

Cocaine Use in Ireland Update II

(2007)



Research conducted by:

A joint project by the NACD and the National Drugs Strategy Team (NDST). Report compiled by Dr Justine Horgan, NACD.

Aim:

Arising from concerns about increasing levels of cocaine availability and use in Ireland, the Government in late 2005 requested the NACD and NDST to prepare a report updating information on cocaine use previously published in 2003 by the NACD. The aim was to facilitate the development of an appropriate response within the framework of the National Drugs Strategy.

Method:

The report looked at a wide variety of sources of information including prevalence data from population surveys, criminal justice data, laboratory data, drug treatment data, surveys, interviews among users and research studies. Additional information was gained from cocaine-related studies reported in the relevant scientific literature.

Key Findings:

- All the available data sources indicate an increase in cocaine availability and use nationwide
- There has been a three and four fold increase in those seeking treatment for cocaine use as a primary and secondary problem drug respectively between 1998 and 2002
- Data from An Garda Síochána showed an exponential increase in cocaine related offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act from 180 cases in 2000 to 1,224 cases in 2005
- Garda seizures show an increase from 206 in 2000 to 968 in 2005. Customs & Excise seizures increased from 12 in 2000 to 67 in 2004
- Data from the Medical Bureau of Road Safety also indicate an increase in cocaine positive tests up to 2005
- Hospital In-Patient Enquiry (HIPE) data show that the number of cocaine-related admissions in hospitals increased from 54 in 2000 to 222 in 2004
- Polydrug use appears to be a very common phenomenon amongst those using legal and illegal drugs. The co-existence of cocaine and alcohol in the community causes increased anti-social behaviour and criminal damage. Many problem heroin users are also using cocaine
- Cocaine can harm the user and causes direct and indirect harm to the community. The main types of individual harm are damage to physical health, mental health and social and economic harm

- Deprived communities and areas with an existing community drug problem are more likely to suffer the consequences of the use and sale of cocaine. Reports of cocaine debt-related violence and intimidation at a community level have been received
- Treatment programmes in Ireland are generally opiate focused and are not accessed by stimulant users
- There is a perception among service providers and service users that no effective treatment is available for problematic cocaine use
- Many approaches practised in drug services work well with cocaine/crack users. These include psychosocial techniques such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Brief Interventions, Contingency Management, Group Therapy/Counselling and Peer Leadership.

NACD Recommendations to Government:

The recommendations made to Government are summarised here:

- Reorientation of addiction services from being opiate focussed to addressing all drugs of addiction
- Specific interventions may be required in acute problem areas
- Harm reduction services need to adapt to the added burden of cocaine use especially amongst injecting drug users
- Training and development of staff to enhance competencies and capacity to address cocaine is needed
- Develop better working relationships between GPs, A&Es and drug services
- Prison programmes should address cocaine and crack use also
- Optimum number of personnel in Garda Drug Units need to reflect evolving drug markets
- Roll out local policing fora in Local Drugs Task Forces as per guidelines to strengthen community Garda links in addressing community drugs issues
- Information on cocaine harms needs to be disseminated, adapt secondary and tertiary drug prevention to take into account cocaine and crack use
- Data collection needs to be developed by smallest area (Electoral District) so that places most in need can be targeted.
- Understanding diffusion of cocaine and other drugs in Ireland and their resulting patterns of use would serve to inform policy and service delivery.