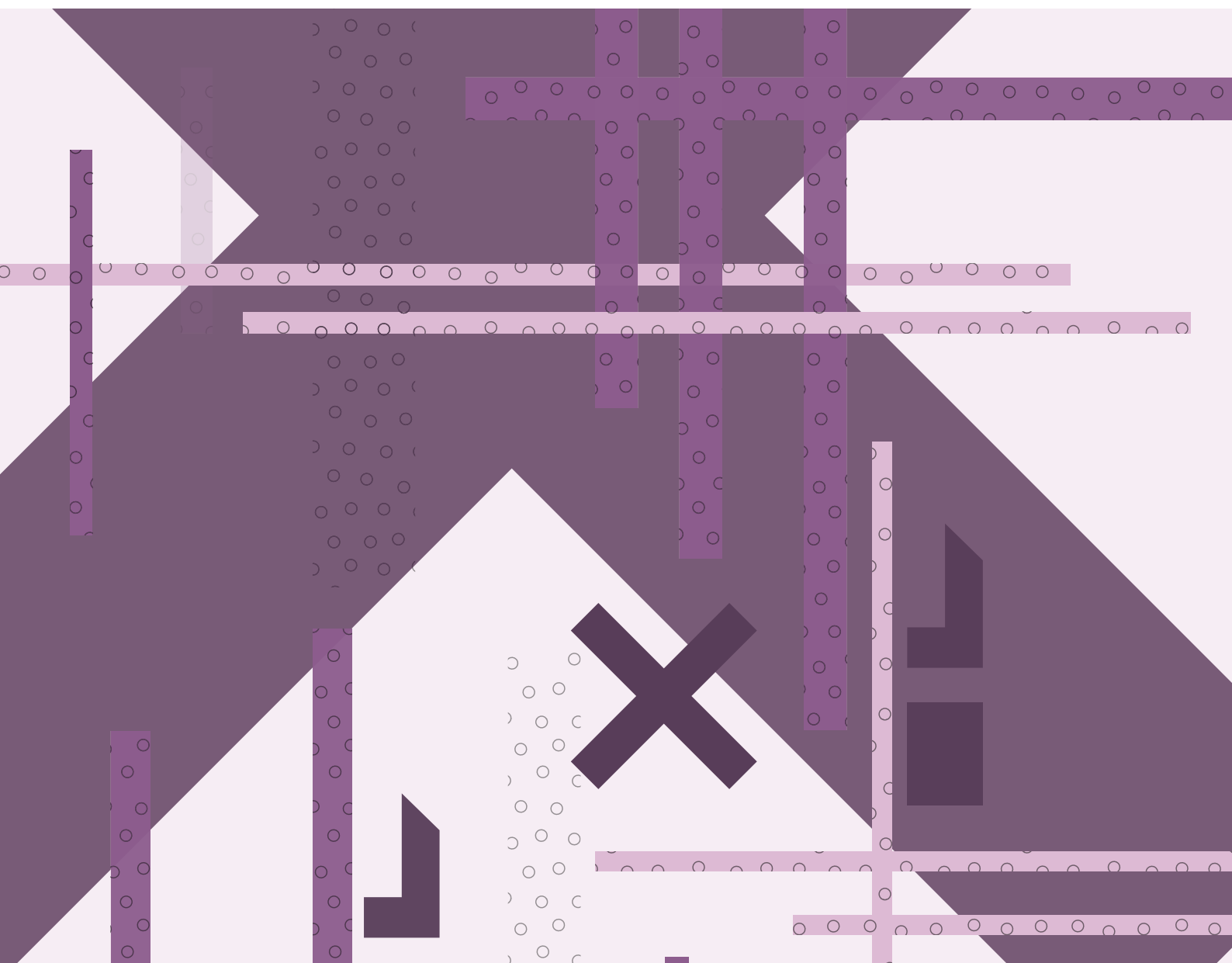


Criminal Justice Project: Drug Interventions Programme

Class A drug tests in Merseyside Police custody:

year ending March 2021

Karen Critchley and Mark Whitfield



August 2021

Public Health Institute, Faculty of Health, Liverpool John Moores University, 3rd Floor, Exchange Station, Tithebarn Street, Liverpool, L2 2QP

🌐 www.ljmu.ac.uk/phi | ✉ k.a.critchley@ljmu.ac.uk | ☎ 0151 231 4290 | 🐦 twitter.com/PHI_IMS

| | |
|--|----|
| Key findings..... | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Drug tests across Merseyside..... | 5 |
| Overview and trends..... | 5 |
| Drug testing activity | 5 |
| Positive drug tests..... | 7 |
| Time of drug tests | 8 |
| Belle Vale, St Anne Street and Wavertree custody suites, Liverpool | 8 |
| Copy Lane custody suite, Sefton..... | 8 |
| Wirral custody suite..... | 8 |
| Offences | 9 |
| Demographics | 11 |
| Merseyside residents..... | 13 |
| Liverpool residents..... | 14 |
| Overview and trends..... | 14 |
| Drug testing activity | 14 |
| Positive drug tests..... | 16 |
| Offences | 16 |
| Demographics | 17 |
| Sefton residents..... | 19 |
| Overview and trends..... | 19 |
| Drug testing activity | 19 |
| Positive drug tests..... | 21 |
| Offences | 21 |
| Demographics | 22 |
| St Helens residents | 24 |
| Overview and trends..... | 24 |
| Drug testing activity | 24 |
| Positive drug tests..... | 26 |
| Offences | 26 |
| Demographics | 27 |
| Wirral residents | 29 |
| Overview and trends..... | 29 |
| Drug testing activity | 29 |
| Positive drug tests..... | 31 |
| Offences | 31 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Demographics | 32 |
| Re-presentations | 34 |
| Demographics of individuals who presented more than once..... | 34 |
| Appendices | 35 |
| Appendix A | 35 |
| Appendix B | 36 |
| References..... | 38 |
| Acknowledgements | 38 |

KEY FINDINGS

- There were 1,482 attempted drug tests for specified Class A drugs on adult detainees across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. This is lowest annual figure of attempted drug tests on record, which is a result of Merseyside Police suspending drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Over half of the total 981 positive drug tests across Merseyside in 2020/21 were cocaine only (56%), while the remaining positive tests were opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 38%; opiates only = 6%).
- There was a total of 938 Required Assessments served by Merseyside Police to 840 individuals in the year ending March 2021.
- Seven in ten (70%) positive drug tests in the year ending March 2021 occurred on a weekday.
- Positive drug tests peaked 12:00-13:59, 16:00-17:59 and 20:00-21:59 on a weekday (all 13%), while they peaked 12:00-13:59 on a weekend (16%).
- Around two in five (39%) positive drug test records across Merseyside in the year ending March 2021 were Misuse of Drugs Act offences, while just under one-quarter (23%) were theft.
- Men accounted for around four in five (81%) individuals testing positive in the year ending March 2021.
- The median age of detainees who tested positive in 2020/21 was 35 years. Around one in five (21%) individuals were aged 30-34 years, followed by 16% aged 35-39 years.
- Positive tests for opiate metabolites peaked for detainees aged 40-49 years, while positive tests for cocaine only peaked for those aged 30-34 years.
- Of the total number of drug tests attempted in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021, 96% were Merseyside residents.
- Of the positive drug tests in the year ending March 2021, over two in five were Liverpool residents (45%), followed by Wirral residents (25%), Sefton residents (12%), St Helens residents (11%) and Knowsley residents (7%).
- Of the 848 individuals who reside in Merseyside who tested positive for opiates and/or cocaine in the year ending March 2021, one in ten (10%) subsequently re-presented and were drug tested again following their initial positive drug test during the twelve-month period.

INTRODUCTION

The Drug Interventions Programme (DIP) has an overarching aim to identify and engage with adult offenders in the criminal justice system who use drugs and/or alcohol, and encourage them towards appropriate treatment services in order to reduce acquisitive crime. The DIP process often begins with the police drug testing detainees in the custody suite for specified Class A drugs (opiates and/or crack/powder cocaine) following an arrest or charge. If a detainee tests positive, they are served with a Required Assessment (RA) by the police. This is a compulsory legal sanction which requires the individual to attend up to two appointments (initial/follow-up RA) with the local Criminal Justice Intervention Team (CJIT). During the RA, a CJIT worker will assess the individual's drug use and offending behaviour and, if necessary, encourage them to engage with treatment services (Home Office, 2010).

In 2015, Merseyside Police introduced targeted drug testing, which replaced Test on Arrest. Targeted testing involves a set list of questions around Class A drug use and drug-related offending that should be considered before a decision is made on whether a detainee is drug tested. The main aim of targeted testing was to reduce the number of negative drug tests, while ensuring offenders who use Class A drugs continue to be drug tested and referred to treatment services through the RA process.

This report¹ presents data on drug tests carried out across Merseyside's custody suites showing trends up to the year ending March 2021. It contextualises Merseyside Police drug testing records by providing numbers and trends of offenders who use cocaine and/or opiates, identified through this key route into DIP, and a demographic overview of this cohort. Furthermore, Merseyside comparisons for the year ending March 2021 are presented in charts in *Appendix B*.

Box 1: COVID-19 pandemic

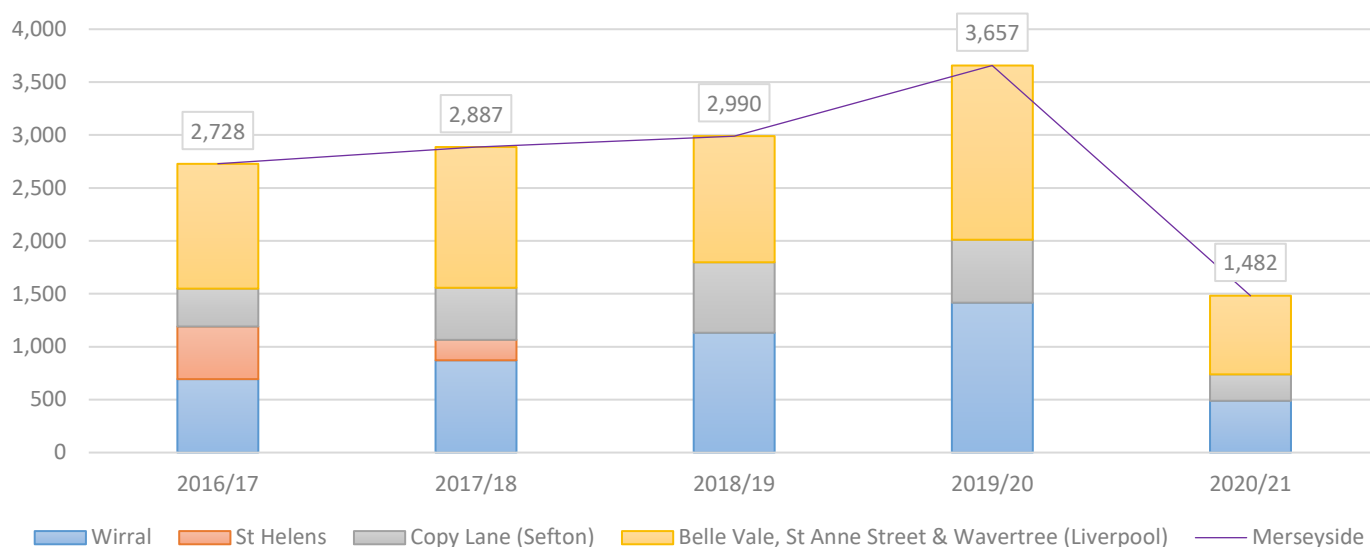
Drug testing in the custody suites was suspended between April and August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, treatment services across Merseyside supplied self-referral forms to be used for detainees requesting support with substance use on a voluntary basis.

¹ Throughout this report, percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Also note that numbers of individuals have been reported for demographics only, while other figures include multiple tests for some detainees.

OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2021, there were 1,482 attempted drug tests for specified Class A drugs on adult detainees across Merseyside's custody suites (*Figure 1*). The number of drug tests increased year-on-year up to 2019/20, though they then decreased by 59% in 2020/21, which is the lowest annual figure of attempted drug tests on record. The low number of attempted drug tests in the latest year is a consequence of Merseyside Police suspending drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the months when drug testing was operating in 2020/21, a monthly average of 212 tests were carried out (monthly average: 2016/17 = 227; 2017/18 = 241; 2018/19 = 249; 2019/20 = 305). Liverpool's custody suites had the highest number of attempted drug tests of all five years shown in *Figure 1*, with half (50%) of all tests in the year ending March 2021 carried out in Liverpool.

Figure 1: Attempted drug tests across Merseyside by custody suite and year, 2016/17 - 2020/21²



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

Figure 2 shows the drug testing activity for detainees drug tested in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Of the 1,482 attempted drug tests, 981 (66%) had a positive result for specified Class A drugs³. Over half of the positive drug tests were for cocaine only⁴ (n=544; 56%), while the remaining positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 373 [38%]; opiates only = 56 [6%]). There were 938 Required Assessments (RAs) served to 840 individuals in the year ending March 2021 (*Figure 2*).



56%

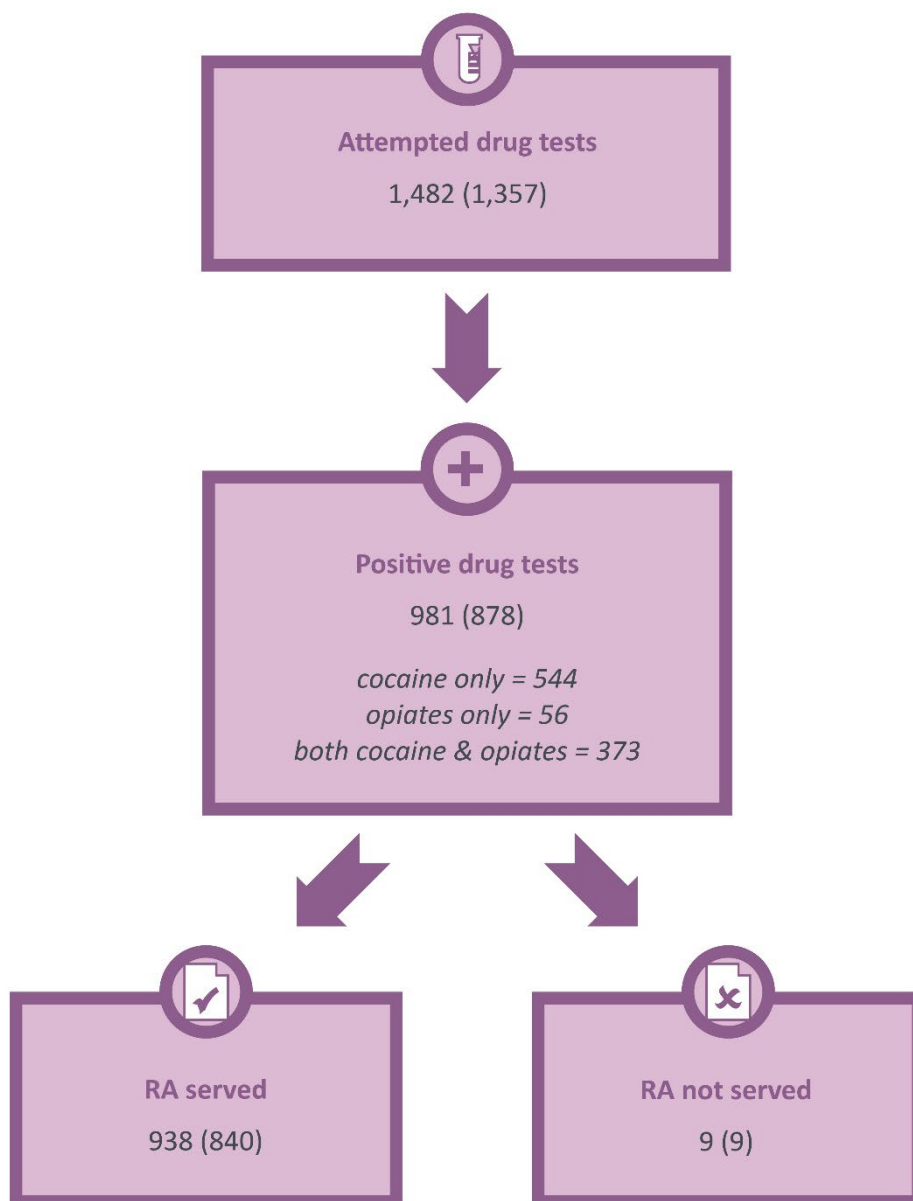
positive tests for crack/powder cocaine, 2020/21

² St Helens custody suite permanently closed mid-August 2017. Copy Lane custody suite closed temporarily for refurbishment for around ten weeks at the end of 2019. Merseyside Police suspended drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no custody suite in Knowsley.

³ A number of the drug tests will have been refused or aborted (i.e. equipment failure or unable to provide sample); therefore, the summation of positive tests and negative test does not equal the number of attempted tests.

⁴ Throughout this report, cocaine includes both powder cocaine and crack cocaine.

Figure 2: Drug testing activity in Merseyside's custody suites, 2020/21^{5,6,7}



⁵ Numbers of individuals at each level are presented in brackets.

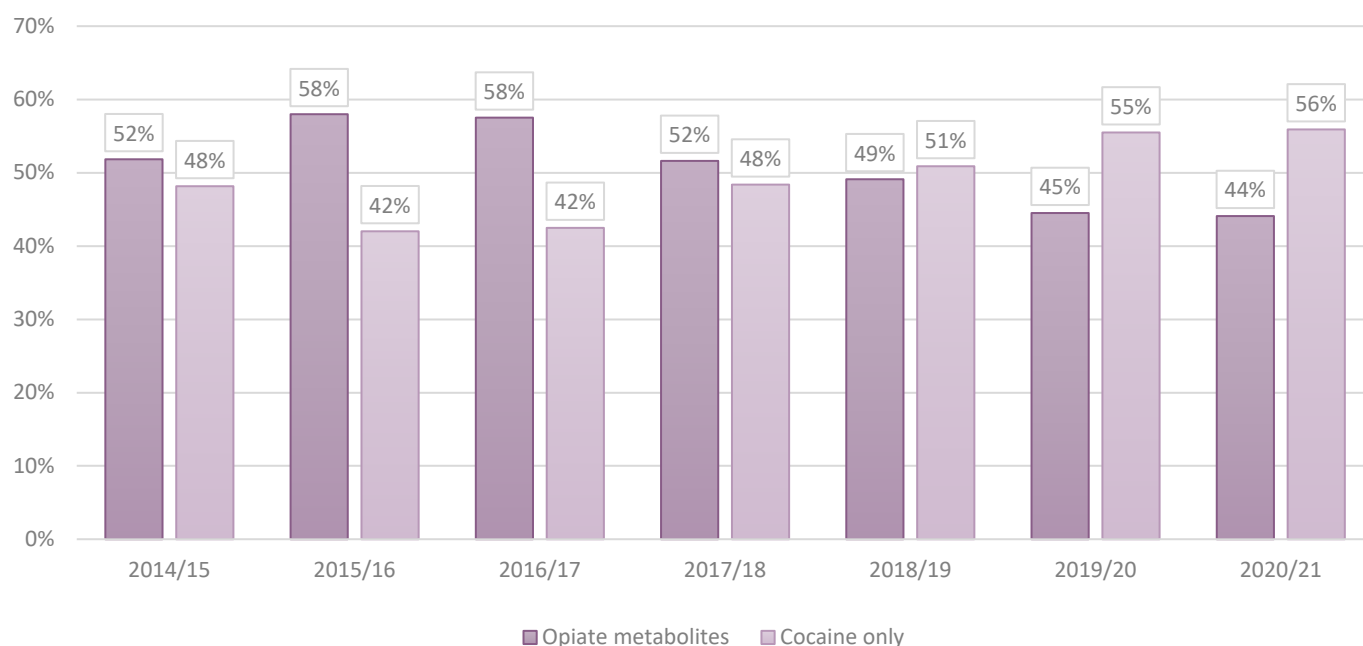
⁶ There were eight positive drug test records that did not indicate the drug(s) detected.

⁷ 'RA served' and 'RA not served' indicate the number of occasions when those testing positive were either served or not served with the requirement to attend an initial RA. There are individuals with more than one positive drug test that could be included in both 'RA served' and 'RA not served'. Note that there were eight records that did not indicate if an RA was served or not. Also, there were 26 records where an RA was served but the positive result was overturned or not resolved following the dispute; these have been removed from the final 'RA served' figure.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

In the four years up to the year ending March 2018, there were more positive tests for opiate metabolites (both opiates & cocaine and opiates only) than for cocaine only, though in the following years there were more positive tests for cocaine only than opiate metabolites (Figure 3). Notably, the proportion of cocaine only positive tests increased year-on-year from 42% in 2016/17 to 56% in 2020/21. The increase in the proportion of cocaine could be attributed to an increase in supply and demand for cocaine in England and Wales in recent years (Black, 2020; Hales et al., 2020).

Figure 3: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by drug test result, 2014/15 - 2020/21



Box 2: Cocaine – an overview of the issue

Black (2020) and Hales et al. (2020) reported an increase in supply and demand for cocaine in recent years, while the Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2019/20 reported cocaine as the second most commonly used drug in the last year among adults, after cannabis (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Not only is there an increase in the availability and use of cocaine, purity is rising and costs are falling (Black, 2020; Hales et al., 2020).

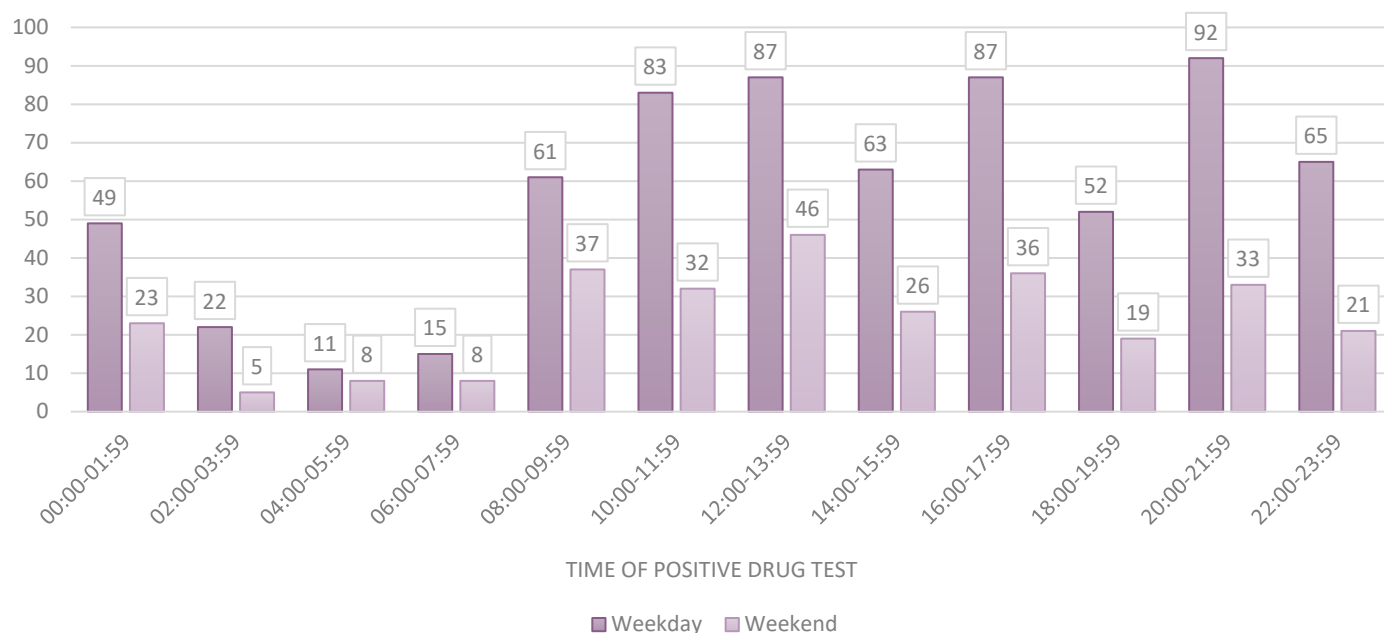
The most commonly seized Class A drug by police forces and the UK Border Force in 2019/20 was powder cocaine. There were 18,790 seizures, which is the highest since the year ending March 2010. A total of 4,274 kg was seized in 2019/20, which is the third highest quantity of powder cocaine since 2006/07, and notably, there was an exceptionally high quantity seized in 2018/19 (9,645 kg). There were 7,050 seizures of a total quantity of 84 kg of crack cocaine in 2019/20. This is the highest number of seizures since 2007/08 and the highest quantity seized since 2003/04 (Home Office, 2020).

Although opiates accounted for around half of all drug poisoning deaths in England and Wales in 2020, deaths attributed to cocaine were at a record high, rising for the ninth consecutive year. There were 777 registered drug poisoning deaths involving cocaine in 2020, representing age-standardised mortality rates of 21.7 for men and 5.5 for women (deaths per million people) (Office for National Statistics, 2021).

TIME OF DRUG TESTS

Of the total 981 positive drug tests across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021, seven in ten occurred on a weekday (n=687; 70%) compared to three in ten on a weekend (n=294; 30%). *Figure 4* shows the number of positive drug tests by time of test, comparing those that occurred on a weekday with those on a weekend. Positive drug tests peaked 12:00-13:59, 16:00-17:59 and 20:00-21:59 on a weekday (all 13%), while they peaked 12:00-13:59 on a weekend (16%).

Figure 4: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2020/21



BELLE VALE, ST ANNE STREET AND WAVERTREE CUSTODY SUITES, LIVERPOOL

Of the 456 positive drug tests at Liverpool's custody suites in the year ending March 2021, just over two-thirds occurred on a weekday (n=310; 68%) compared to around one-third on a weekend (n=146; 32%). Positive drug tests on a weekday peaked 20:00-21:59 (n=44; 14%), followed by 12:00-13:59 (n=41; 13%) and 16:00-17:59 (n=39; 13%), while the number of tests on a weekend peaked 16:00-17:59 (n=26; 18%) (*Appendix A1*).

COPY LANE CUSTODY SUITE, SEFTON

Of the 167 positive drug tests at Copy Lane custody suite in the year ending March 2021, just over seven in ten occurred on a weekday (n=121; 72%) compared to just under three in ten on a weekend (n=46; 28%). Positive drug tests on a weekday peaked 20:00-21:59 (n=17; 14%), followed by 10:00-11:59 (n=16; 13%) and 16:00-17:59 (n=16; 13%), while the number of tests on a weekend peaked 20:00-21:59 (n=8; 17%) (*Appendix A2*).

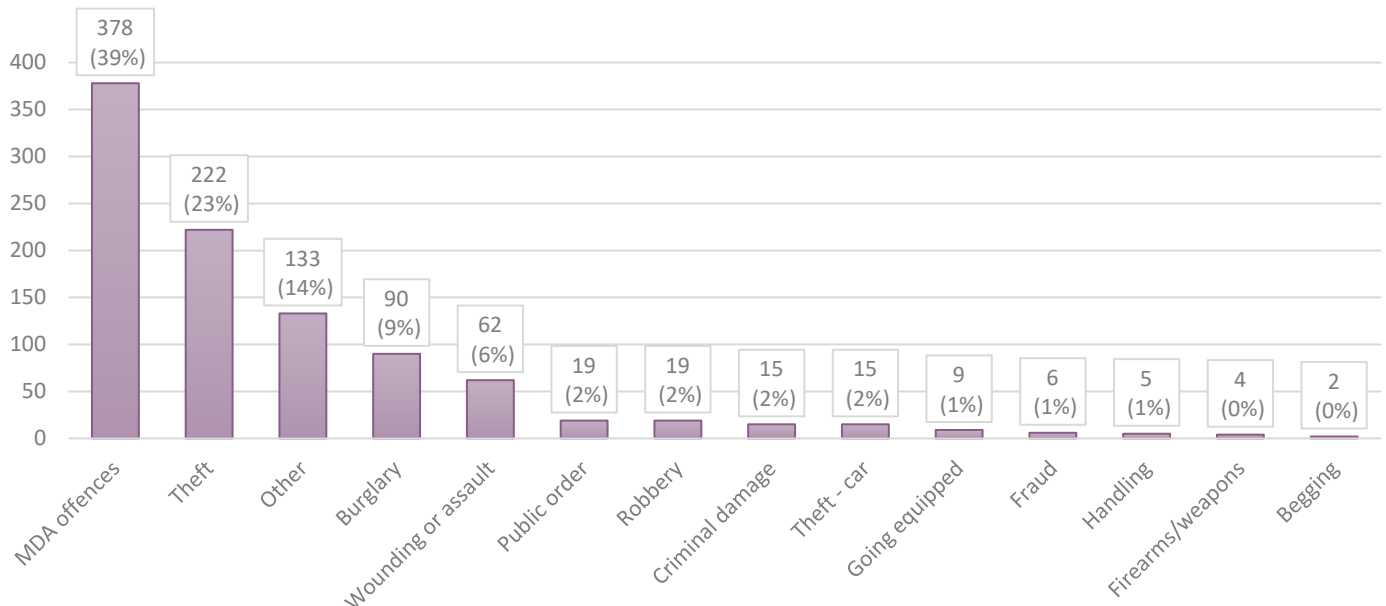
WIRRAL CUSTODY SUITE

Of the 358 positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite in the year ending March 2021, just over seven in ten occurred on a weekday (n=256; 72%) compared to just under three in ten on a weekend (n=102; 28%). Positive drug tests on a weekday peaked 12:00-13:59 (n=38; 15%), followed by 14:00-15:59 (n=34; 13%) and 16:00-17:59 (n=32; 13%), while the number of tests on a weekend peaked 12:00-13:59 (n=19; 19%) (*Appendix A3*).

OFFENCES

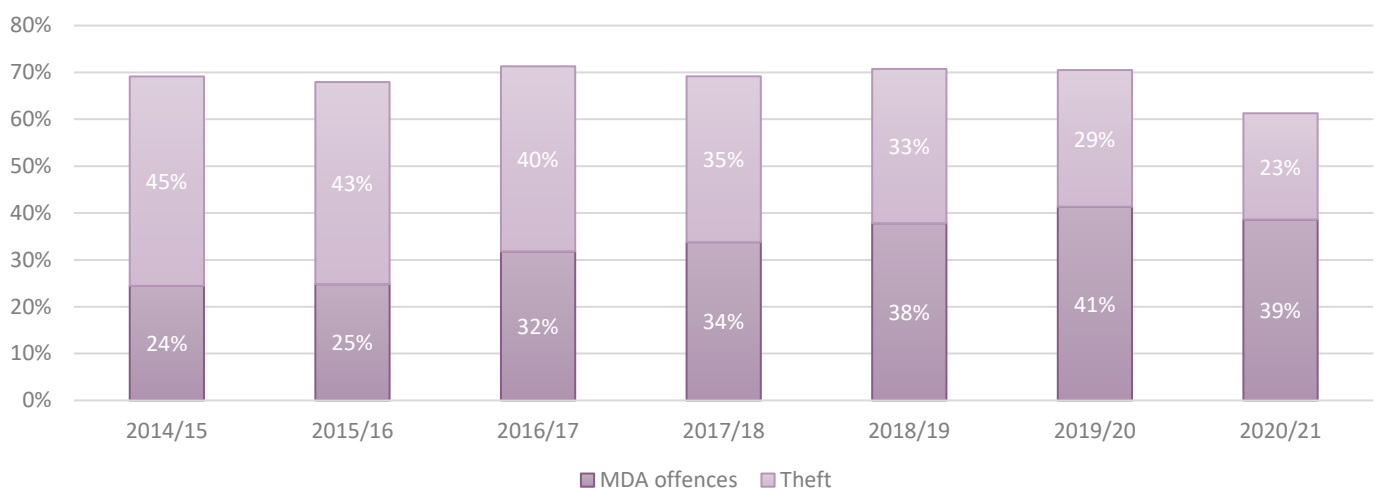
Police drug testing records capture the offence that led to the arrest/charge and subsequent drug test. Around two in five positive drug test records across Merseyside in the year ending March 2021 reported Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) offences (n=378; 39%), while just under one-quarter were theft (n=222; 23%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, 2020/21^{8,9}



Notably, there has been a substantial change in the trends of MDA offences and theft. Figure 6 shows that generally, the proportion of MDA offences has increased, while the proportion of theft has decreased. MDA offences increased year-on-year from 24% in 2014/15 to 41% in 2019/20, followed by a slight decrease to 39% in 2020/21. Conversely, theft decreased year-on-year, from 45% in 2014/15 to 23% in 2020/21.

Figure 6: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, 2014/15 - 2020/21¹⁰



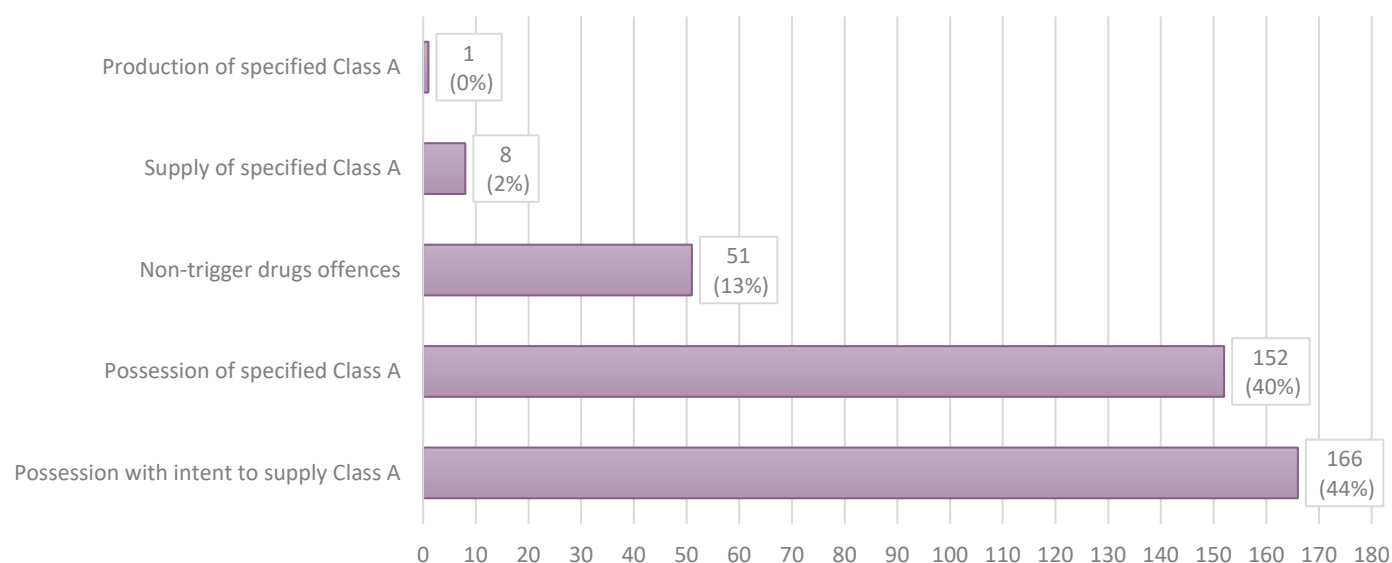
⁸ There were two records that did not have an offence recorded.

⁹ Other offences: other motoring offences = 66; other non-trigger offence = 64; driving whilst disqualified = 1; making off without payment = 1; other summary offence = 1.

¹⁰ In previous reports, MDA offences did not include non-trigger drugs offences. In this report, MDA offences do include non-trigger drugs offences and figures for 2014/15 to 2019/20 have been updated in order to be able to compare and report on trends accurately.

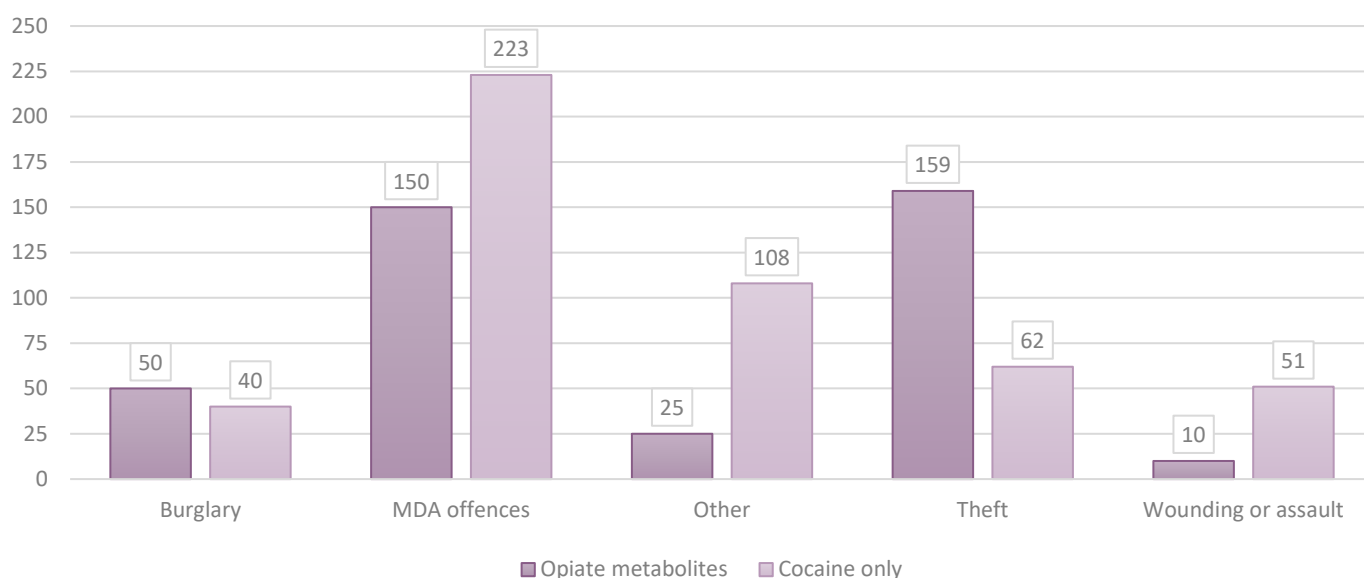
Figure 7 shows the type of MDA offences recorded in the year ending March 2021. Of the 378 MDA offences recorded for those who tested positive, the majority (84%) were for possession offences. Over two in five were possession with intent to supply Class A drugs (n=166; 44%), followed by possession of specified Class A drugs (n=152; 40%).

Figure 7: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by type of MDA offence, 2020/21



As this report shows, there has been a shift in trends for those testing positive in Merseyside's custody suites; cocaine only positive drugs tests have increased, as have MDA offences. Figure 8 shows the five offences with the highest numbers recorded in 2020/21 by the positive drug test result. Of the drug testing records with MDA offences recorded, three in five detainees tested positive for cocaine only (n=223; 60%), while of the records with theft recorded, just over seven in ten tested positive for opiate metabolites (n=159; 72%). Additionally, there were noticeably higher numbers of cocaine only positive tests for offences recorded as 'other' and wounding or assault, than there were for opiate metabolites.

Figure 8: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence and drug test result, 2020/21¹¹

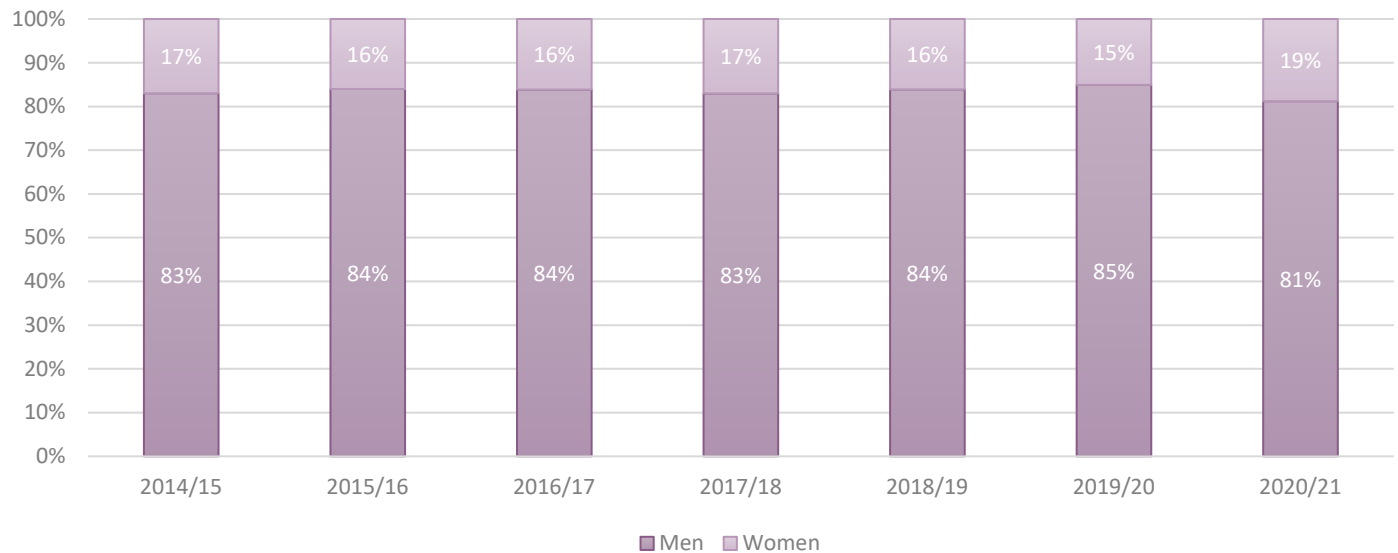


¹¹ There were eight positive drug test records that did not indicate the drug(s) detected; therefore, the totals for the offences do not equal the numbers in Figure 5.

DEMOGRAPHICS

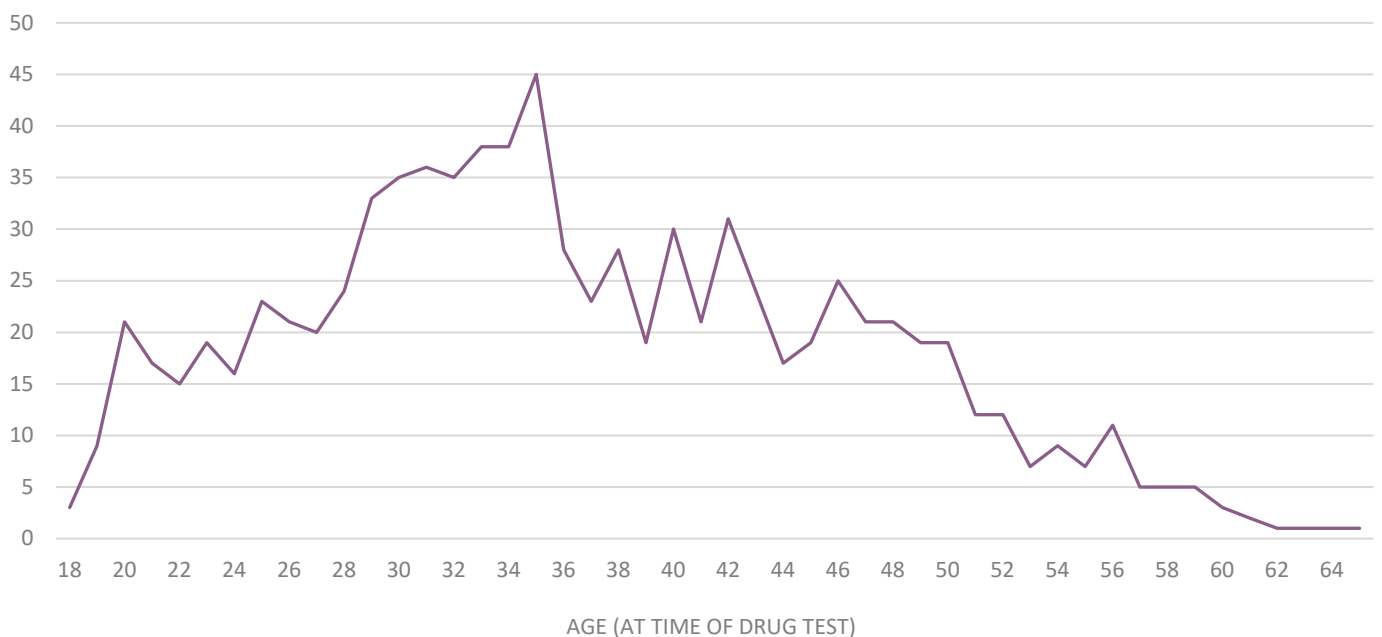
Men accounted for around four in five (81%) individuals who tested positive across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Although proportions have fluctuated in the seven years shown in *Figure 9*, notably, 2020/21 had the highest proportion of women testing positive for specified Class A drugs.

Figure 9: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by gender (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



The median age of detainees who tested positive in the year ending March 2021 was 35 years, while the range of adult detainees testing positive went up to 65 years. *Figure 10* shows that numbers peaked for detainees aged 35 years (n=45), followed by those aged 33 and 34 years (n=38 each).

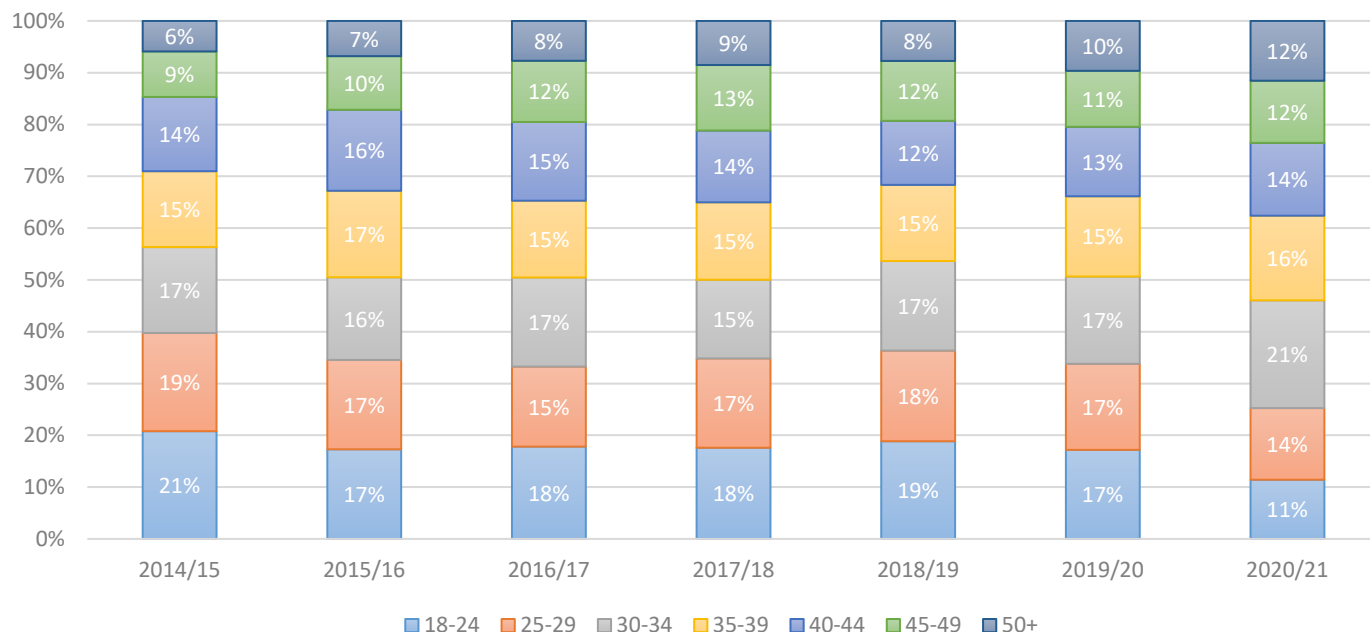
Figure 10: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age at time of drug test (individuals), 2020/21¹²



¹² There was one record that did not have a date of birth recorded and there were two records that had an invalid year of birth recorded.

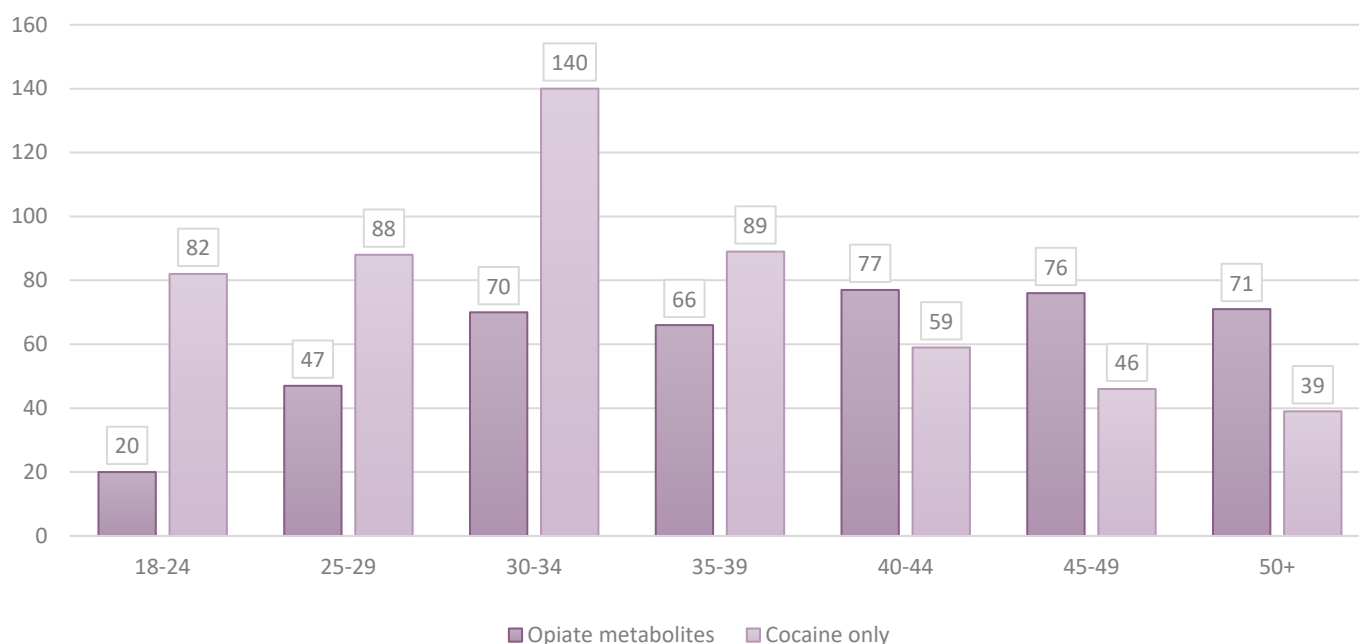
Around one in five of the individuals who tested positive in the year ending March 2021 were aged 30-34 years (n=182; 21%), which is the highest proportion for that age group of the seven years shown in *Figure 11*, while 143 (16%) were aged 35-39 years, which is the highest proportion since 2015/16 (17%). Notably, of the seven-year period, the year ending March 2021 had the lowest proportion of individuals aged 18-24 years (11%) and the highest proportion of individuals aged 50 years and over (12%) (*Figure 11*).

Figure 11: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age at time of drug test (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



Positive drug test results are categorised by age group in *Figure 12*. Positive tests for opiate metabolites peaked for detainees aged 40-44 years (n=77) and 45-49 years (n=76), while positive tests for cocaine only peaked for those aged 30-34 years (n=140).

Figure 12: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age group and drug test result, 2020/21



MERSEYSIDE RESIDENTS

Of the 1,482 drug tests attempted in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021, 1,423 (96%) were Merseyside residents, compared to 93% in the year ending March 2020 and 94% in each of the previous five years. Residents of Liverpool Local Authority (LA) accounted for the largest proportion of detainees drug tested in all seven years, followed by Wirral residents (47% and 21% respectively in the year ending March 2021) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Attempted drug tests across Merseyside by LA of residence and year, 2014/15 - 2020/21¹³

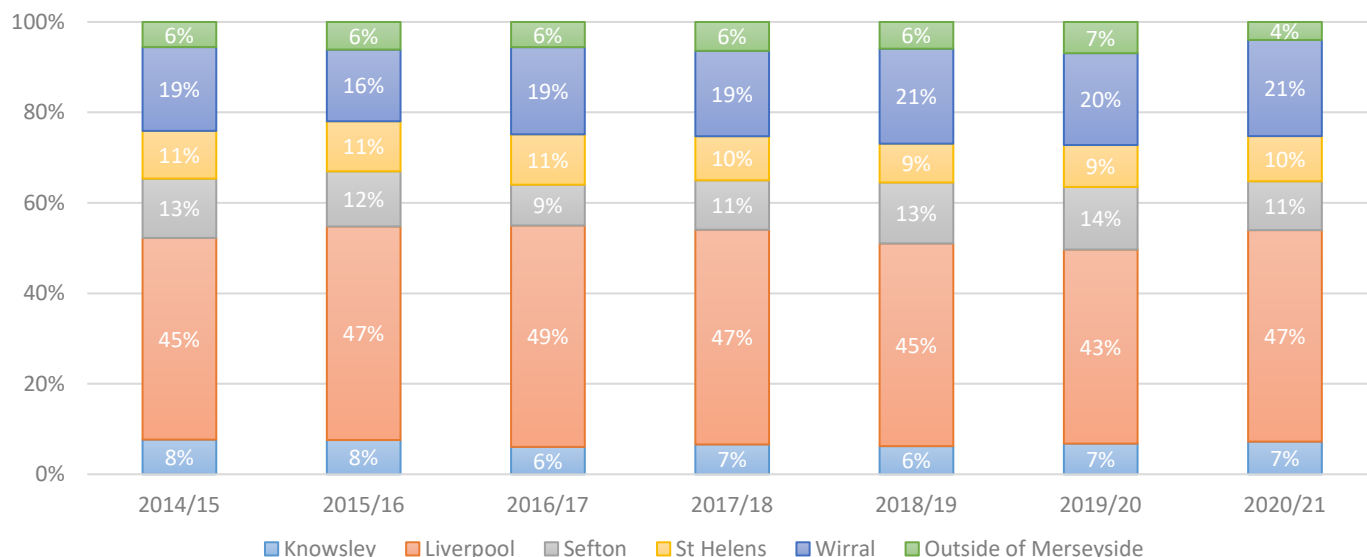


Figure 14: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by LA of residence, Merseyside residents, 2020/21



Of the 950 Merseyside residents who tested positive for specified Class A drugs in the year ending March 2021, over two in five were Liverpool residents (n=431; 45%), followed by Wirral residents (n=237; 25%), Sefton residents (n=112; 12%), St Helens residents (n=106; 11%) and Knowsley residents (n=64; 7%)¹⁴ (Figure 14).

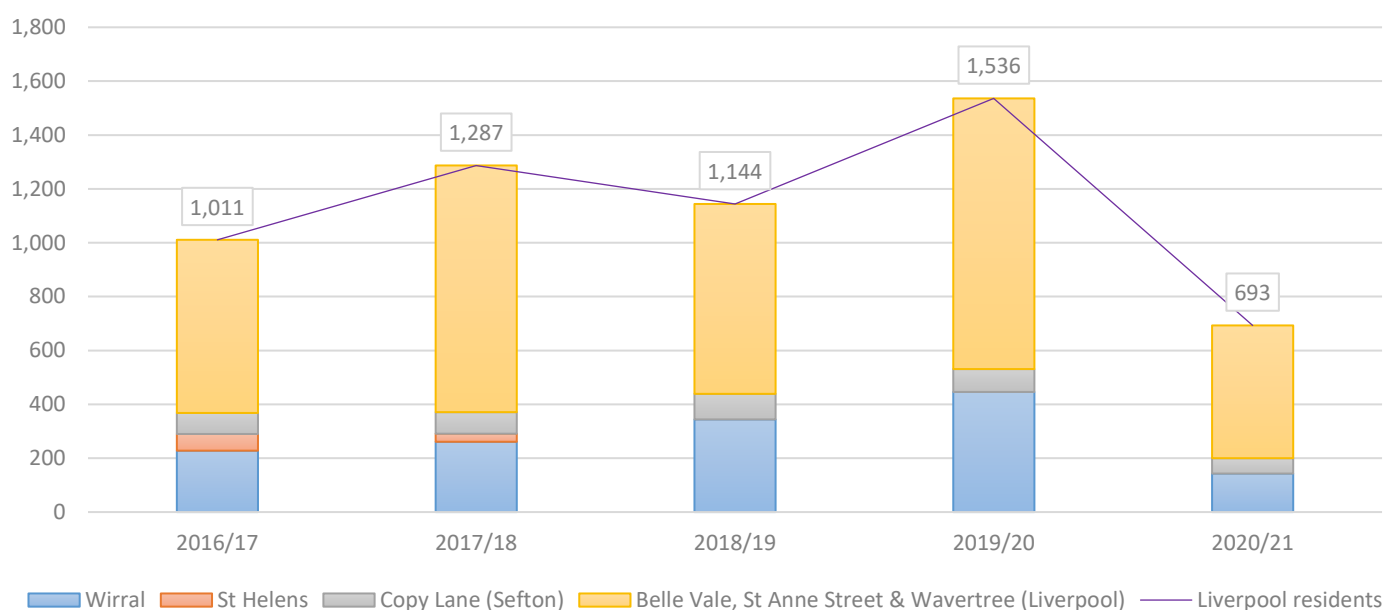
¹³ Caution should be taken with these figures as in some years, a large number of records did not have LA of residence recorded; therefore, the number of Merseyside residents drug tested may be under-reported in these years. Proportion of records missing LA of residence between 2014/15 and 2020/21: 17%, 24%, 24%, 6%, 15%, 2% and 0% respectively.

¹⁴ There is no breakdown of data for Knowsley residents on the following pages as there is currently no commissioning in place for Knowsley DIP monitoring.

OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2021, there were 693 attempted tests for specified Class A drugs on Liverpool residents across Merseyside's custody suites (*Figure 15*), representing around half (49%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. The number of attempted drug tests on Liverpool residents fluctuated between 2016/17 and 2019/20, which could be attributed to the data quality of the LA of residence. The low number of attempted drug tests in the year ending March 2021 is due to Merseyside Police suspending drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of attempted drug tests on Liverpool residents were carried out at a Liverpool custody suite, with an average of 67% across the five years (*Figure 15*).

Figure 15: Attempted drug tests across Merseyside by custody suite and year, Liverpool residents, 2016/17 - 2020/21



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

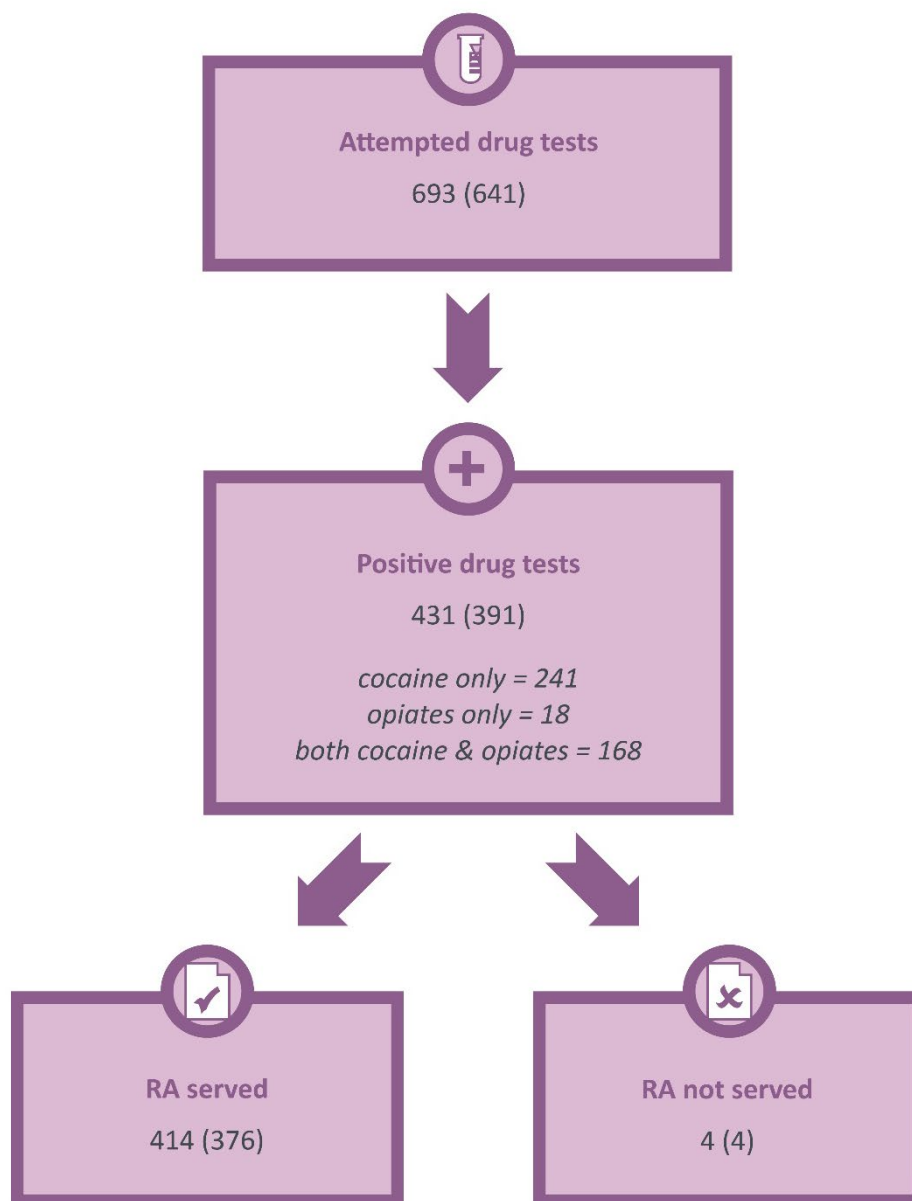
Figure 16 shows the drug testing activity for Liverpool residents drug tested in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Of the 693 attempted drug tests, 431 (62%) had a positive result for specified Class A drugs. Over half of the positive drug tests were for cocaine only (n=241; 56%), while the remaining positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 168 [39%]; opiates only = 18 [4%]). The proportion of cocaine only positive tests is similar to the Merseyside figure (55%). There were 414 RAs served to 376 individuals in the year ending March 2021 (*Figure 16*).



56%

positive tests for crack/powder cocaine, 2020/21

Figure 16: Drug testing activity, Liverpool residents, 2020/21¹⁵

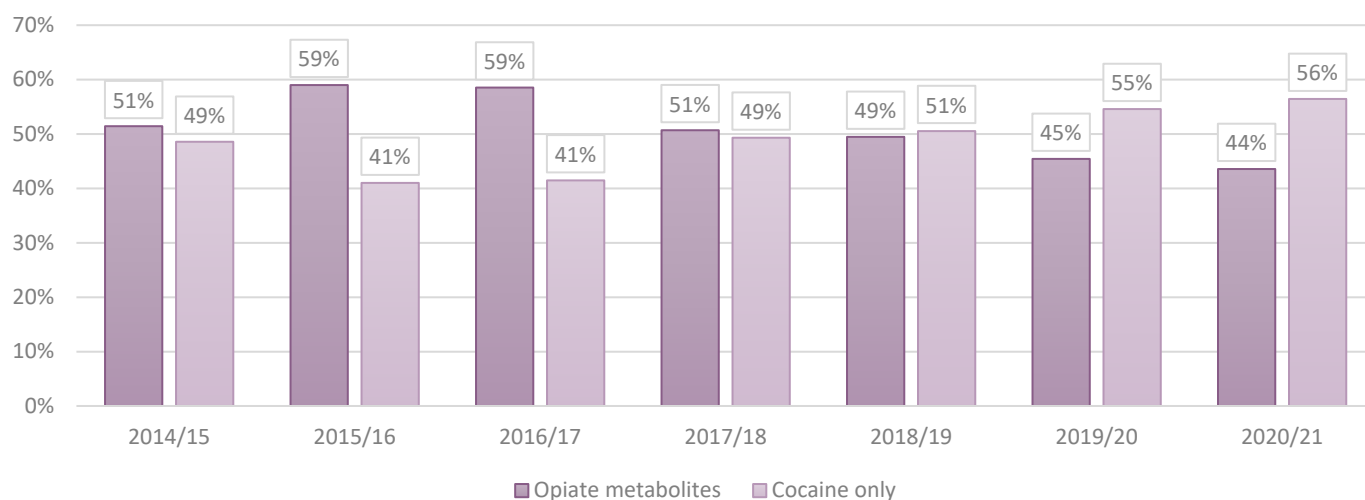


¹⁵ There were four positive drug test records that did not indicate the drug(s) detected.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

In the four years up to the year ending March 2018, there were more positive tests for opiate metabolites (both opiates & cocaine and opiates only) than for cocaine only, though in the following years there were more positive tests for cocaine only than opiate metabolites (Figure 17). Notably, from 2016/17, the proportion of cocaine only positive tests increased year-on-year from 41% to 56% in 2020/21.

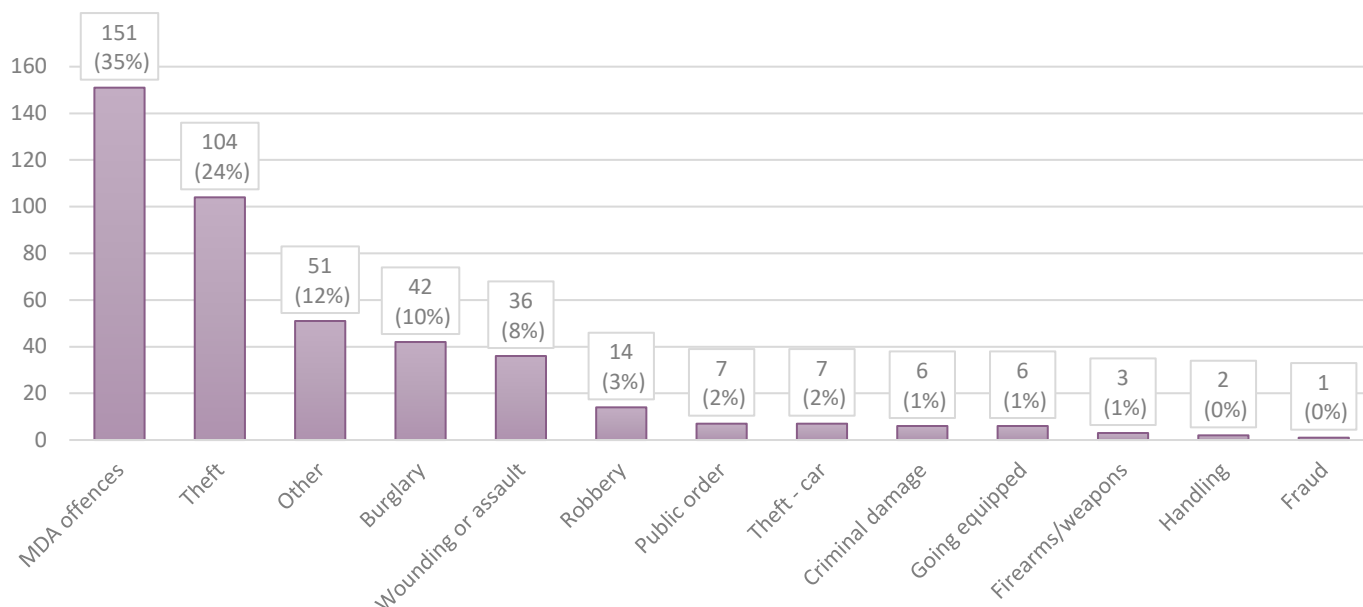
Figure 17: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by drug test result, Liverpool residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



OFFENCES

Just over one-third of the positive drug test records for Liverpool residents in the year ending March 2021 reported MDA offences (n=151; 35%), while around one-quarter were theft (n=104; 24%) (Figure 18). The proportion of MDA offences is the lowest of all Merseyside areas (Merseyside = 38%), while the proportion of theft is similar to the Merseyside figure (23%).

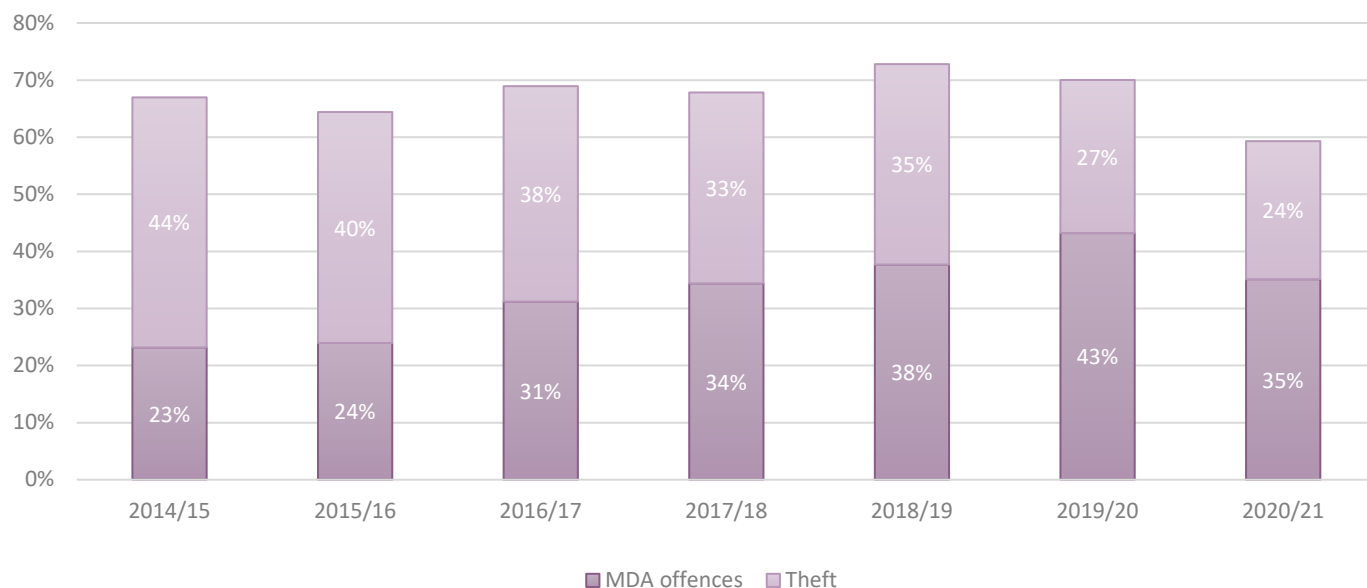
Figure 18: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, Liverpool residents, 2020/21¹⁶



¹⁶ There was one record that did not have an offence recorded. Other offences: other non-trigger offence = 25; other motoring offences = 23; tampering with a motor vehicle = 2; other summary offence = 1.

Notably, there has been a change in the trends of MDA offences and theft. *Figure 19* shows that generally, the proportion of MDA offences has increased, while the proportion of theft has decreased. The proportion of MDA offences increased year-on-year from 23% in 2014/15 to 43% in 2019/20, followed by a slight decrease to 35% in 2020/21. Conversely, theft decreased from 44% in 2014/15 to 24% in 2020/21.

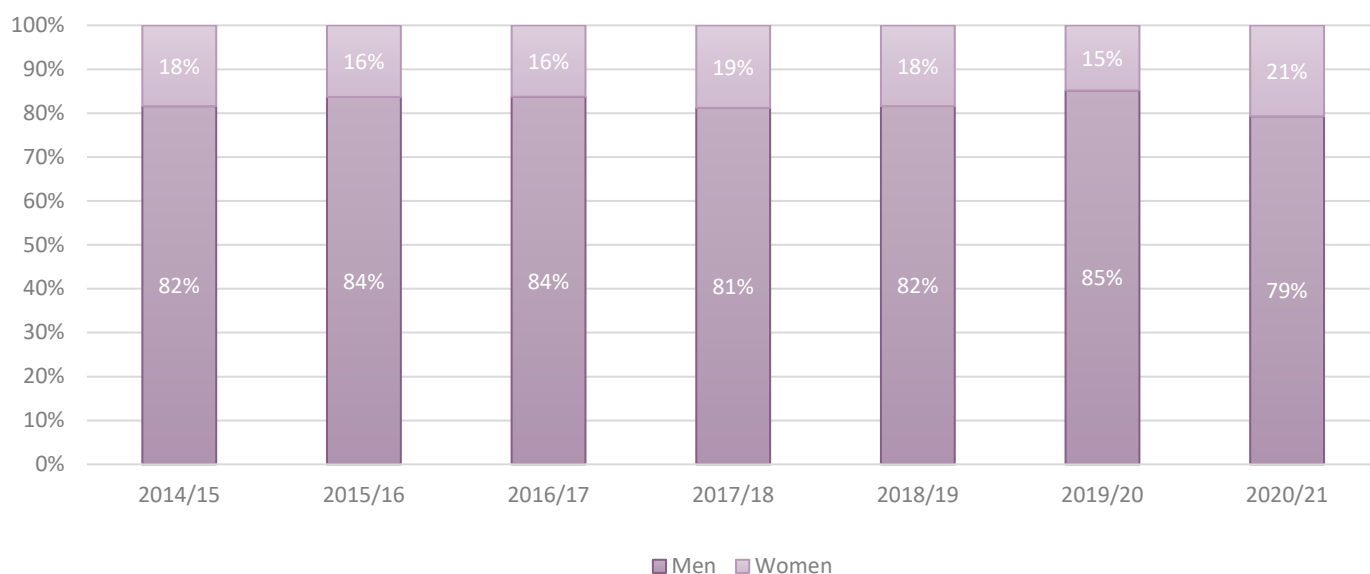
Figure 19: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, Liverpool residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



DEMOGRAPHICS

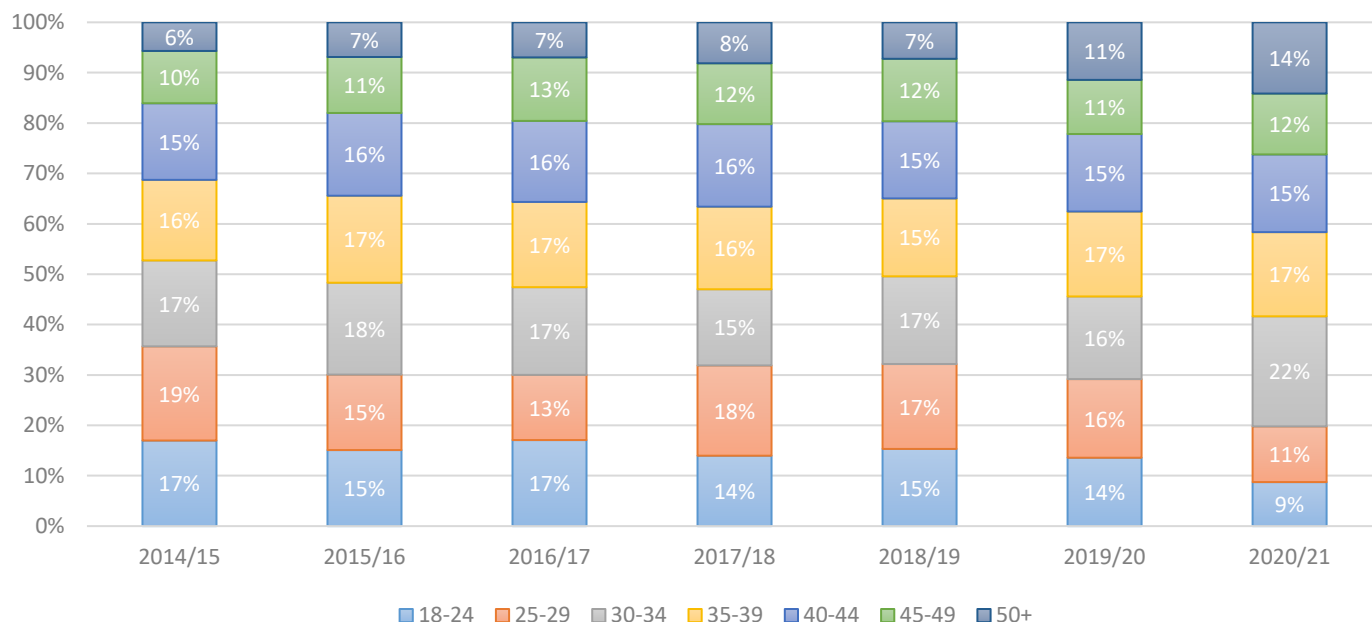
Men accounted for around four in five (79%) individuals who tested positive across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Although proportions have fluctuated in the seven years shown in *Figure 20*, notably, 2020/21 had the largest proportion of women testing positive for specified Class A drugs and is a higher figure than all other Merseyside areas (Merseyside = 19%).

Figure 20: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by gender, Liverpool residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



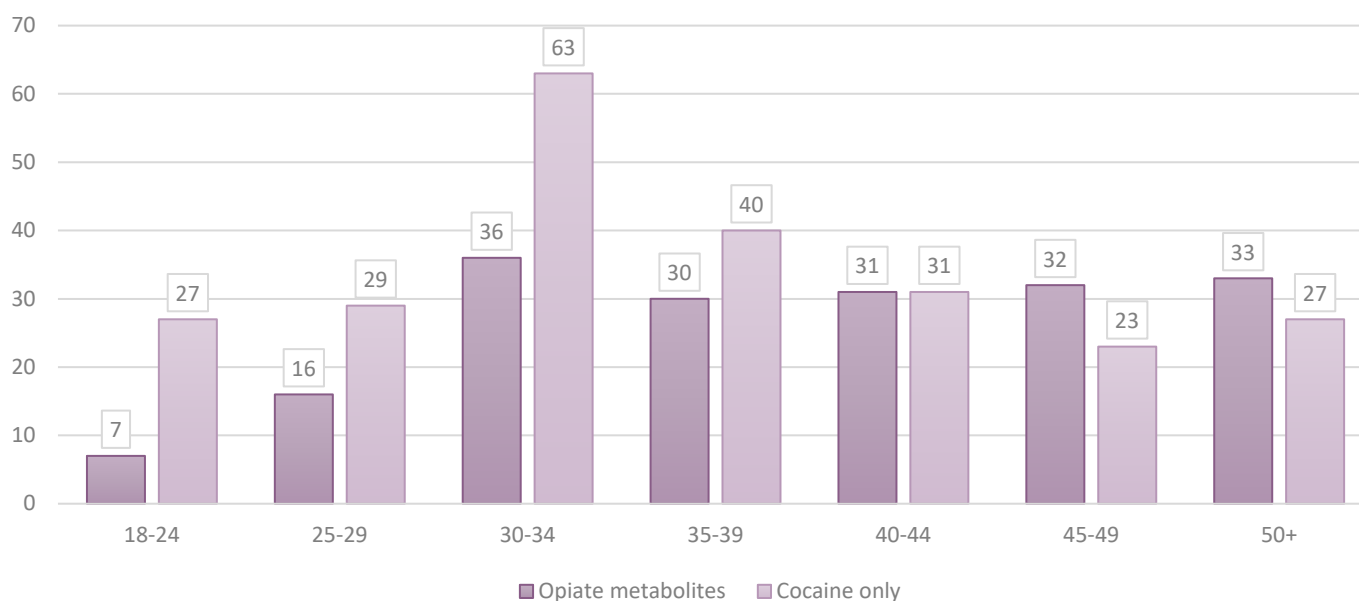
The median age of Liverpool residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2021 was 37 years. *Figure 21* shows that just over one in five of the individuals who tested positive in 2020/21 were aged 30-34 years (n=85; 22%). This is the highest proportion of the seven years shown in the chart and is similar to the Merseyside figure (21%). Notably in the year ending March 2021, the proportion of Liverpool residents aged 18-24 years was the lowest of the seven-year period (9%) and those aged 50 years and over was the highest (14%) (*Figure 21*).

Figure 21: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age at time of drug test, Liverpool residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



Positive drug test results are categorised by age group in *Figure 22*. There were more positive tests for cocaine only than opiate metabolites for those aged up to 39 years, while it was the same for Liverpool residents aged 40-44 years and numbers were higher for opiate metabolites for those aged 45 years and over (*Figure 22*).

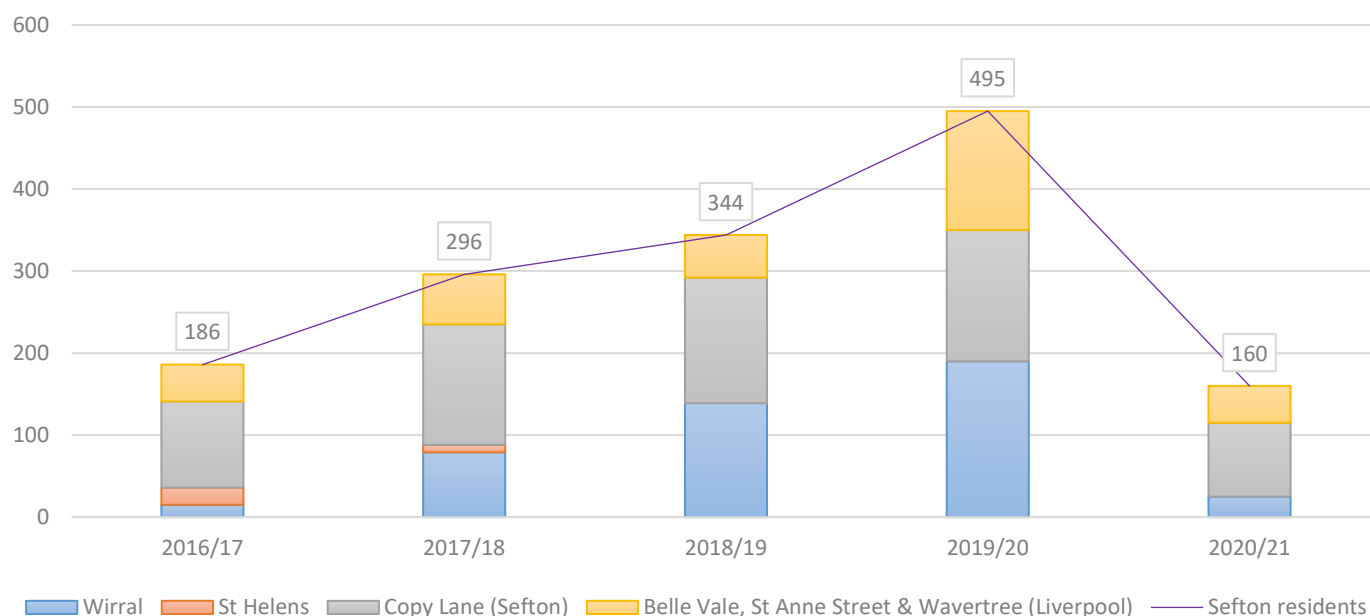
Figure 22: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age group and drug test result, Liverpool residents, 2020/21



OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2021, there were 160 attempted tests for specified Class A drugs on Sefton residents across Merseyside's custody suites (*Figure 23*), representing around one in ten (11%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. The number of attempted drug tests on Sefton residents increased year-on-year up to the year ending March 2020, then decreased substantially in the following year due to Merseyside Police suspending drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the five-year period, an average of 48% of the attempted drug tests on Sefton residents were carried out at Copy Lane custody suite (*Figure 23*).

Figure 23: Attempted drug tests across Merseyside by custody suite and year, Sefton residents, 2016/17 - 2020/21



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

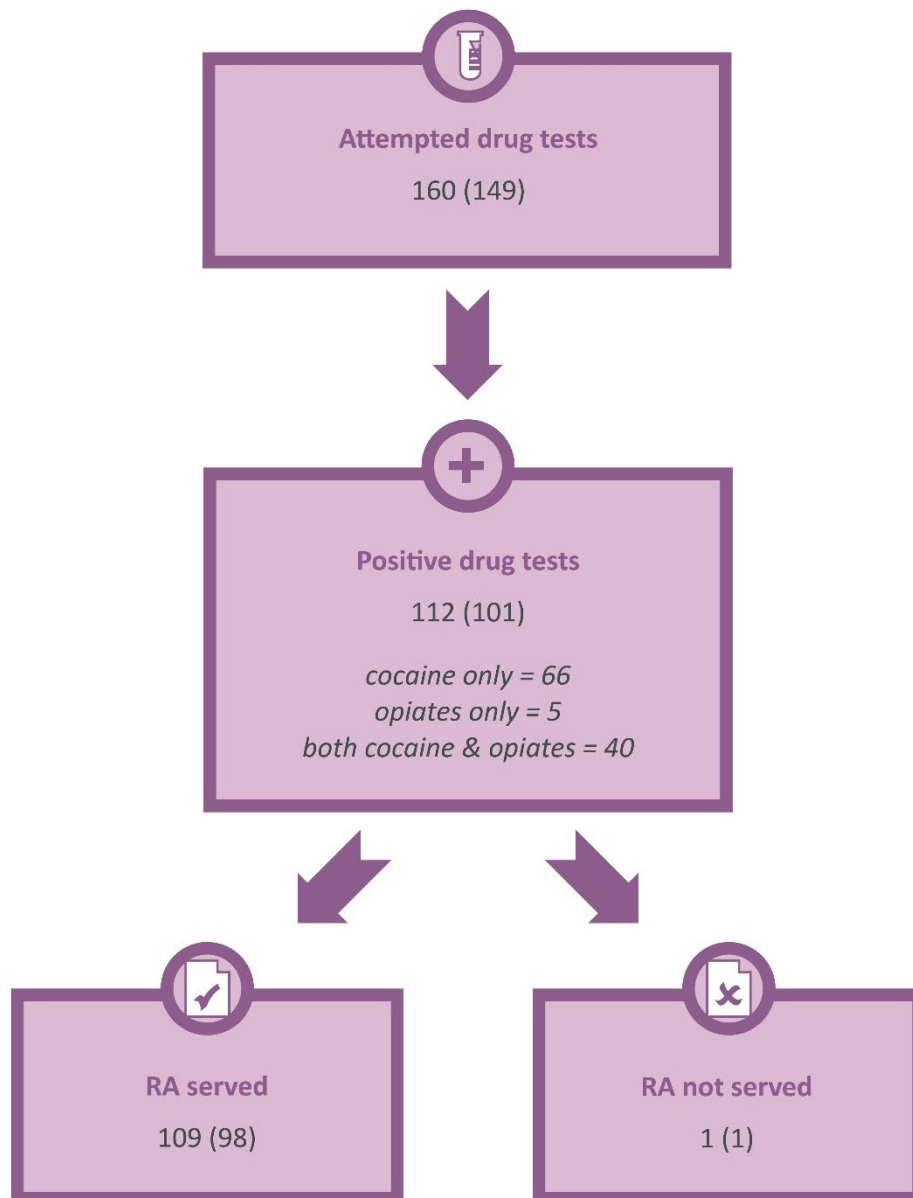
Figure 24 shows the drug testing activity for Sefton residents drug tested in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Of the 160 attempted drug tests, 112 (70%) had a positive result for specified Class A drugs. Around three in five positive drug tests were for cocaine only (n=66; 59%), while the remaining positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 40 [36%]; opiates only = 5 [5%]). Notably, the proportion of cocaine only positive tests is higher than the Merseyside figure (55%). There were 109 RAs served to 98 individuals in the year ending March 2021 (*Figure 24*).



59%

positive tests for crack/powder cocaine, 2020/21

Figure 24: Drug testing activity, Sefton residents, 2020/21¹⁷

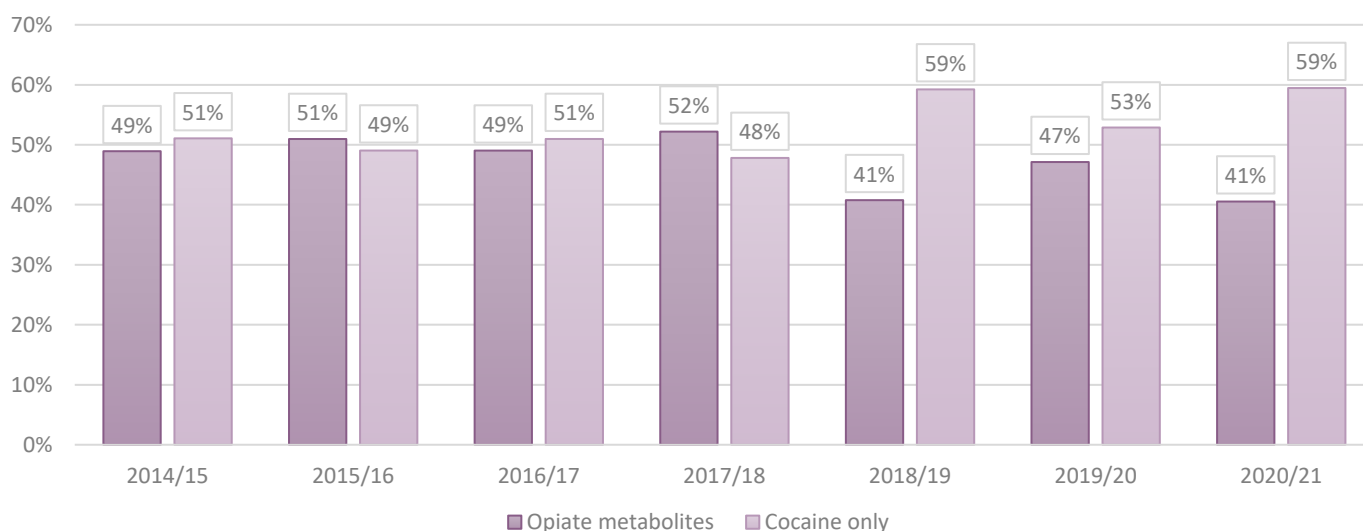


¹⁷ There was one positive drug test record that did not indicate the drug(s) detected.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

The proportion of opiate metabolites and cocaine only positive tests fluctuated in the four years up to the year ending March 2018; however, there were substantially more positive tests for cocaine only in the following three years, particularly the years ending March 2019 and March 2021 (both 59%) (Figure 25).

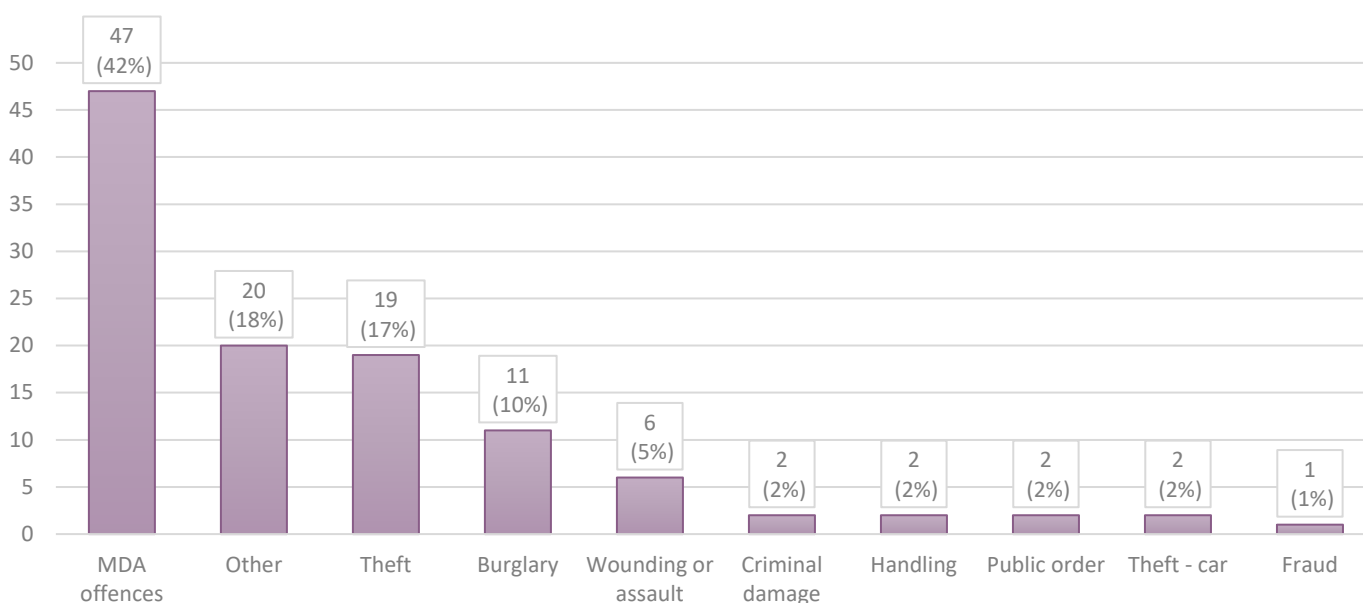
Figure 25: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by drug test result, Sefton residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



OFFENCES

Just over two in five positive drug test records for Sefton residents in the year ending March 2021 reported MDA offences (n=47; 42%), which is the second highest proportion of all Merseyside areas (Merseyside = 38%) (Figure 26). Just under one in five were offences categorised as 'other' (n=20; 18%), which is somewhat higher than the Merseyside figure (13%), while 19 (17%) records were theft, which is somewhat lower than the Merseyside figure (23%).

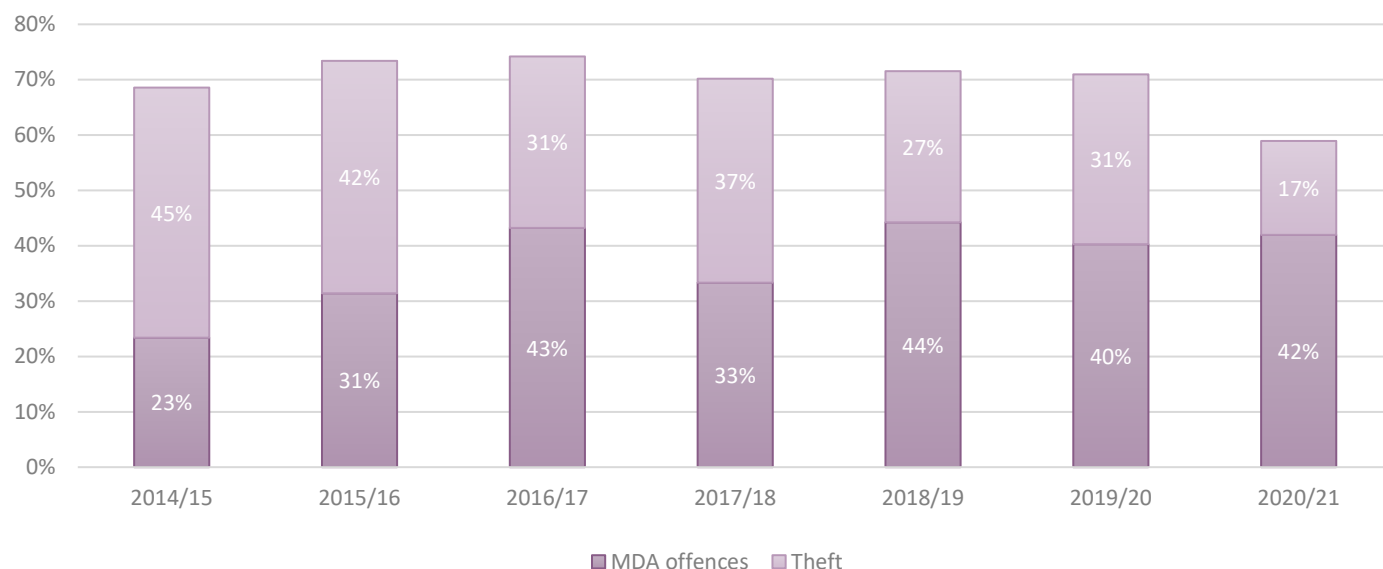
Figure 26: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, Sefton residents, 2020/21¹⁸



¹⁸ Other offences: other non-trigger offence = 13; other motoring offences = 7.

Notably, there has been a change in the trends of MDA offences and theft. *Figure 27* shows that generally, the proportion of MDA offences has increased, while the proportion of theft has decreased, though there have been some fluctuations. The proportion of MDA offences increased from 23% in 2014/15 to 42% in 2020/21, though peaked at 44% in 2018/19. Conversely, the proportion of theft decreased from 45% in 2014/15 to its lowest proportion in 2020/21 (17%).

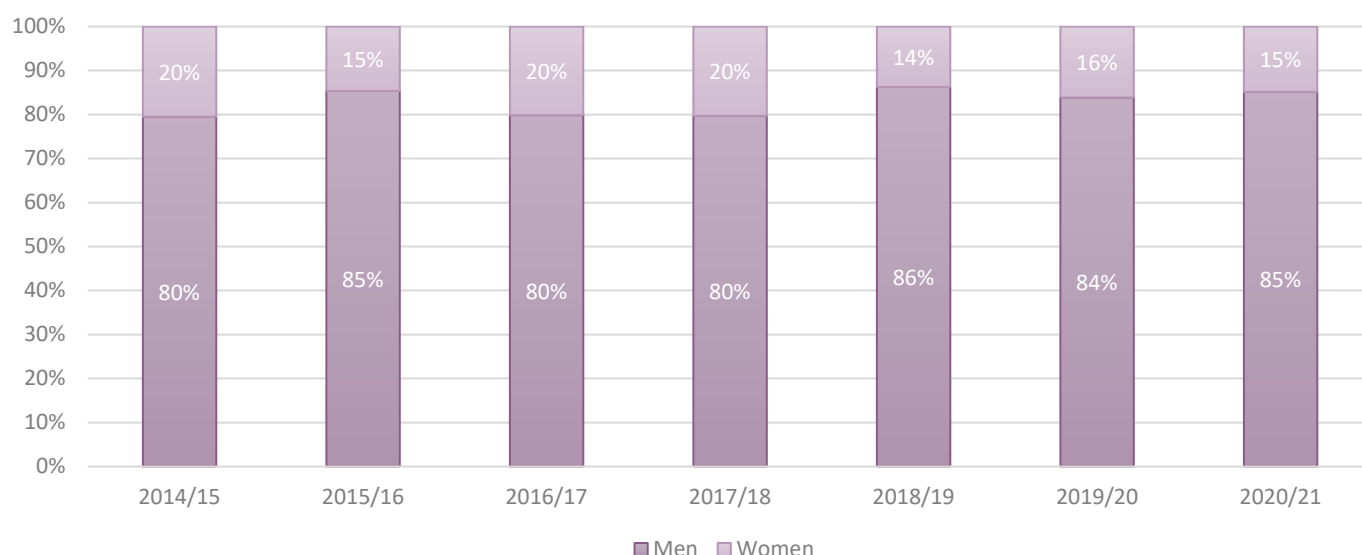
Figure 27: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, Sefton residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



DEMOGRAPHICS

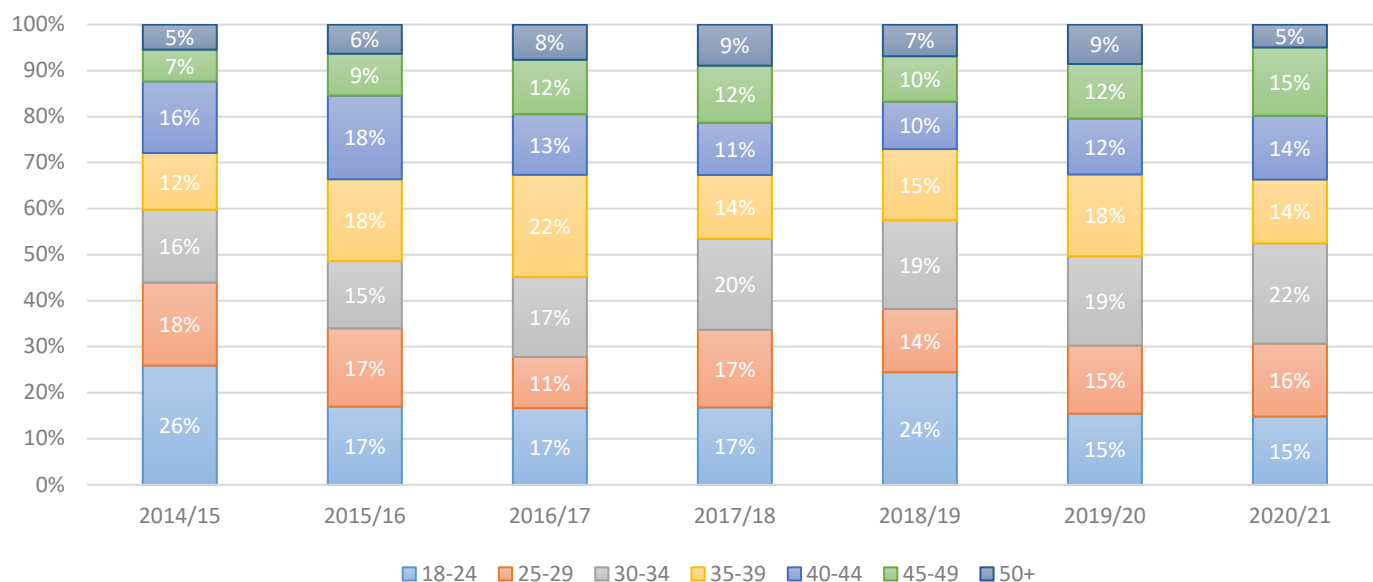
Men accounted for over four in five (85%) individuals who tested positive across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021 (*Figure 28*). This is the second highest proportion of men of all Merseyside areas (Merseyside = 81%).

Figure 28: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by gender, Sefton residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



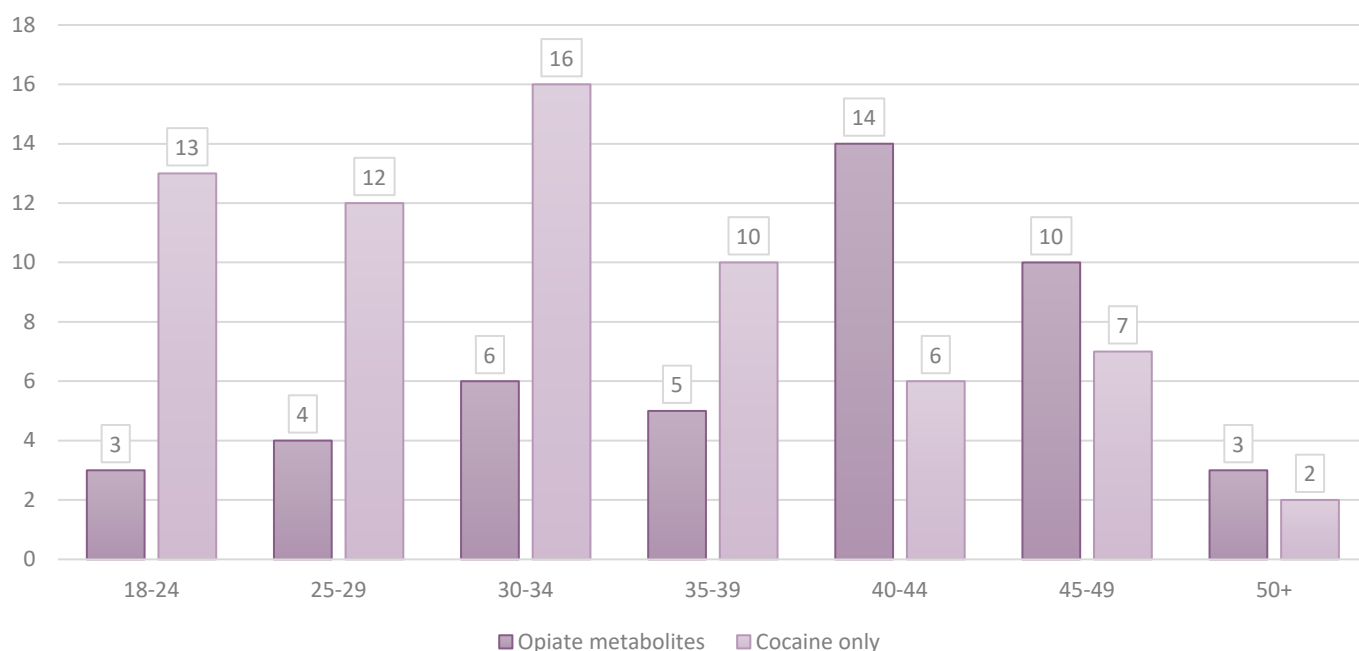
The median age of Sefton residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2021 was 34 years. *Figure 29* shows that just over one in five of the individuals who tested positive in 2020/21 were aged 30-34 years (n=22; 22%). This is the highest proportion of the seven years shown in the chart for this age group and is similar to the Merseyside figure (21%). Notably, in the year ending March 2021, the proportion of Sefton residents aged 18-24 years was the lowest of the seven-year period (15%; joint with the previous year), while those aged 50 years and over was also the lowest (5%; joint with 2014/15) (*Figure 29*).

Figure 29: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age at time of drug test, Sefton residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



Positive drug test results for Sefton residents are categorised by age group in *Figure 30*. There were generally more positive tests for opiate metabolites in the older age groups, while there were substantially more positive tests for cocaine only in the younger age groups. Positive tests for opiate metabolites peaked for Sefton residents aged 40-44 years (n=14) and 45-49 years (n=10), while positive tests for cocaine only peaked for those aged 30-34 years (n=16), followed by the 18-24 and 25-29 year age groups (13 and 12 respectively).

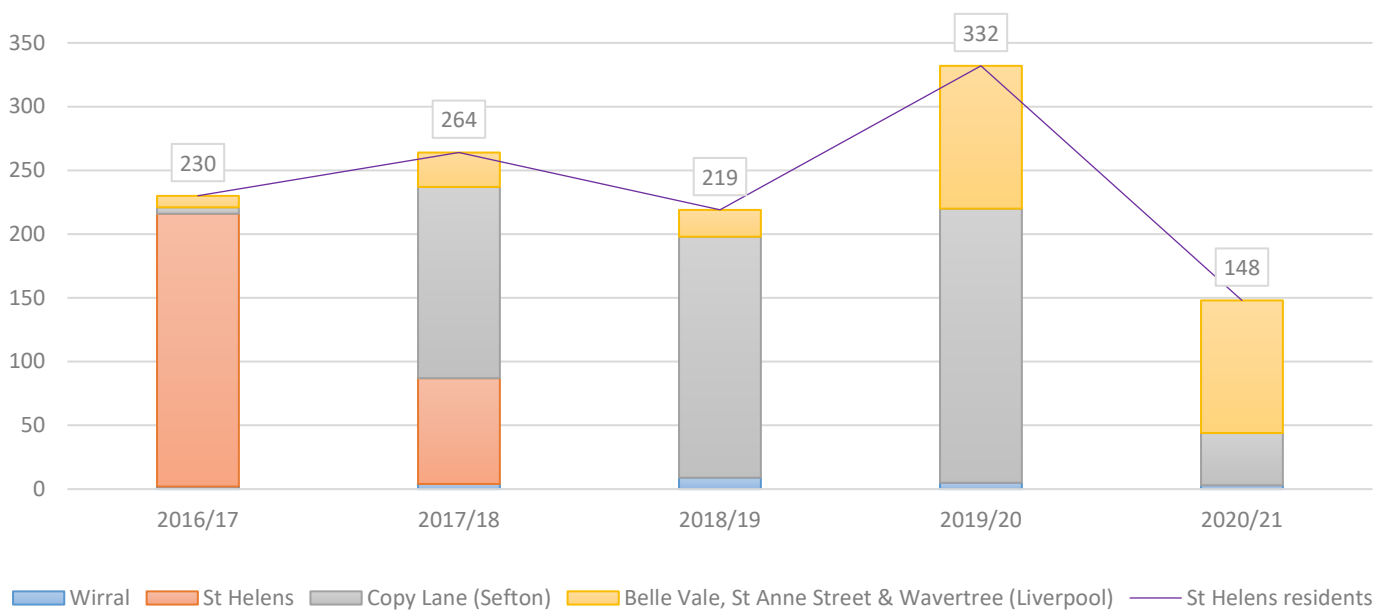
Figure 30: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age group and drug test result, Sefton residents, 2020/21



OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2021, there were 148 attempted tests for specified Class A drugs on St Helens residents across Merseyside's custody suites (*Figure 31*), representing one in ten (10%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. The number of attempted drug tests on St Helens residents fluctuated between 2016/17 and 2019/20, which could be attributed to the data quality of the LA of residence. The low number of attempted drug tests in the year ending March 2021 is due to Merseyside Police suspending drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the closure of St Helens custody suite in August 2017, the majority of St Helens residents had drug tests carried out at Copy Lane custody suite between 2017/18 and 2019/20, representing an average of 69% across the three-year period. However, in the year ending March 2021, seven in ten (70%) St Helens residents were drug tested at a Liverpool custody suite (*Figure 31*).

Figure 31: Attempted drug tests across Merseyside by custody suite and year, St Helens residents, 2016/17 - 2020/21



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

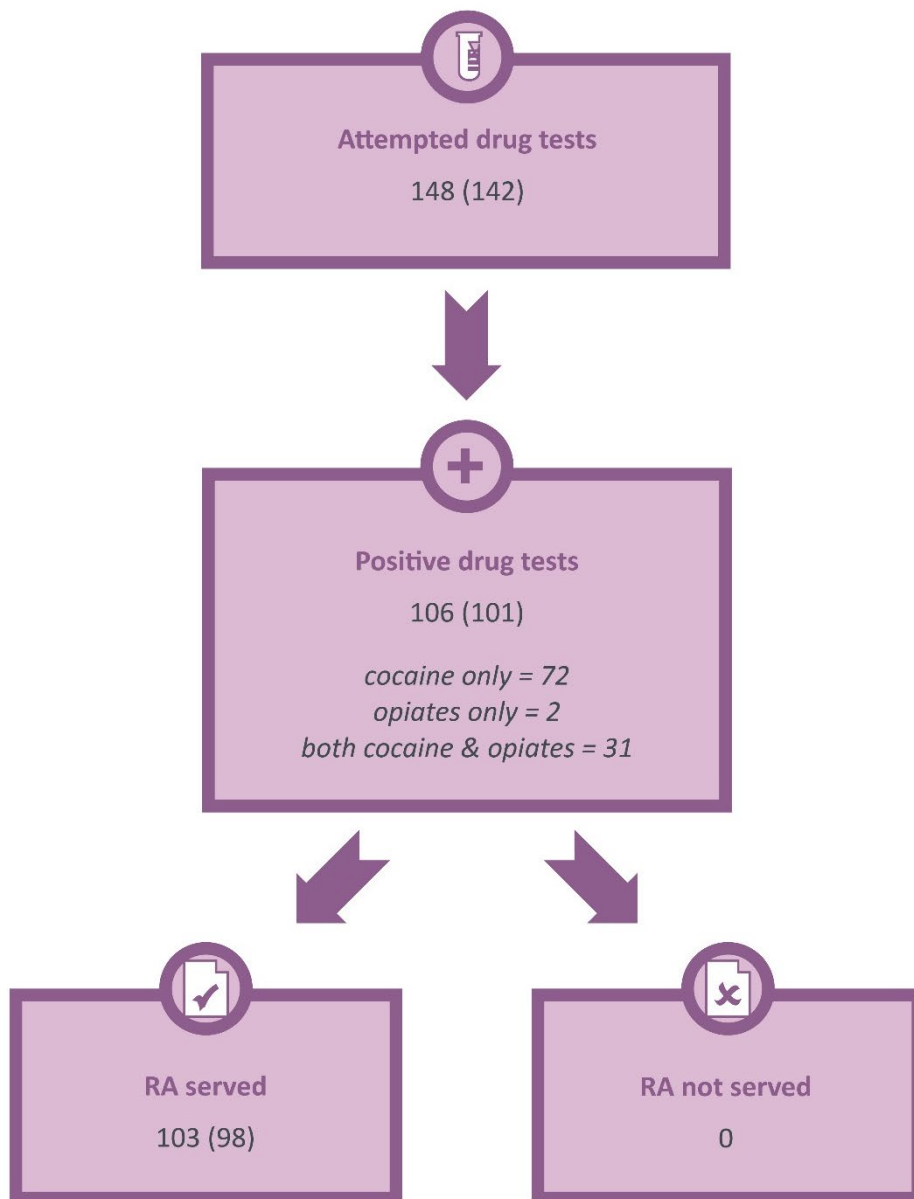
Figure 32 shows the drug testing activity for St Helens residents drug tested in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Of the 148 attempted drug tests, 106 (72%) had a positive result for specified Class A drugs. Around seven in ten positive drug tests were for cocaine only ($n=72$; 69%), while the remaining positive tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 31 [30%]; opiates only = 2 [2%]). Notably, the proportion of cocaine only positive tests is substantially higher than the Merseyside figure (55%) and the second highest proportion of all Merseyside areas. There were 103 RAs served to 98 individuals in the year ending 2021 (*Figure 32*).



69%

positive tests for crack/powder cocaine, 2020/21

Figure 32: Drug testing activity, St Helens residents, 2020/21¹⁹

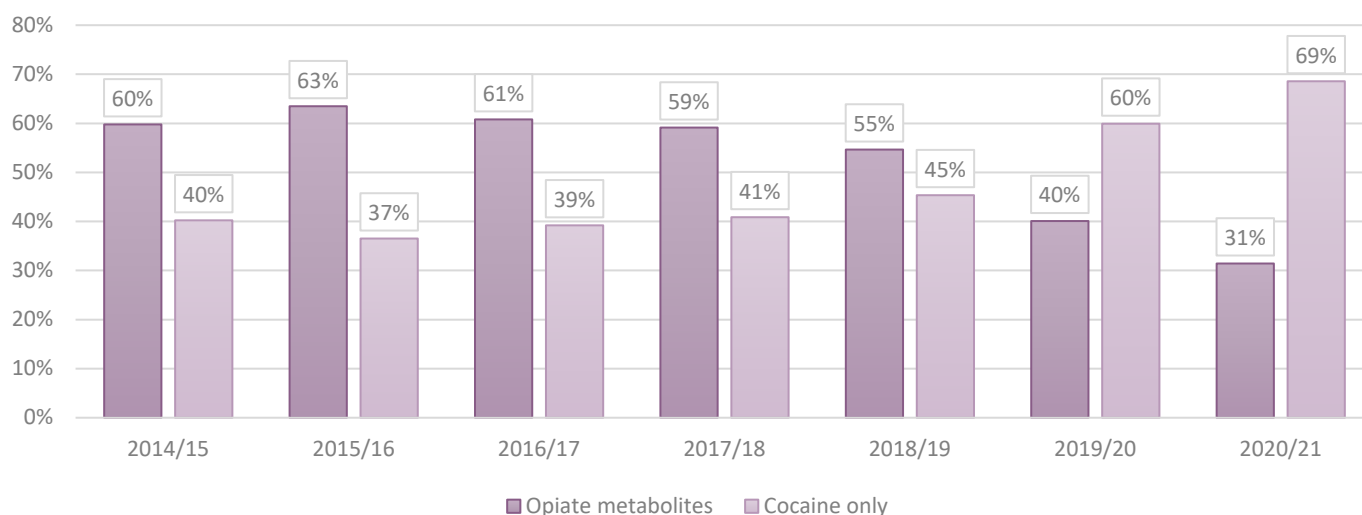


¹⁹ There was one positive drug test record that did not indicate the drug(s) detected.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

In the five years up to the year ending March 2019, there were more positive tests for opiate metabolites (both opiates & cocaine and opiates only) than for cocaine only, though in the following two years there were more positive tests for cocaine only than opiate metabolites (*Figure 33*). Notably, from 2015/16, the proportion of opiate metabolites decreased year-on-year, while cocaine only positive tests increased year-on-year (*Figure 33*).

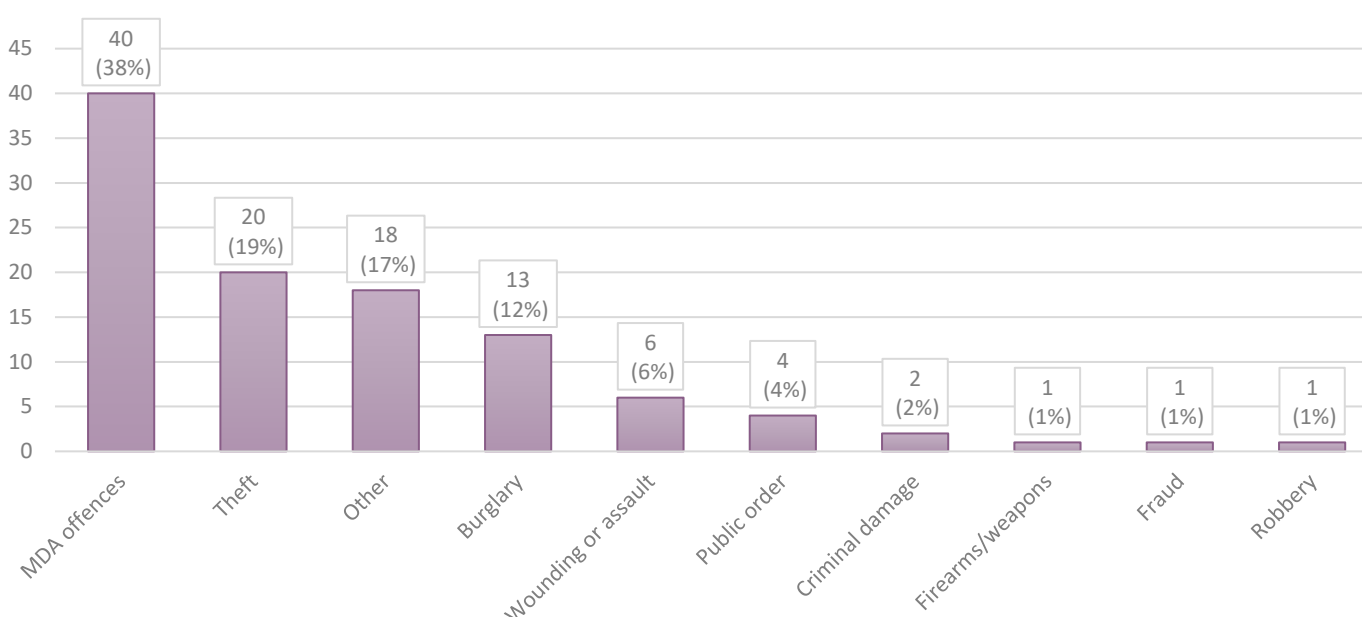
Figure 33: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by drug test result, St Helens residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



OFFENCES

Around two in five positive drug test records for St Helens residents in the year ending March 2021 reported MDA offences (n=40; 38%), which is the same as the Merseyside figure. Around one in five were theft (n=20; 19%), followed by offences categorised as 'other' (n=18; 17%) (*Figure 34*).

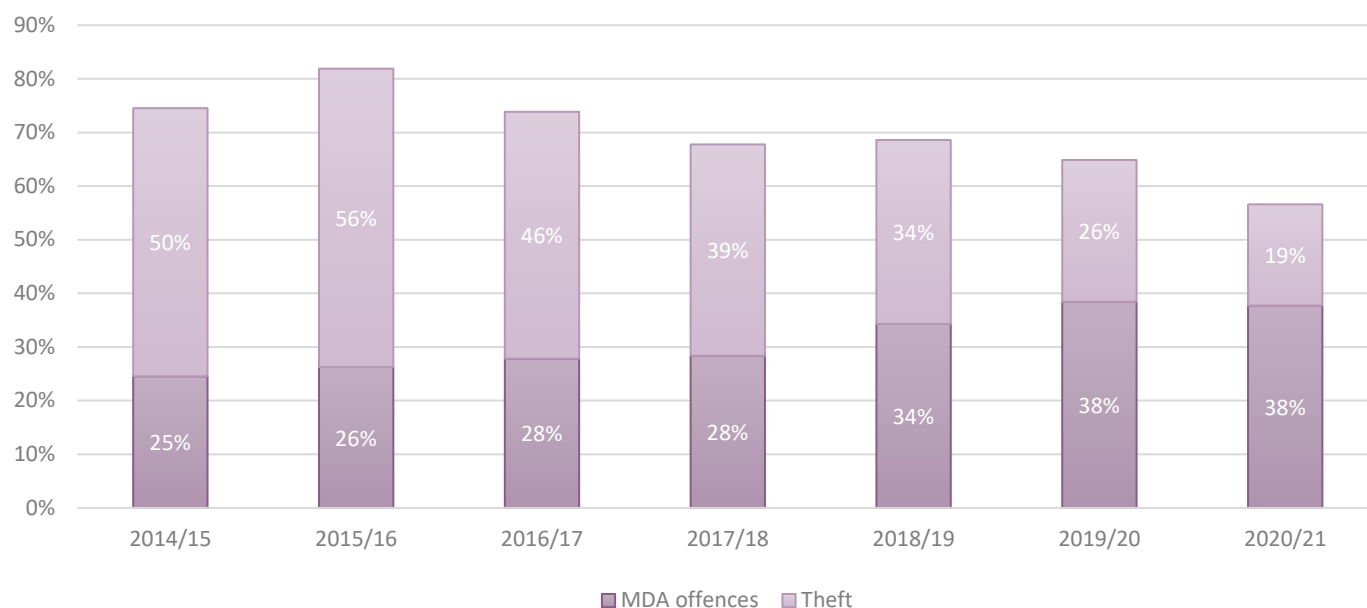
Figure 34: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, St Helens residents, 2020/21²⁰



²⁰ Other offences: other non-trigger offence = 11; other motoring offences = 7.

Notably, there has been a change in the trends of MDA offences and theft. *Figure 35* shows that generally, the proportion of MDA offences has increased, while the proportion of theft has decreased. The proportion of MDA offences increased from 25% in 2014/15 to 38% in both 2019/20 and 2020/21, while the proportion of theft decreased from 56% in 2015/16 to its lowest proportion in 2020/21 (19%).

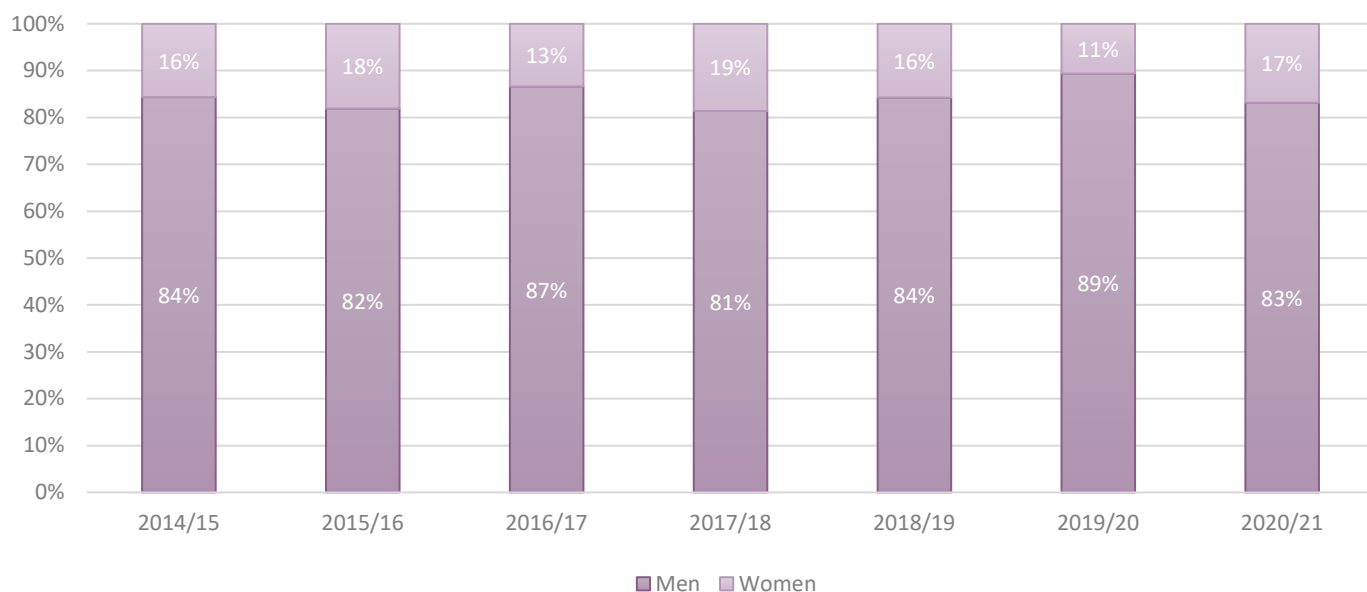
Figure 35: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, St Helens residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



DEMOGRAPHICS

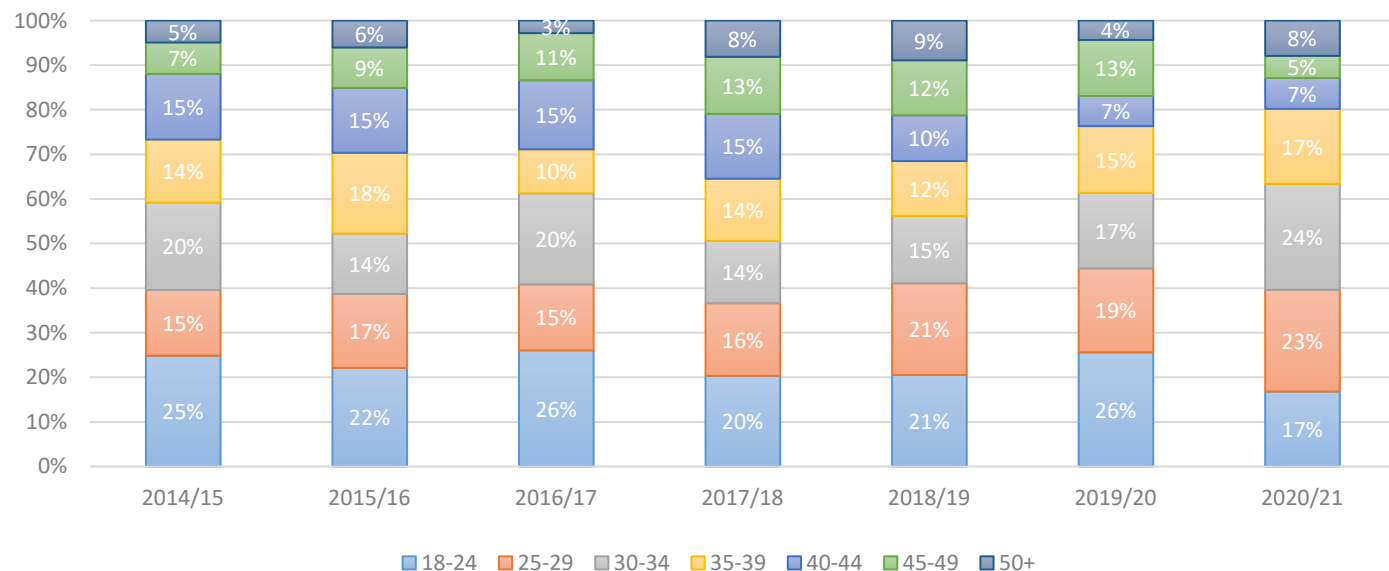
Men accounted for over four in five (83%) individuals who tested positive across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. This is a just above the Merseyside figure (81%), though the third lowest proportion of men of the seven years shown in *Figure 36*.

Figure 36: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by gender, St Helens residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



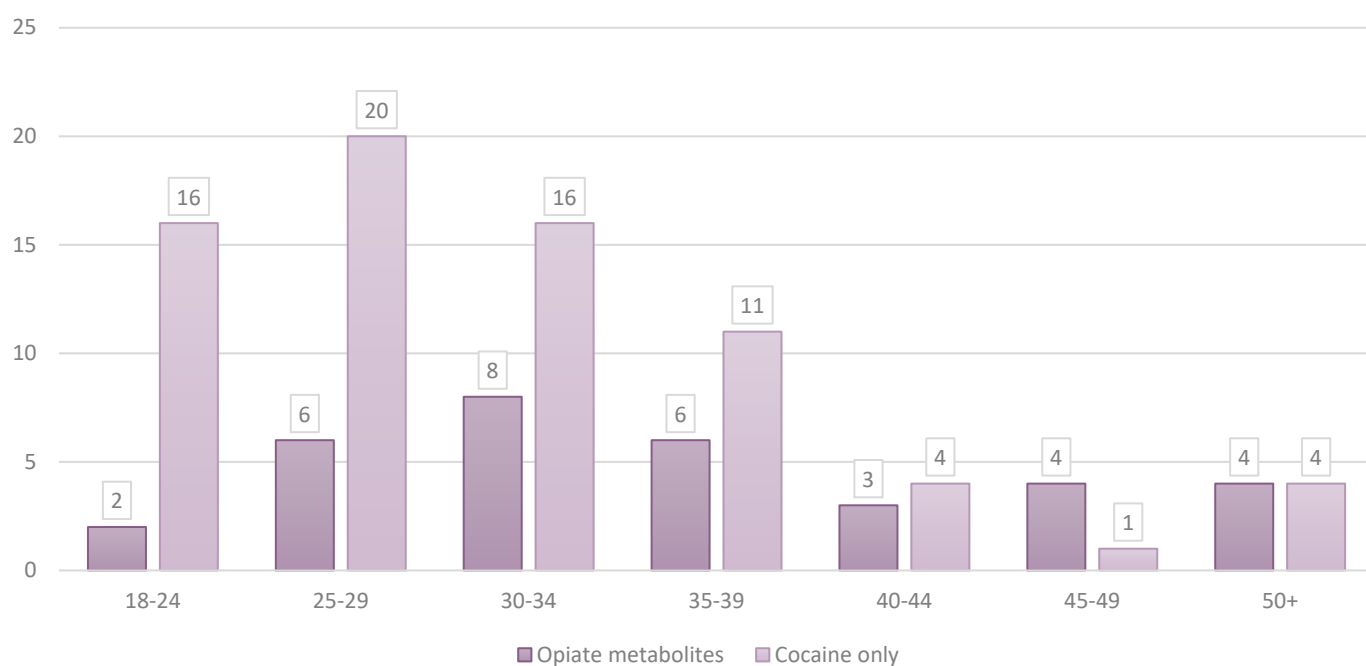
The median age of St Helens residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2021 was 33 years. *Figure 37* shows that individuals aged 30-34 years accounted for the largest proportion of St Helens residents who tested positive in 2020/21 (n=24; 24%), followed by those aged 25-29 years (n=23; 23%). These are the highest proportions of the seven years shown in the chart for both age groups and are higher than the Merseyside figures. Notably, in the year ending March 2021, the proportion of St Helens residents aged 18-24 years was the lowest of the seven-year period (17%) (*Figure 37*).

Figure 37: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age at time of drug test, St Helens residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



Positive drug test results for St Helens residents are categorised by age group in *Figure 38*. Positive tests for opiate metabolites peaked for St Helens residents aged 30-34 years (n=8), followed by the 25-29 and 35-39 year age groups (6 each), while positive tests for cocaine only peaked for those aged 25-29 years (n=20), followed by the 18-24 and 30-34 year age groups (16 each).

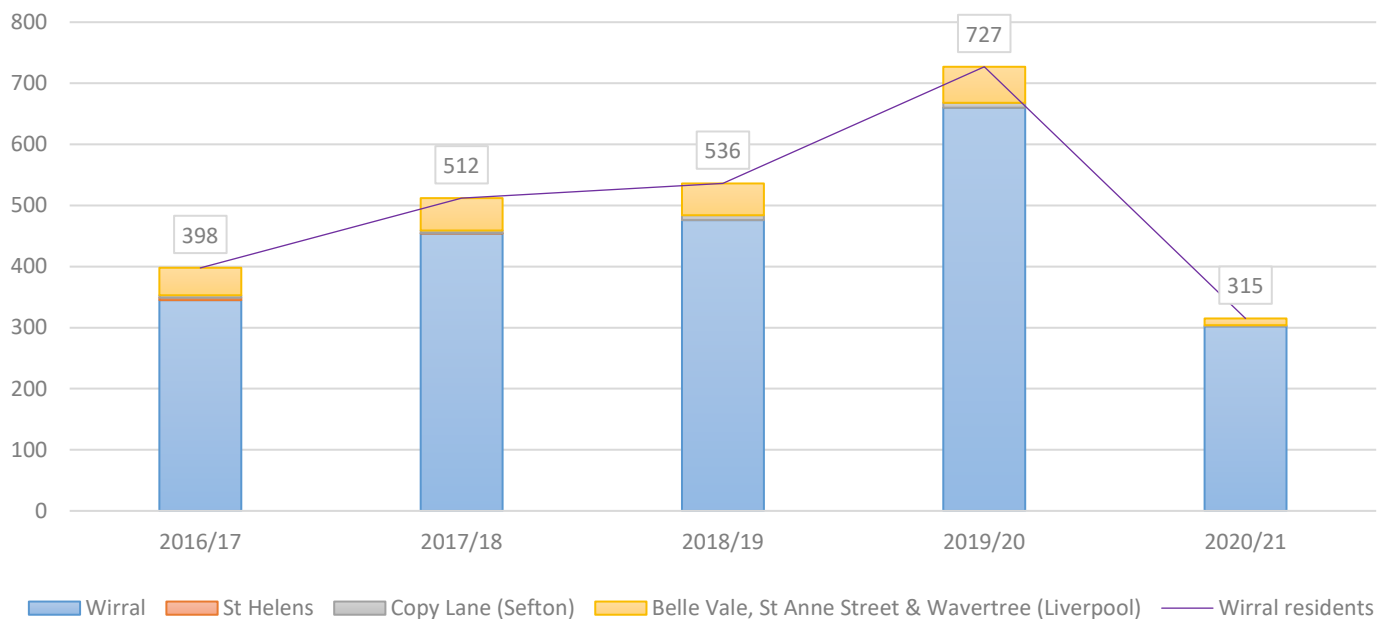
Figure 38: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age group and drug test result, St Helens residents, 2020/21



OVERVIEW AND TRENDS

In the year ending March 2021, there were 315 attempted tests for specified Class A drugs on Wirral residents across Merseyside's custody suites (*Figure 39*), representing just over one in five (22%) of all drug tests on Merseyside residents. The number of attempted drug tests on Wirral residents increased year-on-year up to the year ending March 2020, then decreased substantially in the following year due to Merseyside Police suspending drug testing in the custody suites between April and August 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of attempted drug tests on Wirral residents were carried out at Wirral custody suite, representing an average of 90% over the five-year period (*Figure 39*).

Figure 39: Attempted drug tests across Merseyside by custody suite and year, Wirral residents, 2016/17 - 2020/21



DRUG TESTING ACTIVITY

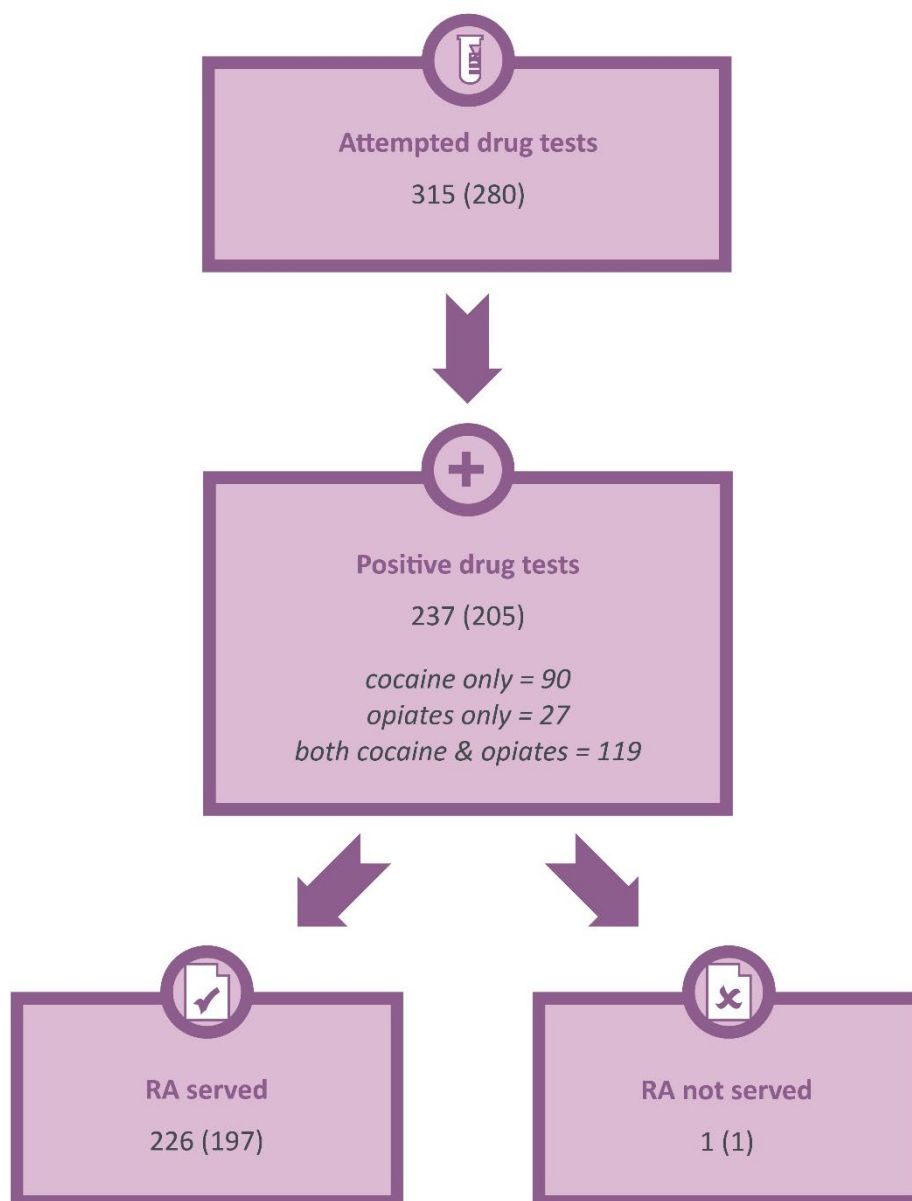
Figure 40 shows the drug testing activity for Wirral residents drug tested in Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021. Of the 315 attempted drug tests, 237 (75%) had a positive result for specified Class A drugs. Just over three in five (62%) positive drug tests were for opiate metabolites (both cocaine and opiates = 119 [50%]; opiates only = 27 [11%]), while the remaining positive tests were for cocaine only (n=90; 38%). Notably, only Wirral residents had a higher proportion testing positive for opiate metabolites than cocaine only, when compared to the residents of the other Merseyside areas (Merseyside residents testing positive for opiate metabolites = 45%). There were 226 RAs served to 197 individuals in the year ending March 2021 (*Figure 40*).



62%

positive tests for opiate metabolites
(both cocaine & opiates and opiates only), 2020/21

Figure 40: Drug testing activity, Wirral residents, 2020/21²¹

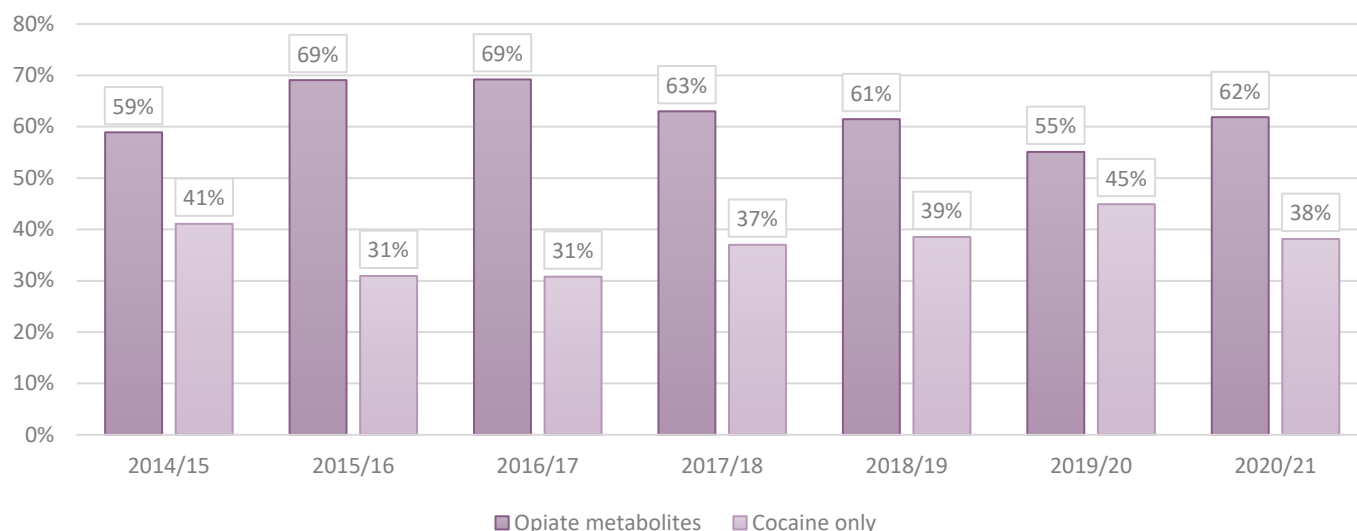


²¹ There was one positive drug test record that did not indicate the drug(s) detected.

POSITIVE DRUG TESTS

Figure 41 shows that there were higher proportions of opiate metabolites than cocaine only in all seven years, peaking at 69% in both 2015/16 and 2016/17. This differs to the residents of the other Merseyside areas, where proportions were higher for cocaine only than opiate metabolites in the last two to three years.

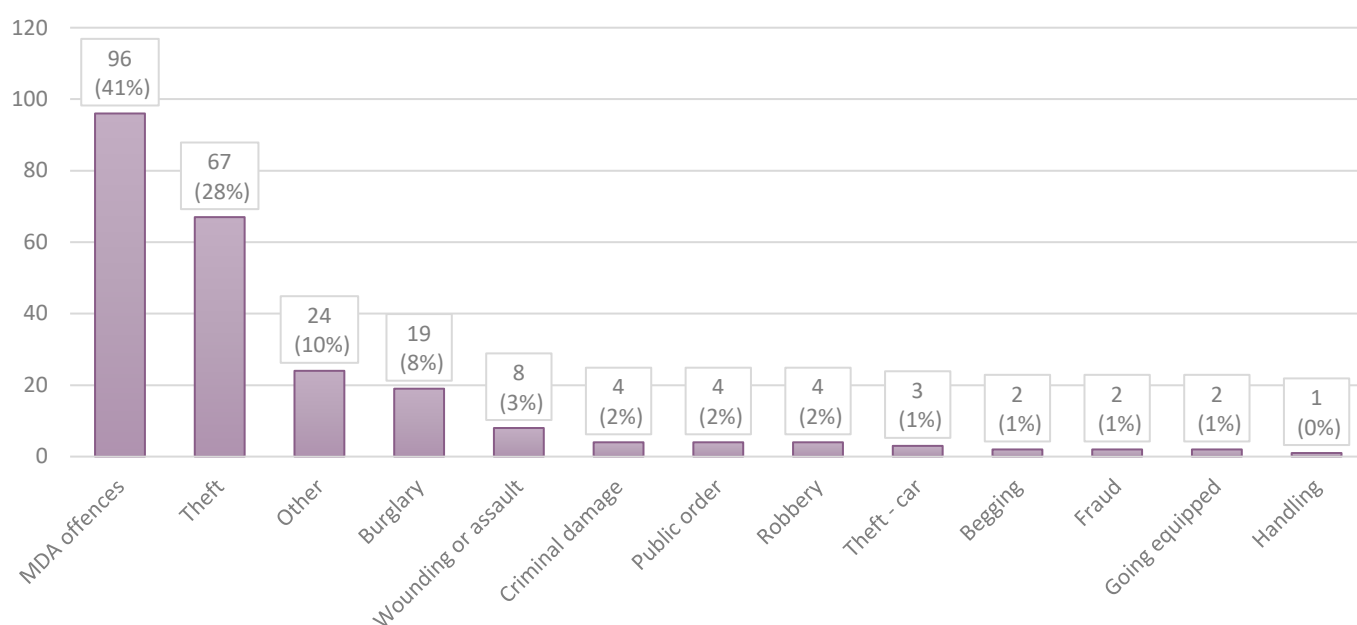
Figure 41: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by drug test result, Wirral residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



OFFENCES

Around two in five positive drug test records for Wirral residents in the year ending March 2021 reported MDA offences (n=96; 41%), followed by theft (n=67; 28%) (Figure 42). Notably, both proportions are higher than the Merseyside figures (38% and 23% respectively).

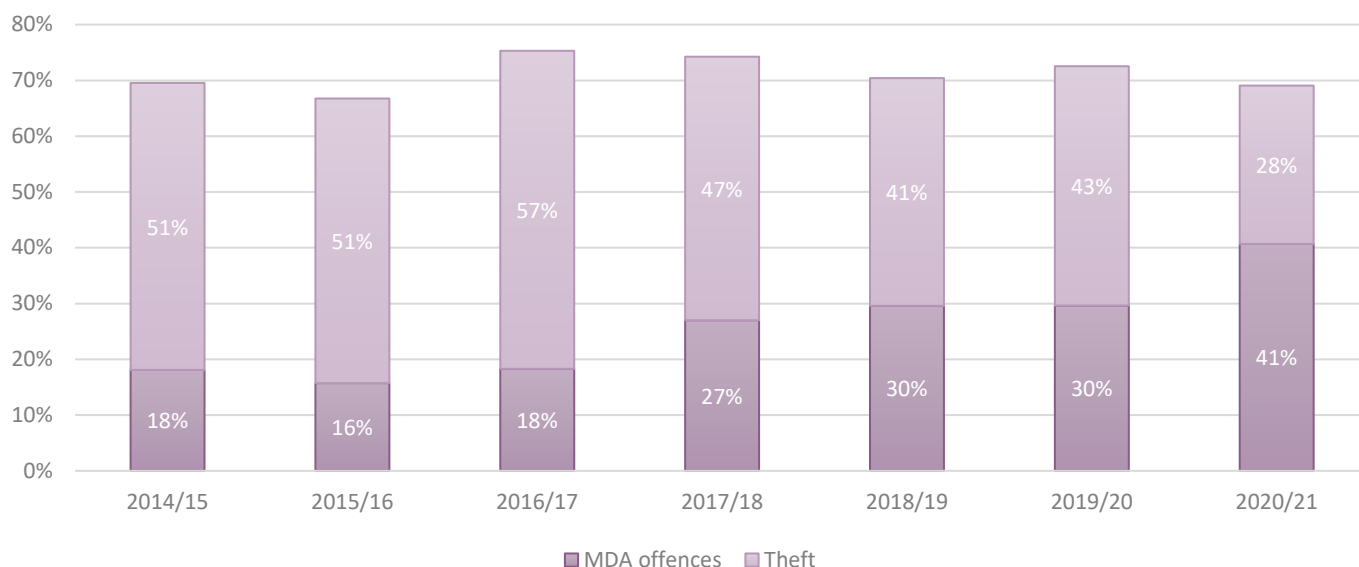
Figure 42: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, Wirral residents, 2020/21²²



²² There was one record that did not have an offence recorded. Other offences: other motoring offences = 12; other non-trigger offence = 10; driving whilst disqualified = 1; making off without payment = 1.

Notably, there has been a change in the trends of MDA offences and theft. *Figure 43* shows that generally, the proportion of MDA offences has increased, while the proportion of theft has decreased, though there have been some fluctuations. The proportion of MDA offences increased from 16% in 2015/16 to 41% in 2020/21, while the proportion of theft decreased from 57% in 2016/17 to its lowest proportion in 2020/21 (28%).

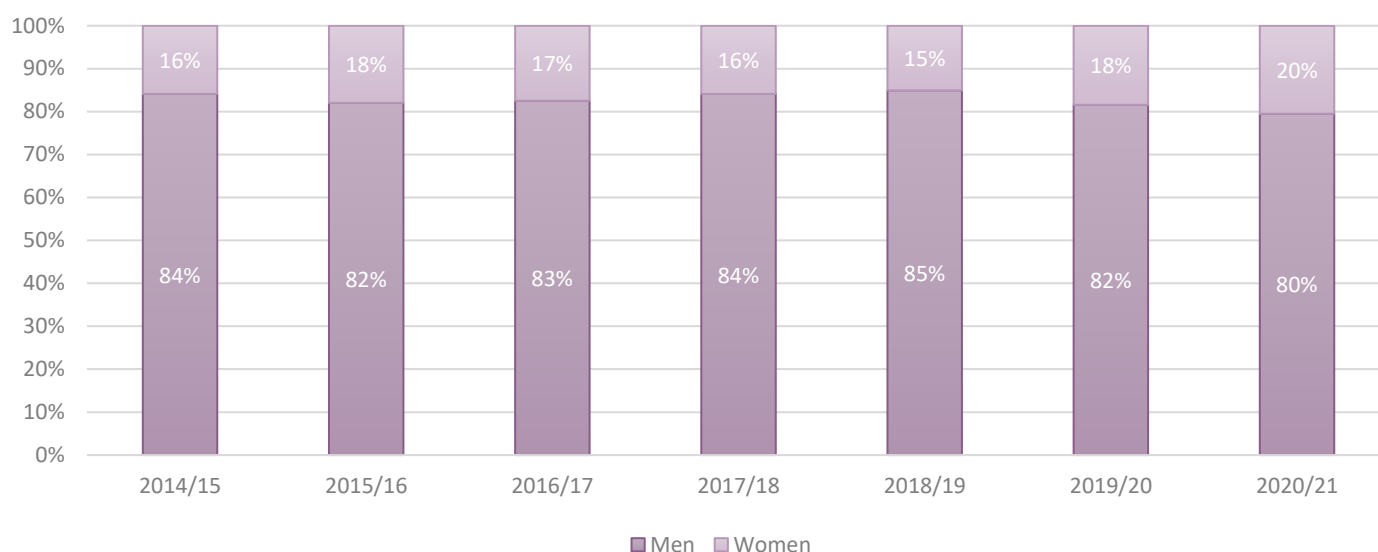
Figure 43: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by offence, Wirral residents, 2014/15 - 2020/21



DEMOGRAPHICS

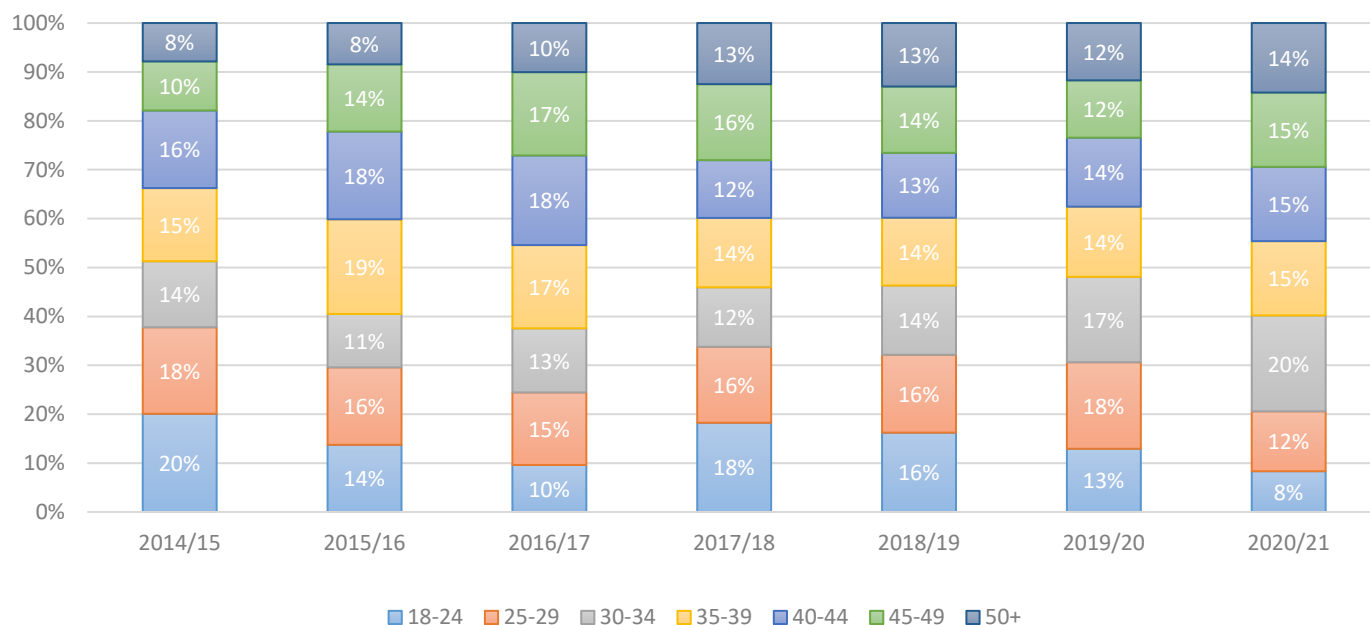
Men accounted for four in five (80%) individuals who tested positive across Merseyside's custody suites in the year ending March 2021, which is similar to the Merseyside figure (81%). Although proportions have fluctuated in the seven years shown in *Figure 44*, notably, 2020/21 had the largest proportion of women testing positive for specified Class A drugs.

Figure 44: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by gender, Wirral residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



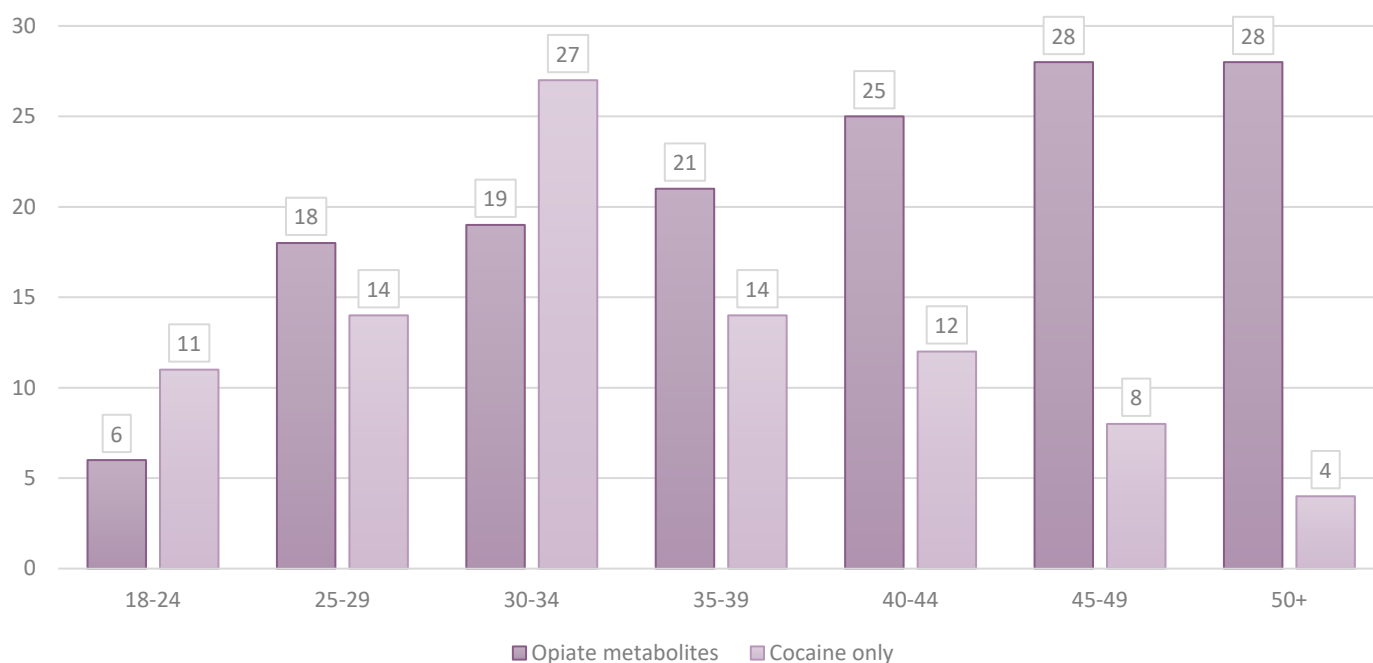
The median age of Wirral residents who tested positive in the year ending March 2021 was 36 years. *Figure 45* shows that individuals aged 30-34 years accounted for the largest proportion of Wirral residents who tested positive in 2020/21 (n=40; 20%). This is the highest proportion of the seven years shown in the chart for this age group and is similar to the Merseyside figure (21%). Notably, in the year ending March 2021, the proportion of Wirral residents aged 18-24 years was the lowest of the seven-year period (8%) and the lowest figure of all Merseyside areas, while those aged 50 years and over was the highest of the seven years (14%) and the highest Merseyside figure, joint with residents of Liverpool (*Figure 45*).

Figure 45: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age at time of drug test, Wirral residents (individuals), 2014/15 - 2020/21



Positive drug test results for Wirral residents are categorised by age group in *Figure 46*. The number of positive tests for opiate metabolites increased by age, peaking for those aged 45 years and over (28 for each of the two oldest age groups), while the number of cocaine only positive tests peaked at 27 for those aged 30-34 years, then decreased by age.

Figure 46: Positive drug tests across Merseyside by age group and drug test result, Wirral residents, 2020/21



RE-PRESENTATIONS

Table 1 provides an indication of the rate of re-presentation of Merseyside residents through the drug testing process. Of the 848 individuals who reside in Merseyside who tested positive for opiates and/or cocaine in the year ending March 2021, 82 (9.7%) subsequently re-presented and were drug tested again following their initial positive drug test during the twelve-month period.

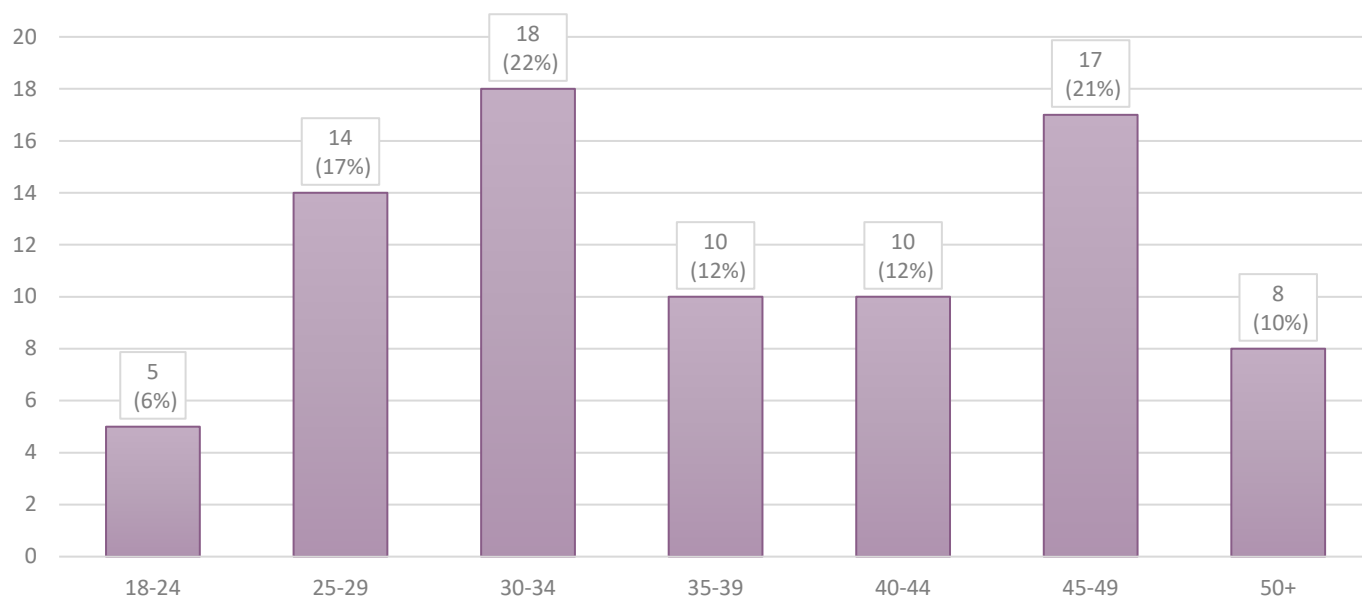
Table 1: Re-presentations of individuals testing positive across Merseyside, Merseyside residents, end 2020/21

| Number of drug test occasions | n | % |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| One | 766 | 90.3% |
| Two | 64 | 7.5% |
| Three | 12 | 1.4% |
| Four | 6 | 0.7% |
| Detainees presenting more than once | 82 | 9.7% |

DEMOGRAPHICS OF INDIVIDUALS WHO PRESENTED MORE THAN ONCE

Of the 82 individuals who presented more than once in the year ending March 2021, 69 (84%) were men. Just over one in five were aged 30-34 years (n=18; 22%) or 45-49 years (n=17; 21%) (Figure 47).

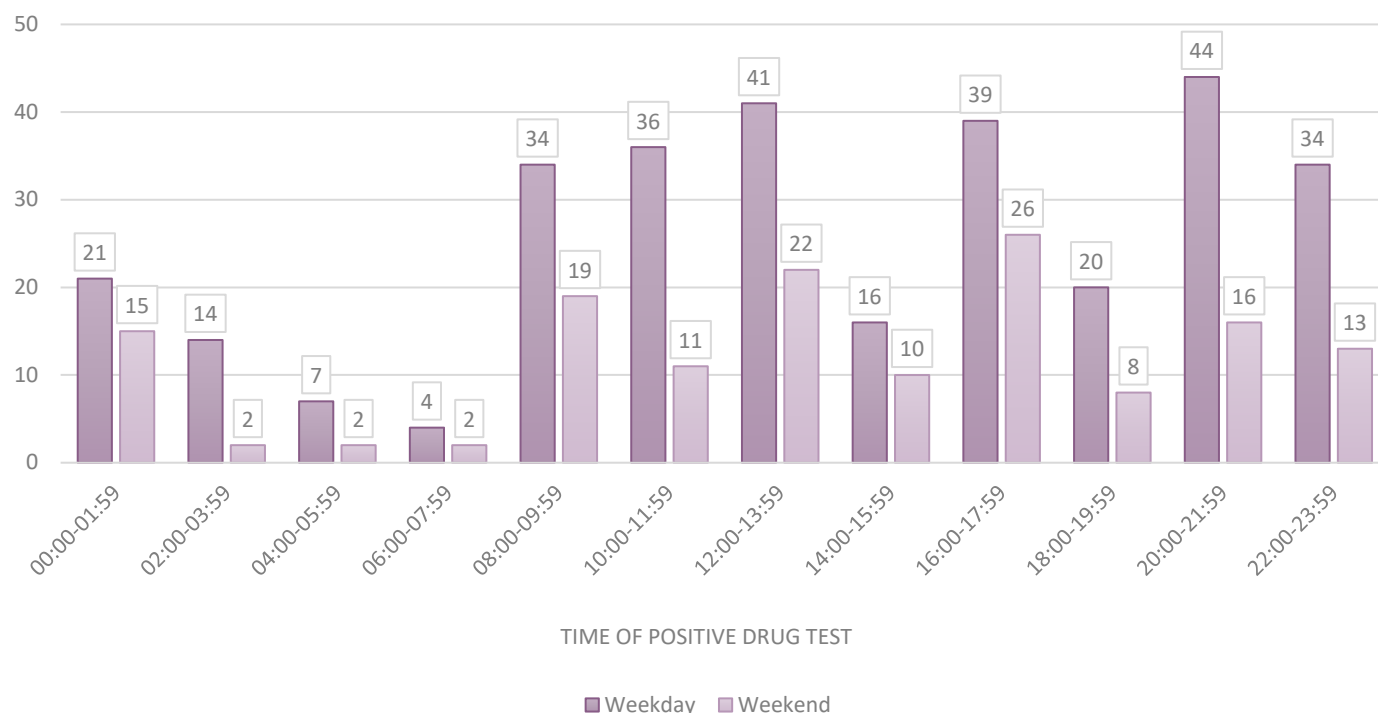
Figure 47: Re-presentations of individuals testing positive across Merseyside by age group, Merseyside residents, 2020/21



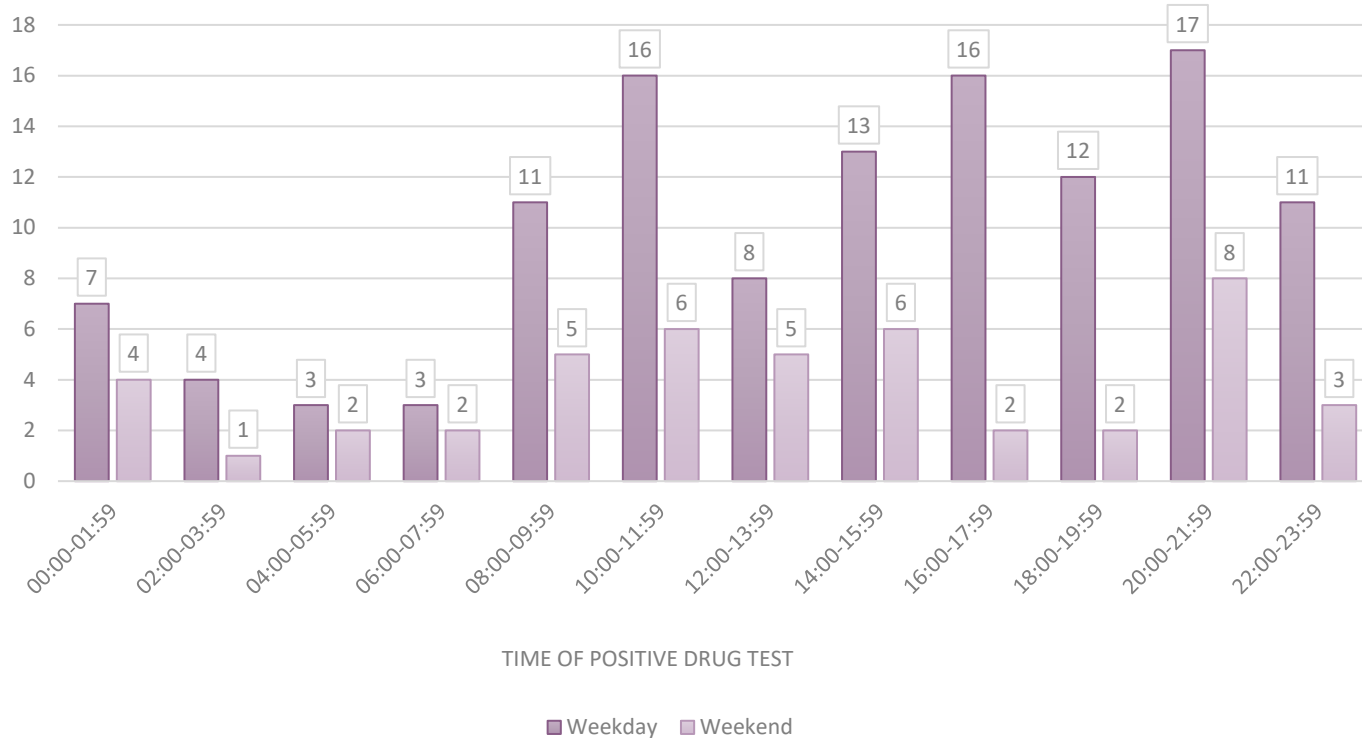
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

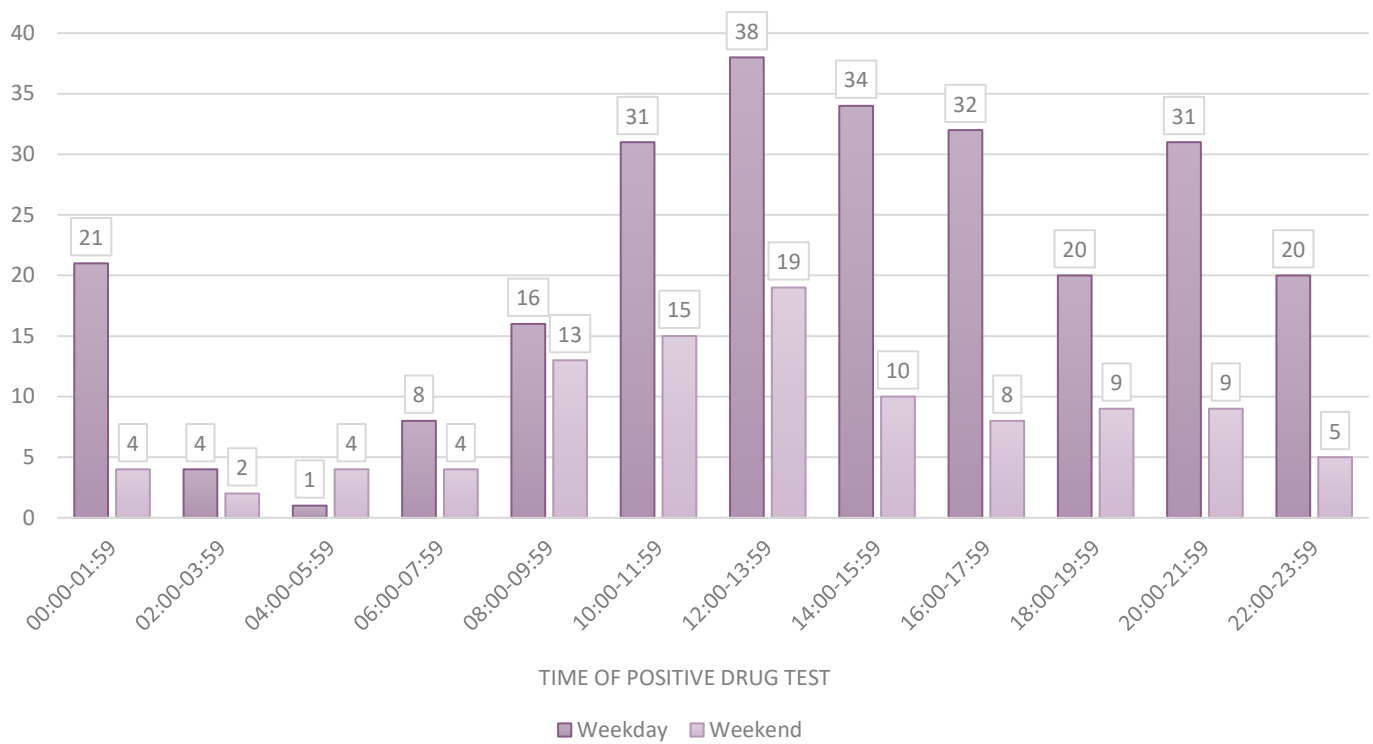
Appendix A1: Positive drug tests at Belle Vale, St Anne Street and Wavertree custody suites (Liverpool) by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2020/21



Appendix A2: Positive drug tests at Copy Lane custody suite (Sefton) by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2020/21

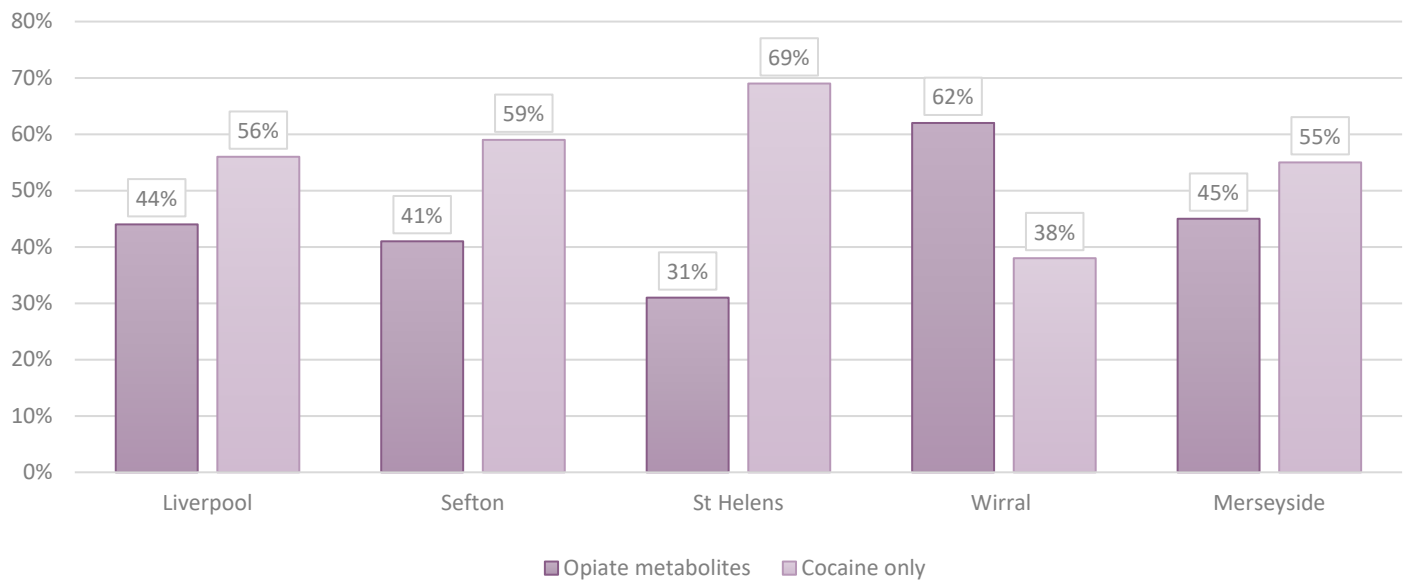


Appendix A3: Positive drug tests at Wirral custody suite by time of test and weekday/weekend, 2020/21



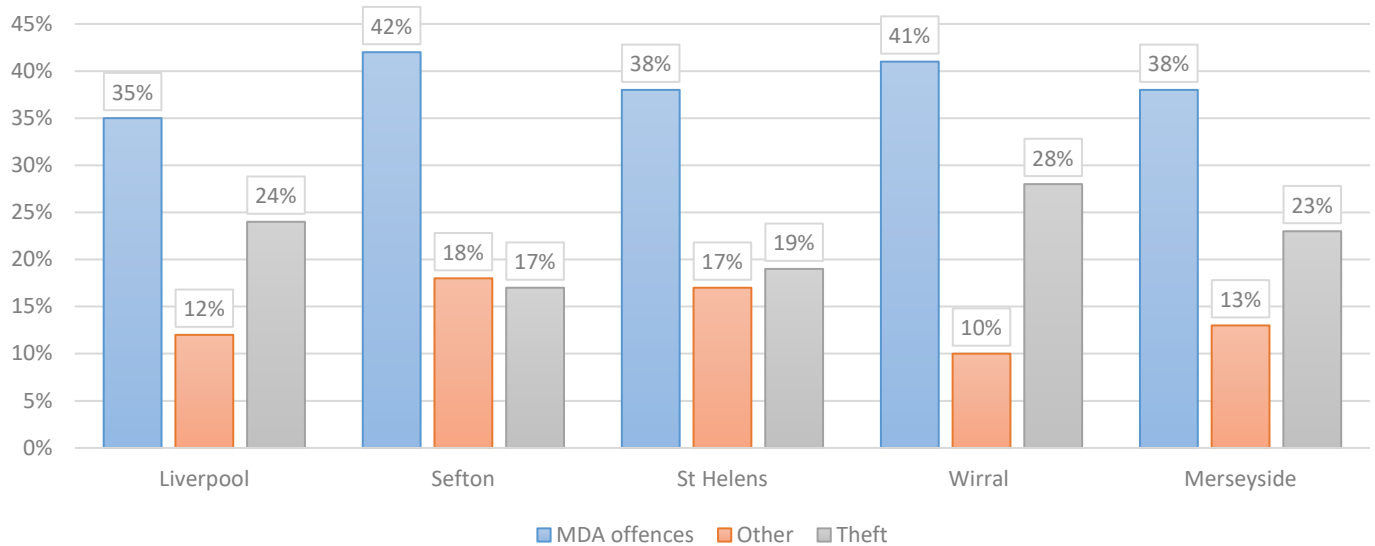
APPENDIX B²³

Appendix B1: Positive drug tests by drug test result and LA of residence, Merseyside residents, 2020/21

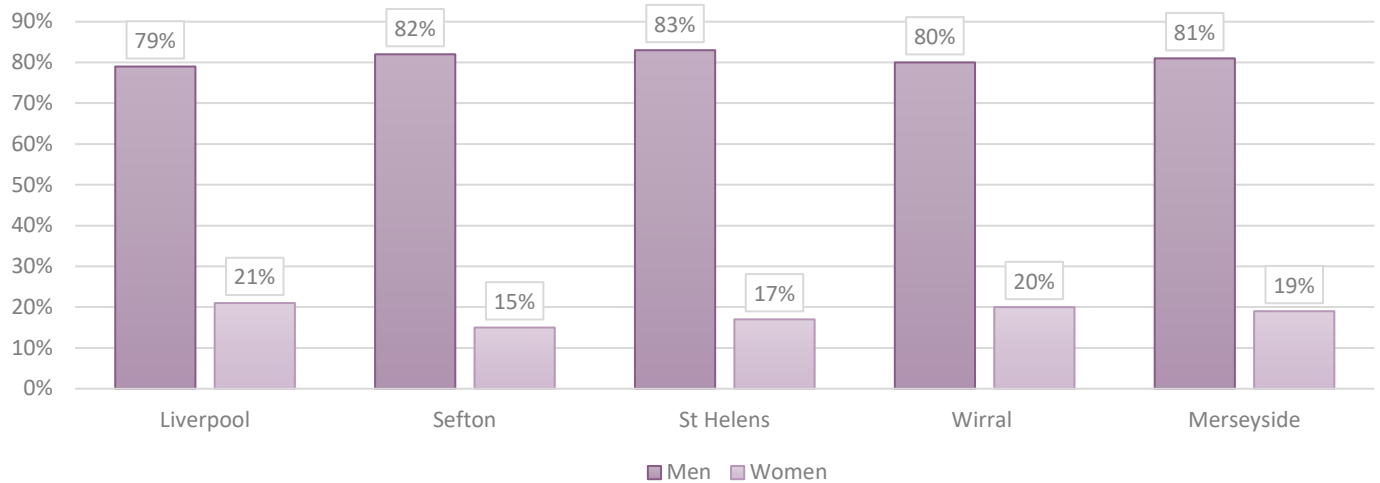


²³ Please note that the Merseyside figure includes Knowsley residents.

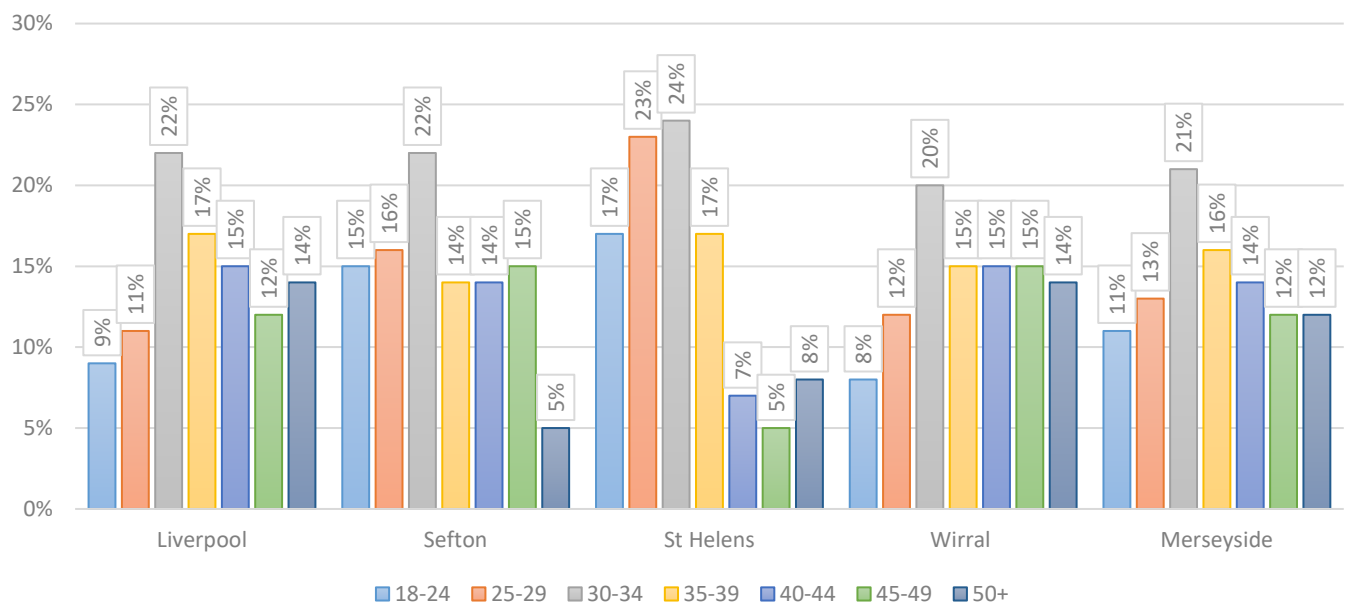
Appendix B2: Positive drug tests by offence and LA of residence, Merseyside residents, 2020/21



Appendix B3: Positive drug tests by gender and LA of residence, Merseyside residents, 2020/21



Appendix B4: Positive drug tests by age at time of drug test and LA of residence, Merseyside residents, 2020/21



REFERENCES

- Black, C. (2020). *Review of drugs: phase one report - evidence relating to drug use, supply and effects, including current trends and future risks* [online]. London: Home Office. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-drugs-phase-one-report> [accessed June 2021].
- Hales, G. et al (2020). *What is driving serious violence: drugs* [online]. London: Crest Advisory. Available at: <https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/understanding-what-is-driving-serious-violence-drugs> [accessed June 2021].
- Home Office (2010). *Operational Process Guidance for Implementation of Testing on Arrest, Required Assessment and Restriction on Bail* [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97792/DTOA-Guidance.pdf [accessed June 2021].
- Home Office (2020). *Seizures of drugs in England and Wales, financial year ending 2020* [online]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950796/seizures-drugs-mar2020-hosb3920.pdf [accessed June 2021].
- Office for National Statistics (2020). *Drug misuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2020* [online]. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020#trends-in-use-of-individual-drug-types> [accessed June 2021].
- Office for National Statistics (2021). *Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2020 registrations* [online]. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales/2020#drug-misuse-in-england-and-wales> [accessed August 2021].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With special thanks to Merseyside Police for providing drug testing records and their ongoing support. Thank you also to the commissioners and treatment providers across Merseyside. Finally, thank you to Petra Collins and Jane Webster at the Public Health Institute for their help in proof reading this report.

