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*******EMBARGOED UNTIL 06:00 CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN TIME
WEDNESDAY MAY 9 2018 (22:00 BST TUESDAY MAY 8)**

**2018 GLOBAL DRUG SURVEY SHOWS ENGLISH DRINKERS DO NOT BELIEVE
ALCOHOL WARNINGS ON PACKAGING**

- *World's largest annual drugs survey publishes 2018 edition*
- *Report explores recreational drug use of **130,000 people across 44 countries***
 - *2018 edition surveyed >5000 people in the UK*
- *Most drinkers remain ignorant of the health benefits of drinking less on cancer risk, but labels highlighting the link between alcohol and cancer could get almost half of English drinkers to think about drinking less*
- *20% don't believe messages stating that alcohol has little or no health benefit*
- *Female drinkers under 25 have poor knowledge of the health risks associated with alcohol*
- *Scottish drinkers most frequently sought emergency medical treatment following alcohol use in the past 12 months*
 - *Cocaine can be delivered more quickly in London and Glasgow than a pizza*
- *The rates of seeking emergency medical treatment following the use of MDMA in the UK have more than doubled in the last year from 0.7% to 1.8%*
- *The UK continues to have some of the highest rates of dark net drug purchasing in the world*
- *1 in 5 users of GHB report passing out each year with women being more at risk than men*

WEDNESDAY 9TH MAY 2018 – LONDON, UK

Alcohol health could help people drink less, though not every message resonates with British drinkers according to the latest edition of the world's largest annual study into recreational drug use.

The Global Drug Survey 2018 which researched the drug-taking habits of 130,000 people across 44 countries, is published today and has found that a high proportion of UK drinkers don't believe the health warnings that are printed on alcohol packaging.

Whilst it would appear that many UK drinkers are also reluctant to accept the fact that alcohol offers little or no health benefit to most people, with male drinkers being most likely to believe this. Over 1 in 3 British drinkers found messages relating to cancer, calories, heart health and violence as personally relevant to them.

1 in 5 (20.5%) of the 3,600 English people surveyed did not believe the warning that most people get little or no health benefit from moderate alcohol use. Almost 10% of those surveyed (9%) did not believe the message that drinking less reduces the risk of 7 different sorts of cancer. But almost half indicated such messages could get them thinking about drinking less.

Female drinkers under 25 have poor knowledge of the health risks associated with alcohol

The survey found that women under 25 had particularly poor knowledge of the health risks associated with alcohol use. The data shows 65% of females under 25 polled did not know that drinking less alcohol reduces the risk of 7 different sorts of cancer. Almost 50% (46%) of women under 25 were unaware that even people with heavy alcohol use can significantly reduce their risk of liver disease by having two alcohol free days per week.

Scottish drinkers most frequently sought emergency medical treatment following alcohol use in the past 12 months

Across the 44 countries surveyed, Scotland is the country with the highest proportion of drinking respondents (4.2%) who sought emergency medical care after a session. This is double the level of English drinkers seeking medical treatment after drinking (2.1%), highlighting how entrenched a problem drinking is North of the border.

Globally, English drinkers rank joint 5th with Russia in terms of the proportion of respondents who looked for medical care after drinking. This rate was highest among men and women under 25 in England at almost 3% (2.8%). The Germans and the French are the least likely nations to seek medical attention at 0.8%.

Similarly, the Scots topped the charts as the nation with the highest proportion of respondents who should have sought medical treatment after a drinking session at 4.5%. By comparison, English drinkers rank at 8th in the global table of A&E admissions after alcohol consumption with 3%, showing just how much more engrained the issue is north of the border.

The proportion of drug takers in England seeking emergency medical treatment exceeds global average due to high quantities consumed

Among the population surveyed, the proportion of drug users accessing medical care after taking drugs in England exceeds the global average. 1.8% of MDMA users had sought medical attention after taking the drug (up from 0.7% last year), compared to the global average of 0.9%. England was second in the global index, behind Scotland which once again topped that table at 1.9%.

When it came to cocaine uses, 1.1% of users in in England had sought medical treatment in the past 12 months when the global average is 0.9%, ranking England in 7th place and highlighting the continued risk that higher purity cocaine is placing users at greater risk. Again, Scotland ranked higher than England in fourth place at 2.2%. LSD takers in the UK were third in their use of emergency medical care after using at 1.6% with a global average of 1%.

High incidence of emergency medical admissions in Scotland and England may be due to the amount of substances consumed in each session. For cocaine consumption, respondents from Scotland consumed over double the global average per session of 0.5g at 1.2g ranking first in the world. Respondents from England consumed the second highest quantity at 0.7g.

The survey also found similar patterns for MDMA doses per session. In both pills and powder forms England and Scotland exceed the global average in terms of dose per session. In terms of pills, English respondents consumed 1.5 on average, Scotland 1.8 pills with the global average at 1.3. In powder England is joint second at 0.5g, Scotland taking first place with 0.6g far exceeding the global average of 0.4g.

Cocaine delivered quicker than pizza in many countries.

We asked 15,000 cocaine users from around the world whether it was quicker to get a gram of cocaine delivered or a pizza. Overall 30% said they could get cocaine delivered in 30 minutes or less compared to only 16.5% who could get a pizza delivered. There was wide regional variation but in the UK, 80% of recent users reported same day delivery of cocaine being available, with 36.7% of users in Glasgow and 26.7% in London reporting delivery within 30 minutes. Easy access and higher purity are likely to lead to escalating use and harms among people.



GHB – not just a drug for gay men. 1 in 5 reports passing out in the last year.

GHB is not just drug used within the gay community. Of 1000 last year users over 505 were heterosexual men and women (though rates of use were higher among gay men).

Frequency of use (days used in last year) among different gender and sexuality groups is not as expected – with a mean of about 16 times in last year. Only about 5% of gay men reported use on 50 more occasions in the last year.

Mixing GHB with other drugs is not the norm, though the rates concurrent with alcohol consumption still place many at risk of overdose. The most common drug used with GHB globally is not crystal meth but MDMA.

1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men report passing out on GHB in the last 12 months. 10% of people, using once or twice report passing out, compared to 1 in 3 who report using it more often. 4% of women reported seeking EMT compared to 2% of men.

Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists (SCRAs/synthetic cannabis products) as addictive as crystal meth

Using a standardised tool - the 5-item Severity of Dependence Scale - 24.5% of last year users of SCRAs met a threshold at which they could be considered as dependent upon the drug, narrowly behind crystal meth amphetamine at 24.7%.

Our findings confirm the very high abuse potential of SCRAs. This information should inform both the need for service development by local treatment providers but also act as another warning to users to avoid using these drugs. The high rates of dependence for those using methamphetamine is not surprising but is a particular concern given the absence of particularly effective pharmacological treatments for users, with psychological therapies being the mainstay of current treatment.

Dark net rising

The UK once again had the highest rates (24.6%) of people accessing drugs through the dark net amongst English speaking countries and 3rd overall after Norway (30.3%) and Finland (45.8%).

MDMA, followed by cannabis, LSD and novel drugs are the most commonly purchased drugs on the dark net, with notable increases in rates for cannabis and LSD over the last 4 years, with a marching year on year decline in NPS purchase.

Global trends in losing your drug virginity: free drugs, little test dosing and few tripsitters despite being with friends

The study also found that the majority of drug users surveyed did not pay for their drugs on their first trip. 50% of first timers did not pay for their first dose of MDMA, 71.5% did not pay for their first line of cocaine and 66% got their first LSD trip for free.

Whilst many first-timers tried drugs with close friends, many did not have someone to look after them during their experience. For first time users of MDMA across the globe, 61% claim that they first tried the drug with close friends and 56.8% did not have a trip sitter. Equally with cocaine, 78.9% of first time cocaine users in England were with close friends but only 25% had someone designated to look after them. People losing their LSD virginity were among the safest with 68% taking that first dose with close friends and 50% having a mate to watch out for them.

Although many first-time users sought advice about using drugs for the first time and many indicated they knew quite a bit about the drug they're taking, first time drug use does appear to be a risky event. Highlighting the risks of first time drug use, 0.5% of over 4000 people who reported use of MDMA for the first time in 2017, reported seeking emergency medical treatment following their first use. This may be related to many not taking a small dose the first time and not planning their first ever use session.

The report also suggests that the much-discussed trend of 'micro-dosing' appears to be gaining popularity with over 30% of last year users reporting such practices in the last 12 months. However, the most common method of dosing (cutting a piece of an LSD tab) would suggest dosing remains rather unsophisticated for most. However, accessing LSD through the dark net (the second most common source of LSD globally) may allow users to purchase different doses to make micro-dosing more accurate.

Professor Adam Winstock, Consultant Psychiatrist and Addiction Medicine Specialist and Founder & CEO of The Global Drug Survey comments:

'The 2018 Global Drug Survey highlights how much more work there is to do with alcohol messaging in the UK. It is clear that the link between alcohol consumption and increased cancer risk is a message that is still not reaching UK drinkers and where it does, many chose to react to the message with scepticism.'

"The alcohol industry which makes profits from selling its product will never embrace anything that might lead to people drinking less. A self-regulated industry will always regulate to optimise profits not public health."

Further to this, the regularity with which UK drinkers are ending up needing emergency treatment is truly alarming, especially when you compare it to the global average. That both England and Scotland are in the top 5 global nations needing emergency treatment after alcohol consumption is truly concerning. This is another finding that shows how much more work is required to drive home the message of responsible drinking.'

Sir Professor Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance comments:

"These results on the potential power of health information on alcohol labels are important and compelling. They make it clear that people just do not know about key health issues like the link between alcohol and cancer that might well change their behaviour and improve public health."

Professor Winstock also adds:

"Overall our findings suggest there is a need to engage people who use drugs in honest conversations about drug use. Zero tolerance approaches do not allow governments to optimise public health policies or health promotion approaches."

"People who use drugs are interested in their own health and wellbeing and that of their friends and communities. We need to harness the expertise and interest of the drug using community to help them stay safe, without ideological barriers that prevent the adoption of evidence-based drug policies."

"As technologies such as the dark net, vaping and drug checking increase, we need to become smarter in how we communicate the right information to the right people at the right time. We cannot reduce the risks associated with drugs to zero but by helping people know about drugs we can support them to adopt safer use behaviours."

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