

Section 1: Introduction

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This report contains detailed data from specialist substance abuse treatment centres in the five sites that comprise the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, namely, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Gauteng province and Mpumalanga province. Summaries or abstracts of other presentations given at the various report back meetings are also provided.

A number of the presentations given on research conducted continue to stress the problems society experiences relating to alcohol consumption. The availability of cheap wine in certain communities and the associated selling practices, causing many social problems, was highlighted as an issue that needs to be addressed. The relationship between the use of alcohol and sexual risk behaviour was also investigated in a qualitative study, highlighting the need to further investigate excessive or 'risky' alcohol consumption as an exacerbating factor in the country's HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Cannabis is still the most common illicit drug used, especially among youth attending specialist treatment centres. Young people under the age of 20 now comprise almost a quarter of the treatment centre client population across all sites, with only Mpumalanga having less than 20% of all patients under the age of 20 years.

It appears that treatment demand for cocaine/crack may be stabilizing or even decreasing in most sites, although Mpumalanga had a slight increase in the proportion of patients with cocaine/crack as their primary substance of abuse during the 2nd half of 2002.

Although the proportion of patients seeking treatment for heroin abuse has not continued to increase in Cape Town and Gauteng, an increase was noted in Mpumalanga. However, about half of the patients treated in Mpumalanga resided in Gauteng.

Club drugs and prescription or over-the-counter medicines are still more common as secondary substances. Currently LSD seems to have almost disappeared from the South African market. Anecdotal reports of the increasing availability of methcathinone (CAT) in Cape Town and Gauteng also continue.

I hope you will find this report of value to you in your work. If you have any specific feedback on the report please send your comments to Susan Hon at susan.hon@mrc.ac.za or fax her at 021-938-0342.

On a personal note, the editors wish to express their condolences to the co-ordinator of treatment data collection in Gauteng, Hennie Potgieter, who lost his son Albert earlier this year. Albert also played a part in making the SACENDU data collection in Gauteng a success by developing a special computer programme for data entry purposes. We thank him for this contribution.

It remains for me to thank Susan Hon for her effort in compiling this report, the various members of the network who have provided data, presentations or comments, and the Gauteng Department of Social Services and Population Development and the Mental Health & Substance Abuse Directorate of the National Department of Health for their ongoing financial support to this project. Their support has among other things been used to collect treatment information on over 10 000 treatment episodes annually, to facilitate hosting regional meetings attended by approximately 200 persons every six months, and the preparation and mailing of reports that are sent bi-annually to over 400 persons.