



NOVEL PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES INSIGHT REPORT:

“The View from Young People”

RESEARCH SUMMARY REPORT FEBRUARY 2017



Young People's
Health Partnership

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES – THE VIEW FROM YOUNG PEOPLE RESEARCH SUMMARY REPORT FEBRUARY 2017

INTRODUCTION

Addaction is a member of the Young People's Health Partnership. As part of our work through the partnership we have identified a need to improve the ability of health and social care services to understand and respond to young people's use of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS). We decided that the best way to improve this understanding was to seek young people's views on the help that they need and the way that it should be provided.

In autumn 2016 we conducted a research study to gather these views and develop learning points for service providers. More than 1,600 young people gave us their views and opinions during the project.

This summary report explains the main learning points from the research. The full report is available on Addaction's website.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Addaction commissioned TONIC (www.tonic.org.uk), an organisation with extensive experience of researching young people's issues, to carry out the research.

We focused on reaching young people aged under-25 who live in England, in line with the remit of the Young People's Health Partnership. The research methods were:

- Online survey – 1,604 young people responded.
- Telephone interviews – 20 young people were interviewed.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS:

1. NPS USE

- Young people are continuing to use NPS, despite the change in classification, and many of them use a range of other illegal substances.
- Nitrous Oxide and synthetic cannabinoids were the most commonly reported NPS being used, but some young people said they use ecstasy imitations.
- 66% of the young people who completed the online survey had used NPS at some point in their life.
- Many young people reported that they took NPS to 'have fun' and said they enjoyed the effects of NPS.
- A number of young people said they used NPS as a method of coping with a difficult situation. These young people often used in isolation and this was less visible to their support networks
- Young people reported that there were significant adverse effects of NPS both in terms of physical health and emotional wellbeing, with 'delusions, hallucinations, panic or anxiety' reported as the most common effects that had been experienced.
- Bad experiences of NPS use often led the young person to stop their NPS use, but they did not seek help with stopping and instead went 'cold turkey'. They said this was because they didn't know about the support available or worried that they would be stigmatised for their NPS use.
- Young people who had stopped their NPS use reported that withdrawal symptoms could continue for a significant period of time.
- A substantial number of individuals stated that the reason that they started was not why they continued and described feeling 'addicted'.

2. HOW DO YOUNG PEOPLE ACCESS INFORMATION ABOUT USING NPS SAFELY?

- Some young people had researched NPS before using them, through watching documentaries or visiting websites that provide advice on dosing.
- Other young people got their information through word of mouth, from people they knew who previously used NPS.
- Young people clearly stated that they want credible and reliable information about NPS.

3. ENGAGING WITH SERVICES

- Young people overwhelmingly asserted that they would not approach a mainstream drug service for support for NPS use.
- This reluctance to attend a face-to-face service was attributed to: fears about the stigma associated with problematic NPS use; anxiety around confidentiality; and not wanting to be aligned with other drug users.
- Young people said they would prefer to access support anonymously, particularly in the first stage of their contact with a service, so they could build up a sense of trust. This anonymous support could happen through online chat or email facility or over the phone/text message.
- Social media was highlighted as an effective tool for advertising support services.
- Young people repeatedly stated that they wanted to receive support from someone with lived experience of drug misuse.
- Young people also told us that they want balanced information from keyworkers that recognises the pros and cons of NPS use and they want advice on how to use NPS safely rather than a judgemental 'just say no' approach.
- It was felt that both group work and one-to-one interventions could be useful in helping young people to change their NPS use and that this support should be provided as part of a holistic approach to their full range of needs, including general wellbeing, education and employment.
- The importance of diversionary activities was emphasised, particularly activities that **'concentrate on the people and not make it look to them like you're concentrating on the addiction'** (male, 22-23)

LEARNING FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

The combination of group work, one-to-one interventions and diversionary activities will be familiar to many providers of young people's services and the research findings suggest that this work should continue to support young NPS users. However, the study results suggest that services need to do more to reach this group of young people and provide them with effective information and support.

The key learning points for Addaction and other agencies are:

- Use social media, internet and phone tools to reach young people, promote the help that is available and offer them anonymised support.
- Work to reduce the stigma that young people increasingly feel subject to because of their NPS use.
- Develop NPS harm reduction messages and ensure that these can be delivered in a credible way by a range of agencies as part of the support that they provide to young people. These messages should be incorporated into wider health and wellbeing support rather than activities that focus solely on the substance use.
- Consider how to reach young people as they are reaching a decision to stop their use and provide support to help them deal with any withdrawal symptoms.

Young People's Health Partnership

The Young People's Health Partnership (YPHP) is a seven-strong consortium of organisations working with the Department of Health, Public Health England and NHS England as strategic partners to raise the profile of the health agenda across the voluntary sector.

We work to:

- influence and shape the health system to understand young people's needs for age-appropriate services equip the voluntary youth sector to work in partnership with the healthsystem
- support young people to exercise empowered and active voices in the healthcare system
- The partnership includes Addaction, Ambition, Association for Young People's Health, Brook, CLIC Sargent, StreetGames and Youth Access.

Contact us for more information:

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