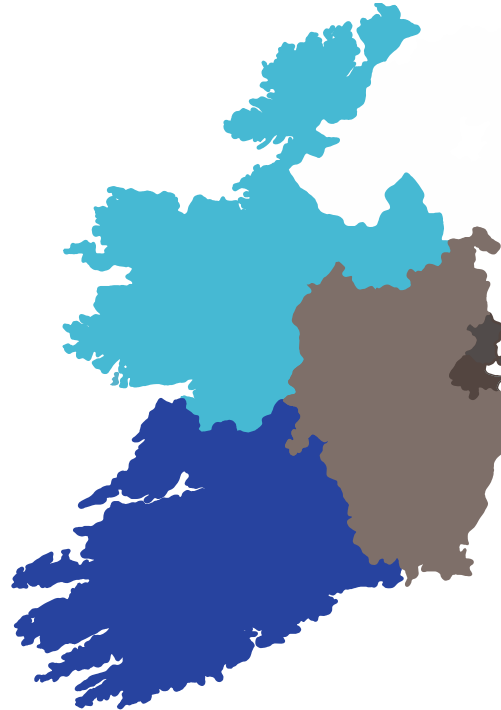
All Ireland  
**9%**

Connacht  
/ Ulster  
8%

Munster  
8%

Dublin  
13%

Rest of  
Leinster  
7%



# Socioeconomic status of people who use drugs

# Percentage of people who use drugs, by employment status

Drug use higher among students and unemployed



**Employed**  
8%



**Unemployed**  
14%



**Student**  
17%



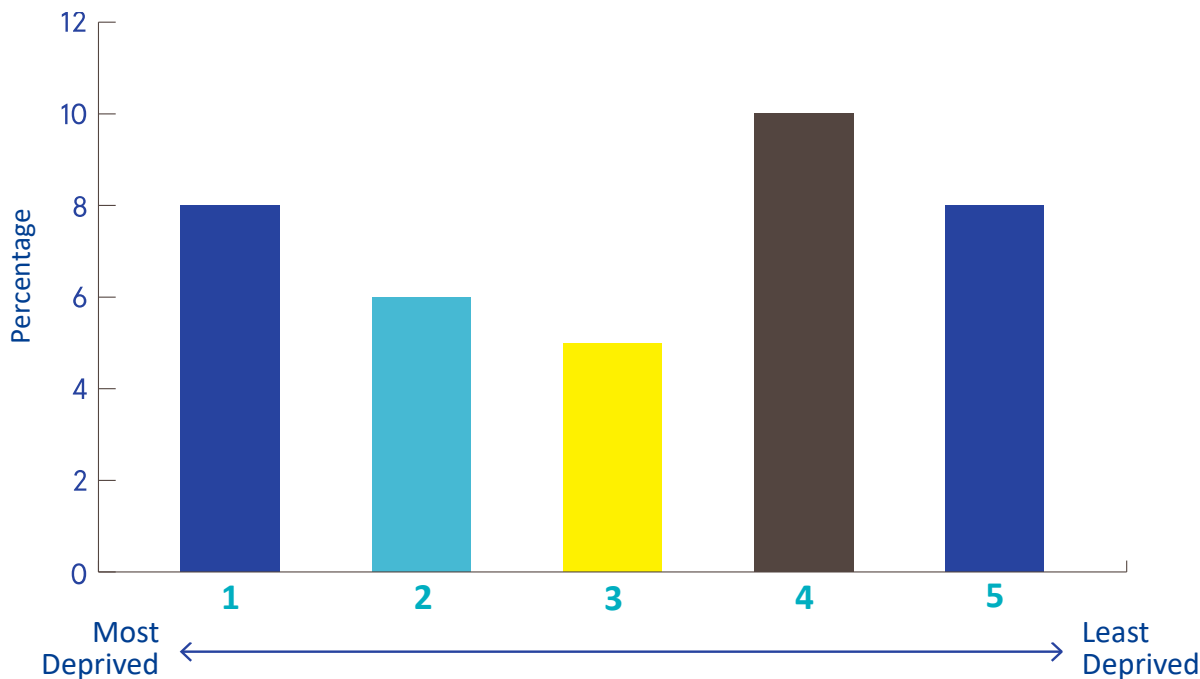
**Home duties**  
3%

# Drug use across society

Area deprivation indicators include

- **Income**
- **Employment**
- **Education**

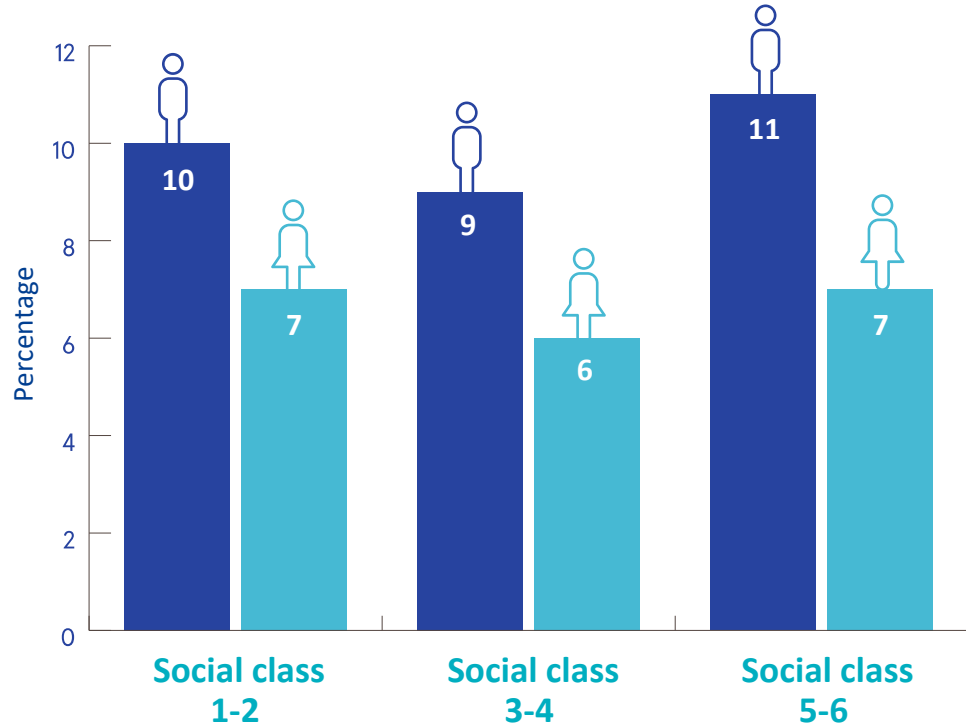
Similar levels of drug use in **most and least deprived areas**



# Cannabis use in schoolchildren by social class

Cannabis use by schoolchildren **not affected by social class**

Social class determined by **parent's job**



# Socioeconomic status and cannabis use disorder

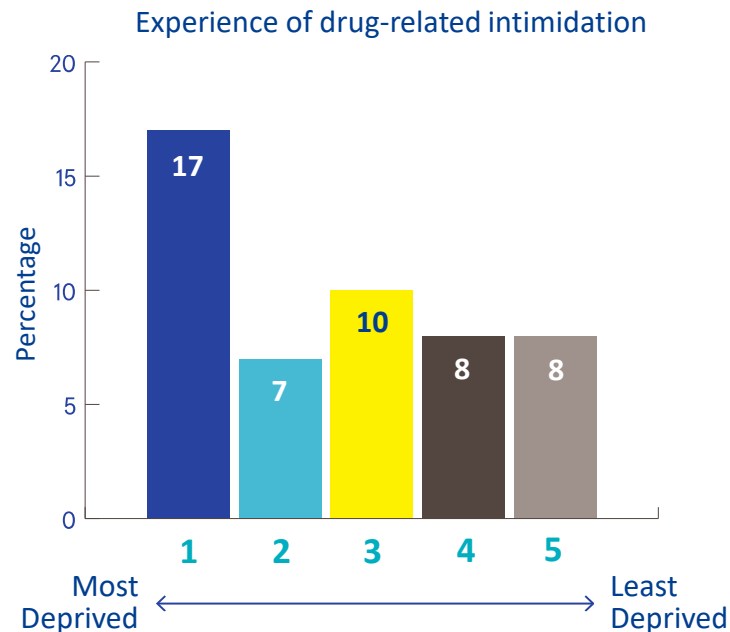
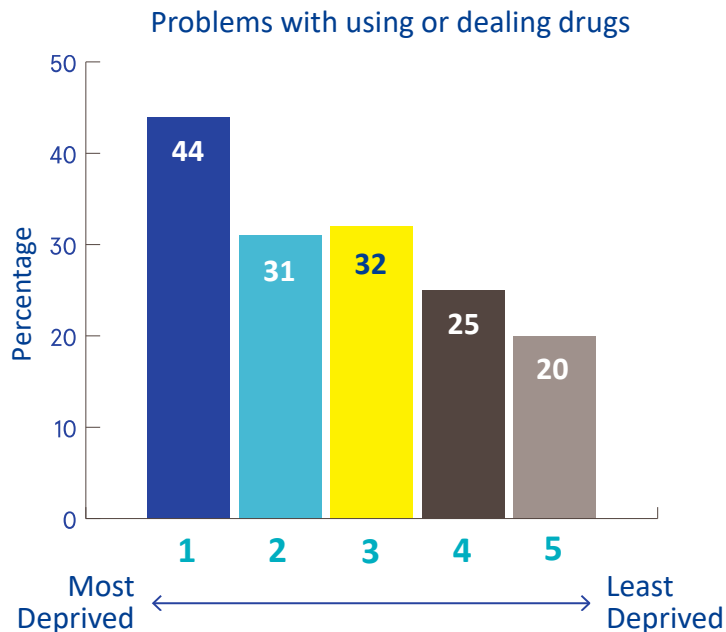
Cannabis use **common across all socioeconomic groups** but...

...problem cannabis use such as cannabis use disorder (CUD) **higher among individuals with lower education levels**



# Impact of drug use on communities

Impact of drug use greater in areas of deprivation



# Key Messages

- 9% of people in Ireland use drugs
- Cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine most commonly used drugs
- Young people & males more likely to use drugs
- Gap between 15–24-year-old males and females drug use is narrow
- Polydrug use common
- Socioeconomic status does not impact drug use...but ...does differ in impact felt in communities