

NORCAS

YOUNG PEOPLE AND DRUGS

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

PROJECT 2009

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RESEARCH REPORT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- CHEC Ltd were commissioned by NORCAS to help complete a research report exploring illegal drug use among young people in Suffolk.
- Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in this exploratory research project to better understand young people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours towards illegal drug use.
- The research survey sample was 1,018 completed questionnaires and three sets of fully transcribed focus group datasets. 92% of the sample was White British. Only Warren Hill and Suffolk College had less than 90% White British respondents. Young women were more likely to complete the survey questionnaires than young men.
- Overall young men reported more illegal drug use (32%) than young women (26%). This difference was particularly marked in the establishments where the sample age group was generally older.
- Knowledge about all drugs varied across the sample from 5% having an "OK" awareness about all drugs mentioned in Ipswich schools, to 36% in Lowestoft College (average was 19% - one in five of the sample).
- Some drugs were perceived to be more dangerous and more illegal than others. Young people had strongly negative associations with regard to heroin. The drug was described as '*dirty*'.
- Young people in the groups were more tolerant of cannabis use. Whilst only half of the group disclosed that they had ever used drugs, the majority of these indicated that it was cannabis.
- 36% of the sample had done some form of drug awareness work this year. This ranged from 13-14% in Ipswich schools to 67% in Warren Hill Young Offenders Institution (YOI).
- Where drug awareness sessions have been received these sessions were reported as having met almost 80% of drug informational needs. However, the proportion of the sample total who felt their actual need for 'drug awareness sessions' was met was only 28%. This indicates that awareness sessions are successful, when delivered but only seem to reach a small proportion of the young people included in this study.
- The research groups made suggestions about changes and improvements to drugs awareness sessions. The first point was about making sessions more interactive and using imaginative approaches to presenting information and ideas about drugs.
- A range of channels was mentioned for how young people in the groups would choose to access drugs information. Both narrow spectrum media resources, such as booklets and leaflets, and broad spectrum mass media internet campaigns such as FRANK were commonly mentioned.

- Perhaps against expectations many in the groups claimed that they preferred to look at leaflets about drugs than accessing this information over the internet. There did seem to be a link between chosen information channels and anonymity, that necessitated the provision of a differentiated approach to accessing information.
- Overall only 17% of young people had heard of NORCAS, this ranged from 6% in Ipswich schools to 47% at Lowestoft College.
- Although participants did not seem to have a good **unprompted awareness of NORCAS** as an agency, 40% had seen at least one of the three NORCAS drug leaflets shown during the survey (**prompted awareness**).
- Attitudes from the focus groups towards the alco-cards and drug cards were positive. Most importantly, the respondents felt that the resources were interesting, informative and attractive enough to be retained in the future or even collected.
- 23% of the survey sample agreed with at least one statement about the positive effects of drug taking on the questionnaire. For those not reporting any drug use, this was less than 1%, whereas for those using illegal drugs almost 80% reported at least one positive effect of illegal drug taking.
- Approximately a third of the sample disclosed ever trying illegal substances. As expected the % of young people who have tried drugs increases with age, but worryingly 15% of under 16's report having tried drugs with 3% of 13 year olds and 13% of 14 year olds reporting that they had used drugs at some time. This survey also found that only 11% of 13-15 year olds had heard of NORCAS.
- Approximately half the respondents in the focus groups disclosed that they had tried illegal drugs. Interestingly, some were not sure if they had used illegal drugs or not.
- 8% (83) of the sample reported having used illegal drugs at sometime during the last week with 37 reporting having used them either on the day of the survey or the day before. 20 of those using in the last week were aged 13-15 with a further 51 aged 16-18. Those using in the last week were spread fairly evenly over all sample sites.
- Of those who have tried illegal drugs, Just over half had used them in someone else's home (54%) and almost half (48%) had used them at a party. Other popular places were in the park and in the street, the least likely responses were pubs and clubs.
- 21 members of the sample had been picked up by the police for taking drugs, of these only 2 were from Warren Hill.
- 84% of the sample reported experiencing no adverse consequences of drug taking, although for those who disclosed having actually tried illegal drugs this drops to just over one in ten (13%).
- The most obvious risks of drug taking seemed to be linked to increased morbidity. The groups discussed the effects of drugs on both short term and longer term physical and mental health. Consensus was that drug taking had a negative effect on all aspects of health, however, the degree to which an individual was affected by drugs was seen to vary.
- Some drugs were felt to be inherently more dangerous than others. Heroin and crack cocaine were mentioned as being more harmful than other drugs discussed.

- Females in the groups discussed how the danger of sexual exploitation existed for those who used drugs. Risks ranged from unwanted sexual advances, date rape, unprotected sexual acts and even having to have sex in order to pay for drugs.
- An emerging issue was how many of the young people in the groups had been affected by another person's drug use. In some cases this had had quite traumatic effects upon their lives.
- The results of the survey showed that 288 answered the question about whether they would like to stop using drugs in the future. Of the 292 who had stated that they had tried illegal drugs 162 would like to stop (56%) this was split evenly between males and females.
- A range of reasons were given for how members of the groups had given up using drugs. The most common seemed to be a change of peer group, of environment or lifestyle.
- It was encouraging to note that 92% of the sample responded positively to at least one statement reflecting the negative consequences of drug taking. Of those reporting that they had used illegal drugs 83% reported at least one negative consequence.