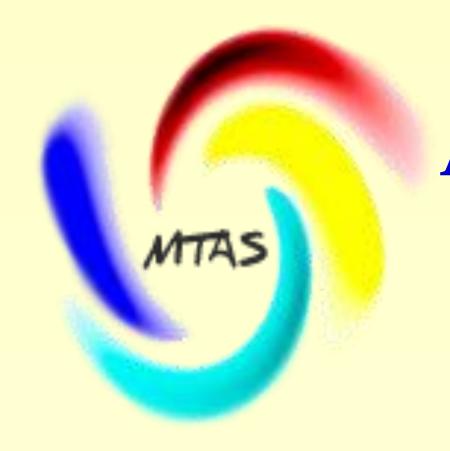| Title	A survey of service-users attending Matt Talbot Services (MTS) during 2009 and their use of alcohol.
Authors	Murphy, Kevin D.;Sahm, Laura J.;Byrne, Stephen
Publication date	2011-10-19
Original Citation	Murphy K., Sahm L., Lambert S., Byrne S. (2011) 'A survey of service-users attending Matt Talbot Services (MTS) during 2009 and their use of alcohol', European Society of Clinical Pharmacy (ESCP) 40th International Symposium on Clinical Pharmacy, Clinical Pharmacy: Connecting Care and Outcomes Dublin Ireland, 19–21 October, in International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy (2012) 34(1), pp. 231. doi: 10.1007/s11096-011-9602-2
Type of publication	Conference item
Link to publisher's version	https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11096-011-9602-2 - 10.1007/s11096-011-9602-2http://www.escpweb.org/
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Download date	2025-08-03 18:18:25
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/6203

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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

A survey of service-users attending Matt Talbot Services during 2009 and their use of alcohol

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Background:

Matt Talbot Services (MTS) is a day treatment service for young substance-users within Cork/Kerry area. They provide a specialised, individualised counselling service for 14 – 23 year olds, and have an after-care service to reduce the incidence of relapse.

Alcohol consumption amongst adolescents in Ireland is at an alarmingly high level. In the most recent European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) survey, 86% of 15-16 year-old students have consumed alcohol, and 56% will have consumed alcohol in the month previous to questioning[1]. Irish students were in the top 3 out of the 35 countries surveyed in relation to the percentage of students having been drunk more than 40 times in their lives.

Aims:

The objectives of this study were to collect demographic information and alcohol usage data about service-users who attended MTS during 2009.

A secondary aim of the project was to look for any association between service-user demographic factors and alcohol consumption.

Method:

Ethical approval was obtained from the Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Cork Teaching Hospitals. Data were collected from service-user records, which were compiled from interviews conducted during initial therapy sessions and subsequent follow-up meetings. The data were anonymised and a database was constructed in Microsoft Access® 2010. A retrospective analysis was performed using Predictive Analytics SoftWare Statistics (PASW; SPSS Inc. Chicago, Ill.) version 18.0. A significance level of $\alpha=0.05$ was used for any inferential statistics calculated.

Results:

Adolescents (n=90, 90.0% male) were accepted for treatment at MTS during the period Jan-Dec 2009 for counselling relating to substance use. The mean age of the service-users was 16.2 years. Sixteen of these (17.8%) were seeking help with alcohol as their main substance of misuse (Table 1).

92.2% of those accepted for treatment admitted to drinking alcohol in their lifetimes. The mean age of a service-user's first drink was 12.7 years. The median self-reported frequency of alcohol consumption, in the month prior to enrolment, was 8 days. The favoured alcoholic beverage amongst service-users was beer (78.3%), and cider and spirits were nearly equal at 7.8% and 6.7% respectively. The median units of alcohol consumed by service-users on a typical drinking day was 24 (Table 2).

There is a strong positive correlation between the age of first consumption of alcohol and the age of first use of any substance. There is also a significant correlation between the age of first consumption of alcohol and the age of first use of cannabis and the age of first use of cocaine (Table 3).

Table 1   Demographics of service-users

Service-user Demographics	Number of service-users (n=90)
Male	81 (90%)
Female	3 (3.3%)
Gender unspecified	6 (6.7%)
Age mean (years)	16.2
Age standard deviation (years)	1.22
Age range (years)	13 - 20

Table 2   Use of alcohol amongst service-users

1st consumption of alcohol	Number of service-users (n=83)
Mean age (years)	12.7
Standard deviation (years)	1.47
Range (years)	8 - 16
Preferred alcohol type	Number of service-users (n=83)
Beer	65 (72.2%)
Cider	7 (7.8%)
Spirits	6 (6.7%)
Other	2 (2.2%)
Unknown	3 (3.3%)
Number of days alcohol was consumed in the previous month	Number of days (n=83)
Median	8
Interquartile range	6 – 10
Range	0 - 30
Alcohol consumption on a typical drinking day in the previous month	Units of alcohol (n=83)
Median	24
Interquartile range	16 – 28
Range	0 – 80

Table 3   Correlation between age of first consumption of alcohol and other substances

Substance of misuse	Pearson's r	p-value
Age of first misuse of any substance	0.798	<0.001
Age of first use of cannabis	0.707	<0.001
Age of first use of cocaine	0.519	0.004

Conclusions:

The results show that the number of service-users who have had their first drink by 13 years of age (73.5%) is close to double the national figure (38%)[2]. This increased level of early-onset drinking implies that these service-users will see more alcohol-related violence, absenteeism from school and increased risk for using other drugs[3]. The results also highlight that service-users consume more alcohol in a drinking day than the recommended weekly allowance for an adult[4]. Continuation of this behaviour could lead to serious health problems for these service-users. The work of MTS is to minimise the impact that early-onset drinking has on their future. Further studies must be conducted to elucidate the factors that promote alcohol use in service-users, so that and their relapse level is reduced.

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