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## Drug use and offending: summary results from the first year of the NEW-ADAM research programme

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After two developmental phases, New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) is now a national research programme of interviews and voluntary urine tests to establish the prevalence of drug use among arrestees (suspected offenders arrested by the police). This rolling programme covers 16 locations in England and Wales and each data collection cycle lasts two years. Eight sites are visited in Year 1, followed by the remaining eight sites in Year 2. The first eight sites are revisited in Year 3, and so on. Summary data are presented from the eight custody suites visited in the first year (1999–2000). This represents an interim baseline against which future progress in the Government's anti-drugs strategy will be monitored. Interviewed arrestees are also asked about their offending behaviour (focusing on acquisitive crime), enabling the relationship between drug use and certain types of criminal activity to be explored.

### Key points

- Urine tests of arrestees revealed that 65% tested positive for one or more illegal drugs, and 30% tested positive for two or more such substances.
- 29% of arrestees tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack). A short-term drugs strategy aim is to reduce the proportion of arrestees testing positive for these drugs by at least three percentage points (to 26% for these eight sites) by 2001–02.
- A longer-term aim of the anti-drug strategy is to reduce the levels of repeat offending among drug misusing offenders. 15% of the interviewed arrestees were repeat offenders, regularly using heroin and/or cocaine/crack. The target is to reduce the size of this group by 25% in 2005 and by 50% in 2008.
- Average expenditure on drugs, by those who had used them in the last 12 months, was highest of all for those consuming *both* heroin *and* cocaine/crack, at £290 in the last seven days or £15,000 per year. This compared with £169 per week (around £9,000 per year) for all interviewed arrestees.
- Users of *both* heroin *and* cocaine/crack represented just under a quarter of the arrestees interviewed, yet were responsible for more than three-fifths of the illegal income reported. On average their illegal income was around £15,000 per year – a similar amount to their expenditure on drugs.
- 40% of arrestees who reported using illegal drugs in the last year acknowledged a link between their drug use and offending. Past year users of heroin and/or cocaine/crack were nearly twice as likely (78%) to acknowledge a link.

The NEW-ADAM research reported here relates to fieldwork undertaken in eight sites during 1999–2000 and has been used to generate interim baseline measures for targets associated with the second of the four strands of the Government's anti-drugs strategy, concerned with protecting communities from drug-related

anti-social and criminal behaviour. These targets are to:

- reduce levels of repeat offending among drug misusing offenders
- reduce the proportion of arrestees testing positive for heroin and cocaine (including crack).

**The views expressed in these findings are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy)**

The NEW-ADAM research programme is a key part of the tracking research for setting baselines and monitoring the progress of the Government's anti-drugs strategy. The full baseline against which changes are to be assessed will be generated from data collected in a total of 16 sites over a period of two years (1999–2001).

The eight custody suites visited in 1999–2000 were in Sunderland, Norwich, Newport, Southampton, Wolverhampton, Bournemouth and, in London, Bethnal Green and Hammersmith. Some 1,500 arrestees were interviewed across the eight locations, and 95% of these provided a urine sample for scientific testing. These eight sites are due to be revisited in 2001–02 to assess any early changes in the light of the strategy.

The interim baseline sites have been supplemented by fieldwork in eight further sites in the second year (2000–01) to generate, in due course, full baseline data covering all 16 sites (see Methodological note).

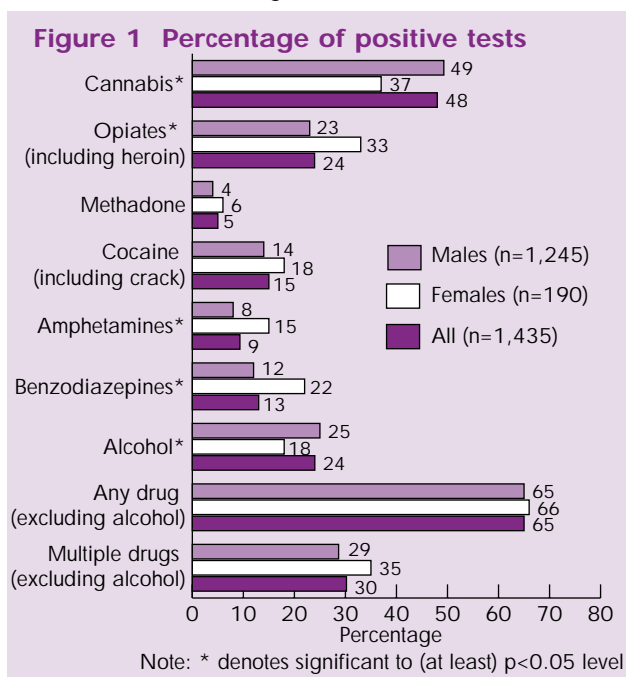
### Drug use – urinalysis

Drug use was measured in two ways:

- collecting and analysing urine samples
- using self-reported information provided by arrestees.

The urine tests provide a scientific analysis to identify which of six illicit drug groups are present in an arrestee's urine and to represent a good indicator of drugs used in the last few days. The six drug groups tested for are: cannabis, opiates (including heroin), cocaine (including crack), benzodiazepines, amphetamines, and methadone. The tests also covered alcohol but, as this is broken down more quickly by the body, the results may represent only very recent alcohol use.

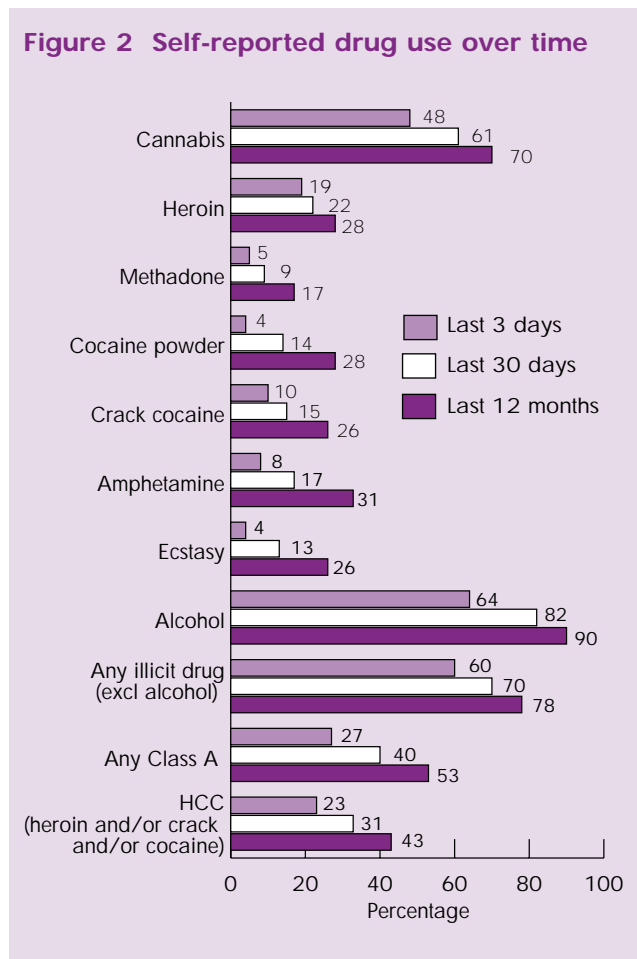
Overall, nearly two-thirds of arrestees tested positive for one of six illicit drugs, and just under one-third tested positive for two or more such substances. Cannabis was found in the urine of nearly half of those tested (see Figure 1). Equivalent figures for opiates (including heroin) and cocaine (including crack) were 24% and 15% respectively, with 29% testing positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack).



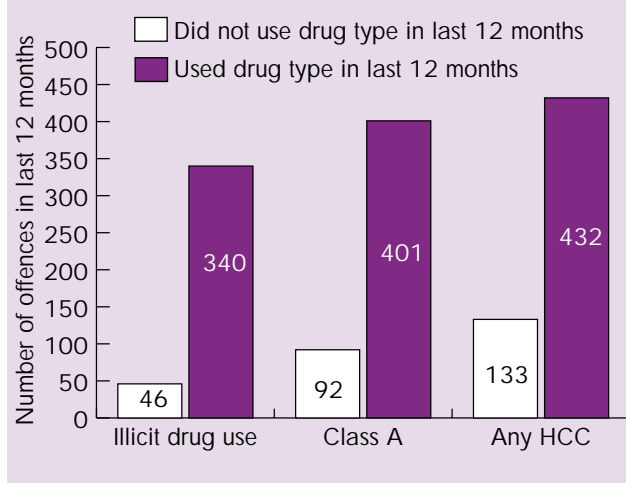
Although the overall prevalence of taking any drug was similar for male and female arrestees, the pattern of substances detected was different. The relatively small group of female arrestees (n=190) included in the survey had a significantly higher rate of positive tests for opiates (33%) than did the males (23%). Female arrestees were also significantly more likely to test positive for amphetamines and benzodiazepines. A significantly higher proportion of older arrestees (aged 25–59) tested positive for all drug types (except cannabis) than did younger ones. There were also some differences between whites and non-whites, with significantly more whites testing positive for amphetamines and benzodiazepines, and significantly more non-whites testing positive for cocaine (including crack). There was also some geographical variation in the proportion of arrestees testing positive for any drug (excluding alcohol) ranging from 58% to 74% (with an average of 65%).

### Self-reported drug use

The self-reported information covers a wider range of drugs, and provides more information on drug use behaviour including the extent, frequency and method of taking drugs over different time periods. In particular, a distinction can be made between use of cocaine powder and crack cocaine. While the prevalence of cocaine powder use is similar to that for crack over longer time periods (last 12 months and last 30 days), self-reported use of crack in the last three days (and therefore nearer the time of arrest) exceeds that of cocaine powder (see Figure 2).



**Figure 3 Average number of offences in last 12 months, by drug use (last 12 months)**



There is generally a good correspondence between self-reported drug use and urinalysis. In relation to most drug types, the difference is no more than one or two percentage points. However, some of those testing positive for each substance did not admit to taking it in the last few days. One-quarter of opiate (including heroin) and one-third of cocaine (including crack) users under-reported their drug use in this way.

For the most part, those arrestees reporting drug use were using them on a regular basis. 87% of those reporting any illicit drug use in the last 30 days had used the reported substance(s) on average at least once a week. 71% had used them at least every other day. For those reporting heroin and/or cocaine/crack use (the term HCC is used to refer to this group) in the last 30 days, 78% had used HCC on average at least once a week and 62% at least every other day.

The average weekly expenditure on drugs among arrestees who reported using and spending money on drugs in the last 12 months was £169. The average weekly expenditure for HCC users was significantly higher at £290.

### Drug use and offending

The NEW-ADAM survey also asks respondents about their past offending behaviour in relation to certain types of acquisitive crimes, including theft, burglary, shoplifting, fraud, handling stolen goods, drug supply and prostitution-related offences. Just over half (53%) of the arrestees reported having committed one or more acquisitive crimes in the last year. This increased to three-fifths (62%) of those who had used any drug in the last 12 months, and three-quarters (75%) of those who had used heroin and/or cocaine/crack in the last year.

Similarly, the average number of offences reported by those arrestees who had offended in the last 12 months varied according to their drug use. Those not reporting any drug use in the last year reported an average of 46 acquisitive crimes over the same period (see Figure 3). Drug use in general, and especially use of heroin and/or cocaine/crack, was associated with much higher levels of offending. Among HCC users, respondents reported an average of 432 acquisitive crimes. This was nearly ten times higher than for non-drug users.

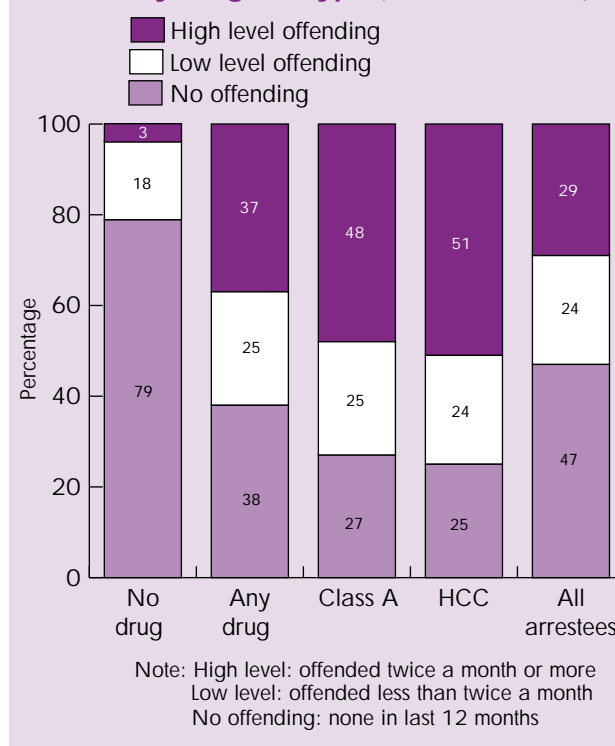
Figure 4 presents the relationship between offending and drug use in a different way. Around half of HCC and Class A drug users, compared with over one-third of drug users more generally, had offended on average at least twice a month in the last year. This compared to just 3% of those arrestees who did not report using drugs and 29% of all interviewed arrestees. Interestingly, one-quarter of HCC users did not report any offending over the last year.

### Illegal income

Illegal income can be acquired in a number of ways. In addition to income-generating property crime (theft, burglary, robbery, handling and fraud/deception), these include undeclared earnings (in which the illegality refers to the fraudulent attempt to additionally gain government support rather than the earnings themselves), drug dealing, prostitution-related offences and begging. More than two-fifths (44%) of those interviewed reported that they had some illegal income in the last 12 months. Among this group, the most commonly reported source of income was property crime (59% of those reporting illegal income), followed by drug dealing (32%) and undeclared earnings while claiming social security benefits (28%).

Drug using arrestees reported higher levels of illegal income than non-drug using arrestees. The average illegal income generated in the last year by those reporting use of any illicit drug in the last 12 months was just over £7,000, compared with nearly £6,000 for all interviewed arrestees. Users of both heroin and cocaine/crack reported the highest levels of illegal income, with an average for this group of over £15,000 in the last year. This group represented just under a quarter of the arrestees interviewed, yet they were responsible for more than three-fifths of the illegal income reported.

**Figure 4 Levels of offending in last 12 months by drug use type (last 12 months)**



A large minority (40%) of arrestees who reported any drug use in the last year, thought that there was a connection between their drug use and offending behaviour. For those who had taken any illicit drug(s) and also reported acquisitive crime in the last 12 months, the proportion was 55%.

Among those arrestees who reported any drug use in the last 12 months, the majority (70%) of those who saw a connection between drug use and acquisitive crime said it was because they needed money to buy drugs. The remainder thought that drugs affected their judgement which thereby caused crime (30% of those who saw a connection) and/or that they used the money from crime to buy drugs (12%). Users of *both* heroin *and* cocaine/crack were more likely to perceive a connection between their drug use and offending behaviour (78% compared with 40% overall).

### Interim baselines for anti-drugs strategy targets

The first year of the NEW-ADAM research programme has successfully delivered an interim baseline for tracking the key targets of the anti-drugs strategy 'communities' strand.

#### Reducing levels of repeat offending among drug-misuse offenders

The key performance indicator is a 50% reduction in levels of repeat offending among drug misusing offenders over the ten years of the strategy (1998–2008). This indicator could be defined in a number of different ways, reflecting the different possible measures of drug use and repeat

offending. Given the prolific offending of arrestees using heroin and/or cocaine/crack, drug misusing offenders have been defined as arrestees using some or all of those substances at least once a week. The measure of repeat offending has been based on self-reported information provided by arrestees covering the year prior to the interview, rather than on recorded convictions. It is defined as reporting two or more income-generating offences per month. The agreed approach to setting an interim baseline is to identify the size of the group of drug misusing offenders who are also repeat offenders, and to aim to reduce the size of this group. 15% of arrestees fell within this combined definition in the first year of the programme which implies that this group should be reduced to 7.5% of arrestees by 2007–08. However, it should be recognised that this represents a period of eight years, rather than the ten originally envisaged.

#### Reducing the proportion of arrestees testing positive for heroin and/or cocaine/crack

29% of arrestees tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack) in 1999/2000. Against this interim baseline, the target is to achieve a reduction of three percentage points by 2002. Looking ahead, this implies that the proportion of arrestees testing positive for these drugs should be reduced to 26% by 2001/02, when the same eight sites are revisited. Again, it should be recognised that this reduction will in practice need to be achieved over a two-year period, instead of the four years originally envisaged (1998–2002).

### Methodological note

1,511 arrestees were interviewed during 1999–2000 in eight police custody suites, all with high throughputs. The fieldwork period in each site covered 24 hours per day for 30 days (or until 200 interviews had been achieved). The dates were: Sunderland (July–August 1999); Norwich (August–September 1999); Newport (September–October 1999); Southampton (November–December 1999); Wolverhampton (January–February 2000); Bournemouth (February–March 2000); Bethnal Green (March–April 2000) and Hammersmith (March–April 2000). Results from Sunderland have previously been published in the last report on the developmental stage of NEW-ADAM (Bennett and Sibbitt, 2000). All but nine interviewees were aged between 17–59 years; 51% were between 17–24. Most were male (87%) and white (82%). The 1,511 achieved interviews represented 59% of all eligible arrestees (the largest groups deemed ineligible were juveniles and those held for drunkenness or breath test purposes). The three factors accounting for the 41% non-response rates were: non-contact between researcher and arrestee (64%); refusal to participate (25%); and other/unknown (10%). Of those interviewed, 1,435 (95%) provided urine samples. Within this final group, 87% were male and 82% were white, the same proportions as interviewed. Finally, two points about urine testing for drugs. First, positive test results generally reflect use within the last three days, except in the use of cannabis (when use may have occurred in the last three weeks). Second, the same type of test is used to detect heroin and other opiates; however, relevant self-reporting tends to confirm the validity of referring to heroin in the NEW-ADAM context.

### Reference

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A full analysis of the findings of the full baseline of 16 NEW-ADAM sites will be published in 2002.

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