



**STUDENT
GAMBLING,
SUBSTANCE USE
& MENTAL
HEALTH**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2026**

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In Autumn 2025 Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn (formerly the Union of Students in Ireland), in partnership with Ulster University launched a survey on Gambling, Substance Use and Mental Health among students in third level education across the Island of Ireland. The study was funded by the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland.

There has never previously been data available on gambling behaviours of students in Ireland. Data does exist on substance use and mental health in students, however, the most recent data was collected either before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it was important to gather more up-to-date data.

904 students took part; with 545 females, 311 males, 38 non-binary and 10 students who identified as another gender identity taking part. The summary presented here represent initial, high-level findings from that data. Full reports on the initial findings can be found at www.mentalhealth.amle.ie. Further analysis will take place in due course.

The researchers would like to thank the Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland for their funding, as well as all the students who took the time to complete the survey.

For any queries related to this study, please contact Sarah Hughes, Mental Health Programme Manager, Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn at mentalhealth@amle.ie.

Executive Summary: Gambling

Overall, 61.2% of participants (N = 904) indicated that they had previously gambled. Of those who had gambled previously, the most used mechanism for gambling was online or via apps (46.5%), with other options (24), between friends (20.6%) and via a bookies (8.9%) being the other options. The majority of those who had gambled did so on the lottery (51.2%) followed by sports (41%), card games (27.4%), bingo (22.5%), online games (22.5%), other options (18.1%), and casinos (15.6%).

The vast majority of those who had previously gambled reported doing so occasionally (83.5%), with the next highest frequency being weekly (8.8%), followed by monthly (4.3%) and then daily (3.4%).

In terms of problematic gambling behaviours, the Problem Gambling Severity Index (Ferris & Wynne, 2001) was used. This demonstrated that 4.9% of participants were in the high-risk category for problematic gambling. 10.8% were in the moderate risk category, and 83.4% were in the low-risk category.

Very few participants who had gambled had sought help for gambling (0.9%) and only 34% knew where to seek help if it was needed. 42.2% did not know and 23.7% felt unsure where to seek help. Just under half (48.6%) felt that gambling was an issue among students, but 38.9% were also unsure whether it was an issue or not.

Executive Summary: Substance Use

62.1% of participants had never used drugs, while 16.2% had used them in the past but did not use them in the past 12 months, and 21.8% had used them within the past 12 months (classified as current users throughout the rest of the data).

Overall data:

The main drugs used by current users included cannabis (93.9%), cocaine (37.1%) and ecstasy (27.9%), and for previous users included cannabis (91.1%), cocaine (22.6%) and poppers (15.8%). The most common age of starting for current users was 16 and for previous users was 18.

Most current users used their drugs in a friend's home (56.9%), followed by at home (50.8%) and pubs/bar/nightclub (38.1%), while for previous users it was in a friend's home (54.1%), at a house party (45.2%) and at home (31.5%). In terms of the reasons for use, the main reasons for use for current users were to have fun/more fun (47.7%), to relax (24.4%) and to cope with emotions (13.2%). For previous users the main reasons were to have fun/more fun (51.4%), to cope with emotions (13.7%), and to fit in (12.3%).

While only 6.7% have sought help for drugs related issues, 61.4% said they would know where to get help if they or someone they knew needed it. 81.5% of participants feel that drugs are an issue among students.

Current Substance Users:

Most current users reported using drugs once or twice (67.5%), with 20.3% using weekly and 9.1% using daily or almost daily within the last 12 months, with 27.3% having not used them at all within the last 3 months, and the other numbers dropping to 47.2%, 16.8% and 8.1% respectively. Correspondingly, when asked, 42.1% of participants said their use had decreased in the past 12 months, with 38.1% reporting that it stayed the same, and 19.8% reporting an increase in use.

When asked their opinions on their drug use, 59.6% disagreed to some extent that they sometimes take too much, 49.7% agreed to some extent that they were trying to use drugs less, 69% disagreed to some extent that their substance use is a problem, 81.4% agreed to some extent that they don't use drugs too much. There was a split in opinion over whether users felt they should cut down, with 35.5% agreeing to some extent and 31.5% disagreeing to some extent.

In terms of adverse experiences from drug use, 40.6% reported having had a blackout or flashback, 43.7% reported feeling guilty over their substance use, 19.3% had experienced withdrawal symptoms and 9.1% had experienced medical problems.

In terms of some of the repeated adverse experiences from drug use, 16.2% reported being unable to remember what they said or did on more than 2 occasions, 15.2% had unprotected sex on more than 2 occasions, 14.2% felt regret on more than 2 occasions. Other reported adverse experiences included 20.8% reporting having been a passenger in a vehicle drive by someone impaired once or twice, 15.2% had unintended sex once or twice, and 14.2% performed poorly in college once or twice as a result of drug use.

Executive Summary: Mental Health

The overall mean score for the short-form version of the WEBWMS (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009) was fairly high at 22.58. However, 42.8% reported having had difficulties with their mental health often or all the time over the previous 12 months.

Participants reported that for 39.5% these mental health difficulties impacted on their life often or always, for 34.9% it impacted on their studies often or always, for 31.3% it impacted on their college experience often or always and for 14.3% it made them consider dropping out of college often or always.

26.6% reported feeling lonely often or always, and a similar amount (22%) reported having nobody to talk to.

With regards to stigma, 30.5% of participants reported that they would be embarrassed to get help for their mental health, and 36.9% were afraid to experience mental health problems because of how they might be treated. 7.8% agreed with the statement that it is a sign of weakness to need help with your mental health.

Help-seeking was varied however, with 17.6% seeking help from on-campus counselling, 12.7% from other on-campus services, 29.6% having sought help off-campus before starting college, 4.5% having sought help off-campus since starting college, and 12.8% having sought off-campus help both before and since starting college. 74.1% report that they would know where to get help if they or a friend needed it for their mental health.