

A paper calling for public awareness of the causal link between Cocaine, Mental Health, Suicide and the emerging crisis in Wales.

This paper aims to produce supporting evidence for the need to raise awareness of increase in cocaine related suicides in Wales.

Introduction

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young and middle aged adults worldwide and is a public health priority (World Health Organisation, 2014).

Environmental exposures in the form of drug taking are prominent in discussion about suicide. Drug use is associated with 60% of suicides of those 30 years and under.

It has been shown that drug use is an independent predictor of subsequent suicide attempts, significant associations have been identified when controlling for sociodemographic variables and comorbid mental health disorders (Borges, King et al 2001).

There is longstanding evidence to suggest that suicide attempts are most pronounced when the drug of choice is Cocaine (Lewisham et al, 1996).

An earlier study using a large sample of 9,000 Americans identified that the risk of making a suicide attempt was significantly and independently associated with the use of cocaine. Despite exploring the relationship between many substances and suicide attempts, Cocaine was the only drug explored within the study that was identified to have an independent causal link when controlling for other factors (Petronis et al, 1990)

A more recent study conducted by professors at Brown University identified that alcohol and cocaine used together had a significant association with suicide and was a significant predictor of a suicide attempt. Although people in the study reported misusing many different substances, only the use of cocaine and alcohol combined showed a significant association with suicide risk (Arias, Dumas, Ashley, Sullivan, Boudreaux, Miller and Camargo, 2016).

The Brazilian National Alcohol and drug survey (2019) has more recently reported that Suicidal ideation and Suicide attempts were 20.8% more likely for Cocaine users than any other substance, after adjusting for demographic characteristics such as family history of mental health disorders.

A clear causal link has been identified between Cocaine use and suicidal ideation and suicide attempts which is concerning given that national statistics suggest that Cocaine use has doubled in the UK over the last five years.

Government statistics on the seizure of illegal substances reports that Cocaine is the second most commonly seized drug in the U.K with a high percentage of these seizures being made in Wales, specifically the South Wales area. Last year police officers seized more Cocaine than any other class A drug. Over half of those 14,892 seizures were made in Wales and almost a quarter of them were in the South Wales force area alone. Suggesting that Wales is at the heart of the Cocaine rise.

The Advisory Council on the misuse of drugs reports that Cocaine is the second most commonly used drug in the U.K with a year on year increase in its use. The Advisory Council report that there is significant evidence to suggest that its use has spread to a wider social demographic spectrum.

Nick Shepley an addiction councillor in Cardiff reports that he has seen a demographic change in users of Cocaine from the middle class to the everyday person such as labourers and bricklayers.

Police warnings suggest that the change in demographic of users is due to low sale prices and higher purity levels that are now available. This has been corroborated by a senior lecturer in Health Sciences at York University, Dr Ian Hamiltonian his contribution to the Sun's end of the line campaign.

For the 1 in 5 that become addicted to Cocaine it tears their families apart, destroys their careers and leaves them financially crippled and desperate. Worryingly Dr Hamilton reports that the higher purity levels of Cocaine now available on the street is catching young users out and increasing addiction rates. He further highlighted the proven links between Cocaine and psychosis is creating a mental health epidemic amongst young people.

Cocaine used to be the sole preserve of affluent City workers and dissolute rock stars they continue to favour the drug with data from the crime surgery of England and Wales showed that powdered cocaine use increased from 2.2% in 2014/15 to 3.4% in 2017/18 in households earning 50,000 a year or more. But powdered cocaine now appeals to those in more modest income brackets due to lower price levels.

Brussels Drug Agency report 5% of the UK's 15-34 year olds have used Cocaine in the last 12 months. Further evidence suggesting that 1 in 5, 16 -24 year olds have taken Cocaine and do so on a regular basis.

Deaths linked to Cocaine have quadrupled since 2011, while hospital admissions for Cocaine fuelled mental health conditions have increased twofold with entrants to treatment for Cocaine addiction increasing by 28%. Cocaine was associated with 282 deaths in 2008 with deaths related to cocaine reaching at their highest rate in 2017 since records began with figures reaching 432 Cocaine related deaths in England and Wales. Cocaine was further reported in the Public Health Wales documents to be associated with 564 hospital admissions in 2017-2018.

However, Cocaine also creates subtler forms of misery. Users report that paranoia can last for days after a "bender" and many report experiencing suicidal thoughts in the days following its use. Many users report needing to secure Cocaine in order to enjoy a night out (antidotal evidence to support this is included in the documents attached).

With the majority of users using the substance alongside the consumption of alcohol, Dr Prun Benjal of the drug treatment service Grow Live, suggests that further caution is needed given that combined use increases the risks associated with the drug and impairs users ability to make judgments and measure risks.

The depression experienced by users in the days following a Cocaine binge has been described as "crushing" however many continue to mix the drug with alcohol recreationally week after week. Some may think that its use would be linked to those enjoying the party lifestyle however users report needing to use the substance when ever alcohol is available including the local pub, weddings family and house gatherings.

Many Professionals have publicised concerns relating to the Cocaine being seen as 'the drug without consequence'. Due to how quickly the drug is metabolised in the body, recreational users see it as a drug that can be dabbled with at the weekend before work on Monday with no traces remaining in

their system (although the psychological effects have been proven to persist for even the most casual of users) It's normalisation within today's society has created a false sense of security for users which are ever increasing and has masked the devastating risks associated with taking the drug.

At a time of welfare cuts and even longer NHS mental health waiting lists Cocaine also seems to offer a quick fix for those struggling with stress or anxiety. As a stimulant it offers the increases confidence and reduces anxiety and is instantly and readily available. There are no waiting lists or opening hours.

Cocaine is not seen as a hard drug, to many people, snorting cocaine with a glass of wine on a Saturday night is an ordinary thing. The normality, acceptance of the drug is what we perceive to be most dangerous. The prevalence of the drug can be supported by the fact that Cocaine and traces of it have been reportedly found in everyday establishments. The Chelsea flower show, the Opera and Peppa Pig World are just some of the places that Matt Quinton former journalist for the Sun found traces of the drug when working undercover for the newspaper. In an 18 month period Quinton only failed to find cocaine once, at a children's festival.

It is likely that traces of Cocaine would be found in most public establishments. Users report being offered the drug in restaurants, local parks, fundraising events. Consequently, for those trying to avoid the drug it is almost impossible.

For many drug addiction conjures up images of 'junkies' in crack dens however with cocaine addiction most people function in their every day lives they get up and go to work Monday to Friday only to binge on the substance over the weekend.

The above information is aimed at demonstrating the causal link between Cocaine use , psychosis suicide ideation and suicide. Given the increase use of the drug across demographics in Wales and the normalisation of its use we feel this issue needs public awareness and also further research into the numbers of suicides whereby cocaine has been associated using coroner reports. This information could then be used to better inform support services and identify risk factors in those taking the drug.

Summary

There is a significant causal link between Cocaine and suicide

Cocaine use is normalised within today's society particularly with young working adults across demographics.

South Wales has seen a surge in seizures of Cocaine and there is antidotal, evidence to suggest that suicides as a result of Cocaine use is on the rise with young men in Wales.

Its use has increased 15% year on year due to lower costs prices and higher purity

Addiction to the substance has increased.

Sent separately, supporting information from 2wish upon a star and The Jacob Abraham foundation.