

A3 National study of prevalence of problematic drug misuse 2003

During 2004 the Centre for Drug Misuse Research at the University of Glasgow in conjunction with Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health undertook the second national study of problematic use of opiates, benzodiazepines and psychostimulants (funded by the Scottish Executive). The data used within the most recent study relates to 2003 and the population age range 15-54 years. The 2000 and 2003 studies used similar methods (ie capture-recapture) in order to facilitate comparisons between the results from the two time points.

The full report is available at (<http://www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/publications/abstracts/prevalence3.htm>).

Key Points

Overview of national prevalence study

- The national prevalence of opiate and/or benzodiazepine misuse was estimated to be 51 582 individuals in 2003. This corresponds to 1.84 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 54 years. The 95% confidence interval (CI) attached to the national estimate ranges from 51 456 to 56 379 (1.84 - 2.01%). (Table A3.1)
- The proportion of opiate and/or benzodiazepine users estimated to be female is 31 per cent and male 69 per cent. (Data not shown)
- Age breakdowns could only be estimated for males: 30 per cent aged between 15 and 24 years, 45 per cent aged between 25 and 34 years and 25 per cent aged between 35 and 54 years. (Data not shown)
- Local prevalence estimates for opiate and/or benzodiazepine misuse have been generated at LHCC, DAAT, Council, NHS Board and Police Force areas. These geographic breakdowns show variations in prevalence between various areas in Scotland. For example, prevalence rates in mainland council areas ranged from 0.66 per cent (95% CI 0.39 - 3.48%) in Moray and 0.69 per cent (95% CI 0.51 - 1.50%) in East Dunbartonshire through to 3.31 per cent (95% CI 3.16 - 3.49%) in Glasgow City. (Table A3.1)
- It is estimated that 18 737 people were injecting opiates and/or benzodiazepines in 2003 in the 15-54 age group (95% CI 17 731 to 20 289). The highest drug injecting prevalence rates were found in Aberdeen City (1.48%), followed by Glasgow City (1.32%) and Renfrewshire (1.25%) council areas. (Table A3.3)
- The national prevalence study (2003) was not able to provide national estimates for amphetamines, cocaine or crack cocaine use due to methodological and data availability issues. However, valid estimates were produced for crack cocaine use in Aberdeen City. Here it was estimated that around 0.72 per cent of the 15-54 year old population use crack cocaine, with the majority of these people thought to also be misusing opiates. (Data not shown)

Trends – 2000 and 2003

- Overall the prevalence of problem drug use has decreased in Scotland from 55 800 (95% CI 1.92 - 2.09%) in 2000 to 51 582 (95% CI 1.84 - 2.01%) in 2003. This decrease is statistically significant at the 90% level and is thus indicative of a true decline in problem drug use prevalence. Significant decreases at the 95% level in prevalence were found in the Aberdeen, Glasgow City and North Lanarkshire areas. In contrast, significant increases were seen in Dumfries and Galloway and South Ayrshire. (Table A3.5)
- The estimate that 0.67 per cent of 15-54 year olds were injecting drugs in mainland Scotland in 2003 is a reduction from the earlier 2000 estimate of 0.87 per cent - however, this change does not reach statistical significance. (Data not shown)
- There was a statistically significant decrease in injecting rates in Greater Glasgow NHS Board area, decreasing from 1.4 per cent (95% CI 1.0 - 2.6%) in 2000 to 0.98 per cent (95% CI 0.89 - 1.09%) in 2003. A similar, but not significant decrease was seen in the Grampian NHS Board area where the prevalence also dropped from approximate 1.4 per cent to approximately 1.0 per cent. However there were increases (though not statistically significant) in some other areas, for example, Dumfries & Galloway. (Data not shown)

Background Information

The national prevalence study provides estimates of the prevalence of opiate and/or benzodiazepine misuse for every Council area, Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) area, NHS Board area and Police Force area within Scotland. Estimates of the prevalence of opiate and/or benzodiazepine misuse are also most Local Health Care Co-operatives (LHCC). Estimates of the prevalence of drug injecting are given at the Council and NHS Board area level.

This study has also provided an estimate of the number of crack cocaine users in the Aberdeen City Council area; however there were too few data to provide estimates in any other Council area for crack cocaine use. Moreover, it was not possible to provide estimates of psychostimulant use more generally.

Within the main report prevalence estimates for opiate and/or benzodiazepine misuse are compared with the results of the previous National Prevalence study in 2000.