

Evidence for public health on novel psychoactive substance use: a mixed-methods study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Novel psychoactive substances (NPSs) are drugs, sometimes referred to as 'legal highs', that have recently received a lot of attention from governments in many countries and in media reports. We wanted to find out more about who uses NPSs and why, what difficulties they experience and what might be the best ways to help them. We first used data we had already collected, which were from the Belfast Youth Development Study. We used statistics to see whether or not those who had used NPSs were any different from those who had used other drugs. We interviewed people from different places (drug and alcohol services and prison) who said that they had used NPSs. People who used NPSs also used many other drugs. They used NPSs for many reasons: they liked the buzz, they found that NPSs were cheaper than other traditional drugs or they became dependent on using them. Harms reported after using included mental health problems and heart, liver, stomach and bladder problems. We considered the implications of our research. Our findings help to more clearly explain why people use NPSs in the ways that they do. We hope that this will help experts on NPSs to decide together what research would be most helpful in preventing people from using NPSs in the future and reducing harms for people who already use NPSs in the interests of better health across society as a whole.

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This report

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