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Mephedrone: the rise of heroin's cheap rival

Heroin, speed and cocaine use is down but mephedrone is more popular than ever since it became

Mephedrone powder is dissolved in water and injected – in extreme cases, up to 40 times a day. Photograph: Rex Features

Mephedrone was popular among young people and internet-savvy experimenters as a cheap alternative to cocaine and ecstasy, easily bought online legally and for a fraction of the price of its illegal alternatives. Then it appeared to slip from view after being classified as a class B drug in 2010. But now it's back, reincarnated as an injected drug to rival crack and heroin.

Research carried out among police forces, drug agencies and frontline drug workers across the UK, published this month by the charity DrugScope, shows that while use of substances such as cannabis, heroin, speed and cocaine is decreasing, mephedrone use is on the rise.

"It has become really prolific in the past 12 months; we have young people from 13 years old taking it," says Lucy Hulin, a substance misuse worker in Gloucester. "People we see are using the drug all day, mainly because they are bored." Hulin says the young people's drug service in Gloucester has seen more than 50 new cases of problematic mephedrone use in the past nine months.

In Barry, south Wales, drug workers have witnessed an epidemic of mephedrone injecting among the town's 200 or so users of intravenous heroin and amphetamine. "It happened very quickly and we didn't see it coming," says Mike Brown, a case manager at drug charity Inroads. "Virtually all our heroin and speed injectors suddenly began injecting mephedrone instead. It's a close community, so habits spread quickly. They call it 'M-smack'."

It is easy to see how the drug might flourish. Less reliant on a traditional distribution system than crack, cocaine, ecstasy and crystal meth, mephedrone is more accessible to those living outside major city centres. And it has none of the "junkie" stigma associated with heroin and crack.
But mephedrone’s compulsive effect means that, in extreme cases, users are injecting the powder (dissolved in water) up to 20 to 40 times a day, according to a report compiled by the drug charity Addaction in Barnsley.

“This may be the start of a whole new problem with a whole new population who are not even easy to identify, never mind engage with,” says Glen Jarvis, a Nottingham drug worker.

The unpredictable nature of substances sold as mephedrone – drug services say it is being cut with everything from benzocaine to monosodium glutamate (the flavour enhancer is added to mephedrone by some sellers to make it less painful to snort) – means drug users are taking huge risks if they inject it. In south Wales, dealers are selling “kit kat”, a mixture of mephedrone and the increasingly popular hallucinogenic anaesthetic ketamine.

The optimism sparked by falling heroin use, heralded by some as the end of the “Trainspotting generation”, will have to be tempered. As Britain exits one phase of its drug using history, it is about to enter another.

Daly is co-author with Steve Sampson of Narcomania: a journey through Britain’s drug world
PRESS RELEASE: OAS Approves New Multilateral Instrument for Assessing Drug Policy in the Region

OAS Approves New Multilateral Instrument for Assessing Drug Policy in the Region

Organization of American States - November 29, 2012

Representatives of the Member Countries of the Organization of American States (OAS) approved today in San Jose, Costa Rica, a new tool for assessing drug policy in the region during the fifty-second Regular Session of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), which was inaugurated yesterday by the President of Costa Rica, Laura Chinchilla, and in which the Secretary General of the OAS, José Miguel Insulza, is participating today.

President Chinchilla congratulated the representatives from throughout the hemisphere who attended the session of the Commission on the progress in the design of a multilateral instrument for evaluating the performance of countries in the fight against drug trafficking.


During the presentation of the proposal, the General Coordinator of the Intergovernmental Working Group (IWG) and Chair of CICAD, Mauritius Boraschi (Costa Rica) said that "in the current environment is very important to have strategies and mechanisms that facilitate hemispheric cooperation to address the global drug problem in all its aspects. Particularly, through recommendations aimed at strengthening the capacities of the smallest and most vulnerable states, as is the case in Central America."

Additionally, in detailing the set of components that make up this instrument of evaluation, the representative of Mexico, and Assistant General Coordinator of the IWG, Juan Gabriel Morales, said that "the proposal means the relaunching of the MEM, moving to a model of objective assessment, more dynamic and attached to the principles of the CICAD Strategy and Plan of Action."

For his part, Ambassador Paul Simons, Executive Secretary of CICAD, said that "the Sixth Round of Evaluation will begin in early 2013 and will mark an important milestone in the implementation of the Hemispheric Drug Strategy and its Action Plan."

Pursuant to a mandate from the Second Summit of the Americas (1998), the MEM is an instrument designed to evaluate the progress of measures taken by Member States to address drug control. This evaluation is carried out through the development and publication of national and hemispheric level reports. To this point there have been five previous rounds of evaluation. The reports are prepared by the Group of Governmental Experts, whose members are appointed by the Member States to be part of a multidisciplinary team. Experts do not participate in the evaluation of their own country.

CICAD is the Western Hemisphere's policy forum for dealing with the drug problem. The Hemispheric Drug Strategy, approved in May 2010, expresses the firm commitment of Member States to deal with the consequences of the drug trade, which pose a growing threat to health, economic development, social cohesion, and the rule of law.

The 52nd Regular Session of CICAD, which was inaugurated yesterday by the President of Costa Rica,
brings together main anti-drug officials from the region to examine the impact of drug trafficking in the hemisphere and explore mechanisms to respond more effectively and efficiently to its threats. For more information, please visit the OAS Website at www.oas.org.
Virado: A New Method of Crack Consumption in Brazil

Solange A. Nappo, PhD, Zila M. Sanchez, PhD, Rossana Rameh, MPH, Renata Almeida, MPH, Roberta Uchoa, PhD

Crack emerged in the late 1980s in Brazil. This emergence was a critical moment for public health; the growing AIDS epidemic led intravenous cocaine users to migrate toward crack use to avoid the use of injection drugs. At the same time, young consumers of marijuana also began using crack, largely due to market strategies in drug trafficking that led to a shortage of marijuana and the availability of crack as a substitute.1 Twenty years later, crack use has spread throughout the country and among all social classes, creating a social burden on the State.2,3

This situation has led crack users to develop survival strategies, which, at times, increase the risks to users rather than protecting them.4 In this context, the use of virado has recently been identified in the city of Recife (northeast of Brazil). This letter is intended to comment on a new form of crack use, not previously described or quantified in epidemiological studies, which was identified during a large ethnographic study of crack cocaine use in Recife. In this study, several "cracklands".

The American Journal on Addictions Virado - A new method of crack consumption in Brazil.pdf
Após parceria com Ambev, governo vai liberar cerveja na Copa-2014

FABIOLEITE
DE SÃO PAULO

Na semana em que a Ambev anunciou investimento de R$ 35 milhões para a construção das arquibancadas provisórias do Itaquerão, o governo paulista informou que estuda enviar à Assembleia Legislativa um projeto de lei para liberar o consumo de cerveja na Copa-2014.

A Ambev é patrocinadora da CBF (Confederação Brasileira de Futebol) e dona da marca Budweiser, que será a cerveja oficial do evento comandado pela Fifa. A empresa disse que investirá na obra com parceiros a pedido do governador Geraldo Alckmin.

O tucano havia se comprometido com a Fifa a aumentar a capacidade do estádio do Corinthians de 47 mil lugares para os mais de 60 mil que são exigidos pela entidade -- serão 67 mil -- para garantir São Paulo como sede da abertura da Copa-2014.

Tanto a empresa quanto o governo negam haver relação entre os fatos.

MUDANÇA

A venda de bebida alcoólica nos eventos da Fifa já havia sido liberada por uma alteração no estatuto do torcedor feita pela Lei Geral da Copa, sancionada em junho pela presidente Dilma Rousseff.

Mas ficou pendente a legalização do consumo nos Estados onde a prática é proibida por lei local, como ocorre em São Paulo -- desde 1996.

Alckmin, que procurou a Ambev no início do ano para convencê-la a construir os 20 mil assentos móveis "sem nenhum benefício" em troca, era reticente à ideia.

No Congresso, seu partido, o PSDB, foi contra a liberação na votação da lei, em março. "É um retrocesso em relação à luta pela paz nos estádios. Nós temos de derrotar esse item", disse à época o deputado Jutahy Júnior (PSDB-BA).

No fim de junho, contudo, Alckmin foi o anfitrião do encontro dos governos das 12 sedes e endossou carta na qual elas se comprometeram a "propor medidas legais para normatizar a comercialização de bebidas".

Ontem, o comitê paulista da Copa informou à Folha que deve reapresentar na Assembleia um projeto de lei do ex-deputado estadual Vicente Cândido (PT) que libera o consumo de cerveja nos estádios, "restringindo" à Copa.

O petista, que foi o relator da Lei da Copa na Câmara dos Deputados, disse ter sido informado sobre a estratégia do governo em outubro.
Em nota, o comitê disse que o projeto busca "atender à proposta de regulamentação do Ministério do Esporte" e que como já havia defendido antes, "decisões sobre procedimentos adotados nos estádios durante a Copa devem ser tratadas de forma unificada pelo país."