NPS use, harms and health responses to NPS in Europe:
findings from multi-method studies

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NPS & public health responses

• Set the scene by providing a brief update on some recent developments in this area

• Identify some of the public health challenges that are associated with NPS in specific settings and current responses

• Steps forward
What are we talking about?

**New psychoactive substance definition** — a new narcotic or psychotropic drug, in pure form or in preparation, that is **not controlled** by the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but **which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by substances listed in these conventions**.”
620 substances monitored by the Early Warning System

Synthetic cannabinoids and cathinones largest groups
Challenges ahead…

25 new synthetic opioids detected between 2009 and 2016
- 8 new fentanils reported to EU Early Warning System (EWS) in 2016
  - Highly potent, also found in other products
  - Intoxication risk to users and to those accidentally exposed

Acryloylfentanyl
- opioid receptor affinity similar to fentanyl
- 170 x more potent in pain models vs. morphine; but less than fentanyl
- detected in 6 countries
- often sold as ‘ready-to-use’ nasal sprays
- 40 deaths, 35% in August 2016
Current situation

- Still a large number of new substances being identified
- Speed of innovation may be slowing down but overall the total numbers of substances available on the market remains high
- Some ‘products’ and drug classes have become established (SCRA & Cathinones) and some substances persist after control
- Legal highstreet market (shops) becoming less important, and online markets, the darknet, and interaction with illicit drug markets becoming more important
- More harms being detected and some more harmful products available
- To some extent a shift from young recreational drug users to more marginalise groups or specific populations or settings, including injectors in some countries
High risk drug use and health responses to NPS in Europe

Health responses to new psychoactive substances

High-risk drug use and new psychoactive substances

Results from an EMCDDA trendspotter study
June 2017
Trendspotter methodology

Draws on mixed methods approaches and rapid assessment methodologies

Multi-source, multi-method, triangulation:
- Literature review
- Data collection
- Electronic survey
- Expert presentations
- Focus groups
- Social media
Targeted settings – NPS use and harms

Party goers

(Global Drug Survey – 26000 young people)

NPS prevalence higher than in General population

Lower than traditional drugs in this settings

Used within polydrug pattern (Moore et al., 2013)

Educational information, outreach, social media, drug testing,
Use and harms in ER settings

EURO-DEN study (Dines et al., 2015)
12 months – 16 centres – 10 Countries
5529 Acute drug toxicities
NPS: 5.6% (mostly mephedrone)

Agitation, aggression, anxiety, palpitations, hallucinations

Symptomatic management
Use and harms among injectors

Changes in injecting practices

Greece, Romania, Ireland, Wales, Slovenia, Hungary

80% of LTA visitors inject syn. cathinones (Tarjan et al., 2014)

High frequency inject., needle sharing, groin inject.

Localised HIV & HCV outbreaks (e.g. Hungary, Wales)
Use and harms in other settings

Low specialist treatment demand (<2%)

NPS in custodial settings

NPS in chemsex and slamming practices among MSM
The challenges of responding to NPS health problems

- Many of the skills appropriate to illicit drugs in general are also appropriate to NPS. We need to work with professionals in order for them to recognise their existing competencies.

- But there some difference that require adaption to current approaches (sexual health risks, multiple injections, psychiatric comorbidity, drug interactions).

- As NPS use may be prevalent in different cultural groups and settings we need culturally competent services and engagement with generic staff.

- Sexual health, homelessness, and prison services are all particularly relevant here. We need better interagency cooperation, coordination and knowledge transfer.

- Internet sales means that NPS users may be particularly hidden and geographically dispersed. We need to develop new forms of outreach and engagement.
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Health responses – priorities

- Substance identification
- Effective risk communication
- Competence building
- Knowledge transfer & interagency partnerships
Thank you
Health responses to new psychoactive substances

Research paper

New psychoactive substances: Current health-related practices and challenges in responding to use and harms in Europe

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