

Psychoactive substance use in France: recent trends (2014-2015)

**Agnès
Cadet-Taïrou,**

**Michel
Gandilhon,**

**Magali
Martinez,**

**Thomas
Néfau**

Each year, since 1999, the Emerging Trends and New Drugs (TREND) scheme of the French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) describes the key and emerging developments in terms of illegal or misused substance use. The phenomena which emerge from this fifteenth year of observation are a continuation of the previous period, with problems related to social instability among users and the resulting tensions still in the spotlight. Changes in supply and trafficking, which now involve communication technologies, are also continuing. Lastly, this edition of *Tendances* touches on the main substances, particularly new psychoactive substances (NPS), which occupy a growing place in substance use each year.

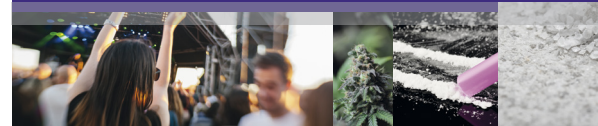
■ Contextual developments

Urban tensions

2014 was marked by tensions in four areas (Bordeaux, Marseille, Rennes and Toulouse) caused by the growing numbers of populations in very unstable, precarious situations, wandering around city centres. This can involve migrants, generally originating from Eastern Europe (Kosovars, Russian speakers, Romani), or even Western Europe (Spain, Portugal) or North Africa (Tunisia, Morocco), or French populations, mainly consisting of young people living on the street. Their greater visibility in metropolitan urban centres notably corresponds, in recent years, to the accelerating migrant influx into Europe and the effect of the recession which makes those in the most precarious situations even more vulnerable.

The growing number of these individuals frequenting support centres for the reduction of drug-related harms (CAARUD) is an increasing source of conflict with residents in the neighbourhoods concerned (noise, discarded injection paraphernalia, altercations between users). These conflicts, which are also expressed through tensions with harm reduction (HR) teams, have led to residents calling for action from the local councils. These interventions took the form of greater police presence to evacuate the affected sites, which interfered with follow-up and complicated the work of support teams. In several cities, migrant squats were closed down without

Results of the TREND scheme's observations on illegal or misused prescription drugs



any alternatives being offered to those living there (Rennes, Bordeaux, Paris). This only shifts the problems elsewhere, by accentuating the trend, observed for many years, in migration of the poorest to suburban or rural districts with practically non-existent health care delivery [1]. This phenomenon is particularly worrying since drug use, among these populations originating from the East of the continent, is dominated by the intravenous diversion of opiates (Subutex, Skenan) in a context in which harm reduction measures are largely unknown.

This year, the sites confirm the increasing trend to substitute medications for traditional substances in the most marginalised areas. The Toulouse site even reports the practical disappearance of illicit drug use among precarious users. This increased diversion of medications stems from the limited availability of heroin in the south of France, and particularly the high price of substances such as cocaine (see p. 5).

Reorganisation of the recreational setting

The tensions observed are also affecting the alternative recreational setting. Certain sites (Bordeaux, Lille, Marseille, Paris) report the practical disappearance of the alternative party scene in metropolitan areas, due to squats being closed down or "sound systems" seized by the police. As is the case for precarious users, this situation has caused free parties to go underground and shift to suburban zones or private (apartment) or privatized (warehouse) venues, which complicates the work of harm reduction teams. These developments are also observed in Metz and in Rennes, but appear to generate fewer problems owing to greater

1. "Sound system" refers to the audio equipment the organisers use for a party.

tolerance by the local public authorities and the organisation of smaller parties. The scarcity of alternative events in metropolitan zones is in response to the availability of clubs and discotheques. These are tending to broaden their musical fields and offer more electronic nights, where small trafficking networks tout, developing their supply of products, such as MDMA.

The second sociological development is related to the increasing diversity of the public frequenting “alternative” party events who do not display any special interest in the music or the techno counter-culture. The observers particularly report an influx of young people (aged 16–25), or even very young people (aged 13–15, unaccompanied) in Lorraine and in Brittany, notified via social media. Originating from surround rural areas or city centres, they are solely attracted by the prospect of taking substances such as MDMA and cocaine. The greater access to substances among these populations without a HR culture promotes the use of random associations, even in commercial dance-event settings.

Modernisation of supply

There have been several developments in drug supply in France in recent years: adaptation among dealers following the creation of priority safety zones², from 2012 onwards, the increasingly mobile nature of trafficking based on mobile phone use, and the emergence of purchasing on the deep web³, hand in hand with an incessantly growing supply of substances on the Internet.

The first phenomenon is very apparent in Metz and in Paris, where the dismantling of major dealing sites has not only generated well-known trafficking displacement and dissemination phenomena (“balloon effect”), but has also led to changes in the organisation of networks. These have, to some extent, moved away from conspicuous points of sale, based on

the “lookout-tout-drug dealer” structure, in which users would converge on the dealer, in favour of furtive meetings, by mobile phone, at ever-changing sites. In Paris, the drug squad suggests the emergence of facilities described as “cocaine call centres” where substances are obtained simply by calling a number. These practices also extend to crack use, with certain drug dealers travelling to deliver rocks. Moreover, dealers often chase up clients via text messaging. Hence, the Metz site suggests the emergence of real trade based on the resale of SIM cards, the market value of which is proportional to the number of clients registered. These types of networks are difficult to dismantle, complicated by the fluidity of trafficking, and the separation between suppliers and dealers. At the same time, changes in the role of consumers are observed, as they gradually take on a central role in a competitive system.

The second change affecting supply is the continuing development of the Internet as a preferred medium for trafficking, and particularly the increasing proportion of illicit substance purchases on the deep web, based on both direct statements by users having access to this type of supply and law-enforcement focus groups (police, French *Gendarmerie*). The latter are faced with an appreciable rise in postal trafficking, as a consequence of online purchases. Far from only concerning new psychoactive substances (NPS), still usually purchased on the surface web, this phenomenon includes substances such as cocaine, MDMA, heroin, methamphetamine (see box), together with medications, opiates or benzodiazepines.

A “do it yourself” trend?

Following on from the previous year’s signals reporting attempts to produce amphetamines on a small scale at national level, 2015 saw a number of alerts related to the discovery of a marginal adolescent practice, involving the production and use of Purple Drank. This

mixture, the formula of which has been available on forums for a decade or so, consists of a cough syrup, usually containing codeine or another opioid substance and an antihistamine, promethazine, added to soda. Attempts to locally produce cannabis resin and oil were also observed in Bordeaux (see p. 4). These signals, still insufficient to indicate an emerging phenomenon, may however be linked to the current popularity⁵ of user forum discussion threads, which have nonetheless been closed for comments for several years, on the recipes and methods used to extract active substances from commercially available products [2].

■ Update on substances

Emergence of “RC” or new psychoactive substances (NPS)⁶

Emerging in France around 2008, NPS represent a potentially infinite, diverse collection of substances. When they arrived on the market, most had no clear legal status, unknown hazards and were difficult to identify outside specialised toxicology laboratories.

One hundred and seventy-eight new agents were identified in France between 2008 and the start of 2015. The rate of identification further accelerated in 2014, with approximately one new chemical agent detected per week for the first time on French soil (56 agents) and nearly double on a European level (101) [3]. In 2014, this predominantly involved cathinones (14) and synthetic cannabinoids (13). Five opioid agents have gone on sale since 2013, including two in 2015.

Online supply has evolved rapidly, with a number of sales sites growing in appearance, although frequently directed to the same online store [4]. At the same time, sellers are adopting strategies for segmenting their activities in different degrees of visibility, with certain areas of the websites exclusively accessed by selected clients.

Faced with this dynamic supply, gradual diffusion of use is observed,

Methamphetamine in Bordeaux: the “deep web” medium

SINTES (National Detection System of Drugs and Toxic Substances) has identified methamphetamine in the Bordeaux region for the first time since the creation of the TREND scheme. Although only five collections of the substance took place between 2010 and 2013 at national level, four took place in 2014. All originated in south-western France. While one sample corresponded to powder sold for amphetamines, the other three originated from deep web purchases, according to user statements. Methamphetamine, sold as “meth”, “crystal” or “crystal meth”, is supplied in capsule form, traded at €20 to €30. Methamphetamine is sold at between €80 and €120 per gram. It should be noted that another three collections of methamphetamine originating from the deep web took place in the Aquitaine region in 2015. However, a sample of a turquoise-blue product sold as methamphetamine was shown to be alpha-PVP.

2. Areas with high criminality and delinquency levels, and a particularly high police presence.

3. Websites not indexed by search engines, access to which is limited through the use of confidential websites as the URLs can only be communicated between individuals.

4. Describes the shift of a problem to outlying areas when it has been eradicated in a given geographical zone.

5. Measured by the average number of daily views over a month.

6. Research chemicals: this term alludes to the emergence of some of these agents in the context of pharmaceutical research. The name “RC” is particularly used in the recreational setting. The term “new psychoactive substances” (NPS) describes new synthetic drugs. This term refers to substances not classified by the 1961 and 1971 international conventions and includes natural substances.

but almost exclusively among populations already using other drugs⁷. Use patterns moving beyond the circle of systematic lifetime users appear to be stabilising around a few key agents, according to the groups concerned [5]. According to all available sources (TREND observations, monitoring of forums, SINTES analyses and reports, customs and police seizures, user surveys, health events according to available data), a large proportion of use remains focused on cathinone stimulants (primarily 3-MMC and 4-MEC, but also methylone, MDPV and alpha-PVP) or one piperidine, named ethylphenidate [6, 7]. The latter are primarily found in the predominantly commercial dance-event setting, among “older” drug users whose use patterns are centred around opiates and stimulants, and among fringe gay users who practice *chemsex*⁸. Among psychonauts⁹ and users frequenting the alternative recreational setting, hallucinogen, especially psychedelic hallucinogen, effects are particularly sought after with agents such as 2C-x or 25-x-NBOMe, DOC or DOB, belonging to the phenylethylamine category and, again this year, methoxetamine¹⁰ (MXE), use of which could however experience a decline [2]. Lastly, dealers could particularly favour 4-FA, a phenylethylamine, with a view to reselling it under different names. Despite generating a significant number of customs seizures in 2014, this agent does not appear in other data sources, perhaps due to the limited number of health incidents related to its use.

In the open party scene, outside private circles, NPS are still usually sold as conventional substances, particularly hallucinogens the availability of which remains uncertain. Hence, as shown by SINTES, LSD is often the subject of fraud: numerous collections have evidenced the presence of NBOMe upon analysis, and four samples (2 blotters, one gelatin and one colourless liquid) were shown to contain a mixture of DOC + DMA (dimethoxyamphetamine), the latter causing ten or so hospital admissions in the same group of friends. Stimulants are also affected, such as the ecstasy tablet with the Mitsubishi logo which contained PMMA (25%), an agent which causes serious side effects [8].

Observation of NPS circulation, for example, according to the online I-TREND survey conducted alongside users, fairly clearly suggests that the legal status of substances is of little interest to NPS users: among the 11 agents identified as being the most widely diffused in the second semester of 2014, six were already classified on the list of narcotics.

The organisation of different user populations, in concentric circles around a core of expert psychonauts, familiar

What about synthetic cannabinoids (SC)?

Synthetic cannabinoids are the NPS category with the apparently largest potential target, cannabis users. In 2014, lifetime use of SC concerned 1.7% of 18-75 year-olds, and up to 4% of 18-34 year-olds [11]. In the absence of comparable figures for other NPS, it is hard to define the diffusion model for this class of substances. SC do not feature in their expected place in the various data sources on the circulation of substances (user surveys, forum interest, seizures, SINTES collections¹¹) and only 5F-AKB-48 appears on the list of NPS most widely circulating in France in 2014 [12, 10, 2]. An initial explanatory hypothesis is in the somewhat negative feedback from users regarding synthetic cannabis. The natural cannabis market is currently expanding (see below), which does not prompt users to resort to SC. It is thus possible that experimenters are greater in number than those repeating the experience. However, monitoring of forum activity, in the summer of 2014, clearly shows a major rise in interest in SC, almost exclusively from the perspective of their adaptation to e-cigarettes via e-liquids. The production of e-liquids containing SC, due to the possibility for users to use them discreetly, could probably be the reason for the rapid expansion in their use [2].

with the chemical names, different effects and harm reduction measures, is confirmed [9, 2]. As users move away from this central core, the less familiar they become with the exact nature and name of the substance used, use becomes less selective or even chosen. This unprepared opportunistic or involuntary use, in the context of polydrug use and which is very often difficult to come to terms with, clearly differs from planned lifetime use, almost in the scientific meaning of the word, occurring in a private context [10]. Use in a public party setting usually falls into this second category.

Confirmed re-emergence of MDMA/ecstasy tablets

2014 confirms the re-emergence of ecstasy tablets on the different party scenes, whether the commercial dance-event settings (clubs, discotheques) or alternative recreational settings. This re-emergence goes hand in hand with a genuine marketing strategy by producers with larger, more potent, colourful and 3D tablets (see box on p. 4). This re-emergence of ecstasy tablets does not challenge the dynamics in terms of the diffusion of crystal MDMA: all sites report the appeal of this substance, particularly among under-25s on the recreational setting. This phenomenon may be described as “generational” insofar as the diffusion in terms of use is no longer driven by a cultural identity, like at the start of the ‘2000s, but transcends both culture (clubbers, free party attendees) and social class. This trend is even stronger since many users do not perceive MDMA as a drug but rather as a sort of evident addition to a successful party event, due to its stimulant and empathogenic effects. Moreover, the supply network is organised, and very difficult for law-enforcement agencies to dismantle as it is made up of small

networks of user-dealers who obtain supplies in Belgium and the Netherlands where most of the European production units are based. The dynamic nature of the MDMA market is further confirmed by the OFDT ESCAPAD and INPES Health Barometer surveys, which, in the first case, show a two-fold increase in prevalence among 17 year-olds [16], and, in the second case, a three-fold increase in last-year use among 18-64 year-olds [11]. MDMA is the second most widely used illicit substance among 18-25 year-olds in 2014, ahead of cocaine. From a health perspective, the French National Agency for Medicines and Health Products Safety (ANSM) DRAMES (Drug and Substance Abuse-related Deaths) system indicates that 4.6% of registered deaths involved MDMA alone or in combination, *versus* 2.9% in 2012, and no cases in 2011 [17].

Cannabis, a constantly growing supply

According to all TREND sites, the cannabis market is continuing to develop related to a highly dynamic herbal cannabis supply in response to increasing demand. The observers report that herbal cannabis is sourced more easily than cannabis resin in Lille and Rennes. This phenomenon is explained by the development of herbal cannabis cultivation in France, driven by crime networks [18] or private individuals taking up commercial cultivation,

7. As shown by ethnographic observations, the online survey conducted alongside NPS users, but particularly health cases reported to TREND.

8. Sexual practices closely linked to the use of chemical substances, particularly psychoactive substances.

9. Persons attempting to explore altered states of consciousness.

10. Belonging to the arylcyclohexylamine class.

11. Only five SINTES collections of SC took place in 2014, three of which were prompted by the development of adverse effects resulting in hospitalisation for one user.

as shown by the increase in dismantling operations by the law-enforcement agencies on indoor plantations comprising several dozen plants. These observations are corroborated by national data on seizures, which reached a new record in 2014 with 158,000 plants [19], while herbal cannabis seizures totalled more than 10 tonnes (Figure 2). Herbal cannabis has a positive image due to its “natural” characteristics and presumed quality. For many years, the emergence of hybrid varieties (Amnesia, Sinsemilla, Skunk) has contributed to the strong increase in THC levels (Figure 1). In the seized substances, THC potency reached 13% in 2014 (*versus* 4.7% in 2000), i.e. the highest level every observed in France [14]. This wide availability of herbal cannabis is helping to cloud its status in the eyes of many users, particularly among young people, who consider smoking herbal cannabis not as an offence but rather as “normal” practice, all the more so when older generations are also users [11]. In this respect, the international debate surrounding the legal status of cannabis, and likewise the legalisation of the substance in Uruguay and in certain American states (Alaska, Colorado, Washington, etc.), are intensifying this trend.

At the same time, several indicators point to the transformation of the cannabis resin market in France, notably with an increase in scale as shown by a rise in average THC levels in cannabis resin seizures reaching a record level of 20.7% in 2014, following a three-fold increase in 15 years (6.5% in 2000). The observations conducted in Moroccan production zones showed that farmers tend to substitute hybrid varieties for traditional kif [20]. This strong rise in THC levels raises questions as to the risks arising from such highly potent products. Three sites, Marseille, Paris and Toulouse, report an increase in emergency visits due to mental or, indeed, psychiatric disorders (bad trips, and decompensation). At other sites, field observers report adaptation among users who add lower quantities to their joints. In 2013, 31 deaths related to cardiovascular disorders (myocardial infarction, for instance) resulting from cannabis use, were documented in the ANSM DRAMES system¹² (including 9 cases in which it was combined with another substance) [17].

An emerging phenomenon appeared in 2014 at the Bordeaux site: attempts by users to produce highly potent cannabis resin and cannabis oil (wax) from herbal cannabis. This type of

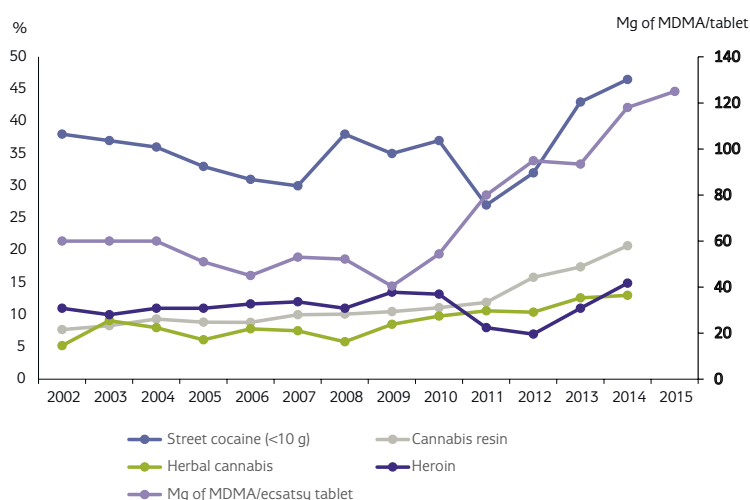
Ecstasy tablets, the SINTES perspective

Between December 2014 and May 2015, SINTES conducted a survey on the current composition of the ecstasy tablets in circulation [13]. Collection was accompanied by a user questionnaire, particularly concerning their perceptions of the substance. The latter were predominantly males (84%), aged 17 to 50 (median age: 26), and regular users, taking the substance at least once a month.

Out of the 103 tablets analysed, 94 contained MDMA, including 4 combined with caffeine, 1 with amphetamine (traces) and 1 which mainly contained paracetamol, chloroquine and bumetanide and only traces of MDMA. Furthermore, 9 tablets did not contain any MDMA at all, but instead mCPP, chloroquine, or amphetamine, or indeed no pharmacologically active substances. The results of the analyses performed on the tablets demonstrated the high variability in terms of tablet mass (186 mg to 457 mg), together with the quantity of MDMA present (50 mg to 280 mg). These values, consistent with the analyses of seizures, indicate the continued growth of these two indicators, observed since 2010. Average tablet weight observed in this study was 316 mg, compared to approximately 235 mg in the ‘2000s, and up to 2009. The average quantity of MDMA found in a tablet displays a proportionally greater increase, from approximately 50 mg prior to 2009 to 125 mg in 2015 [14, 15] (Figure 1). Lastly, the average price of an ecstasy tablet, sold in units, was estimated at €9.3.

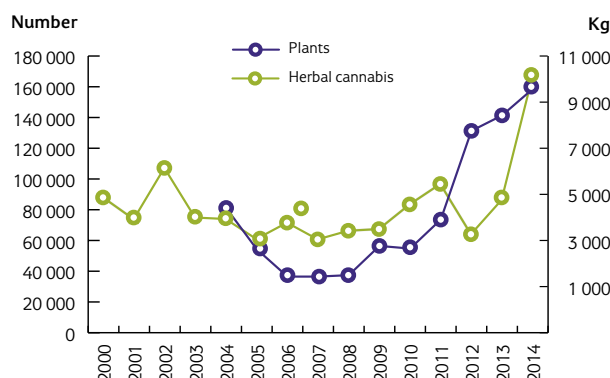
In addition, 80% of respondents claim that ecstasy is not difficult to source, and more than 50% consider it to have powerful effects. A third of respondents did not perceive any difference between MDMA and ecstasy. Another third defined ecstasy as a mixture of MDMA and other psychoactive substances, mainly amphetamines. The last third described differences in terms of effects. Hence, the majority of users were unaware of the similarity between these two substances which only differ in terms of their form.

Figure 1 - Changes in the purity of street seizures of cocaine (< 10 g), heroin, herbal cannabis and cannabis resin, and in the mass of MDMA in ecstasy tablets since 2002



Sources: Cannabis (resin and herbal cannabis), heroin, cocaine: INPS / Ecstasy: INPS and SINTES

Figure 2 - Changes in seizures of cannabis plants and herbal cannabis between 2000 and 2014



Sources: Cannabis (resin and herbal cannabis), heroin, cocaine: INPS / Ecstasy: INPS and SINTES

12. No conclusions can be drawn as to possible changes, as these deaths are taken into account more effectively by professionals, artificially increasing the figures.

practice has developed in certain American states which legalised herbal cannabis and should be monitored due to the effects of these highly potent substances, but also because the production of certain substances can cause accidents.

Cocaine, still widely available

As shown by the latest results of the Health Barometer survey, cocaine use is still continuing to rise steadily. Hence, between 1992 and 2014, last-year use went from 0.3% to 1.1% in the population aged 18-64 [11]. In the TREND observation areas, the availability of cocaine is still high, driven by the growing diversity in access to the substance, from the Internet, to the trafficking in housing estates, through to micro-networks of user-dealers. This year, Marseille and Toulouse reported deep-rooted cocaine dealing in problem housing estates with regard to cannabis resin dealing, although trafficking does not have the same structure in the two cities. In Marseille, the networks specialising in cannabis resin and cocaine appear to be the same, whereas different channels are still used in Toulouse. This growing supply of cocaine in certain housing estates attracts diverse populations, including well-integrated individuals who stop to purchase their substance before going out to party, as well as marginalised users. The Marseille site reports incidents between the inhabitants of certain northern districts and injecting drug users around dealing sites. The dynamics in terms of the diffusion of the substance are still favoured by its positive image among users, associated with its recreational aspect. In 2014, the average level of street

seizures, which, according to INPS (French National Forensic Science Institute), reached 47%, evidencing a 75% increase since 2012, does not tarnish this image. [14]. The high average price per gram of cocaine, in the region of €80 (Table 1), does not hinder the diffusion of the substance despite the deep-rooted effects of the economic recession. The practice of fractionating the units sold, clearly apparent last year [21], has developed further, guaranteeing an incessantly growing market for cocaine. However, this observation should be weighed against the Paris site which evidenced competition arising from MDMA, particularly among under 25s, and from speed (amphetamine), “competitive” due to the poverty of certain users attracted by its relatively low price (€15 per gram). Furthermore, the emergence of Ritalin (methylphenidate)¹³ use, among precarious injecting drug users, is observed both in Rennes and Bordeaux where, in certain cases, it has replaced cocaine, following diversion limited to the Provence-Alpes-Côte-d’Azur region for the past ten or so years. The Bordeaux site clearly reports the presence of a street market (€50 to €60 “per pack”, €10 to €15 “per blister”). In Paris, this type of market seems to have emerged briefly in 2014 but did not last.

Opiates: between heroin and medications

Since substitution treatments were first introduced in France 20 years ago, heroin no longer epitomizes opiate use by drug users, who have turned to non-therapeutic buprenorphine, morphine sulphate and also methadone use [22]. This process was intensified by

the heroin shortages in 2011, particularly in the south of France (Bordeaux, Marseille, Toulouse), where its scarcity was offset by a rise in the diversion of opioid medications. In 2014, heroin – as shown by the sudden rise in seizures [19]¹⁴ – saw an increase in its availability and a return to a high average potency: 15% in 2014 vs. 7% in 2012 (Figure 1). It is too early to claim that the increase in the proportion of heroin-related deaths among all deaths directly related to drug use reported by the DRAMES system (from 15% to 20% between 2012 and 2013¹⁵) is related to the increased circulation of more potent heroin batches, although this hypothesis seems plausible [17]. Be that as it may, the situation in France is still characterised by a major cut-off between northern/eastern France (Lille and Metz), where heroin is widely available, and the south where it is still barely visible or accessible. Hence, Bordeaux, Marseille and Toulouse report the practical disappearance of small street markets destined for the most destitute. At these three sites, the only type of trafficking remaining in the cities, like in rural areas, stems from small groups of users who purchase their supplies in Spain, the Netherlands or Belgium. In the Paris region, in 2014, the law-enforcement services report a major rise in seizures in the suburban areas, indicating the availability of the substance among trafficking organisations. This could foreshadow a significant re-emergence of the substance on the streets of the capital. Small-scale trafficking of Subutex, methadone, or indeed Skenan destined for precarious users is still very present at all sites. However, this year, some sites (Bordeaux, Lille, Marseille, Metz and Rennes) are reporting greater visibility of problems related to the abuse and diversion of other opioid medications (tramadol, Lamaline, fentanyl, Oxycontin) prescribed for the treatment of pain, or available on the Internet, via professionals working at national treatment and prevention centres for addiction (CSAPA) and community pharmacists. These practices supposedly tend to concern socially integrated individuals, and are said to lead, in certain cases, to the prescription of methadone substitution treatment.

Table 1 - Prices in euros of the main substances as observed by the TREND scheme

Price for 1 gramme	2000	2010	2011*	2012*	2013*	2014**	Recent trend
Heroin	59	42	40	43.4	46.5	42.5	↘
Cocaine	84	67	68	70.6	76.6	80.0	↗
Ecstasy (tablets)	15	7.7	7	10.0	8.2	9.7	↗
MDMA (powder)	NA	60	63	56.3	54.7	54.7	→
Cannabis resin	NA	5	5.4	6.9	6.6	7.3	↗
Herbal cannabis	NA	8	8	9.6	10.4	10.4	→
Amphetamines	15	16	15.5	14.3	13.8	15.5	↗
LSD (blotter)	8.5	10	10	10.0	9.8	10.3	↗

* TREND data from the half-yearly “prices” Barometer for a gram of heroin or cocaine, a tablet of ecstasy and a gram of herbal cannabis or cannabis resin. The data on price per gram of amphetamines and per LSD blotter come from the TREND ethnographic observations.

** TREND ethnographic data and qualitative questionnaires administered to structures or associations in contact with drug users. NA: not available.

Source: Prices Barometer/TREND/OFDT

13. Psychostimulant medication mainly prescribed for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children.

14. In 2014, seizures of heroin, which had halved since 2010, returned to relatively high levels, reaching nearly 1 tonne.

15. In the past few years, overdose deaths have been predominantly linked to opioid medications.

■ Conclusion

The 2014–2015 observation period is marked by the reinforcement of the developments already identified, contributing to the gradual and profound change in psychoactive substance use, in France and on an international scale. In a context characterised by the continuing expansion of user populations, the most striking phenomena notably concern the increasingly diversity of supply which is difficult to control.

The frontiers between drugs, doping substances and, above all, medications, which are gradually facing the same problems, seem to be increasingly blurred in the context of growing confusion on the legal or illegal status of substances in circulation. The other striking aspect is the growing variety of user profiles with clearly differentiated motives, contexts of use, difficulties and levels of knowledge, which call for a suitable preventive and therapeutic response.

The building blocks of the TREND scheme

TREND (Emerging Trends and New Drugs) is a scheme established by the OFDT in 1999. TREND endeavours to detect emerging phenomena in illegal drug use, including trends in substances, supply, routes of administration and user profiles. To fulfil its observation mission, TREND relies first and foremost on a network of seven local coordinating sites (Bordeaux, Marseille, Lille, Metz, Paris, Rennes, Toulouse) with a common information collection and analysis strategy. The data collection tools used are mainly qualitative: continuous ethnographic observations conducted in urban areas and on the party scene, qualitative questionnaires are administered to structures or associations in contact with drug users (CAARUDs), focus groups ("health", "law enforcement") that aim to rapidly establish overviews of the situation with professionals in the field.

Against this background, thematic qualitative or quantitative investigations are also conducted to acquire more information about a particular subject and retail selling prices of the main illegal drugs ("price" Barometer) are regularly collected.

TREND also relies on:

- SINTES (National Detection System of Drugs and Toxic Substances), an observation system geared towards detecting and analysing the toxicological composition of illegal substances;
- recurrent quantitative surveys, such as the OFDT/DGS ENa-CAARUD survey (national survey of CAARUDs' clients) which has been conducted among drug users seen in French low-threshold structures certified as CAARUDs (Support Centre for the Reduction of Drug-related Harms) every two years since 2006;
- the qualitative elements mentioned by CAARUDs in their activity reports;
- the use of the results of information systems supervised by the CEIP network (Centre for Evaluation and Information on Pharmacodependence) and the ANSM (National Agency for Medicines and Health Products Safety), the OCRITIS (Central Office for the Repression of Drug-related Offences) and the INPS (National Forensic Science Institute) and finally, other OFDT surveys.

Moreover, since 2010, the scheme has endeavoured to create appropriate tools in order to monitor the virtual Internet space, which materialised in the context of the European I-TREND project. Five approaches were implemented: continuous observation of forums, from a quantitative perspective (as an indicator of user interest) and an ethnographic perspective, analysis of the online supply targeting the French market, online survey alongside NPS users, Internet purchases and analyses of substances, and, lastly, the accumulation of all available sources to determine the most widely circulating NPS at national level, and compilation of technical data sheets on several substances.

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French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

3, avenue du Stade-de-France
93218 Saint-Denis La Plaine cedex
Tel. : (+ 33) 1 41 62 77 16
Fax : (+ 33) 1 41 62 77 00
e-mail : ofdt@ofdt.fr



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