

TENDANCES

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Update on current research

Recent trends and new drugs in France

The results of the sixth national report on the TREND system: subject-based operations 2000-2004 and principal observations 2004

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This edition of *Tendances* presents the principal results of the sixth year of operation of the TREND system (recent trends and new drugs) for 2004.¹ This system, set up as part of the three-year plan adopted by the public authorities in 1999, aims as quickly as possible to identify and describe the emerging phenomena linked to illegal drugs. These include new phenomena or existing ones undetected by the information systems previously in place. The information obtained should enable the various participants in the sphere of drug addiction (decision-makers, professionals, users) to contribute to the prevention or adaptation of behaviours, so as to encourage better protection of drug users and of the general population.

This year, several of the system's recent findings have been processed using a general synthesis which combines the information collected since the system's inception.

The first part of this edition of *Tendances* is devoted to an analysis of four special subjects, revisiting the information collected since the system was created. These "special subjects" concern the practice of intravenous drug use and its projected reduction; the appearance of new and younger groups of people in lowthreshold

¹ The national report on the TREND system is available in full on the OFDT website at the following address: www.ofdt.fr/ofdtdev/live/public/rap05/efxpblc.html.

facilities and treatment structures; the development in the TREND system's two spheres of research in cocaine and crack taking, and finally, the current fashion for natural hallucinogens. The second part is devoted to a more traditional exercise highlighting the main trends of 2004.

. The various websites affiliated to the TREND system contain observations in two principal fields: urban areas and the electronic music scene. Urban areas, as defined by TREND, essentially cover systems of low threshold facilities (shops and syringe-exchange programmes) and open spaces (streets, squats, etc.). Most of the people encountered in this framework were problem users of illegal products with particularly difficult living conditions. The electronic music scene (where people who do not take drugs were also encountered) is defined as places where events focusing on music take place (raves, clubs, discotheques, private parties). The choice of these two fields is justified by the high probability of finding new phenomena there, or phenomena not hitherto observed. On their own, however, they cannot reveal everything about the real use of drugs today in France and French overseas territories. It is also important to remember that the observations and data have been collected from sub-groups of populations who are more inclined to experiment and use products than the general population of equivalent age. The resulting findings cannot therefore be extrapolated to the whole population. However, they are useful for describing developments that are likely to affect a wider population.

Special subjects 2000 – 2004

Intravenous drug use in France

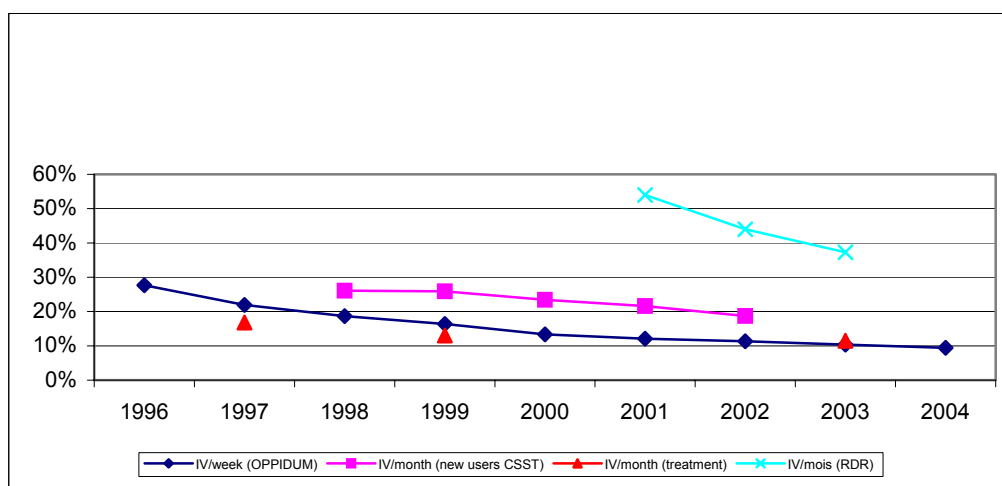
Since the year 2000, the observations derived from the TREND system reveal a probable reduction in drug injection in populations who use illegal products. This finding is derived from a combination of factors:

- The number of people being monitored, including those undergoing opiate-substitution treatment, has increased, leading some of them either to give up this method of administration or to reduce their usage frequency;
- The methods of administration of the illegal products most frequently used today, particularly stimulants (cocaine, ecstasy, amphetamines) and hallucinogens ("magic" mushrooms, LSD) are mainly snorting, administration by mouth or inhalation;
- The image of **intravenous drug use** is very negative because it is held responsible for the risk of contracting infection (AIDS, hepatitis) or painful life-threatening conditions (abscesses, haematomas).
- In the recreational scene, injection is extremely rare and tends to be stigmatised.

The quantitative data collected during the various surveys conducted with users at so-called low threshold facilities confirm a reduction in intravenous use. The proportion of injectors, therefore, during the month before the survey, fell from 54% in 2001

(429/799) to 37% in 2003 (401/1,074).² Moreover, among heroin users in the preceding month, the proportion of people taking the drug intravenously fell from 58% in 2001 to 53% in 2003. The data derived from other survey systems seem to confirm this finding (see graph below).

Frequency of injection during the past week or month in several populations of drug users in France between 1996 and 2004



OPPIDUM (Observation of medical products used for non-medical purposes): Annual survey of drug-users receiving treatment for a given week conducted by the CEIPs (Centres for assessment and information on drug-dependency). New CSST (specialised treatment centre for drug-users) users: information taken from the annual reports of the CSST's sent to the DGS (General Health Directorate). Treatment: "November" surveys for a given month in 1997, 1999 and 2003. RDR: "Low threshold" surveys of users of low threshold facilities by TREND/OFDT.

However, injection is still frequently practised, particularly in marginal sub-groups composed mainly of very young adults. There is a genuine risk relating to vigilance against infection, especially as young users are less likely than their elders to take sufficient precautionary measures against HIV contamination.

However, these latter elements do not invalidate the observed general decline in intravenous use and the positive effects of such a decline on public health.

Homeless urban drug-users and low threshold or treatment arrangements

Since 2002, the people involved in low threshold and treatment arrangements have reported that the population of drug-users is growing and becoming younger and that the majority of the people concerned live in highly precarious social situations. The prevalence of drug use is spreading to the fringes of urban societies and the recreational scene.

According to observers, this population is far from homogeneous and consists essentially of two relatively different worlds. The first is that of "traditional" and "experienced" marginality, an expression of the disaffiliation process (family, work,

² This information should be interpreted with caution, as participation in the survey of users was voluntary.

social rights) that leads individuals into situations of deep social and sanitary poverty. The second is the product of the widespread emergence, in the mid 1990s, of “electronic” music which, alongside the more conventional symptoms that are expressed in discotheques and night clubs, acted as a catalyst for a growing number of disaffected young people, rebelling against the dominant way of life.

Although there are differences between these two populations, particularly in terms of consumption control and the type of products consumed, they are now found in the centres of large cities where they are becoming increasingly visible over time. The future prospects of the use of psychoactive products, and the heavy consumption of many different products, distinguish these populations. The increasing attendance of users at so-called low threshold and treatment facilities is creating unprecedented difficulties for the professionals who staff these facilities. Originally, these low threshold facilities were intended for a relatively limited public, consisting of people in highly marginal situations caused by dependency on intravenous opiates, and heroin in particular. Nowadays, these facilities are confronted by larger and younger populations, characterised by consumption that is more diverse and people who are more difficult to find and retain. The task facing professionals is to adapt the facilities to this new public, either in terms of the material resources needed or the development of new prevention measures against risky practices, as well as the retention of the people concerned in a health and social rehabilitation process.

The consumption of cocaine and crack/free base

The use of cocaine in powder form (chlorhydrate) is continuing to grow in France, both in the urban and recreational fields.³ The social environments in which this consumption takes place have become so broad and varied that it is now difficult to describe a typical consumer. In the “electronic music” recreational scene, among the five cities included in the survey in 2004 (Nice, Toulouse, Rennes, Bordeaux and Metz)⁴, 35% (518/1,496) of the people surveyed said they had taken cocaine in the last month and over two thirds said they had taken it at least once in their lives. In urban areas, the latest data available (2003) show that 35% of the people who took part in the survey conducted on low threshold facilities had taken it in the last month.⁵ In both of the fields researched, the quantitative data show that the most frequent method of administration is “snorting” (98% in the “electronic music” scene and 62% in “low threshold” facilities). However, in urban areas, the practice of injecting cocaine is widespread, as nearly four out of ten cocaine users said they had injected it (43%).

³ In France, the number of people aged between 18 and 75 who have taken cocaine is estimated at 1 million, or about 2%, and the number of users during the year at 150,000.

⁴ This survey was designed to provide estimates on the consumption of psychoactive substances by people visiting “electronic music” recreational areas (night clubs and parties) and the principal characteristics of those people (demographic, social, health related, risky practices, party-going habits).

⁵ A quantitative survey conducted on users of low threshold facilities (shops and the syringe exchange programme) in the sites covered by TREND. In 2003, 1,082 people were questioned in nine cities in France and three French overseas departments.

The availability of the product is increasing constantly, while at the same time its price is falling to the point of becoming affordable to a growing number of potential users. In 2004, the average price of a gram of chlorhydrate of cocaine was 60 euros, representing the lowest price recorded since the TREND system's inception. This is due to the increase in international trafficking to Europe in recent years. It is reflected in the birth of *ad hoc* networks of small cocaine dealers. Often, previously existing cannabis and heroin dealing networks may simply add cocaine to their range of products. It is therefore becoming easily obtainable. Unlike other users of psychoactive substances, cocaine users are hardly affected by the stigmatisation linked to using illegal products. Having been represented early on as a relatively "controllable" and "manageable" drug producing few negative "dependency" consequences, cocaine has been integrated into a wide variety of social networks with relative ease..

Based on all these points, it is impossible to project that the spread of cocaine use in France will slow down in the near future.

The crack/free base form of cocaine is not nearly so popular in either urban areas or the recreational scene. In 2003, in urban areas, it seems that the frequency of crack use in the past month in the population attending low threshold facilities was half that of cocaine use in its chlorhydrate form (18% compared with 35%). In the recreational ascene, the "electronic music" survey showed that only a small minority of the people who took part in the survey (6.1%) used crack/free base. However, some observers of the recreational scene, and the "rave" environment in particular, reported an increase in cocaine smoking. This product circulates under the name of "free base", which is less stigmatised in this environment than crack, although strictly speaking it is the same product, something which most of its users do not realise.

As in previous years, the availability of cocaine in "crack" form remained low. Only the three known traditional locations (French Guiana, Martinique and central Paris) showed a significant presence of the product and associated sales networks. The prevalence of the product was uniformly negative, regardless of the locations, contexts or periods concerned.

Methodological reference points

The TREND system

TREND uses continuous collection tools coordinated by the OFDT, specific research and shared information systems. The tools coordinated by the OFDT comprise: the network of eleven sites, nine of them new in metropolitan areas (Bordeaux, Dijon, Lille, Lyons, Marseilles, Metz, Paris, Rennes and Toulouse) and two in overseas territories (French Guiana and Martinique), with a shared toxicological research and analysis strategy of samples of seized synthesised drugs.

The specific research is carried out through surveys which aim to gain a fuller understanding of a subject identified by the system, the exploration of a particular social space or the preparation of new observation tools. The shared information systems are: the OPPIDUM survey (Observation of psychotropic products or

medications used for non-medical purposes) of the CEIP's: an annual description of CSST users, mainly; the SIAMOIS system (Information system for the accessibility of drug injection equipment and substitution); injection equipment and substitution products sales figures and trends; the OFDT's ESCAPAD survey: an annual description, previously bi-annual, of consumption by people aged under eighteen; the data of the OCRTIS (Central office for the repression of illicit drug trafficking) comprising statistics on police activity and overdose deaths.

Natural hallucinogens

There has been a marked rise in the consumption of natural hallucinogenic substances in the last decade. This phenomenon is part of a general movement towards natural "organic" products.

The most popular hallucinogens in France are "magic" mushrooms, especially in the 17-18 year age group, among whom mushrooms are second only to cannabis as the most widely-taken drug. In 2004, in the "electronic music" scene, more than one user in two had consumed hallucinogenic mushrooms at least once in their life, and more than 12% had consumed them in the last month. In low threshold facilities in urban areas, the rate rose to 14%.

Since 2001, , other substances (Datura, Ayahuasca, Salvia divinorum, wood rose) have been increasingly consumed alongside hallucinogenic mushrooms, but by much more restricted groups.

This rise in the use of natural substances is can be partly explained as a reaction to the virtual monopoly held by synthetic and chemical substances which are increasingly perceived as being harmful in the long term to the consumer. Moreover, the risks and dangers aside, these natural substances have a powerful spiritual and mystic image. In combination with preparation and consumption rituals, these drugs have earned a special status, shielding them from the disdain normally attributed to other drugs..

With an emphasis on exchanging gifts, bartering and sharing, the consumption of natural products also represents an escape from the dominant system of values and fits in well with the ideology of going back to nature and the non-commercial relationships typical of primitive societies. This "primitivism" is also seen in the increasing use of words derived from traditional societies to describe the people who become initiated into the consumption of these substances: they are often referred to as "shamans" or "guides". Moreover, the promotion of the ritualised and frequently community-based character of this type of consumption gives their users a positive self-image in which controlled use is a fundamental element. This is a stark contrast with the image of the archetypal drug addict who is dominated by his habits.

Over recent years, hallucinogens have developed "cool" status and as such have the potential to spread considerably over the next few years..

Observations on 2004

High-dosage buprenorphine (HDB) is still preponderant among opiates in urban areas

It appears that HDB remained widely available in city centres in 2004, with the exception of two locations (Bordeaux and Toulouse), which registered a drop in the

availability of high-dosage buprenorphine (Subutex ®) in 2004 on the parallel market, essentially due to local restrictions on prescriptions,. As a result of this wide availability, the average price of an 8 mg tablet is low, at about three euros on the parallel market. In other words, the price has halved in five years.

As in previous years, this misuse more often affects the most marginalized populations, for whom the drug constitutes a sort of “poor man’s heroin”. Observers of urban areas emphasise the rise in snorting in 2004, a finding that coincides with the data derived from the survey carried out in low threshold facilities in 2003, showing a marked rise in the frequency of snorting (+ 40%) compared with the previous years.

Among populations of abusers, the perception of high-dosage buprenorphine remains negative. It is associated with the street, and an increasing number of users complain about the strong dependency it induces, whether it is misused or taken as part of a therapeutic programme.

... but heroin is still present in spite of the marked differences between locations

In 2004, the number of sites covered by the TREND system, situated in metropolitan France, reported that the increased availability of heroin (especially in its brown form) in urban areas was greater than in the previous year. Whereas in 2003 only two sites (Toulouse and Paris) showed this upward trend, four other sites saw increased availability in 2004 (Lyons, Lille, Metz and Rennes). Conversely, it seems that in Marseilles, continuing the trend observed in previous years, the availability of the product has fallen considerably. This general increase in the availability of heroin affects the change in the average price of a gram of heroin, which was 30 euros in metropolitan France, a sharp fall compared with the previous year (45 euros).⁶

In the recreational scene, heroin has become more prevalent at events such as raves and “teknivals” and seems to affect an ever widening public. Several sites reported an increase in the presence of the drug, although its perception has barely changed and it is still stigmatised as a taboo drug.

Ecstasy use still significant in the recreational scene

In 2004, continuing the trend of previous years ecstasy was commonplace in the electronic music scene. The reduced frequency of raves has caused increased ecstasy distribution in clubs and discotheques, particularly in the form of pills and capsules which make it easy to administer discreetly. Moreover, it was confirmed in 2004 that the use of ecstasy outside any recreational environment was on the increase in urban areas, among a marginalised population who used it intravenously. Ecstasy is apparently popular for its stimulating effects, which enable people to deal with the

⁶ These data should be interpreted cautiously because of the methodological differences in price calculations between 2003 (“low threshold survey”) and 2004 (qualitative data derived from the sites).

difficult conditions associated with living on the street. This finding corroborates the information derived from the survey conducted in 2003 in low threshold facilities, showing that almost one third of drug users had recently taken the stimulant and that one user in ten took it by injection.

Although ecstasy continues to be distributed, the question of its image among users is ambiguous. It seems that a generation gap is appearing in the opinions of ecstasy users. Whereas recent users seem to like it, older users seem to consider the pill form of ecstasy to be a “clinker”, a “common” product, whose use no longer confers the “distinction” that made it appealing a few years ago. Conversely, when in “powder” form, generally considered to be of a higher quality, it seems to be more popular because of its more marked effects.

According to the data obtained from the SINTES system, the dominant form is still the ecstasy pill (85%), with powders (8.5%) and capsules (4.5%) falling far below this figure. The average dose of MDMA per pill is 60 mg.

The re-emergence of LSD ...

The previously reported enthusiasm for natural hallucinogens does not seem to have had any adverse effects on LSD. In fact, after LSD had almost disappeared in 2002 following a breakdown in supplies, its reappearance in the electronic music scene was observed in 2004. The increase in availability varied greatly. Some sites, such as Marseilles and Paris, reported a marked increase, whereas others, such as Bordeaux, Lyon and Metz, while confirming the reappearance of LSD, indicated the erratic nature of the product and the frequency of “swindles”. Fuelled by the current fashion for products with hallucinogenic effects, LSD’s image in the electronic music scene seems to be very positive. Alongside its much sought-after effects, this substance seems to be enjoying a certain “aura” attached to its reputation as a symbol of the 1960s and 1970s, linked to various currents of the counter-culture of those days. For many young users, who are close to the alternative environments of the electronic music movement, it is a product which bears a certain mythology. This finding was confirmed by the survey into uses in the “electronic music” scene. The levels of experimentation with LSD vary from more than two thirds (71.4%) among people who go to “raves” to less than a quarter (22.8%) for people who frequent “exclusive” clubs.

... the presence of GHB ...

As in 2003, there is evidence of the misuse of GHB in the French electronic music scene. Its use is still geographically limited, however, as only two sites, Paris and Marseilles, reported direct observations. It would appear that it is used mostly in environments linked with the homosexual community. The anaesthetic appears to be misused in homosexual clubs, where the de-inhibiting effects of very small doses are highly prized. Furthermore, health officials monitoring GHB use in Paris reported serious medical side effects, most notably comas.

... and the invisibility of methamphetamine

This edition of *Tendances* deals with methamphetamine, a drug better known as Ya baa, Ice or Crystal Meth, mainly because of the increasing interest of a certain section of the media in the imminent arrival of the product in France,⁷ rather than because its presence was detected by the TREND system. Information on these substances is in fact virtually non-existent or is little more than rumour. Some observers, however, relaying information circulating in the gay clubs of Paris, say that people are starting to use methamphetamine in those environments.

For fuller information

BELLO (P-Y), TOUFIK (A.), GANDILHON (M.), GIRAUDON (I.), *Phénomènes émergents liés aux drogues en 2004, Sixième rapport national du dispositif TREND*, Saint-Denis, OFDT, 2005, 171 p.

This report is available in PDF format only on the OFDT website (www.ofdt.fr) at the following address: <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/fr/>

BELLO (P-Y), TOUFIK (A.), et al., *Phénomènes émergents liés aux drogues en 2003*, TREND 2004, OFDT, Paris.

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⁷ “Drugs – the Crystal warning”, *Têtu*, number 95, December 2004. In this article, *Têtu*, a publication close to the gay community, announced the arrival of crystal meth and devoted an article to it focusing on the dangers caused by its use, based on statements by American users, particularly regarding the abandonment of safe practices in sexual relations.

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