

A Community Drugs Study: Developing Community Indicators for Problem Drug Use

Research Conducted by:

The NACD commissioned Dr Hilda Loughran and Dr Mary Ellen McCann from UCD to carry out this study.

Aim:

This study set out to examine how the experiences of three separate communities which have experienced problem drug use - Ballymun, Bray and Crumlin - have changed since 1996; to describe initiatives developed between 1996 and 2002 which the communities perceive to have influenced any change; to explore how the communities experienced their involvement in planning and implementation of such initiatives; and to assess how the then community infrastructure affected the community's experiences.

Method:

Qualitative research was carried out in the three communities across Dublin. Local contacts were recruited and trained as community researchers because they lived in and/or worked in the three communities. Additional insight was brought to the study through the personal experience of drugs problems of the researchers. To ensure the validity and rigor of the research, core data triangulation methods included focus groups; key participants; desk research; grey literature; review meetings; oral diaries and one-to-one in-depth interviews. Data was analysed qualitatively with the assistance of the community researchers. Such was the vast amount of data gathered and analysed, a case-study has been published on each of the participating communities in which more detail of their experiences over the last 10 years is documented.

Key Findings:

- All three communities showed improvements in the number of children under 15 years-of-age staying in school and an increase in those completing the Leaving Certificate.
- Employment opportunities have increased over the 10 years and this has had an impact on the local economy and community optimism. Fewer numbers are unemployed.
- Increased provision of drug treatment and ancillary support services which has improved access to drug treatment locally.

- Alcohol misuse is having a major effect on communities giving weight to the argument for linking alcohol and drugs strategies.
- Polydrug use is undermining the successes of community responses providing a clear case for continued investment in drug free alternatives and rehabilitation options.
- Local reports of drug-related deaths are not reflected in official statistics.
- Diminishing levels of community participation are likely to have a negative impact on local initiatives and the willingness to find solutions from within communities.
- There is a re-emergence of fear and a risk of communities feeling overwhelmed by their current drugs experience. While experience of crime had reduced, local crime rates had started to grow again.
- The study reinforces the need to continue to work with local communities in partnership to achieve long-term, sustainable improvements.

NACD Recommendations to Government:

The NACD recommended as a first step, the development of Community Drug Indicators which would identify drug problems in communities to facilitate the earlier allocation of resources for national and local service planning and delivery. This new dataset of Community Drug Indicators would require agencies to collect and store data at Electoral Division (ED) level so that the relevant information can be broken down by local area. Types of data considered comprise:

- Crime (including alcohol related public order offences) and victimisation reports
- School absenteeism and early school leaving trends
- Extent of family engagement with or disengagement from the community
- Levels of volunteerism and community participation, use of local amenities

The study findings demonstrated the need for closer working between National Alcohol and Drugs Strategies as under-age drinking was a cause of serious disturbance in these communities.