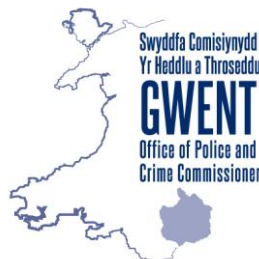


[Inquiry into new psychoactive substances \(“legal highs”\)](#)

Evidence from Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner – LH 22



Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (legal highs) / Ymchwiliad i sylweddau seicoweithredol newydd (legal highs)

Please find responses to questions in support of the above named inquiry. These have been completed on behalf of the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner.

- ***How to raise awareness of the harms associated with the use of legal highs among the public and those working in the relevant public services.***

The education of staff working with substance misuse clients/offenders, e.g. statutory sector (Police and National Probation Service) Private Sector (Community Rehabilitation Company) and third sector providers is a key factor in raising awareness of new psychoactive substances (NPS) amongst this client/offender group and the wider community. Staff should be encouraged to keep themselves informed and up to date with emerging drug using trends, attend internal and external training and completing research online utilising sites such as WEDINOS and EROWID. Organisations should endeavour to assist local agencies and organisations improve their knowledge of NPS by offering workshops and staff training as and when needed. Outreach campaigns can prove successful with regard to public and professional engagement. Current, relevant literature on NPS is an issue that has been raised by individuals and communities in contact with statutory and local services. Experience can prove difficult, due to the constantly changing nature of the subject matter.

Supported with a £5,000 contribution from Gwent PCC Ian Johnston's Partnership Fund, a 60 minute film – 'The Good Drug Dealer' – was professionally developed and focuses on the devastating impact of drugs such as Mephedrone on families and local communities. The film was created out of an identified community need in Gwent and was brought to fruition by the community organisation PACE (Partners and Communities Engaging) which includes Caerphilly and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Councils, Tai Calon Community Housing, Tredegar Communities First and the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board. The

film and the accompanying DVD-ROM education package as well as helping to provide training for best use of the package by teachers, youth workers and police within existing drug education programmes. Both the film and the education package are now ready to be rolled out to all schools and youth organisations in Gwent, free of charge, in preparation for the this academic year with the aim of reaching as wide an audience as possible. Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner Ian Johnston hosted a screening of 'The Good Drug Dealer' at a recent meeting of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual General Meeting in Manchester. Each of the PCCs also received a copy of the DVD allowing them share and promote the film with educational establishments and youth organisations in their own communities.

The Education Pack has been informed by young people themselves and designed for use by school pupils from the age of 14 and over. One student, who took part in the evaluation at one of the trial schools, commented: "The film opened my eyes a lot about drugs and I will never, ever go near them. It made me realise how bad things can get when you sell or use drugs."

- ***The capacity of local services across Wales to raise awareness of – and deal with the impact of – the harms associated with the use of legal highs.***

The harms are very often caused by ignorance of the drug's effects and the fact that these are untested drugs. Ignorance is at the heart of the problem. Local organisations capability and/or willingness to deliver internal and external training on a variety of subjects including NPS and offering therapeutic interventions to anyone over the age of 18 who has a substance misuse issue including NPS has shown to be sporadic. Third sector organisations are more proactive in terms of offering and delivering both internal and external training, this includes a single point of contact phone number (e.g. Kaleidoscope NDAS) which enables the organisation to make onward referrals if a potential service user does not fit for their service criteria. E.g. If the service user were under 18 they would be referred to the Barnardo's B@1 service through the weekly JAM (Joint Allocation Meetings) that are held at the Lighthouse in Pontypool. The JAM enables an all encompassing and universal approach to treatment through a structured partnership approach.

Kaleidoscope have seen Referrals for NPS increase significantly since October 2011 with Mephedrone (MKAT) making up 42% of total referrals to the tier 2 service in 2011-12.

Due to increased public and service concern over Mephedrone usage CRI, funded by the Gwent Drug Interventions Programme implemented a consensual 'test pilot' that was run from September to November 2012 in Ystrad Mynach Police station only via the Arrest Referral team. This innovative pilot study became a model of good practice here in Gwent and as a result was rolled out further in April 2013 and also included Newport custody suite from January 2013.

From the time the 1st test was completed until the end of the 1st year, the Arrest Referral team identified 270 individuals (222 Ystrad Mynach and 48 Newport) to be tested for Mephedrone use with an average of 45% of these individuals self declaring using Mephedrone as their primary substance.

Statutory sector organisations due to austerity measures have lost the capability to deliver both internal and external training around substance use and misuse, e.g. due to the

reduction in budgets this has left a gap which in turn has had a detrimental effect on Gwent Police capability to monitor and deliver both internal and external training on issues such as NPS and associated harms.

- ***The effectiveness of data collection and reporting on the use of legal highs in Wales and their effects.***

One of the biggest challenges in tackling NPS is the limited data collection and reporting on this subject matter. As well as offering a unique service for drug users and professionals in Wales, data collection and dissemination from the WEDINOS project (www.wednos.org) is extremely useful when discussing NPS. Third sector service providers have described it as being one of the most useful tools that they have had as a reference/data source in the last year allowing a better understand the effects of NPS. New information presented can be very useful in a professional capacity, however, organisations and individuals must be cognisant of the fact that NPS using trends change very quickly (with the exception perhaps of Mephedrone) therefore when information is collected and shared it must be done so just as quickly for the data to be of practical use. Engagement with service users is therefore essential to fill the knowledge/data gaps.

- ***The possible legislative approaches to tackling the issue of legal highs, at both Welsh Government and UK Government level.***

Society has become blasé to drug use and misuse, the challenge for Central Government and Welsh Government is to work with communities to challenge the perception that drug taking is an acceptable activity or 'rite of passage' for young people. Focus on Prevention together with a view to addressing the harms caused by NPS and the challenges faced by organisations in providing suitable treatment for users and those affected by their use. Statutory services need to become more involved in this area. An example of this being the consensual 'test pilot' delivered in both Gwent Police custody suites as mentioned above.

It has been recognised that Gwent Police cannot combat the threat of drugs alone. With an ever-diminishing pot of resources, there has been a need to think innovatively about the future, pooling budgets and working together with the community to find effective solutions to these issues. Welsh Government is also an important partner in the innovative development of future commissioning and how to legislate on the growing problem of NPS, there is a danger of legitimising their use; Government needs to take a clearer and firmer stance. It must not underestimate the challenges we face, Police forces and the wider criminal justice system must ensure that they are best placed to tackle NPS use/misuse, there is a need for more prevention and better education, a need for society to be less tolerant of drug use and a recognition between all partners that there is a need for law enforcement to continue, sending a tough message that both illegal drugs and NPS will not be tolerated, whilst, we continue to work more closely together to rid our society of the impact of drugs. This can be achieved with strong collaborative working between statutory, private and third sector organisations, Area Planning Boards and local partnership commissioning of appropriate services.

One of the legislative changes that may be considered is to make it easier for police forces and courts to close 'head shops' which blatantly make readily available NPS to our young people. Experience has shown that proprietors of such premises have little or no scruples regarding to whom who they sell NPS and the potential harms caused.

- ***How effectively a partnership approach to tackling the issue of legal highs in Wales is being coordinated, both within Wales and between the Welsh and UK Governments.***

Local partnerships are an essential part of our work across statutory, private and third sector substance misuse services and these partnerships continue to grow in strength across the Gwent Region. Across Wales and the UK there is far more inconsistency with regards to NPS and the term 'legal highs' is a good example of this. The term is ambiguous, misleading and in many cases inaccurate. It is still regularly used by professionals and is a small but important part of understanding of the issue. Information can only be of practical use if we are specific with our terminology.

A coordinated effort to collate information nationwide is obviously the best approach and this inquiry should serve that goal. Agencies, relevant professionals and the public also have to contend with sensationalist media coverage of NPS on a regular basis and this forms one of the biggest barriers to understanding the subject.

- ***International evidence on approaches taken to legal highs in other countries.***

Welsh Government have been proactive in attempting to address this issue across Wales by advising from a Ministerial level the fact that Novel Psychoactive Substances is the correct terminology for this family of substances and this falls in line with EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drug and Drug Addiction).

The emergence of NPS in the drug markets has gained pace over the last decade. A record number of 81 substances were detected for the first time in Europe in 2013, up from 73 substances in 2012, 49 in 2011, 41 in 2010, and 24 in 2009 (EMCDDA, 2014). The 81 NPS detected in 2013 included: 29 new synthetic cannabinoids; 13 new substituted phenethylamines; 7 synthetic cathinones; one new piperazine; one new tryptamine; and 30 miscellaneous 'other' substances that do not fit into the main categories above. In total, over 300 NPS had been identified by member states by mid-2013 (EMCDDA, 2014).

NPS have been seized in most countries across the world, but there are regional variations in the types of drugs seized. Most NPS originate from Asia (especially China and India), followed by Europe, the Americas, Africa and Oceania. The internet plays an important role in the supply of NPS, with 651 internet shops identified in Europe at the last count (EMCDDA, 2014). Countries are responding to the growth in demand and supply of NPS in three main ways: enforcement; prevention; and treatment. A range of different actions can be taken to place NPS under legal control. These include: adding new substances to the 1961 or 1971 UN Conventions; using the European Early Warning System (EWS) to identify NPS and place them under control; and various national measures which involve using consumer safety or medicines legislation, extending and adapting existing laws and processes, or devising new legislation for new substances. Although these measures may have worked to some degree in individual countries, they leave loopholes in the global control system which can be exploited by drug dealers. Efforts are also now being made to reduce the demand for NPS by educating young people and implementing targeted

prevention initiatives. For example, in Scotland information on NPS is provided on the Know the Score website and to school children through the Choices for Life initiative. (Scottish Government Social Research 2014 - NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES – EVIDENCE REVIEW).

To date treatment for NPS users who seek formal help is primarily supportive and there is limited information on what constitutes appropriate psychosocial treatment for this group.