

## Conference on psychoactive drugs sold in head shops and on line *(continued)*

highs' online and in head shops in Ireland and across Europe under a variety of names, such as MCAT, Snow, Charge. Some of these products are sold as bath salts or plant food. The contents listed on the package may contain the word 'ketones'. These compounds are advertised as a replacement for 'Charlie' (cocaine). Some users have reported injecting the compounds. The use of these drugs can induce anxiety and paranoia. Reports say that their use can become compulsive and can create a state of psychological dependence. Mephedrone was linked to two deaths in Sweden in 2008.

*(Jean Long)*

Podcasts of the presentations given at the conference are available at [www.drugs.ie/media](http://www.drugs.ie/media)

### Department of Health and Children statement in relation to legislation to be made under Misuse of Drugs Act 1977

The Government agreed at its meeting on 2 March 2010 to the commencement of a notification process under Directive 98/34/EC (the 'Technical Standards' Directive) as amended by Directive 98/48/EC, of the Government's intention to make a Declaration Order under the Misuse of

Drugs Act 1977 declaring certain substances, products and preparations to be controlled drugs for the purposes of the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1977 and 1984.

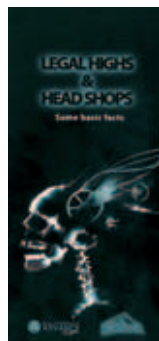
The substances concerned include a range of products sold in so-called 'head shops' including:

- synthetic cannabinoids (for example, Spice products)
- benzylpiperazine (BZP) derivatives
- mephedrone, methylone and related cathinones
- GBL and 1,4 BD

In addition, the Declaration Order to be made under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 will include Ketamine and Tapentadol which are substances that have legitimate uses as medicines but which can be subject to misuse. The Declaration Order will also cover certain narcotic and psychotropic substances which Ireland is obliged to bring under control in order to comply with the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

[www.dohc.ie/press/releases/2010/20100303.html](http://www.dohc.ie/press/releases/2010/20100303.html)

## Legal highs and head shops: the basic facts



In response to interest among drug workers regarding 'legal high' drugs available in head shops, Ballyfermot Advance Project and The Base youth and child centre in Ballyfermot have produced an information leaflet.

The leaflet outlines the current legal status and effects of common drugs such as Salvia, Spice, Piperazine, BZP and Kratom. There is also harm reduction information that may be used to advise clients of risks.

Content has been approved by Dr Des Corrigan, chairperson of the NACD, and Dr Bobby Smyth, consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist.

This brief, timely and straight-forward resource is available to download from [www.drugsandalcohol.ie/12941](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/12941)

For more information, or for hard copies, please email [community@ballyfermotadvance.ie](mailto:community@ballyfermotadvance.ie).

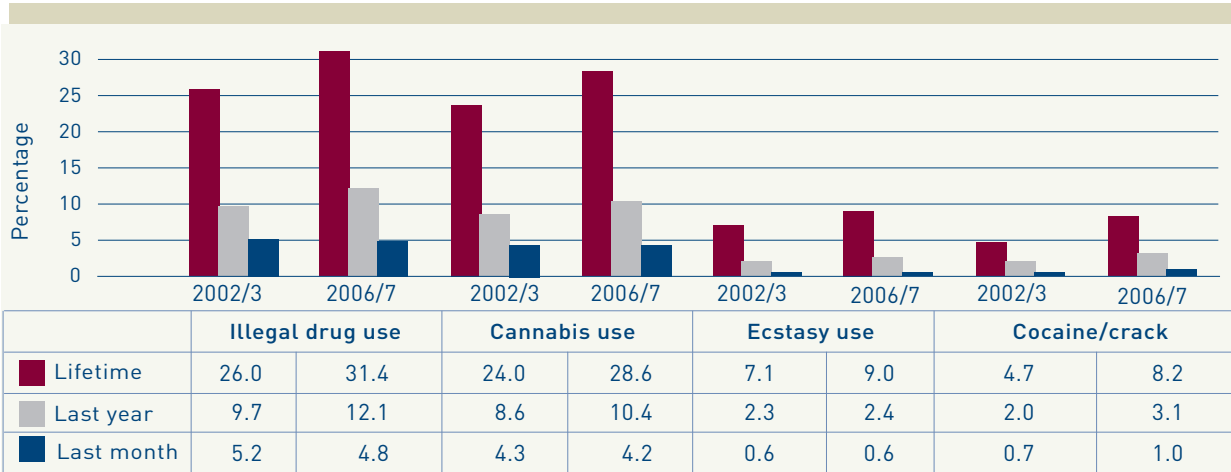
## Alcohol and drug use among young people in Ireland

There are three sources of data that estimate the prevalence of alcohol and other drug use among young people in Ireland: the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD) surveys on drug use among the general population,<sup>1,2</sup> the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (known as the ESPAD surveys)<sup>3,4,5</sup> and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys.<sup>6,7,8</sup> The NACD surveys classify young adults as those aged between 15 and 34, while the ESPAD surveys ascertain alcohol- and drug-using practices among 15–16-year-old school children. The HBSC surveys record health behaviours (including cannabis use) among school children aged 13–17 years. Drug use was measured for three time parameters, lifetime use, use in the

12 months prior to the survey and use in the month prior to the survey.

### Drug use

According to the NACD general population surveys, the proportion of young adults who reported using an illegal drug in the year prior to the survey increased from 10% in 2002/3 to 12% in 2006/7 (Figure 1). The proportions using cannabis showed a similar increase, rising by almost two percentage points, to over 10%. The proportions using cocaine increased for all three time parameters and the proportions using ecstasy during their lifetime or in the 12 months prior to the survey increased marginally.

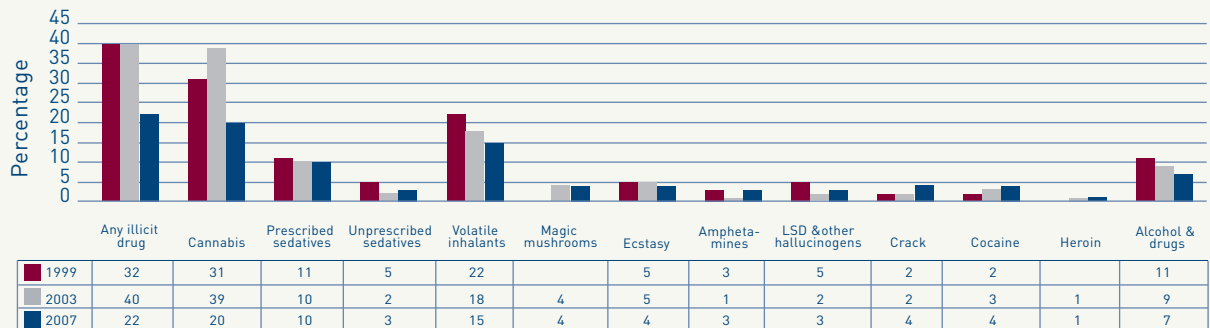


**Figure 1** Lifetime, last-year and last-month prevalence of illegal drug use among 15–34-year-olds in Ireland, 2002/3 and 2006/7

Source: National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (2005, 2008)

In the ESPAD surveys, the proportion of 15–16-year-old school children who reported use of any illicit drug at some point in their life decreased markedly between 2003 (40%) and 2007 (22%), a fall of 18 percentage points (Figure 2). As the majority of those who have tried any illicit drug have used cannabis (marijuana or hashish), the decrease in illicit drug use was influenced by the considerable decrease in the percentage of students who had tried cannabis at some point in their lives, from 39% in 2003 to 20% in 2007 (European average 19%). Lifetime use of solvents/

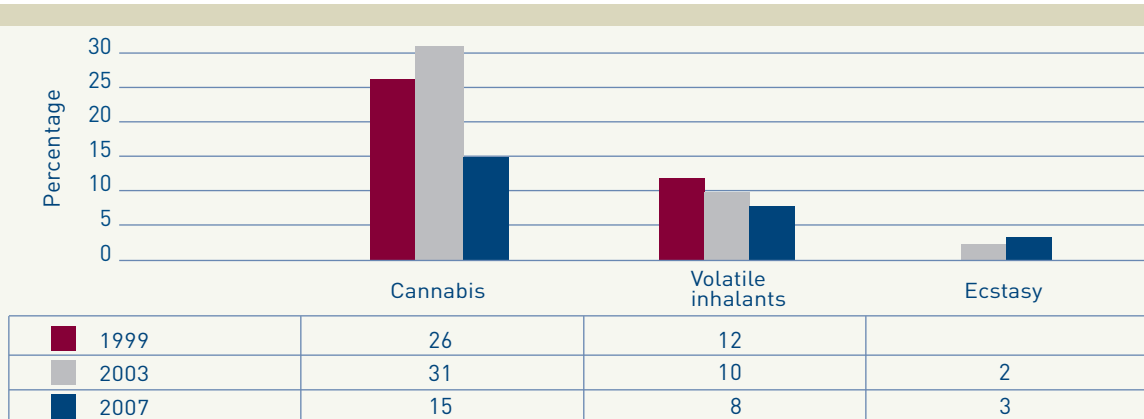
inhalants decreased from 18% in 2003 to 15% in 2007, but remained higher than the European average (9%). In the case of amphetamines and cocaine powder, the proportions reporting lifetime use increased marginally to equal or exceed the European average of 3%. In 2007, one in ten of the survey participants reported that they had taken prescribed tranquillisers or sedatives at some point in their lives; the use of such drugs had decreased marginally since 1999.



**Figure 2** Lifetime use of drugs among 15–16-year-old school children in Ireland, ESPAD 1999, 2003 and 2007

Source: ESPAD (2000, 2004, 2009)

As shown in Figure 3, trends in the use of cannabis and volatile inhalants in the 12 months prior to the ESPAD survey mirror the trends in lifetime use reported above.

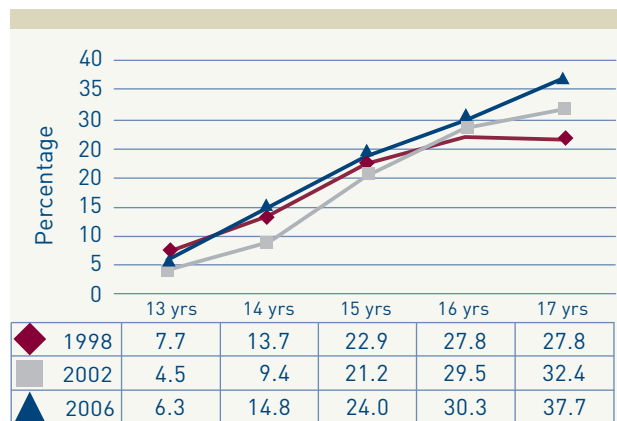


**Figure 3** Use of drugs in the 12 months prior to the survey among 15–16-year-old school children in Ireland, ESPAD 1999, 2003 and 2007

Source: ESPAD (2000, 2004, 2009)

## Alcohol and drug use among young people in Ireland (continued)

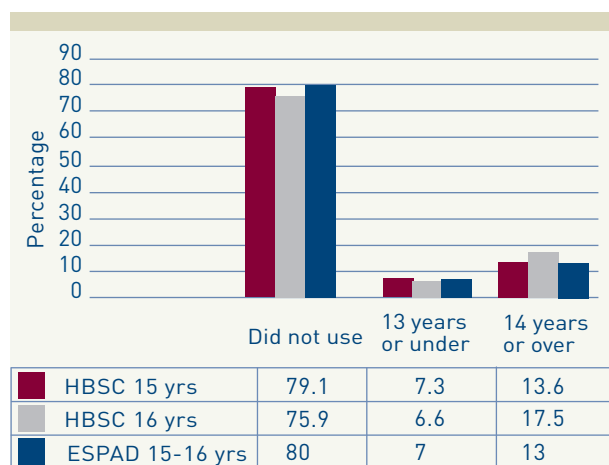
The proportion of school children who reported cannabis use at some point in their life increased with each year of age between 13 and 17 in all three HBSC surveys, except for 17-year-olds in 1998 (Figure 4). In 2006, 6% of 13-year-olds reported lifetime use of cannabis, and the proportion increased steadily with each year of age, to 38% for those aged 17 years. The proportions of those who had used cannabis in each age group from 14 to 17 years increased between 1998 and 2006.



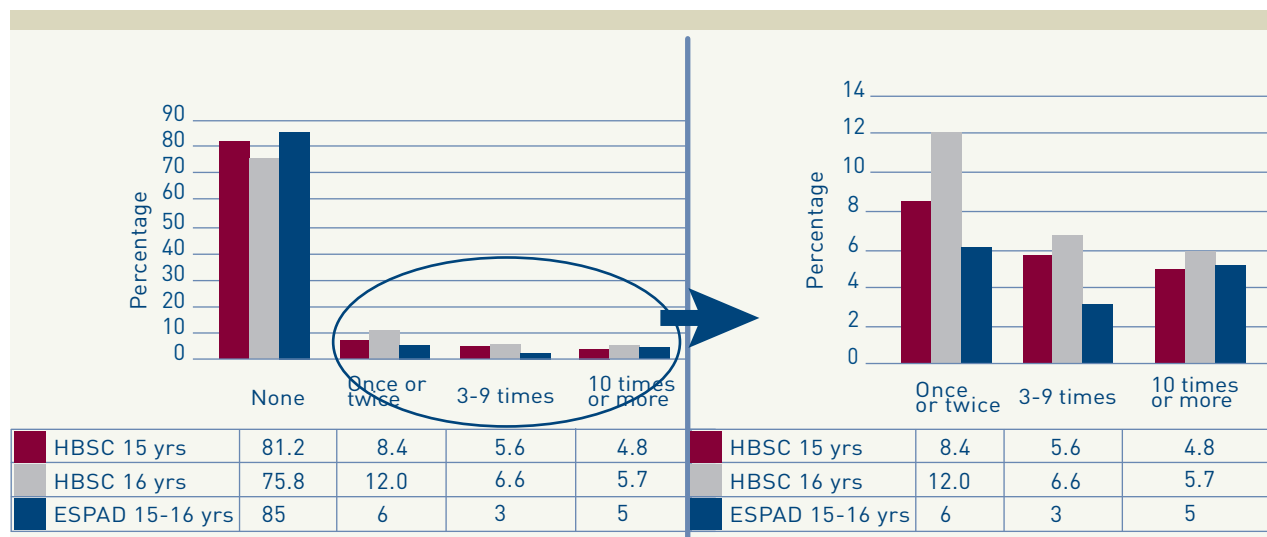
**Figure 4** Proportion of children who used cannabis at least once in their life, by age, HBSC 1998 2002 and 2006  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC surveys

The proportion of children who reported commencing cannabis use at 13 years or under was considerable, and similar in both the HBSC and ESPAD surveys (Figure 5).

In 2006/7, the proportion who had used cannabis three or more times was higher in the HBSC (10.4% and 12.3%) than in the ESPAD survey (8%) (Figure 6).



**Figure 5** Age commenced cannabis use for children aged 15–16 years, HBSC 2006 and ESPAD 2007  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC survey 2006 and published data from ESPAD (2009)

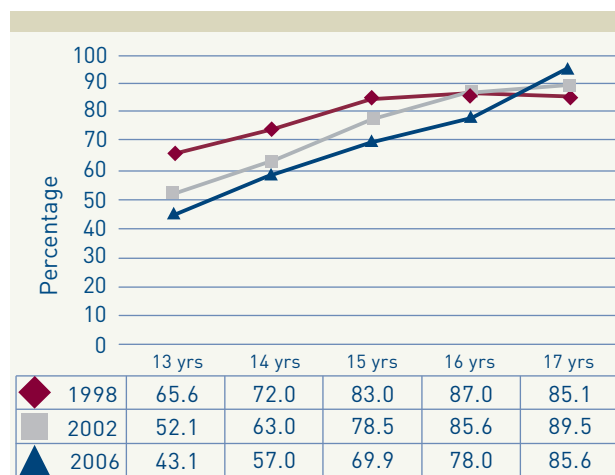


**Figure 6** Frequency of cannabis use in the 12 months prior to the survey among 15–16-year-olds, HBSC 2006 and ESPAD 2007  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC survey 2006 and published data from ESPAD (2009)

## Alcohol and drug use among young people in Ireland (continued)

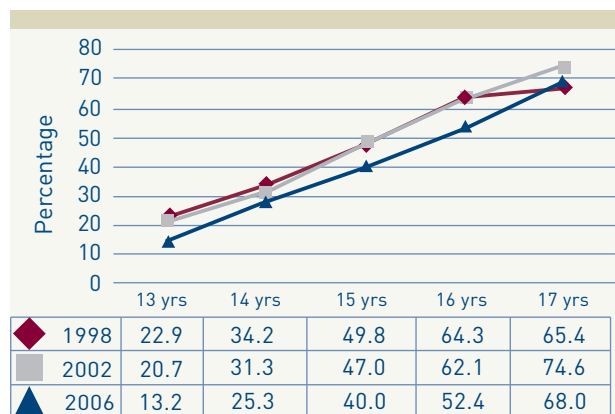
### Alcohol use

The HBSC and ESPAD surveys also examined alcohol use among schoolchildren. According to the last three HBSC surveys, the majority of schoolchildren had consumed alcohol, although the rate of lifetime use among the age groups from 13 to 16 years was lower in 2006 than in 1998. The largest decrease was observed among 13-year-olds; in 1998 66% reported having ever consumed alcohol, compared to 43% in 2006. The likelihood of having ever consumed alcohol increased with each year of age, with almost nine in ten 17-year-olds having ever consumed alcohol (Figure 7).



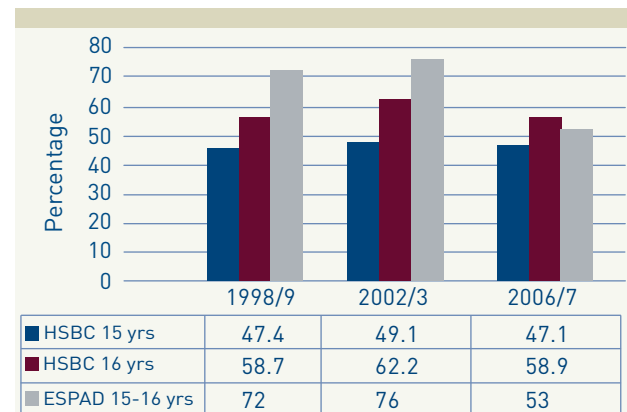
**Figure 7** Lifetime use of alcohol among 13–17-year-old schoolchildren, HBSC 1998, 2002, 2006  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC surveys

Last-month use of alcohol decreased among the age groups from 13 to 16 years between 1998 and 2006. In all three surveys, rates of alcohol use were higher at each year of age; for example, in 2006, 13% of 13-year-olds, and 25% of 14-year-olds had consumed alcohol in the previous month, (Figure 8).



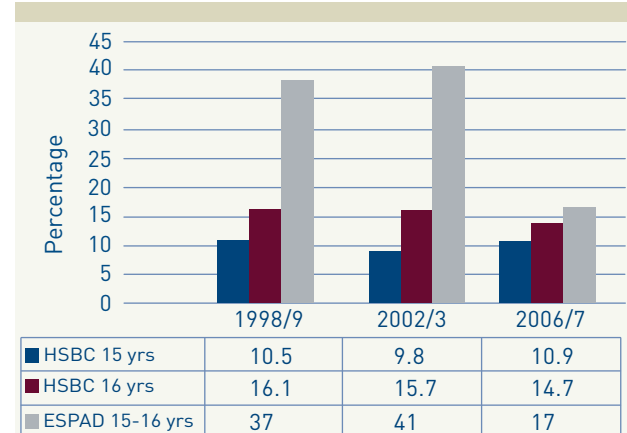
**Figure 8** Last-month use of alcohol among 13–17-year-old school children, HBSC 1998, 2002, 2006  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC surveys

According to the 2007 ESPAD survey, over half of 15–16-year-olds reported having ever been drunk (Figure 9). The percentages reporting drunkenness did not vary to any great extent across the three HBSC surveys. However, there were variations between the ESPAD and the HBSC surveys: in the 1999 and 2003 ESPAD surveys, the proportion of 15–16-year-olds who reported having ever been drunk was considerably higher than in the HBSC surveys. The 2007 ESPAD results were similar to those of the 2006 HBSC survey.



**Figure 9** Proportion of 15–16-year-olds who reported having ever been drunk, HBSC 1998, 2002, 2006; ESPAD 1999, 2003, 2007  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC surveys; Data from ESPAD (2000, 2004, 2009)

The proportion of 15-year-olds who reported having been drunk at least 10 times remained relatively stable over the three HBSC surveys, while the proportion of 16-year-olds decreased marginally (Figure 10). The ESPAD surveys of 1999 and 2003 reported 37% and 41%, respectively, of 15- and 16-year-olds who had been drunk at least 10 times. In comparison, just 17% reported the same in 2007. The results of the ESPAD and HBSC surveys were closer in 2007 than in previous years.



**Figure 10** Proportion of 15–16-year-olds who reported having been drunk at least 10 times (HBSC 1998, 2002, 2006; ESPAD 1999, 2003, 2007)  
Source: Unpublished data from HBSC surveys; Data from ESPAD (2000, 2004, 2009)

## Alcohol and drug use among young people in Ireland (*continued*)

### Conclusion

Overall, the HBSC surveys show a steady increase in cannabis use between 1998 and 2006, whereas the ESPAD surveys show a large increase between 1999 and 2003 and a larger, unexpected, decrease between 2003 and 2007. The HBSC survey results are in line with those of the NACD survey and other epidemiological indicators. They show a steady decrease in lifetime and last-month use of alcohol among 13–16-year-olds, but do not report major changes in drunkenness. In comparison, the 2007 ESPAD survey shows a large decrease in drunkenness compared to the 1999 and 2003 figures.

It is important to investigate the reasons for the marked decrease in alcohol use and in cannabis use reported in the ESPAD survey of 2007; these figures could represent a genuine fall in the use of alcohol and cannabis, or a change in the profile (age, gender or socio-economic group) of the sample chosen, or in the way the questionnaire was administered.

(Jean Long and Deirdre Mongan)

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2. National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (2008) *Drug use in Ireland and Northern Ireland: first results from the 2006/2007 drug prevalence survey*. Bulletin 1. Dublin: National Advisory Committee on Drugs.
3. Hibell B, Andersson B, Ahlström S, Balakireva O, Bjarnason T, Kokkevi A *et al.* (2000) *The 1999 ESPAD report: alcohol and other drug use among students in 30*

*European countries*. Stockholm: The Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN) and the Council of Europe Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group).

4. Hibell B, Andersson B, Bjarnason T, Ahlström S, Balakireva O, Kokkevi A *et al.* (2004) *The ESPAD report 2003: alcohol and other drug use among students in 35 European countries*. Stockholm: The Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Other Drugs (CAN) and the Council of Europe, Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs (Pompidou Group).
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6. Friel S, Nic Gabhainn S and Kelleher C (1999) *The national health & lifestyle surveys: survey of lifestyle, attitudes and nutrition (SLÁN) & the Irish health behaviour in school-aged children survey (HBSC)*. Galway: National University of Ireland.
7. Kelleher C, Nic Gabhainn S, Friel S, Corrigan H, Nolan G, Sixsmith J *et al.* (2003) *The national health & lifestyle surveys: survey of lifestyle, attitudes and nutrition (SLÁN) & the Irish health behaviour in school-aged children survey (HBSC)*. Galway: National University of Ireland.
8. Nic Gabhainn S, Kelly C and Molcho M (2007) *The Irish health behaviour in school-aged children (HBSC) study 2006*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.

## Alcohol use in Ireland: results from SLÁN 2007

On 1 December 2009, the SLÁN (Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition) group published the results of the alcohol component of the 2007 SLÁN survey.<sup>1</sup> This was the third SLÁN survey – previous surveys were conducted in 1998 and 2002. The survey involved 10,364 adults aged 18 years and over, representing a response rate of 62%. As part of the survey, participants were questioned in face-to-face interviews about their rates and patterns of alcohol consumption, harm from their own drinking and harm from others' drinking.

### Alcohol consumption and drinking patterns in Ireland

Four-fifths (81%) reported that they had consumed alcohol in the past year, with women (23%) more likely than men (15%) to be abstainers from alcohol. Higher rates of abstinence were reported by older respondents than by younger ones: for example, 41% of those aged 65 and over abstained from alcohol, compared to 11% of 18–29-year-olds. Three-quarters of the total number of respondents reported that they had consumed alcohol in the previous week, and 38% (45% of men; 30% of women) consumed

alcohol at least twice a week. Twenty-nine per cent of drinkers reported consuming 1–2 standard drinks on a typical drinking occasion. A standard drink was defined as a half pint or a glass of beer, lager or cider; a single measure of spirits; a single glass of wine; or a longneck bottle of alcopops. Two-fifths (41%) reported drinking at least five standard drinks on a typical drinking occasion. This was more common among men (54%) than women (27%) and among younger age groups.

One in 10 drinkers reported drinking over the recommended weekly alcohol limit (defined as 21 standard drinks for men and 14 standard drinks for women) and 28% engaged in weekly binge drinking (defined as consuming at least six standard drinks or 60g of alcohol on a single occasion). Drinking patterns were also assessed using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test – Consumption (AUDIT-C), which identifies those with harmful drinking patterns by examining frequency of drinking, volume consumed and extent of binge drinking. Over half (56%) of drinkers had a positive AUDIT-C score. Applying this percentage to