



South African Community Epidemiology
Network on Drug Use (SACENDU)

Update
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ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE TRENDS: July - December 2010 (Phase 29)

Background

The SACENDU Project is an alcohol and other drug (AOD) sentinel surveillance system now operational in 9 provinces in South Africa: Western Cape (WC); KwaZulu-Natal (KZN); Eastern Cape (EC); Mpumalanga (MP) and Limpopo (LP) (combined as the Northern Region: NR); Gauteng (GT: Johannesburg, Pretoria); Free State (FS), Northern Cape (NC), and Northwest (NW) (combined as the Central Region (CR)). The system, operational since 1996, monitors trends in AOD use and associated consequences on a six-monthly basis from specialist AOD treatment programmes. **This report will focus on data on treatment admissions from the 8407 patients seen across the 58 centres/programmes in the 2nd half of 2010 (i.e. 2010b).**

Latest key findings by substance of abuse (unless stated otherwise the findings relate to the 2nd half of 2010)

Alcohol remains the dominant substance of abuse across all sites except the WC and the NR. Between 28% (WC) and 66% (CR) of patients in treatment have alcohol as a primary drug of abuse. The proportion reporting it as a primary drug of abuse (Table 1) remained fairly stable except a decrease in GT and NR, when compared to the 1st half of 2010. Treatment admissions for alcohol-related problems in persons under 20 years of age are generally less common, but in this period an increase was noticed (except KZN and GT) ranging between 9% (EC) and 20% (KZN) of all patients in this age group (Table 1).

Table 1. Primary drug of abuse (%) for all patients and patients under 20 years – selected drugs (2010b)

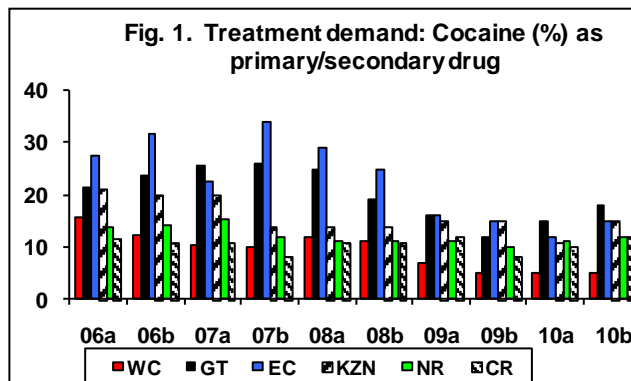
	Age	WC	KZN	EC	GT	NR ¹	CR ²
# centres		23	5	5	15	5	5
# patients		2933	669	707	2884	669	545
Alcohol	All	28	55	44	41	31	66
	<20	15	20	9	10	15	17
Cannabis	All	18	26	18	28	41	19
	<20	38	63	43	62	62	69
Methaq.	All	3	2	6	2	<1	1
	<20	5	1	11	2	2	1
Cocaine	All	2	6	7	6	4	4
	<20	1	3	7	2	2	1
Heroin	All	12	9	5	12	20	3
	<20	7	10	6	14	13	2
Methamphetamine	All	35	<1	9	1	0	1
	<20	33	1	21	1	0	0

1-Northern Region (MP & LP) 2-Central Region (FS, NW, NC)

Across sites between 29% (EC) and 62% (NR) of patients attending specialist treatment centres had **cannabis** as their

primary or secondary drug of abuse, compared to between 1% (NR) and 19% (WC) for the cannabis/**Mandrax** (methaqualone) ‘white-pipe’ combination. In 2010b the proportion of treatment admissions with cannabis as a primary drug increased slightly in NR, decreased in the KZN and remained stable in other sites when compared to the previous period. In the CR cannabis is reported as primary substance of abuse by 69% of patients who are younger than 20 years. Treatment admissions for Mandrax remain fairly low in all sites.

Treatment admissions for **cocaine**-related problems had shown a decrease over the past few reporting periods in a number of sites, but remain stable as in the previous period, with a slight increase in KZN and EC. Between 5% (WC) and 18% (GT) of patients in treatment have cocaine as a primary or secondary drug of abuse, increasing slightly in GT and EC (Fig.1). Relatively few patients younger than 20 years are admitted for cocaine-related problems, ranging between 1% (WC) and 7% (EC), of all adolescent patients admitted from July - December 2010.

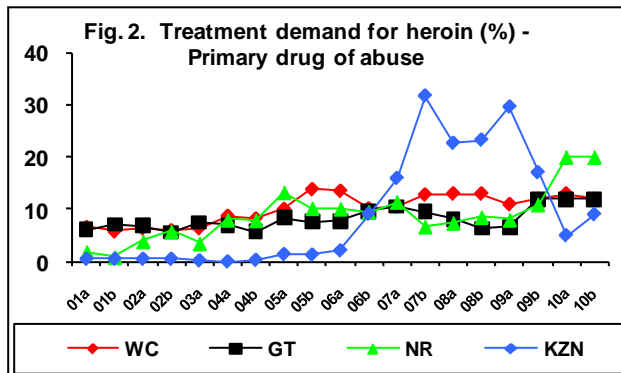


Treatment admissions for **heroin** as a primary drug of abuse remained fairly stable in WC, GT and NR, increased slightly in the KZN compared to previous period (Fig. 2). The decline in KZN since 2nd half of 2009 was mainly due to data not being included from a centre which primarily deals with the use of ‘Sugars’ (a low quality heroin and cocaine mix) among young, Indian males in South Durban; and in this period no data was supplied by this centre. Mostly heroin is smoked, but of patients with heroin as their primary drug of abuse in WC, GT and NR, 8%, 17% and 12% respectively report injection use. Injection use of heroin has decreased in the WC, but decreased in GT (from 37% in 2008b) and decreased significantly in the NR (from 26% in 2009b).

The proportion of heroin patients who were Black/African increased to 62% (from 30% in 2008b) in GT and to 64% in the

* We also acknowledge the input of our provincial coordinators and participating treatment centres

NR (from 52% in 2009b). In GT 82% of heroin patients younger than 20 years were Black/African compared to 79% in the previous period. While the proportion of patients who report heroin as their primary drug only increased in the KZN and EC, a relatively large proportion in Gauteng (14%) also reported heroin as a secondary drug of abuse.



Club drugs and methamphetamine (MA) - Treatment admissions for Ecstasy, LSD or MA as primary drugs of abuse are low except in Cape Town. Across sites only 1% to 4% of patients had Ecstasy as a primary or secondary drug of abuse. MA (aka 'Tik') remained the most common primary drug reported by patients in Cape Town in 2010b; however the proportion declined to 35% from 41% in 2009a. Among patients under 20 years the proportion reporting MA as a primary or secondary substance of abuse decreased slightly to 46% (compared to 51% in 2009b), but remained lower than the over 70% recorded in 2006 and the first half of 2007. Over half of patients in treatment for MA are younger than 25 years. Treatment admissions related to MA use as a primary or secondary drug remain low in other sites, with between <1% (KZN) and 14% (EC) reporting MA as a primary or secondary drug in 2010b. Port Elizabeth has seen an increase of local patients admitted for MA since the 2nd half of 2009.

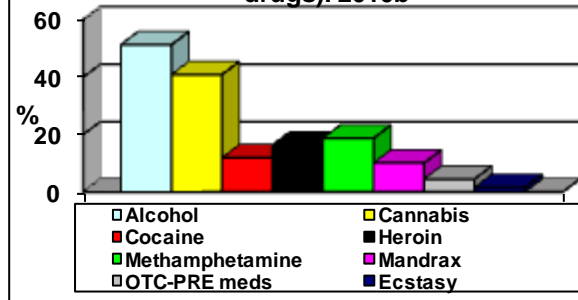
The abuse of **over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medicines** such as slimming tablets, analgesics, and benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam and flunitrazipam) continues to be an issue across sites. Treatment admissions as a primary or secondary drug of abuse were between 1% (NR) and 12% (EC). **Inhalant/solvent** use among young persons continues to be an issue across sites, although the number of patients reporting inhalants as their primary drug is low. **Methcathinone** ('CAT') use was noted in most sites, especially in GT where 8% of patients had 'CAT' as a primary or secondary drug of abuse. **Poly-substance abuse** remains high, with between 32% (EC) and 60% (KZN) of patients indicating more than one substance of abuse.

Other key findings

The **proportion of patients under 20 years** ranged from 18% (NR) to 22% (KZN and GT). In all sites the **proportion of Black/African patients in treatment** is still substantially less than would be expected from the underlying population demographics; however these proportions have increased among young patients in GT and MP specifically over time. In the NR 67% and in GT 66% of patients younger than 20 years were Black/African in 2010b. An overall picture of drug treatment admissions in South Africa based on information combined over the 60 treatment centres in 9 provinces is given in Fig. 3

Between 25% (EC) and 35% (NR and KZN) of patients reported that they had been **tested for HIV** in the past 12 months, showing increase overtime. Overall 4% of patients declined to answer this question.

Fig. 3. Tx demand data based on data from 9 provinces (primary+secondary drugs): 2010b



Selected implications for policy/practice

- Counter the false perception that university students have that most other students drink heavily.
- Initiate programmes to prevent increase in MA use among black African populations in the WC and MA use in general in EC - especially by persons under 20 years (PE).
- Engage medical aid groups more in efforts to reduce the abuse of prescription medications.
- Consider initiating a multi-pronged strategy to address heroin use in EC (East London) and in Gauteng and NR (Nyaope).
- Consider initiatives to address cannabis use among Black African teens, especially in KZN.
- Promote screening for alcohol problems at places of employment and trauma units

Selected issues to monitor

- Increase in patients under 20 coming to treatment for problems related to alcohol use in WC.
- Decrease in age of MA users coming to treatment in WC (especially females) and use of MA by females under 20 in Gauteng.
- Increase in treatment admissions among females under 20 and the elderly in EC (PE).
- Increase in treatment admissions related to the abuse of OTC/prescription meds in persons under 20 in EC (PE).

Selected topics for further research

- Investigate the extent to which the liquor industry exploits/promotes social norms that encourage increased drinking among university students.
- Use of different services by MA users in WC (treatment centres, psychiatric services, etc.).
- Using treatment centre data map geographic locations where problems with certain drugs (e.g. heroin) are high.
- Phenomenon of intergenerational drug use as well as the impact of parental drug use on their offspring.

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www.sahealthinfo.org/admodule/sacendu.htm

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