

Prevalence of Opiate Use in Ireland 2000-2001

A 3-Source Capture-recapture Study (2004)



Research Conducted by:

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Aim:

To estimate the prevalence of opiate users.

Method:

Prevalence estimates were determined by identifying the number of individuals in three data sources: Central Drug Treatment List, National Garda Study on Drugs, Crime and Related Criminal Activity, and the Hospital In-Patient Enquiry Database (HIPE) and the overlap of those appearing in one, two or three data sets. The numbers were then modelled using a statistical technique to provide an estimate. Anonymised information was sought on opiate users such as the person's initials, date of birth, and gender in order to provide a reliable match across three sources and eliminate duplicates. The Capture-recapture methodology (CRM) is the principal indirect method for estimating the prevalence of some partially hidden population such as opiate users. It has been extensively used in population-based opiate prevalence studies, both abroad and in Ireland, and is recommended by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in Lisbon.

Findings:

- This is the first national prevalence estimate for Ireland. Results show that there was an estimate of 14,158 opiate users aged 15-64 in 2000 with a modest rise to 14,452 for 2001. However the rate of 5.6 opiate users per 1,000 of population remained the same.
- The estimated number of opiate users in Dublin for the year 2000 was 12,268 rising to 12,456 for 2001. This represents a rate of 15.9 opiate users per thousand of the population in the years 2000 and 2001.
- Data for Dublin only was available in 1996 for those aged 15-54. When compared with 2001 striking differences were observed. There was a statistically significant decrease in the number of young males aged 15-24 starting heroin use over the time period. There was also a substantial drop in overall numbers using heroin, although this was not statistically significant.
- There was an increase in the number of young women aged 25-34 using opiates and this was statistically significant.
- The rest of Ireland (excluding Dublin) estimates are 2,526 for the year 2000 and 2,225 for the year 2001. This represents a rate of 1.4 per 1000 in 2000 and 1.2 per 1000 in 2001.