



EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

**CORONAVIRUS, 22 January 2021**

### **GREY LITERATURE**

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**Harm reduction service delivery to people who use drugs during a public health emergency : examples from the COVID-19 pandemic in selected countries**

Eurasian Harm Reduction Association  
Vilnius : 2020

The ten case studies presented here provide a snapshot of the responses of specific organisations and communities who work with people who use drugs and some other marginalised groups around the world, including Afghanistan, Australia, the Czech Republic, Kenya, Poland, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

The objective of presenting these case studies is to provide details as to how changes in service delivery were implemented in response to COVID-19, and why, together with the impact of such innovative approaches. In so doing, governments, organisations and communities around the world can learn from the experiences presented in these case studies for possible application, and adaptation, to their own context and environment.

<http://files.idpc.net/library/Harm-reduction-service-delivery-to-people-who-use-drugs-during-a-public-health-emergency.pdf>

**Cannabis und Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 – Eine Online-Kurzbefragung während der Kontaktbeschränkungen in der frühen Phase der Pandemie**

[Cannabis and coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 – short German online survey during contact restrictions in the early stage of the pandemic]

Werse, B ; Kamphausen, G

Suchttherapie

21 January 2021

DOI : 10.1055/a-1336-8005

**Ziel**

Erkenntnisse über Änderungen des Erwerbs und Konsum von Cannabisprodukten während der Zeit der Kontaktbeschränkungen im Zusammenhang mit dem Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

**Methode**

Eine ad hoc erstellte, über Soziale Medien verbreitete Online-Umfrage ergab 1146 vollständig ausgefüllte Fragebögen, die quantitativ, teils auch qualitativ ausgewertet wurden.

**Ergebnisse**

Es wurden überwiegend Personen erreicht, die häufig Cannabis konsumierten. Rund ein Drittel hatte während der entsprechenden Phase der Pandemie den Konsum gesteigert, nur etwa ein Sechstel reduziert. Mit zunehmender Dauer der Beschränkungen stieg auch der Anteil jener, die angaben, mehr zu konsumieren. Rund die Hälfte stellte keine Änderungen der Marktbedingungen fest, ansonsten wurden leichte Preissteigerungen und schwerere Verfügbarkeit beobachtet. Infektionsgefahren wurden durch diverse Schutzmaßnahmen und Verhaltensänderungen versucht zu minimieren.

**Schlussfolgerung**

Trotz gewisser Beeinträchtigungen wurde während der betreffenden Phase der Coronapandemie häufiger Cannabis konsumiert.

**Aim**

To gain evidence about changes in the cannabis market and user behaviour during the SARS-CoV-2-related contact restrictions.

**Methods**

An ad-hoc online survey, promoted via Social Media, yielded 1146 completed questionnaires, which were analysed quantitatively and to a lesser degree, with qualitative methods.

**Results**

Mainly persons who use cannabis frequently participated in the survey. Around one third have increased their cannabis use during the corona crisis, while only about one sixth used less than before. As the restrictions lasted longer, the proportion of those who stated that they use more further increased. Around half of respondents did not observe any changes in the cannabis market, while others mentioned slight price increases and reduced availability. Various protective measures and behavioral changes were undertaken to minimize the risk of infection.

**Conclusion**

Despite some impairments of conditions, the use of cannabis has increased during the corona crisis.

**Covid-19, confinement et addictions**

Hautefeuille, M

Psychotropes

26, 2-3, p.11-16, 2020

**Business not as usual - Covid-19 vaccination in persons with substance use disorders**

Barocas, J A

New England Journal of Medicine, 2021, 384, e6

**Trust in a COVID-19 vaccine among people with substance use disorders**

Mellis, A M, Kelly, B C, Potenza, M N, Hulse, J N

Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2021, 220, 108519

**Harm reduction and adaptations among PWUD in rural Oregon during COVID-19**

Seaman, A, Leichtling, G, Stack, E, et al

AIDS and Behavior

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) may influence HIV/HCV transmission risk behaviors in rural communities. We conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with people who use drugs (PWUD) in five rural Oregon counties and asked about COVID-19 impact on substance use and harm reduction practices and their advice for improving public health responses. Participants (n = 36) reported using only methamphetamine (52.8%), only heroin (16.7%), or both (30.6%); 75% of participants reported recent injection. Three thematic categories emerged: SSP adaptations and accessibility, PWUD harm reduction practices, and policy suggestions. Participants noted the importance of SSPs to COVID-19 prevention and wellbeing, though some experienced increased barriers, leading to increased risky injection practices. Participants suggested need-based rather than one-for-one exchange, increasing syringe delivery services, encouraging secondary exchange by PWUD, and peers as trusted voices for information exchange. Rapid implementation of policy and practice changes are urgently required to improve SSP access, reinforce safer use, and prevent HIV/HCV and COVID-19 transmission.

### **Substance use treatment in Appalachian Tennessee amid COVID-19: Challenges and preparing for the future**

Kedia, S K; Schmidt, M; Dillon, P J; et al  
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment  
124, 108270, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic created a number of rapidly emerging and unprecedented challenges for those engaged in substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, forcing service providers to improvise their treatment strategies as the crisis deepened. Drawing from five ongoing federally funded SUD projects in Appalachian Tennessee and hundreds of hours of meetings and interviews, this article explores the pandemic's impact on an already structurally disadvantaged region, its recovery community, and those who serve it. More specifically, we note detrimental effects of increased isolation since the implementation of COVID-19 safety measures, including stakeholders' reports of higher incidences of relapse, overdose, and deaths in the SUD population. Treatment providers have responded with telehealth services, but faced barriers in technology access and computer literacy among clients. Providers have also had to restrict new clients to accommodate social distancing, faced delays in health screening those they can accept, and denied family visitations, which has affected retention. In light of these challenges, several promising lessons for the future emerged—such as preparing for an influx of new and returning clients in need of SUD treatment; making arrangements for long-term housing and facility modification; developing a hybrid care delivery model, taking advantage of new regulations enabling telemedicine; budgeting for and storing personal protective equipment (PPE) and related supplies; and developing disaster protocols to withstand threats to intake, retention, and financial solvency.

### **Is necessity also the mother of implementation? COVID-19 and the implementation of evidence-based treatments for opioid use disorders**

Becker, S J; Garner, B R; Hartzler, B J  
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment  
122, 108210, 2021

Opioid-related overdoses and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) represent two of the deadliest crises in United States' history and together constitute a syndemic. The intersecting risks of this syndemic underscore the urgent need to implement effective opioid use disorder (OUD) treatments that are sustainable amid COVID-19 mitigation strategies. In response to new federal guidance released during the pandemic, opioid treatment programs (OTPs) have quickly innovated to implement new systems of medication delivery. OTPs rapid implementation of new medication delivery models defies conventional wisdom about the pace of research transfer. As part of an ongoing cluster-randomized type 3 hybrid trial evaluating strategies to implement contingency management (CM), select staff of eight OTPs had been trained to deliver CM and were in the midst of receiving ongoing implementation support. As COVID-19 emerged, all eight OTPs mirrored trends in the addiction field and effectively adapted to federal/state demands to implement new methods of medication delivery. However, over the past few months, necessity has arguably been the mother of implementation. We have observed greater variance among these OTPs' success with the additional implementation of adjunctive CM. The speed and variability of innovation raises novel questions about drivers of implementation. We argue that the mother of the next innovation should be a public call for a progressive, thoughtful set of public health policies and other external setting levers to address the needs of those with OUD and the OTPs that serve them.

### **Increased availability of telehealth mental health and substance abuse treatment for peripartum and postpartum women: A unique opportunity to increase telehealth treatment**

Moreland, A; Guille, C; McCauley, J L  
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment  
122, 108268, 2021

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several federal, state, and payor policy changes have facilitated the uptake of telehealth service delivery. These changes have resulted in a significant uptick in the utilization of maternal mental health and substance use disorder screening and treatment services for pregnant and postpartum women. The Medical University of South Carolina's [MUSC] Women's Reproductive Behavioral Health Program provides outpatient mental health and substance use treatment to pregnant and postpartum women within obstetric practices. With the onset of COVID-19, our program converted all of its screening for and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders to remote platforms. Lessons learned during this time may lay the foundation for transitioning to sustainable telehealth-based referral and delivery of substance use treatment more broadly.

### **The double effect of COVID-19 confinement measures and economic recession on high-risk drug users and drug services**

Costa Storti, C, Bretteville-Jensen, A L, De Grauwe, P, Moeller, K, Mounteney, J, Stevens, A  
European Addiction Research, 21 January 2021 - DOI: 10.1159/000513883

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a profound impact on the lives of high-risk drug users and on the services responding to their needs in at least two important ways: first, through the restrictive measures introduced to mitigate the spread of the virus and, second, as a result of extensive economic downturn. Currently there is great uncertainty as to the future intensity and duration of the pandemic. In addition, the lessons we have been able to learn from previous economic downturns may be of limited applicability to the current situation, which differs in a number of significant respects. Experience nevertheless suggests that the potential consequences for drug users' health and well-being may be severe. The ongoing uncertainty serves to underline the importance of close monitoring of the drug situation and preparing flexible and innovative solutions to be able to meet new challenges which may arise.

### **New data on access to mental health and addictions services and home and community care**

Cho, M Z, Froot, J, Husak, L, et al  
Healthcare Quarterly  
23, 4, p.9-11, 2021

As the population ages, more Canadians need home care to help manage their health conditions and live safely at home. For Canadians of all ages, timely access to mental health and addictions services is an area of growing concern. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its strain on health system resources have further highlighted the need to improve services in these areas. The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) is working with governments across Canada to bridge data gaps, develop indicators and publicly report results as part of a collective effort to improve access in these two sectors. Results for three new indicators were released by CIHI in 2020.

### **Multiple clinical risks for cannabis users during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Borgonhi EM, Volpatto VL, Ornell F, et al  
Addiction Science & Clinical Practice, 2021, 16, 1, 5

The pandemic caused by Sars-CoV-2 (COVID-19) has been a great concern for public and mental health systems worldwide. The identification of risk groups is essential for the establishment of preventive and therapeutic strategies, as for substance users. During COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in the use of psychoactive substances during the lockdown, including cannabis. This commentary reviews relevant findings and discusses scientific evidence on the risks of worse clinical and psychiatric complications due to coronavirus disease COVID-19 in subjects who use cannabis. Although they are not included as a risk group in the health recommendations for that disease, they may have a more vulnerable respiratory system to viral diseases. There are certain similarities between the harmful cardiovascular and respiratory effects of cannabis use and those of smoking. Due to the different modes of smoking, cannabis chemicals are retained in the body for longer and may also contain other toxic substances such as tar, a substance found in tobacco and which has been associated with the development of lung cancer, bronchitis and pulmonary emphysema. Therefore, we discuss if individuals who use cannabis regularly might be more vulnerable to COVID-

19 infection. This population deserves more clinical attention worldwide and this manuscript can help clinicians become more aware of cannabis risks during pandemics and develop specific intervention strategies.

**Teesside's drug problem: Drugs deaths hit record high, as fears about lockdown cocaine use grow**

<https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/teessides-drug-problem-drugs-deaths-19467825>

**Spike in people caught driving while on cocaine after State entered first lockdown**

Cannabis remains most commonly detected substance by gardaí targeting drug-driving | Irish Times, Ireland

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/spike-in-people-caught-driving-while-on-cocaine-after-state-entered-first-lockdown-1.4460568>

**How did the Dutch lockdown influence cannabis use and addiction?**

Covid-19 lockdown measures introduced substantial psychosocial stressors in everyday life. Did changes in mental wellbeing lead to more cannabis use and more severe cannabis disorders? A study among near daily cannabis users concludes that while cannabis use increased at the group level, the effect of the first lockdown months on the addiction severity varied significantly between individuals | University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

<https://www.uva.nl/en/shared-content/faculiteiten/en/faculteit-der-maatschappij-en-gedragwetenschappen/news/2021/01/how-did-the-dutch-lockdown-influence-cannabis-use-and-addiction.html?origin=cnUSYqO%2BT4OvERocBmGxmw>

**Bad habits increase among students during pandemic, U of Sask. study finds**

A newly released study suggests university students are eating worse, are less active and are drinking more alcohol during the COVID-19 pandemic than they were before | CBC News, Canada

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/u-sask-study-students-pandemic-bad-habits-1.5879552>

**Meth use is on the rise in Southeast Asia – and COVID is to blame**

An excess of drugs in the Golden Triangle region due to COVID export restrictions has led to an increase in meth use among young people and workers | VICE, UK

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/epdq4k/meth-use-is-on-the-rise-in-southeast-asia-and-covid-is-to-blame>