

Emerging Phenomena related to drug use

in France in 2003

Main Results of the 5th National Report

The 5th Annual Report of the TREND¹ (*Tendances récentes et nouvelles drogues*, Recent Trends and New Drugs) system within the OFDT (*Observatoire français des drogues et des toxicomanies*, French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction) was put on line in 2004. This *Tendances* issue presents its main results. This system², set up within the context of the triennial plan approved by government in June 1999, aims at identifying and depicting as soon as possible emerging phenomena in connection with illicit drugs unlikely to appear in other methods of data collection. Spotting such phenomena must provide decision-makers, professionals, and citizens an unbiased basis to start considering the most appropriate behaviours and guidelines for responding precociously to such evolutions.

In 2003, the two major milieus to be monitored by the system were “the urban context” and the “the techno festive context”. The first one, as labelled by TREND, essentially includes low treshold services (“drop-in” and syringe exchange schemes) and “open” areas (street, squat, etc.). It enables meeting and observing illicit drug users having generally a problematical use of such substances. The “techno festive context” covers the areas and periods when festive events take place (*free-parties*, discotheque or home parties) as being part of techno culture. Such a specific context allows studying users and uses pertaining to that milieu.

Both contexts have been chosen because of the notable prospect of detecting new phenomena or not yet monitored ones so far. However they do not represent in themselves the reality of illicit drug use in Metropolitan France and its overseas departments, especially for the most distributed substances. It is also vital to remind that observations and data collections are performed among population subgroups that prove more apt to experiment and use substances than the matching general population. Conclusions issuing from such a survey should not be generalized to the whole population within the same age-bracket. On the other

¹ <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/fr/trend03.htm>

² This system is more detailed page 4 under the *Methodological References* column.

hand, such results are invaluable for describing the variety of problematical users and predicting evolutions to come in the future within a wider population.

Among the evolutions/phenomena regarded as outstanding, six of them have been retained in 2003, among which four are confirming evolutions previously identified.

- In the “urban context”:

- a likely decrease in injection practices;

- a major status for high-dosage buprenorphine (HDB, Subutex®)

among opiate users;

- a decrease in recent use of heroin.

- in both monitoring contexts: cocaine and ecstasy uses are carrying on and increasing.

Two conclusions appear as emerging phenomena in 2003:

- a “renewing” of populations attending low threshold services;

- certain users’ craze for hallucinogenic substances of natural origins.

A Decrease in Injection Practices

During the last three years of monitoring, a number of pieces of information issued from the network of TREND sites indicate a decrease in the proportion of individuals performing injections, and a change in the behaviours of the most recent users. Since 2001, some sites report observations in accordance underlining a reduction in injection practices. Alongside such observations, within the entire users of “first rank” structures, the proportion of injection users during the previous month went from 54% in 2001 (429/799) down to 44% in 2002 (401/1,074). Among heroin users during the last month, the ratio of individuals resorting to injection went from 58% in 2001 up to 61% in 2002, and down to 53% in 2003. Therefore a drop in injection practices during last years seems most likely among psychoactive users. However this conclusion goes along with that of a persisting main group of injection users, and cannot exclude the fact that such a practice may be picking up again in the future. Furthermore, observers of the “urban context” report a renewed interest in that mode of administration among certain young users. Along with that fact all the data collections show the importance of resorting to sniffing as a mode of administration for numerous substances. Indeed 84% of users met in the street or through “first rank” structures resorted to it in their lifetimes, among which 38% during the past month. In the “festive context” sniffing proves also the major mode of administering substances.

Such evolutions in the modes of administering substances — decrease of injection practices and development of sniffing — must be carefully and steadily monitored. They are indeed likely to involve changes in the frequency of risks taken by users and therefore diseases (viral infections...) related with drug use.

A Continual Development of Cocaine Use...

Under its powder aspect (cocaine hydrochloride), cocaine is a substance benefiting from a rather positive image, which improved during the last years, as much among users met in the street or through “first rank” structures as among those belonging to the “festive context”. This substance was experimented by more than two-thirds (70%) of the users in relation to the “electronic music festive context” in the cities of Nice and Toulouse³. Its use during the last month concerns 37% of these individuals and 35% of users attending front rank structures. The social profiles of such substance users are diversifying: from very marginalized individuals to those with a high income yet belonging to the “festive context”. Sniffing is the almost exclusive mode of administration within the “festive context” and now prevails in the “urban context” (62% of cocaine users in the last month). However the injection of cocaine hydrochloride still concerns more than four cocaine users out of ten in the previous month and attending “first rank” structures (43%). In both contexts cocaine use remains basically periodic (a few intakes during the month).

The availability of such substance still seems to increase in 2003. The medium price for one gram remains steady in Metropolitan France, where it varies between 60 and 75 €. The purity of the samples seized and analysed by the police has increased: three-quarters contain between 60 and 100% of cocaine.

Cocaine hydrochloride is a substance whose use is spreading in Metropolitan France. It keeps a real potential of development because of its positive image among psychoactive users, its significant availability, the variety of the users' social profiles, as well as the minor rates of use during the year among young French adults when compared with most of other European countries (Spain, United Kingdom, etc.)

³ One of the purposes of the “electronic music” survey is to settle a quantitative methodology enabling the depiction of socio-demographical features and the psychoactive uses of individuals attending musical and festive events within that specific musical movement. See Reynaud-Maurupt, C. S. Akoka and S. Chaker, Faisabilité d'une étude quantitative sur les pratiques des substances psychoactives dans l'espace festif « musiques électroniques »: compte-rendu intermédiaire, in *Phénomènes émergents liés aux drogues en 2003*, P.-Y. Bello et al., 2004, OFDT, Paris, pp. 231-252.

... and Ecstasy Use

Ecstasy is a substance with a general “good” image among users. However its perception varies according to its aspect (pill or powder) and the user’s experience. The most experienced users judge ecstasy pills as a “casual” substance and seem to resort to “powdered MDMA” regarded as of better quality. Experimentation and use ratios remain high as much in the techno festive context as in the “urban” one. Thus ecstasy has been tested by more than three-quarters of the users (76%) from the “electronic music” festive milieu of the cities of Nice and Toulouse, and used by more than one third of the individuals (35%) during the previous month. In the “urban context” the ten use occurrences during one’s life time concern six “first rank” users out of ten (59% vs. 42% in 2002) and the recent use relates to nearly one third (32% vs. 25% in 2002, and 24% in 2001). Numerous observers within the “urban context” report an increasing presence of ecstasy in that milieu, with uses which may be performed outside of any festive context. In the “festive” milieu, the main routes of administration are the oral route, then sniffing, whereas in the “urban context” the oral duct prevails over injection.

Ecstasy benefits from important availability and accessibility. If the average price for one unit is steady (a little under 10 €), the development of sales in batches of a few pills may reduce prices down to 3 or 4 € per unit. The prevailing appearance remains pills (90%) far ahead of capsules (5%) and powders (4%). More than nine pills out of ten sold as “ecstasy” actually contain MDMA. If the average dose remains moderate (56 mg of MDA), a large variability in the doses may nevertheless be observed (1 to 157 mg);

In 2003, ecstasy keeps a rather “good” image among users. The use of this substance is still spreading among the populations monitored by the TREND system, as well as its high availability and accessibility can be observed. Such features enable to consider that its use could keep on developing in France among young adults.

The Prevailing Status of High-Dosage Buprenorphine (Subutex®) Among Opiates

High-dosage buprenorphine (HDB, Subutex®) is a substitute for opiates used by a great number of individuals in France (71,000 to 84,500 in 2003). In the “festive context” HDB remains a substance hardly used. In contrast, among users attending first rank structures, its use during the previous month proves notably frequent, as it relates to more than four individuals out of ten. It is the most used opiate ahead of heroin, and users often take it on a

daily basis. In more than fifty percent of cases, the user admits using it only for therapeutic purposes. In 2003 prime-users (individuals whose first opiate used is HDB) and prime-addicts (individuals whose first addictive substance is HDB) are still identified on several sites. Among the users met in the street or through first rank structures this substance still suffers from a degraded perception because of its frequent misuses and the strong addiction it causes. If more than six HDB users out of ten take it orally, nearly half of the latter resort to injection, and a quarter of them to sniffing, as far as modes of administration are concerned. More than two-thirds of the HDB injectors declare undergoing pathologies in relation to that mode of administration. HDB injection proves indeed statistically associated to a more frequent unexpected appearance of local and regional symptoms, such as hand or forearm swelling and abscesses.

Nearly all sites report a large availability of HDB on the blackmarket that translates in a steady decreasing price of the 8 mg-pill: since the year 2000, the latter would have been split by half and its average amounts to 3 € in Metropolitan France in 2003.

In 2003, a persisting misuse of HDB among users belonging to the “urban context” has been observed. The increasing availability of this medicine on the unofficial market goes along with the observation of a rather young population of prime-users.

Contrasting Evolutions for Heroin

Heroin still benefits from a positive image perceived by its users, undoubtedly in contrast with the tarnished one associated with HDB. Heroin remains a substance known by a majority of users met in the street or attending front rank structures: more than two-thirds (68%) have used it ten times or more during their lifetimes. On the other hand, its use during the last month among the same population seems to decrease (25% in 2003 vs. 33% in 2001) without a relevant progress in the “festive context”. The prevailing route of administration varies according to populations and contexts: injection in the “urban context” and more particularly among the older individuals, sniffing in the “festive context” and among the younger ones. Availability and accessibility appear to develop within the “festive context” (home parties and *free-parties*) and to vary a lot in the “urban context” according to the sites (“disappearance” in Marseilles and “increase” in Toulouse). The average price for one gram of brown heroin seems to drop from 58 € in 2001 to 45 € in 2003). Seizures analysed by police laboratories

enable to observe an increase in the share of heroin samples with a content over 20% (43% in 2003 vs. 27% in 2001).

As in the previous years, it seems that the recent use of heroin keeps on decreasing within the “urban context” yet without significantly moving upwards in the “festive context”. Such a trend is not contradicted by its comparatively better perception, restricted to heroin users, issuing partly from its image of “quality” substance.

A Renewal of the Individuals Attending First Rank Structures Within the “Urban Context”

During the last two years, the socio-demographical features of the populations of users met in the street or through first rank structures (“shops”, syringe exchange scheme) have changed. It would seem that a “renewal” of such populations is in progress. Among these individuals recently observed, three subgroups have been identified:

- individuals being strongly affected by the techno culture, claiming certain forms of marginality and most particularly the “mythical” nomadism of English *travellers* (spreading of the techno culture all around France);

- individuals dropping out from their families and with a weak social integration. The share of that specific subgroup, observed for a long time by first rank structures collaborating with TREND, would appear to be growing;

- finally young adults issuing from a recent immigration, specially from Eastern Europe.

The young belonging to the first two subgroups identified are bordering in-between the “urban context” and the “festive” one, favouring that way the “exchanges” as far as the substances modes of use are concerned. Data resulting from the 2003 “first rank” survey (carried out among 1,082 individuals) allow conveying certain features relating to the younger ones (15-24 year-olds) attending first rank structures (26% of the population surveyed vs. 20% in 2001). They are individuals living in poorer social conditions than their elders’. More than six of them out of ten declare having no Social Security cover, and more than one third having no means of support. The 25+ year-olds, entitled to get RMI (income support), live in a more advantageous situation.

The substances used and the modes of use partly differ from those of their elders. Almost all of them have used tobacco (92%), cannabis (85%) and alcohol (80%) during the previous

month. This specific group includes the highest ratio of daily cannabis users (64%), as well as the average number of joints used on a daily basis (4.9). During the past month, the 15-24 year-olds use more *uppers* (stimulants) and hallucinants, yet less opiates than their elders. The *uppers* mainly used include ecstasy (59% vs. 23% among the 25+ year-olds) and cocaine hydrochloride (42% vs. 33%). The hallucinants being chiefly used are mushrooms (30% vs. 9%) and LSD (23% vs. 7%). Among the opiates, the only one to be most used by the 15-25 year-olds is *rachacha*⁴ (9% vs. 4%). However it comes far behind HDB (33%) and heroin (24%), as far as the frequency of use is concerned. The modes of administration performed by the younger ones are sniffing (57% of the 15-24 year-olds vs. 25% of the 25+ year-olds) and less often injection (28% vs. 40%). The screening ratios for viral infections are negligible (HIV: 56%; virus C hepatitis: 53%; virus B hepatitis: 3%) among the 15-24 year-olds. Among individuals knowing their serological status, prevalence are comparatively low (HIV: 6%; virus C hepatitis: 17%; virus B hepatitis: 3%). But all these results are also caused by a lack of knowledge of their serological status among untested or not recently tested individuals.

According to the observations brought about by the TREND system, it appears that the generation of the under 25 year-old users met through first rank structures characterized itself by a frequently degraded social condition, numerous uses in contrast with those of previous generations and sensibly different modes of use.

A Certain Craze For Natural Hallucinants

The use of hallucinogenic substances is less spread than the one relating to opiates or *uppers* among the populations being surveyed. However in 2003 several features indicate an increase in the experimentation and the use of natural hallucinogenic substances. The latter benefit from a usually positive image among users, because of their natural origins enabling them to rank alongside “bio” products. Hallucinogenic mushrooms stand for the most distributed ones. They have been tested by more than half of the users (58%) belonging to the “electronic music festive context” of the cities of Nice and Toulouse, and used during the previous month by more than one individual out of seven (15%). Within the “urban context” the ten use occurrences during one’s lifetime relate to four first rank users out of ten (40% vs. 23% in 2002), and the use in the previous month involves 14% (7% in 2002) of them. Such

⁴ Handmade opiate prepared out of poppy. It looks like a soft paste of reddish brown colour. It may be smoked or taken in a decoction form.

hallucinants are almost exclusively used by oral duct in a private context or in connection with a festive event. Accessibility appears to be on the rise notably through Internet purchase or in some neighbour countries, as well as through the development of self-cultivation.

Datura stramonium is a plant with hallucinogenic and toxic properties. If its use is much more restricted than the one of mushrooms, it nevertheless seems to develop. Several accidents pertaining to its use have been reported. *Salvia divinorum* is a plant whose use causes intense and quick hallucinations. Its use, notably aside the “festive context”, appears to grow but concerns limited groups of individuals so far.

The “good” image of hallucinogenic substances of natural origins, as well as the possible rise of their use by young users belonging to the surveyed contexts, must prompt the monitoring to be carried on. Hallucinogenic mushrooms gather several features suggesting their distribution will develop among limited groups of individuals.

Pierre-Yves Bello, Abdalla Toufik, Michel Gandilhon, Isabelle Giraudon

Methodological References

The TREND system is based upon:

1) A constant data collection coordinated by OFDT. Information come from:

- The network gathering twelve sites, including nine in Metropolitan France (Bordeaux, Dijon, Lille, Lyons, Marseilles, Metz, Paris, Rennes, Toulouse) and three overseas departments (French Guyana, Martinique, Réunion) provided with a common strategy for collecting and analysing data. It summons up around 600 local partners coming from varied scopes of activities;

- The SINTES system, for toxic analysis of synthetic drug samples seized and collected, involving 50 collectors and 5 analysis laboratories.

2) Specific investigations as surveys which may pertain to deeper studying some subject matter identified by the system, exploring a specific social context, or developing new tools for monitoring:

3) Information systems in partnership:

- OPPIDUM investigations (Monitoring psychotropic substances or those diverted from their medical use) and OSIAP (Suspicious prescriptions, indicative of abuse and drug dependency) from the CEIP and AFSSAPS;

- The SIAMOIS system (Information system on the accessibility of medicinal injection equipment and substitutes):
- The ESCAPAD survey within OFDT (annual depiction of the use among the 18 year-olds);
- The data from OCRTIS (Central office for the repression of drug-related offences) pertaining to the police activities figures and overdose deaths.

For More Information

BELLO (P-Y), TOUFIK (A.), GANDILHON (M.), GIRAUDON (I.), *Phénomènes émergents liés au drogues en 2003- Cinquième rapport national du dispositif TREND*, Saint-Denis, OFDT, 2004, 275 pp. <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/fr/trend03.htm>
(*TREND 5th National Report*)

The twelve site reports available at : http://www.ofdt.fr/ofdt/fr/trend_sites.htm

Giraudon, I. and P.-Y. Bello, *Regards sur l'ecstasy et d'autres produits de synthèse en France . Analyse de la base du système d'identification national des toxiques et des substances (SINTES) de 1999 à la fin du premier semestre 2002*. Rapport TREND. 2003, Paris: OFDT. 215 pp. <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/fr/ecstasy.htm>

Escots, S, G. Fahet, *Usages non substitutifs de la buprénorphine haut-dosage, Investigation menée en France, en 2002-2003*. TREND. 2004, Paris: ORSMIP/OFTD. 118 pp.
<http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/fr/bhd.htm>

Reynaud-Maurupt, C. and C. Verchère, *Les nouveaux usages de l'héroïne*. 2003, Paris: OFDT. 117 pp. <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/fr/heroine.htm>

Tendances

Director of Publication: Jean-Michel Costes – **Writing:** Marie-Danièle Barré, Aline Desesquelles, Alain Epelboin, Jean-Dominique Favre, Claude Got, Serge Karsenty, Annette Leclerc, Thoams Rouault – **Layout:** Frédérique Million – **English Translation:** Jean-Noël Chatain – **Documentation:** Isabelle Michot, Laurence Callard – **ISSN** 12956910

