

HEALTH AND HARM REDUCTION FOR PEOPLE WHO USE STIMULANTS: CRACK PIPES AS AN ENGAGEMENT TOOL IN ENGLAND.

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Background:

Harm reduction interventions for people who smoke stimulants are limited. In England crack cocaine use is rising, yet provision of safe inhalation equipment is prohibited. Consequently, people who smoke crack have little reason to access drug services. Pipes used for crack smoking are often homemade, exacerbating viral transmission and respiratory risk. We report on the SIPP (Safe inhalation pipe provision) study which trials and evaluates a crack pipe provision intervention in England. Our aim is to generate robust evidence to inform service provision and legislative review.

Methods:

Study components comprise: 1) peer network capacity building; 2) pre-and post-intervention survey at intervention and control sites; 3) process evaluation; 4) economic evaluation. Survey eligibility criteria is crack use in past 28 days. We report findings from baseline survey (n=734) intervention monitoring data, qualitative interviews with people who use crack (n=32) and service providers (n=10).

Results:

Baseline respondents (n=734) were primarily male (70%), white (86%), with an average age of 42. Respiratory symptoms were common (60%, n= 437) with 39% (n=272) reporting hospitalisation for a respiratory condition. Women were particularly vulnerable to respiratory symptoms (66% vs 58%) and hospitalisation (44% vs 36%) compared to men. Homemade pipe use was common, with materials used contributing to respiratory risk. During 6-month intervention over 3,000 pipes were distributed. Monitoring data show over 192 people contacting drug services for the first time ever to obtain a crack pipe. Engagement extending beyond crack pipe provision to the offer of psychosocial supports, hepatitis C testing and other health interventions.

Conclusions:

Findings highlight the value of crack pipe provision for enhancing service engagement and a high unmet need for respiratory health interventions among people who use crack, particularly women. Provision of safer crack smoking equipment, with legislative change, holds potential for long term risk reduction amongst this underserved population.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

Mr Andrew Preston is ED of Exchange Supplies which supplied the crack pipes pro bono for the SIPP intervention. All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.