

# Chronic Pain and Non-Medical Use of Opioids, Benzodiazepines, and Pregabalin in the United Kingdom

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## Introduction

- The objective of the Survey of Non-Medical Use of Prescription Drugs (NMURx) is to study rates of non-medical use of prescription drugs and to characterize associated behaviors and outcomes among the general population in the United Kingdom (UK).
- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is an annual household survey used to monitor illicit drug use and is considered a representative population sample.

## Research Aims

- The primary aim was to investigate the relationship between chronic pain and use of illicit drugs and non-medical use of prescription drugs in the NMURx in the UK.
- A secondary aim was to compare data on the prevalence of illicit drug use collected from the NMURx and the CSEW.

## Methods

- NMURx is deployed biannually via a survey administration company. Respondents age 16 and older living in the UK are eligible.
- Data analysed from the July 2014 NMURx dataset (n=2,499) for primary aim were: whether the individual had experienced chronic pain ("pain lasting for at least 3 months that either occurs constantly or flares up frequently"); lifetime and last year prevalence of illicit drug use; and lifetime prevalence of non-medical use of prescription drugs (use without a doctor's prescription or for any reason other than recommended by a doctor).
- Data on lifetime non-medical use of prescription drugs was studied for opioids, benzodiazepines and pregabalin/gabapentin.
- Fisher's exact test was used to determine statistical significance (alpha ≤0.05).
- For the secondary aim, respondents aged 16-59 years residing in England or Wales only (n=1,594) were included from NMURx to allow comparison with the CSEW; the 2013/2014 CSEW included 34,906 respondents aged 16-59 years.
- Lifetime and last year prevalence of illicit drug use was compared for the NMURx and the CSEW between all respondents (16- 59 years) and in young adults (16-24 years).

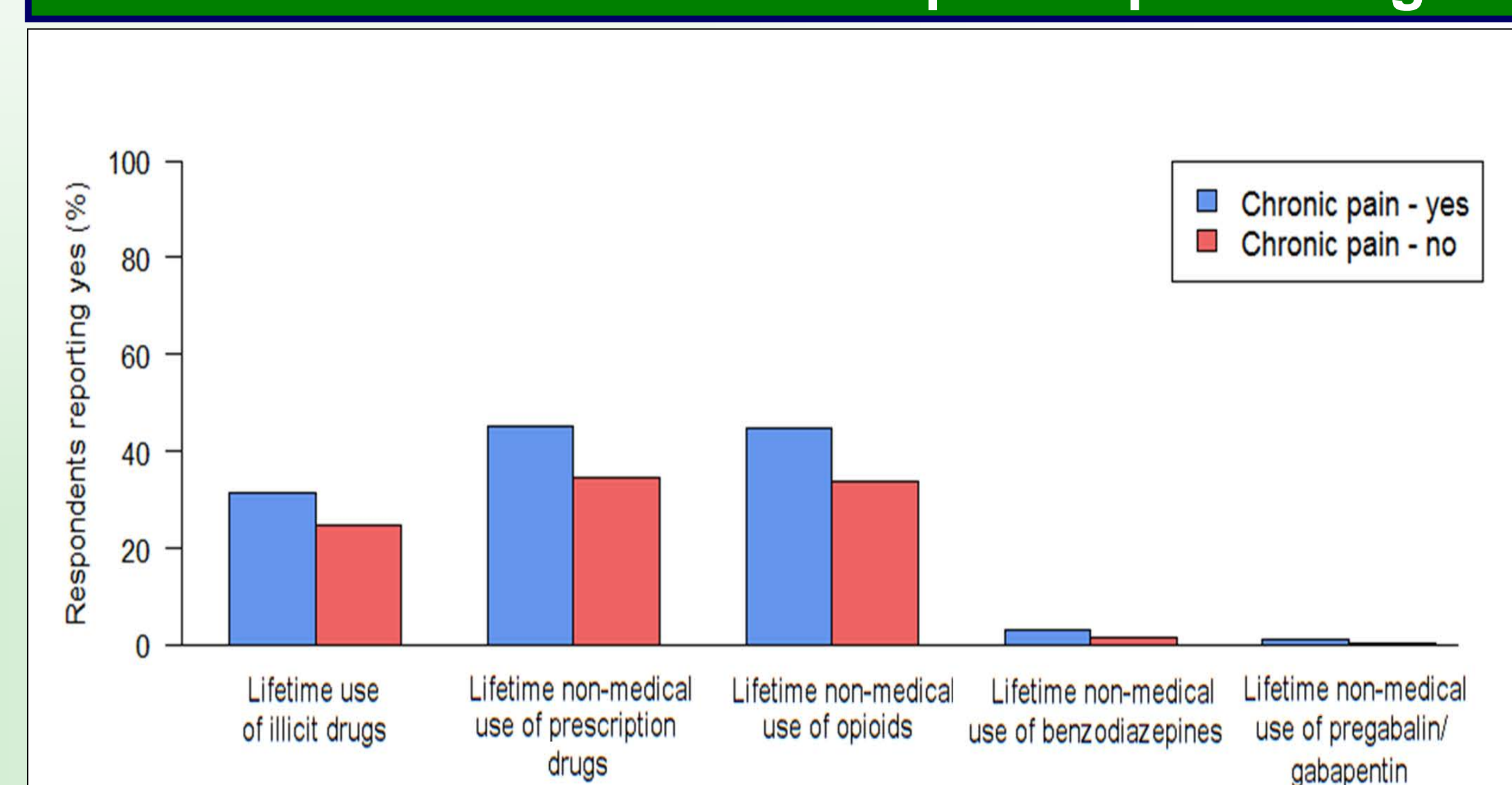
## Results

- The mean ± SD age of NMURx respondents was 48.0 ± 15.6 years and 49.9% were male.
- 693 (30.8%) reported lifetime use of an illicit drug and 984 (39.4%) reported lifetime non-medical use of a prescription drug.
- Chronic pain was reported by 45.3% respondents, comparable to the UK (30-50%).
- Lifetime use of illicit drugs and non-medical use of any prescription drug were more common in those with chronic pain (Table 1, Figure 1).
- Reported non-medical use of benzodiazepines, opioids, pregabalin/ gabapentin and were more common in those with chronic pain (Table 1, Figure 1).
- Prevalence of illicit drug use in NMURx and CSEW were similar for all respondents and young adults.
  - All respondents lifetime use: NMURx 32.6%, CSEW 35.6% (Figure 2).
  - Young adults lifetime use: NMURx 31.4%, CSEW 36.3% (Figure 2).
- For lifetime use, cannabis was the most commonly used drug in each data source (23.7% and 29.9%), amphetamines were the second (9.7% and 11.1%) and any cocaine was the third (8.2% and 9.5%) (Figure 4).

**Table 1. Chronic pain and prevalence of illicit drug use and non-medical use of prescription drugs**

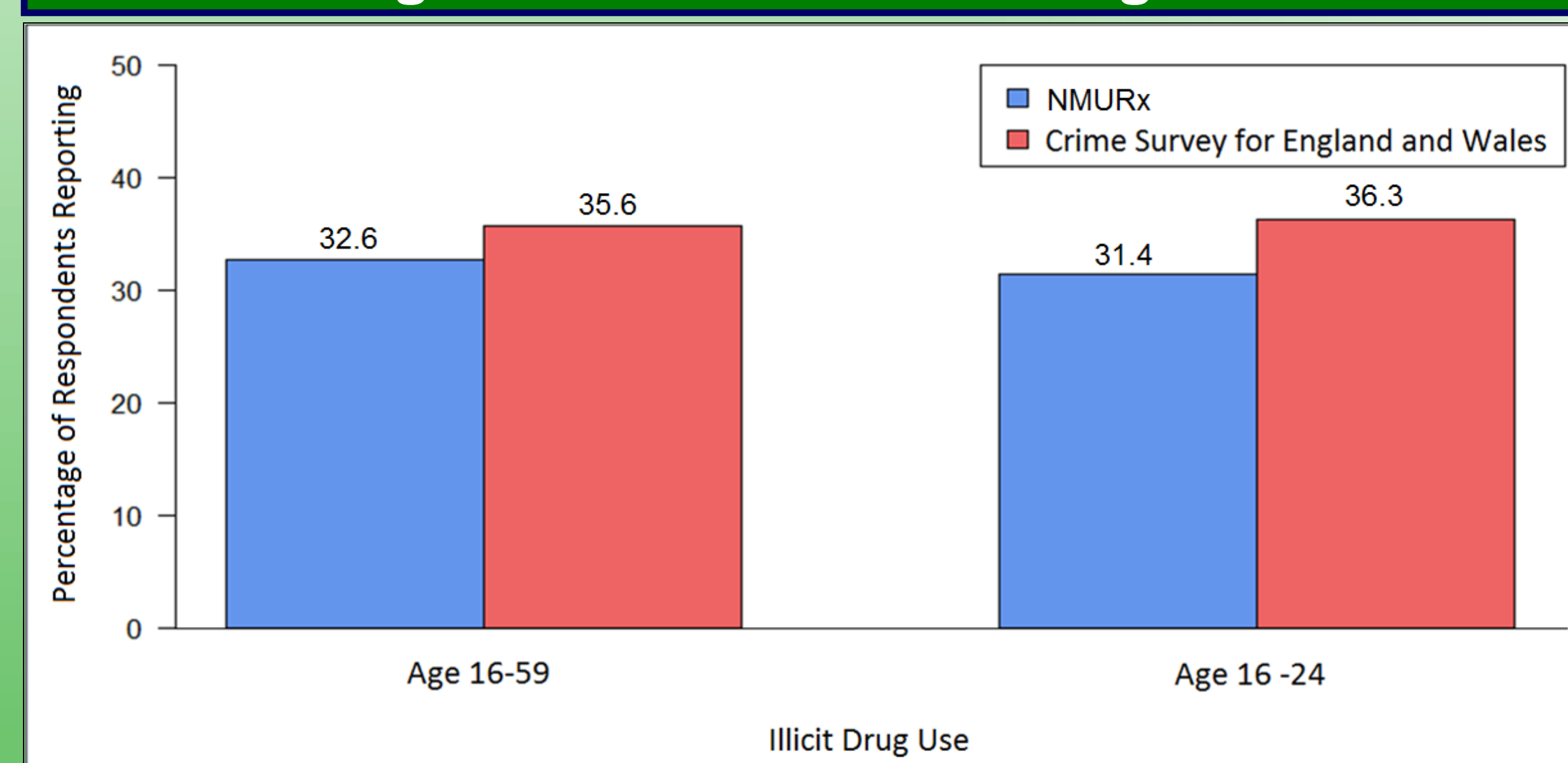
Respondent "Yes" Endorsements	Chronic Pain		P-value
	Yes N (%)	No N (%)	
Lifetime use of illicit drugs	357 (31.5)	336 (24.6)	<0.0001
Lifetime non-medical use of any prescription drug	511 (45.1)	473 (34.6)	<0.0001
Lifetime non-medical use of opioids	507 (44.8)	461 (33.7)	<0.0001
Lifetime non-medical use of benzodiazepines	34 (3.0)	23 (1.7)	0.0311
Lifetime non-medical use of pregabalin/gabapentin	13 (1.1)	2 (0.1)	0.0013

**Figure 1. Chronic pain and prevalence of illicit drug use and non-medical use of prescription drugs**

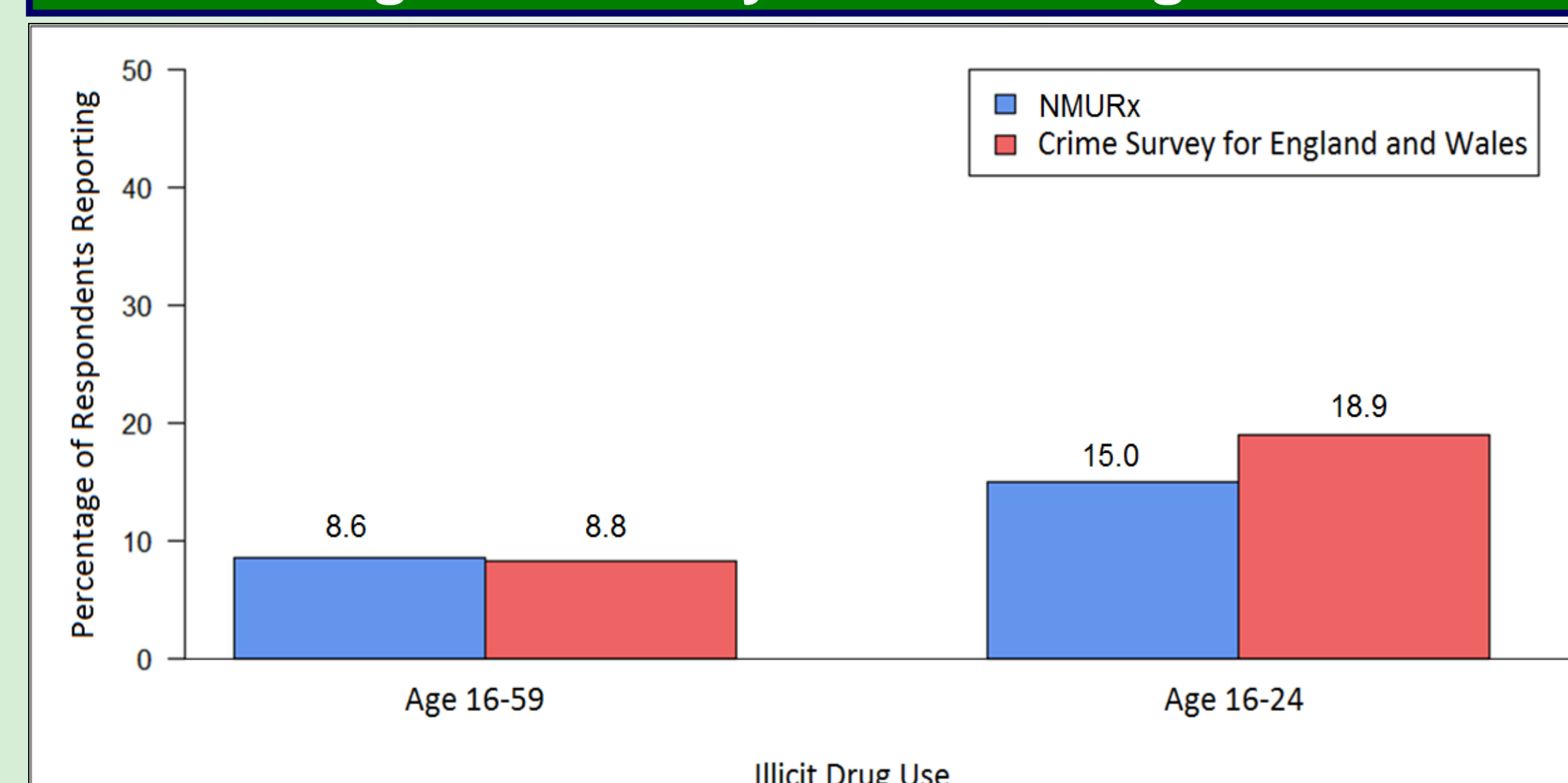


† Figure only includes respondent "yes" endorsements for each of the items presented

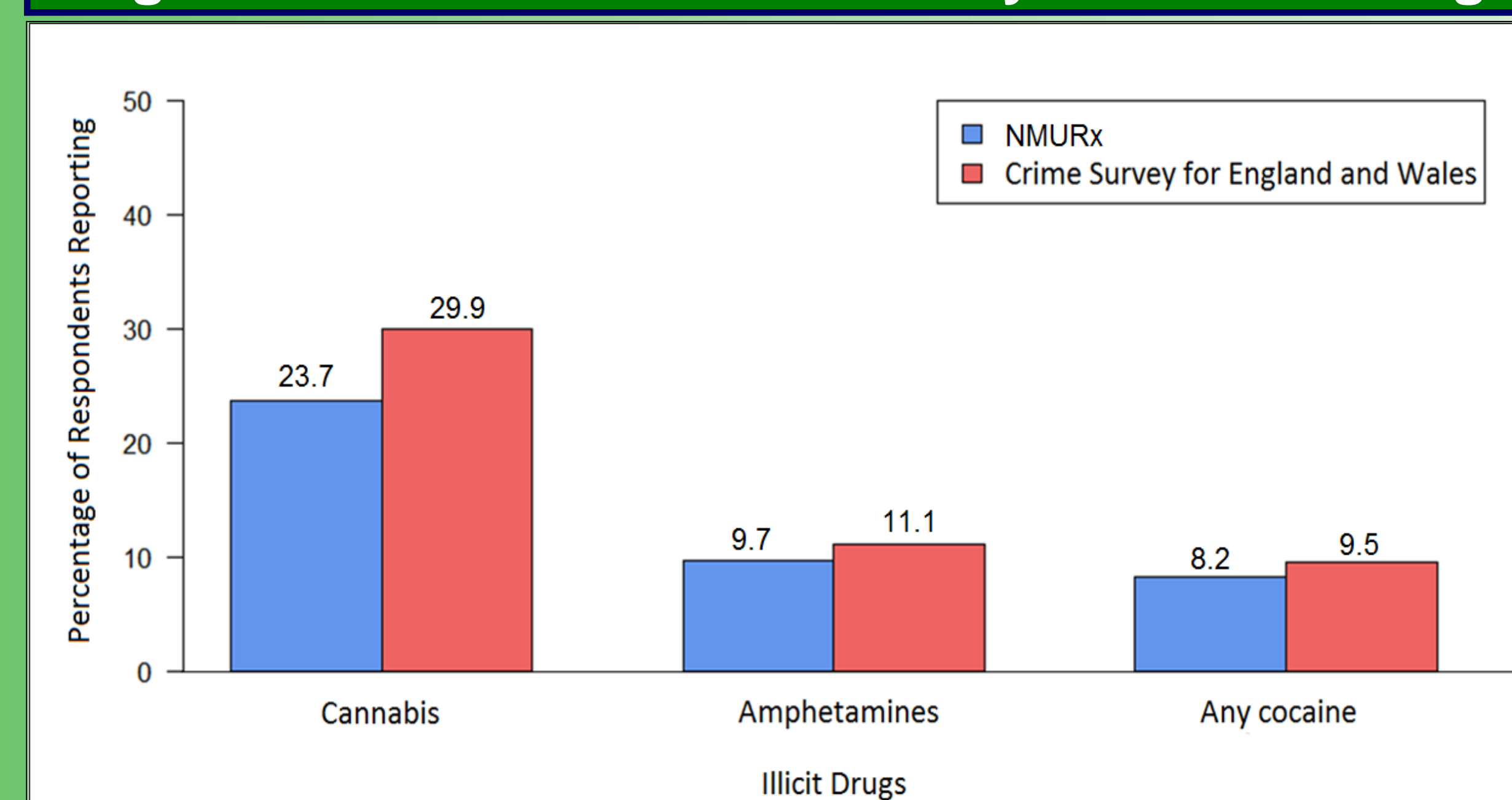
**Figure 2. Lifetime illicit drug use**



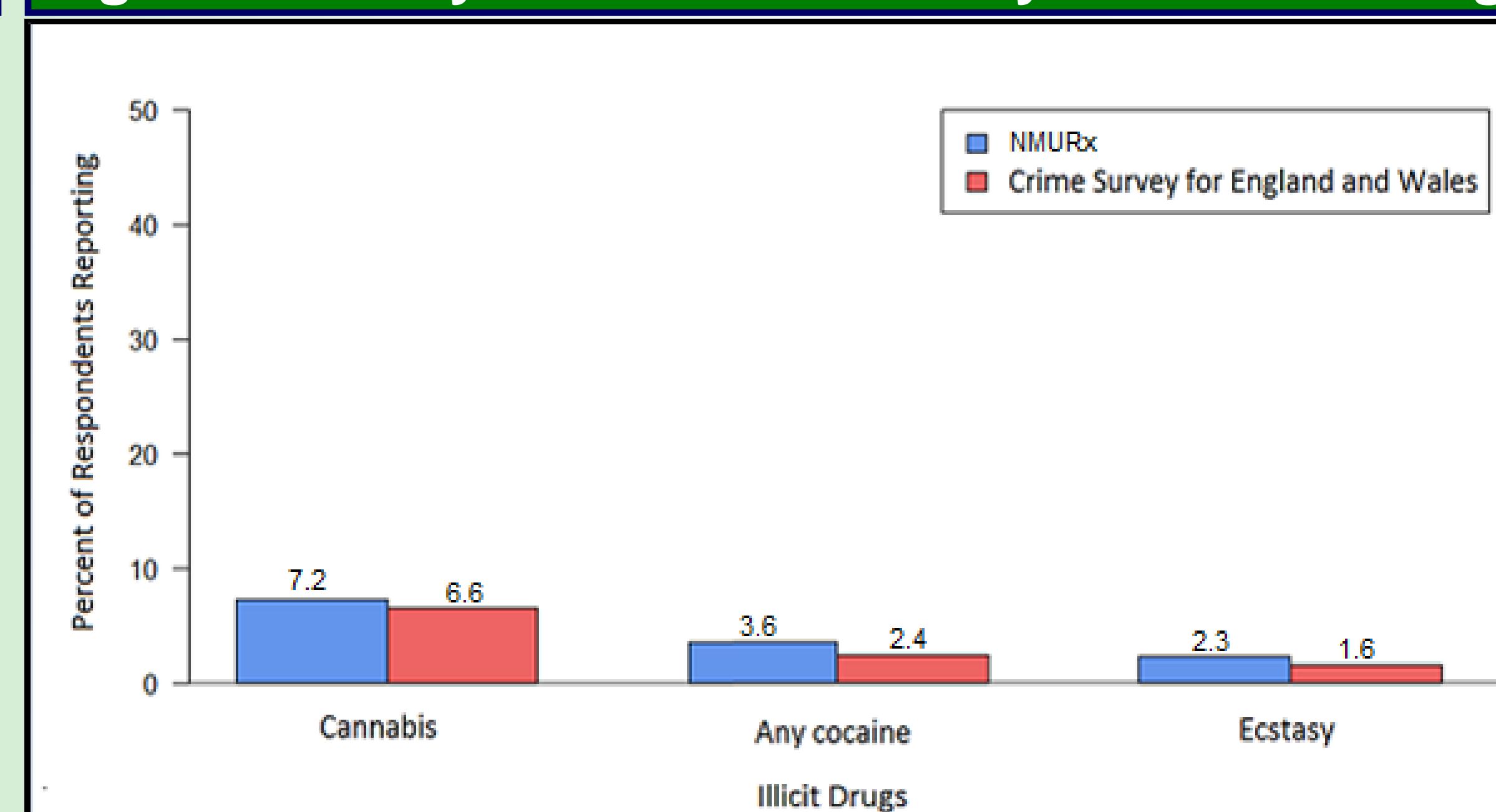
**Figure 3. Last year illicit drug use**



**Figure 4. Lifetime most commonly used illicit drug**



**Figure 5. Last year most commonly used illicit drug**



## Conclusions

- Data from NMURx suggest that use of illicit drugs and non-medical use of prescription drugs is more common in those with chronic pain in the UK. It is important that clinicians managing patients with chronic pain and those managing patients with drug misuse consider this in their clinical assessment.
- The prevalence of use of illicit drugs was similar in the online national survey and the CSEW.
- The comparability of these findings demonstrates the feasibility of using an online survey administered with a survey administration company to obtain data comparable to the well-established household CSEW with a considerably smaller sample.

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1. Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2013/14 Crime Survey for England and Wales, Statistics – national statistics, 15 August 2014, accessed 19 December 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drug-misuse-findings-from-the-2013-to-2014-csew/drug-misuse-findings-from-the-201314-crime-survey-for-england-and-wales>