

Emerging phenomena linked to drug use

Trends 15

This summary sets out the observations from the second year of operation of the TREND project (Tendances récentes et nouvelles drogues) (*Recent trends and new drugs*). Its objective is to identify and describe the emerging phenomena linked to use of psychoactive products. Just as last year, there were two priority fields of observation: users dependent on illicit drugs (urban environment), covering mainly the population in contact with care and support organisations and participants in party events (party environment), covering mainly use occurring in a recreational context.

These reports originate from a system of observation which is still widely experimental and which has limited fields of investigation. The TREND project is based for practical purposes on areas where there is a tradition of observation and field organisations capable of extracting the information. It can not therefore claim to exhaust the many realities of drug use in France.

Trends in the use of psychoactive products

Opiates

As in previous years, the significant fact in the urban environment is the wide availability of high dose buprenorphine (Subutex®) on the alternative market. This product is reasonably priced and easily obtainable and is now spreading out from the traditional addict population to touch younger people who are often without stability, living in contact with the lowest members of society.

The use of heroin seems stable after several years in which it has decreased. Access to this product seems to be difficult because of the contraction of small-scale street dealing due to competition from sales in private houses or in more discreet locations. Better quality heroin at a reasonable price seemed to be available at some sites as part of the heroin sold in 2000, probably due to pressure exerted by the increased availability of substitution products.

Average price in francs of one gram of the two forms of heroin at TREND sites in 1999 and 2000

	White (Hydrochlorate)		Brown (base)	
SITES	1999	2000	1999	2000
Bordeaux	1350	1500	700	300
Dijon	650	750	375	350
Lille	300	-----	200	283
Lyon	900	400	500	400
Marseille	600	766	300	550
Metz	800	-----	262	300
Paris	-----	550	475	375
Rennes	700	600	600	600
Seine st. Denis	750	666		400
Toulouse	733	475	450	475
Médiane	733	633	450	388

Today the two substances which dominate the alternative market are heroin and high dose buprenorphine.

The low frequency of medical prescriptions for methadone and morphine sulphate seems to be relegating these to a marginal position on the alternative market.

In the party environment, the most frequently used opiate remains Rachacha, but it would seem that use of heroin, while remaining very minor, is increasing. It seems to be used mainly as a product for regulating stimulant and hallucinogenic products, and more marginally for its own specific effects.

The intravenous method remains the most widely-used of the methods of administration in the urban environment. We also note increasing use of high dose buprenorphine and heroin by the nasal method. In the party environment, the nasal and inhalation methods are more favoured than the injection method, which is used only by a minority.

Stimulants

Just as in previous years, the availability of cocaine and crack continues to increase in the two environments while amphetamines and MDMA are mainly widely available in the party environment. A growing availability of these two products has however been noted in the urban environment. Cocaine remains the product which enjoys the most favourable image with users. Ecstasy and speed have a slightly mixed image while crack still has an undeniably negative image.

The predominant method of administration in the party and urban environments for cocaine and speed is by inhalation, orally for ecstasy and inhalation for crack. In the urban environment, cocaine and crack are also injected.

Hallucinogens

The most widely-used hallucinogenic products today are LSD and hallucinogenic mushrooms. Use of these is mainly seen in the techno party environment.

The wide use of LSD is explained by its low price, its effects (visual and auditory), the possibility of combining it with other substances (which enables new effects to be obtained) and the option of oral administration.

Because of their natural origin, hallucinogenic mushrooms are only rarely considered to be a drug and even less to be a dangerous drug.

Apart from these two predominant products, other substances such as poppers, ketamine and GHB occupy a significant position in the pattern of use.

The profile of users of LSD and mushrooms seems to be similar to that for users of MDMA (Ecstasy). Ketamine users more often seem to be closer to some types of fringe behaviour and rebellion against society.

Diverted psychotropic drugs

The drug family most frequently seen diverted for use consists of the benzodiazepines, particularly flunitrazepam (Rohypnol®). In the most marginalised circles of drug use, flunitrazepam is used to supplement other products such as alcohol, heroin, buprenorphine, even cocaine or crack. Its use in this way regulates the effects of

these substances and particularly increases the feeling of tripping when used with alcohol or heroin or lessens the come-down with products like cocaine, crack and even ecstasy.

Data on use of illicit products in overseas departments

During the year 2000, the TREND project was extended to three overseas departments: Martinique, Guyana and Réunion Island. Apart from rum, consumption of which is historically common to all three departments, analogies and dissimilarities exist both among these departments and between the three departments referred to and metropolitan France.

- Cannabis, as in the current situation in France, is the most widespread illicit psychoactive substance: its use today has become commonplace. However, in the overseas departments the methods of use are different from those in France in that local production dominates the market more and use of cannabis resin is, so to speak, almost non-existent.
- Alcohol consumption is at least as great as in France with local rum production in addition.
- Compared to metropolitan France, the three departments do not exhibit wide use of opiates in general. However, heroin has a greater presence in Guyana and Réunion than in Martinique.
- Réunion stands out with a relatively large use of diverted psychotropic drugs (benzodiazepines, tranquillisers) similar to that observed at certain domestic TREND sites.
- Guyana and Martinique record high use of crack although this substance is totally absent in Réunion and less present in France.

With the exception of atypical use of Trihexyphenidyl (Artane®) in Réunion, the widespread use of natural and synthetic hallucinogens is non-existent or rare in the overseas departments. There is a clear contrast with the mother country where this family of substances is fashionable in the techno party environment. Within this environment, which is still embryonic in the three departments, there seems to be a small-scale use of ecstasy, a phenomenon which seems marginal at the moment but which appears however to be on the increase.

Analysis of synthetic substances

The SINTES system (Système d'identification national des toxiques et substances) (*National identification system for drugs and toxic substances*) database is the result of grouping together four databases. It contains the physical and chemical description of samples of synthetic substances:

- seized by police departments and analysed by forensic science laboratories;
- seized by customs and the IRCGN (state police)
- collected in various environments (parties, private parties, clubs) by people involved in prevention or care. These samples are analysed by two hospital toxicology laboratories (Fernand-Widal Hospital in Paris and Salvator in Marseille).

The purpose of the SINTES system database is to provide objective information, without in any way claiming to reflect the current situation in France exactly in regard to use of synthetic substances, about the content of the samples offered as synthetic drugs. It also offers context data for samples collected from users.

Results

In the year 2000, 1,782 samples were collected, 734 (41%) of them by the specific SINTES project, 682 (38%) by the customs service and 366 (21%) by the police services.

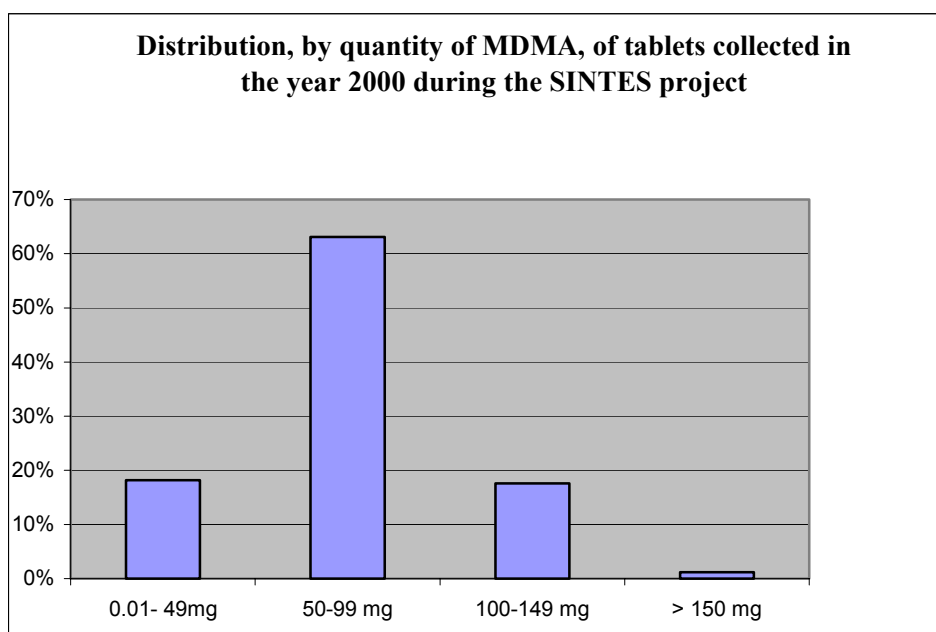
During 2000, the amphetamine family and its derivatives (amphetamine, ephedrine and pseudo ephedrine, MDA, MDEA, MDMA) were the most represented. At least one of these molecules was found in 71% of the samples in the SINTES database, taking all forms together. The two molecules of this family most often observed are MDMA (64%) and amphetamine (5%).

Another stimulant, caffeine, is found in 16% of cases. It is particularly frequent in powder samples since 36% of samples contain it. Medicinal substances, excluding anaesthetics, are found frequently (11%) and most particularly in powder samples.

Finally, we note that in more than one in eight samples (13%), no active ingredient was identified. On this last point, we observe an important difference between tablets (8% without active ingredient) and other forms of samples (at least 28%).

The database has enabled substances considered as rare, such as 2-C-T-7, 4-MTA, DOB, PEA and PMA, to be identified.

In regard to the most frequently found substance, MDMA, the average quantity of MDMA per tablet is 75 mg, which is similar to 1999 (72 mg). The dispersal of doses of quantity of MDMA is high (see figure). Around a fifth of the samples show a large dose (above 100 mg of MDMA).



For the six logos most frequently found in the SINTES database during the year 2000 we observe that the presence of MDMA is very frequent (85-100%) and that there may be a wide variation under the same logo in the quantity of MDMA present (see table). In the same way, other molecules (caffeine, medicinal substances) may or may not be present under the same logo.

Physical and analytical characteristics of the six most frequent logos in the SINTES database in the year 2000						
Logo	Mitsubishi	Couronne	Euro	007	Tulipe	Poisson
<i>Number of tablets</i>	107	40	35	34	31	31
Thickness 3 to 5 mm	93 %	100 %	100 %	91 %	81 %	71 %
Diameter 6 to 7 mm	-	-	-	-	-	48 %
Diameter 7 to 8 mm	-	-	-	91 %	-	-
Diameter 8 to 9 mm	89 %	87 %	94 %	-	100 %	48 %
MDMA	91 (85 %)	38 (95 %)	33 (94 %)	34 (100 %)	31 (100 %)	31 (100 %)
Average dose	64 mg	86 mg	78 mg	75 mg	52 mg	74 mg
Dose > 100 mg	4 (7 %)	11 (34 %)	4 (17 %)	2 (8 %)	1 (5 %)	3 (14 %)
Dose > 150 mg	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Amphetamine	102 (95 %)	38 (95 %)	35 (100 %)	34 (100 %)	31 (100 %)	31 (100 %)
Caffeine	11 (10 %)	4 (10 %)	2 (6 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
Medicinal substances	4 (4 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)
No active ingredient	3 (3 %)	2 (5 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

Because the questionnaires are filled in together with the users, the SINTES project enables the supposed content of the samples consumed to be identified. Among tablets sold as ecstasy, 78% actually contained MDMA, 6% MDA, 5% caffeine, 5% amphetamine and 2% MDEA.

Conclusions

In the urban environment, opiate products remain predominant. High dose buprenorphine (BHD) is strengthening its hold on the alternative opiate market. The demand for heroin and codeine derivatives seems to be diminishing. Methadone is available without a medical prescription but its use remains very limited.

In the techno party environment, consumption of heroin seems to be increasing. It is used both as a regulating product for stimulants and hallucinogens and for its own opiate effects. This use seems for the moment to be minor. Follow-up of the observation of this phenomenon is essential.

In the urban environment, the intravenous method for administration of heroin remains preponderant. Use of the nasal method for both heroin and BHD is spreading. This is the opposite of what we see within the party environment. The nasal and inhalation methods remain preponderant. But use of the injection method seems to be increasing, although it remains quite rare.

The availability of cocaine and crack continues to increase in the party and urban environments. MDMA and amphetamines are particularly present in the techno party environment although cocaine and crack are present in both environments.

LSD is the most widely-used hallucinogen in the techno party environment followed by hallucinogenic mushrooms. Benzodiazepines, particularly flunitrazepam (Rohypnol®) are mainly used by drug users with serious social problems or very marginalised.

The three overseas departments are distinguished from metropolitan France by low use of opiates. On Réunion, there is relatively high use of diverted psychotropic drugs (benzodiazepines, tranquillisers). In Guyana and Martinique we note relatively high use of crack. Apart from misuse of Artane® on Réunion, the use of hallucinogens seems non-existent or rare in the three overseas departments. As far as ecstasy is concerned, it is used on a small scale but this use seems to be increasing.

Among the products collected as synthetic products, 71% of amphetamine derivatives were found, including 64% MDMA. Among the tablets containing MDMA, the average dose was 75 mg. Around a fifth of the samples showed a large quantity of MDMA, above 100 mg. Under the same logo, we observed variations in the composition and dose quantity of MDMA. Several psychostimulant products were identified for the first time in the SINTES database: cathinone, 2-CT7, 4-MTA and PMA.

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For further information

Tendances récentes (*Recent trends*), TREND report, OFDT, March 2000.

Tendances récentes, TREND report, Pierre-Yves Bello, Abdalla Toufik, Michel Gandilhon, OFDT, June 2001.

Methodological references

The TREND project (Recent trends and new drugs) attempts to combine several information sources in order to try and identify emerging phenomena linked to drugs. It relies on several source types: a specific network of observers and institutional sources.

The networks of sentinel observers

For two years these networks have been based at ten sites: Bordeaux, Dijon, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Metz, Paris, Rennes, Toulouse and the Île-de-France department of Seine-Saint-Denis. Since the year 2000 three overseas departments have been included in the project: Martinique, Guyana and Réunion.

In the year 2000 at each site in the urban environment, data collection relied mainly on an ethnographic interviewer from the IREP network, personnel from the "low threshold" organisations and, at some sites, ASUD groups. In the party environment, these observers included members of the Techno plus association and ethnologists from the LIRESS association who specialise in the rave culture.

Institutional sources

The CEIP's (Centre d'évaluation et d'information sur les pharmacodépendances) (*Drug dependence assessment and information centre*) which supply data on illicit or diverted psychotropic products and their medicinal use (OPPIDUM, OSIAP systems) and deaths observed or published linked to abuse of drugs and illicit substances (DRAMES system).

The InVS's (Institut de veille sanitaire) (*Health watchdog institute*) which collects data on sale of syringes and substitution treatments using the SIAMOIS system.

In addition, the data from general population surveys (DRESS November survey, ESPAD survey, ESCAPAD survey) was incorporated into the analysis in order to put into perspective the use of substances analysed in the report.

Data analysis is carried out by the team responsible for the project at OFDT and is then discussed by a committee of experts composed of members of the ad hoc committee of the OFDT scientific board and external experts.