

NPS / LEGAL HIGHS SURVEY RESULTS

Background

Anecdotal evidence from frontline services in Manchester portrays a city struggling to cope with the impact of Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS). First-hand accounts are well reported in the media, but there is little in the way of figures and in-depth research.

Being at the forefront of the community response to some of the most complex and challenging use, day centres in Manchester decided to survey their clients. We hope the information collected will help shape an effective response to, and raise awareness of, problematic NPS use, specifically within the homeless population.

Methodology

From September to December 2015, day centres invited their clients to take part in a survey to find out more about their drug use and the support they are receiving. Surveys were completed with a staff member and participants were informed their answers would be used anonymously.

Response

We received 56 responses from 4 agencies –

- The Booth Centre
- Lifeshare Day Centre
- Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH)
- Salford Loaves & Fishes

Key findings

- NPS (in particular synthetic cannabinoids) and poly drug use is extremely prevalent in the rough sleeping population.
- Most NPS users were 'poly drug users', using a variety of other substances alongside NPS, most notably crack and cannabis.
- 'Hipster' and 'Pandoras Box', two brands of synthetic cannabinoids, were the most commonly used, although the majority use multiple types - 'any' and 'all' that is available.
- Almost all respondents who use NPS purchased them from head shops. Over half had bought from off licenses or newsagents. 18% had bought from street dealers but none had bought from the internet.
- The legal status, convenience and ease of access were the most common reasons given by respondents for using NPS.
- 45% of those reporting NPS use said they did not have a drug problem.
- 29% who said they had a drug problem said they didn't need help with it.
- Respondents identified NPS as having the biggest impact on their housing situation and homelessness, physical health and relationships.

- 1 in 5 respondents usually buy NPS from street dealers, suggesting there is already an existing black market prior to the proposed NPS Bill in April 16.

Recommendations

We recommend the following action is taken by the local authority and frontline services.

- **Appropriate funding** should be available to ensure street outreach teams and day centres have the capacity and resource to address poly drug use in the street population
- Services need to see **NPS use within a wider poly drug use context** with appropriate drug treatment and on-site support to address the underlying causes of drug use. Specialist support around health issues, counselling services and increased housing options, such as 'housing first', may help to lead more users into recovery.
- **Training for frontline staff** in psychologically-informed approaches, working with complex needs and poly-drug use
- **Good multi-agency working arrangements** will help to increase the effectiveness of services.
- **City-wide systematic and ongoing monitoring and data collection.** Monitoring incidents of harm and supply, will help multi-agency information sharing, a joined up response across statutory and non-statutory services. This could lead to a rapid targeting of health resources, alerts and warnings and action against head shops and other suppliers, in response to particularly harmful strands of NPS.
- As well as the above, ongoing monitoring and data collection will help services **highlight and respond to the impact of local and national policy and legislative changes.**

Appendix 1 – Survey results

1 AGE

Average for men: 28
Average for women: 30

2 GENDER

59% Male
41% Female

3 WHERE ARE YOU CURRENTLY SLEEPING?

52% Sleeping rough on streets/parks
14% Housed - in own tenancy
13% In a hostel or supported accommodation
6% Sleeping on somebody's sofa/floor
6% In B&B or other temporary accommodation
5% Other: 2 x mixture of rough sleeping and sofa surfing
4% In emergency accommodation, e.g. night shelter, refuge

4 IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS HAVE YOU TAKEN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?

80% New Psychoactive Substances (also known as legal highs)
72% Cannabis
50% Crack
58% Cocaine
28% Heroin
16% Amphetamines/speed
12% Tranquilisers, such as benzodiazepines/benzos, not prescribed for you
12% Any other prescription drugs, not prescribed for you

NOTE: 0 respondents said they had not used drugs

5 IF ANSWERED YES TO TAKING NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (ALSO KNOWN AS LEGAL HIGHS) HOW FREQUENTLY DO YOU TAKE THEM?

66% Every day
14% Five or six days a week
6% Three or four days a week
6% Once or twice a week
2% Once or twice a month
4% Once or twice a year
2% Tried once

6 IF ANSWERED YES TO TAKING NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (ALSO KNOWN AS LEGAL HIGHS) WHICH SUBSTANCES HAVE YOU USED IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?

53% 'All', 'most' or 'any'
37% Pandora's Box
35% Hipster
19% Spice

+11 other NPS brands

NOTE: 11% of respondents used only one type. 84% used at least 3 types

7 IF ANSWERED YES TO TAKING NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (ALSO KNOWN AS LEGAL HIGHS) WHERE DO YOU NORMALLY BUY THEM FROM?

- 97% Head shop
- 58% Newsagent or off-license
- 18% Street dealer
- 0% Internet

8 IF ANSWERED YES TO TAKING NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (ALSO KNOWN AS LEGAL HIGHS) WHAT IS YOUR MAIN REASON(S) FOR USING THEM?

- 38% Convenient and easy to access
- 31% They are legal
- 26% Substitute for other substances (i.e. alcohol or illegal drugs)
- 21% They are cheaper than other substances
- 8% They are more effective/stronger than other substances
- Other responses:
 - 3% Helps with depression
 - 3% Taken under the influence of alcohol

9 THINKING ABOUT YOUR USE OF LEGAL HIGHS, DO YOU THINK IT HAS HAD A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

- 5% Debt or money issues
- 27% Relationship problems
- 27% Physical health
- 21% Homelessness
- 3% Criminal activity/offending
- 3% Mental health
- 3% Prevented or slowed down recovery
- 0 Antisocial behaviour (including threatening behaviour and violence)

10 DO YOU HAVE OR ARE YOU RECOVERING FROM A DRUG PROBLEM?

- 57% Yes, I have a drug problem
- 3% Yes, I am in recovery
- 40% No

11 IF YES TO A DRUG PROBLEM, ARE YOU RECEIVING SUPPORT/TREATMENT TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR DRUG PROBLEM?

- 21% Yes, and it meets my needs
- 18% Yes, but I'd still like more help
- 32% No, but it would help me
- 29% No, I do not need any

12 IF YES TO Q11, WHAT SUPPORT ARE YOU RECEIVING TO HELP YOU ADDRESS YOUR DRUG USE?

- 61% Attendance at day programmes, delivered in the community
- 8% Advice and information (e.g. from GPs, A&E departments)
- 6% Harm reduction services, such as needle exchange
- 0% Self-help groups (often called Mutual Aid), e.g. Narcotics Anonymous
- 3% Community prescribing (drug treatment prescribed as part of a care plan)
- 3% Counselling or psychological support
- 3% Peer support - support from others who have been through a similar experience
- 0% Detox (help with withdrawal as an inpatient)
- 0% Residential rehabilitation
- 0% Aftercare (support following structured treatment)
- Other answers:
- 3% BIDAS for use of Cannabis
- 3% Just been referred to ADS/ICM