

# NACD Community and Voluntary Sector Research Grant Scheme



## Drug use among new communities in Ireland: an exploratory study (2004)

### Research conducted by:

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### Aim:

To provide an in-depth understanding of problematic drug use among new communities namely refugees and asylum seekers; to explore patterns, reasons and motivations for drug use; to establish risks the users may be exposed to; to examine the level of awareness of health promotion / harm minimisation strategies and drug treatment services; and to identify barriers to accessing services.

### Method:

Action research methodology was used. Ethnographic methods included participant observation and ten in-depth interviews with nine males and one female ranging in age from 24 to 44 years, from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

### Key Findings:

- Heroin was the drug of choice for the majority of the respondents; three reported the use of cocaine. The majority also used cannabis which they did not perceive as being harmful.
- Some were adopting drug patterns similar to those in their countries of origin and were mixing various concoctions such as khat (natural stimulant from *Cartha Edulis* plant) or kasha (porridge made from wild cannabis).
- Half were involved in problematic drug use before coming to Ireland, others had no history of drug taking. Cultural variations were noted, Africans were more likely to smoke cocaine while Eastern Europeans preferred to inject heroin.

- Contributing factors to drug use included the social situation of new communities coupled with other stresses such as displacement, asylum seeking, the stress of insecure legal status and unemployment.
- Conversely some were able to combine employment with the lifestyle associated with problematic drug use.
- Those accommodated in socially deprived areas were very concerned that their children would be exposed to drugs.
- Drugs were used as an escape from current and past experiences. Some used drugs to combat social exclusion and isolation, whilst others used drugs to combat past experiences of war, torture and trauma. Some used drugs to 'fit in' with their Irish peers, others used drugs out of curiosity, boredom, relationship breakdown or simply because they had access to them.
- Barriers to accessing drug services were identified. These included: lack of knowledge due to language difficulties, long waiting lists, the actual assessment procedure, discomfort about their own ethnicity, fear of racism, fear of Gardai and Dept. of Justice, social stigma and the belief that they could cope with their own drug problem.

### Recommendations from the Report:

- Drug services need to produce culturally, sensitive material in different languages with diverse images which clearly highlight the confidentiality and range of services provided.
- Drug services need to recruit staff from new communities; existing staff need anti-racism training to increase their awareness of issues surrounding race and ethnicity.
- The issue of social exclusion needs to be addressed by anti-poverty policies in Ireland.