

# An Overview of Cocaine Use in Ireland (2003)

## Research conducted by:

The NACD presents an overview of cocaine use in Ireland by combining data from a range of sources.

## Aim:

To provide baseline information on cocaine use in Ireland.

## Method:

Indicator data from population studies, criminal justice data, laboratory data, drug treatment data, user surveys and anecdotal information were examined to calculate the nature and extent of cocaine use within the population.

## Key Findings:

- About cocaine: The effects include euphoria, increased energy and excited state. The side effects include headache, insomnia, loss of appetite, agitation, irrational behaviour, aggression and paranoia. Physically it affects the heart, lungs and brain, causing heart attacks, respiratory distress, strokes and kidney failure, all of which can result in fatalities.
- The mode of administration - snorting, inhaling and injecting - carries with it varying degrees of risk.
- A prevalence survey revealed that 3% of respondents reported ever using cocaine. Lifetime prevalence (5%) was highest among 15-24 year olds. Males reported more than double the rate of lifetime cocaine use than females. Cocaine was the fourth most commonly used drug after cannabis, magic mushrooms and ecstasy.
- Increases reported in cocaine use from 1.8% of males in 1998 to 3% in 2002 and from 0.6% of females in 1998 to 1.9% in 2002, however, no change amongst 16 year old school goers at 2% between 1995 and 1999.
- Cocaine use crosses all social strata with increasing visibility on the pub and club scene.
- Substantial increases were noted across other indicators (positive samples in drug treatment population, increasing drug seizures, other surveys and drug treatment data).
- Recognised treatment for cocaine dependence:
  - Some pharmacotherapies have effects on symptoms but there is no drug of substitution;
  - Individual and/or group counselling is effective;
  - Cognitive behavioral therapy is effective;
  - Self help groups and peer leadership have provided benefits to users in treating symptoms and retaining in treatment;
  - Acupuncture can be helpful;
  - Outpatient programmes for moderate problems and residential programmes for severe problems are recommended;
  - Rapport and empathy are important together with early appointments and reduced waiting time.

## NACD Recommendations to Government:

- The report dispels the myth that cocaine is a clean and safe drug with few health complications.
- The perceptions of cocaine as a safe drug need to be addressed given the level of risk behaviours associated with sharing equipment for injecting, snorting and smoking.
- It is imperative that polydrug use be tackled in prevention and harm reduction programmes.
- There is a need to review the capacity in addiction services in order to increase provision for cocaine users.
- Structured programmes are needed with core services such as individual or group counselling. Cocaine users should be made aware of what services are available.