

NACD Community and Voluntary Sector Research Grant Scheme



Benzodiazepines-whose little helper?

The role of Benzodiazepines in the development of substance misuse problems in Ballymun (2004)

Research conducted by:

The Ballymun Youth Action Project (BYAP).

Aim:

To study the role of benzodiazepines in the development of substance misuse problems in Ballymun; to explore the dynamics of supply and demand and highlight the factors that allow the continuance of a relatively high level of benzodiazepine use within the community.

Benzodiazepines are part of the favoured drug repertoire of opiate users and problem polydrug users.

Method:

Action research methodology combining qualitative and quantitative data gathered from three major sources: community based focused groups, a pharmacy based dispensing survey (n=751) and a key person who provided a medical perspective.

Key Findings:

- The level of benzodiazepines prescribing in Ballymun may be notably higher than the national level.
- A considerable proportion of patients who are initiated on benzodiazepines continue to take them for many years.
- The conditions that would foster the review of benzodiazepines prescriptions, such as availability of time and adequate patient load, are not normally present in the Ballymun context.

- There is a clear gender bias in the prescribing of benzodiazepines in Ballymun, with women being prescribed almost two-thirds of the benzodiazepines covered in the Pharmacy Survey.
- There is a general acceptance of benzodiazepine use leading to a danger of normalisation which could lead to the misuse of other drugs.
- There is a significant supply of benzodiazepines in Ballymun arising from prescriptions which could lead to the misuse of this drug and making their consumption culturally and commonly acceptable.
- The use of benzodiazepines is not always the appropriate response to coping with reality challenges (troubles with children, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness) in individuals in Ballymun.

Recommendations from the Report:

- Investment in the development of services to complement medical practitioners is needed.
- Development of non-pharmaceutical supports for benzodiazepine detoxification and alternatives to benzodiazepine therapy is also needed.
- There is a need for adequate provision of information about benzodiazepine to all members of the community; this information should be comprehensible to those with literacy difficulties.