



Knowledge and Library Services (KLS)

Impact stories

Title: A KLS literature search revealed that there is a dearth of evidence relating to the effects of secondary exposure to new psychoactive substances (NPS) and helped in the production of a joint guidance document.

User testimonial: *“The problems associated with new psychoactive substance (NPS) use within a prison environment continue to challenge all staff working in prisons. The findings produced allowed PHE’s Criminal Justice Team, Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco Division to work with colleagues in Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and the Prison Officers Association (POA) to ensure that new guidance on exposure to all harmful substances was based on sound evidence based research.*

“We are particularly grateful to Rachel Gledhill for her prompt and helpful responses to our enquiries and to the Knowledge and Library Services for the information that they provided.”

- **Dr. George Ryan, Clinical Advisor, and Kieran Lynch, Criminal Justice Programme Manager**

Challenge: To establish the evidence base, if any, relating to the effects of secondary exposure to NPS. Most of the reports available were only verbal reports of staff ‘feeling unwell’ having provided care to a prisoner considered to have been using NPS. These reports were only in a small number of prisons with most other prisons not reporting any issues.

Over time, however, there were increasing reports in the media of staff working in prisons being adversely affected by secondary exposure to NPS, a feature which was captured in a second search in the Summer of 2017.

Solution: A total of 192 results were cited. The articles revealed only one case of secondary exposure causing adverse effects. There were three reports of hair samples being contaminated by secondary exposure.

These results demonstrated that there is a dearth of evidence relating to the effects of secondary exposure to NPS. Using the report provided, PHE staff were able to brief both HMPPS colleagues and representatives of the POA on our findings and to help to develop guidance based around the current research.

Impact: The production of a joint guidance document with colleagues from Justice and Prison teams. This document is the first to address secondary exposure and other harmful substances in a prison setting.

Success factors: Working with colleagues across the 5 Nations, (Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland), we were able to share our findings along with the new guidance that was issued. It was clear that PHE is ahead in not only producing guidance but also by having such a valuable resource as the Knowledge and Library Services.

The potential impact of secondary exposure to NPS continues to be an area that requires further and more wide-ranging research. The literature search revealed a considerable amount of collateral information on the adverse effects of NPS, which will be of significant use and interest to a wide range of practitioners.

Lessons

Several notable points were taken away from this work:

- Be clear what you have been asked to produce.
- Do not try to make the evidence fit the problem and be prepared to stand by the existing evidence base and to make recommendations determined by this evidence.
- Lack of evidence does not mean that a problem does not exist; rather that it is necessary to undertake further research into this topic.
- Preliminary findings indicate that the science relating to secondary exposure and its adverse effects is extremely complex and that new, deep and targeted research will need to be undertaken to establish a reliable evidence base.

Contacts:

Kieran Lynch Kieran.Lynch@phe.gov.uk

Criminal Justice Programme Manager

Dr. George Ryan George.Ryan@phe.gov.uk

Clinical Advisor, Criminal Justice Team, Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco Division