Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England

Findings by region, 2006 to 2008

A survey carried out for the NHS Information Centre
by the National Centre for Social Research
and the National Foundation for Educational Research
Published by The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

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This new set of statistics has not been formally assessed for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. However, the Statistics Authority has agreed that, in view of the fact that the statistics are the product of secondary analysis of existing National Statistics, they can be designated as National Statistics. The producer body has confirmed that the new statistics are produced to the same standards as the existing ones.
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Background

The survey of smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England (SDD) has been carried out annually by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) since 2000.¹ It is commissioned by the NHS Information Centre, with support from the Home Office; the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) also has an interest in the statistics. Findings are used to inform policy and monitor progress towards government targets.²

The survey uses a two-stage probability sample of schools and pupils, designed to be representative of young people aged between 11 and 15.³ The sample of schools is stratified by sex of intake and school type. Within these strata, the sampling frame is sorted by local authority. This design does not guarantee a representative sample of schools within all regions and so reliable estimates by region cannot currently be derived from any one year’s data.⁴

This note presents key survey findings by region, based on data from the three most recent survey years, 2006 to 2008, combined and weighted to be regionally representative. Differences are commented on only if significant at the 95% confidence level.⁵ Details of the weighting methodology can be found at the end of this work.

Smoking

In recent years, the proportions of young people who try smoking and who become regular smokers have declined. In 2006, the proportion of 11 to 15 year olds who said that they had smoked at least once in their lives was 39%; this fell to 33% in 2007 and 32% in 2008. The survey defines regular smoking for this age group as usually smoking at least once a week. The proportion of this age group who were regular smokers was 9% in 2006, and 6% in both 2007 and 2008. Girls are more likely to smoke than boys and there is an increase in the prevalence of regular smoking with age.

Table 1 shows the proportions of 11 to 15 year olds who have ever smoked, by region and sex.⁶ This varies by region from 31% in London to 42% in the North East. In the North East, North West and Yorkshire and Humberside, girls are more likely than boys to have tried smoking. Differences by sex are not significant in other regions.

Table 2 shows the prevalence of regular smoking among 11 to 15 year olds, by region and sex. This varies by region from 5% in London to 10% in the North East. In all regions girls are more likely than boys to be regular smokers.

Drinking alcohol

As with adults, 11 to 15 year olds are more likely to drink alcohol than to smoke. Within this age group, the proportions who have had at least one alcoholic drink varied between 55% in 2006 and 52% in 2008. Over the same period, there was a similar decline in the proportions who had drunk in the last week from 21% to 18%. Boys and girls are equally likely to drink alcohol.
In 2007, SDD, in common with other publicly funded surveys, revised the method of calculating alcohol intake from drinks consumed. These estimates of alcohol consumption are based on the revised method of calculation. In 2006 to 2008, average consumption for 11 to 15 year olds who had drunk alcohol in the last week was between 13 and 16 units. Among those who have drunk in the last week, boys drink more than girls.

Table 3 shows the proportions of 11 to 15 year olds who have ever had an alcoholic drink, by region and sex. Young people in this age group in London are much less likely to have ever drunk alcohol than those living elsewhere. In London, 39% had ever drunk alcohol; otherwise this proportion varies between regions from 51% in the East Midlands to 63% in the North East.

Table 4 shows the proportions of this age group who drank alcohol in the last week, by region and sex. Again, young people in London are much less likely than those elsewhere to have had a drink in the last week (12%); elsewhere the proportion varies from 19% in the East Midlands and the South East to 26% in the North East.

The mean consumption (units of alcohol) of those who drank in the last week, by region and sex, is shown in Table 5. The amount consumed varies by region; it is lowest in London (11.3 units) and highest in the North East (17.7 units).

**Drug use**

The survey asks about awareness, availability and use of 15 named drugs. The prevalence of drug use has declined since 2001. The proportion of 11 to 15 year olds who reported having taken any drugs in the last year was 17% in 2006 and 2007 and 15% in 2008. Similar proportions of boys and girls had taken drugs in the last year.

Table 6 shows the prevalence of drug use in the last year by region and sex. The proportion of 11 to 15 year olds who have taken drugs at least once varies from 15% in the South West to 20% in the North West. Prevalence is similar among boys and girls in all regions.

The most commonly taken drug in this age group is cannabis. In 2006, 10% of 11 to 15 year olds had taken cannabis in the last year; in both 2007 and 2008 9% reported this. Boys are more likely than girls to have taken cannabis.

As Table 7 shows, the prevalence of cannabis use in the last year varies by region from 8% in the North East to 12% in the North West.

**Notes and references**

1 SDD is a continuation of a series of earlier surveys which began with a survey of schoolchildren’s smoking in 1982.

2 Full reports on the surveys are published by the NHS Information Centre.

3 For further information about the survey design, see Fuller E (2009) cited above.

4 From 2010, the sample design will change to be representative of the ten English Strategic Health Authorities.

5 When referring to differences between regions, the overall pattern of variation across England is described. While significant variations between regions may exist overall, this does not imply that any one region stands out by being significantly different from every other region. Where this is the case, it will be indicated.

6 Including those who have only had a puff or two, not a whole cigarette.

7 For further information about the change in calculation methods and the rationale behind it, see Fuller E (2007), cited above.
8 Defined as a whole drink, not just a sip.
9 One unit of alcohol is equivalent to 10ml of pure alcohol.
10 Because of small base sizes it is not possible to compare the consumption of boys and girls within regions.
### Table 1
The proportions of young people who have ever smoked, by Government Office Region and sex: 2006-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever smoked</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>2006-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unweighted bases

| **Boys**    | 585        | 1760       | 1037                    | 1195         | 1672         | 1424             | 1238    | 1832       | 1246       |
| **Girls**   | 537        | 1777       | 1105                    | 1125         | 1593         | 1332             | 1435    | 1683       | 1064       |
| **Total**   | 1122       | 3537       | 2142                    | 2320         | 3265         | 2756             | 2673    | 3515       | 2310       |

Weighted bases

| **Boys**    | 607        | 1678       | 1154                    | 1135         | 1340         | 1371             | 1626    | 1990       | 1185       |
| **Girls**   | 584        | 1621       | 1104                    | 1079         | 1277         | 1307             | 1575    | 1868       | 1137       |
| **Total**   | 1192       | 3299       | 2258                    | 2214         | 2618         | 2678             | 3201    | 3858       | 2322       |

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Smokes regularly</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>2006-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unweighted bases

| **Boys**         | 585        | 1760       | 1037                    | 1195         | 1672         | 1424             | 1238    | 1832       | 1246       |
| **Girls**        | 537        | 1777       | 1105                    | 1125         | 1593         | 1332             | 1435    | 1683       | 1064       |
| **Total**        | 1122       | 3537       | 2142                    | 2320         | 3265         | 2756             | 2673    | 3515       | 2310       |

Weighted bases

| **Boys**         | 607        | 1678       | 1154                    | 1135         | 1340         | 1371             | 1626    | 1990       | 1185       |
| **Girls**        | 584        | 1621       | 1104                    | 1079         | 1277         | 1307             | 1575    | 1868       | 1137       |
| **Total**        | 1192       | 3299       | 2258                    | 2214         | 2618         | 2678             | 3201    | 3858       | 2322       |
### Table 3

#### The proportions of young people who have ever drunk alcohol, by Government Office Region and sex: 2006-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ever drunk alcohol</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>2006-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Unweighted bases   | %          | %          | %                       | %             | %             | %                | %      | %          | %          |
| Boys               | 570        | 1713       | 1009                    | 1167          | 1638          | 1383             | 1204   | 1777       | 1209       |
| Girls              | 529        | 1724       | 1082                    | 1108          | 1578          | 1309             | 1415   | 1651       | 1037       |
| Total              | 1099       | 3437       | 2091                    | 2275          | 3216          | 2692             | 2619   | 3428       | 2246       |

| Weighted bases     | %          | %          | %                       | %             | %             | %                | %      | %          | %          |
| Boys               | 592        | 1633       | 1123                    | 1108          | 1313          | 1331             | 1581   | 1931       | 1150       |
| Girls              | 576        | 1573       | 1080                    | 1062          | 1266          | 1284             | 1553   | 1831       | 1109       |
| Total              | 1168       | 3205       | 2203                    | 2171          | 2579          | 2616             | 3134   | 3763       | 2258       |

### Table 4

#### Proportions of young people who drank alcohol in the last week, by Government Office Region and sex: 2006-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drank alcohol in the last week</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>2006-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Unweighted bases             | %          | %          | %                       | %             | %             | %                | %      | %          | %          |
| Boys                          | 570        | 1713       | 1009                    | 1167          | 1638          | 1383             | 1204   | 1777       | 1209       |
| Girls                         | 529        | 1724       | 1082                    | 1108          | 1578          | 1309             | 1415   | 1651       | 1037       |
| Total                         | 1099       | 3437       | 2091                    | 2275          | 3216          | 2692             | 2619   | 3428       | 2246       |

| Weighted bases               | %          | %          | %                       | %             | %             | %                | %      | %          | %          |
| Boys                          | 592        | 1633       | 1123                    | 1108          | 1313          | 1331             | 1581   | 1931       | 1150       |
| Girls                         | 576        | 1573       | 1080                    | 1062          | 1266          | 1284             | 1553   | 1831       | 1109       |
| Total                         | 1168       | 3205       | 2203                    | 2171          | 2579          | 2616             | 3134   | 3763       | 2258       |
### Table 5

**Mean consumption of alcohol by young people who drank in the last week, by Government Office Region and sex: 2006-2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol drunk in the last week</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>Units of alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error of the mean</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error of the mean</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error of the mean</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unweighted bases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>270</th>
<th>193</th>
<th>202</th>
<th>239</th>
<th>230</th>
<th>105</th>
<th>287</th>
<th>221</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weighted bases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>112</th>
<th>267</th>
<th>234</th>
<th>194</th>
<th>196</th>
<th>242</th>
<th>143</th>
<th>322</th>
<th>218</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6

**Proportions of young people who took drugs in the last year, by Government Office Region and sex: 2006-2008**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Took drugs in the last year</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; the Humber</td>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unweighted bases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>543</th>
<th>1601</th>
<th>941</th>
<th>1124</th>
<th>1539</th>
<th>1311</th>
<th>1120</th>
<th>1689</th>
<th>1169</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>1669</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>1520</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1345</td>
<td>1596</td>
<td>1014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1037</td>
<td>3270</td>
<td>2070</td>
<td>2195</td>
<td>3059</td>
<td>2576</td>
<td>2465</td>
<td>3285</td>
<td>2183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weighted bases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>565</th>
<th>1529</th>
<th>1052</th>
<th>1068</th>
<th>1235</th>
<th>1265</th>
<th>1473</th>
<th>1837</th>
<th>1112</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>1523</td>
<td>1030</td>
<td>1027</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>1242</td>
<td>1478</td>
<td>1772</td>
<td>1085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1104</td>
<td>3052</td>
<td>2082</td>
<td>2095</td>
<td>2455</td>
<td>2508</td>
<td>2951</td>
<td>3610</td>
<td>2197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Proportions of young people who took cannabis in the last year, by Government Office Region and sex: 2006-2008

#### 11 to 15 year olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Took cannabis in the last year</th>
<th>Government Office Region</th>
<th>2006-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North East %</td>
<td>North West %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unweighted bases</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>579</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>1106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>1760</td>
<td>3480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>1099</td>
<td>2115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1181</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>2299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1637</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>3227</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1407</td>
<td>1316</td>
<td>2723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1206</td>
<td>1432</td>
<td>2638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1786</td>
<td>1669</td>
<td>3455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1233</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>2289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weighted bases</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>601</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>1175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1641</td>
<td>1606</td>
<td>3247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>2230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1122</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>2194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1313</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>2588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1354</td>
<td>1292</td>
<td>2646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>1572</td>
<td>3156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1853</td>
<td>3794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>1128</td>
<td>2301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

Data from the 2006, 2007 and 2008 SDD surveys were combined. Weights were constructed taking into account sex, school year, region and survey year; for each subgroup, the population proportion was divided by the sample proportion. The weights were trimmed to three decimal places before being applied to the data set.

Population data was supplied by DCSF, based on school year 2006/2007 (i.e. the mid-year of the three surveys).

School year was used as a weighting variable rather than age. Within schools, the samples of pupils are selected using stratification by school year. The equivalent variable from the population data is based on pupils’ ages. These are standardised and so are effectively equivalent to the normal school year (for example, 11 years in the data equates to Year 7). Data on actual school year is not available for all schools in the database (most notably independent schools).

Unweighted and weighted key survey estimates, based on the total sample, are compared below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular smokers</td>
<td>unweighted</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>weighted</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drank in last week</td>
<td>unweighted</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>weighted</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean alcohol consumption in last week</td>
<td>unweighted</td>
<td>14.5 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(based on the revised method of calculation)</td>
<td>weighted</td>
<td>14.5 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took drugs in last year</td>
<td>unweighted</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>weighted</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**About the National Centre for Social Research**
The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is an independent institute specialising in social survey and qualitative research for the development of public policy. Research is in areas such as health, housing, employment, crime, education and political and social attitudes. Projects include ad hoc, continuous and longitudinal surveys, using face to face, telephone and postal methods; many use advanced applications of computer assisted interviewing.

**About the National Foundation for Educational Research**
The National Foundation for Educational Research has been engaged in educational research since 1946 and is an independent foundation with charitable status. The Foundation undertakes research and evaluation for local and national agencies, in the government, commercial and charitable sectors. The research programme is concerned with all aspects of education and training, a major part being concerned with the public education system.