

Background

In the spring/summer of 2013 the DAAT began to receive anecdotal reports of an increase in the use of so-called “legal highs”.

“Legal highs” is the common place term for New Psychoactive Substances (NPS). Many are currently legal, often unregulated, substances although some – like Mephedrone – started as a legal substance and became banned in 2010. However, “legal highs” remains a catchall layman’s term for this family of substances.

As part of a series of measures and with resources from the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and the BCC Public Health Team, the Bucks DAAT commissioned a “legal highs” Needs Assessment in January 2014. The Needs Assessment included field research, a national online survey (of users and non-users) and a data capture exercise. The full report is now complete and available on request from the DAAT by email to arepenning@buckscc.gov.uk

Major Findings & Impact

There is confirmation that existing Problem Drug Users (PDUs) and high frequency users were switching to ‘legal highs’ use with few, or no sanctions. A core group of injectors have moved from injecting Heroin 2-3 times a day to injecting Mephedrone between 20-50 times daily. Mephedrone injectors are sharing needles with increased Blood Borne Virus (BBV) and associated risks

Legal highs use is resulting in ongoing or escalating patterns of crime and debt particularly amongst the minority of extreme Mephedrone users. Users described house and car breaking, shoplifting, bag snatching and prostitution which they directly related to periods of intense use of Mephedrone. Acts of violence, including sexual assault, were also associated with periods of intense use.

Testing, for those on the Integrated Offender Management scheme (IOM), Drug Rehabilitation Requirements (DRR’s), and subject to a Safeguarding process, is **not** detecting Legal Highs use so many users/offenders are slipping through the net of sanction or support

There is a Mephedrone hot spot in Aylesbury but increasingly prevalent in High Wycombe (and now in Buckingham too). Use of Mephedrone is leading to more extreme and risk related behaviour

The presence of a shop that sells’ legal-highs known as a ‘Headshop’ in High Wycombe is having a significant effect on the locality, particularly at the Hostel for young adults at the Old Tea Warehouse, including increased mental health issues and rising debt with the shop owner and with rent arrears.

The ability to restrict Legal Highs sales are shaped by a lack of appropriate legislation, however this is changing with the announcement of The Psychoactive Substances Bill

Moving Forward

Our research and some follow up work that we have engaged in has increased our understanding of this significant change in drug using patterns in Buckinghamshire.

We are in the process of creating a new Bucks CC Drug and Alcohol Strategy that will include legal highs and adopt a partnership approach to address the issues of drug and alcohol **prevention, treatment and supply**

As well as offering briefings to District and Borough Councils we have briefed BCC Council Members and the BCC ETL Select Committee and we plan to go back to the ETL Select Committee in September to update them on our progress

End