



Briefing

November 2011

Drugs used in intentional overdoses in Ireland

The National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) has prepared a briefing on drugs used in intentional overdoses. The information is obtained from the National Registry of Deliberate Self Harm (NRDSH). The aim of the NSRF briefings is to provide an evidence base for suicide and self harm prevention programmes.

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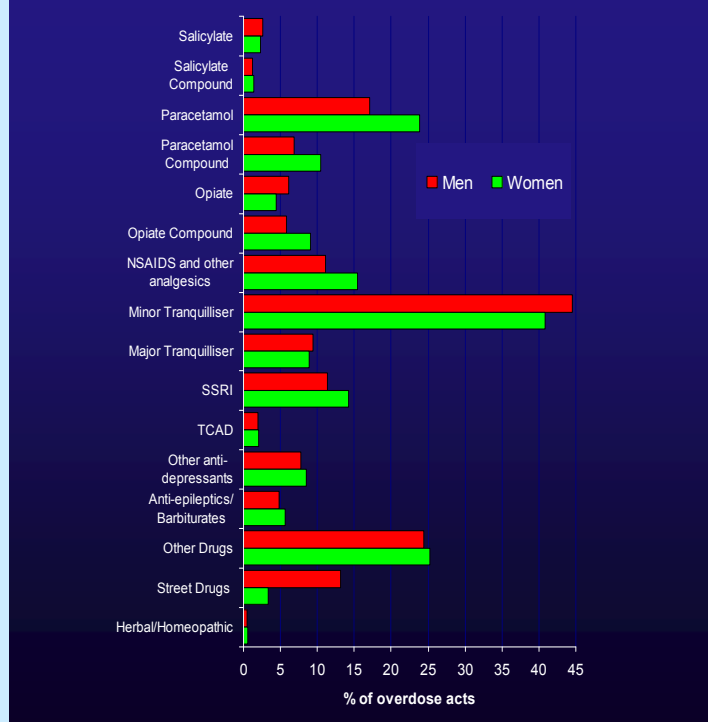
Increase in deliberate self harm

In 2010 the Registry recorded 11,966 presentations to hospital due to deliberate self harm involving 9,630 individuals. Taking the population into account, the age-standardised rate of individuals presenting to hospital following self harm in 2010 was 217 per 100,000, a significant 4% increase on the rate of 209 per 100,000 in 2009 and the fourth successive increase in the national rate of hospital-treated deliberate self harm.

Intentional drug overdoses at national level

Drug overdose is the most common method of self harm involving 71% of all self harm acts registered in 2010, and more so in women (77%) than in men (65%). Of all intentional drug overdoses, 42% involved a minor tranquilliser (benzodiazepines), representing 3568 overdoses (Figure 1). A high proportion of overdoses involving minor tranquillisers has been observed since 2004 without any significant changes, and with an over-representation of men. Almost half (48%) of all female overdose acts and 36% of all male acts involved an analgesic drug.

Figure 1 Drugs used in overdose acts, national level NRDSH-2010

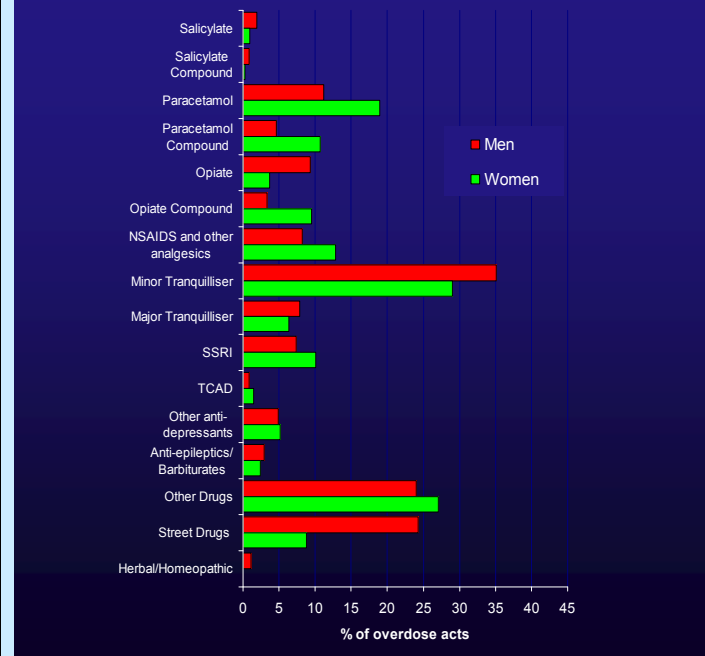


Paracetamol was the most common analgesic drug taken, being involved in some form in 29% of drug overdose acts. Paracetamol was used significantly more often by women (34%) than by men (23%). More than one in five acts (21%) of intentional overdoses involved an antidepressant/mood stabiliser. Street drugs were involved in 12% of male and 3% of female intentional drug overdose acts.

Intentional drug overdoses in Cork

When comparing drugs used in intentional overdoses in Cork to those reported at national level, the findings are mostly similar (Figure 2). However, the proportion of men and women using minor tranquillisers was slightly lower, and the use of street drugs was higher among both men and women.

Figure 2 Drugs used in Cork overdose acts, NRDSH-2010



Recommendations

- Considering the high proportion of minor tranquillisers involved in intentional drug overdose acts (approx. 3500 presentations to hospital each year), priority should be given to initiatives restricting access to minor tranquillisers, especially when taking into account the legal prohibition of extended use of these drugs.

- For the third subsequent year an increase was observed in the use of street drugs in self harm acts. It is therefore recommended that national strategies be intensified to reduce access to street drugs and to increase awareness of their harmful effects.

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 The 2010 Annual NRDSH Report is available at:
<http://www.nsrif.ie/report/2010AnnualReportNational>