

## 5. HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

### 5.6 Substance Misuse in Children and Young People

This section describes the effects of substance misuse in children and young people up to the age of 18, and includes available information on substance misuse among children and young people in Buckinghamshire. Substance misuse is defined as the continued misuse of any mind-altering substance (which can include alcohol and a range of illegal and legal drugs) that severely affects a person's physical and mental health, social situation and responsibilities<sup>1</sup>.

#### *5.6.1 The impact of substance misuse on the health of children and young people*

The Chief Medical Officer's official guidance is that the healthiest and safest option is for children to remain alcohol free up to the age of 18. If they do drink alcohol it should not be at least until the age of 15 and no more than once a week<sup>2</sup>. This guidance is based on evidence that alcohol can have particular consequences for young people such as impaired brain development, physical and mental health problems as well as being associated with poor attainment at school, violent and antisocial behaviour and unsafe sexual behaviour<sup>3</sup>.

Young people who misuse drugs are at risk of mental health issues, including suicide, depression, psychotic symptoms and disruptive behaviour disorders<sup>3</sup>. New psychoactive substances (NPS) are manufactured to mimic the effects of substances such as ecstasy, cannabis or cocaine. Young people are particularly susceptible to the growing NPS market due to their relative affordability, accessibility, and confusion about their legal status. However, the Psychoactive Substances Bill became law in May 2016. The Act makes it an offence to produce, supply or offer to supply any psychoactive substance<sup>4</sup>. There is limited information about the health effects of these substances; it is thought likely that they will be similar to the effects of the substances they have been designed to mimic but they may have unpredictable and idiosyncratic effects because they often contain unknown substances or a mixture of substances<sup>5</sup>.

Exposure to alcohol and illicit drug use during adolescence has also been shown to lead to an increased risk of substance dependence and addiction in adulthood<sup>6</sup>. In addition, children and young people who live with substance misusing parents and carers are at increased risk of neglect, exposure to domestic violence, and of misusing alcohol and illegal drugs themselves<sup>7</sup>. Nationally, parental drug use is a risk factor in 29% of all serious case reviews and the annual cost of looking after drug-using parents' children who have been taken into care is £42.5m<sup>8</sup>.

## 5.6.2 Information on substance misuse among children and young people in Buckinghamshire

### 5.6.2.1 Prevalence of substance misuse

The 2014 Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) survey on Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England found that 15% of pupils (11-15 year olds) reported ever having taken any drugs (including volatile substances), 10% had taken drugs in the last year and 6% had taken drugs in the last month<sup>3</sup> (table 1). For Buckinghamshire, this would equate to 4,845 who had ever taken drugs, 3,230 who had taken drugs in the last year and 1,938 who had taken drugs in the last month. The commonest drug reported was cannabis (used by 6.7%) followed by volatile substances such as glue or solvents (2.9%) and any stimulant such as ecstasy or cocaine (2.1%).

**Table 1 Reported use of any drug by 11-15 year olds, proportion by age and gender, England, 2014**

	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	Total
<b>Boys</b>						
Ever taken drugs (%)	7	7	13	18	27	16
Taken drugs in the last year (%)	5	4	8	12	20	11
Taken drugs in the last month (%)	3	2	5	8	12	6
<b>Girls</b>						
Ever taken drugs (%)	5	7	10	19	22	13
Taken drugs in the last year (%)	3	4	6	15	17	10
Taken drugs in the last month (%)	2	3	2	7	11	6
<b>Total</b>						
Ever taken drugs (%)	6	7	11	19	24	15
Taken drugs in the last year (%)	4	4	7	14	19	10
Taken drugs in the last month (%)	2	2	4	8	12	6

Source: Smoking, alcohol and drug use among young people, 2014 (HSCIC)

The national What About YOUth? Survey of 15 year olds was carried out for the first time in 2014. The sample included 989 15 year olds from Buckinghamshire, with a total of almost 118,000 nationally. It found that 8.1% of the young people surveyed in Buckinghamshire (10.7% in England) said they had ever tried cannabis, 2% in Buckinghamshire (4.6% in England) had used cannabis in the last month, and 6.3%

in Buckinghamshire (8.9% in England) had used it in the last year<sup>9</sup> (table 2). In this survey 98% of young people had not tried other drugs.

**Table 2 Reported use of cannabis by 15 year olds, proportion by gender, Buckinghamshire (n=989) and England, 2014**

	Ever tried cannabis		Used cannabis in last month		Used cannabis in the last year		Never used cannabis	
	Bucks	England	Bucks	England	Bucks	England	Bucks	England
<b>Boys</b>	7.3	10.6	1.9	4.7	N/A	N/A	92.7	89.4
<b>Girls</b>	9.0	10.8	2.2	4.5	N/A	N/A	91.0	89.3
<b>All</b>	8.1	10.7	2.0	4.6	6.3	8.9	91.9	89.3

*Source: What about YOUth? Survey 2014*

In the 2014 HSCIC survey, 8% of 11-15 year olds reported that they had drunk alcohol during the last week, 9% one to four weeks ago, 10% one to six months ago and 8% more than six months ago, while 64% said they had never had a drink<sup>3</sup> (table 3). For Buckinghamshire, this would equate to over 5,000 11 to 15 year olds who have had a drink in the last month.

**Table 3 Reported use of alcohol by 11-15 year olds, proportion by age and gender, England, 2014**

	11 years	12 years	13 years	14 years	15 years	Total
<b>Boys</b>						
During the last week (%)	1	2	3	9	20	8
One to four weeks ago (%)	2	2	5	12	20	9
One to six months ago (%)	2	5	7	14	17	10
More than six months ago (%)	3	6	8	9	10	8
Never had a drink (%)	92	85	76	57	33	66
<b>Girls</b>						
During the last week (%)	-	2	4	14	17	8
One to four weeks ago (%)	1	2	6	12	23	10
One to six months ago (%)	1	5	9	15	18	11
More than six months ago (%)	3	7	10	10	11	8
Never had a drink (%)	95	85	72	49	31	63
<b>Total</b>						
During the last week (%)	1	2	3	11	18	8
One to four weeks ago (%)	1	2	5	12	22	9
One to six months ago (%)	2	5	8	14	18	10
More than six months ago (%)	3	6	9	10	10	8
Never had a drink (%)	94	85	74	53	32	64

Source: *Smoking, alcohol and drug use among young people, 2014 (HSCIC)*

The What About YOUTH? Survey of 15 year olds found that around 62% said they had ever drunk alcohol, 6.5% of the young people in Buckinghamshire (6.2% in England) were classed as regular drinkers (drinking alcohol at least once a week), 13.6% in Buckinghamshire (11.4% in England) drink about once a month, and 41.4% in Buckinghamshire (42.7% in England) currently classed themselves as non-drinkers<sup>8</sup> (table 4).

**Table 4 Reported use of alcohol by 15 year olds, proportion by gender, Buckinghamshire (n=989) and England, 2014**

	Ever had a drink		Regular (at least once a week)		Once a month		Non-drinker	
	Bucks	England	Bucks	England	Bucks	England	Bucks	England
<b>Boys</b>	58.3	59.7	8.1	6.6	14.2	10.3	44.3	45.5
<b>Girls</b>	66.2	65.2	4.6	5.9	13.1	12.6	37.9	39.8
<b>All</b>	62.4	62.0	6.5	6.2	13.6	11.4	41.4	42.7

Source: *What about YOUth? Survey 2014*

Data collected in Buckinghamshire schools during 2015 via the school nursing service as part of a health assessment found that in year nine (ages 13-14, n=1,729), 1.4% of students said they consume alcohol weekly, 4.3% monthly and 17.1% rarely. Amongst the same cohort, 0.3% said they take illegal substances more than weekly, 0.1% weekly, 1.5% monthly and 0.8% take illegal substances rarely<sup>10</sup>.

The Buckinghamshire Children and Young People’s Voice Survey is a county-wide survey conducted in secondary schools and included 573 young people aged 12 to 18 years old. In the 2015 survey, nearly half (46%) of 14 to 15 year olds said they had had an alcoholic drink (73 out of 157 respondents). Almost a third (29%) of 12 to 18 year olds had felt the effects of alcohol once, twice or three times or more in the last month (130 out of 443 respondents), and 60% agreed that using alcohol is common for people of their age (308 out of 517 respondents)<sup>11</sup>.

#### 5.6.2.2. Use of services for substance misuse by young people

During 2014-15, 164 young people accessed Buckinghamshire specialist treatment services<sup>12</sup>. Of these, 92% had used cannabis (compared with 85% nationally), with alcohol the second commonest substance (66% in Buckinghamshire and 52% nationally) (these figures include adjunctive use) (table 5).

**Table 5 Number and % of young people taking up specialist substance misuse services by age and substance used, Buckinghamshire and England, 2014/15 (numbers include adjunctive use)**

	≤ 13 years	14-15	16-17	18-24	Total
<b>Heroin and/or crack</b>	0	X	X	0	X
<b>Stimulants</b>	0	18	27	3	48 (29%)
<b>Cannabis</b>	9	60	75	7	151 (92%)
<b>Alcohol</b>	6	40	56	6	108 (66%)
<b>NPS</b>	0	X	X	0	X
<b>Tobacco</b>	8	39	42	2	91 (55%)
<b>Other drug</b>	X	X	X	0	5 (3%)
<b>Total (n)</b>	10	65	81	8	164
<b>Total Bucks (%)</b>	6%	40%	49%	5%	
<b>National (%)</b>	6%	35%	45%	14%	

X: Numbers <5 suppressed

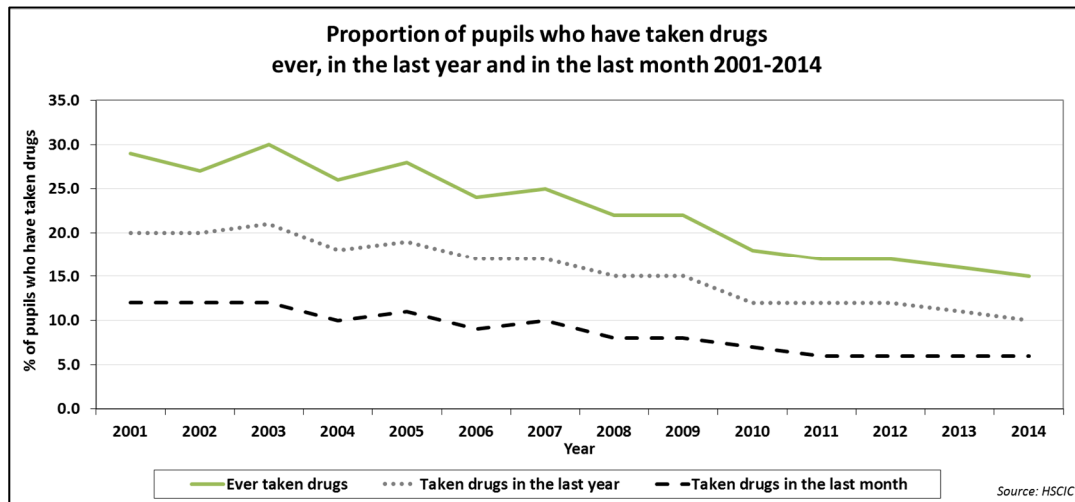
Source: Public Health England, JSNA support pack

During the period 2011-14, there were 75 alcohol-specific hospital admissions (admissions where alcohol is causally implicated in all cases) for under 18 year olds in Buckinghamshire, a rate of 22.0 per 100,000 of the population. This is lower than the national and regional rates which are 40.1 and 35.6 per 100,000 respectively<sup>7</sup>. Data for drug-related hospital admissions is provided for ages 15-24 years rather than up to the age of 18. In Buckinghamshire, the rate of hospital admissions between 2012–15 due to substance misuse was significantly lower than national and regional levels, at 33.2 per 100,000 compared to 88.8 per 100,000 nationally and 80.5 per 100,000 regionally<sup>13</sup>.

#### 5.6.2.3 Trends in substance misuse

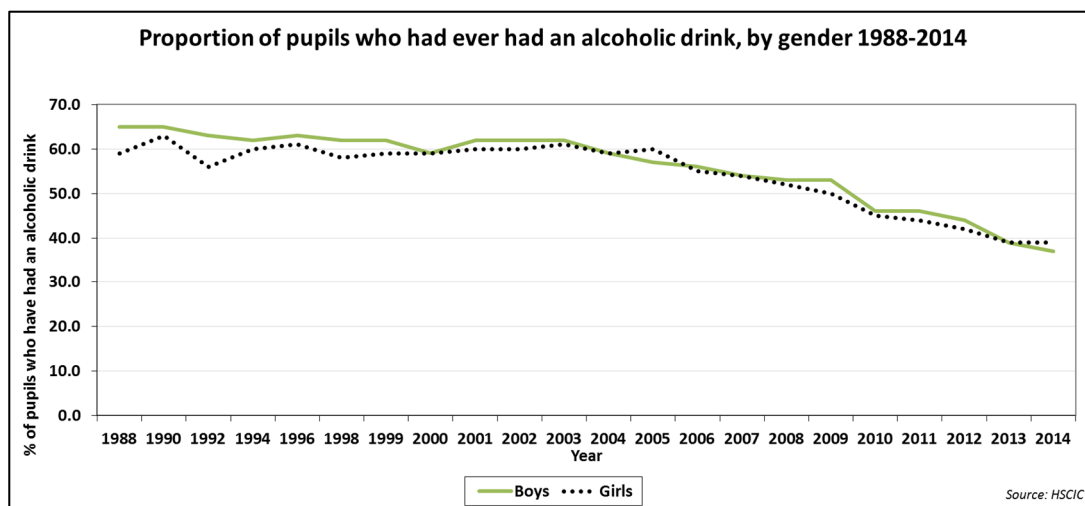
The national survey of Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use in 11-15 year olds has found declining prevalence of drug use between 2001 and 2014, although the rate of decline has slowed since 2010 (Figure 1)<sup>3</sup>. The prevalence of ever having used alcohol has also declined among 11-15 year olds in England since 1988, with a particularly steep decline since 2004 (Figure 2)<sup>3</sup>.

**Figure 1 Prevalence of drug use among 11-15 year olds in England, 2001-14**



Source: HSCIC 2015

**Figure 2 Prevalence of alcohol use (ever) among 11-15 year olds in England, 1988-2014**

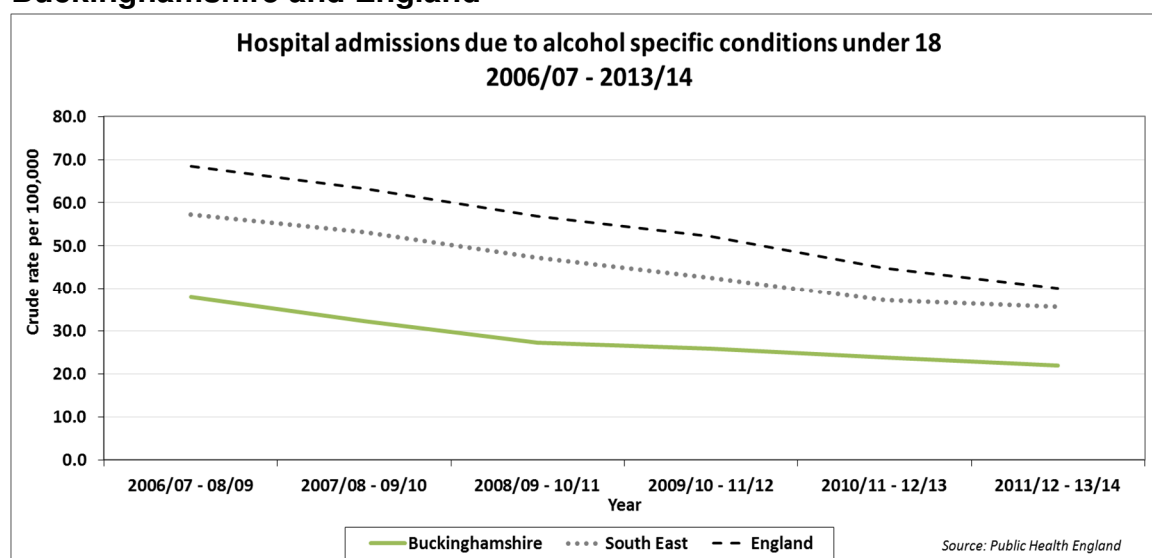


Source: HSCIC 2015

Nationally, there has been a 24% reduction in the number of young people attending specialist substance misuse services between 2008/9 and 2014/15<sup>14</sup>. In Buckinghamshire, the number of young people in specialist services fell from 203 in 2012/13 to 162 in 2013/14, but then increased slightly to 165 in 2014/15. This may in part have been related to a minor reconfiguration of the way the services ran.

In Buckinghamshire, the alcohol-specific hospital admission rate for under 18s fell from 38 per 100,000 in 2006/07-2008/09, to 22 per 100,000 in 2011/12-2013/14 (three-year rolling averages) (figure 3). The national admission rate declined over the same period from 52 per 100,000 to 40 per 100,000<sup>7</sup>.

**Figure 3 Trends in alcohol-specific hospital admissions in under 18 year olds, Buckinghamshire and England**



Source: Public Health England

### 5.6.3 Substance misuse among different population groups of children and young people

#### 5.6.3.1 Age and Gender

Tables 1 and 3 above show that the national surveys of 11-15 year olds found slightly higher rates of drug use among boys than girls at most ages between 11-15, while alcohol use tends to be slightly higher among girls<sup>3</sup>. However, the What About YOUth? survey found that in 2014, 7.3% of 15-year-old boys in Buckinghamshire reported ever having tried cannabis and 1.9% having used it in the last month, compared with 9% and 2.2% of girls respectively<sup>8</sup> (table 2). The What About YOUth? survey also found that the proportion of 15-year-olds in Buckinghamshire who reported that they currently drink was higher among girls (62%) than boys (56%) (table 4).

The specialist service in Buckinghamshire was used by many more males (72%) than females (28%) in 2014-15, a higher proportion of males than nationally (65%)<sup>11</sup>.

National data (tables 1 and 3) also show that both alcohol and drug use increase markedly between the ages of 11 and 15, particularly among 14 and 15-year-olds<sup>3</sup>. Table 5 above shows the age breakdown of the young people aged up to 24 in Buckinghamshire specialist treatment services during 2014/15. The largest group (49%) were aged 16-17 years, and 40% were aged 14-15 years. The proportions in these age groups are higher than nationally because 18-24 year olds are more likely to be seen in adult services in Buckinghamshire.



### 5.6.3.2 Ethnicity

Table 6 shows data from the national survey on smoking, drinking and drug use among 11-15 year olds, broken down by broad ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>. Alcohol use was most common in White populations and drug use was at a similar level across the White, Mixed and Black ethnic groups. Both alcohol and drug use were lower in Asian and 'Other' populations.

**Table 6 Proportion of 11-15 year olds in broad ethnic groups who report using drugs or alcohol, England 2014 (% of total in each ethnic group)**

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
<b>Ever drunk alcohol</b>	42	32	10	21	11
<b>Drank alcohol in the last week</b>	9	7	1	4	6
<b>Ever taken drugs</b>	14	17	13	19	3
<b>Took drugs in the last year</b>	10	12	6	11	3
<b>Took drugs in the last month</b>	6	8	4	9	2

Source: *Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people, 2014 (HSCIC)*

The What About YOUth? survey of 15 year olds conducted in 2014 found a slightly different pattern with the highest ever-use and use in the last month of cannabis reported among young people from Mixed ethnic groups, followed by White, Black, Other and Asian groups<sup>8</sup> (table 7). More young people from White or Mixed ethnic groups also reported ever trying other drugs. Findings in relation to alcohol were similar to those found in 11-15 year olds, with the highest rates of being a current or regular drinker among young people from White or Mixed ethnic groups<sup>8</sup>.

**Table 7 Proportion of 15-year-olds in broad ethnic groups who report using drugs or alcohol, England 2014 (% of total in each ethnic group)**

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
<b>Ever tried cannabis</b>	11	16	3	10	7
<b>Used cannabis in the last month</b>	5	7	2	4	3
<b>Ever tried other drugs</b>	3	3	1	1	1
<b>Ever had an alcoholic drink</b>	72	61	11	32	19
<b>Current drinker</b>	67	54	8	24	15
<b>Regular drinker (≥once a week)</b>	7	4	0	1	1

Source: *What about YOUth? Survey 2014*

### 5.6.3.3. Socioeconomic differences

The What About YOUth? survey reported that 15 year olds living in the least deprived areas in England were more likely to report that they drink alcohol than those from the most deprived areas (66% and 44% respectively), and also to report that they were regular drinkers (8% in least deprived areas compared with 4% in most deprived)<sup>8</sup>. The survey reported little difference between deprivation quintiles for cannabis use, with 9% in the most deprived areas compared with 8% in the least deprived having used cannabis in the last year<sup>8</sup>.

### 5.6.3.4. Vulnerable groups

A review based on analysis of the Crime and Justice Survey 2003 compared drug use among five vulnerable groups of young people aged 10-24 with use among young people not in a vulnerable group<sup>15</sup>. Although these data are quite old, relative patterns of use are still likely to be similar. The vulnerable groups were those who have ever been in care, those who have ever been homeless, truants, those excluded from school and serious or frequent offenders. Those in a vulnerable group were significantly more likely to use drugs, and to use them frequently (table 8). The vulnerable groups most at risk of drug use were serious or frequent offenders and truants, and young people who were in more than one vulnerable group were also significantly more likely to use drugs than those who were in just one.

**Table 8 Percentage of those aged 10-24 who were and were not in vulnerable groups who had used drugs in the last year (England, 2003)**

	<b>In no vulnerable group</b>	<b>In any vulnerable group</b>	<b>In one vulnerable group</b>	<b>In more than one vulnerable group</b>
<b>Any drug</b>	15.6	40.7	34.1	57.7
<b>Class A drug</b>	3.9	16.0	12.3	24.8
<b>Frequent use</b>	4.6	23.8	17.7	39.4

*Source: Becker and Roe: findings from 2003 Crime and Justice Survey*

### *5.6.4 Geographical variations in substance misuse*

The What About YOUth? survey reported that 15 year olds in Buckinghamshire had slightly higher rates of alcohol consumption than 15 year olds in England. In Buckinghamshire, 59% of 15 year olds classed themselves as current drinkers and 41% as non-drinkers, compared to 57% current drinkers and 43% non-drinkers in England<sup>8</sup>.

The same survey reported slightly lower rates of cannabis use amongst 15 year olds in Buckinghamshire, with 8.1% reporting having ever used cannabis, compared to 10.7% nationally, and 2.0% having used it in the last month compared with 4.6% nationally (table 2)<sup>8</sup>. The use of other drugs was also reported to be lower in Buckinghamshire, with just over 1% reporting having tried any other drugs, compared to 2.5% in England.

Compared with national data, young people in treatment services in Buckinghamshire were more likely to be using cannabis, alcohol, stimulants or tobacco, less likely to be using NPSs or other drugs (see Table 5), and also more likely to be using two or more substances (69% in Buckinghamshire compared with 61% nationally)<sup>11</sup>. A high proportion of young people in treatment began using a problematic substance under the age of 15; 85% in Buckinghamshire and 93% nationally. Young people in treatment services in Buckinghamshire were more likely to be affected by others' substance misuse than for young people nationally, with 30% affected in Buckinghamshire compared to 21% nationally.

Alcohol-specific hospital admissions for under 18s in Buckinghamshire are significantly lower than the rates in England and the South East region. In 2011/12 – 2013/14, alcohol-specific admissions for under 18s in Buckinghamshire were 22 per 100,000 compared to 35.6 per 100,000 in the South East and 40 per 100,000 in England<sup>7</sup>.

#### *5.6.5 Demand and horizon scanning*

National surveys and data from local treatment services show that cannabis and alcohol remain the substances of choice for young people. National trends suggest that the use of both alcohol and drugs among young people has been gradually declining, and the numbers using services both nationally and in Buckinghamshire have also fallen over the last few years. Relatively small numbers of young people currently using local services report the use of NPS, but the future impact of these is difficult to predict. The NPS market is rapidly changing and the substances may be attractive to young people, affordable, and more easily available than longer-established illegal drugs. It is not known how the change in the legal status of NPS will affect their use and reporting. Prevention initiatives and diversionary tactics will continue to be a priority for this group. Buckinghamshire County Council has developed a NPS action plan and will work with partners to review and update regularly.

### 5.6.6 Conclusions

Misuse of alcohol and drugs by young people is associated with significant physical and mental health problems as well as worse educational outcomes, violent and antisocial behaviour and unsafe sexual behaviour. Substance misuse at a young age can also lead to habitual use in later life.

National surveys have found that 6% of 11-15 year olds had taken any drugs and 8% had drunk alcohol in the last month. The commonest drug young people report using is cannabis, and a survey of 15 year olds in Buckinghamshire found that 2% had used cannabis in the last month, and 6.3% in the last year. Rates of cannabis use in Buckinghamshire are lower than those reported nationally. However, 6.5% of 15 year olds in Buckinghamshire drank at least once a week and 13.6% about once a month, higher than the national averages. National data also suggest that the use of both drugs and alcohol among young people is declining.

In Buckinghamshire, higher proportions of 15 year old girls than boys reported using both cannabis and alcohol; this differs from the national pattern where alcohol use is also higher among girls but drug use is higher among boys. However, many more boys than girls in Buckinghamshire access substance misuse services. The use of both drugs and alcohol increases with age, particularly when young people reach the ages of 14-15 years. Alcohol use is more common among young people in the least deprived population groups, while there is little difference between socioeconomic groups in the frequency of drug use. Young people from White and Mixed ethnic groups tend to report higher levels of both alcohol and drug use compared to other ethnic groups. Drug use is also much more common among young people in vulnerable groups.

The rates of hospital admissions of young people related to both drugs and alcohol are significantly lower in Buckinghamshire than the national and regional rates, and are declining. Young people using specialist substance misuse services in Buckinghamshire are most likely to be using cannabis or alcohol, and the proportions of service users in Buckinghamshire who use these substances are higher than the national averages. Very few local service users report using New Psychoactive Substances, but these substances may be particularly attractive to young people and their future impact is difficult to predict.

Even though the rates of alcohol and drug use among young people appear to be declining, they are still a significant cause for concern due to their potentially serious impact on many aspects of young people's lives. Local services should focus on delaying the onset of use and reducing levels of substance misuse in this group. Use of substances is more prevalent in certain populations, who can be targeted to reduce misuse and the damage it can cause.

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