

What is the Young Persons' Substance Use Survey?

The Amy Winehouse Foundation Young Persons' Substance Use Survey is an online questionnaire funded by The Big Lottery as part of the Resilience Programme. We hope to find out about the types of alcohol and drugs that young people, aged 11 to 18 years, are using across England.

Young people will be asked to answer questions on the following:

- Patterns of substance use
- Attitudes towards substance use
- School life
- Activities outside school
- Potential risk/protective factors

Focus groups

In addition, we are aiming to conduct a series of focus groups with young people, parents and teachers, the purpose of which will be to discuss the survey structure, content and administration. The results of these focus groups will be used to improve the survey. In addition, we will be asking further questions relating to knowledge, attitudes and experiences of substance use to supplement the survey data, and would also be interested in listening to any particular concerns you have about substance use in general, for example, what substances young people are using in your school or area.

Interviews will also be conducted with a selection of young people to obtain further qualitative data.

Aims of the study

- Development of a reliable and valid survey for young people
- To obtain an estimate of the prevalence of substance use and emerging trends in substance use behaviour among 11-18 year olds in mainstream schools
- To usefully inform service design and provision, policy, practice and future research

Purpose of the research

The main aim of this study is to identify current trends in substance use. This information can then demonstrate the necessity for high quality drug, alcohol and low level mental health issues education to schools, commissioners and local and central government officials, and be used to develop more targeted and effective support and treatment services in the future.

As well as alcohol and more widely known illegal drugs, such as cannabis and ecstasy, young people may be using a range of other substances, such as:

- Novel Psychoactive Substances (also known as 'legal highs')
- Prescription drugs
- Performance enhancing drugs
- E-cigarettes and vaping
- Energy drinks

Trends and behaviours relating to substance use may have changed significantly in young people. This means that education and treatment programmes may also need to be tailored accordingly.

We hope to encourage young people to answer questions honestly by reassuring them that their individual responses will be confidential and any published data will be anonymous.

What number of students is required?

We are intending to conduct the survey across all year groups, but if you would prefer us to just sample a selected number of students from each year group, or to concentrate on year 11s, for example, that is also fine.

Obtaining informed consent from young people

Information sheets will be provided for parents and guardians explaining what the study involves so that they will have the opportunity to decline for their child to take part. Any queries regarding consent can be discussed with our researcher.

Fully informed consent will be taken from all young people. Information sheets will detail the aims and objectives of the study and what is involved in taking part. On the day of the survey, informed consent will be taken from the selected students and they will have a further opportunity to ask questions and opt out if they wish.

How is the survey administered?

The survey can be completed during a lesson timetabled by the school to reduce any disruption to the teaching schedule, and takes approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. Young people will be supervised by a member of the research team or a teacher. Teachers should always be present for safeguarding purposes.

The survey is administered via a secure online method that is easy to use, and contains filters so that young people who are not using substances will only complete the sections of the survey that are relevant to them. Young people also have the option to skip any question that they do not wish to answer. We have chosen to use an online survey to save paper and thus be more environmentally friendly.

Young people will be able to complete the survey on a PC, laptop or tablet computer.

If a young person decides to withdraw from the study while completing the survey or afterwards, they can do this by alerting a member of the research team who is supervising the survey.

Confidentiality

All answers to the questionnaire will be collected via a secure online application and students will not be identified from their responses. No identifiable information about participants will be included in the data analysis, in any disseminated information or in the school report. Individual schools will also not be identified in any published data.

We will only disclose information to anyone outside of the research team if an individual approaches a member of the team or school staff to indicate they may be at risk of harm i.e. they have expressed the desire to harm themselves or another person.

Findings of the study

Individual survey responses will remain confidential. Schools will receive a report containing prevalence of substances used in their school and themes identified from the focus groups, but individual students cannot be identified from this. In addition, schools will also receive a copy of the main research findings.

Safeguarding young people

The safety and wellbeing of young people is a very high priority for us. It is expected that completing the survey will be an interesting and enjoyable experience for young people. However, in the event that completing the survey raises any worries or concerns, appropriate safeguarding procedures have been put in place.

Prior to participation in the survey, all schools must have a clear referral and support pathway for any young person identified as needing additional support.

The researchers administering the survey and conducting focus groups have received safeguarding training. The survey has received full ethical approval.

There will be a leaflet handed out to participants at the end of the classroom session with the contact details of local and national support providers, as well as who to talk to within the school (e.g. named school counsellor). For those schools that currently have the Resilience Programme in place, young people may already have received drug and alcohol education sessions from members of the survey research team.

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