Exploring Novel Psychoactive Substance (NPS) use and its consequences for police practitioners and substance users in the North East of England

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OVERVIEW

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Aims of the Study

1. To understand how NPS impact on users and police staff
2. To gain insights into the challenges posed by mental health and NPS use
3. To understand how NPS users experience police custody
4. Identify key areas of priority
Overview of NPS

- Novel psychoactive substances (aka ‘legal highs’) contain one or more chemical substances
- Effects similar to other ‘traditional’ drugs
- NPS are generally manufactured overseas
- Different categories: stimulants/downers/Hallucinogenic drugs/ Synthetic Cannabinoids/ Disassociative
The UK Psychoactive Substances Act: 26 May 2016
The Study

Fieldwork - conducted between June-Sept 2016.

- **Police Staff**: 15 semi-structured interviews conducted:
  n=4 female and 11 males; n=1 Sergeant, n=1 Senior Police staff, n=13 DOs

- **NPS Users**: 25 semi-structured interviews conducted:
  n=9 female, n=16 male; 18-46 years old; n=8 infrequent user; n=12 current user; n=5 ex user; n=25 Caucasian; n=3 self identified as LGBT
Understanding the impact of NPS
Impact on Staff

“I mean, we’ve got a duty of care to make sure they’re safe, and that’s the real problem … if they start harming themselves … it puts officers and staff at risk. It’s also resource intensive; we might have to handcuff them, we might have to leave an officer with them on close proximity supervision, and it’s just very resource intensive. And it’s possibly dangerous for us, and dangerous for the individual that we’re trying to restrain.”

- Drain on time and resources
- Additional stress
- Require more care than other detainees
"Some of them come in kicking and screaming, and kicking off. Some of them come in quite calm, but get worse as they’ve been in here … They’re absolutely horrendous. I’ve seen people hallucinating, screaming, sweating, violent, extraordinarily strong for their size."

- Unknown effects
- Different behaviour
- Challenge to manage
‘I’ve already been pulled off the bridge twice last week, off the High Level. I got pulled, well I didn’t get pulled off I got talked off by the police just saying, “Now mate it’s not worth jumping and this, that…” I go, “Here mate you haven’t lived a life like I lived.’ Male, NPSUR03
'I will ask for things like blues or even yellows [...] To calm me down so I can get some sleep because police stations are noisy. They don’t seem to get the whole grasp of addictions [...] If you haven’t got any legal high in your system then it is like a war zone going on inside your body because one wants to be sick, one wants to have a shit and the other is telling you shout. The other one saying, “I need to get to sleep.” Sweat is just not nice.’ Female, NPSUR16
Key Priorities

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- Understanding **intersections** with other substances
- Managing issues of risk/safety for users and staff in custody – **training and custody nurse**
- Quantity, potency and mix of substances create unpredictability – **Harm reduction messages**
- Care **pathways** for existing NPS users
Dissemination

NPS Conference, UK

Public Health England North East Clinical Commissioning Group

North East Crime Research Network Conference

The Association of Forensic Science Conference

N8 PRP Conference, Greater Manchester Police HQ

N8 PRP Policing Innovation Forum

The VI International Conference on Novel Psychoactive Substances, Maastricht.
Exploring the intersections between novel psychoactive substances (NPS) and other substance use in a police custody suite setting in the north east of England

Michelle Addison, Kelly Stockdale, Ruth McGovern, William McGovern, Iain McKinnon, Lisa Crowe, Lisa Hogan & Eileen Kaner
Publications

Which individual, social and environmental influences shape key phases in the amphetamine type stimulant use trajectory? A systematic narrative review and thematic synthesis of the qualitative literature

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ABSTRACT

Background and aims: There is limited evidence on what shapes amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS) use trajectories. This systematic narrative review and qualitative synthesis aimed to identify individual, social and environmental influences shaping key phases in the ATS use trajectory: initiation, continuation, increase/relapse and decrease/abstinence.

Methods: MEDLINE, PsycINFO, EMBASE, and PROQUEST (social science premium collection) were searched from 2000 to 2018. Studies of any qualitative design were eligible for inclusion. Extracted data were analysed according to key phases within drug pathways, and then cross-analysed for individual, social and environmental influences.

Results: Forty-four papers based on 39 unique studies were included, reporting the views of 1879 ATS users. Participants were aged 14–58 years, from varied socio-economic and demographic groups, and located in North America, Europe, Australasia and South East Asia. Reasons for initiation included: to boost performance at work and in sexual relationships; to promote a sense of social ‘belonging’ and help manage stress. Similar reasons motivated continued use, combined with the challenge of managing withdrawal effects in long-term users. Increased tolerance and/or experiencing a critical life event led to escalation.

Conclusion: The qualitative overview and thematic synthesis demonstrate that ATS users are diverse and face multiple challenges. Understanding the complex pathways to ATS use requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach.
Spice and police custody: there must be a better way

May 10, 2017 11.33am BST

BORIS ROESSLER/REUTERS

A string of shocking videos showing users of the drug “spice” in frozen and catatonic states on Britain’s streets and in prisons have sparked a national debate about how to deal with the substance and its users. But these disturbing images are just a snapshot. The true cost is yet to be counted and it is frontline police staff who are bearing the brunt at a time when they are least prepared to face such a worrying phenomena.

Author

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Impact

**Home Office**

- Shared the outputs of our research on NPS

**BBC Panorama**

- Invited to take part in BBC Panorama programme – had to decline

**ACMD**

- Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
  - Submitted evidence to the *Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs: Call for Evidence* (2018)
  - CustodyCommunity Transitions
Links to Other Research

NPS in prisons

ATTUNE

The Wellcome Trust
Spice, Spice Kick, Clockwork Orange, Sonic Blue, Ramshot, Zombie Mario Mind Trip, Royal Exodus, Red Exodus, Blue Exodus, Black Exodus, Mephedrone, Red Dragon, China White, Salvia, Pandora’s Box, Pandora Unleashed, Pandora Reborn, Space Cadet, Blue Cheese, Hummers, Insane Joker, Bubble, Poppers, and Ching.
Thank you

Research Team:

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Funded by N8 Policing Research Partnership