

A1 Scottish crime survey 2003

The Scottish Crime Survey (SCS) is a survey, which gathers information about public perceptions and experiences as victims of crime. Since 1993 the SCS has included a short self-completion component, which asks questions about respondents' knowledge and illicit use of a range of prescribed and illegal drugs. Asking such questions in a self-completion module is considered a more effective way of ensuring the truthfulness of respondents' answers on such a sensitive issue. The 2003 survey¹ was based on an overall sample of 5 041 households. Of that sample after exclusions (see background) the drugs questionnaires was completed by 3 168 individuals between the ages of 16 and 59. The response rate for the survey as a whole was 68 per cent and for the self-completion module was 63 per cent.

Key Points

Overview of Scottish crime survey

- Twenty-seven per cent of respondents reported having taken illicit drugs at least once during their lives. (Table A1.5) Nine per cent reported using illicit drugs in the last year (Table A1.4) and five per cent reported using an illicit drug in the month prior to the survey. (Table A1.3)
- More males reported using drugs than females in each time category, ever (males 31%; females 22%), in the last year (males 12%; females 7%) and in the last month (males 8%; females 3%). (Table A1.3, Table A1.4 and Table A1.5)
- Younger respondents (16-24 years) reported higher rates of use in the month and year prior to the survey than older respondents (35-59 years). However, the highest rate of 'ever used' is found in the 25-29 year age group. (Table A1.3, Table A1.4 and Table A1.5)
- The drug most frequently reported as being used in the month (5%) and year (8%) prior to the survey and ever (24%) was cannabis. Only very small percentages of respondents reported using other drugs. (Table A1.3, Table A1.4 and Table A1.5)
- Cannabis was the drug reported as having been most frequently offered. Four per cent of respondents said they had been offered cannabis in the month prior to the survey. The next most frequently offered were ecstasy and cocaine at one per cent for both. (Table A1.1)

Trends – 2000 and 2003

- The percentage of respondents who reported ever having taken illicit drugs increased between the 2000 (19%) and 2003 (27%) surveys. (Table A1.6)
- The percentage of respondents who reported having taken illicit drugs in the month prior to the survey remained stable between the 2000 and 2003 surveys (5%). (Table A1.6)
- Results from the 2000 survey showed that more young women than young men in the age group 16 -19 had used drugs in the previous 12 months (21% compared to 15%) and that there was little difference in the 20 to 24 age group (17% to 19%). This was interpreted as a possible narrowing in the gap between the sexes that was found in previous sweeps of the survey². However in the 2003 findings more men reported using any drug in the last year than women in both age groups (27% compared to 20% for 16-19 years age group; 33% compared to 25% in the 20-24 years age group). (Table A.1.4)

Background Information

The 2003 Scottish Crime Survey (SCS) was the sixth survey of its kind to be carried out in Scotland since the early 1980s. The first two sweeps in 1982 and 1988 were conducted as part of the British Crime Survey and only covered Central and Southern Scotland. A separate SCS was introduced in 1993 that covered the whole of mainland Scotland, including the larger islands. This was repeated in 1996, 2000 and 2003. The SCS was primarily designed to ask people about their experiences and perceptions of individual and household crime. However, it also included a self-completion component that asked adults about their use of drugs. This section focuses on the findings of the 2003 sweep and trends in drug use between 2000 and 2003.

As in previous surveys, the questionnaire was paper based, and respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and place it in a sealed envelope provided for return to the interviewer.

Fieldwork for the 2003 SCS was carried out by MORI Scotland and TNS Social Research. Fieldwork for the previous three sweeps of the survey, conducted in 1993, 1996 and 2000 was carried out by MVA.

The questions asked and the drugs asked about

As in previous sweeps, in 2003 the questions covered the following drugs: amphetamines; cannabis; cocaine; crack; ecstasy; heroin; methadone/physeptone; LSD; magic mushrooms; temazepam; valium; glues, gas or aerosols; anabolic steroids and poppers. The main questions included:

- whether they had ever taken the drug
- whether they had been offered the drug in the last year
- whether they had taken the drug in the last year
- whether they had been offered the drug in the last month
- whether they had taken the drug in the last month.

There are, of course, limitations to self-report data on drug use. It is possible that serious drug users are less likely to have taken part in the SCS, because they are less likely to have been at home. Consequently, it is likely that the SCS underestimates drug use. There may also be a stigma attached to taking some drugs, especially 'hard' drugs such as heroin and crack, which again might have resulted in some under-reporting, despite the reassurances of confidentiality.

It is also possible that there is some exaggeration in reported drug use. There is some evidence of this in the 2003 SCS, more so than in previous years. To check for exaggeration, all respondents were asked whether they had ever taken a bogus drug. Previous surveys have found very little over-reporting of this kind, with 4 respondents reporting taking this drug in the 1993 SCS, 11 in 1996 and 18 in 2000. In 2003, however, there was almost a three-fold increase over 2000 with 51 respondents reporting ever using the bogus drug. It is difficult to know why there has been such an increase; there is no obvious demographic bias in these respondents (by age or sex). However, 22 of the bogus drug users also reported having taken every other drug asked about. This suggests that many respondents who reported using the bogus drug were likely to have been exaggerating. For this reason, respondents who reported taking the bogus drug have been excluded from all analyses of drug taking reported in this section.

The above results are taken from analysis carried out by the Criminal Justice Research team of the Scottish Executive for the Scottish Crime Survey 2003 report.

References

1. McVie, S., Campbell, S. and Lebov, K. Scottish Crime Survey 2003. Scottish Executive Social Research 2004.
2. Fraser F. Drug misuse in Scotland: findings from the 2000 Scottish Crime Survey. The Scottish Executive Central Research Unit 2002.