



**UKDPC**

**UK DRUG POLICY COMMISSION**

**Representations of Drug Use and Drug  
Users in the British Press**

*A Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage*

**Evidence Review**  
December 2010

Loughborough Communications Research Centre  
Loughborough University

Published by:  
The UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC)  
Kings Place  
90 York Way  
London N1 9AG  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7812 3790  
Email: [info@ukdpc.org.uk](mailto:info@ukdpc.org.uk)  
Web: [www.ukdpc.org.uk](http://www.ukdpc.org.uk)

This publication is available online at:  
[www.ukdpc.org.uk/publications.shtml#Stigma\\_reports](http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/publications.shtml#Stigma_reports)

ISBN: 978-1-906246-28-0

© UKDPC December 2010

The UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) is an independent body providing objective analysis of evidence related to UK drug policy. It aims to improve political, media and public understanding of drug policy issues and the options for achieving an effective, evidence-led response to the problems caused by illegal drugs.

UKDPC is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales No. 5823583 and is a charity registered in England No. 1118203. The UKDPC is grateful to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for its support.

The views, interpretations and conclusions set out in this publication are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the UK Drug Policy Commission.

# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
SUMMARY	6
1. INTRODUCTION	9
2. METHODS USED	11
RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLING APPROACH	11
CONTENT ANALYSIS APPROACH	12
3. EXTENT AND NATURE OF COVERAGE OF DRUG USE AND DRUG USERS	14
FREQUENCY AND NATURE OF COVERAGE OVER TIME	14
WHAT TRIGGERS DRUG NEWS?	18
THE TYPE OF DRUG MENTIONED MOST OFTEN IN NEWS ABOUT DRUG USE	21
THE BACKGROUNDS OF USERS WHO FEATURED IN THE NEWS	24
KEY POINTS	26
4. CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG USE	28
ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF DRUG USE	28
HARM TO HEALTH	32
KEY POINTS	33
5. HOW RECOVERY AND THE CAUSES OF DRUG USE ARE PORTRAYED	34
EXPLAINING DRUG USE	34
RECOVERY: AN OVERLOOKED ISSUE	37
KEY POINTS	39

6.	ATTITUDES TO DRUG USE AND DRUG USERS WITHIN MEDIA COVERAGE	40
	CONDEMNATION OF DRUG USERS	40
	KEY DESCRIPTORS USED IN COVERAGE	42
	POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF USERS	45
	KEY POINTS	47
7.	THE ACCURACY AND BALANCE OF NEWSPAPER REPORTING	48
	STORY 1: SKUNK AND PSYCHOSIS	48
	STORY 2: COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PRISONER DRUG TREATMENT	49
	STORY 3: <i>WORLD DRUGS REPORT 2009</i> COVERAGE	51
8.	MEDIA COVERAGE OF OTHER STIGMATISED GROUPS	53
9.	KEY CONCLUSIONS	57
	PRESS REPRESENTATION OF DRUG USERS	57
	EXPLAINING DRUG USE	58
	REFERENCES	60
	APPENDIX A: SEARCH TERMS	61
	APPENDIX B: CODING MANUAL	62
	APPENDIX C: CODING SHEET	70

# Acknowledgements

LCRC would like to thank the following people for the help during this project: Raffaella Bianchi; Pawas Bisht; Deena Dajani; Li Gao; Laura Ranca; Christina Marinho; Ian Taylor; Penny Xanthopoulou.

The UK Drug Policy Commission is very grateful to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Scottish Drug Recovery Consortium and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for their financial support for the study reported here.

# Summary

Previous research has suggested that the media conveys a mainly negative impression which 'demonizes' and 'marginalizes' drugs users and misrepresents drugs users, drug use and its effects. Other UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) research has shown that nearly two-thirds (64%) of adults in the UK agreed with the statement that "People with a history of drug dependence are too often demonised in the media".

The UKDPC therefore commissioned the Loughborough Communications Research Centre (LCRC), to undertake a comprehensive and systematic study of the coverage of drug users and drug use in print media in the UK, to improve our understanding of the way drug users and drug use is represented in the British press.

This research involved analysing all items (over 6,000 in total) referencing drug users or drug use in eight newspapers (representing national, regional, tabloid and broadsheet papers from across the UK) in each of three years, 1995, 2002 and 2009. This found that:

- There was no apparent trend in the amount of coverage of drug use and drug users over time. In 1995 there were 1,642 items, this rose to 2,759 in 2002 and then fell to 1,763 in 2009.
- The majority of coverage (80%) was in news reports in all years, with feature pieces mentioning drug use or users being next most common (10%).
- The most frequent trigger for a newspaper item that featured drug use (25% of items) was an event within the criminal justice system; for example, a reported court case or arrest. This was particularly the case in the English regional press (38% of items).
- There were other variations between types of newspapers. The activities of celebrities and public figures were more likely to trigger drug use coverage in the tabloid press (9% of items) than in the broadsheet press (3%).
- The use of certain drugs was more frequently mentioned than others. The majority of items involved Class A drugs, although cannabis was the most commonly mentioned individual drug (22% of items).
- Compared with other drugs, coverage of ecstasy was much more commonly triggered by a death. Indeed, deaths were the most common triggering event for reports on ecstasy, in marked contrast to other drugs.

- Around a quarter of drug users mentioned in the press were professionals of one kind or another.
- The tabloid press featured celebrity users more often than the other outlets. The Scottish press featured proportionally more young users, while the English regional press was more likely than the other papers to refer to offenders.
- Portrayals of professionals and celebrities as drug users are most often linked to cocaine use. Young people are most likely to be shown as cannabis and ecstasy users while offenders and parents are most commonly portrayed as heroin users.
- Where the effects of drug use were mentioned in news items for either the community or the individual, these were overwhelmingly negative.
- The major negative impact raised for the individual was on health, with the next most significant consequence being crime.
- The results show some variation in the reported effects for individuals of using different drugs. Where the impact of heroin, cannabis, or ecstasy use was mentioned it was mainly the impact on the individual's health, especially in the case of ecstasy. However, the main consequence of taking cocaine was on the individual's career, and in the case of crack cocaine on the individual's propensity to commit crime.
- News items that mentioned the health harms of heroin, ecstasy, cocaine or crack use focused on the impact of the drug on physical health. However, news items that mentioned the harm of cannabis use raised its mental health impacts more frequently.
- Drug use rarely gets explained within newspaper coverage; reasons are only suggested in about one-third of items. Where it does, environmental factors are most often cited.
- There were no strong differences between the broadsheet press and the tabloid press in the ways in which drug use was explained. There was slightly greater emphasis on emotional and personal reasons in the Scottish press and the English regional press than in the UK national press, and the English regional press was also more likely to mention the influence of others.
- There were some noteworthy differences in the way all newspapers explained heroin and cocaine use. The reasons for heroin use were mainly personal and emotional issues and the influence of others while cocaine use tended to be explained in terms of lifestyle choice.
- Over the sample period, stories that mainly focused on recovery and rehabilitation were few and far between. When they did surface they mainly

concerned the appropriateness of government proposals to rehabilitate heroin users.

- Drug users were more likely to be condemned than empathised with in all newspapers, but were most likely to be condemned in the tabloid press, where around a fifth of users were condemned.
- The most significant group of users condemned in the tabloid press were offenders and parents who used drugs. Young people were least likely to be condemned.
- Certain groups of users were more likely to be labelled as 'addicts' or 'junkies' than others. Celebrities, non-professionals, young people and professionals were least likely to be labelled 'addicts' or 'junkies', while offenders, parents and unspecified members of the public were most likely to be given the tag.
- Offenders were also more likely to attract negative descriptions, while young people and professionals were more likely to attract positive ones.
- While it is not possible to identify in the findings a single coherent theme, this study shows that most of the reporting of drug use and drug users in the print media is in the form of brief news reports and that use of terms, such as 'junkie', are thankfully fairly rare.
- It does appear that coverage is skewed both in terms of what is covered and in how it is framed and there is clearly the potential for an increased focus on informative content (eg features, editorials and comment pieces) about the causes of drug dependency and the routes and challenges for getting out of it.
- Television, radio and on-line media will also be an important influence on public perceptions of drug use and drug users. Further research looking at the portrayal of drug users in other media would be beneficial.



# 1. Introduction

This analysis of press reporting<sup>1</sup> is part of a wider UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) investigation looking at the issue of stigma and barriers to recovery for people with drug dependence.

The objectives of this research project were guided by a need to explore a range of existing concerns about newspaper representation of drug users and use in the UK. These concerns stem from the observations of the drugs policy community and from academic research. They are perhaps best summarised by Stuart Taylor's recent synoptic account of research which paints a bleak picture. It reveals that studies show as media conveying a mainly negative impression, which 'demonises' and 'marginalises' drugs users, and consistently misrepresents drugs users as well as drug use and its effects (Taylor, 2008). This view is supported by the findings of a public attitudes survey conducted as part of the wider UKDPC research programme which showed that nearly two-thirds (64%) of adults in the UK agreed with the statement that "People with a history of drug dependence are too often demonised in the media" (Singleton, 2010).

While Taylor's review highlights some of the key findings of existing research it also shows that further empirical investigation is needed in certain areas. The first concerns the extent to which there is a dominant stereotypical image of drug users. While media outlets portray most users in a certain way, for example, as 'outsiders', 'folk devils', or as threats, other users, Taylor acknowledges, may be presented differently, for example, celebrity or middle-class users. While the media may portray certain users in certain ways, the exact extent to which this takes place in the UK is unknown. How the media represent some drugs users but not others, and the extent of this, requires further exploration if it is to be fully understood.

The second area concerns the extent to which the dominant stereotypical image of drug users transcends media outlets. Taylor suggests that there is "undoubtedly a dominant stereotypical image [of drug users] that has emerged, prevailed and been sustained within the reporting of national and local news over the last three decades" (p.371). However, the empirical evidence for this in the UK is lacking; it might well be the case that certain stereotypical images transcend media outlets, but it is important to establish this in the UK context. Those familiar with the British press might well expect the portrayal of drug users in the broadsheet press to differ from that in the popular tabloid press. The reader of a broadsheet newspaper such as *The Guardian* or *The Times* might be presented with a radically different image of drug use in the UK than a reader of the *Mirror* or the *Daily Mail*. Further, representation might vary by

---

<sup>1</sup> Due to resource constraints it was not possible to examine representation of drug users in broadcast or 'new' social media outlets.

geographic area, as newspapers reflect specific local or regional concerns. Readers of a regional newspaper in England and readers in Scotland may well be presented with different images of drug users and drug use from the readers of the UK national press.

The third area concerns, as Taylor observes, the way media coverage emphasises a causal link between crime and drug use, with drug users repeatedly connected to crime. This intriguing observation raises further questions which are crucial to address; namely, how does that link emerge and how it is maintained?, and is there any difference between newspapers?

Finally, Taylor observes, that studies claim that media coverage consistently misrepresents the effects of drugs. The emergence of drug scares, often triggered by a death see the accuracy, balance and contextualisation of drug reporting compromised.

The Loughborough Communications Research Centre (LCRC) also sought to broaden the research agenda to explore specific aspects of representation. The researchers examined the words that were employed to describe users. As Taylor mentions, drug users are often described pejoratively, but there is no sense of how frequently this occurs. This study also sought to establish the extent to which users were condemned and how journalists sought to rationalise why drug use occurred and its consequences.

In analysing media content it is important to move beyond impressionistic accounts of trends in the media; a rigorously designed and executed content analysis is the best means of doing this. This content analysis of all news items on drug use and users in eight newspapers over three one-year periods (1995, 2002 and 2009) is one of the most comprehensive studies of the representation of drug users in the UK. Its size and scope (6,164 different news items) is crucial for providing a full understanding of the way drug users are represented. Only through such broad sampling can patterns be established with some degree of confidence. The report starts by outlining the research design before examining the specific findings in more detail.

## 2. Methods used

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLING APPROACH

This research aimed to provide a better understanding of the changing way drug users and drug use have been presented to the general public via the print media. Specifically, it sought to capture how drug users and drug use in general are portrayed and how this varies between different actors in the population and between different newspapers. The report only focuses on news items<sup>2</sup> that specifically dealt with drug use and drug users, rather than stories that dealt with drugs in other contexts, such as large police or customs seizures.

The results of this research are based on a content analysis of eight newspapers. The research examined four UK national newspapers, two Scottish newspapers and two English regional newspapers - one an urban paper, the other covering a region. The following newspapers were selected: *The Times*; *The Guardian*; *Daily Mail*; *Mirror*; *The Herald*; *The Daily Record*; *The Northern Echo*; and *London Evening Standard*. This selection allows a series of comparisons to be made; namely, between urban and more rural perspectives, local and national, and Scottish and the UK as a whole. The research has focused on three one-year time periods: 1995, 2002, 2009. These dates took account of the newspapers available via Nexis<sup>3</sup> and the preferred time range as outlined in the tender document.

The relevant stories were purposively selected through searching the Nexis newspaper database. Each of the newspapers listed above was searched throughout the three *one-year* time periods. The search terms used are shown in Appendix A. They included the names of a range of 13 controlled Class A, B and C drugs. In some cases these were combined with additional search words, such as 'skunk' in the case of cannabis, 'MDMA' in the case of ecstasy and 'crystal meth' in the case of methamphetamine. In addition, the terms 'methadone' and 'mephedrone' were also used; the latter due to the publicity it received while the content analysis was being designed. The keyword searches were kept as simple as possible to avoid two problems: first, the problem of latent bias, which is often associated with text classifiers and means that important stories may be overlooked; and second, the problem of producing lots of hits that are not relevant. Including the term 'speed', for instance, produced hundreds of irrelevant hits. The resulting stories were then saved. The team of coders then analysed all stories that mentioned drug use and/or drug users, discounting duplicate stories and those not relevant. The content analysis only examined those stories that referred in some way to drug users or drug use. Any stories on the economics of the drugs trade,

---

<sup>2</sup> For this study, 'news items' includes: news reports, editorials, columns, features, first-person pieces, diaries, readers letters, charts and graphs and interviews.

<sup>3</sup> Nexis is an electronic newspaper database.

smuggling, police drug hauls, drugs raids, cannabis farms that were thrown up by the search were not analysed. However, it is likely that the regularity and prominence of such reports will also tend to frame perceptions of drug users.

Throughout the study checks were made to ensure the reliability of the coding process. The purpose of intercoder reliability measurement is to ensure that a team of coders code the same variables in the same way. The first important stage in this process is training. The four coders used in this research underwent full training before the research started. The training included analysing ten news items using the coding manual and schedule (see appendix B and C). The aim: to familiarise the coders fully with the coding schedule and manual and identify any areas where there was a lack of agreement.

In addition, the coders were then given three trial news items to code on their own. The coding of these items was then compared variable by variable by the project manager and an inter-reliability score produced. The intercoder reliability scores for variables 1-13 (see appendix B) on the sample stories were consistently 100%; that is there was no difference between coders. Some of the reliability scores for variables 14-41 fluctuated. The scores for the occupation and identity variables were 100%, but the scores for tone and condemnation were initially much lower at the 50% level. Given the subjective nature of what was being measured this was perhaps not surprising. A further effort was made to provide detailed explanations of what was meant by each variable and this was followed by the coding of a further news item. This improved reliability scores to 100%. The reliability scores for variables 42-52 were consistently 100%.

Through out the coding process the coders were in constant contact with each other and the project manager. Any queries that arose were discussed by the team and final decisions were made. Half way through the coding process a further test was carried out on the more subjective variables to ensure there continued to be complete agreement.

### **CONTENT ANALYSIS APPROACH**

The coding manual, which gives an indication of the types of content included within different categories, can be found in Appendix B. For each newspaper and relevant story the content analysis examined:

- frequency of coverage
- type of article (editorial, news story, health page etc.)
- subject of the story (age, race, class, religion etc.)
- type of drug
- background context (attempts to contextualise use)
- geographical location (region, city, estates)
- tone of coverage (positive, negative, no clear direction)
- key adjectives used by the press.

The study also involved an exercise looking at the accuracy and balance of reporting and a brief review of the literature on the media representation of another stigmatised group, people with mental health problems.

### 3. Extent and nature of coverage of drug use and drug users

#### FREQUENCY AND NATURE OF COVERAGE OVER TIME

This section provides an overview of coverage starting with the overall amount of output. There were no clear trends in the amount of coverage of drug use over time. In 1995, there were some 1,642 news items on drug use. In 2002 that figure had increased to 2,759, before falling in 2009 to 1,763.

Table 1 below shows the output for each newspaper over the three time periods covered by the study.

*Table 1: News items\* on drug use and drug users in the press over time*

	Number of news items			
	1995	2002	2009	Total
<b>Tabloids</b>				
Mirror	119	640	303	1,062
Daily Record	330	403	319	1,052
Daily Mail	274	396	240	910
<b>All tabloids</b>	<b>723</b>	<b>1,439</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>3,024</b>
<b>Broadsheets</b>				
The Guardian	308	395	327	1,030
The Times	181	244	274	699
The Herald	211	165	85	461
<b>All broadsheets</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>804</b>	<b>686</b>	<b>2,190</b>
<b>English regional press</b>				
The Northern Echo	78	188	125	391
London Evening Standard	141	329	89	559
<b>All regional press</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>950</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,642</b>	<b>2,760</b>	<b>1,762</b>	<b>6,164</b>

\* includes: news reports, editorials, columns, features, first-person pieces, diaries, readers letters, charts and graphs and interviews

Most coverage over the three years was in the three 'popular' or tabloid newspapers, although the table shows no clear trends in output over time. Among the 'quality' or broadsheet press, *The Guardian* devoted the most coverage to drug use, the *The Times* coverage increased over time and that of the *The Herald* fell quite significantly. The coverage in the *London Evening Standard* and the *The Northern Echo* varied.

**Table 2: Types of news item in which drug use and users featured over time (all newspapers)**

Type of item	1995	2002	2009	Total
	Number of items			
News report	1,326	2,190	1,415	4,931
Feature	164	272	203	639
Column piece	43	100	36	179
Readers' letters	39	81	43	163
Editorial/leader	27	59	26	112
Interview	16	25	13	54
Evidence/supporting material	12	7	7	26
First-person piece	4	13	4	21
Diary	3	3	4	10
Other not listed	8	10	11	29
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,642</i>	<i>2,760</i>	<i>1,762</i>	<i>6,164</i>

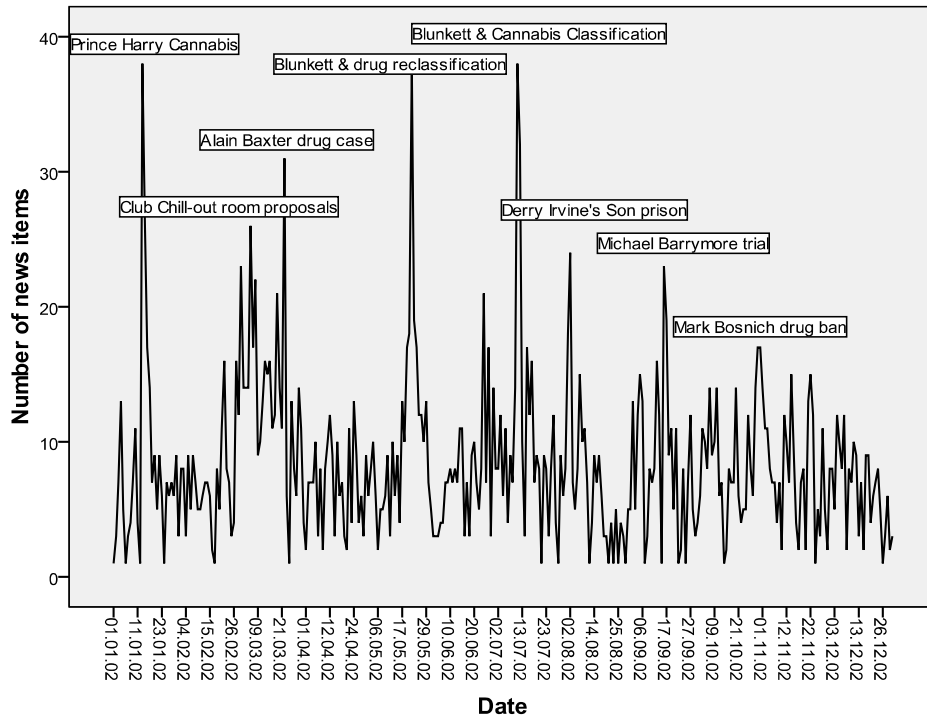
**Table 3: Types of news item in which drug use and users featured by newspaper type (all newspapers)**

	Newspaper Type			Total
	Tabloid press	Broadsheet press	Regional press	
News item	81.4%	75.6%	85.5%	80.0%
Feature	8.9%	14.7%	4.8%	10.4%
Column piece	3.1%	2.3%	3.6%	2.9%
Readers' letters	2.3%	4.0%	0.5%	2.6%
Editorial/ leader	2.3%	1.2%	1.7%	1.8%
Interview	0.8%	0.5%	1.9%	0.9%
Evidence/ supporting material	0.4%	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%
First-person piece	0.5%	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Diary	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.2%
Other	0.2%	0.7%	0.8%	0.5%
<i>Total number of items</i>	<i>3,024</i>	<i>2,190</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>6,164</i>

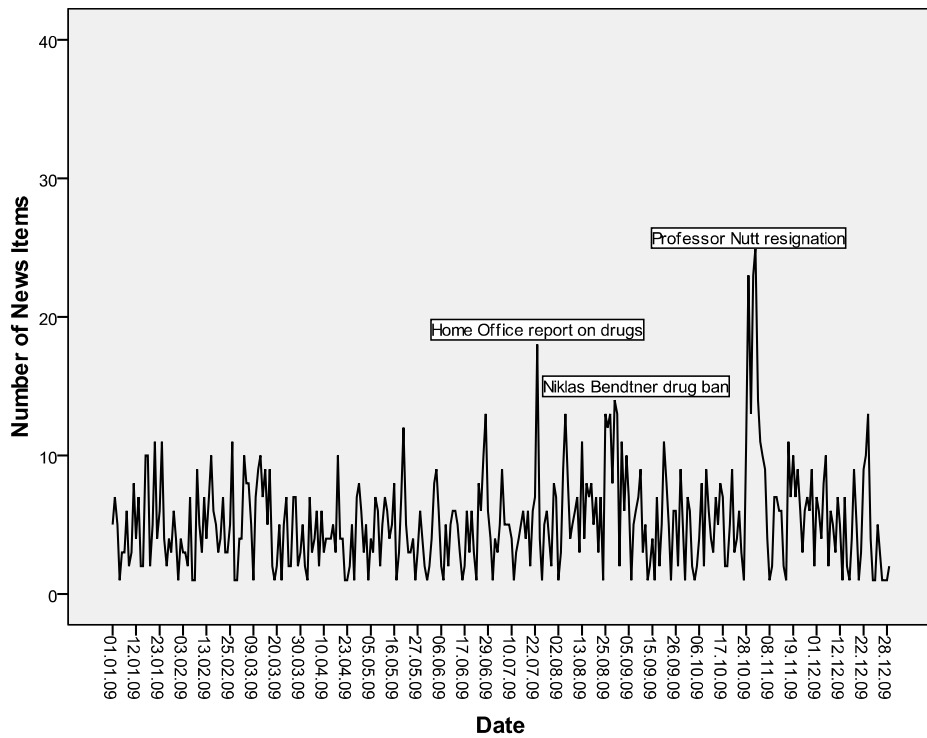




**Figure 2: All news items on drug use and users in 2002**



**Figure 3: All news items on drug use and users in 2009**



Figures 1 to 3 reveal the episodic nature of news coverage.<sup>4</sup> The peaks in coverage show what news organisations found highly newsworthy when it came to reporting events that featured drug use. Most of the peaks on the graphs involve an event such as a trial or investigation for drug misuse that includes a celebrity, a public figure or sports star. In the years examined here other peaks included government announcements on drug classification; for example, the 2002 reclassification of cannabis from a Class B to a Class C drug. There were also one-off events which gained widespread coverage, such as the death of schoolgirl Leah Betts in 1995, and the sacking of Professor Nutt, the head of the government advisory body on drugs, for voicing views that were seen as at odds with the Government's position in 2009.

If we look below the peaks then we see a substantial amount of news that features drug use but which does not involve celebrities, high-profile sports stars or government announcements. It is the images of drug users and drug use that these reports portray when taken as a totality that is significant.

### WHAT TRIGGERS DRUG NEWS?

To understand how these reports contribute to the construction of an image of drug use and drug users in the UK requires careful consideration. The first point – which is obvious but often overlooked – is that drug use features in a whole array of different news items not just items that are wholly about drug use. But what triggers these news items?

**Table 4: Triggers of news coverage (all newspapers, all years)**

	<b>Number of items</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Criminal justice related	1,564	25.4
Charity/business/public body activity	808	13.1
A death	480	7.8
Media investigation/debate	454	7.4
Government activity	433	7.0
Personal experience	390	6.3
Celebrity activity	377	6.1
Other official inquiry	334	5.4
Public opinion/opinion polls	151	2.4
Parliamentary debate	116	1.9
Unclear what triggered item	493	8.0
No trigger indicated	564	9.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>6,164</i>	<i>100.0</i>

---

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Schudson (2009) *Why Democracies Need an Unlovable Press*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Chapter 5.

News items that mention drug use are triggered by a range of events. For example, one way drug use gains exposure is via coverage of official reports highlighting drug use in Britain, another is in connection with a criminal trial or a celebrity confession. Table 4 shows what events triggered news items in which drug use featured; it seems that drug use was more newsworthy when connected with other newsworthy events.

The most frequent trigger was an event within the criminal justice system; for example, a court case or an arrest which was then reported. A quarter of stories which featured use were related in some respect to an event in the criminal justice system. This was a fairly consistent figure over the three time periods. These included events ranging from an arrest for shoplifting through to a murder trial. These crimes were committed by users - in the language of the popular newspapers - to 'feed their habit'. Occasionally users were the victims, although they tended not to be treated sympathetically, as in the case of Darren Taylor in 2002, a burglar who, allegedly high on drugs, was killed in an altercation with a grandfather during a burglary. (The connection between drug use and crime is a recurrent theme in coverage and will be touched on in other sections of this report). The next most frequent trigger of news was the activities of a charity, business or public body, a broad cross-section of actors comprising of research centres, quangos, business organisations, pressure groups and charity organisations. In this context the common trigger activities included producing and publicising research findings, launching a campaign and commenting on drug related matters.

**Table 5: Events that trigger news coverage by newspaper type (all years)**

	Newspaper type			Total
	Tabloid press	Broadsheet press	English regional Press	
Criminal justice related	25.3%	19.9%	38.2%	25.4%
Charity/business/public body activity	10.0%	15.1%	18.5%	13.1%
A death	8.4%	8.2%	5.1%	7.8%
Media investigation/debate	6.3%	8.2%	8.9%	7.3%
Government activity	6.1%	8.9%	5.7%	7.0%
Personal experience	7.2%	7.1%	1.7%	6.3%
Celebrity activity	9.0%	2.9%	4.4%	6.1%
Other official inquiry	6.6%	5.9%	0.5%	5.4%
Public opinion/opinion polls	2.8%	1.8%	2.9%	2.4%
Parliamentary debate	1.8%	2.7%	0.1%	1.9%
Unclear what triggered item	8.0%	11.1%	0.9%	8.0%
No trigger indicated	8.6%	8.2%	12.9%	9.2%
<i>Total number of items</i>	<i>3,024</i>	<i>2,190</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>6,164</i>

Table 5 compares triggers by newspaper type. The research was interested in determining whether news in different types of newspaper had similar or different triggers? The table shows that news items in the English regional press were triggered mainly either by an event within the criminal justice system or by the activities of a charity, business or public body. The triggers of news in the tabloid and broadsheet press were slightly less narrow. In the tabloid press, the activities of celebrities and public figures were much more likely to trigger news on drug use than in the other newspaper types. Celebrity activity was the third major trigger of tabloid news items featuring drug use. News was more likely to be triggered by government activity in the broadsheet press than in other outlets.

**Table 6: Events that trigger news coverage by newspaper region (all years)**

	Newspaper region			Total
	UK national press	Scottish press	English regional press	
Criminal justice related	21.8%	26.1%	38.2%	25.4%
Charity/business/public body activity	12.8%	10.6%	18.5%	13.1%
A death	7.6%	10.0%	5.1%	7.8%
Government activity	8.4%	4.6%	5.7%	7.0%
Other official inquiry	6.9%	4.8%	.5%	5.4%
Media investigation/debate	7.9%	4.8%	8.9%	7.3%
Personal experience	8.3%	4.4%	1.7%	6.3%
Celebrity activity	6.2%	6.9%	4.4%	6.1%
Parliamentary debate	2.0%	2.6%	0.1%	1.9%
Public opinion/opinion polls	1.9%	3.5%	2.9%	2.4%
Unclear what triggered item	8.0%	12.4%	0.9%	8.0%
No trigger indicated	8.2%	9.3%	12.9%	9.2%
<i>Total number of items</i>	<i>3,701</i>	<i>1,513</i>	<i>950</i>	<i>6,164</i>

Table 6 shows some similarity between the UK national press and the rest. The majority of stories which featured use were related in some respect to events in the criminal justice system; that said, there was some variation between the newspapers. Coverage in the Scottish press was triggered by a broader series of events than in the English regional press.

In sum, our research shows that when a reader of the tabloid, broadsheet or regional press, in Scotland or England, reads about drug use, it is in news items that were triggered by certain events, the most significant ones being crime or a death. This picture is fairly uniform over time and between the different newspapers, although there were some variations. In the tabloid press the activities of celebrities and public figures were much more likely to trigger news on drug use than in the other

newspaper types, while in Scotland coverage slightly was more likely to be triggered by a death.

### THE TYPE OF DRUG MENTIONED MOST OFTEN IN NEWS ABOUT DRUG USE

Not only were certain events more newsworthy than others but also the use of certain drugs dominated coverage more than others.

**Table 7: The most frequently reported drugs in the press (all newspapers, all years)**

<b>Drug type</b>	<b>Number of reports</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Cannabis	2145	22.3
Cocaine	1962	20.4
Heroin	1879	19.5
Ecstasy/MDMA	1097	11.4
Crack cocaine	495	5.1
Amphetamine	424	4.4
Methadone	269	2.8
Diazepam/Valium	178	1.8
Crystal Meth/methamphetamine	148	1.5
LSD	137	1.4
Anabolic steroids	55	0.6
Ritalin	43	0.4
Morphine	29	0.3
GBH	22	0.2
GBL	21	0.2
Ketamine	24	0.2
Opium	18	0.2
Librium	23	0.2
Klonopin	5	0.1
Magic mushrooms	7	0.1
Xanax	5	0.1
Spice	11	0.1
Mephedrone/MCAT	9	0.1
Angel dust/PCP	2	0.0
Mescaline	2	0.0
Ritalin	2	0.0
Other not listed	210	2.2
Drugs general	401	4.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>9,623</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three drugs could be coded per news item

Table 7 highlights the most frequently reported drugs. The analysis coded up to 27 illegal drugs, in addition to general mentions of the word 'drug' (for detail see the coding instructions in Appendix B). Tables 8 and 9 show the extent to which different types of newspaper found the use of certain drugs more newsworthy than others.

**Table 8: Proportion of coverage given to the five most mentioned drugs by newspaper type (all years)**

	Newspaper type			Total
	Tabloid press	Broadsheet press	English regional press	
Cannabis	22.6%	21.4%	23.6%	22.3%
Cocaine	21.3%	19.8%	19.0%	20.4%
Heroin	19.9%	17.4%	23.5%	19.5%
Ecstasy	12.1%	10.5%	11.4%	11.4%
Crack cocaine	4.5%	5.0%	7.9%	5.1%
All other drugs	19.6%	25.9%	14.5%	21.3%
<i>Total number of items</i>	<i>4,674</i>	<i>3,559</i>	<i>1,390</i>	<i>9,623</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three drugs could be coded per news item

**Table 9: Proportion of coverage given to the five most mentioned drugs by newspaper region (all years)**

	Newspaper region			Total
	UK national press	Scottish press	English regional press	
Cannabis	23.3%	19.0%	23.6%	22.3%
Cocaine	21.8%	17.8%	19.0%	20.4%
Heroin	17.6%	22.0%	23.5%	19.5%
Ecstasy	10.6%	13.5%	11.4%	11.4%
Crack cocaine	5.2%	3.4%	7.9%	5.1%
All other drugs	21.6%	24.4%	14.5%	21.3%
<i>Total number of items</i>	<i>5,888</i>	<i>2,345</i>	<i>1,390</i>	<i>9,623</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three drugs could be coded per news item

Tables 8 and 9 show that while there were no significant differences in focus by the type of newspaper, there were some differences between the UK national, Scottish and English regional press. The use of heroin received proportionally more coverage in Scotland, while in the UK national press, most mentions concerned cannabis use followed by cocaine. In the English regional press, the focus was mostly on cannabis and heroin.

Table 10 shows what triggered the news items that featured the use of the five most mentioned drugs.

**Table 10: What triggered news about use featuring the five most mentioned drugs (all years)**

	Drug type						Total
	Cannabis	Cocaine	Heroin	Ecstasy	Crack cocaine	Other drugs	
Criminal justice related	22.9%	22.5%	25.8%	17.0%	29.1%	18.7%	22.1%
Charity/business/public body activity	16.7%	12.1%	14.9%	15.0%	15.2%	16.5%	15.7%
Government activity	11.4%	5.5%	11.1%	9.5%	16.6%	7.2%	9.3%
A death	4.0%	5.2%	10.1%	17.1%	4.0%	7.7%	7.7%
Media investigation/debate	8.9%	9.4%	6.1%	5.6%	7.1%	6.4%	7.4%
Personal experience	4.7%	6.0%	6.4%	5.7%	5.3%	9.6%	6.5%
Celebrity activity	4.0%	11.8%	3.7%	3.0%	2.4%	5.5%	5.6%
Other official inquiry	5.8%	5.5%	2.2%	4.2%	2.0%	5.9%	4.7%
Public opinion/opinion polls	3.1%	1.7%	3.4%	4.1%	2.0%	3.8%	3.0%
Parliamentary debate	3.2%	1.1%	2.1%	4.6%	1.4%	2.2%	2.4%
Trigger unclear	5.4%	10.4%	7.0%	5.8%	8.9%	9.2%	7.9%
No trigger indicated	10.1%	8.8%	7.2%	8.3%	6.1%	7.4%	8.3%
<i>Total number of items</i>	<i>2,145</i>	<i>1,962</i>	<i>1,879</i>	<i>1,097</i>	<i>495</i>	<i>2,045</i>	<i>9,623</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three drugs could be coded per news item

Nearly a third of stories that featured crack cocaine use (29%), and about a quarter of those that featured heroin use (26%) or featured cocaine use (23%), were triggered by events in the criminal justice system. In contrast, stories that featured ecstasy use were equally likely to be triggered by a death. Research by Forsyth (2001), comparing media coverage of drug deaths with toxicology reports, found that deaths attributed to certain drugs were more likely to be reported in the media than others. High-profile deaths linked to ecstasy during the sample periods, such as Leah Betts' death in 1995, might go some way to explaining the high proportion of associated mentions.

## THE BACKGROUNDS OF USERS WHO FEATURED IN THE NEWS

The researchers were interested to establish the backgrounds of users where such information was included in the news items. The coders were looking for manifest descriptions of who the users were in any story. The backgrounds of up to four users per story could be identified. In tables 11 to 14, users whose backgrounds could be identified have been placed into seven categories: offenders (including drug dealers, drug smugglers, prisoners, those on bail); professionals (including sports, medical, legal and media professionals and artists); young people (children, school pupils and students); celebrities and public figures; non-professional workers (including skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers and the unemployed); parents (including single mothers); and members of the public.

Table 11 shows the different backgrounds in order of frequency of mention. Around a quarter of drug users mentioned in the press were professionals of one kind or another. These were followed by: young people; celebrities and public figures; offenders; members of the public; non-professional workers; and parents.

**Table 11: User background where mentioned (all newspapers, all years)**

	Responses	
	Number	Percentage
Professional (sports, law etc )	1,647	24.4
Young person	1,415	21.0
Celebrity/public figure	1,120	16.6
Offenders	1,055	15.6
Member of the public	851	12.6
Non-professional worker/unemployed	419	6.2
Parent	235	3.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>6,742</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to four users per news item.

Table 12 shows the extent to which the type of user mentioned varied by newspaper type. The popular press featured young and celebrity users more often than the other outlets. The English regional press was more likely to feature offenders than the other newspapers.



**Table 12: User background by newspaper type (all years)**

	Newspaper type			Total
	Tabloid press	Broadsheet press	English regional press	
Professional (sports, law etc )	20.9%	28.0%	29.0%	24.4%
Young person	22.8%	20.9%	11.3%	21.0%
Celebrity/public figure	20.9%	11.1%	16.6%	16.6%
Offender	16.8%	11.7%	26.6%	15.6%
Member of the public	8.3%	19.9%	5.2%	12.6%
Non-professional worker/unemployed	5.8%	5.9%	9.8%	6.2%
Parent	4.5%	2.6%	1.6%	3.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,438</i>	<i>2,683</i>	<i>621</i>	<i>6,742</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to four users per news item.

Table 13 shows that the Scottish press featured proportionally more young users than did the other papers, while the UK national press and English regional papers were more likely to feature users from a professional background.

**Table 13: User background by newspaper region (all years)**

	Newspaper Region			Total
	UK national press	Scottish press	English Regional Press	
Professional (sports, law etc)	26.3%	17.9%	29.0%	24.4%
Young person	20.6%	25.5%	11.3%	21.0%
Celebrity/public figure	16.5%	16.9%	16.6%	16.6%
Offender	14.7%	14.2%	26.6%	15.6%
Member of the public	13.8%	12.2%	5.2%	12.6%
Non-professional worker/unemployed	4.7%	8.9%	9.8%	6.2%
Parent	3.4%	4.4%	1.6%	3.5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>4,441</i>	<i>1,680</i>	<i>621</i>	<i>6,742</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to four users per news item.

The extent to which the type of drug used varied by background/occupation of the drug user portrayed within the press is shown in Table 14.

**Table 14: Drugs mentioned by user background (all newspapers, all years)**

	First drug mentioned					Total
	Cannabis	Cocaine	Crack cocaine	Heroin	Ecstasy	
	Row percentages					
Professional (sports, law etc )	21.8%	60.3%	1.7%	11.9%	4.4%	1,324
Young person	41.2%	8.7%	2.3%	12.8%	35.0%	1,215
Offender	25.4%	13.8%	11.4%	43.8%	5.5%	910
Celebrity/public figure	31.6%	42.6%	4.8%	17.9%	3.2%	980
Non-professional worker/unemployed	38.0%	22.7%	3.4%	22.7%	13.3%	353
Parent	24.4%	16.1%	7.3%	50.2%	2.0%	205
Member of the public	34.8%	17.2%	5.9%	26.9%	15.2%	692

Note: Multiple response table; up to 4 users per story.

Some clear patterns emerge in newspaper coverage in terms of drug use and users' backgrounds. Professionals are most commonly linked to cocaine use, as are celebrities, who are also quite frequently linked to cannabis use. Press portrayals of young people using drugs tend to relate to cannabis or ecstasy use. Offenders and parents who use drugs are most likely to be linked to heroin use.

### KEY POINTS

- There was no apparent trend in the amount of coverage of drug use and drug users over time. In 1995 there were 1,642 items, this rose to 2,759 in 2002 and then fell to 1,763 in 2009.
- The majority of coverage (80%) was in news reports in all years, with feature pieces mentioning drug use or users being next most common (10%).
- The most frequent trigger for a newspaper item that featured drug use (25% of items) was an event within the criminal justice system; for example, a reported court case or arrest. This was particularly the case in the English regional press (38% of items).
- There were other variations between types of newspapers. The activities of celebrities and public figures were more likely to trigger drug use coverage in the tabloid press (9% of items) than in the broadsheet press (3%).
- The use of certain drugs was more frequently mentioned than others. The majority of items involved Class A drugs, although cannabis was the most commonly mentioned individual drug (22% of items).

- Compared with other drugs, coverage of ecstasy was much more commonly triggered by a death. Indeed, deaths were the most common triggering event for reports on ecstasy, in marked contrast to other drugs.
- Around a quarter of drug users mentioned in the press were professionals of one kind or another.
- The tabloid press featured celebrity users more often than the other outlets. The Scottish press featured proportionally more young users, while the English regional press was more likely than the other papers to refer to offenders.
- Portrayals of professionals and celebrities as drug users are most often linked to cocaine use. Young people are most likely to be shown as cannabis and ecstasy users while offenders and parents are most commonly portrayed as heroin users.

## 4. Consequences of drug use

### ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF DRUG USE

Drug use is associated with a wide range of harms, both to society and the individual (see, for example, McDonald et al., 2005). Therefore, this research also looked at the way newspapers portray the effects of drug use for the individual and the community/neighbourhood and wider society. The coders looked for explicit mentions of impact, coding up to three per story for the individual and for society. The following possible effects of drugs use were coded for: health effects for the individual or community; financial effects; career effects; social impact, including antisocial behaviour; impact on family relations; emotional and relational effects; association with crime; and any perceived positive consequences.

Nearly 70% of stories ( $n = 4,140$ ) raised the impact of drug use at least once - a total of 7,073 mentions (up to 6 consequences could be coded per story). Seventy six per cent of mentions ( $n = 5,445$ ) related to the individual, the rest to the impact on the community and wider society. In each story where consequences were mentioned, the impacts could be subdivided into positive or negative.

Where the effects of use were mentioned, for either the community or the individual, these were overwhelmingly (94%) negative. The negative effects included:

- increase in crime and other types of antisocial behaviour;
- loss of job and earnings
- harm to health
- impact on the family
- emotional and personal consequences, including a graduation to hard drugs.

Positive effects - for example, medical benefits in the case of cannabis - were rarely mentioned.<sup>5</sup> Table 15 sheds more light on the consequences for both the individual and society.

---

<sup>5</sup> One might contrast this with the type of reporting related to alcohol, where reports about the potential beneficial effects of moderate drinking are not infrequent.

**Table 15: Impacts of drug use by drug type (all newspapers, all years)**

	Drug Type					Total
	Cannabis	Cocaine	Heroin	Ecstasy	Crack cocaine	
<b>Consequences for the individual</b>						
Health consequences	25.9%	24.0%	37.6%	60.3%	21.4%	32.1%
Leads individual to crime	20.7%	16.4%	29.3%	12.9%	39.3%	20.6%
Career impact	20.9%	31.5%	5.5%	7.0%	9.5%	19.4%
Consequences for the individual's family relations	6.0%	7.1%	9.3%	2.2%	8.4%	6.9%
Financial consequences	3.0%	6.1%	4.4%	1.7%	6.4%	4.2%
Social consequences	4.1%	4.6%	3.5%	1.9%	3.4%	3.9%
Emotional/relational consequences	2.8%	4.0%	2.7%	2.1%	4.5%	3.9%
Graduation to harder drugs	6.1%	1.9%	3.8%	3.9%	4.5%	3.1%
Positive consequences	5.6%	2.0%	1.8%	3.7%	1.6%	3.4%
Consequences for individual less harmful than thought	5.0%	2.4%	2.1%	4.4%	0.9%	2.5%
<i>Total individual consequences</i>	<i>1,764</i>	<i>1,777</i>	<i>1,826</i>	<i>1,034</i>	<i>440</i>	<i>6,841</i>
<b>Consequences for society</b>						
Crime levels in country/region/city etc	42.7%	40.0%	59.0%	49.4%	37.1%	40.8%
Social consequences for country/region/city etc	20.9%	18.9%	19.8%	17.4%	19.2%	21.5%
Health consequences for country/region/city etc	12.9%	12.6%	5.7%	9.2%	23.0%	12.5%
Financial consequences for country/region/city etc	7.8%	9.3%	9.7%	12.4%	5.6%	10.0%
Consequences for families in country/region/city etc	7.3%	10.7%	4.0%	10.1%	8.5%	9.6%
Emotional/ relational consequences for country/region/city etc	0.9%	1.9%	0.9%	0.3%	0.9%	2.1%
Consequences for country/region/city etc	3.2%	5.2%	0.9%	0.6%	4.7%	2.0%
Any positive consequences for country/region/city etc	4.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.7%	0.9%	1.5%
<i>Total social consequences</i>	<i>464</i>	<i>365</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>696</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>1,965</i>

Note: Percentages based on consequence; up to three could be coded for individual and for society.

The major negative effect for the individual, emphasised across all newspapers was on health (the exact nature of these stories is explored later). The next most significant consequence raised was crime. Drug use was connected in different ways to a variety

of crimes. These stories included high-profile murder trials where a defendant's use of drugs was raised as a part of the coverage. For example, the trial in mid-2009 of two men accused of torturing, killing and then burning the bodies of two French students in their south London flat. On the day of the verdict in June, one tabloid paper called the murderers, 'drug fuelled psychopaths'. This did not mean that newspapers always made an explicit causal link; often the connection between drug use and crimes was implied by a mention of the defendant's drug taking. See the example of Chelsea O'Mahoney below.

### **Scourge of Ladette Thugs: Rising tide of violent crime committed by young women**

Daily Mail, 30 January, 2009

"CHELSEA O'Mahoney was 14 when she filmed three of her friends on her mobile phone as they beat a defenceless man to death. Then she joined in the killing of barman David Morley. Police say O'Mahoney, pictured, and her gang carried out dozens of attacks beside the Thames in the heart of London, singling out homeless and vulnerable people and filming the carnage to watch later. The violence always happened on Fridays - it was the only night her foster parents would let her stay out late. Mr Morley, who had survived the 1999 Soho nail bombing, was attacked as he sat on a bench with a friend. He suffered a ruptured spleen, broken ribs and more than 40 bruises to his head and body. O'Mahoney, the daughter of **two heroin addicts**, was described as a football-playing tomboy. She **smoked cannabis** and spoke a bizarre form of pidgin Jamaican-English. She was found guilty of manslaughter in January 2006 and given eight years' youth detention. Three accomplices were jailed for 12 years."

The third most common category, the effect on job and career, was often raised in relation to sports professionals. For example, there was much coverage of the banning in 2009 of three Bath rugby players by the Rugby Football Union for refusing to submit to a drug test for recreational drug use.

The major negative effect raised for the community was crime and social impact. Over 40% of stories that mentioned community consequences linked drug use to levels of crime in the community or the country and 21% to the impact on the social fabric of communities. Often the latter focused on drug use in certain localities - for example, large cities were often mentioned - but there were also news items that focused on the impact of drugs on particular communities, for example, on former mining communities.

Table 15 also allows an assessment of whether there was any variation in the consequences of using different drugs. It shows that where the impact of heroin, cannabis or ecstasy on individuals was mentioned, it mainly related to health, especially in the case of ecstasy. However, the most frequently mentioned impact of taking cocaine was on the individual's career and the most frequently mentioned consequence of taking crack cocaine was on the individual's propensity to commit crime.

**Table 16: Impact of drug use for the individual by background (all newspapers, all years)**

	User background								Total
	Young person	Offender	Professional (sports, saw etc )	Celebrity/ public figure	Non-professional worker	Parent	Member of the public	Other	
Health consequences for the individual	63.7%	21.1%	13.3%	30.3%	30.7%	21.3%	55.2%	50.6%	35.0%
Leads individual to crime	12.1%	64.9%	9.8%	16.8%	19.5%	27.9%	26.7%	23.6%	22.8%
Career impact	7.7%	0.8%	64.6%	21.6%	32.0%	0.7%	2.0%	.9%	22.9%
Financial consequences for the individual	0.8%	3.2%	2.2%	6.3%	6.5%	2.9%	0.9%	3.5%	3.0%
Social consequences for the individual	3.5%	2.4%	1.4%	3.6%	1.7%	.7%	0.9%	4.0%	2.5%
Consequences for the individual's family relations	1.6%	2.2%	2.7%	8.0%	4.3%	38.2%	1.2%	7.4%	5.0%
Emotional/relational consequences for the individual	0.9%	0.8%	1.7%	3.1%	2.6%	0.7%	0.6%	2.1%	1.6%
Graduation to harder drugs	3.9%	2.2%	0.3%	1.3%	0.9%	2.2%	2.3%	0.9%	1.6%
Positive consequences for the individual	2.7%	1.8%	2.6%	4.4%	1.7%	4.4%	3.5%	5.1%	3.2%
Consequences for the individual less harmful than thought	3.0%	0.6%	1.4%	4.6%	0.0%	0.7%	6.7%	1.9%	2.4%
<i>Total items</i>	<i>634</i>	<i>502</i>	<i>1,004</i>	<i>524</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>344</i>	<i>571</i>	<i>3,946</i>

Note: Percentages and totals are based on responses. First mentioned user and consequence only

The connection between drug taking and crime was further raised in relation to the impact of drug use on the community. The main consequence of the use of these five key drugs on the community was an increase in crime. However, there was some difference between drugs, with crack cocaine and heroin being most likely to be linked to crime levels, and with ecstasy the least likely.

Table 16 shows that for those users from a professional background the impact of use mainly concerned their careers – many of these stories focused on sports stars. For young people, the reported impact was mainly on health; for parents, the impact was on their family; and for offenders, drug use was related either explicitly or implicitly to crime.

### **HARM TO HEALTH**

Given the frequent mention of health effects, the researchers examined in more detail stories that dealt specifically with the negative health impact of drug use for individuals. The coders looked to see if there was any specific mention in a news item of harm to physical health and/or harm to mental health from taking drugs, or whether harm to health was mentioned more generally. In total 32% ( $n = 1,945$ ) of news items mentioned harm one or more times (up to three mentions of harm could be coded per news item). Table 17 shows that over half of the mentions of harm concerned physical health (which included deaths).

**Table 17: Harm to health by most frequently mentioned drug used (all newspapers, all years)**

	Drug type					Total
	Cannabis	Cocaine	Heroin	Ecstasy	Crack cocaine	
Harm to physical health	25.6%	53.7%	74.8%	69.1%	46.5%	54.5%
Harm to health generally	47.5%	24.9%	18.1%	22.2%	29.6%	22.3%
Harm to mental health	26.9%	21.4%	7.1%	8.7%	23.9%	23.3%
<i>Total number of harms</i>	<i>593</i>	<i>309</i>	<i>464</i>	<i>564</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>2,001</i>

Note: Percentages and totals based on responses. Up to three responses could be coded per news item.

The researchers were also interested in whether there was any variation in the harm attributed to the use of different drugs. Table 17 shows that news items that mentioned the harm of heroin and ecstasy, and, to a lesser extent, cocaine and crack cocaine, focused on the impact on physical health. The emphasis on physical health harms in coverage of the health impacts of using ecstasy is due to the fact that the coverage was often prompted by the death of a young person; for example, the death of schoolgirl Leah Betts in 1995.

For cannabis, the coverage mostly talked about harms to health in a general way. Where specific harms were mentioned these were as likely to be harms to mental health as to physical health. For cocaine and crack cocaine, harms to mental health were also quite commonly reported, although only half as often as physical health harms.



**Table 18: Harm to health by newspaper type (all newspapers, all years)**

	Newspaper type			Total
	Tabloid press	Broadsheet press	Regional press	
Harm to physical health	53.4%	53.4%	61.1%	54.4%
Harm to health generally	28.3%	30.8%	20.9%	28.3%
Harm to mental health	18.3%	15.8%	18.0%	17.3%
<i>Total number of harms</i>	<i>1,165</i>	<i>905</i>	<i>316</i>	<i>2,386</i>

Note: Percentages and totals based on responses. Up to three responses could be coded per news item.

**Table 19: Harm to health by newspaper region (all newspapers, all years)**

	Newspaper region			Total
	UK national press	Scottish press	English regional press	
Harm to physical health	48.5%	65.5%	61.1%	54.4%
Harm to health generally	31.6%	24.0%	20.9%	28.3%
Harm to mental health	19.9%	10.5%	18.0%	17.3%
<i>Total number of harms</i>	<i>1,479</i>	<i>591</i>	<i>316</i>	<i>2,386</i>

Note: Percentages and totals based on responses. Up to three responses could be coded per news item.

There was no significant difference between the type of newspaper or between regions (Tables 18 and 19) although the Scottish press and the English regional press were perhaps more likely to mention the harm of drugs to physical health.

## KEY POINTS

- Where the effects of drug use were mentioned in news items for either the community or the individual, these were overwhelmingly negative.
- The major negative impact raised for the individual was on health, with the next most significant consequence being crime.
- The results show some variation in the reported effects for individuals of using different drugs. Where the impact of heroin, cannabis, or ecstasy use was mentioned it was mainly the impact on the individual's health, especially in the case of ecstasy. However, the main consequence of taking cocaine was on the individual's career, and in the case of crack cocaine on the individual's propensity to commit crime.
- News items that mentioned the health harms of heroin, ecstasy, cocaine or crack use focused on the impact of the drug on physical health. However, news items that mentioned the harm of cannabis use raised its mental health impacts more frequently.

# 5. How recovery and the causes of drug use are portrayed

## EXPLAINING DRUG USE

The content analysis looked at the extent to which the newspapers tried to explain why drug use occurred. The coders searched for all explicit attempts to provide reasons for drug use, allowing for three possible reasons to be put forward in any one item. It should be noted that the majority of items contained no attempt at explaining why use occurred. Of 6,164 stories only 37% ( $n = 1,920$ ) provided one or more reasons for drug use. In those stories that did give reasons, six key reasons emerged.

### 1. Environmental factors

That is, drug use seen as a product of the environment in which the subject lived, worked or socialised. News items in this category included stories about how membership of a youth subculture, such as clubbing, had led to an individual's use of drugs. Other stories blamed drug use on work-based socialising. Others examined drug use in a broader social context; for example, looking at how economic deprivation in a community impacted on drug use.

### 2. The influence of others

In these items drug use was explicitly linked to the influence of other people or groups. These might be a peer group or celebrities, or government ministers issuing different messages. In these news items those exerting influence were often clearly identified. For example, celebrities who used drugs were often claimed to be influencing the young and impressionable.

### 3. Price and availability of drugs

For example, items relating to falling drug prices making drugs cheaper and more accessible.

### 4. Emotional and personal issues

As when use was linked to abuse suffered by the user.

### 5. Individual choice

In some items, use was connected to individual choice; that is, no other factors were mentioned and use was explained in terms of decisions made by the individual.

## 6. Medical benefits

Use was sometimes linked to medical benefits. In these stories, mostly about cannabis, the use of drugs was related to the need of users to reduce pain or improve their lives.

Table 20 shows the mix of different reasons in the newspaper coverage reviewed. Across all newspapers, items that provided a reason for drug use were fairly evenly split across the first four reasons, although the most frequently implied reason was environmental factors (in over a quarter of cases). Around a fifth suggested each of individual choice, the influence of others and personal or emotional reasons. Medical benefit was mentioned in 11% of items and the price of drugs in only 4%.

**Table 20: Reasons for drug use (all newspapers, all years)**

	Reasons	
	Number	Percentage
Environmental factors	664	26.7%
Individual choice	527	21.2%
Influence of others	467	18.8%
Emotional or personal	457	18.4%
Medical benefit	271	10.9%
Price of drugs	100	4.0%
<i>Total number of reasons</i>	<i>2,486</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three reasons per new item.

**Table 21: Explanations for why drug use happens by newspaper type (all newspapers, all years)**

	Type of Newspaper			Total
	Tabloid press	Broadsheet press	English regional press	
Environmental factors	27.0%	27.4%	20.9%	26.7%
Individual choice	20.3%	24.2%	10.7%	21.2%
Influence of others	19.9%	16.4%	25.0%	18.8%
Emotional or personal	19.2%	15.8%	26.5%	18.4%
Medical benefit	9.1%	13.1%	10.7%	10.9%
Price of drugs	4.4%	3.2%	6.1%	4.0%
<i>Total number of reasons</i>	<i>1,226</i>	<i>1,064</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>2,486</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three reasons per news item

There were no strong differences between the broadsheet and tabloid press, although there perhaps appeared to be a stronger emphasis on individual choice and medical

benefits in the broadsheet press and on the influence of others and emotional and personal reasons in the tabloid press (Table 21).

There were some differences by news region. The coverage in the English regional press rarely included any explanation of use but where it did it was most often in terms of emotional or personal reasons or the influence of others, followed by environmental factors. Individual choice was less likely to be mentioned (in 11% of items compared with 21% for all newspapers). Environmental factors were the most commonly implied reason in the UK national and Scottish press, with slightly more emphasis on emotional and personal reasons in the Scottish press than in the UK national press (Table 22).

**Table 22: Explanations for why drug use happens by newspaper region (all newspapers, all years)**

	Newspaper region			Total
	UK national press	Scottish press	English regional press	
Environmental factors	27.7%	25.1%	20.9%	26.7%
Individual choice	23.3%	16.9%	10.7%	21.2%
Influence of others	18.2%	18.7%	25.0%	18.8%
Emotional or personal	16.7%	21.6%	26.5%	18.4%
Medical benefit	10.6%	12.3%	10.7%	10.9%
Price of drugs	3.5%	5.5%	6.1%	4.0%
<i>Total number of reasons</i>	<i>1,851</i>	<i>439</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>2,486</i>

Note: Multiple response table; up to three reasons per news item

**Table 23: Explanations for why drug use happens by drug type (all newspapers, all years)**

	Drug type					Total
	Cannabis	Cocaine	Crack Cocaine	Heroin	Ecstasy	
Environmental factors	24.3%	37.8%	32.6%	23.0%	34.9%	29.3%
Individual choice	20.9%	21.3%	9.3%	13.4%	38.1%	21.1%
Influence of others	25.8%	11.3%	27.9%	26.1%	13.9%	20.5%
Emotional /personal	11.2%	21.9%	20.9%	29.2%	5.3%	17.9%
Medical benefit	16.0%	2.2%	.0%	5.6%	2.1%	7.2%
Price of drugs	1.8%	5.6%	9.3%	2.7%	5.7%	3.9%
<i>Total items</i>	<i>608</i>	<i>503</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>479</i>	<i>281</i>	<i>1957</i>

Note: First reason mentioned only.

There were, however, some noteworthy differences though, in the way all newspapers explained the use of different drugs as can be seen from Table 23.

- **Heroin** use was most often explained in terms of personal and emotional issues (29% of cases), then by the influence of others (26%) followed by environmental factors (23%).
- **Cannabis** use was almost equally explained by the influence of others (26%) and environmental factors (24%), followed by individual choice (21%). Medical benefit was also mentioned much more frequently than for other drugs (16%).
- **Ecstasy** use was most often explained by individual choice (38%) and environmental factors (35%).
- **Cocaine** use was explained by environmental factors (38%), emotional or personal reasons (22%) and individual choice (21%). and
- **Crack cocaine** use was explained in terms of environmental factors (33%), the influence of others (28%) and emotional or personal reasons (21%).

### RECOVERY: AN OVERLOOKED ISSUE

Recent UK Drug Strategies have had a strong focus on recovery, so researchers were interested in how often the newspapers reported the issues of recovery and rehabilitation. The coders examined whether recovery and/or rehabilitation was mentioned and if so whether it was mentioned only briefly or was the main focus of a news item. Overall, less than a quarter of items made any mention of recovery or rehabilitation and very few items had a main focus on recovery or rehabilitation, less 3% in the sample as a whole.

**Table 24: Mentions of recovery and/or rehabilitation in newspaper coverage over time, all newspapers.**

Year	References in news items			Total number of items
	News item mainly about recovery and/or rehabilitation	Recovery and/or rehabilitation briefly mentioned	Nothing mentioned	
	<i>Row percentages</i>			
1995	1.3%	13.2%	85.6%	1,642
2002	2.9%	22.2%	74.9%	2,760
2009	3.4%	19.5%	77.1%	1,762
<b>All years</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>78.4%</b>	<b>6,164</b>

Table 24 shows that the proportion of news items that mainly focused on recovery increased over time but not by a very large amount, rising from 1.3% of items in 1995 to 3.4% in 2009. A bigger increase was in the proportion of items that mentioned recovery and rehabilitation in passing, which rose from 13.2% in 1995 to 22.2% in 2002 but then decreased slightly to 19.5% in 2009.

Table 25 shows that there was little difference between the newspapers; most news items made no mention of recovery or rehabilitation. Less than a quarter did so and, of those that did, most mentioned it in passing, with only a very few focused on it in

detail. While the English regional press had the largest proportion of news items that mainly focused on recovery and rehabilitation, this amounted to only 6% of items.

**Table 25: Reference to recovery and rehabilitation in the press by newspaper type and region**

	References in news items			<i>Total number of items</i>
	News item mainly about recovery and rehabilitation	Recovery and rehabilitation briefly mentioned	Nothing mentioned	
<b>Newspaper type</b>	<i>Row percentages</i>			
Tabloid press	1.0%	19.0%	80.0%	3,024
Broadsheet press	3.3%	19.4%	77.4%	2,190
English regional press	6.1%	18.3%	75.6%	950
<b>Newspaper region</b>				
UK national press	1.9%	19.7%	78.4%	3,701
Scottish press	2.0%	17.8%	80.2%	1,513
English regional press	6.1%	18.3%	75.6%	950
<b>All papers</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>78.4%</b>	<b>6,164</b>

Taking the 161 stories that focused mainly on recovery and rehabilitation, Table 26 shows the kind of drugs they were most associated with.

**Table 26: Type of drug mentioned in recovery stories (all newspapers)**

	Mentions	
	Number	Percentage
Heroin	106	50.7%
Cocaine	45	21.5%
Cannabis	27	12.9%
Crack Cocaine	21	10.0%
Ecstasy	10	4.8%
<i>Total</i>	<i>209</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

The largest proportion of recovery stories concerned heroin, and most of these revolved around public policy and the politics of recovery, especially where it concerned offenders. Here, the news items tended to be either supportive of government initiatives, such as the Scottish Government's national drug strategy *The Road to Recovery*, published in 2009, or they were opposed. News items often highlighted the results of trials of new treatments or calls for more effective drug treatment, or they spoke about their failures. Issues such as heroin prescription trials for drug addicts led to many news reports. The broadsheet press was largely supportive of attempts to rehabilitate addicts, especially in prison, while the tabloids were often sceptical of the costs and benefits of such policies.

The other predominant story type concerned personal accounts of recovery; in particular, trips to 'rehab' by members of the public who had overcome their addiction, or by celebrities such as Boy George, Dannella Westbrook and Kelly Osborne or sports stars such as footballers Mark Bosnich and Paul Merson and jockey Dean Gallagher. In addition, stories about cures for addiction also featured. The cures covered included a vaccine for cocaine addiction, doing yoga and special cures offered by a Thai monastery.

### **KEY POINTS**

- Drug use rarely gets explained within newspaper coverage; reasons are only suggested in about one-third of items. Where it does, environmental factors are most often cited.
- There were no strong differences between the broadsheet press and the tabloid press in the ways in which drug use was explained. There was slightly greater emphasis on emotional and personal reasons in the Scottish press and the English regional press than in the UK national press, and the English regional press was also more likely to mention the influence of others.
- There were some noteworthy differences in the way all newspapers explained heroin and cocaine use. The reasons for heroin use were mainly personal and emotional issues and the influence of others while cocaine use tended to be explained in terms of lifestyle choice.
- Over the sample period, stories that mainly focused on recovery and rehabilitation were few and far between. When they did surface they mainly concerned the appropriateness of government proposals to rehabilitate heroin users.

## 6. Attitudes to drug use and drug users within media coverage

### CONDEMNATION OF DRUG USERS

In order to establish the extent to which drug users were condemned in the press, the coders looked at whether the news item contained a clear condemnatory remark or one empathising with each user mentioned. These remarks could be made by the journalist or author of the article or another actor. All stories where such comments were present were coded. The remarks concerning the vast majority of users that appeared in the newspapers had no clear direction, but where comment was made users were twice as likely to be condemned as empathised with.

**Table 27: Manifest condemnation in remarks about drug users by newspaper type and region**

	Tone of remarks in stories about drug users			Total
	Condemnation	Empathy	No clear direction	
<b>Newspaper type</b>	<i>Row percentages</i>			
Tabloid press	19.3%	5.5%	75.3%	4,054
Broadsheet press	10.6%	6.9%	82.5%	3,051
Regional press	13.2%	11.4%	75.3%	876
<b>Newspaper region</b>				
UK national press	17.7%	6.9%	75.4%	4,966
Scottish press	10.7%	4.2%	85.2%	2,139
English regional press	13.2%	11.4%	75.3%	876
<b>All papers</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>78.0%</b>	<b>7,981</b>

Note: Percentages and totals are based on number of remarks about users coded. Up to four remarks per news item.

Table 27 shows that users were most likely to be condemned in the tabloid press, where around a fifth of remarks about users were condemnatory. The Scottish press was slightly less likely to contain items including condemnatory remarks about the drug users featured than the UK national press and the English regional press. The English regional press was more likely to include empathic remarks than other groups.



As Table 28 shows condemnation and empathy were more likely to be applied to certain groups.

**Table 28: Manifest condemnation in remarks about drugs users in the press by user group (all newspapers, all years)**

	Remarks			Total number of remarks
	Condemnation	Empathy	No clear direction	
	Row percentages			
Professional (sports, law etc )	10.6%	8.1%	81.3%	1,699
Young person	8.8%	6.8%	84.4%	1,386
Celebrity/public figure	12.0%	8.2%	79.8%	1,176
Offender	36.2%	4.3%	59.5%	1,010
Non-professional worker/unemployed	14.2%	5.9%	79.9%	423
Parent	35.3%	5.0%	59.7%	258
Member of the public	12.9%	4.3%	82.8%	845
Other	13.0%	7.3%	79.8%	1,183
<b>All users</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>78.0%</b>	<b>7,981</b>

Note: Percentages and totals based on number of remarks about users coded. Up to four remarks per news item

Unsurprisingly, the group of users most often condemned in the press were offenders (36% of remarks being condemnatory), while young people were least often condemned (9%). Condemnation was not reserved only for offenders; a stark divide stands between parents and young people. Drug-using parents were the subject of condemnatory remarks almost as frequently as offenders (35% of remarks were condemnatory). It is less surprising that parents were so regularly condemned if we take into account the context in which the news items were written. Very often parents featured in news items covering court cases, where their criminal acts were reported and commented on. It was here that their drug use was raised and their actions condemned. When parents featured in stories as drug users, they and their acts were more likely to be condemned than was the case with young people. For example, the mother of Brandon Muir, a young child murdered in Dundee, attracted particular vitriol.

**Here Lies Little Brandon Muir, Uncared for in Life... and Death. Exclusive: Baby Brandon Tragic Upbringing. Kid's Life of Hell Among Drugs and Booze. Baby Brandon: Chaotic Life of Tot's Mum**

*Daily Record*, 4 March, 2009

Heather Boyd, the mother of baby Brandon, "led a debauched lifestyle as a heroin addict, party girl and prostitute. ... Her two small children were subjected to thumping music and drug crazed strangers until the early hours. ... She swore at the children constantly."

“Boyd's low intellect was no excuse, however.... She had a better start than most, coming from a decent home where her father Raymond was exmilitary and her mother Veronica was a civil servant. But her stable home environment failed to prevent her descent into trouble. ...She left school at 16 and soon became involved with drugs... To feed her habit, Boyd would sell her body. ... On the night of Brandon's death, when she should have been caring for her son, she was streetwalking in Arbroath Road, Dundee, with her friend Kelly Parkin. ... Earlier that night, Boyd and Cunningham had partied at his sister's home. While most of the adults there smoked cannabis and drank, Brandon repeatedly vomited brown liquid. Boyd claimed her son had a 24-hour bug and repeatedly refused to call for a doctor.... She left the flat and her sick child, pretending she was visiting an uncle when in fact she headed to the drag in Arbroath Road.”

“Since Brandon's death, her reaction has been more one of detachment than grief. Two weeks after her child's death, she was spotted kissing and drinking with three different men in Dundee city centre. Little Brandon may be dead - but the party girl lives on.”

### **KEY DESCRIPTORS USED IN COVERAGE**

The coders were asked to record the key descriptors applied to different drug users, up to a maximum of three words per user. Of 6,164 news items coded, 1,124 contained key labels describing users in these stories; 741 items in the tabloids, 333 in broadsheet press and 50 in the English regional press.

#### **'Addicts' and 'junkies'**

A frequent label applied to drug users was the word 'addict'. 'Addict' is a medical term, but in many reports it was the label of choice to describe a user, used either on its own or combined with other words, sometimes pejorative. For example, the label 'addict' was combined with negative adjectives, such as 'evil', 'dodgy' or 'sick', or sometimes positive adjectives, such as 'promising', 'brilliant' or 'talented'. The research looked at all stories where the word 'addict' was used on its own or in combination with other words to get a sense of its application. Table 28 shows that the label 'addict' was used in 484 of the 6,164 news items (8%), which is 7% of the 6,742 mentions of users. In the majority of cases the term was used on its own or with neutral adjectives. However, in about 1 in 5 cases (19%) it was used with negative adjectives, and positive adjectives were used in conjunction with the term in only 2% of cases.

However, certain groups of users were more likely to be called 'addicts' than others. Table 29 shows that remarks that included labels and adjectives that concerned professionals (12%), non-professionals (26%), celebrities (27%) and young people (31%) were less likely to include the label 'addict', while offenders (60%), parents (64%) and members of the general public (75%) were more likely to be given the tag. The chances that members of these former groups were addicted may have been equally likely, but they were less likely to be described in that way. Further, when 'addict' was used to describe offenders and parents, it was also more likely than with other groups to be combined with other negative adjectives. In such stories, the addict was also described as 'evil', 'fiendish', 'drug crazed', 'a thug', 'a yob' etc.

The same pattern could be seen when the number of uses of the term 'addict' is considered as a proportion of the number of times different types of user are mentioned in news items. It is used in 17% of items mentioning parents, 16% of references to offenders and 10% of references to the general public; for other groups the term was used in less than 4% of items (data not shown).

**Table 29: The proportion of news items containing remarks with labels that use the word 'addict' on its own or with adjectives (all newspapers, all years)**

	Label 'addict' used ...			Other items containing labels	Total number of items with labels
	... alone or with neutral adjectives	... with positive adjectives	... with negative adjectives		
	% (No. of items)				
<b>Offender</b>	47% (130)	0% (1)	13% (37)	40% (110)	278
<b>Young person</b>	23% (28)	5% (6)	3% (4)	69% (85)	123
<b>Professional (sports, law etc)</b>	10% (18)	(0)	2% (3)	88% (153)	174
<b>Celebrity/public figure</b>	22% ( 32)	2% (3)	3% (4)	73% (107)	146
<b>Non-professional worker/unemployed</b>	20% (10)	(0)	6% (3)	74% (36)	49
<b>Parent</b>	50% (31)	(0)	14% (9)	36% (22)	62
<b>Member of the public</b>	65% (74)	1%(1)	9% (10 )	25% (29)	114
<b>Other group</b>	34% ( 59)	1%(1)	11% (20)	54% (96)	176
<b>Total</b>	<b>34% (382)</b>	<b>1% (12)</b>	<b>8% (90)</b>	<b>57% (640)</b>	<b>1,124</b>

Table 30 shows the extent to which the word 'addict' was used in remarks that contained labels or descriptors of drug users by newspaper type. It should be noted that tabloid newspaper items were more likely to use some sort of label within them; 741 out of 3,024 (25%) did so, compared with 333 out of 2,190 items (15%) in the broadsheet press and only 50 out of 950 items (5%) in the English regional press.

Within remarks containing some sort of label there was there was not much difference between the proportion containing the word 'addict' in the broadsheet newspapers (47%) and in the tabloid newspapers (43%). Also, the word 'addict' was used in combination with negative adjectives with a similar frequency in the broadsheet (7%) and tabloid (8%) press. However, the term was almost never used in the English regional press.

**Table 30: The proportion of news items containing remarks with labels that use the word 'addict' on its own or with other adjectives by newspaper type (all years)**

	Label 'addict' used ...			Other items using labels	Total number of stories with labels
	... alone or with neutral adjectives	... with positive adjectives	... with negative adjectives		
	% (No. of items)				
Tabloid press	33% (248)	2% (12)	8% (66)	57%(415)	741
Broadsheet press	40% (133)	(0)	7% (24)	53% (176)	333
English regional	2% (1)	(0)	(0)	98% (49)	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>34% (382)</b>	<b>1%(12)</b>	<b>8% (90)</b>	<b>57%(640)</b>	<b>1,124</b>

Table 31 shows the extent to which users were labelled as 'junkies' in the press.

**Table 31: The proportion of news items that use of the word 'junkie(s)' on its own or with other adjectives (all newspapers, all years)**

	Used alone or with other adjectives	Used with positive adjectives	News items using other labels	Total number of items with labels
	% (No. of items)			
Offender	13% (36)	(0)	87% (242)	278
Young person	5% (6)	2% (2)	93% (115)	123
Professional (sports, law etc )	9% (15)	(0)	91% (159)	174
Celebrity/public figure	5% (8)	(0)	95% (138)	146
Non-professional worker/unemployed	14% (7)	(0)	86% (42)	49
Parent	13% (8)	(0)	87% (54)	62
Member of the public	7% (8)	(0)	93% (106)	114
Other group	18% (32)	1% (2)	81% (142)	176
<b>Total</b>	<b>11% (120)</b>	<b>0% (4)</b>	<b>89% (1,000)</b>	<b>1,124</b>

People who used drugs were described as 'junkies' in 124 of all 6,164 news items examined over the time period – a small proportion (2%) of all stories. Table 31 shows that, where labels were applied within stories, some actors were more likely to be called 'junkies' than others. Stories featuring celebrities, young people and professionals were least likely to use the term 'junkie', while stories about non-professionals, parents and offenders were more likely to do so.

**Table 32: The proportion of news items that use of the word 'junkie' on its own or with other adjectives by newspaper type (all years)**

	Used alone or with other adjectives	Used with positive adjectives	News items using other labels	Total number of items with labels
	% (No. of items)			
Tabloid press	14% (102)	0% (3)	86% (636)	741
Broadsheet press	5% (16)	0% (1)	95% (316)	333
English regional press	4% (2)	(0)	96% (48)	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>11% (120)</b>	<b>0% (4)</b>	<b>89%(1,000)</b>	<b>1,124</b>

As mentioned earlier, news items in the tabloid press were more likely to contain remarks about drug users than were items in other papers. Also, as shown in Table 32, remarks about users in the tabloid press were about three times as likely to include the term 'junkie' than were remarks in the other outlets.

### **POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF USERS**

The tone of user descriptions - whether drug users were described negatively or positively in news items - was also considered.<sup>6</sup> The comments had to specifically refer to the user. Up to three descriptions were allowed per news item.

**Table 33: The tone of user descriptions (all newspapers, all years)**

	Responses	
	Number	Percentage
Only negative	861	10.8
Positive prior to being a user	193	2.4
Positive after being a user	184	2.3
No reference	6,769	84.4
<i>Total number of descriptions</i>	<i>8,007</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Note: Percentages and totals are based on number of descriptions coded. Up to four users coded per news item.

In most reports there were no overtly positive or negative comments about users, but in those reports where there were comments ( $n = 1,238$ ), these were mostly negative (Table 33).

The research further examined the application of descriptions to different users. Table 34 shows that, where the tone of any description was other than neutral, offenders

<sup>6</sup> The coders looked for manifest use of words or phrases that put users in a negative light or positive light. For example, this could be a single word such as 'dangerous', or sentence describing a user in a negative light.

were more likely to attract negative descriptions, while young people and professionals were more likely to attract positive ones. These positive comments often focused on the person before they were a user or after they had stopped using. A typical story about a young user saw the user described as 'brilliant', 'happy' or 'loving' before he or she started using drugs, or 'happy' and 'useful' now he or she had turned his or her life around after getting off drugs. Some times, these stories were first person features. For example, the story of Vikki Hudson published in the *Mirror* (6 July 2009). The headline gives a flavour of the story: "Cannabis at 13, Heroin by 14... Exclusive: Vikki Hudson was a Quiet Teenager Until She Tried Drugs at 13. Injecting Heroin by 14, her Subsequent Addiction Almost Tore Her Family Apart. Here Vikki, 24, Shares Her Story". In the news report Vikki recounted falling in with the 'wrong crowd', her descent into heroin addiction at age 14, and her recovery by age 24. Another example, published in the *Daily Mail* June 10, 2002, featured Virginia Bickett, who told a similar story of heroin addiction and recovery.

**Table 34: The tone of user descriptions by user group (all newspapers, all years)**

	Tone of description				Total no. of descriptions
	Only negative	Positive prior to being a user	Positive after being a user	No reference	
Professional (sports, law etc)	5.5%	2.4%	4.1%	88.0%	1,699
Young person	5.1%	4.4%	1.4%	89.0%	1,386
Offender	27.3%	1.4%	1.2%	70.0%	1,011
Celebrity/public figure	7.3%	1.8%	4.4%	86.5%	1,175
Member of the public	12.3%	.6%	.9%	85.9%	846
Non-professional worker/unemployed	5.9%	2.4%	2.1%	89.6%	423
Parent	23.6%	4.3%	.8%	71.3%	258
Other	12.4%	2.6%	1.0%	84.0%	1,209
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>84.4%</b>	<b>8,007</b>

Note: Percentages and totals are based on descriptions. Up to four users coded per story

Table 35 shows that where the tone of any description was other than neutral, the tabloid press was proportionally most likely to describe users in negative terms, although across all newspapers, negative descriptions outweighed the positive.

**Table 35: The tone of user descriptions by newspaper type (all years)**

	Tone of description				Total no. of descriptions
	Only negative	Positive prior to being a user	Positive after being a user	No reference	
Tabloid press	14.2%	3.0%	2.5%	80.2%	4,057
Broadsheet press	8.2%	1.5%	2.5%	87.8%	3,051
Regional press	4.1%	3.1%	.7%	92.1%	899
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>84.4%</b>	<b>8,007</b>

Note: Percentages and totals are based on number of descriptions. Up to four users coded per news item.

### KEY POINTS

- Drug users were more likely to be condemned than empathised with in all newspapers, but were most likely to be condemned in the tabloid press, where around a fifth of users were condemned.
- The most significant group of users condemned in the tabloid press were offenders and parents who used drugs. Young people were least likely to be condemned.
- Certain groups of users were more likely to be labelled as 'addicts' or 'junkies' than others. Celebrities, non-professionals, young people and professionals were least likely to be labelled 'addicts' or 'junkies', while offenders, parents and unspecified members of the public were most likely to be given the tag.
- Offenders were also more likely to attract negative descriptions, while young people and professionals were more likely to attract positive ones.

## 7. The accuracy and balance of newspaper reporting

Assessing the accuracy of newspaper reporting of drug use posed a particular challenge. The drugs field is characterised by heated debate and as a result the evidence is often contested. The small project advisory group, including academics and practitioners in the drugs field, was asked to assess a sample of specially selected news items for accuracy. While there are more resource-intensive means of assessing accuracy, with time and budgetary constraints this was deemed the most appropriate way.

Three events or clusters of coverage were identified, representing common types of trigger. Altogether, 25 news items were selected covering these events. The idea was to assess the accuracy and balance of reporting across a range of events. These news items were from the UK national press and from both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. A wider selection of newspapers was drawn on than for the content analysis in order to ensure the sample was as diverse as possible. These news items were then circulated to the experts. The experts were asked to comment on three areas. First, the accuracy and validity of the claims made in each article. Second, the balance of opinions contained within each item and whether there were any obvious omissions. Third, the relevance of all material contained within each news item.

The first set of items concerned an article in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* by researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry, which claimed that skunk-cannabis was more likely to trigger psychotic illness than regular cannabis. The second was a series of news items on the cost of providing UK prisoners with the heroin substitute methadone and whether enough was being done to reduce prisoner reliance on methadone. The final sample of news items was on the 2009 *World Drug Report* by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The findings and conclusions are laid out below.

### STORY 1: SKUNK AND PSYCHOSIS

On 1 December 2009 four newspapers covered the Institute of Psychiatry report, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Mirror* and *The Sun*. The items covered this report were:

1. *Daily Mail* (London), December 1, 2009 SKUNK CANNABIS SMOKERS SEVEN TIMES MORE LIKELY TO SUFFER FROM PSYCHOSIS DAILY MAIL (London), December 1, 2009 BY Jenny Hope Medical Correspondent. Published alongside: THE USER WHO KILLED PARENTS
2. *The Guardian* (London) Home Pages, December 1, 2009: SKUNK USERS FACE GREATER RISK OF PSYCHOSIS, RESEARCHERS WARN By Sarah Boseley, Health editor



3. *Mirror*, News, December 1, 2009 SKUNK 7 TIMES WORSE THAN MILD CANNABIS  
By Emily Cook
4. *The Sun* (England), News, December 1, 2009 SKUNK 7 TIMES RISK

In terms of accuracy and validity of claims, a major difference between those stories examined concerned the use of evidence provided in the report. The *Mirror* and *The Sun* reports were extremely brief, meaning that much of the detail was ignored, and the claims they did make about the report's findings were at best vague. The *Mirror* suggested that "skunk was the drug of choice for psychosis sufferers", which was not a claim that could be made on the basis of the study. *The Sun's* claim that skunk "contains much higher amounts of THC" was also vague. While the *Daily Mail* produced the longest report, it was a combination of two unrelated news items: one on the coverage of the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP) report, the other a case study of a person who suffered from schizophrenia who stabbed his parents to death. While the first item covered the IoP report with reasonably accuracy, the second item appeared to be based on court proceedings with no sources provided. By having this second item alongside the report of the IoP study and stating that the attack was carried out "after smoking super-strength skunk", the clear impression is given that the use of skunk was directly responsible for the attack – whereas the refusal to give the user his medication, mentioned much further down the article, was clearly a contributory factor, as was perhaps the alcohol also consumed but it was not suggested as such. *The Guardian* provided the most rounded coverage.

In terms of balance and omissions, the short length of the news items in *The Sun* and the *Mirror* meant that much of the detail of the report was missing. Further, *The Sun* used sources unrelated to the report, including reporting that "some experts" (unspecified) "believe [skunk] should be made a higher Class A drug". A lack of balance in the use of sources could also be seen in the *Daily Mail*. While some were clearly identified, they tended to have a view of drugs that were one-sided. Other sources - for example, unspecified 'experts' who think skunk should be a Class A drug - were mentioned but not always identified. Across all reports little was made of the complexity of the relationship between cannabis use and psychosis, such as the fact that people who hear voices may use cannabis to 'quieten' the voices down. The case study in the *Daily Mail*, "The User who Killed Parents" also implied a direct causal link between drug use and psychosis and suggested the man would have had no problem if he had not tried drugs. This might be true, but there was no hint of the possibility of another scenario. The coverage in the *Daily Mail* seemed to deliberately seek to reinforce the relationship between skunk, schizophrenia and violence, skewing the way information was presented to a greater extent than the other outlets.

## **STORY 2: COSTS AND BENEFITS OF PRISONER DRUG TREATMENT**

Between the end of November and the beginning of December 2009, a total of 11 reports examined claims about the cost and effectiveness of providing methadone to prisoners. The specific items identified were:

1. *Express*, November 28, 2009, News; JAIL DRUG BILL SOARS TO GBP 40M
2. *Daily Star*, November 30, 2009, News; JAIL DRUGS BILL

3. *The Herald* (Glasgow), December 7, 2009, Features; TACKLING DRUG ABUSE; NEW FUNDING AND STRATEGY ARE TO BE WELCOMED
4. *Express*, December 10, 2009, News; ALARM AT DRUGS FOR CONVICTS By John Twomey
5. *The Independent* (London), December 10, 2009, Comment; IS METHADONE BEING OVER-PRESCRIBED AS A TREATMENT FOR DRUG ADDICTION?; THE BIG QUESTION By Jeremy Laurance Health Editor
6. *The Times* (London), December 10, 2009, Editorial; GET PRISONERS OFF DRUGS? DON'T BE SO SILLY; BY PUSHING METHADONE TO INMATES, THE STATE HAS BECOME THE DEALER-IN-CHIEF IN BRITAIN'S JAILS By Melanie Reid
7. *Sunday Mirror*, December 13, 2009, Features; TOO EASY FOR JAIL JUNKIES By Mark Austin
8. *The Times* (London), December 15, 2009, Letters to the Editor; METHADONE, PRISONERS AND RESULTS.
9. *The Times* (London), December 17, 2009, Letters to the Editor; STATE-INDUCED ADDICTS.

Two events triggered these reports: first, a study by the Centre for Policy Studies questioning the effectiveness of methadone use in getting prisoners off heroin; and second, claims by the Conservatives, based on government figures, that the methadone programme cost tax payers £40 million a year. It was this latter claim that was widely seized on by the press, while the Centre for Policy Studies report was largely ignored, especially in the tabloid press. In the tabloid press the claims about the cost of methadone provision tended to be relayed without attempting to assess the accuracy. There appeared to be some confusion as to whether the cost was the cost of methadone dispensing or the cost of drug treatment or both; very often they were treated as one and the same. In addition, there was a widespread assumption in the popular press that the Government's policy was a waste of money.

The reports in the tabloid press also tended to be one-sided. There was a clear slant against treatment and dispensing of methadone with most adopting a pro-abstinence/anti-methadone position - in the words of the *Sunday Mirror*, "Jail junkies have it too easy". This was reinforced in some papers by the use of selected letters, which forcefully attacked methadone dispensing. In general, the broadsheets provided more balanced reporting of the Government's programme: *The Herald* provided the most balanced coverage of the value of methadone prescription in prison. However, some broadsheet newspapers did take a specific stance on matters; for example, *The Times* editorial was clearly anti-methadone prescribing in any form and used stigmatising language, stating "Lunatics are running the asylum".

Consideration of the arguments for the use of methadone in prisons, particularly for prisoners on short sentences, was almost non-existent. In particular there was no mention of its role in reducing drug-related deaths. The period immediately following release from prison is associated with an extremely elevated risk of drug-related death. Prisoners who have stopped using heroin in prison (and are not prescribed methadone or other opiates) develop a reduced tolerance; once released they go back to same situation, use heroin again as before and overdose, all too often resulting in death.

### **STORY 3: *WORLD DRUGS REPORT 2009* COVERAGE**

Toward the end of June 2009, a total of 12 news items focused on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) report on drug use around the world, including in Britain. These were:

1. *London Evening Standard* (London), June 24, 2009; LONDON'S 74,000 PROBLEM COCAINE USERS.
2. *Daily Mail* (London), June 25, 2009; 400,000 BRITONS 'HAVE A SERIOUS DRUG PROBLEM'.
3. *Daily Star*, June 25, 2009, News; BRITS TOP EURO COCAINE LEAGUE by Tom Hutchison
4. *Express*, June 25, 2009, News; 1 Million Are Using Cocaine By Jo Willey Health Correspondent
5. *The Guardian* (London), June 25, 2009, Home Pages; WORLDWIDE PRODUCTION OF HEROIN AND COCAINE FALLING, SAYS UN DRUG CHIEF: CALL TO TREAT USE AS AN ILLNESS, NOT A CRIME: BRITAIN HAS MOST PROBLEM USERS IN EUROPE By Duncan Campbell
6. *The Herald* (Glasgow), June 25, 2009, News; BRITAIN IS THE COCAINE CAPITAL OF EUROPE; UN CLAIMS UK HAS EUROPE'S BIGGEST MARKET FOR THE DRUG FOLLOWING DRAMATIC RISE IN USE, By Lucy Adams Chief Reporter.
7. *The Independent* (London), June 25, 2009, News; Britain Is UN's 'Cocaine Capital Of Europe' By Robert Verkaik Home Affairs Editor.
8. *Mirror*, June 25, 2009, News; UK HAS 1M COKE USERS By James Lyons
9. *The Sun* (England) June 25, 2009, News 1 MILLION BRITS ON COCAINE; UK TOTAL IS WORST IN EUROPE, By Graeme Wilson
10. *The Times* (London), June 25, 2009, Features; COCAINE MIXED WITH MORE IMPURITIES BUT BRITAIN STILL BIGGEST MARKET IN EUROPE, By Richard Ford
11. *The Times* (London), June 25, 2009, News; WHY IT'S TOO SOON TO CELEBRATE; ANALYSIS By Tom Coghlan
12. *The Sunday Times* (London), June 28, 2009, News; SCOTLAND IS DRUG CAPITAL OF EUROPE; SNP URGED TO DROP 'OBSESSION WITH DRINK' TO TACKLE ABUSE OF COCAINE AND AMPHETAMINES. By Mark Macaskill.

Overall, the press reported reasonably accurately some of the basic statistics in the report. For many of the tabloid newspapers - the *Daily Star*, *Express*, *Daily Mail* - Britain's lead in European cocaine use was the most newsworthy element in the UNODC report, to the exclusion of all else, and despite this not being a new fact. "Brits Top Euro Cocaine League" trumpeted the *Daily Star*, while in *The Sun* it was "One Million Brits on Cocaine". In contrast, the broadsheet press in contrast provided a more rounded picture and fuller coverage, while the tabloid newspaper coverage lacked balance. For example, the *Daily Mails* coverage of the UNODC report was a clear condemnation of the Labour Government's drugs policies; the *Daily Mail* even used a Tory spokesperson to reinforce the point. Finally, no outlet pointed out that the UK has been top of the cocaine league for some time, or that other European countries are now catching up.

Overall, the broadsheet newspapers were assessed as presenting the more accurate and balanced account in each case study when compared with the tabloid press, and were less likely to make tenuous links to other stories. They were also more likely to provide comments from both sides of the debate and to use named sources.

## 8. Media coverage of other stigmatised groups

Studies of media representations of other stigmatised groups paint a bleak picture. Perhaps the most widely researched area has been media coverage of mental health issues and sufferers of mental illness. Exhaustive reviews of the international literature in this area – looking at advertising, TV serial drama, children’s TV, and the news – have revealed coverage that could be considered ‘distorted’ in the majority of cases.

Klim and Lemish (2008), in their literature review, found that analyses of the media show that coverage often sensationalises aspects of behaviour such as violence, especially in the case of schizophrenia. A review by Stout et al. (2004) of some 18 pieces of research shows this research reveals that the media stigmatises and marginalises those who suffer poor mental health. A review by Nairn (2007) of 19 content analysis studies highlights that the media perpetuate similar negative associations, especially between violence, crime and mental health. Indeed, all these reviews create a grim image of media coverage of mental health issues (see also Anderson, 2003).

Table 36 summarises those studies that specifically focus on UK newspaper coverage of mental illness. Again, the predominant finding seems to be the negative associational context in which mental health issues are reported; when mental health issues are covered in the UK press it is always in association with crime, harm to others and self-harm (Ward, 1997) or violence toward others, especially in the tabloids (Philo et al., 1996). The use of stigmatising terms is frequent; for example, Ward found 40 per cent of all coverage on mental health issues in the tabloid press used stigmatising terms (Ward, 1997). The voice of the subject also tends to be absent. Such negative coverage can be seen in press coverage of those with a considered learning disability. Huws and Jones (2010) found voice of the individual with autism is largely absent from autism coverage in the press. In addition, Huws and Jones found that media discourses about autism present it as an affliction of suffering – with people referred to as victims – and allude to individuals’ traits, or engagement in behaviours, that might be indicative of autism, even though it is not known whether these people could be (or have been) diagnosed as having autism.

**Table 36: Studies of press coverage of mental health and sufferers from mental illness**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Key findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Mental illness/mental health general	Philo, G., McLaughlin, G. and Henderson, L. (1996) "Media Content." In Philo, G. (ed) <i>Media and Mental Distress</i> . London: Longman	A content analysis of TV news, children's programmes, magazines and 17 newspapers (5 national daily tabloids, 5 Scottish papers, 4 national Sunday tabloids, 3 Scottish Sunday papers). Over one-month period April 1993.	Coverage was overwhelmingly negative and fell into five key categories: comic, harm to others, harm to self, prescriptive advice, and criticism. The most prolific form of nonfictional representation concerned violence toward others ( $n = 323$ ), attacks on the public by mentally ill strangers being a feature of the tabloids. The next prominent theme in non fictional media was how to cope with mental illness ( $n = 92$ items), but the authors note there were very few positive stories within this sample. The other categories received less coverage by nonfictional media.	If media attitudes are to change then the media has to be engaged with. Some measures: (1) Code of practice for journalists reporting mental health issues; (2) In April 1995, 3,000 psychiatrists signed a petition that criticised media coverage, which was sent to the controllers of BBC, ITV and Channel Four.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Study</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Key findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Mental illness/mental health general	Ward G. (1997) <i>Making headlines. Mental health and the national press</i> . London: Health Education Authority	A content analysis of all UK national newspaper coverage of all stories about mental health over one year 1996 – 1035 stories analysed.	Almost 43% of all broadsheet coverage about mental health concerned the subjects of crime, harm to others and self-harm, while almost 54% of tabloid coverage was devoted to these areas. Both covered these issues negatively, clearly linking violent criminal activity with mental health problems. The proportion of negative, coverage was, though, greater in the tabloids, with almost 75% of their editorials about crime and harm to others being negative, compared with 67% of corresponding broadsheet coverage. In the daily tabloids, 40% of all coverage on mental health issues used stigmatising terms, while in the Sunday tabloids the proportion was 45%.	<p><i>Newspaper editors</i> should: (1) examine their coverage to see if it accurately reflects the reality that mental health problems; (2) efforts should be made to put the reporting of violence in context to help minimise public fear and misunderstanding; (3) avoid using stigmatizing language and recognise that it adds to mental distress, creates a climate of hostility and discourages people from seeking help; (4) realise that clinical terms such as schizophrenia have precise meanings and should not be used in non-specific or derogatory ways; (5) give more space to articles which seek a greater understanding of mental health and mental illness.</p> <p><i>Journalists</i> should: (1) follow the professional guidelines outlined in the National Union of Journalists' guide to better mental health reporting, <i>Shock Treatment</i>, and the Press Complaints Commission's Code of Practice; (2) should seek to influence the way mental health issues are reported.</p> <p><i>Users of mental health services and Health Professionals</i> should: (1) seek and be given access to the media to break down damaging stereotypes about people with mental health problems; (2) health professionals can also contribute to better understanding by co-operating with the media seeking information on mental health issues; (3) users and others should complain if coverage is unfair or misrepresents them, in the first place to the editor of the newspaper or other source responsible, then to the PCC if they remain dissatisfied.</p>

<b>Subject</b>	Autism	<b>Study</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Key findings</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	Huws, J.C. and Jones R.S.C.P. (2010) Missing voices: representations of autism in British newspapers, 1999–2008. <i>British Journal of Learning Disabilities</i> . DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-3156.2010.00624.x	A qualitative content and discourse analysis of newspaper accounts of autism over four one-month time points, every three years, between May 1999 and May 2008. A range of UK daily and Sunday newspapers.	Findings in three areas: (1) Voice of the individual with autism is largely silenced, and predominantly the focus is on third-person accounts of autism. (2) Discourses about autism present it as an affliction of suffering, and people are referred to as being victims of this condition. (3) Misuse of the label. Articles allude to individuals' traits or engagement in behaviours that might be indicative of autism, even though it is not known whether these people could be (or have been) diagnosed as having autism.	Further research could explore whether there are differences in how sectors of the media (tabloids and broadsheets) present autism, and the impact of such portrayal on people's understanding of autism, and their attitudes towards individuals diagnosed with autism.	



## 9. Key conclusions

Following previous research, which has raised concerns about the extent to which reporting of drug use and drug users may be unbalanced and dominated by negative stereotypes, this study has used content analysis to ascertain the extent to which this may be true for newspaper coverage.

Using a large sample comprising all news items mentioning drug use or users in each of three years from eight newspapers, the analysis showed that while there were notable peaks in reporting associated with a range of events – such as a celebrity’s trial, a young person’s death, or the reclassification of cannabis – in the background there was constant coverage, mainly in news reports and most often triggered by events in the criminal justice system, such as arrests and trials of people who were identified as drug users.

### **PRESS REPRESENTATION OF DRUG USERS**

News items featured drugs users from a variety of backgrounds, but there was no one dominant stereotypical image of drug users; rather there was a series of images. There was also a difference in the frequency that different groups of users featured and how they were portrayed.

The most frequently mentioned drug users across all newspapers were professionals (including sports, medical, legal and media professionals, and artists), celebrities and public figures, and young people – together they accounted for 62% of the users who appeared in the news. Members of other groups, such as offenders (including drug dealers and smugglers and prisoners) and parents, appeared less frequently in comparison. In addition, professionals, celebrities and public figures, and young people were also least likely to be condemned in coverage, less likely to be called ‘addicts’ or described pejoratively and more likely to be treated positively compared with other groups.

The picture could not be more different for offenders and parents. They were more likely than other users to be condemned, especially in the tabloid press, more likely to be labelled an addict, a term that was more often combined with pejorative words, and more likely to be called a ‘junkie’. These users were unlikely to be treated positively.

Drug users from different backgrounds were also clearly connected to different drugs. Across newspapers cocaine use was linked closely with professionals and celebrities, cannabis and ecstasy with young people, and heroin with offenders and parents.

Further, the different impact of these drugs on different users was also highlighted. For those with a professional background the most frequently mentioned impact related to

careers – many of these stories focused on sports stars' bans for use of recreational drugs. For young users, the most reported impact was on health. For parents, the main impact was on their family, and for offenders the consequences of drug use were related either explicitly or implicitly to crime.

It is not possible to identify in the findings a single coherent theme, but some themes do emerge nonetheless. While previous research has hinted that drug users from different backgrounds were treated in different ways in the press, this research shows it clearly is the case. For example, the cocaine-using professional or celebrity and the cannabis or ecstasy-using young person were treated differently from the heroin-using offender or parent. The latter were frequently condemned, labelled pejoratively and treated negatively, and the consequence of their habit shown as crime or a breakdown in the family. The presence of these actors in the news was triggered by a range of events within the criminal justice system – such as a court case or an arrest – whereas with other groups their presence in the news was the result of a broader set of factors. There were some variations between newspapers, but this was the picture by and large across newspapers. Heroin or crack-using offenders were probably one of the most stigmatised groups of users in the coverage. Many of these actors already carried a stigmatised identity as an offender; further stigmatising labels, such as evil junkie, were added by certain newspapers. The cocaine-using professional, celebrity or public figure and the cannabis or ecstasy-using young person were in no way subject to the same levels of venom in the press as heroin or crack-using offenders. The processes identified here are also identified in research on the media coverage of other stigmatised groups (see table 35).

While previous research has highlighted the complexity of the link between drug use and crime, this research has shown that such a connection is made quite widely. In the 1500 plus news items triggered by events in the criminal justice system drug use was suggested as the cause, either explicitly or implied in a seemingly throwaway line. Through repetitive coverage of events within the criminal justice system in which drug use featured, the link between criminality and drug use is reinforced. It is not only crime though, drug use was also be linked to other dangers. The high newsworthiness of young people and drug-related deaths reinforced a picture of direct cause and effect between the two, a picture reinforced by a focus on the health effects of drugs. News items which feature drug use, even in passing, therefore play a double role. In telling a story in which drug use features, they make a string of connections linking drug use to particular events and people.

### **EXPLAINING DRUG USE**

The impact of drug use both for the individual and for the community and wider society was widely mentioned but it was overwhelmingly negative. When it came to explaining the effects of drugs on drug users it was always 'bad' news. Most items that mentioned the effects on individuals emphasised the impact on users' health, wealth and that use led to crime. Most items that mentioned the effects on the community emphasised crime.

The results show some variation in the reported effects for individuals of using different drugs. Where the impact of heroin, cannabis or ecstasy use was mentioned it was mainly on the individual's health, especially in the case of ecstasy. However, the main reported consequence of taking cocaine was on the individual's career, and in the case of crack cocaine it was on the individual's propensity to commit crime.

In the case of cannabis use, the impact of use on mental health is often mentioned. It should be noted that in the assessment of accuracy exercise on the coverage of the research study on the health effects of cannabis, the tabloid press tended to make irrelevant or overstated links concerning cannabis, psychosis and violence.

While there were frequent mentions of the effects of drug use, the majority of items made no attempt to try and explain why use happened; only 37% of items provided one or more reasons for drug use. Across all newspapers the main reasons given were environmental factors, including work, social life and the socio-economic environment. Individual choice was the second most frequently cited reason, followed by the influence of named others and emotional issues.

The differences between the UK national press, the Scottish press and the English regional press were generally small. There were some noteworthy differences, though, in the way all newspapers rationalised the use of different drugs. For example, heroin use was mainly explained in terms of personal and emotional issues, cannabis use in terms of the influence of others, ecstasy related to individual choice, while cocaine and crack cocaine use was explained in terms of environmental factors.

Of course the findings need to be qualified. Television, radio and online media will also be an important influence on public perceptions of drug use and drug users. Further research looking at the portrayal of drug users in other media would be beneficial. This study only examined a sample: eight newspapers over three one-year periods sourced via Nexis. It also did not include any consideration of the pictures that accompany the coverage, which might also be influential, or any detailed consideration of the accuracy of the reporting. However, it provides the most comprehensive review of the way drug use and drug users are represented in the UK press to date.

While this study shows that most of the reporting of drug use and drug users in the print media is in the form of brief news reports and that use of terms such as 'junkie' is thankfully fairly rare, it does appear that there is a lack of balance in what is covered and how, and there is clearly the potential for a greater focus on positive news stories about treatment and recovery. Coomber (2000) highlighted the potential for improving the quality of reporting through the development of a negotiated media guide and DrugScope has recently published *The Media Guide to Drugs* (Shapiro, 2010). Since the media can be a powerful influence it is to be hoped that initiatives such as these can help to ensure in the future that the public get a more rounded view of drug users from the press.

# References

- Anderson, M. (2003) "One flew over the psychiatric unit: Mental illness and the media". *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*. 10: 297-306
- Coomber, R. (2000) "How the media do drugs: Quality control and the reporting of drug issues in the UK print media". *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 11: 217-55.
- Forsyth, A.J.M. (2001) "Distorted? A quantitative exploration of drug fatality reports in the popular press". *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 12: 435-453.
- Huws, J.C. and Jones R.S.C.P. (2010) "Missing voices: representations of autism in British newspapers, 1999–2008." *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*. no. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-3156.2010.00624.x
- Klim, A. and Lemish, D. (2008) "Mental Disorders Stigma in the Media: Review of Studies on Production, Content, and Influences." *Journal of Health Communication*, 13: 434-449.
- McDonald, Z., Tinsley, L., Collingwood, J., Jamieson, P. and Pudney, S. (2005) *Measuring the Harm of Illegal Drugs using the Drug Harm Index*. Home Office Online Report 24/05. London: Home Office
- Nairn, R G. (2007) "Media Portrayals of Mental Illness, or is it Madness? A Review." *Australian Psychologist*, 42 (2):138-146.
- Philo, G., McLaughlin, G. and Henderson, L. (1996) "Media Content." In Philo, G. (ed) *Media and Mental Distress*. London: Longman
- Shapiro, H. (2010) *The Media Guide to Drugs* London: DrugScope
- Singleton, N. (2010) *Attitudes to drug dependence: Results from a survey of people living in private households in the UK*. London: UK Drug Policy Commission
- Stout, P A., Villegas, J. and Jennings, N A. (2004) "Images of Mental Illness in the Media: Identifying Gaps in the Research." *Schizophrenia Bulletin*. 30 (3): 543-561.
- Taylor, S. (2008) "Outside the Outsiders: Media Representations of Drug Use." *Probation Journal: The Journal of Community and Criminal Justice*, 55(4): 369-387.
- Ward G. (1997) *Making headlines. Mental health and the national press*. London: Health Education Authority

# Appendix A: Search terms

For each of the newspapers the search terms used for each year were:

- Amphetamine;
- Cannabis and skunk;
- Cocaine;
- Crack cocaine;
- Ecstasy and MDMA;
- Heroin;
- Methadone;
- Ket and ketamine;
- Klonopin;
- Librium;
- Mephedrone and MCAT;
- Methamphetamine and Crystal Meth;
- Methylphenidate and Ritalin;
- Valium and Diazepam;
- Xanax

# Appendix B: Coding Manual

## **V 1, Case Number**

Each coded item is to be assigned a unique code

## **V 2, Date (Day, Month and Year)**

## **V 3, Newspapers**

1. the Guardian
2. the Times
3. the Daily Mail
4. the Daily Mirror
5. the Herald
6. the Daily Record
7. the Northern Echo
8. the London Evening Standard

## **V 4, Position of item**

1. Front page – page 1
2. Other page
99. Not known

## **V 5, Type of Item**

1. News item
2. Editorial/ leader
3. Feature
4. Column piece
5. First person piece
6. Diary
7. Readers letter
8. Evidence /supporting material
9. Interview
10. Other

## **V 6, Story headline**

Please write the story headline

## **V 7, Who reports?**

1. Health correspondent/editor
2. Political correspondent/editor
3. Education correspondent/editor

4. Home affairs correspondent/editor
5. Social affairs correspondent/editor
6. Entertainment correspondent/ editor
7. Foreign correspondent/ editor
8. Science correspondent/ editor
9. Economic/ business correspondent/ editor
10. Sports correspondent/ editor
11. Name only
12. No name/ no specialism listed
13. Other (please write correspondent designation on the coding sheet)

### **Mention of drug (V 8-12 )**

This variable is designed to provide some indication of the **main** drugs mentioned in the story (e.g. Is this a mainly a story about heroin and cocaine that lists other drugs?).

- 1.**Amphetamine** – ( speed, uppers)
- 2.**Angel dust/PCP** – Phencyclidine
- 3.**Anabolic Steroids**
- 4.**Cannabis**, (marijuana, marihuana, and ganja, also Skunk)
- 5.**Cocaine** (Charlie, Coke)
- 6.**Crack cocaine** (rock, crack)
- 7.**Crystal meth** – Methamphetamine, Ice
- 8.**Ecstasy** - MDMA ("E")
- 9.**GBH** -  $\gamma$ -Hydroxybutyric acid , 4-hydroxybutanoic acid and sodium oxybate
- 10.**GBL** - *gamma*-Butyrolactone  $\gamma$ -butyrolactone
- 11.**Heroin** or diacetylmorphine, diamorphine
- 12.**Ketamine** - Ket
- 13.**Klonopin** - Clonazepam
- 14.**Librium** - Chlordiazepoxide
- 15.**LSD** - Lysergic acid diethylamide, abbreviated LSD or LSD-25, or Acid
- 16.**Magic mushrooms** - *Psilocybe*
- 17.**Mephedrone** (MCAT, meow or miaow (or meow meow or miaow miaow)
- 18.**Mescaline** - 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenethylamine
- 19.**Methadone** (Symoron, Dolophine, Amidone, Methadose, Physeptone, Heptadon, Phy)
- 20.**Methylphenidate** (Ritalin)
- 21.**Morphine** (MS Contin, MSIR, Avinza, Kadian, Oramorph, Roxanol, Kapanol)
- 22.**Naphyrone** NRG -1
- 23.**Ritalin** - Methylphenidate (MPH; Ritalin, Concerta, Metadate or Methylin)
- 24.**Opium** - poppy tears
- 25.**Spice**
- 26.**Valium** -Diazepam
- 27.**Xanax** - Alprazolam
- 28.Other not listed
- 29.Drugs mentioned in general (no names mentioned specifically)

### **What triggers coverage (V 13)**

This variable is designed to provide some indication of the main trigger behind the news story.

1. Police arrest
2. A death
3. Judicial process/ outcome
4. Official enquiry/ investigation
5. Media initiated investigation
6. Parliamentary debate
7. Other legislature debate
8. Government policy announcement/ initiative
9. Other public body policy announcement/ initiative
10. Corporate sector policy announcement/ initiative
11. Voluntary sector/ NGO announcement/ initiative
12. Research publication\* – central government
13. Research publication – local government
14. Research publication - university sector
15. Research publication – charity/ voluntary sector
16. Research publication – business sector
17. Research publication – other
18. Conference – central government
19. Conference – local government
20. Conference - university sector
21. Conference – charity/ voluntary sector
22. Conference – business sector
23. Conference – other
24. Publicity campaign – central government
25. Publicity campaign – local government
26. Publicity campaign – University
27. Publicity campaign – Charity/ Voluntary
28. Publicity campaign – other
29. Opinion polls
30. Unnamed survey
31. Public demonstration against drug use
32. Public demonstration for use
33. Other citizen activism against
34. Other citizen activism for
35. Response to media coverage/debate
36. Celebrity pronouncement
37. Family campaign
38. Personal experience
39. Unclear
99. N/A

\*The test for classification here is authorship, not sponsorship of research



## **Descriptions of drug users (V 14-41)**

### **Who (occupation)**

Can code up to four individuals

1. Unemployed
2. Student
3. School pupil
4. Young people (general not specified)
5. Prisoner
6. Ex-offender
7. Full time parent (Single mother)
8. Manual worker (general)
9. Artist (inc. musician)
10. Media professional
11. Medical professional (Doctor, Nurse, etc)
12. Professional sports person
13. Other professional (Lawyer etc)
14. Celebrity
15. Other public figure (politician etc)
16. Relative of celebrity/ public figure
17. The public (General not specified)
18. Drug related
99. Not known

### **Is the person a/ are they described as:**

#### **Individual**

1. A drug user (nothing else specified)
2. A drug user in treatment
3. A former drug user

#### **Group**

4. drug users (nothing else specified)
5. drug users in treatment
6. former drug user
99. None

### **Gender**

1. Male
2. Female
99. Not known/ NS

### **Age**

1. Under 16 – school age
2. 17-29
3. 30 -39
4. 40- 49
5. 50+
6. 16+ (General)
99. Not known

### **Race**

1. White British/Irish
2. Other white
3. Black British/Caribbean
4. African
5. Chinese
6. Indian
7. Pakistani
8. Bangladeshi
9. Other Asian background
10. Any mixed background (please specify)
99. Not known/ NS

### **Tone of descriptions**

The idea for this variable is that we document the key words used to describe the user (if any).

Is the user referred to:

1. Only Negative (for example: Addict(s),Druggie (s),Junkie(s),Dope fiend(s),Smack-head (s),Tripper(s))
2. Positive prior to being a user (for example: Outstanding, talented, brilliant)
3. Positive after being a user
99. No reference/ NA

We are interested in the words used to *describe the user* specifically.

Coders should also note a maximum of three descriptive words (if relevant).

### **Condemnation of user**

The idea for this variable is that we only code the tone of coverage toward the subject. Does the article empathise with users or condemn them? There has to be **clear** condemnation/ empathy (please make note of words used)

1. The subject(s) and or action(s) are condemned (perpetrator)
2. The article empathises with the subject (victim)
3. There is no clear evaluative direction evident

## **Drug Use (V 42-52)**

### **Explaining drug use**

In what way do newspapers seek to explain why drug use happens? To what extent is the socio-economic context of drug use is over looked? You need to find specific references to the below.

Rationalising why:

1. Individual choices
2. Peer influence
3. Celebrity influence
4. Personal/ emotional issues
5. Physical abuse
6. Lifestyle issues
7. Performance issues
8. Workplace culture
9. Cost of drug
10. Confused official message
11. Connection to socio economic deprivation
99. Not mentioned

### **Situating drug use**

Does drug use tend to be situated in certain locations more than others?

Location described:

1. School/ university
2. Night club/concert/ festival/party
3. Place of work
4. Prison
5. Care facility
6. Rural environment
7. A city
8. Deprived city area (estate)
9. Affluent region/ area (County/ region)
10. Deprived region
11. The home
12. Other
13. Nation/ Other country
14. On vacation
99. None mentioned

### **Consequences of drug use for community/ individual**

How do the newspapers seek to portray the consequences of drug use for the community/ neighbourhood and wider society? The report might name a specific area/ individual but might talk generally. Look for key words. (Can code up to three consequences for each)

Rationalising the consequences for the community:

1. Crime
2. Financial consequences
3. Social consequences
4. Health consequences
5. Family consequences
6. Emotional/relational consequences
7. Positive consequences
8. Less harmful consequences

Rationalising the consequences for the individual:

9. Crime
10. Financial consequences
11. Social consequences
12. Health consequences
13. Family consequences
14. Emotional/relational consequences
15. Graduation on to harder drugs
16. Positive consequences
17. Less harmful consequences
18. Career impact
99. None mentioned

### **Recovery and Rehabilitation**

We are interested in how often newspaper stories raise issue of recovery and rehabilitation. Is this a story about:

1. Mainly Recovery and Rehabilitation
4. Recovery and Rehabilitation briefly mentioned (one sentence - word)
99. Noting mentioned

**Mentioning drug harm**

How often do newspaper stories raise the harm of drug use? **The stories must specifically raise the issue of harm to health. (can CODE UP TO THREE POSSIBILITIES)**

Mentioning:

- 1.Harm to physical health
- 2.Harm to mental health
- 3.Harm general
- 4.Less harmful than alcohol and cigarettes
- 5.Mention of Classification of harm (harm index)
99. Nothing mentioned

# Appendix C: Coding Sheet

V 1, Case Number: \_\_\_\_\_

V 2, Date (Day, Month and Year) \_\_\_\_/ \_\_\_\_/ \_\_\_\_

V 3, Newspapers: \_\_\_\_\_

V 4, Position of Item: \_\_\_\_\_

V 5, Type of Item: \_\_\_\_\_

V 6, Headline

--

V 7, Who reports: \_\_\_\_\_

V 8-12, Mention of drug (code up to three drugs mentioned)

(V) Drug 1	
(V) Drug 2	
(V) Drug 3	

V 13, Coverage Trigger: \_\_\_\_\_

**V 14-41, Users (code up to four users)**

	Who	User	Gender	Age	Race	Tone	Condemn
(V) User 1							
(V) User 2							
(V) User 3							
(V) User 4							

Note any key adjectives here

--

**Drug use (V42-52)**

**V42-44, Rationalising Drug use: (code up to 3 reasons)**

V Reason 1	
V Reason 2	
V Reason 3	

**V45, Situating Drug use: \_\_\_\_\_**

**V46-51, Consequences for drug use for the community: (code up to 3 consequences for each)**

	V Consequence 1	V Consequence 2	V Consequence 3
Community			
Individual			

**V52, Mentions of Harm:**

1, \_\_\_\_\_,

2, \_\_\_\_\_,

3, \_\_\_\_\_