

Drug Trend Monitoring System Pilot Study Summary Report

(2007)



Research conducted by:

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Aim:

To pilot elements of a model for a Drug Trend Monitoring System (DTMS) that could identify trends such as the spread of heroin into new areas, the availability of new drugs, new patterns of use and new drug user groups, in response to a Government request set out in the Programme for Government 2002 and the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 regarding the identification of new drug trends.

Method:

A pilot model was developed based on a literature review and the experiences of a similar pilot under the EMCDDA (EU Drugs Agency). The emphasis was on tapping into new drug trends early in their lifecycle through the establishment of a network of trend monitors encompassing frontline workers from a range of disciplines and environments, a media monitoring system which tracked drug seizures, drug related court cases and local drug issues nationwide, and through a series of focus groups with both problematic and non-problematic drug users to assess their view of trends.

Key Findings:

Overall, the DTMS has shown some very interesting findings that would not have been known otherwise such as:

- All Regional Drugs Task Force (RDTF) areas reported intravenous (IV) heroin use
- 4 RDTF areas reported IV cocaine use (Southern, East Coast Area, Northern Area and South Western Area)
- 4 RDTF areas reported IV crack cocaine use (South Eastern, East Coast Area, Northern Area and South Western Area)
- 5 RDTF areas reported IV steroid use (East Coast Area, Northern Area, South Western Area, South Eastern and North Eastern)
- 3 RDTF areas reported IV amphetamine use (South Eastern, Northern Area and South Western Area)
- Increasing misuse of prescription drugs reported such as sedatives, tranquillisers and anti-depressants and re-emergence of misuse of drugs like Ritalin®
- New information provided on non-fatal drug overdoses not otherwise available
- A reported decline in popularity of ecstasy
- Reports of increasing misuse of over-the-counter drugs such as codeine based products and cough mixtures

- Reports of increasing misuse of anabolic steroids which can seriously affect the physical and mental health of those who use them
- Reports that combined binge drinking and drug taking is becoming a greater social norm for more and more young people
- Media monitoring and reports show that drug markets operate at different levels in different areas in Ireland and for different drugs and that criminal justice responses vary greatly in terms of arrests and sentencing across the country
- RDTF co-ordinators provided validation of the analysis of information provided and it proved hugely beneficial to them. Local Drugs Task Force (LDTF) co-ordinators validated the data but they found the information less beneficial.

The pilot demonstrated that emerging trends can be identified early, changes in patterns of behaviour and drug availability can be observed and current localised knowledge can be achieved.

NACD Recommendations to Government:

1. The DTMS fulfils the requirements under the Programme for Government outlined above
2. The value of such a system is clear: it will produce twice yearly information on national, regional and local trends on heroin and other drugs. At present the collection of data on drugs shows trends based on data that is three and four years old according to indicators used for national reporting
3. The DTMS has shown that injecting of heroin is occurring in every RDTF area in Ireland, information not available at the time of the NACD Harm Reduction Report which now validates the NACD request that harm reduction services be available throughout all health board areas
4. The DTMS reinforces the concerns about cocaine use highlighted previously by the NACD in 2003
5. In addition, the EU Action Plan on Drugs commits member states to develop Guidelines for a DTMS by 2007.