

***DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND YOUTH
IN RATHMINES***

*Report for the
Rathmines Drug Awareness Group*

© 2001 Rathmines Drug Awareness Group,
Rathmines Information Centre,
Wynnefield Road, Rathmines, Dublin 6.
Tel. 01-4965558.
E-mail: info@rathminesinformationcentre.com

Compiled by Maire Ni Chearbhaill from research commissioned by Rathmines Drug Awareness Group and carried out by Eoin O'Mahony (FAQs Research) and Alan Curtis (Independent Community Worker).

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FOREWORD

We the residents of Rathmines and representatives of service agencies working in the area established the Rathmines Drug Awareness Group in 1997. The objective of the Group was to develop a network among residents, traders, community organisations and the Gardai to provide information on drugs and substance abuse in the area.

Rathmines has a population of almost 20,000, with exceptionally high numbers of young people both local and transient. Yet in spite of its high population density, it lacks many of the recreational and social facilities normally associated with a town of this size.

The Rathmines Drug Awareness Group commissioned this report to identify trends and needs in relation to drugs, alcohol and young people in Rathmines and to highlight the infrastructural deficits of the area. It draws on research carried out by FAQs Research and an independent researcher in the autumn of 2000.

The report is limited to a small sample and inevitably shows up the need for further research. In this context, it is proposed to seek funding for the development of support services for youth through inclusion in the Drugs Task Force Development Plan.

I wish to thank the members of the Rathmines Drug Awareness Group for initiating this project, and Nollaig Hannaway and Tara Smith of the Rathmines Information Centre for ensuring its completion. In particular, I am grateful to the East Coast Area Health Board for their funding for this most important work.

Mary Freehill
Chairperson, Rathmines Drug Awareness Group
June 2001

1. RATHMINES: CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

Rathmines has the highest youth population in the Dublin 6 area. This includes young people living locally in family units, students and other transient groups in low-cost rented accommodation, young professionals in owner-occupied apartments.

While its late night shops and active night life give a sense of vibrancy to Rathmines, the lack of youth services and of adequate recreational facilities place many at risk of drugs and substance misuse from a very early age.

Situated one-and-a-half miles from the city centre, it is at the convergence of a number of main routes to the outer suburbs and has strong links with neighbouring communities, such as Charlemont Street, Ranelagh and Crumlin. The report which follows concentrates mainly on a small number of the school-going population in Rathmines who come from these areas.

The Rathmines Drug Awareness Group was set up to develop a network among residents, traders and community organisations in the area and to provide information on drugs and substance abuse. This was in line with national trends and in response to growing concerns about the dangers of drug use and underage drinking.

The establishment of the National Drugs Task Force led to the setting up of drugs task force areas nationally. In 2000, Rathmines Drug Awareness Group applied for inclusion in a drugs task force area and was advised to carry out research to ascertain the extent of the problem in Rathmines. It was in this context, and with funding from the Eastern Regional Health Authority, that the present research was carried out.

In autumn of 2000, the Rathmines Drug Awareness Group, in collaboration with the Rathmines Information Centre, decided to commission research that would:

- i. quantify the level of illegal drug use in the Rathmines area;
- ii. reflect the culture of under-age drinking in Rathmines;
- iii. identify the services needed for young people in Rathmines.

The study was carried out by FAQs Research and by an independent community worker.

2. EXISTING SUPPORT SERVICES FOR YOUTH

- A small number of youth clubs have been running recreational activities in Rathmines for many years, in spite of limited resources. These cater for the 10 to 15 age group and are well attended by young people from Rathmines.
- Rathmines Information Centre collaborates with local schools to provide services for up to a hundred young people aged 10 to 14 years through the Homework Club and through the Rathmines Schools Initiative which operates all year round. A very active team of local Gardai and a Juvenile Liaison Officer work closely with these projects in providing support and resources for youth projects in Rathmines.
- Ranetagh - Rathmines Drugs Awareness Project is a focused drug prevention programme with three main aspects: a drugs intervention programme at primary and secondary level, a drop-in advice facility at the Rathmines Information Centre, and occasional drug awareness workshops for the local community.
- A drugs outreach counsellor from the East Coast Area Health Board provides one-to-one support for drug-users and their families, and support for the local community.
- A methadone service is based at the Satellite Clinic in the Rathmines Health Centre. This service is provided by the Eastern Regional health Authority and is open twice a week from 7.30 a.m. to 8.30 a.m.
- Rathmines Drug Awareness Group is based locally and represents the concerns of the community. It recognises the need for information on drugs for all members of the community and the need for support and advice for families who are affected by drug misuse.
- An active group of local residents run supervised summer programmes for young people in the local communities.'

3. ISSUES FOR YOUTH - GAPS IN SERVICES

- Lack of public services and recreational facilities in general, apart from Dublin Corporation Swimming Pool and commercial enterprises such as health clubs and sports clubs.
- In particular, the lack of recreational and sports facilities and social outlets such as playing fields, drop-in centres and meeting places for young people.
- High numbers of youth living in Rathmines – twenty-five per cent of the population is under 25.
- Within this youth population there are no focused activities to cater for the varying needs of the different age groups.
- Low educational achievement and early school-leaving among sections of the youth population and lack of educational support.
- Transient nature of student population living in rented accommodation.
- Use of recreational drugs by young professionals and others in Rathmines, thereby increasing the risk of added availability and misuse.
- Large numbers of young people with access to disposable cash due to ease of casual employment.

“Drug misuse is closely associated with social and economic disadvantage characterised by unemployment and poor living conditions, low educational attainment, high levels of family breakdown and a lack of recreational facilities and other supports.” - *First Report of the Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs*

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this research combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. Questionnaires, interviews and fieldwork provided both formal and informal methods of eliciting the values, attitudes and perceptions of the young people involved in the study.

i. Questionnaire to Second-level Pupils

A short questionnaire was given to about 75 pupils, mostly aged 13 to 14 years, in November and December 2000. To meet the broad aims of the study as outlined above, the questionnaire was devised to identify patterns of behaviour in under-age drinking and illegal drug use. It focused on type of alcohol, frequency, age of first drink, source and availability, It further asked the group if they took drugs, if so, what type of drugs and how they were sourced, and whether they used drugs in combination with alcohol.

ii. Questionnaire to Clubs and Youth Groups

A second questionnaire was circulated to clubs and groups working with youth in the area to identify the need for increased services for youth in Rathmines. It focused on questions such as club objectives, activities, constraints and issues for young people in relation to drink, drugs and wider issues.

iii. Fieldwork Interviews with Young People

The researchers and the drugs prevention officer from the Ranelagh - Rathmines Drugs Awareness Project carried out a fieldwork interview with a group of young girls aged 15 to 17 at the rear of a local church, the actual setting where they drank and socialised. This informal, unstructured approach was chosen to gain a better understanding of the sub-cultural elements associated with underage drinking and illegal drug use.

iv. Interviews with Clients at the Satellite Clinic

As part of the research, a small number of clients availing of the methadone services at the Satellite Clinic in Rathmines were interviewed. These interviews broaden the context of the research by eliciting the views and experience of users in treatment.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS

i. Questionnaire to Second-Level Pupils

DRUGS

- **AGE WHEN FIRST USED:**
The research showed that experimenting with glue and hash began between the ages of 11 and 12 and continued through the teens.
- **DRUG PREFERENCE:**
Sixty-three per cent of the sample had experimented with hash, 24% with solvents. Less than one in five had experimented with ecstasy and LSD. There was minimal use of heroin, cocaine and barbiturates.
- **AVAILABILITY:**
Hash, ecstasy and solvents were perceived to be the most easily obtained drugs, with 53% finding hash easy or very easy to obtain.
- **FREQUENCY:**
Ten per cent of the respondents used drugs regularly. The two most frequently used drugs were solvents and hash. Of the sample, 10% used drugs of some description daily, 5% used drugs several times a week, 2%-5% used drugs two to three times a month. Between the ages of 14 and 16 a wide range of drugs had been experimented with: tippex, glue, hash, speed, ecstasy, cocaine and others.
- **DRUGS AND ALCOHOL:**
Forty per cent of the sample have used drugs in conjunction with alcohol.

continued

ALCOHOL

- **AGE WHEN FIRST USED:**
The research showed that by the age of 9-10 years, 8% had experimented with alcohol - beer, atcopops and cider, increasing to 12% by the age of 11. 90% of respondents had started drinking by 15 years.

 - **ALCOHOL PREFERENCE:**
In the sample, which was predominantly girls, beer was the most popular type of alcohol used, followed by spirits.

 - **AVAILABILITY**
The perception among respondents was that alcohol was easy to obtain. 40% claimed that they obtained beer themselves from public houses, and a high proportion from an off-licence through a friend.

 - **FREQUENCY:**
20% drank two or three times a week. Most did not drink alcohol more than four times a week. Spirits, including alcopops, were consumed two to three times a week.
- ii. Questionnaire to Clubs and Youth Groups**
- The youth groups which responded varied in aims, but their overall objective was to provide resources for young people in the area. Most cater for the 10-15 age group.

 - Drug use and under-age drinking were seen as a serious issue but were not a particular concern for the clubs in the sample.

 - The clubs identified the need for volunteers and leaders, for cross-community networking and coordination of services.

iii. Fieldwork Interview with Young People

From the informal mid-view, some deductions can be made about alcohol and drug use:

- All the young people were under age and drinking alcohol.
- They could gain access to public houses.
- They visited public houses on Friday and Saturday nights.
- Once entry was gained there was no problem in being served alcohol.
- Some had experiences - and all had a fear of - having their drinks 'spiked'.
- All had experimented with hash.
- They saw a difference between hash and harder drugs.
- They had first-hand experience of the effect of hard drugs on family and friends.
- They knew people who used petty crime to buy drugs-
- They saw hash as easily obtainable by phone and were always offered ecstasy along with hash.
- They were aware that dealers worked by offering small amounts of drugs at first, and then putting pressure on them to buy larger quantities.
- They were afraid of walking home alone.

iv. Interview with Clients at the Satellite clinic

A small number of clients in treatment interviewed in this research expressed concerns about the Clinic, particularly what was perceived as unsuitable opening hours.

- Other issues they referred to were the need for privacy, the need for secondary back-up by way of one-to-one counselling and supports, and the need to seek out client needs.
- Those interviewed also noted changing patterns in drug supply in Rathmines. In their opinion, "heroin had been driven underground" due to the low cost of mobile phones and the efforts of the local community and the Gardai.
- One of those interviewed made the observation that a more effective clinic would lead to a decline in crime.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- The Rathmines research indicates that the culture of drug use and under-age drinking is not dissimilar to national trends, which show that teenagers experiment with a wide range of both drugs and alcohol between the ages of 14 and 16. As the research mainly targeted school-going teenagers, different results may emerge if early school-leavers or an older group were targeted.
- This research provides a snapshot of what was happening in relation to drug use and under-age drinking among a group of young teenagers in Rathmines at a particular time. However, the practice and patterns of drug-taking and alcohol are constantly changing.
- While there was not widespread drug use reported among the sample group, nevertheless their interest in drugs and alcohol and their knowledge of the availability was considerable. This would seem to indicate the strong link between the use of alcohol and drugs and the peer pressure that forces young people to be in touch with, and knowledgeable about, drugs and drink.
- The cheaper drugs - hash, solvents and ecstasy - are the most frequently used among the 14-16 age group, and under-age drinking is extensive. This raises serious concerns. While hash is not immediately life-threatening, it has serious implications for health, education and fertility and can be a precursor to the use of other drugs. Furthermore, it introduces young people to the world of illegal practice. Other dangers arise through the ease of availability and the low cost. Young people may get into debt when they cannot pay ready cash, and may be encouraged to pay back in kind through trafficking or other unsafe activities.
- The Rathmines Drug Awareness Group has serious concerns about the extent of regular drug misuse and under-age drinking among the respondents. There is a need for further research to investigate the levels of drug and alcohol misuse among the wider population.
- The findings indicate the need for extensive preventative measures through early educational interventions and through the provision of public and accessible recreational and sports facilities for the young people in Rathmines.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- That Rathmines be recognised by the Ministerial Drugs Task Force Group for inclusion in a Drugs Task Force Development Plan in order to access funding for the development of youth services in Rathmines.
- Following inclusion in a Drugs Task Force Development Plan to appoint a coordinator to establish linkages with the surrounding communities and to identify examples of best practice among other groups, local and national, that have identified and effectively responded to similar needs.
- The appointment of a youth officer to identify needs and to develop appropriate structures and programmes for the provision of youth supports and services in Rathmines.
- To initiate and monitor infrastructural change in Rathmines which would provide a youth centre and public recreational and sports facilities.
- To use this research to identify the most vulnerable groups, and to identify and respond to the needs of different age groups.
- To undertake further research into drugs misuse among the wider population, particularly the use of recreational drugs.

Rathmines Drug Awareness Group

- Mary Freehill - *Chairperson and Local Resident*
Mary Kenny - *East Coast Area Health Board*
Charles Best - *Local Resident*
Breda Corboy - *Local Resident*
Gerry Stokes - *Local Resident*
Enda Walsh - *Garda Superintendent*
Gerry Hogarty - *Community Garda*
Surita Stipp - *Ranelagh-Rathmines Drug Awareness Group*
Grace Maguire - *Dublin Corporation*
Brendan Hayden - *Dublin Corporation*
Nollaig Hannaway - *Programme Manager,*
Tara Smith - *Community Development Officer,*