Prevalence of Problem Drug Use in Scotland

2015/16 Estimates
An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

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About this release
This release by Information Services Division (ISD) provides estimates of the national and local prevalence of problem drug use in Scotland between April 2015 and March 2016. The definition of problem drug use combines opioids such as heroin with the prescribed use of methadone or other opioid replacement therapies, and the illicit use of benzodiazepines. The definition does not include recreational and occasional use, and is limited to those aged between 15 and 64.

Main Points
- The number of individuals with problem drug use in Scotland was estimated to be in the range 55,800 to 58,900 during 2015/16. This represents an estimated prevalence rate of approximately 1.62%.
- The majority of individuals with problem drug use were male (71%). The prevalence rate amongst males was 2.35%, this compares to 0.92% for females.
- The rate of problem drug use amongst males and females was highest in the 25 to 34 years age group. The prevalence rates for males were higher than for females in each age group. The rate for males aged 15 to 24 was more than four times higher than the equivalent rate for females.
- The highest regional rate was 1.99% in the West of Scotland compared to 1.37% in the South & East, and 1.17% in the North. The estimates suggest that prevalence rates are tending to be higher in the most populated areas of Scotland, which include large urban areas.
- The latest national prevalence rate is lower than was observed for 2012/13. However, due to some changes to the data included for this study and the margin of uncertainty that surrounds the statistical models and assumptions, it is not possible to conclude that a real reduction has occurred.
Council area forms the smallest unit of analysis. Using council area estimates, it has been possible to produce estimates for health and social care planning regions, and for NHS boards.

Estimates were obtained for each council area using capture-recapture statistical models. This form of analysis uses multiple data sources, which identify individuals with problem drug use, and examines the overlap pattern between them. The estimates are presented with a margin of error, which is reflected in 95% confidence intervals.

The statistical methods used for these latest estimates are consistent with methods used in previous studies. Changes however have been necessary on the number of data sources incorporated into the statistical models. A full explanation of data sources and methods are provided in the main report.

Contact
Richard Dobbie
Information Consultant
Phone: 0131 275 7732
richard.dobbie@nhs.net

Linsey Galbraith
Principal Information Analyst
Phone: 0131 275 6227
linsey.galbraith@nhs.net

General Enquiries
NSS.isddrugprevalence@nhs.net

Further Information
For more information on Drug Prevalence see the Prevalence of Problem Drug Use section of our website. For related topics, please see the Drugs Misuse pages. There are no plans in place for a future release of this publication; this will be announced in due course on our webpage.

ISD and Official Statistics
Information Services Division (ISD) is the principal and authoritative source of statistics on health and care services in Scotland. ISD is designated by legislation as a producer of 'Official Statistics'. Our official statistics publications are produced to a high professional standard and comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Further information about our statistics.