



## Pathology & Biology Section – 2005

### G91 Patterns of Illicit Drug Use of Prisoners in Police Custody in London, United Kingdom

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the types of illicit drug use seen in prisoners in police custody in the U.K., and the characteristics of such drugs users.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by allowing understanding of the needs of the drug users and the need for forensic physicians to have a broad general medical background, and thus assisting in determining the type of training needed by forensic physicians to manage such patients in the police setting.

Various national and local strategies have been formulated and implemented directed at reducing illicit drug use, and crime associated with such drug use, in England & Wales. A number of these strategies directly involve police (including drug arrest referral workers in all police stations, drug testing for trigger offenses, needle exchange schemes), and thus directly or indirectly, forensic physicians.

**Aims and Methods:** Studies undertaken in 1992 identified the proportion of drugs users seen as part of the forensic physician workload and explored the characteristics of such drug users seen in police custody. The aim of the current study was to identify changes that have taken place in the last decade comparing the number and characteristics of drug users seen in police custody. A prospective, anonymised, structured questionnaire survey was undertaken of consecutive, self-admitted illicit drug users seen by forensic physicians in police custody within the Metropolitan Police Service in London, U.K.

**Results:** In a separate study 30% of detainees seen had dependence on heroin or crack cocaine (1992 – 11%). 113 drug users were studied in 2003. 95.4% gave their consent to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire. Of those consenting, 82% were male, 18% female. Mean age was 28.5y (range 18-49). 80% were unemployed; 29% had no fixed address (1992 – 10%); 65% were Caucasian (1992 – 85%); 18% were Bangladeshi (1992 – 4%). Significant mental health issues (e.g., schizophrenia) were present in 18%; 15% had significant alcohol use; 23% were married or had long term partners; 56% of partners/spouses used drugs. Heroin remains the most frequently used drug – in 93% of cases (1992 – 77%); crack cocaine was used by 87% (1992 – 30%); mean daily cost – heroin GBP 76 (range 20-240), crack GBP 81 (range 20-300). More than 50% of users inject crack and heroin simultaneously. 56% used the intravenous route (1992 – 72%); 25% had shared needles at least once (1992 41.6%); 100% had accessible sources of clean needles; 6.4% were hepatitis B positive (1992 – 25.7%); 42% were aware of hepatitis prophylaxis (1992 – 9.7%); hepatitis C positive – 20.2% (not recorded in 1992); 3.6% were HIV positive. The mean total length of time of drug use was 7.5y (range 1 month – 20 years); 82% had served a previous prison sentence; 73% of prison sentences were drug-related (drug-defined – 21%, drug-inspired – 74%); 54% had used drugs in prison (1992 28%); 11% had used needles in prison (1992 30%); 3% of users stated they had started using in prison. 38% had been on some form of rehabilitation programs previously; 11% had been on Drug Treatment & Testing Orders (DTTO); 5.5% were currently on DTTOs at assessment; 32% had used the services of Drug Arrest Referral Teams in police stations; 10% were in contact with Drug Teams at the time of assessment.

**Summary and Conclusions:** National drug reduction strategies appear to have had little beneficial influence on patterns of drug use of the population seen in police custody. In the last decade there appears to be a substantial increase in the prevalence of drug use – particularly of crack cocaine. Treatment interventions are either not available, not followed through or not needed. In very general terms, the illicit drug use problem appears to have significantly worsened in the population seen in police custody, although there is evidence that suggests that within this population health education and harm reduction messages appear to have had some positive effects.

Drugs, Police Custody, Forensic Physicians