

Key Indicator “Prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population – Population Surveys”

2012 Annual EMCDDA Expert meeting

Brief summary of minutes

The 2012 annual expert meeting on the EMCDDA epidemiological indicator “Prevalence and patterns of drug use among the general population” took place the 26 and 27 June at the EMCDDA in Lisbon

The meeting brought together experts from almost all Member States, a group of Balkan countries and Australia as well as from the ESPAD and HBSC international schools projects

The meeting objectives were to:

- Provide an overview of progress and results for 2011/2012.
- Exchange information between countries and international projects.
- Promote methodological discussion about ways to progress measuring and describing substance use as well as ways to analyse and interpret trends
- Explore ways to bridge the gap between surveys, policy and responses.

Specific topics for the meeting included:

- A co-ordinated analysis on national changes in prevalence estimates of cannabis, cocaine and alcohol use.
- A special focus on response rates and ways to address concerns about low response in some countries.
- Promoting comparable analysis and harmonisation of questionnaire wording
- A special session was included on intensive cocaine and intensive cannabis use: exploring the potential and limitations of general population surveys in monitoring this. Several countries are testing different methods such as short screening instruments, frequency of use, targeted surveys and waste-water analysis and or a combination of these.

Two panel discussions took place on:

1. Response rates with contributions from Elena Alvarez, Björn Hibell, Daniela Piontek and Jean Long. The discussion highlighted that serious response rate problems are restricted to only a few countries and in school surveys the problem is largely confined to schools participation - not individuals. In adult surveys motivation is a key issue. Mixed mode survey data collection, particularly with online self completion tools, may help. The EMCDDA has commissioned a study on data collection tools and the results will be available next June.
2. Harmonisation of data collection, storage and analysis with contributions from Nicola Singleton, Janusz Sieroslowski, and Björn Hibell. The main focus was on polydrug use including alcohol measures and a paper on this topic is in progress and will be published on line by the end of the year. Participants reported that through their work on harmonisation they developed better understanding of the problems that serve as barriers to truly comparative international analysis. Joint analysis also serves to highlight issues to consider in more depth at national level.

Two satellite meetings took place

1. A satellite meeting with eight countries participating in a project to harmonize a core set of variables in existing databases of national general population surveys took place on Monday 25 June 2012 at the EMCDDA to review progress and make plans for the next stage (Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, France, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, and UK participated.) The workshop explored available data on polydrug use with a view to improve information in this field and further develop methods for joint analysis.
2. A satellite meeting of the Project of cross-cultural validation of short cannabis scales SDS and CAST also took place on Thursday 28 June 2012 at the EMCDDA. Experts from nine countries participated (Czech Rep., Germany, Spain, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and UK.) Main aim of the meeting was to assess the state of art in the European project of SDS and CAST validation and to agree on a way forward.

Progress in 2012

The collection of methodological information has improved by the mapping of core survey questions and more detailed information on response rates. This contributes to a better informed and nuanced assessment of the implementation of the Key Indicator than was possible in the past.

Relations with international school surveys have been strengthened with the EMCDDA publication of a multilingual (23 language) summary of the 2011 ESPAD Report and the hosting the ESPAD schools survey meeting at the end of 2011.

A contract was launched to explore and map methods of data collection in General Population Surveys (in particular the use of computer assisted and on-line questionnaires) and to evaluate the costs, benefits and mode effects of different survey tools.

Additional countries joined the European Surveys Harmonised Database Project bringing the total number already participating to nine.

Work has begun with experts to explore possible revision of parts of the EMQ (particularly to include a module on use of 'new' psychoactive substances)

Routine data collection on frequency of cannabis use has been reported and incorporated with standard analyses in Annual Report.

Next steps in 2013 are to:

Rationalise and improve web-based information on the drug situation from population surveys

Expand the European Surveys Harmonised Database Project with at least four more countries, focusing on how to improve information on polydrug use and develop methods for joint analysis.

Prepare structured analyses plans to support the annual reporting packages and other outputs.

Explore ways to make the annual European GPS expert meeting more interactive; promoting focused analyses and filling information gaps about methodological differences between surveys and across countries.

Scale up cooperation with ESPAD project

Continue work, in co-operation with the PDU indicator, to assess intensive forms of cannabis use in population samples (psychometric scales).

Provisional date of the next annual meeting will be 18-19 June 2013