

Study focuses on mephedrone use in Northern Ireland post-ban

October 4 2010

Researchers at Queen's University Belfast have completed one of the first studies of mephedrone use in Northern Ireland since the drug was outlawed earlier this year. They found that the ban did not deter those mephedrone users surveyed from taking the substance.

Interviews with 23 mephedrone users were completed during a two-month period (May and June 2010) following the legislation that made the drug illegal in the UK. Study participants were aged 19 to 51 years, around half of whom (12) were female. 19 of the 23 people who took part in the study were employed, and most occupations were affiliated with business, trades, the service industry or the public sector.

The research was led by Dr Karen McElrath at Queen's School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work.

The key findings from the study were:

- 21 of the 23 study participants had used mephedrone after the ban.
- Only one person was very much opposed to using the substance again.
- Approximately half the sample preferred mephedrone to cocaine or ecstasy. Some had experienced negative effects, for example,

sleeplessness, difficult comedowns and next-day [depression](#), but these factors generally did not deter them from using the substance again.

- None of those who took part in the research felt that 'legal highs' were safe simply because they were legal.
- None of the study participants recalled an initial interest in using mephedrone because it had been legal. Rather, its legality before April 2010 meant that it was easier to access and cheaper than many illegal substances.
- Prior to the ban, only three interviewees had purchased mephedrone from 'head shops' and four interviewees had purchased mephedrone from online suppliers. The majority tended to access mephedrone through friends or dealers.
- The majority of interviewees had prior experience of taking ecstasy, [amphetamine](#) or [cocaine](#).
- During their most recent use of mephedrone, all the study participants had also consumed alcohol, although the timing and amount of alcohol varied.
- During their most recent use of mephedrone, six of the 23 participants had used another psychoactive substance, other than [alcohol](#).
- During their most recent use of mephedrone, most participants had consumed between one-two grams of the drug, although half recalled bingeing on mephedrone, sharing upward of seven-eight grams with two to three other people.

Dr McElrath said: "This is one of the first studies into mephedrone use in Northern Ireland since it was made illegal earlier this year. The findings suggest that the ban did not have a significant impact on those who already used mephedrone, at least during the two-month period that followed the ban. We are keen to develop this research further and to compare our results with a similar study conducted in Waterford prior to the ban on mephedrone in the Republic of Ireland in May 2010."

The study was part of a cross-border research partnership with Marie Clare Van Hout at the Waterford Institute of Technology.

Provided by Queen's University Belfast

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