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Trends in drug use and offending: the results of the NEW-ADAM Programme 1999–2002

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This report provides a summary of the results of the first and third years of the NEW-ADAM (New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) programme. The NEW-ADAM survey, carried out across sixteen police custody suites, provides information on the nature and extent of drug use among arrestees. There is a particular focus on the links between drug use and offending behaviour of arrestees held in police custody suites.

Key points

Comparison between Year 1 (1999/00) and Year 3 (2001/02)

- Urine tests of arrestees revealed that there was no increase in the proportion of arrestees testing positive for any drug (65% in both years).
- The proportion testing positive for opiates and/or cocaine increased significantly from 29% to 35% across the eight sites. However, at the individual site level this result is only statistically significant for Sunderland.
- The proportion of arrestees who tested positive for amphetamines decreased significantly from 9% to 6%. At the individual site level this result is statistically significant for Sunderland and Newport.
- The number of heroin users that reported injecting heroin in the last 30 days decreased significantly from 56% to 48%.
- The proportion of heroin, cocaine and crack users who reported committing one or more property crimes decreased significantly from 92% to 85%.
- The proportion of arrestees reporting the use of crack in the last three days increased significantly from 10% to 14% across the eight sites. At the individual site level this result is only statistically significant for Norwich and Newport.
- Median expenditure on drugs in the last week, by arrestees who had used heroin, cocaine and crack in the last 12 months, increased significantly from £200 to £300.
- Median illegal income in the last 12 months among arrestees who had generated some illegal income, remained the same at £4,800.
- The incidence of property offending decreased significantly among arrestees who reported using drugs other than heroin, cocaine and crack in the last 12 months.

The NEW-ADAM programme is based on interviews with arrestees held in police custody suites in 16 locations in England and Wales. The NEW-ADAM data collection cycle lasts for two years – eight sites are visited in Year 1 and the other eight in Year 2. This report focuses on the first eight sites visited in the first year of the programme (July 1999 to April 2000). These same eight sites were revisited two years later (May 2001 to April 2002). They were surveyed to explore whether there have been any changes in patterns of drug use and offending behaviour at these sites. When interpreting the findings presented it is important to note that they are specific to the eight custody suites that were surveyed and generalisations cannot be made for the entire arrestee population

3,064 arrestees were interviewed in the first and third year combined across the eight locations: Sunderland, Norwich, Newport, Southampton, Wolverhampton, Bournemouth, Bethnal Green and Hammersmith. Drug use was measured in two ways: urine samples (urinalysis) and self-reported information provided by arrestees.

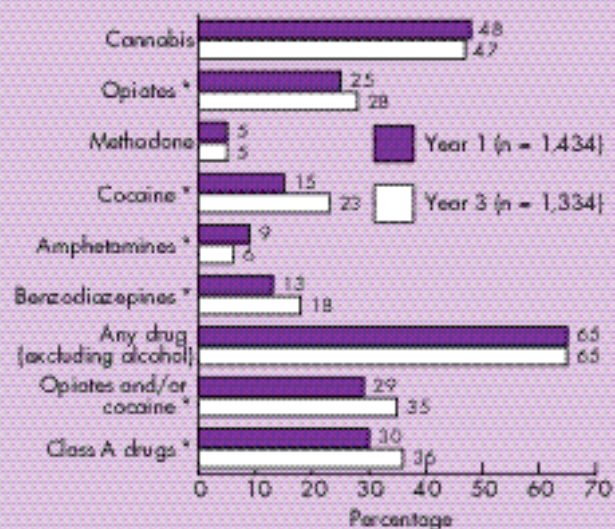
Drug use

Drug testing – urinalysis

Urinalysis is a scientific procedure that can determine recent drug use, in most cases in the last few days. Urinalysis was conducted on six drug groups: cannabis, opiates (including heroin), cocaine (including crack), benzodiazepines, amphetamines and methadone.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of arrestees in each year tested positive for one or more of six illicit drugs (Figure 1). Overall therefore, there was no change in the proportion of arrestees testing positive across all eight sites combined. However, the proportion testing positive for opiates and/or cocaine increased significantly from Year 1 (29%) to Year 3 (35%) across the eight survey sites. In addition, significant increases were also found for opiates, cocaine, benzodiazepines and

Figure 1 Percentage of arrestees testing positive across eight sites in Year 1 and Year 3



Note: * denotes significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 to (at least) $p < 0.05$ level.

Class A drugs as a whole. In contrast to these results, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of arrestees testing positive for amphetamines.

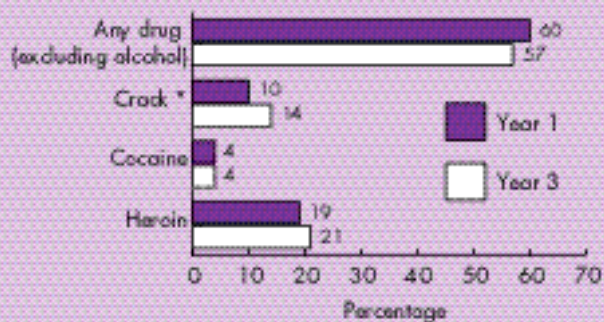
In both Year 1 and Year 3, significantly more females than males tested positive for opiates and/or cocaine. Indeed, 43% of all females, compared with 34% of males, tested positive for either or both of these drugs in Year 3. Similarly, in both years, arrestees aged 25 or older were significantly more likely than arrestees aged 17 to 24 to test positive for opiates and/or cocaine. However, the proportion of males aged 20 to 24 testing positive for these drugs increased significantly from Year 1 (32%) to Year 3 (40%).

Self-reported drug use

In addition to providing urine specimens, arrestees participating in the NEW-ADAM programme were interviewed about their drug use over various periods of time (ever; in the last 12 months; in the last 30 days; in the last three days). These interview questions supplement the results of the urinalysis and also cover a wide range of issues, including injecting behaviour, dependency and expenditure on drugs. Unlike the urinalysis results, the interview questions are able to distinguish between use of cocaine powder and crack cocaine, and between use of heroin and other opiates.

At the aggregate level, the overall proportion of arrestees reporting use of one or more illicit drug types in the last three days decreased from 60% in Year 1 to 57% in Year 3 which is comparable to the urinalysis results (Figure 2). However, this difference is not statistically significant, hence there was no overall change in self-reported drug use.

Figure 2 Self-reported drug use in last three days by year



Note: * denotes significant difference between Year 1 and Year 3 to (at least) $p < 0.05$ level.

At the aggregate level, a significant increase was found in the proportion of arrestees reporting the use of crack in the last three days (from 10% in Year 1 to 14% in Year 3). There was no significant change in the proportion of arrestees reporting use of either heroin or cocaine in the last three days, from Year 1 to Year 3.

Injecting behaviour

Injecting drugs is one of the most dangerous methods of administration and carries a variety of health risks, including fatal overdose. It can also serve to escalate drug use and dependency and the associated individual and

social problems relating to drug misuse. At aggregate level, there was a decrease in the proportion of heroin users who had injected heroin in each time period. This decrease (from 56% in Year 1 to 48% in Year 2 among arrestees who had used heroin in the last 30 days) was statistically significant.

Expenditure on drugs

Arrestees who reported that they had used at least one illicit drug in the last 12 months were asked how much money they had spent on drugs in the last seven days. One of the aims of this question was to determine whether information on expenditure on drugs could help explain the link between drug use and crime. One possible link is that users will resort to illegal means to finance drug use when expenditure on drugs exceeds their current legal income. The analysis focuses on arrestees who said that they had used one or more illicit drugs in the last 12 months and who reported spending money on drugs in the last week.

Seven of the eight sites experienced an increase in median expenditure on drugs in the last seven days. Overall, median expenditure on drugs in the last seven days increased significantly from £55 in Year 1 to £75 in Year 3. Arrestees who said that they had used heroin, cocaine and crack in the last 12 months reported the highest level of median expenditure on drugs in both Year 1 and Year 3. Median expenditure on drugs in the last seven days among this group increased significantly from £200 in Year 1 to £300 in Year 3. (Given the abnormal distribution of the variable measuring expenditure on drugs, the median rather than the mean was used as it provides a clearer summary measure of expenditure.)

Drug use and offending

Arrestees who were interviewed were asked about their past offending behaviour in relation to certain types of property crimes, including vehicle crime, burglary,

shoplifting, robbery and handling stolen goods. Arrestees were also asked about drug supply offences and any illegal income that they might have generated in the last 12 months and 30 days.

Illegal income

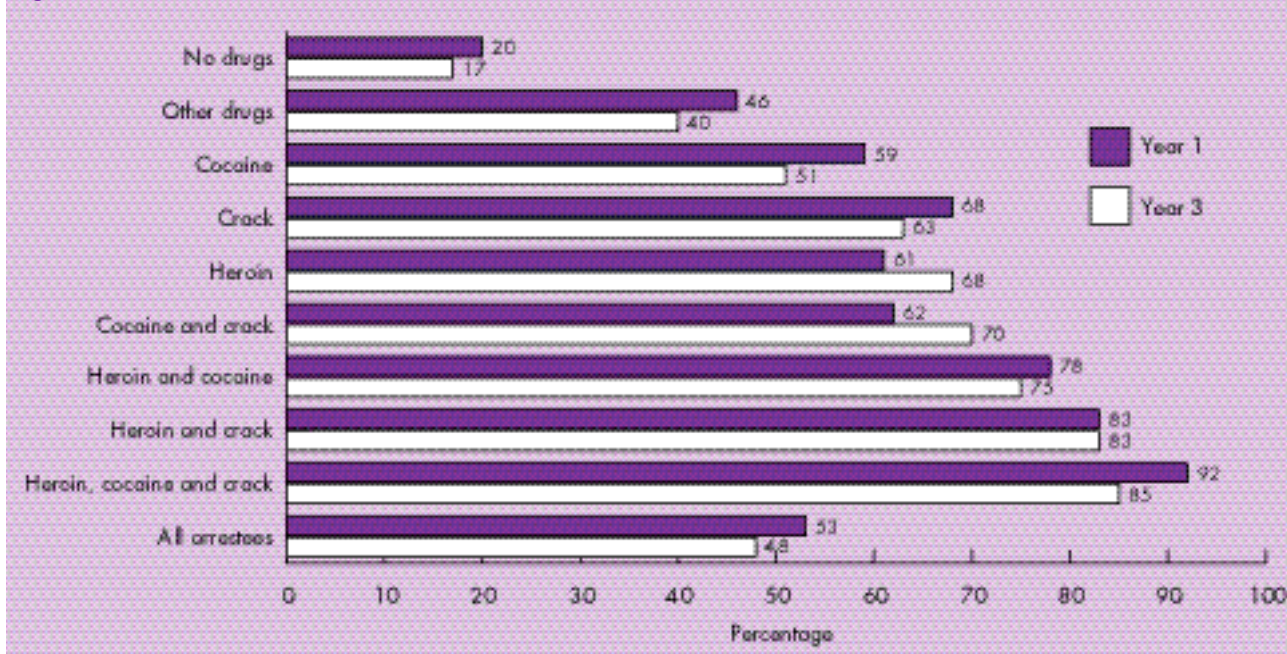
Arrestees can acquire illegal income in a number of ways such as property crime, prostitution, begging, dealing in drugs and other tradeable goods and from undeclared earnings while claiming unemployment benefits.

At the aggregate level, the median illegal income generated in the last 12 months by arrestees was the same in both Year 1 (£4,800) and Year 3 (£4,800). Indeed, there were no significant changes in the median illegal income reported by arrestees over the last 12 months by different types of drug user. In both years, the arrestees who reported using heroin, cocaine and crack in the last 12 months reported generating the highest level of median illegal income (£14,875). Arrestees who said they had used no drugs or drugs other than heroin, cocaine and crack in the last 12 months reported generating substantially lower levels of median illegal income (£1,000 and £1,590 respectively) than arrestees who had used heroin alone or in combination with cocaine and/or crack.

Overall, across the eight sites, the proportion of arrestees reporting property crime in the last 12 months decreased significantly from 53% to 48%. The significant decrease in property crime among arrestees is consistent with the decrease in property crime recorded at the national level by the police over the same period (Povey, 2001).

Figure 3 shows that the prevalence of offending is lowest, at 20%, among arrestees who had not used an illicit drug in the last 12 months. By contrast, the prevalence of offending among arrestees who reported using heroin, cocaine and crack in the last 12 months is over four times this rate.

Figure 3 Percentage who reported committing one or more property crimes by drug use, by year (last 12 months)



Decreases can be seen among six of the nine groups of arrestees. The decreases in reported offending among heroin, cocaine and crack users (from 92% in Year 1 to 85% in Year 3) were statistically significant.

Drug dependence

Drug dependence perpetuates drug use and the individual and social problems associated with it, including any links between drugs and crime. Arrestees were asked whether they had 'ever' or 'recently' felt that they needed a drug or felt bad or ill when they did not have it. Arrestees were asked these questions in relation to 19 illicit drug types. (Questions are based on those asked in the ADAM programme in the US. Internal tests by the National Institute of Justice have found high levels of validity from simple questions based on the concepts of 'needing' the drug and 'feeling bad or ill' when the results are compared with more detailed methods of assessment.)

The data show little change in the prevalence of dependency over the time period. Approximately one-third of arrestees in both years (32% in Year 1 and 31% in Year 3) reported that they had recently been dependent.

Conclusion

These findings provide a summary of change in drug use and offending in eight specific locations in England and Wales which were visited in both Year 1 and Year 3 of the survey. The analysis of the data has shown that overall there was no change in the proportion of arrestees testing positive for drugs but there were changes in measures of drug-related crime at some of the sites.

For an overview of the NEW-ADAM research programme, and current developments in the approach monitoring drug-related crime within the Home Office, please see <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/drugs1.html>

Methodological note

3,064 arrestees were interviewed during Year 1 (1999–2000) and Year 3 (2001–2002) in eight police custody suites. The fieldwork period in each site covered 24 hours per day for 30 days (or until 210 interviews had been achieved). The eight fieldwork sites visited in both years were (in order of visit): Sunderland, Norwich, Newport, Southampton, Wolverhampton, Bournemouth, Bethnal Green and Hammersmith. For results from Year 1 of the survey see Bennett, Holloway and Williams, 2001.

The 3,064 achieved interviews represent 53% of all eligible arrestees (in both years the largest groups deemed ineligible were juveniles and those held for drink driving or drunkenness offences). The main reason for not approaching an eligible arrestee for interview in both years was the absence of a time-gap long enough to complete the interview. The majority of interviewed arrestees were male (86%) and white (79%). Of those interviewed, 90% (2,768) provided urine samples.

With the exception of cannabis, which can be detected up to four weeks later following chronic use, positive test results generally reflect use at least within the last three days. It should be noted that the test for opiates detects both heroin and other opiates (such as codeine). However, the majority of arrestees who tested positive for opiates reported using heroin in the last three days.

The results of the significance tests should be interpreted with caution as the arrestees were selected using multi-stage rather than single stage sampling methods. The sampling method does not provide a nationally representative survey of arrestees, and the results should not be applied generally beyond the specific eight sites and the specific times in which the survey took place.

References

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