

YOUTH MEDIA SUMMARY

**Summary of a feasibility study:
Monitoring youth media as a new source of information for detecting,
tracking, and understanding emerging drug trends**

**EMCDDA
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Executive Summary

In 1999, The EMCDDA commissioned a small-scale youth media study in France, Italy and the UK to explore the feasibility of using youth media as a source of information for emerging drug trends. The main findings are:

- The notion of a homogenous, universal, ‘western youth culture’ is challenged by the great differences found in youth media coverage of illegal and illicit drugs in different Member States.
- Conflicting beliefs exist about whether drug-specific information in media is more likely to prevent or encourage drug use and drug related damage. These beliefs are reflected in different editorial policies and practices.
- Youth media focus coverage on patterns of recreational drug use rather than ‘problem’¹ drug use.
- Drug specific information is mostly confined to self-produced and highly targeted leaflets (known as fanzines) in Italy and France. In the UK, targeted lifestyle, music, and gay magazines also provide information about specific drugs.
- Evidence-based, or expert-based information about drugs and drug taking is provided by media in the UK but not in Italy or France.
- A significant proportion of media in all three countries provides warning of health risks associated with drug taking.
- The findings suggest that drug trends and attitudes to specific drugs could be monitored over time. For example, during the study period (1997 and 1998):
 - cannabis was most often portrayed as being used for psychological effects and opinions about positive and negative aspects of its use were mixed.
 - the effects of ecstasy and its health risks predominated in Italian and UK media. Opinion about ecstasy use was mixed but overall skewed towards the positive.
 - cocaine in Italy and France was generally referred to in a non-specific way with no opinions expressed. In the UK, articles about cocaine referred mostly to its effects and opinions about it were mainly positive. In UK and Italian media, cocaine was presented in a light that was more utilitarian than hedonistic.
 - heroin in both UK and French media was largely associated with injecting. Media in all three countries covered risks for both physical health and dependency and all of the opinions expressed about heroin were negative.
 - information about drugs such as ketamine and GHB was extremely limited.
 - information about tranquillizers and volatile substances was much rarer than information about ecstasy in youth media. This contrasts with findings from school surveys showing significantly higher levels of lifetime use of tranquillizers and volatile substances than of ecstasy.

Conclusions

The low cost method and tools developed by this feasibility study are suitable for monitoring drug coverage in written media. The study shows that youth media monitoring provides insights into the context of illegal and illicit drug taking and, thereby, an understanding of the sought-after effects and the undesired or harmful side effects. The consumer perspectives offered by youth media monitoring are essential for the development of innovative approaches to the prevention of abuse of synthetic drugs called for by the European Action Plan. Additionally, monitoring print media is necessary for a better understanding of whether media information about specific drugs and patterns of use is more likely to prevent, or encourage drug use and drug-related damage.

¹ defined as ‘intravenous or long-duration/regular use of opiates, cocaine and/or amphetamines’

**Summary of a feasibility study:
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understanding emerging drug trends**

Introduction

It is ironic that while information systems are looking to youth media for indicators of emerging drug trends, young people in some European states are looking to magazines and other media for objective, evidence-based information about drugs. This document provides a short review of the key learning that has emerged from the EMCDDA project, 'Feasibility study: Monitoring youth media as a new source of information for detecting, tracking and understanding emerging drug trends'. The primary purpose of the summary is to facilitate discussion on what further activities in this area are likely to lead to the collection and dissemination of more sensitive information about drug trends than in the past. Consequently, the work conducted during the course of this study is not comprehensively reviewed here.

A time lag exists between developments in patterns of illegal and illicit drug use and the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge about associated health and social risks by the drug information systems which monitor them. A classic example of this time lag is the emergence of ecstasy (MDMA) use. In the case of ecstasy, the first published accounts of it as an emerging drug trend were found in articles written in 1985 by youth/style/music journalists. These youth media accounts of ecstasy use appeared long before specialised drug information sources began to report the trend. The perceived poor performance of drug information systems in recording the emergence of ecstasy and monitoring its diffusion and associated health problems, has served to emphasise the cultural and time gaps that exist between emerging drug trends and drug information systems. These gaps - together with the scientific difficulties in validating 'soft' (local, qualitative and anecdotal) information - are obstacles to the rapid release of information to scientists, policy makers, service providers, and the general public about new or changing patterns of drug use and their associated health risks.

One of the EMCDDA's goals is to address cultural and time gaps by identifying new or poorly developed data sources to detect and understand emerging drug consumption patterns. The identification of 'leading edge' indicators² from new sources - closer to drug users - will enable interventions and policy responses to be carried out in a more timely, targeted and effective way than previously.

The EMCDDA commissioned this feasibility study to explore the possibility of using youth media as a new source of information about drug use. It is the first time that youth media has been explored systematically for this purpose. Identifying information to serve as 'leading edge' indicators by exploring the significance, for drug information systems, of drug coverage in youth media is a major challenge. It is probably the reason why youth media has not been used systematically by drug researchers in the past.

The completed feasibility study provides an analysis of 859 distinct units of drug-related youth media from 3 EU Member States. It addresses a number of conceptual, practical, and methodological issues associated with using youth media to identify and understand emerging drug phenomena. The study

² Leading edge signifies being at the forefront of a new trend

was conducted by Gruppo Abele in Torino, Italy, in collaboration with the EMCDDA and drug fieldworkers in France, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

Results

Three key questions that the research answered were: firstly, do youth media deal with drug issues; secondly, what types of youth media cover drug issues; and thirdly, what type of information is given about which substances?

Do youth media deal with drug issues?

The number of units identified that contained references to drugs demonstrates clearly that youth media do cover drug issues. However, the type of coverage varies and appears to depend upon editorial policies and practices and on the interests of target readers. Policies, practices, and interests are influenced not only by market forces but also by the national legislative, political and cultural context. For example, interviews with editors and other key informants reveal stark differences in approaches to covering drug topics. During an interview in France, a magazine editor referred to Article L 3421-4 (formerly L.630) of the Code of Public Health. This Code addresses media issues and stipulates that presenting drugs in a way that is perceived as ‘encouraging’ drug use is an offence. This Code is interpreted by magazine editors interviewed in France as meaning that the media cannot speak freely about drugs and that any coverage of the subject requires great caution. In 1998 an editorial in a large circulation French magazine questioned the logic of existing social and legal constraints saying:

‘In this country where several million citizens consume cannabis with less damaging effects than those of alcohol and tobacco, how much can the media cover without being instantly demonized?’

A similarly cautious approach was demonstrated in an interview with an Italian editor of a large circulation lifestyle magazine who said:

‘I realise that many of our readers are drug consumers and that this is in some way linked to the world of night entertainment. I also know that a magazine such as ours should, so to speak, be obliged to inform. But here in Italy this is not possible.... in the end we choose not to talk, or, if we do, it’s only to invite kids to never take anything ever but I know that these appeals don’t work.....We are an independent journal, which has managed to survive by its own means and from advertising, which is fundamental for us. We can’t allow ourselves to lose our advertisers..... ‘

In the United Kingdom the perspective of the editors interviewed was very different. One UK editor of a wide circulation music magazine said:

‘Mixmag knows that many of its readers take drugs and for this reason we look for experts that can give correct information...We have never published stories that terrorise, giving our preference to documented, responsible information that is useful for the health of our readers’

This UK editor expressed the belief that drug-related articles increase sales, which was not the case in Italy or France where caution with regard to drug coverage was perceived as being necessary in order to protect financial and legal interests. Also, actively seeking information and advice from experts in

the drugs field was an editorial practice identified only in the UK. This practice is illustrated by the following quotation from a recent UK music magazine:

“It’s very difficult to find drug information you can rely on. Each new scientific report seems to contradict the last, and government figures can be loaded with scare-mongering or political spin. So we’ve now collected in one place the most up-to-date information that exists, and Mixmag’s drug doctor Dr Adam Winstock, has cut through the bullshit to tell you everything you should know about taking drugs. We hope this information will help you use drugs more safely and to understand what you’re taking before you drop.” (Mixmag, March 2001).

Contrary to assumptions about the universal nature of youth culture, there is great variation in the type of coverage given by youth media to illegal and illicit drugs in different Member States, depending on editorial policies and practices. It is not clear from the limited exploration afforded by this study how much of the difference is based on the concrete legal consequences of writing about drugs in each Member State and how much is based on other social, cultural, and economic factors. Clearly difference in the volume and the changing nature of media coverage given to drug taking by youth media in different Member States has implications for using it to identify ‘leading edge’ indicators of emerging drug trends in Europe. The different type of coverage by media in Member States suggests that youth media may be used in a compatible, rather than in a highly standardised way, as a source of information. Monitoring youth media over time will provide insights into changing editorial interests and attitudes.

A summary of the volume and type of drug coverage found in youth media of the three Member States during the 1997-1998 period follows.

What types of youth media deal with drug issues?

The type of drug issues covered in youth media include a range of drugs together with a range of topics. These include context of use, properties of substance, perceived advantages, risks and disadvantages. The study shows that in all three countries, the more specific the target readership group, the more the information is detailed and in-depth. In general, media with widest circulation refer to drugs in a very general way or to widely diffused drugs such as cannabis. New and emerging forms of drug use, such as ketamine, GHB, and diffusion of cocaine, are found almost exclusively in low circulation, self-produced media in France and Italy and in media targeted at clubbers and the outgoing gay population in the UK. In all types of media, the provision of health information focuses particularly upon the physical risks and disadvantages. The targeted media is more likely to provide pragmatic information to limit the social and health damage that may result from taking specific substances. In some cases, objective scientifically based evidence is included but this is mainly limited to the UK. 15% of UK media articles quoted directly from experts in the field of drugs compared with between 1% and 2% in France and Italy. Although statistical information appears in few units of analysis, the instance is higher in the UK (7% of the total) compared with 3% in Italy and 2% in France. In the UK and Italy the source of the statistics was generally provided, but this was not the case in France.

The study explored the type of journalistic language used to cover drug related topics and found that, in all three countries, the most frequently adopted styles were narrative and investigative. In Italy, over a third of all units of analysis were interviews and book or CD reviews. In France reviews alone constitute a quarter of all units. In the UK nearly a quarter are investigative reports. During the course of the work, a new category of journalistic language was created to accommodate the pragmatic harm

reduction information in the UK media. The French and Italian media however, seldom fell into this category. The study also addressed the type of media that directly reflects the views and experiences of readers and found that feedback from readers in the form of letters and interviews appeared in a substantial proportion of the UK articles. However, it was rare in Italian media and appeared in one solitary case of a letter from a reader out of 400 French units.

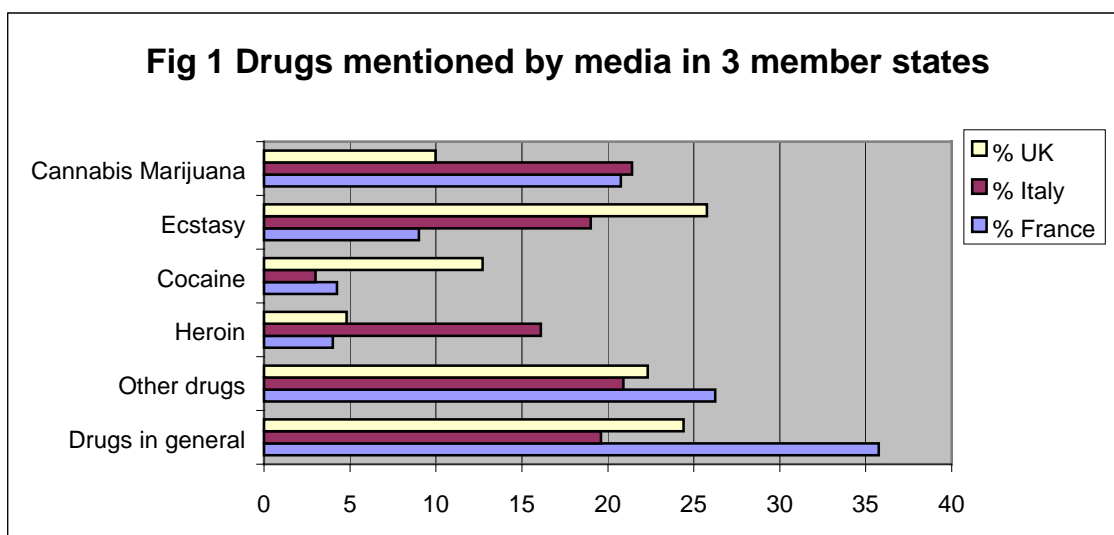
The Italian and French media make greater use of photos or graphic images and illustrations than media in the UK. Over half of the Italian and French units used visual material, compared with only a quarter of the UK. Researchers observed that visual images often have no direct relationship to the psychotropic substances mentioned but appear to be used to evoke a particular nuance.

What type of information is given about drug issues?

In addressing the question of which substances are discussed and what can be learned from youth media about emerging drug trends, this summary first examines the substances covered and then the coverage of topics by each of the three countries. Topics include such things as; the context of use, the place of use, route of administration, dosages, frequency of use, properties of the substances, market information, risks and disadvantages, advantages, purpose of consumption, associated lifestyles and opinions. Finally - and more specifically - the types of information provided about specific drugs are examined.

Substances covered

‘Drugs in general’ was a category label for media which referred to unspecified illegal drugs. This constitutes the largest single category of drug type in all of the media units analysed. In this category, drugs are presented from a mass media perspective which appears to be aimed at readers who are, in the majority, non-drug users. Consequently, articles about ‘Drugs in general’ seldom provide specific or pragmatic health information, except in the case of the UK where articles sometimes address a range of different drugs. Figure 1 shows that over a third of the units in French media concern ‘Drugs in general’ compared with a quarter of UK units and less than 20% of the Italian. The category labelled ‘Other drugs’ includes 19 different substances in total, such as crack, ketamine, methadone, alcohol and tobacco.



The difference between countries in their coverage of specific substances is marked. France gives most coverage to cannabis, less than 10% to ecstasy, and under 5% to cocaine and heroin. Italy also gives most coverage to cannabis, but Italian media coverage of ecstasy and heroin approaches 20%. Demonstrating a very different pattern of media coverage, the UK media gives over a quarter of total coverage to ecstasy, with cocaine in second place, and cannabis third. It is clear from this analysis of media coverage that youth media cannot anticipate other indicators for lifetime drug prevalence. For example, amphetamines receive scant attention from youth media in the three countries that participated in the feasibility study. Yet population and school surveys show that, after cannabis, amphetamines take second place in lifetime prevalence figures. Nor does youth media cover other types of relatively high drug prevalence. For example, tranquillizers and volatile substances were either not mentioned at all, or hardly mentioned, in youth media. Yet the 1999 European School Survey Project shows that lifetime use of tranquillizers and inhalation of volatile substances among 15 to 16 year olds far exceeds that for ecstasy (ESPAD 1999 Report).

It is clear that monitoring youth media will not lead to early predictions of the more delayed lifetime prevalence figures for the main drugs of abuse, currently derived from 'lagged' school and population surveys. However, lifetime prevalence, as indicated by population and school surveys, addresses experimentation rather than health risk. The major goal of the EMCDDA's work on emerging trends is to provide information to enable policy makers to plan prevention and to prevent health risks. Youth media has been shown to be a source of 'leading edge' indicators of potentially rapid diffusion of a new pattern of drug use and associated health risks. In the case of ecstasy, many of the deaths over the past decade were due to overheating and dehydration. The rapid release of information specific to ecstasy to address club environment issues and knowledge gaps of young people - for example about appropriate fluid intake - may have prevented those deaths (White et al 1997).

Working on the hypothesis that the relative frequency of references to a drug indicates potential for diffusion, the relatively low percentage of cover given to cannabis in the UK youth media (illustrated in Figure 1) would indicate that potential for further diffusion of cannabis in the UK is limited. This analysis is supported by traditional indicators (EMCDDA 2000 Annual Report), which suggest that cannabis has reached saturation point in the UK. In Figure 1, the relatively high coverage of heroin in Italian youth media may indicate a greater potential for diffusion of heroin use in Italy than in the UK, or France. This however remains hypothetical. The high frequency of youth media references to ecstasy in the UK compared with that in France and Italy may indicate the potential for further diffusion of ecstasy in the UK. Other epidemiological indicators of ecstasy use in the UK suggest that use is stabilising or falling. There are also indications that the use of ecstasy continues to shift away from large dance events to more geographically diffuse club, bar and private settings (EMCDDA 2000 Annual report). In view of the consumer-minded and health conscious nature of mainstream recreational drug users, it is probable that further diffusion of ecstasy will be significantly influenced by media coverage of ecstasy associated deaths and scientific evidence regarding its long term health risks. However, lack of research about the influence of youth media on recreational drug taking, limits understanding of the significance of different types of media drug coverage.

It should be noted that references to ketamine use, which was an emerging drug trend during the 1997-1998 period of study, only appeared in 1-2% of the total (859) articles. In France and Italy, relatively low prevalence drugs such as ketamine, GHB, and cocaine appear most usually in the self-produced and highly targeted fanzines and in the UK in targeted specialist magazines.

Topics of Information covered

The purpose of the study was to examine the feasibility of using youth media as a source of ‘leading edge’ indicators in the detection, tracking and understanding of emerging trends. Table 1 shows substantial differences between the three countries’ coverage of drug related topics. Topics include ‘Context of use’, ‘Mode of administration’, etc. In 9 out of the 11 topic areas, the UK media cover substantially more than the Italian media which cover substantially more than the French. For the purposes of analysis and presentation, each of the topic areas listed in Table 1 is addressed separately. In reality however, these topics are closely linked.

Table 1
Topic areas by % coverage in 3 Member States

Topic areas	France (400 units)	Italy (168 units)	UK (291 units)
Context of use	14%	9%	30%
Place of use	21%	25%	48%
Mode of administration	10%	18%	25%
Dose	11%	12%	11%
Frequency	3%	4%	4%
Properties of substance	9%	27%	47%
Advantages in taking	5%	30%	37%
Purpose in taking	9%	37%	59%
Risks/Disadvantages	32%	40%	48%
Market information	16%	16%	29%
Lifestyle associated	35%	42%	47%

Context of use

The majority of units of analysis that address context of use refer to drug use in the context of group consumption. This is evident in all three countries although references to the context are significantly more frequent in the UK. There are some references to solitary consumption in each of the three countries.

Place of use

Disco/night club settings were the most usual places of drug use in Italian and UK media whereas rave parties featured most often in the French media. In the UK, the shift from large organised raves to high street dance clubs as locations for the use of amphetamine-type dance drugs was identified in the 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports of the EMCDDA. It should be noted that a relatively high number of ‘other’ entries were made and four of these in the UK referred to drug use whilst driving.

Modes of administration

In the UK, references to modes of drug administration appeared in almost a quarter of all units. This figure approached 20% in the Italian media whilst in the French only one tenth of the units addressed the mode of drug administration. Oral drug use - which is generally associated with tablets and

powders - had the greatest frequency of all routes of administration in the UK which is consistent with the high frequency of reference to ecstasy. In France 'inhaling smoke' was mentioned most often, which is consistent with the high number of references to cannabis. Injecting was mentioned more often in the Italian media than elsewhere and tallies with the high number of references to heroin in the Italian media. However, because of the large number of topics, the numbers involved in many of the variables are too small to represent statistical significance.

Dose and frequency of use

The percentage of media coverage given to 'Dose and frequency of use' is the only topic percentage that is equal in all three countries. However qualitative information reveals that, even here, differences exist between the countries. For example, media content that was recorded as referring to dose and frequency includes phrases such as "a lot of ...", "12 Es in one night", "100 dollars a day", "once a week", and "48 hour long binges". However 'Dose and frequency' also included references to the consequences of certain levels of consumption. For example, the French media analysis includes a number of references to consequences of high or frequent doses in terms of "addiction", "collapse", "overdose" whilst the UK media was more explicit with phrases such as "as little as half a bottle may cause overdose", "2 and a half pills in one night caused a fatal reaction". More rigorous definitions for coding variables may have led to different results.

Properties of substance

Differences between the three countries are very marked in relation to the descriptions of the properties of the substance. Almost half of all the UK units provide information of this type, compared with a quarter of the Italian and one tenth of the French. The great majority of references to the properties of a substance refer to its psychoactive properties. In the UK and Italy, over 10% of units refer to the intensity and quality of effects of substances, or to new and different ways of using substances. Generally, there is limited direct reference to duration of effects, although this may be implicit in references to the intensity and quality of effects. Very few French articles refer to intensity or quality of effects. An initially large category of "other" in the UK was recodified to include "effects on sexuality" as a new variable. This new category was used exclusively by the UK researchers who identified 12 units addressing this issue.

Advantages

Perceived advantages of a drug's use are generally closely related to its properties. Approximately a third of units in Italy and the UK addressed advantages of use compared with only 5% in France. Amongst all the references to advantages, 'psychic benefits' are most frequently cited as the main advantage of drug use. In Italy and UK, 'enhanced energy levels' follow 'psychic benefits' as the main advantages. In France, there were very few references to advantages and, when they were mentioned, they were physical and social benefits rather than psychic ones.

Considering the role that peer pressure is often said to exert on patterns of drug use, there was a notable absence of overt references to social prestige benefits linked to drug taking (other than in a very small minority of Italian articles). Nevertheless, it is probable that social prestige is implicitly linked to other more frequently expressed advantages, such as 'psychic benefits', 'enhanced energy' and 'greater sociability'. It may not be a useful concept for the analysis grid.

Purposes

The purpose of drug use is addressed in over half of the UK units of analysis, over a third of Italian and less than 10% of French units. The most commonly referred to purpose of drug taking in all three countries was 'entertainment'. Following 'entertainment', the Italian media presented 'self/medication/therapeutic purposes' as the second most common purpose for drug taking. In the UK and France 'experimentation' and to serve a 'utilitarian' purpose such as to stay awake, keep dancing, or lose weight, were both equal in second place

Risks and disadvantages

With regard to media coverage about risks of drug use, the differences between the UK, Italy and France are less marked but remain skewed towards the UK providing the most coverage and French the least. Almost half of the UK units of analysis provide coverage of risks compared with only a third of the French. Italy lies between the two in terms of the amount of coverage. The risks most often referred to are 'acute and long-term health risks', followed by 'social and psychic risks'. In the UK media, physical risks associated with particular drug combinations were also addressed. Sexual and economic risks were given least coverage but these may be included implicitly in other categories of risk. Death was an additional risk variable but it is not clear to what extent the risk of death is separable from acute physical risk.

Market information

The frequency of coverage given to drug markets was considerably less than that given to risks, with the UK as in other areas providing the most coverage. Almost a third of UK media referred to drug markets in comparison to only a sixth of Italian and French media. The most frequently referred to aspect of the market was 'availability', which was followed by the 'quality of drugs', and the 'costs and physical descriptions'.

Lifestyle

Between a third and a half of the units addressed lifestyle issues, with the UK giving most coverage. In all three Member States, drug use is associated in particular with music scenes but also with sub-populations such as gay, economically marginal, new age, and artistic.

Opinions

The study attempted to examine opinions about drugs proffered in the media by people such as journalists, 'opinion leaders' and members of the target reader group. The objective was to explore the hypothesis that 'opinion leaders' play a significant role in the development of a new drug trend. In the French and Italian media an opinion was expressed in approximately a third of the total units, whereas in the UK media opinions were given in two thirds of the units studied. In France and Italy positive opinions were rarely expressed though a small proportion of the opinions expressed in UK about drug use were positive.

This coverage of a wide range of drug related topics illustrates how insights into the context of illegal and illicit drug taking can be gained from monitoring youth media. With this insight comes an

understanding of the sought after effects and the undesired and harmful side effects from a consumer perspective, that is essential for effective policy response. However, in general, youth media is a source of information about drug use within recreational and social subcultures associated with particular music/dance settings and lifestyles. The target readers appear to be consumer minded and health conscious rather than representative of 'problem drug users'.

A major difference that distinguishes the UK media from those in France and Italy is that some of the UK media plays a deliberate role in providing readers with objective, evidence-based, or expert-based information. The French media is very limited in both scope and depth of drug information and the Italian media falls somewhere in between.

What kind of specific drug information is provided?

Drug specific information appears most usually in self-produced and highly targeted fanzines in Italy and France but also in targeted specialist magazines in the UK.

With the exception of amphetamines, the drugs that are most frequently mentioned in youth media – cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin - are the drugs with the highest prevalence rates for use or problems, according to traditional indicators.

Cannabis

In the UK media, over half of the articles about cannabis address the intensity and duration of its effects. A quarter of articles about cannabis in the Italian media provide information about its psychoactive properties and a small proportion provide information about the duration of effects. The French media appears to refer to cannabis mostly without providing specific information about the substance itself. In Italy and the UK, cannabis is most often portrayed as being used for psychological effects. In Italy and France the most frequent references to risks associated with using cannabis were 'health risks' whereas in the UK 'negative social consequences' are the most frequently cited risks. Availability of cannabis is discussed in media from all three Member States but considerably more often by UK media. In the UK quality is also addressed. Opinions about cannabis are mixed. Although overall opinion is more positive than negative, there are a substantial number of units in which either no opinion or negative opinions were expressed.

Ecstasy

In both Italian and UK media, half of the articles about ecstasy address the properties of the substance with a smaller proportion addressing the amount used, the intensity and duration of effects, and how it is taken. In the French media there are no references to the properties of ecstasy. Over a half of the Italian units which address ecstasy, and three quarters of the UK units refer to the pleasurable and social aspects of using ecstasy, while advantages of, or reasons for taking, ecstasy are not addressed in the French media. In all three Member States the primary risk associated with ecstasy is that of individual health. UK researchers identified a small number of media that address the risk of drug combinations in relation to ecstasy.

Ecstasy is one of the drugs which the French media provides information for with regard to availability. The UK media addresses both availability and - to a lesser proportion - the quality of ecstasy.

In Italian media, journalists who gave their views appeared to view ecstasy in a largely positive light. In the UK media, where opinion is expressed it is largely tolerant or positive though with a significant proportion of negative opinion. The few opinions given in French media about the use of ecstasy are largely negative.

Cocaine

In Italy and France, cocaine is generally referred to in a non-specific way. However UK articles about cocaine refer most often to the effects and, then to a lesser extent, to intensity, quality and duration, doses, frequency, routes of administration, and effects on sexuality. In the Italian and UK media where the purpose for taking cocaine is addressed, it is presented in a light which is markedly more utilitarian than hedonistic. In the UK media, physical, social, and dependency risks of cocaine use are discussed. The UK media also addresses issues of availability and cost of cocaine. Only in the UK media is a substantial amount of opinion expressed about cocaine. This is largely positive

Heroin

During the period of study (1997-1998), in a quarter of all the references to heroin in the UK media, links were made between heroin and the dance scene. This implies a potential diffusion of heroin in the dance scene which has not been borne out in traditional indicators (EMCDDA annual report 2000, and Winstock et al 2000). In both UK and French media, injecting remains highly associated with heroin use although it has been documented by other sources that heroin is increasingly smoked rather than injected by new users (EMCDDA 2000 Annual Report). In all three countries 'physical health risks' and 'dependency' are risks that are given most coverage. There is almost no information about availability of heroin although some UK media discuss costs and quality. In all of the countries, opinions expressed about heroin were negative.

Information about lesser-known drugs such as ketamine and GHB is extremely limited.

Conclusions

Monitoring youth media is a step towards better detection, tracking and understanding of recreational drug trends among young people across the EU.

Differences between the three countries in the scope and depth of coverage of drug issues in youth media challenge assumptions about the homogenous nature of western youth culture. The study shows that youth media can provide insights into the context of illegal and illicit drug taking. They also provide an understanding from a consumer perspective of the sought after effects and undesired, or harmful side effects, of illicit drug use. This understanding is essential for effective policy response and a prerequisite for prevention strategies and early health responses aimed at recreational drug takers. The consumer perspective is particularly valuable in the absence of clinical human trials to assess the harmful effects of illegal drugs, or routes of administration.

The study raises important questions about the role of youth media in the provision of evidence-based information about drugs to meet the need for information of a group who are widely documented as being consumer minded and health conscious. The results of the feasibility study call for an examination of two hypotheses. First, that the presence of evidence-based information about a specific drug in youth media is an indicator of a readership demand for objective information about that drug;

and second, that the demand for objective information about a drug implies a level of current, or potential, use of that drug among that readership .

The low cost method and tools developed by the EMCDDA for this feasibility study are suitable for monitoring the coverage given to drugs in mass publications, targeted publications and self-produced youth 'fanzines'. However, the importance of using key informants to identify and update relevant media and analyse the contents in the wider legal, social and economic context should not be overlooked. Youth media is part of a broad and changing consumer market, subject to different editorial and media concerns, and fluctuating interest in drug issues.

As in all new trends, a large number of factors relate in complex ways to influence diffusion (Rogers 1995, Golub and Johnson 1996). Monitoring different types of drug coverage in youth media alongside indicators of drug prevalence might provide a better understanding of factors influencing drug trends. EMCDDA's work on the role of youth media is particularly relevant in the light of the calls in the European Action Plan for further development of innovative approaches to the prevention of the abuse of synthetic drugs, taking into account the specificities of synthetic drug users. Youth media monitoring provides the foundation for one such development and is necessary for a better understanding of whether information about specific drugs and patterns of use in the media is more likely to prevent - or encourage - drug use and drug related damage.

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ANNEX

Methodology

Aim and objectives

The general aim of the study was to explore the relationship between different types of media content and other indicators of drug use and to explore the possibility of using the contents of some types of youth media to serve as 'leading edge' indicators of new patterns of youthful drug taking.

More specifically the objectives were:

To identify and select media which may provide information ('leading edge indicators') on drug trends among young people.

To develop methods to collect and analyse references to drugs in selected media.

To assess the feasibility of using references to drugs in youth media as 'leading edge' indicators of new trends of drug use in Europe.

The study was conducted in three countries of the European Union characterised by different drug policies and patterns of drug consumption; it included diverse media aimed at the youth population in each country; and it was a retrospective study in order to assess possible 'leading edge indicators' in the light of more traditional 'lagged' indicators of drug use.

Methods

Within the constraints of a low budget, the following operational parameters were applied. Media produced in France, Italy and the United Kingdom during 1997 and 1998 were selected. This retrospective period was recent enough to facilitate the retrieval of source materials but allowed comparison with both traditional indicators and the findings of drug researchers in each of the 3 Member States. The study focus was on media which addressed drug issues aimed primarily at 20-30 year olds since this was the age range most involved in drug taking and most targeted by a wide range of media. The media content analysis included all drugs controlled by drug laws and illicit use of drugs such as ketamine and benzodiazapines. Alcohol and tobacco were included in the study when used in conjunction with illegal or illicit drugs. Three diverse types of media were selected: 1) wide distribution lifestyle magazines; 2) targeted music or lifestyle publications 3) self-produced media by young people ('fanzines', flyers, etc.)

Specific publications within each type of media were selected on the basis of interviews with key informants, including magazine editors, youth/music culture experts such as DJs and music critics, researchers, drug workers, and target readers.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse a total of 859 distinct pieces of drug coverage (referred to as 'units of analysis') from media in France, Italy and UK. 341 units were identified in mass publications, 414 in publications aimed at a specific target, and 104 in self-produced publications.

In consultation with specialists in media analysis, a content analysis grid was developed to provide frequency distributions of different types of media content. This was analysed using the SPSS computer program. The content grid allowed an analysis by the type of media (e.g. monthly fashion magazine or self-produced cult publication), the type of unit (e.g. interview, cartoon etc), and the type of information provided (e.g. type of drug, pattern of use, drug effect, health risk). The grid included qualitative 'windows' to allow qualitative impressions, and observations by the fieldworkers to be included in the analysis. The analysis grid was tested for inter-rating reliability and amended accordingly. The fieldworkers, who were all experts in the field of recreational and synthetic drug use, used the SPSS analysis together with their interviews with key informants (including magazine editors) to interpret the data and understand the wider contextual meanings and significance of the media being studied. The overall analysis was carried out and reported by Gruppo Abele.

The small scale of the study did not allow for extensive checks on internal validity and therefore some of the concepts employed in the content analysis grid may need further definition. However, the findings based on the analysis - which are described in this summary - were generally clear and consistent.

Costs

On the basis of this feasibility study, ongoing prospective work covering the same volume of material would require 10 hours of a drug researcher's time per month in each participating Member State.

