

## **Investigating the Effect of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 on the Incidence of Adverse Medical Events in Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) Leeds**

**Authors :** Hayley Boal, Chloe Bromley, John Fairfield

**Abstract :** Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) are synthetic compounds designed to reproduce effects of illicit drugs. Cheap, potent, and readily available on UK highstreets from so-called 'head shops', in recent years their use has surged and with it have emerged side effects including seizures, aggression, palpitations, coma, and death. Rapid development of new substances has vastly outpaced pre-existing drug legislation but the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 rendered all but tobacco, alcohol, and amyl nitrates, illegal. Drug use has long been rife within prisons, but the absence of a reliable screening tool alongside the availability of NPS makes them ideal for prison use. Here we examine the occurrence of NPS-related adverse side effects within HMP Leeds, comparing May-September of 2015 and 2017 using daily reports distributed amongst prison staff summarising medical and behavioural incidents of the previous day. There was a statistically-significant rise of over 200% in the use of NPS between 2015 and 2017: 0.562 and 1.149 incidents per day respectively. In 2017, 38.46% incidents required ambulances, fallen from 51.02% in 2015. Although the most common descriptions in both years were 'seizure' and 'unresponsive', by 2017 'inhalation by staff' had emerged. Patterns of NPS consumption mirrored the prison regime, peaking when cell doors opened, and prisoners could socialise. Despite limited data, the Psychoactive Substances Act has clearly been an insufficient deterrent to the prison population; more must be done to understand and address substance misuse in prison. NPS remains a significant risk to prisoners' health and wellbeing.

**Keywords :** legislation, novel psychoactive substances, prison, spice

**Conference Title :** ICFMT 2018 : International Conference on Forensic Medicine and Toxicology

**Conference Location :** Prague, Czechia

**Conference Dates :** March 22-23, 2018