

The Home Office: Psychoactive Substances Act

Grace Lauchlan, BA Criminology



For 8 weeks I interned at the Home Office within the Drugs and Alcohol Research unit, looking at how the Psychoactive Substance Act 2016 has

impacted the drug known as 'Spice'. My research will contribute to the review of this legislation in Parliament in November 2018.

Objectives

The main aim of my research was to collate research about the substance 'Spice'. The Psychoactive Substance Act (PSA) was passed in 2016, meaning that it is no longer permissible to produce and supply legal highs. The review of the PSA will consider key themes and the ways in which they have been affected by the legislation. The theme I focused on was 'sales and availability'.

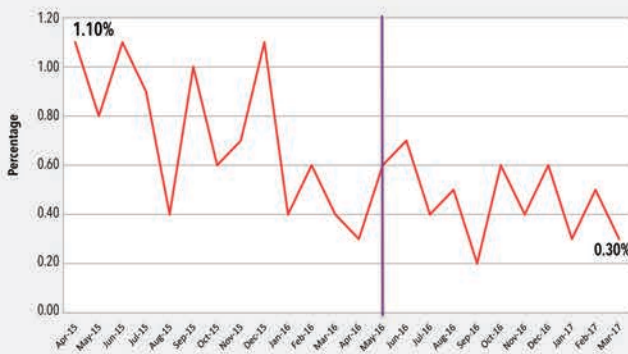
As Spice was no longer available through legitimate sources, my research looked at whether the sale of Spice has moved to street-level dealing and the Dark Web, alongside other traditional illicit drugs. The assumption was that this would also reveal whether the availability of Spice had been affected by the introduction of the legislation.

In order to gain an accurate picture of the prevalence of Spice in England and Wales, the research needed to also consider hidden populations i.e. amongst prisons and the homeless, where Spice is thought to be particularly rife.

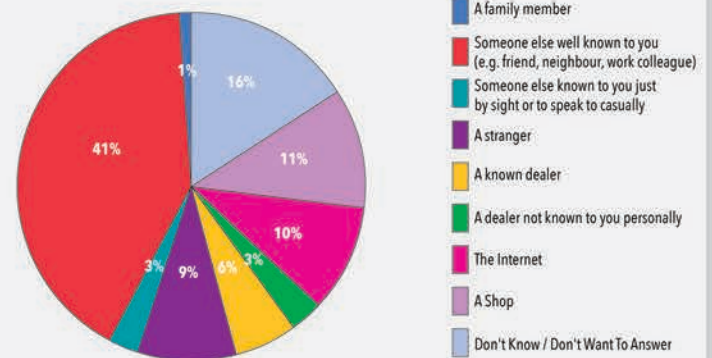
Methods

In order to assess trends and prevalence of Spice in the general population, I used data from the Crime Survey of England and Wales and compared the results of 2015/16-2016/17 which made up the quantitative side of my project. I ran cross tabulations in SPSS and transferred the results into Excel where I was able to compute the results into graphs and tables, as well as running tests of statistical significance to compare the changes before and after the Act came in.

As the CSEW is a household survey, I also needed to do qualitative research to look at the homeless and prison population which meant using qualitative data. This involved compiling a literature review of all the relevant known research that focused on these areas. This meant at times contacting researchers to request unpublished research. The findings were then compared to other countries that have introduced similar legislation to see what trends may be expected in the future. Combined with the quantitative data, this was used to calculate the annual cost of Spice in England & Wales.



% of people who have taken NPS in the last year, CSEW (15/16-16/17)



Who or where did you get the substance from? June 16-Mar 17 (CSEW, 2016/17)

Key Learning

- Analysis on SPSS
- Data presentation on Excel
- Tests of statistical significance
- Time management
- Literature review skills

