

Bucks DAAT

New Psychoactive Substances

(“legal highs”)

Needs Assessment



Background

July 2013 - Increasing awareness of NPS / Legal High use and their effects in Bucks

Reports of:

- Problem Drug User's (PDU's) switching to NPS use
- Stocklake tented community
 - Both vulnerable & “predatory” people sharing the same space
- Injecting shifting from 3 to 4 times / day to 20+ / day with
 - Use of puddle water for injecting Mephedrone also reported
- Rapid deterioration of Mephedrone users
- Testing regimes circumvented – IOM, DRR, Safeguarding
- Increase in crime linked to NPS use including violent and sexual assault, particularly among Stocklake tented community and Mephedrone users

Early Actions

- Local multi agency meetings with service providers and other stakeholders to discuss reports, share information, map the problem, generate actions to address known issues and assess resource implications
 - The “engagement café” was one of the suggestions followed up via SMART CJS
- Development of a cross border group (Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and other areas invited) commissioners, providers and statutory agencies
 - First met at Northampton Police HQ and then at Northampton Trading Standards to share information, developments in practice, & solutions
- Developed a specification for a formal NPS / “legal highs” needs assessment and sought resource to commission this via PCC
 - Discussed with Public Health and used existing DAAT governance

Needs Assessment Process

- Selective tender, autumn 2013
- Contract award, winter 2013 – CDMR Glasgow selected
- Contract start, Jan 2014
 - Review of existing data
 - Stakeholder Interviews
 - Online Survey - First National Online NPS Survey (users & non users)

- First draft report, completed in July 2014
- Project extended for “fresher's” (Sept 2014) at Bucks New University
- Presentation of findings to commissioners 10.10.14
- Final report, completed Nov 2014

Initial Findings

- Previous reports validated with users tending to fall into 3 distinct groups
 - Problematic Users - Those with pre-existing use of illegal drugs that also use NPS
 - High Frequency Users - Those that use multiple substances (both legal and illegal) alongside a wider pattern of drug use considered to be distinct from a pattern of more problematic addictive drug use.
 - Intermittent Users - Those that use a limited number of substances on an occasional or infrequent basis

Initial Findings Cont....

Problem Drug Users

- Confirmation of PDUs switching to NPS use which are “*cheap, easily available and appeared to be of better purity than many of the illegal drugs on the black market*” with fewer (or no) sanctions
- A core group of injectors have moved from injecting Heroin 2-3 times / day to injecting Mephedrone between 20-50 times / day
- Mephedrone injectors sharing needles / BBV risk
- NPS use resulting in ongoing or escalating patterns of crime
- Testing (IOM, DRR, Safeguarding) not detecting NPS use so users/offenders potentially slipping through the net (of sanction or support)
- Mephedrone hot spot in Aylesbury but increasingly prevalent in High Wycombe and Buckingham
- Seeing migration of specific individuals from Aylesbury to High Wycombe – some seeking respite but also spreading mephedrone use and injecting behaviour

Initial Findings Cont....

Service Providers (includes but not limited to treatment)

- Awareness of NPS is 'out there' in pockets across Bucks but uncertainty over what constitutes an NPS
- Issues with attracting and/or engaging NPS users consistently
- No Opiate Substitution Therapy equivalent for NPS
- Old Tea Warehouse (vulnerable young adults) has a particular issue with NPS use and proximity to 'Headshop' (Ruby Moon) is significant
- Increased mental health issues being experienced and reported

Initial Findings Cont.....

Policing Supply

- Police responses to NPS use shaped by supposed legality and limited resources to test for illegal substances.
 - *“A recent operation carried out with trading standards to seize and test legal highs on sale at a market stall found evidence of now illegal substances in the ‘legal high’ packets. These packages were seized. However limited resources meant that not all packages could be tested and the untested packages had to be returned to the stallholder because, until proven otherwise, they were legally available for sale. As the detective inspector interviewed commented, costly tests can only be used restrictively as this form of policing is not performance indicated and diverts resources from policing that is”.* (page 108)
- The presence of a ‘Headshop’ in Bucks is more significant than previously thought

Next steps.....

- Communicate report and findings
- Create a task & finish project group to review report and translate findings into appropriate action
- Schedule NPS training & development for professionals, including treatment staff
- Review of drug testing procedures – IOM & Safeguarding
- Practitioner forum
- Service re-configuration / development in line with updated evidence base in this area
 - *online presence (forums, website etc) and open access spaces e.g. engagement café,*
 - *clearer service goals & client centred approach – tailoring to need (difficult to provide harm min advice when unclear of pharmacology of drug in question??)*

Final Comments

Experiences of NPS use by PDUs

- Criminal activity was most likely to be reported by Mephedrone users, particularly amongst the minority of extreme users of Mephedrone. The latter described house and car breaking, shoplifting, bag snatching and prostitution that they directly related to periods of intense use of Mephedrone.
- Acts of violence were also associated with periods of intense use.
- Amongst legal high users there were those who reported using shoplifting to subsidise their purchases of legal highs and some had clearly got into debt and rent arrears as a result of prioritising legal highs.
- However the Mephedrone users reported heavy involvement in criminal activity to fund their use: *we were breaking into cars, breaking into houses, selling ourselves because we had really big habits.* (page 69)

Trading Standards:

- General Products Safety Regulations 2005
 - Need to prove that the substance is unsafe (Cheshire West)
 - Notice to mark (Norfolk) ignored then prosecuted
- The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008
 - To stop commercial practices which mislead by act or omission
 - Need to show it affects the ‘Transactional Decision’
 - Prohibited practices easier – indicating approval e.g. “a licensed head shop” or giving the impression that a product can legally be sold when it can’t.
- The intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985
 - Aimed at intoxicating substances that are inhaled
 - Requires test purchase by under 18’s
- Enterprise Act 2002 (Part 8)
 - Civil injunction, likely to need to prove harm
 - Doesn’t cover breaches of GPSR

Buckinghamshire County Council

Thank You

Questions?