

Noteworthy phenomena and emerging trends in illegal drugs (2010-2011)

>
TENDANCES
<

TREND observations on significant new French trends

Agnès
Cadet-Tairou

Michel
Gandilhon

Emmanuel
Lahaie

The twelfth edition of the TREND (Emerging Trends and New Drugs) scheme took place in 2010. The main goal of TREND, established by the OFDT (French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction) in 1999, is to identify and describe changes in trends and emerging phenomena in illegal or misused psychotropic substances. This issue of *Tendances* will also include the first set of data available on the first half of 2011, as provided by the seven local coordinating entities (Bordeaux, Lille, Marseille, Metz, Paris, Rennes and Toulouse).

This issue of *Tendances* is divided into three main sections. The first will examine the only major emerging phenomenon¹ identified in 2010, the second will be devoted to describing recent trends and the third will examine changes in the use of the different substances monitored by the TREND scheme.

An emerging phenomenon: a change in the image of cocaine?

Over the past fifteen years or so, the spread of cocaine hydrochloride in France has developed, among other things, as a result of the generally positive image it has enjoyed among consumers (the drug has been associated with partying and social success). This drug's positive reputation, which is in stark contrast to that of crack, has been the dominant perception among psychotropic drug users since TREND first began collecting data on this subject. However, it seems that for the first time since 1999, observers from a majority of the TREND network sites (Bordeaux, Lille, Rennes, Marseille, Metz) reported, in 2010, a clear deterioration in cocaine's image, especially, but not exclusively, among the most experienced users: "The general image of cocaine among the users of this substance is deteriorating. It is gradually losing its positive aura as a 'harmless substance', which characterised it in the early

days of its rise in popularity. This is certainly not yet the case with new users who have just discovered the substance and inhale it. However, the most experienced users are critical about the substance, with the reasons for dissatisfaction varying from one user to the next: the drug's health effects, the decrease in pleasure with increasing use, the cost of the drug and so on." [1]

This alteration in the image of cocaine would seem to reflect several factors related to the nature of the substance and to the form (price, purity) in which the substance is circulating in France. With regard to the substance's nature, it seems that, after fifteen years of uninterrupted circulation, the negative health aspects of cocaine use are more clearly visible.

Moreover, increasing numbers of users are complaining not about the substance itself, but rather about the quality/price ratio, which they believe is clearly declining. Subsequently, despite the decrease in the average price per gram observed in the last ten years, cocaine remains a relatively expensive substance, especially if one considers that, in light of the analyses performed by the INPS (the French National Forensic Science Institute), the overall quality of the cocaine circulating among users - and measured in cocaine seizures of less than one gram - is poor (37% active substance on average) [2]. Furthermore, according to the TREND data from 2010 and the half-year study conducted in 2011, it seems that this quality/price ratio continued to decline, since the price per gram clearly increased to approximately 70 euros from 60 euros [3]. According to these observations, it would be tempting to hypothesise a reversal of trends in cocaine use in France. It is known that illegal drugs are like consumer goods, and that cycle reversals can appear when consumers become tired of the product, when the product goes out of style or if its quality is deemed insufficient; this was observed in the past with the TREND scheme for a substance like ecstasy [4].

1. An emerging phenomenon is the beginning of a change, whose outcome is still unknown: it can be the beginning of a trend that will develop for several years, or may simply be an isolated occurrence.

Nevertheless, given the recent data on the spread of cocaine in the general population of people aged 18 to 64 and the dynamics of its availability, it seems premature to conclude that the trend is reversing. From 2005 to 2010, the number of people using cocaine in the last year increased from 250,000 to 400,000³, while the rise in lifetime use and use is more marked in young adults, both male and female, aged 20 to 34 [5]. Nevertheless, in 2011, for the first time since the initial survey conducted in 2000, data from the ESCAPAD survey on young people aged 17 taking part in France's National Defence and Citizenship Day (JDC, formerly the JAPD) revealed a fall in the level of cocaine use in the last year and lifetime use. However, this drop was only significant in boys. Once again, future surveys are needed to determine whether or not this phenomenon is "incidental" and fleeting or long-term, like in other European countries [6]. It seems that the availability and accessibility trends observed in 2010 and early 2011 follow the pattern seen in preceding years. At all TREND sites, cocaine remains available, with the overall dynamism of the different networks importing the substance into France (wholesalers, micro-networks) remaining strong. The drop in the number of drug seizures in 2010 was only temporary, with a sharp rise in 2011, reaching a new record of eleven tonnes according to the OCRITIS (Central Office for the Repression of Drug-related Offences).

Finally, the steady progression of freebasing (converting cocaine from cocaine hydrochloride to its base form for smoking) among users, particularly as a way to deal with the poor perceived quality of the available product, shows that interest in cocaine is not waning.

Recent trends

2010 and early 2011 were marked by four noteworthy phenomena. Two of them confirm the trends observed in the preceding years: the spread of heroin in France - and especially increased use through "chasing the dragon" (see box on page 3) - and a stronger preference for the "crystal" form of MDMA, resurfacing after a year of short supply.

The other two phenomena would appear to be recent trends: the use of synthetic substances purchased via the Internet and the circulation of high-dose cannabis.

Continued spread of heroin use, with users more frequently "chasing the dragon"

2010 seems to represent a turning point in the spread and use of heroin. For the first time since 1999, all sites report an increase in the availability and accessibility of brown heroin, including in the Marseille area where, more than anywhere else, the arrival of Opiate Substitution Treatments (OSTs) in the 1990s had curbed trafficking. As in other regions,

The building blocks of the TREND system

As part of its monitoring role, TREND relies first and foremost on a network of seven local coordinating entities that use a common strategy to collect and analyse information. The data collection tools used are mainly qualitative: continuous ethnographic observation, qualitative questionnaires for structures or associations in contact with drug users, and focus groups ("health", "law enforcement") that aim to rapidly analyse the situation using professionals in the field.

Against this background, qualitative and quantitative thematic studies are also conducted to acquire more information on a subject, and selling prices of the main illegal substances are regularly collected ("price" Barometer).

TREND also relies on:

- the French SINTES (National Detection System of Drugs and Toxic Substances), which

is an observation programme geared towards detecting and analysing the toxicological composition of illegal substances;

- recurrent quantitative surveys, such as the OFDT/DGS ENa-CAARUD survey conducted biennially since 2006 on users seen in French low-threshold structures certified as CAARUDs (Support Centre for the Reduction of Drug-related Harms);

- the use of the results of the information systems managed by the CEIP (Centre for Evaluation and Information on Pharmacodependence), the AFSSAPS (the French Agency for the Safety of Health Products), the OCRITIS (Central Office for the Repression of Drug-related Offences), the INPS (the French National Forensic Science Institute) and lastly, other OFDT surveys.

Areas specifically observed by TREND

Since its inception, TREND has been focusing on observing the French urban setting and techno party scene. The French urban setting, as defined by TREND, primarily refers to low-threshold harm reduction centres ("drop ins", needle exchange programmes that became CAARUDs in 2006) and open spaces (streets, squats and dealing sites). Most of the people encountered in these settings are problem users of illegal drugs living in highly precarious conditions.

The techno party settings describe places where events are organised around this music. It encompasses the so-called «alternative» scene (e.g., free parties, teknivals and alternative areas within more general festivals) as well as commercial or conventional settings (clubs, discos and even private events). Today, this setting tends to cover the party scene in general, in line with the spread of the techno movement and its infiltration into a more general population.

These two settings were originally chosen due to the high likelihood of finding new or never-before-seen phenomena there. However, on their own, they do not encompass all types of drug use to be found in France. Close observation of these settings has revealed more widespread drug use - over

the past ten years - moving beyond these settings towards ever-wider and heterogeneous social spheres (including, namely, socially integrated populations) and ever-larger geographic areas (rural or suburban areas). These settings, and urban settings in particular, are transit areas for a significant population of drug users, including socially integrated users. It is particularly frequent for "hidden" users² to visit the party scene, which TREND tries to cover, despite its constantly changing scope.

Currently, the increasing number of new synthetic substances (also called NPS "New Psychoactive Substances" by the EMCDDA) available for sale and the online purchases thereof open up a whole new area in the realm of drug use. The latter is characterised by substances distributed in novel ways, thanks to the emergence of new types of dealers, and whose legal status is still unclear. Above all, it is characterised by users who often learn about new substances through the Internet. There is no specific, physical place to enable contact with them, even though a small proportion of these drugs and users are present on the party scene. Covering this third area represents a major undertaking for the TREND and SINTES schemes.

the professionalization of this traffic in Marseille, as well as the tendency of certain specialised cannabis resin networks to market heroin, partially explains this trend. The sites also insist on the important role played by user-dealer micro-networks⁴ that source outside of France (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain in particular), where the wholesale market price per gram can be as low as 10 euros [4].

This practice facilitates the spread of heroin in France in small provincial towns where it is now frequently available for sale, and in

2. So-called "hidden" users are those who have no contact with healthcare structures (i.e., no contact related to their use of psychoactive substances at least) or law enforcement services.

3. Sources: calculations from the Baromètre santé 2010 health survey (INPES), ESCAPAD 2008 (OFDT), ESPAD 2007 (OFDT), and HBSC 2006 (medical department of the Toulouse regional education authority).

4. These are people who are close to one another (families, friends) and who get together to organise a grouped substance purchase from regional metropolitan semi-wholesalers or directly from another country. Heroin purchased in this way may be intended for use by the group only or be sold in part to a limited network of acquaintances.

Table 1 – Changes in median prices (in euros) per gram since 2000

	TREND 2000	TREND 2008	TREND 2009	TREND 2010	TREND 2011*	Trend 2000-2010	Trend 2009-2010
Heroin	59	45	45	42	40	↘	↘
Cocaine	84	65	62	67	68.3	↘	↗
Ecstasy (tab)	15	5	6.8	7.7	7	↘	↗
Cannabis resin	ND	5	5	5	5.4	-	→
Herbal cannabis	ND	7	7.5	8	8	-	↗
Amphetamines	15	15	14	16	ND	→	↗
LSD (blotter paper)	8.5	10	11	10	ND	↗	↘
BHD/Subutex®/8mg	6.2	5	4,5	5	ND	↘	↗

Sources : TREND/OFDT

* TREND data from the half-yearly "price" Barometer

ND : no data

rural areas, as is evidenced by the increase in 2010 in the number of criminal cases involving heroin in these areas [7]. The large quantities seized in 2010, reaching their second highest level in 15 years, bear witness to trafficking intensity. Hence, heroin appears to be rather easily accessible: 83% of users met early in 2011 during the "SINTES-heroin 2011" survey stated having no major difficulty in procuring heroin. The substance's low price makes access even easier. In 2011, it cost 37 euros on average versus 42 euros in 2010 (Price barometer, see table) [3]. Nevertheless, despite the quantity, the quality of circulating heroin is deemed mediocre by the majority of users, only some of whom have access to a purer heroin via networks reserved for a "select few". Half of the seizures analysed in 2010 had a purity level under 8% [8] and the SINTES-heroin 2011 survey revealed purity levels of 5.1% to 9.3%. Very pure heroin (> 50%) is circulating as well, but based on so-called "street" seizures, supplies of this type of heroin remain very confidential (representing 3% of "street" seizures) despite a slight increase since 2006 [8].

« Chasing the dragon »

Chasing the dragon consists of inhaling the vapours produced by heating (with a cigarette lighter) heroin placed on aluminium foil. The active ingredient enters the bloodstream through the pulmonary alveoli, which are highly permeable to gas, and not via the nasal mucosa, like in sniffing. This increases both the intensity and the rapidity of onset of the effects. This method of administration appeared in China in the 1920s and spread to the United States and Europe thereafter. This technique significantly developed in the north of France in the 1980s due to the area's proximity to the Netherlands, where it was introduced by Southeast Asian immigrants.

As in previous years, all sites highlighted the emergence of new users. A surge in interest for heroin has been observed among people taking OSTs who, growing weary of the latter, tend to start using heroin again. The substance is also attracting new injectors among very disadvantaged young populations [9]. Nevertheless, it is among people in an entirely different context that today's characteristic use of heroin is developing. Visible since the early 2000s, this type of heroin use first appeared discretely as a way to regulate stimulant intake in the most radical, so-called underground⁵ circles of the alternative techno scene [4]. Used in this way, the drug gradually spread to wider circles on the techno party scene under the name *rabla*, which is a semantic subterfuge to distract consumers from the true nature of the substance being used. Heroin now tends to be used not only as a secondary substance (to "manage" coming down off a stimulant high), but also for its own effects, like any other substance in a context of polydrug use. To a large extent, young adults from rather varied backgrounds (rural as well as urban) became familiar with so-called "recreational" drugs, including heroin, because of their involvement in the party scene, which considerably expanded in the 2000s.

When sniffed and, to a lesser extent, when inhaled, heroin is less associated with social failure and death (addiction, overdose, AIDS) as is traditionally the case with injecting. The majority of users do not know that sniffing does not rule out the risks of overdose and addiction, and believe that they are not subject to addiction as long as they do not sniff on a daily basis. Generally occasional, such use does not directly lead to addiction. When it does, users who become aware of their drug use problem quickly resort to OSTs, obtained either by their own means (black market) or through a request for treatment. As for last year, outside of the party scene, there are also descriptions of socially well-integrated users who use heroin for its specific effects (in Paris especially) and users from working-class neighbourhoods (Rennes), although a quantitative extension of this phenomenon was not observed.

Regardless, the expansion of heroin use, especially towards socially integrated users, is now visible in the general 18-to-64-year-old population, although this spread remains marginal. In addition to the increase in the number of first-time users in France (at least once in their lifetime) from 360,000 in 2005 to 500,000 in 2010, use in the last year by men increased significantly. Subsequently, use in the last year, which remained very low in the general population, shifted from 0.5% in 2005 to 0.9% in 2010 among 18-to-34-year-old men [5].

The rise in the "chasing the dragon" (inhaling vapour) phenomenon for heroin was reported by six of the seven TREND sites. First and foremost, this practice concerns new heroin users, i.e. users who generally engage in nasal inhalation: socially integrated users, the youngest users and party scene users⁶. It also represents an alternative to injection for former opiate injectors (whose veins are in very poor condition), users seeking more intense effects and, especially, users who became addicted through regular use or who are experiencing drug tolerance. "Chasing the dragon" enables users to feel effects similar to those felt through injecting without, according to these users, the negative image or the risk. This method of use has a similar reputation to that of sniffing, being closer to smoking a cannabis bong⁷ than to injecting for such users. Furthermore, on the alternative party scene, it constitutes a more discreet method of use than injection, which is still highly stigmatised.

5. The quantitative survey conducted from 2003 to 2005 on the use of "psychoactive substances in people frequenting the electro party scene" revealed that on the "alternative" scene, more than 40% of the people who took part in the survey had tried heroin, and more than 15% had used it in the last month.

6. These groups are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they tend to overlap to a large extent.

7. Pipe generally constructed by users themselves.

However, although there is no risk of infection, this route of absorption does not eliminate the risk of addiction or overdose. The observation of the more widespread inhalation of vapours may be partly due to the fact that, starting in 2009, those working in harm reduction began to distribute papers adapted to this practice as an alternative to aluminium foil, which releases a toxic substance when heated. The distribution of a new harm reduction tool generally brings new users to CAARUDs and increases the visibility of their drug use.

The return of MDMA and the increase in the use of its "crystal" form

In France, as in the rest of Europe, 2009 was marked by a major MDMA shortage due to massive seizures of MDMA precursors in Cambodia. In 2010, the situation went back to "normal", and the availability of MDMA in all three of its forms - tablet, powder and "crystal" - is on the rise again in France. Nevertheless, the 2009 interlude did not fundamentally change the main trends for this substance family. The "tablet" form is being increasingly relinquished not only by the most experienced users, but also by inexperienced users. This loss of interest appears in the most recent edition of the Baromètre santé health survey (of the INPES), which recorded a fall from 2005 to 2010 in lifetime use by 15-to-19-year olds, and to a lesser extent, by 20-to-25-year-olds. The number of users in the last year also seems to have declined from 200,000 to 150,000 [5].

Qualitative observations have confirmed this impression with certain sites mentioning near substitution of the powder with the tablet, despite its 55 euro price, which is close to the price of cocaine. However, the most outstanding phenomenon in 2010 was the marked rise at certain sites (Bordeaux, Metz, Marseille, Paris and Rennes) in use of the "crystal" form. The latter seems to be increasingly favoured by users due to its effects, described as even stronger and purer than those of the powder form. The other factor contributing to the spread of the substance is the significant decrease in price, which fell from 80 to 55 euros in the space of three years [3].

The « cristal » form

It was in 2006 that the initial observations related to a new "crystal" form of MDMA (not to be confused with methamphetamine) appeared in the TREND scheme.

The "crystal" form is presented as translucent rocks or crystals (red, white, grey or yellow) that need to be reduced into powder form to be sniffed or ingested.

Synthetic drugs on the Net: supply is progressing faster than use

The emergence and spread of new synthetic substances imitating the effects of certain illegal drugs (ecstasy, amphetamine, cocaine or cannabis) and often sold on the Internet, disguised or not, constitute one of the significant new drug supply phenomena of recent years.

Since they are sometimes not classified⁸ when they appear, these substances are qualified as "designer drugs", "research chemicals" or "legal highs". These terms refer to their imitation of illegal drugs, their synthetic nature or their legal status.

The rise in popularity of these substances represents a real concern Europe-wide⁹, and was emphasised by the EMCDDA when its latest annual report was published [6]. In fact, not only are the medium- and long-term consequences of using these substances not known, but their development also seems difficult to control.

More than 40 such substances were recorded from January to October 2011, while the same number was noted for all 12 months of 2010. In France, a study conducted within the scope of TREND in November 2011 reported 63 new substances available on approximately 32 French-language online sales sites. Concurrently, 43 new substances were identified by the SINTES survey as having circulated at least once in France since 2008¹⁰.

The media coverage of these substances – and the confusion between information and promotion that may result – certainly worked "in favour" of these new drugs, encouraging some users to procure and try them. This phenomenon was particularly marked for synthetic cannabinoids, such as Spice or mephedrone, identified in France in 2009 and the subject of several press articles and forum discussions, at least until it was classified as a narcotic in June 2010¹¹. These substances nevertheless remain fairly unknown outside of small circles. Since then, other substances have appeared more discreetly, even though they are often mentioned on user forums¹².

Various methods are used to procure these drugs, and seem to depend on the type of user. Even though it is currently not possible to estimate the number of users for such substances¹³, it seems that, in France, these users are mainly "experienced" polydrug users. Several profiles coexist. There are, firstly, experienced user groups in which one user orders on the Internet and then shares the substance with other members of the group during drug use sessions in a party setting. Then there are users who are in close contact with the gay party scene and are, traditionally, users of new psychoactive substances mainly used in a sexual context. Such users covertly procure these substances directly on the Internet via merchant sites.

Other users (sometimes unbeknownst to them) seem to resort to traditional networks, with the participation of an intermediary in the purchase process. Moreover, on the party scene, it seems that these substances are not systematically presented as new synthetic

drugs when being obtained (Metz site) by the users. In a context where the illegal nature of a substance is not an obstacle to its use, the substance is not differentiated from illegal drugs. In the urban setting where sites for unstable polydrug users to consume these substances have appeared, procurement also takes place through a dealer for users who do not have the means (bank card, internet connection) to buy on the Internet.

Although these synthetic drugs often have more attractive prices than traditional substances, users seem to believe that purchasing on the Internet provides the guarantee of a strong effect, especially if the drugs available (mainly heroin and cocaine) are deemed to be of poor quality. Moreover, the diversity of forms - tablets, powder, paste and lozenges - provides users with a much-appreciated range from which to choose. Among poorly informed users, the idea that purchasing a substance on the Internet represents a guarantee of quality is spreading. Very few people are aware of the possible difference - nonetheless observed - between what is being advertised and the actual product sold, and especially the risk taken by using a substance whose precise effects are unknown.

Circulation of high-dose cannabis on a changing market

Nearly all of the TREND sites reported an increase in the circulation of cannabis with high THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) potency through certain distribution networks known to experienced users. Such cannabis can be found both in herbal and resin form. Increased availability of herbal cannabis types reputed for their high THC content has been observed. These include the "Amnesia" variety, very much present in Lille, the "Hase" variety, and even the so-called "Afghan" variety of cannabis resin. Dealers can use these "labels", even though the product, which is more expensive to purchase, may not correspond to the name used and the reputed effects.

8. On the list of narcotics. See <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/cpAR2011highlights1.pdf>

9. <http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/AR2011oedt.pdf> (data on the EMCDDA 2011 annual report)

10. http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/sintes/ir_110509_nd-spfd (directory of new synthetic drugs identified since 2008)

11. http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/sintes/ir_100331_mephedrone.pdf

12. http://www.ofdt.fr/BDD/sintes/ir_methoxetamine_111105.pdf

13. According to the ESCAPAD 2011 survey, 0.7% of surveyed 17-year-olds stated having procured a psychoactive substance on the Internet; these purchases were mainly of cannabis, mushrooms and other hallucinogenic plants.

However, the more frequent presence of this purer cannabis has been reported by experienced users - lending credibility to these allegations - especially since in Lille and Toulouse, certain users, including long-time users, do not like this strong cannabis whose intense effects are not always desired.

In any event, laboratories declare having analysed more high-THC herbal cannabis and cannabis resin in 2010 and 2011. According to the analyses of the Customs services, the purity of "Amnesia" was about 20%¹⁴ in a market where the average THC content of herbal cannabis hovered around 10% [8]. The INPS observed an increase in herbal cannabis seizures with THC potency above 15% from 2008 to 2010; this trend still needs to be confirmed for 2011. As for cannabis resin, the trend observed in drug seizures is clear: the portion of samples analysed and containing more than 15% THC has been rising steadily since 2005, from less than a tenth to a quarter of all seizures. This trend leads to an average THC potency in analysed resin seizures of 11% versus nearly 9% in 2005 [8]. A new study on the composition of cannabis acquired directly from users is planned for 2012 within the scope of SINTES.

Moreover, new packaging for cannabis resin has appeared. The form known as *olive*, *olivette*, *olivette poivrée* (in Metz for the latter form) or even "encrusted dope" has existed in Paris and Metz for several years, where its presence is nevertheless seasonal (from August to mid-November). Since 2010, it has also been circulating in Lille and Marseille. This resin enjoys an excellent reputation among some users due to the intensity of its effects. The post-use enthusiasm of long-term users tends to attest to the quality of this resin. It seems to come from Morocco (in the Ketama region), "but it is not cut in Morocco and Spain". These olives are reportedly transported by drug couriers, in corpore¹⁵. The average content of ten cannabis olive seizures in 2010 was 14% [8]. Resins in powder form were also transported. Their THC potency remains average (11% according to the INPS).

All sites have continued to report that increasing production by users of their own cannabis can locally disturb herbal cannabis trafficking, as mentioned by the Rennes site.

Finally, access to Dutch border coffee shops is progressively being restricted for French people who visit them for cannabis supply purposes. In order to reduce disturbances caused by the presence of too many "drug tourists", some towns, following Maastricht's initiative, have already implemented measures to limit the purchase of cannabis by foreigners. Coffee-shop member cards, reserved for Dutch citizens, totally prohibit French people from purchasing in these cities and helps limit the quantities acquired by a single person. This system is expected to be applied throughout the country in 2012.

Focus on a few substances

Crack: its geographic expansion has not been confirmed

Although a geographic expansion of crack outside of its place of origin (namely Paris and the Seine-Saint-Denis administrative department) was reported in 2009 by some sites (such as Rennes, Metz and Toulouse), it seems that the phenomenon was only confirmed in 2010 in Toulouse. One specific investigation, the results of which are to be published at the end of 2012, is underway to explain the reasons for these very sporadic appearances. In contrast, the phenomenon continues in Toulouse, seemingly related to the arrival of French West Indians, who created points of sale frequented by highly marginalised users as well as people from the alternative party scene and traditional "freebase" users. Nevertheless, the phenomenon remains very limited.

In Paris, the historical site for crack use, 2010 was a year marked by the return of an open crack use scene, which had, for reasons related to law enforcement pressures, migrated to Seine-Saint-Denis. Just like in Toulouse, dealing sites are frequented not only by the usual poorly socially integrated users, but also by a rather atypical population of socially integrated users and users from the alternative party scene. The reason for the phenomenon would seem to be the economic problems encountered by a population that usually uses freebase and its difficulties in obtaining cocaine. This seems a rather circumstantial phenomenon. Furthermore, in terms of available drugs, the eviction of African dealers, known as "modous", from the market - leaving room for gangs of young people from the housing estates of the 19th arrondissement of Paris - is a trend that has been confirmed.

Ketamine: increasing availability

Ketamine has become more visible over the past three years. Used as a human and (mostly) veterinary anaesthetic, but misused for its hallucinogenic and dissociative properties, it is clearly considered a drug in contrast to other medications. It is most often imported and cases of veterinary ketamine misuse are not rare. In 2010, its availability was up in Metz, Lille and Paris, despite the fact that distribution networks remained confidential and marginal. It is especially present on the alternative techno scene and much more rarely on the traditional party scene (clubs and discotheques). However, according to more than half the sites (Metz, Lille, Paris and Bordeaux), it can also be acquired in the urban setting. It would seem that errant youth less often account for the new observed uses, as was described in 2008, than more experienced polydrug users in their thirties. Those who seek extreme experiences of mind/body dissociation or hallucinatory voyages consume high doses. Others are simply seeking the spe-

cial sensation of intoxication that the drug provides, and take lower doses. Furthermore, other sites report regular, and even daily, users (Metz, Bordeaux, Lille, Toulouse). The latter were either users from the party scene who became addicted to ketamine or were among the most marginal drug users. It is generally sniffed, but users seeking more intense sensations use it through intramuscular (and exceptionally, intravenous) injection. Although less frightening than in the past for a small fringe of users who think they have domesticated its use, ketamine remains a controversial substance among drug users, which is probably what limits its circulation. Trauma and injury (due to its anaesthetising effect) discovered by users after a session of consumption represent a frequent complication.

In 2010, colouring of the liquid ketamine (red, blue, pink) by distribution networks to mask the real content was frequently reported.

Methamphetamine found in Toulouse

In France, until now, the term "methamphetamine" for certain substances circulating on the party scene rarely resisted toxicological analysis. After years of rumours and media attention related to the arrival of this substance in France in 2010, two toxicological analyses helped confirm the presence of methamphetamine [10]. Two samples, a tablet and some liquid, were collected at the Toulouse site and analysed. The examination that followed demonstrated that there was no real circulation of this substance (at the Toulouse site or elsewhere). Its presence remained limited to very tight circles of experienced users who most often procured the substance abroad during touristic visits (for the Toulouse case, it was Thailand for the Yaba and Israel for the liquid). Use seems to remain exceptional and determined by sporadic deliveries. Methamphetamine seizures on French soil are most often in transit to another country.

GHB/GBL less visible

While ketamine use has clearly extended beyond its circle of regular users, GHB/GBL (an industrial solvent synthesised into GHB after ingestion), which seemed to be circulating outside of its traditional gay party scene circles and moving towards the club scene, seems to be less and less visible, gay party

14. For example, in early 2011, the Villeneuve d'Ascq Customs laboratory analysed a cannabis seizure labelled "Amnesia" for which the THC potency was 34%.

15. In 2011, Paris law enforcement services claimed seeing increasing numbers of drug couriers transporting these "olives".

scene included. In Paris, the vigilance of club managers has fostered a return to restricted use - in private parties - of this substance.

Subutex® still present on the black market

Despite measures to control prescriptions, high dose buprenorphine trafficking persists, mainly on the black markets of the TREND sites. Only the Subutex® proprietary product is circulating; trafficking does not seem to include generics, described as being more difficult to inject. In the majority of cases, dealing is traditional, with the resale of tablets by users who save part of their prescribed supply. However, more professional forms of deal can exist. In 2010, sites like Metz, Toulouse, Lille and Rennes reported an increase in the number of pseudo heroin addicts getting Subutex® prescriptions to resell them, as well as more structured trafficking. This is the case in the east of France, due to its proximity to German towns, where the 8 mg tablet is sought after and can be sold at a price of 25 to 50 euros versus the average 5 euros in France. For the black market clientele, consisting mainly of marginalised users for whom Subutex® represents a poor person's opiate, three sites (Marseille, Rennes and Bordeaux) report the presence and visibility of increasing numbers of young first-time injectors.

Methadone: injection rumours substantiated

With regard to methadone, persistent allegations that users inject the liquid oral form are noteworthy. Methods, such as first freezing the product to remove the sugar and simply diluting the syrup, have been reported. In 2010, the Rennes site collected personal accounts deemed credible from people who witnessed injections of methadone, and a pharmacist who was asked for 10 ml syringes for this purpose confirmed these accounts. The users in question were Eastern European immigrants. In Lyon, a CAARUD professional provided a similar report. In 2008 and 2010, the ENaCaarud survey found a very low rate of recent methadone users claiming to have injected the substance (2.3% vs. 2.0% respectively¹⁶). Although the practice exists, it is very rare and its impact is unknown.

Non-opioid psychotropic medications: the Marseille exception

The Marseille site remains atypical due to the number of local uses of non-opioid psychotropic medications: benzodiazepines, anticonvulsants (Artane® or Akineton®), which are not very present elsewhere in metropolitan France, and Ritalin®, an amphetamine medication whose prescription is controlled. Since it emerged in 2004, Ritalin® misuse among precarious drug users has remained characteristic of the southeast of France (Marseille and Nice). After a period of interest, which seems to have culminated

around 2008 for a large number of local CAARUD users, its level of use seems to have stabilised. Its use now seems to be limited to the most precarious drug users. Its prescription in treating cocaine addiction¹⁷ helps feed the black market, and is potentially supplemented by the theft of substances from pharmacies and more or less restricted prescriptions. Besides its use by some cocaine-addicted users for self-medication purposes, Ritalin®, like other psychotropic medications, is essentially misused by the most precarious users who often have a rather long history of drug addiction. Their reasons for use, regardless of the substance, seem to be mainly time management and idleness: the feeling of speeding up and filling time (Ritalin®), or forgetting oneself and losing the notion of time (benzodiazepines and anticonvulsants). All these medications lead to various dose-dependent degrees of violent behaviour. Coming down from the effects of Ritalin®, which is mostly injected, is regularly accompanied by violent acts of uncontrollable aggression towards oneself or others, according to treatment or harm reduction structure professionals. Furthermore, injecting Valium®, which is very harmful to the venous system at the injection site and which had become rather widespread in Rennes around 2007 before waning again, has now been reported in Marseille, in addition to the injecting of Rivotril®.

16. This is a bit higher than what would be considered as errors when completing the questionnaire (often from 0.0% to 1%).

17. Not including those indications in the MA (marketing authorisation) and all other professional recommendations.

Credits

Aurélien Lazes-Charmetant, Anne-Cécile Rahis, Jean-Michel Delile (Bordeaux); Laurent Plancke, Sébastien Lose, Sylvain Wallart (Lille); Mateo Fano, Étienne Zurbach (Marseille); Michel Monzel, Yvon Schléret, Olivier Romain (Metz); Grégory Pfau, Catherine Pecquart (Paris); Guillaume Girard, Guillaume Pavic, Mylène Guillaume, Matthieu Chalumeau (Rennes); Guillaume Sudérie (Toulouse) et Julie-Émilie Adès, Magali Martinez, Sayon Dambélé (OFDT).

References

- [1] SCHLÉRET Y., ROMAIN O., BALTEAU S., BAILLY F. and MONZEL M., *Rapport du site Trend-Metz (Lorraine)*, Metz, CMSEA, ORSAS Lorraine, 2008, 69 p.
- [2] DUJOURDY L., BESACIER F. and LADROUVE V., « La cocaïne saisie en France. Exploitation des données statistiques nationales », *L'Actualité Chimique*, n° 342-343, 2010, pp. 29-36.
- [3] GANDILHON M., CADET-TAÏROU A. and LAHAIE E., « Les prix de détail et la disponibilité des principales substances psychoactives circulant en France au premier semestre 2011 », Note n° 2011.18 à l'attention de la MILDT, Saint-Denis, OFDT, 2011, 7 p.
- [4] COSTES J.M., *Les usages de drogues illicites en France depuis 1999 vus au travers du dispositif TREND*, Saint-Denis, OFDT, 2010, 194 p.
- [5] BECK F., GUIGNARD R., RICHARD J.B., TOVAR M.L. and SPILKA S., « Les niveaux d'usage des drogues en France en 2010. Exploitation des données du Baromètre santé 2010 relatives aux pratiques d'usage de substances psychoactives en population adulte », *Tendances* n° 76, 2011, 6 p.
- [6] EMCDDA, 2011 *Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in Europe*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2011, 117 pages.
- [7] DCPJ and OCRETIS, *Les prix des stupéfiants en France. La photographie au 4^e trimestre 2010*, Paris, DCPJ, 2011, 14 p.
- [8] INSTITUT NATIONAL DE POLICE SCIENTIFIQUE, *Statistiques 2010*, Ecully, INPS, 2010.
- [9] CADET-TAÏROU A., GANDILHON M., LAHAIE E., CHALUMEAU M., COQUELIN A. and TOUFIK A., *Drogues et usages de drogues en France. État des lieux et tendances récentes 2007-2009. Neuvième édition du rapport national du dispositif TREND*, Saint-Denis, OFDT, 2010, 281 p.
- [10] SUDÉRIE G., *Phénomènes émergents liés aux drogues en 2010. Tendances récentes sur le site de Toulouse*, Toulouse, Graphiti - CIRDD Midi-Pyrénées, 2011, 38 p.

Tendances

Chief Editor
Maud Pousset

Editorial Committee
Catherine Berthier, Sylvain Dally,
Alain Epelboin, Serge Karsenty, Maria Melchior

Editorial Secretary
Julie-Émilie Adès

Graphic Designer
Frédérique Million

Printing
Imprimerie Masson / 69, rue de Chabrol
75010 Paris

ISSN 1295-6910 / Legal publication registration

French Monitoring Centre for Drugs
and Drug Addiction
3, avenue du Stade-de-France
93218 Saint-Denis-La-Plaine cedex
Tél. : + 33 (1) 41 62 77 16
Fax : + 33 (1) 41 62 77 00
e-mail : ofdt@ofdt.fr

