

Truancy Links with Smoking, E-cigarette and Cannabis Use

Joan Hanafin, Salome Sunday, Luke Clancy

TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland, TU Dublin

www.tri.ie

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Background

Truancy: chronic unexcused school absenteeism

Disproportionately affects vulnerable student groups

Associated with educational, health and social harm, and with negative health behaviours¹

Limited research on associations with smoking^{2 3}, e-cigarette^{4 5}, and cannabis use⁶.



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Study Objectives

This study examines associations between teenager truancy and ever & current

- smoking**
- e-cigarette use**
- cannabis use**



European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs

ESPAD Ireland

TobaccoFree Research Institute
TU Dublin
for the Department of Health

Joan Hanafin, Salome Sunday,
Helen Fitzmaurice, Luke Clancy

ESPAD

This study draws on ESPAD Ireland 2024 (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs).

ESPAD is a nationally representative, cross-sectional survey conducted every four years in up to 40 European countries with the aim of collecting comparable data on substance use among students aged 15–16 years in Europe to monitor trends within and between countries.

Methods Sample



Our sample is drawn from a **representative national sample** of schools
Stratification criteria: school size; school type; gender; religious affiliation; fee-paying/non-fee-paying; school-level disadvantage status; geographical region.



In **2024**, ESPAD target population comprised students born in 2008 (15-16 years in the year of the survey).

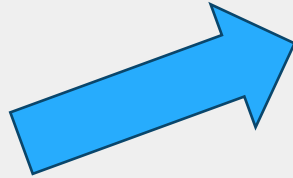
These students in Ireland are found in **Years 3, 4 and 5**.

Students in these three year-groups were surveyed.



Total valid sample: **1,187 students** from 268 classes in those three year-groups. Data were collected online in 2024. Analyses were performed using SPSS v27.





Truancy	N (%)
None	1285 (68.4)
1 day	148 (7.9)
2 days	71 (3.8)
3-4 days	67 (3.6)
5-6 days	21 (1.1)
7 days or more	29 (1.5)
No answer	259 (13.8)
Total	1880 (100.0)

Table 1: Truancy in the previous 30 days through ‘skipping’ or ‘cutting’



Results

Smoking, E-cigarette and Cannabis Use

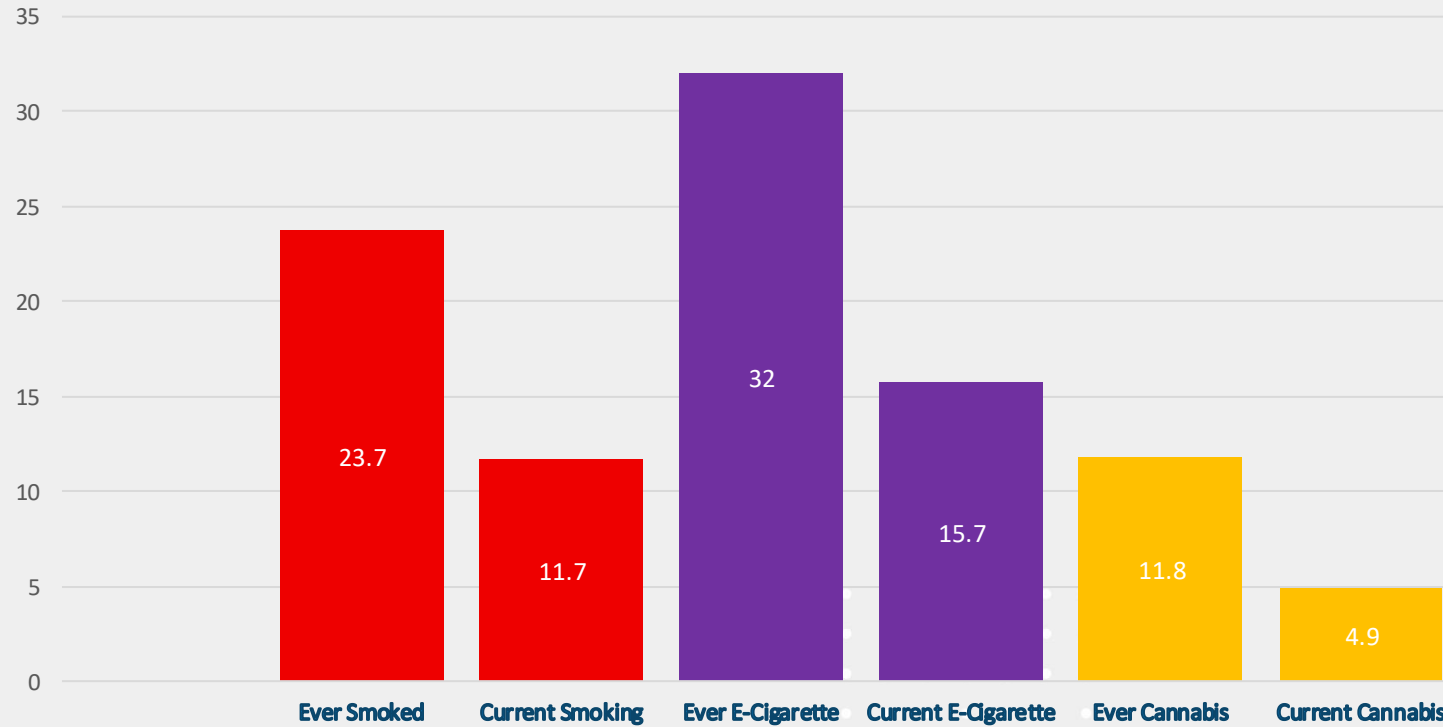


Figure 1: Prevalence (%) of Ever and Current Smoking, E-cigarette and Cannabis Use (15-16 year olds)



Truancy and Smoking

Smoking Status	Skipping school -Truancy, p<0.001						
	Total	Never	1 day	2 days	3-4 days	5-6 days	7 days or more
Never	1229 (75.9)	1049 (81.8)	84 (56.8)	40 (56.3)	36 (53.7)	9 (42.9)	11 (37.9)
Ever	390 (24.1)	234 (18.2)	64 (43.2)	31 (43.7)	31 (46.3)	12 (57.1)	18 (62.1)
Current (last 30 days)	194 (12.0)	106 (8.3)	34 (23.0)	15 (21.1)	18 (26.9)	8 (38.1)	13 (44.8)
Total	1619 (100.0)	1283 (79.2)	148 (9.1)	71 (4.4)	67 (4.1)	21 (1.3)	29 (1.8)

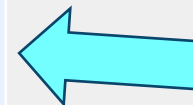
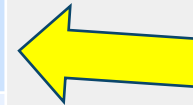


Table 2. Associations between Truancy and Smoking



Truancy and E-Cigarette Use

E-cigarette Use	Skipping school -Truancy, p<0.001						
	Total	Never	1 day	2 days	3-4 days	5-6 days	7 days or more
Never	1096 (67.7)	937 (73.1)	72 (48.6)	35 (49.3)	33 (49.3)	8 (38.1)	11 (37.9)
Ever	522 (32.3)	345 (26.9)	76 (51.4)	36 (50.7)	34 (50.7)	13 (61.9)	18 (62.1)
Current (last 30 days)	260 (16.1)	145 (11.3)	45 (30.4)	25 (35.2)	22 (32.8)	8 (38.1)	15 (51.7)
Total	1618 (100.0)	1282 (79.2)	119 (9.1)	71 (4.4)	67 (4.1)	21 (1.3)	29 (1.8)

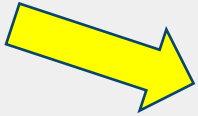


Table 3. Associations between Truancy and Smoking



Truancy and Cannabis Use

Cannabis Use	Skipping school -Truancy						
	Total	Never	1 day	2 days	3-4 days	5-6 days	7 days or more
Never	1425 (88.0)	1188 (92.6)	110 (74.3)	51 (71.8)	50 (74.6)	12 (57.1)	14 (48.3)
Lifetime, p<0.001	194 (12.0)	95 (7.4)	38 (25.7)	20 (28.2)	17 (25.4)	9 (42.9)	15 (51.7)
Last 30 Days, p<0.001	81 (5.0)	40 (3.1)	14 (9.5)	9 (12.9)	6 (9.0)	6 (28.6)	6 (21.4)



Table 4. Associations between Truancy and Smoking



- Almost one in five (17.9%, n=336) respondents reported truancy in the previous 30 days and 2.5% (n=50) on 5 or more days.
- Prevalence of ever-smoking was 23.7% (n=446), current smoking 9% (n=169), ever e-cigarette use 32% (n=601), current e-cigarette use 17% (n=318), ever cannabis use 11.8% (n=222), and current cannabis use 4.9% (n=92).
- Truancy was significantly associated with ever and current smoking, e-cigarette and cannabis use.
- Missing more days was associated with higher use of all substances.
- Those who reported the highest truancy (7 days or more) reported prevalence of ever-smoking 62.1%, current smoking 44.8%, ever e-cigarette use 62.1%, current e-cigarette use 51.7%, ever cannabis use 51.7%, and current cannabis use 21.4%.



Conclusions

Truancy is a widespread problem in schools with well-known risks for teenagers. Almost a fifth of 15-16 year olds reported 'skipping' or 'cutting' in the previous month.

We report significantly higher smoking, e-cigarette and cannabis use associated with truancy.

We observe greater substance use intensity associated with more frequent truancy.

We recommend specialist interventions for this vulnerable group.



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Contact

Prof Luke Clancy/ Prof Joan Hanafin
TobaccoFree Research Institute Ireland
TU Dublin, Dublin 2.

W: www.tri.ie
E: lclancy@tri.ie
E: jhanafin@tri.ie



Thank you

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