

Report on Drug Abuse in Ireland, 1983

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Jervis Street Drug Advisory and Treatment Centre,

Dublin

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The National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre which was opened in 1970 by the Minister for Health, is an out-patient clinic at Jervis Street Hospital (a general teaching hospital of the R.C.S.I.), which offers a treatment and advisory service to drug abusers and their families. Treatment is free and confidential and no referral is necessary, but referrals from doctors are, of course, welcomed.

In 1975 an in-patient Detoxification Unit with a complement of nine beds was opened for the purpose of withdrawing patients from drugs and alcohol and provide intensive treatment for those in need of hospitalisation.

Treatment provided offers comprehensive medical and psychiatric assessment, a withdrawal programme using Methadone (physeptone linctus) for those dependent on opiates, appropriate medication for other conditions following the abuse of drugs, supportive psychotherapy, group therapy and counselling.

The Centre collaborates closely with other services for the treatment of drug and alcohol dependents, the Eastern Health Board Day Centre at Usher's Island, Coolemine Therapeutic Community at Clonsilla and the Rutland Centre in Clondalkin, for the long term rehabilitation of drug dependents. The Centre also liases with other medical and psychiatric services.

The clinic is the National Centre for the treatment of drug dependence and provides statistics to the Department of Health on a regular basis.

Other facilities include provision of an advisory and educational service. Phone calls and queries are accepted from anyone who has a drug problem with assurance of confidentiality. Educational lectures are arranged through the Health Education Sister.

Extent of Drug Problem:

The figures in this report refer to those drug abusers who have attended or are attending the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre. There are no accurate figures for the country as a whole. There is no compulsory register of addicts in Ireland.

Statistics from the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre,
Jervis Street, Dublin 1:

The total number of patients who attended per year is as follows:

1979 – (January-December)	415
1980 – (January-December)	554
1981 – (January-December)	800
1982 – (January-December)	1307
1983 – (January-June)	905

Breakdown for June, 1983:

Total number of patients who attended:	260
Total number of new patients:	60
Total attendances:	1704

Drugs Abused:

Heroin	196	Palfium (Dextromoramide)	4
Alcohol	36	Barbiturates	4
Cannabis	25	Cocaine	3
Diconal (dipipanone)	16	Morphine	1
Minor tranquillisers	14	Pethidine	1
DF118	8	Amphetamines	1
Methadone (Physeptone)	8	Heminevrin (chlormethiazole edisylate)	1
Cough Mixtures	7		
Solvents (glue)	5		

As can be seen from above, individuals usually abuse more than one drug.

Prior to 1979, Morphine alternatives such as Diconal (dipipanone) and Palfium (dextromoramide) were the most widely abused drugs. These drugs were obtained from pharmacy break-ins and by prescription from a small number of doctors.

Since 1979 there has been an acute explosion of Heroin abuse here in Ireland of possibly greater dimension than in any other country. In 1979 the average number of patients treated for Heroin addiction was 5 per month, while in June, 1983 this has risen to 196 per month. The Heroin abuse problem is largely confined to Dublin although there are some reports of the beginning of abuse of this drug in other Irish cities.

The average number of patients who attend the Centre rose from 112 per month in 1979 to 267 per month in 1983.

Breakdown for January-December, 1982 inclusive:

Total number of patients who attended:	1307
Total number of new patients:	892
Total attendances:	13926

Drugs abused:

Heroin	772	Cough Mixtures	28
Alcohol	271	Cocaine	23
Diconal (dipipanone)	201	Methadone (physeptone)	14
Cannabis	195	DF118	12
Palfium (dextromoramide)	111	Amphetamines	11
Minor tranquillisers	84	Magic Mushrooms	8
Morphine	40	Others	6
LSD	37	Pethidine	4
Solvents (glue, etc.)	33	Ritalin (methylphenidate)	3
Barbiturates	30		

The trends of increased drug abuse noted at the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre have been supported by a number of studies carried out in the Republic of Ireland.

For example:

Study on Drug Abuse in a North Central Dublin Area:

This study is the most up-to-date work of its kind available in Ireland and essentially focuses in depth on one particular area of North Central Dublin. The study shows a most serious prevalence of severe Heroin abuse in the study area, and such abuse is almost totally confined to those in the 15-24 age group. There was an aggregate 10% prevalence in this age group. In the 15-19 age sub-grouping prevalence was found to be 12% and the prevalence amongst females in the same sub-grouping was higher at 13%. The Department of Health is satisfied that this data is a reasonably accurate reflection of the real position in the area studied.

Report on Drug Abuse in Dublin Committal Prisons:

This report reveals quite a number of facts of relevance to the provision of treatment and rehabilitation services. There is a good profile of prison drug abusers/addicts which ties in closely with the profiles emerging from other studies done in the inner-city area.

The extent of Heroin abuse is generally high. Petty crime is a regular means of financing addiction. Deprivation and low educational attainment is the norm. The rate of relapse since released from jail is high.

While accepting that the subjects of this study may not be typical of the "average" Irish drug abuser/addict, nevertheless there is quite a deal of information in the Report from which to build up an action/prevention programme for peer groups.

Southern Health Board - Report of the Committee on Drug & Alcohol Abuse, 1983:

The Southern Health Board includes in its catchment area the second principal city in Ireland.

They reported that 17-20 young people were regularly receiving prescriptions for synthetic drugs such as Diconal (dipipanone), Palfium (dextromoramide) and Pethidine. The Committee were aware that a demand for hard drugs has been created in Cork and that some Heroin is used there.

Health Education Bureau - Post Primary Schools Drug Survey:

This survey shows an increase in contact with drugs since a similar survey carried out in 1970. The use of drugs by school children has also increased during that time. The most frequently used drug was Marijuana and the second was Heroin. The report states that these results are in accord with the evidence available from treatment centres and from the Garda Drug Squad.

Because of the serious nature of Heroin abuse since 1979, two Task Forces were set up to consider the situation.

The Terms of Reference of the Eastern Health Board Task Force was:

“To examine the extent and type of drug abuse prevalent in the Eastern Health Board area.”

The E.H.B. Task Force issued a report and is holding on-going meetings to review the present services for drug abusers, to assess their adequacy and to look at any other services which might contribute to a better overall treatment programme.

The Ministerial Task Force set up by the government has reported its findings to the Cabinet but their report has not yet been published.

A recent study on the pregnant addict was made because of the increased number of pregnant girls attending the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre. A summary of the findings was given at the 7th International Congress on Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynaecology held in Dublin in September, 1983.

Drug Abusers Attendance at Dublin Accident & Emergency Departments:

This study, by Dr. G. Byers et al., reported as follows:

Eighty separate individuals involved in the abuse of drugs were reported as having attended Dublin Accident & Emergency Departments during a four-week period commencing September 1st, 1982.

As a large percentage of these 80 individuals had no previous contact with the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre and an equally large number were not currently attending, it might be argued that there is a scope for therapeutic intervention by casualty personnel. The results suggest that many people who are abusing drugs present to Casualty as cases of self poisoning. Trauma and sepsis are other frequent reasons for attendance. Hepatitis on the other hand, accounted for only one presentation.

PROFILE:

The profile of an "average" patient attending the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre is as follows:

- aged between 16 & 24 years
- taking drugs for 4-5 years prior to contact with treatment services
- mainlining Heroin
- involved with the law
- has left school at 16 years, or earlier
- unemployed
- has had a stressful family background

CURRENT SITUATION REGARDING HEPATITIS B POSITIVES AMONG DRUG ABUSERS:

It appears that after the initial peak of positives occurring during the first six months of 1981, the numbers of new positive cases detected dropped slightly but have remained high ever since. The monthly averages of new cases of Hepatitis B among drug abusers are

1979	-	0.6
1980	-	2.6
1981	-	14.0
1982	-	10.3
1983	-	10.0 (to end of July)

These are among known drug abusers. Since information is not always available it is likely that other positives are also drug abusers; it is likely that these would add an average of five to each monthly figure since 1981.

Approximately 30% of the drug abusers since 1981 have shown evidence of infection with the delta hepatitis agent which is reported to increase the severity of Hepatitis B, either fulminantly or by increasing the progression rate to chronic active (but not chronic

persistent) hepatitis, The delta infection rate has fallen slightly during the first six months of 1983 but is still high. Two abusers with Hepatitis B and delta infection have died (December, 1982 and April, 1983).

Transmission of Hepatitis B to non-abusers has occurred among sexual contacts of abusers since 1981; however, no overt Hepatitis B has come to light so far among family contacts but at least two family members show evidence of sub-clinical infection with Hepatitis B and delta as evidenced by positive tests for anti-HBs and anti-delta.

ABSCESSSES:

During 1983 there has been a marked increase in skin abscesses due to use of lemon juice, vinegar and citric acid in preparing materials for injection.

Jervis Street Hospital deals with 20 cases of severe multiple abscesses per month.

The difficulty of treating drug abusers in the context of a general hospital is mainly due to two factors:

- a. the anti-social behaviour of these patients;
- b. the risk of infection.

Information from other sources within Ireland, such as drug seizures by the gardai, Customs & Excise, Probation Service, the Courts and community workers confirm the general trend of a serious opiate abuse problem in the Republic of Ireland.

One of the most serious findings of all studies carried out is that there is a period of about four years between first contact with a drug and arrival at a treatment centre. Because of this, four community projects have been set up in 1983 to monitor drug abuse in the community and to carry out counselling while referring back to the National Drug Advisory & Treatment Centre for medical and laboratory back up, and drawing on the expertise of all the professional staff in the Unit.

Other services for drug abusers:

The rehabilitation centres – Coolemine Therapeutic Community and Rutland Centre Ltd. Usher's Island Day Centre. The psychiatric services in the various Health Board areas.

**Attached is a flow chart of the structure of the services for drug abusers in the Republic of Ireland.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES:

The Health Education Bureau was established in 1975 on the recommendation of the Educational Committee on Drug Education, to advise the Minister on the aspects of health education which should have priority at a national level. They are responsible for the co-ordination and delivery of education in the field of drug abuse.

FUTURE:

Because Jervis Street Hospital is moving to a new location in the suburbs of the city of Dublin, active consideration is being given to the setting up of a city centre comprehensive treatment unit, which will continue in association with the general teaching hospital.

OVER-PRESCRIBING:

The Medical Council is at present investigating a number of doctors in Ireland, under the Misuse of Drugs Act, 1977.

ADDENDUM:

Since writing this paper, the Government has given detailed consideration to the various recommendations of the Special Government Task Force on Drug Abuse, and has decided to implement without delay the decisions with regard to:

1. Law Enforcement.
2. Treatment Facilities.
3. Education.
4. Community and Youth Development.
5. Research.
6. National Co-ordinating Committee on Drug Abuse.