

Abstract:

Background: Although NPS use is increasing, the scale of their use and harms remains unclear. Reports from the United Kingdom show downward trends in drug use in England and Wales among 11 to 15-year-olds, but also a steady increase in NPS use. However, NPS use remains lower than that of many traditional illicit drugs. This paper presents the correlations between age and the awareness, use and accessibility of NPS in Telford and Wrekin local authority, England.

Methods: A self-administered questionnaire completed by 204 participants assessed socio-demographic information and awareness, accessibility, effects, uses, and health and social harms of NPS. Their mean age was 25.7 years (SD = 10.9).

Data analysis used the IBM SPSS statistical package version 21, with significance level set at $p < 0.05$ and confidence interval at 95%. Spearman's correlation coefficients (rho) determined associations between variables.

Results: Descriptive statistics showed that 85.8% of respondents were aware of NPS, 33% knew other users, and 9.8% had ever used it. 40.2% said that access to NPS was easy, 35.8% very easy.

The study showed a rho of 0.3 between age and knowing of NPS ($P \leq 0.000$); rho of 0.5 between age and knowing NPS users ($P \leq 0.000$); rho of 0.28 between age and number of NPS users they knew ($P \leq 0.000$); rho of 0.14 between age and the number of times they accept and consume NPS ($P \leq 0.040$); rho of 0.042 between age and being offered NPS by someone you know ($P = 0.548$); rho of 0.11 between age and being offered NPS by strangers ($P = 0.097$); and rho of 0.08 between age and perceived ease of access to NPS ($P = 0.253$).

Conclusion: While young people's NPS use remains low, they are more likely to use them than the general population. Despite young people's high levels of NPS awareness, their knowledge of higher numbers of NPS users raises concerns about their exposure. We recommend making more effort to prevent uptake of NPS amongst this group.

Biography of presenting author

Dr Mzwandile Mabhala is an associate professor in Public Health Epidemiology at the University of Chester United Kingdom (UK). He has expertise in epidemiology, social justice and research in a wide range of public health projects. He has had several senior public health roles within the UK National Health Service and higher education institutions, including senior public health skills development programme manager at the University of Oxford Institute of Health Sciences. He contributes in All Party Parliament Group in the United Kingdom government.

He is co-editor of Health Improvement and Well-Being: Strategies for Action, which was highly commended in the British Medical Association's Medical Book Awards 2015. He co-edited Key Concepts in Public Health (2009).

He is an invited keynote speaker at the 3rd International Conference on Nursing and Healthcare, held in San Francisco, USA in October 2015. He was a chair and presenter in International Public Health conference Manchester July 2016. He also presented his research papers at several international conferences including the International Public Health Festival 2015, 16 and 17 (Manchester), the UK Public Health Festival (Manchester, July 2013), the International Public Health Conference in Kuching, Malaysia (August 2013), and the 2nd International Conference on Nursing and Healthcare held in Chicago, USA in November 2014.

Dr Mabhala's research interests centre on students' health; socio-economic determinants of inequalities in health and social justice. He was the North West England co-ordinator of the International Study on University Students' Determinants of Health. His recently funded projects are: Behavioural intervention "Making every contact count".

His current funded research projects are:

- The determinants of homelessness through examining the life stories of homeless people and those who work with them.
- Assessment of the potential impact of HealthCheck on health inequalities and evaluation of the impact of social marketing intervention on its uptake
- "Understanding of issues around the New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) in Telford and Wrekin Areas
- Cost benefit analysis for the substance misuse services in Telford and Wrekin Areas

Peer-reviewed work

Mabhala M, Babanumi M, Olagunju A, Akata E, and Yohannes A (2017) Effects of vitamin D supplementation on glucose metabolism in type 2 Diabetes mellitus: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Diabetes Mellitus*, 7, 223-240,

DOI: [10.4236/jdm.2017.74018](https://doi.org/10.4236/jdm.2017.74018), http://file.scirp.org/pdf/JDM_2017092115443919.pdf

Mabhala, MA, Yohannes, A, Griffith, M. (2017) Becoming homeless is a consequence of wider determinants of socio-economic inequalities: Qualitative analysis of life stories of homeless people. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 16:150 DOI

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<https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-017-0646-3>

Mabhala, MA, Yohannes, A, Massey, A, Reid J (in-press) Inequalities in health as fundamental causes of vulnerability to infectious disease: A critical discourse analysis. *International Journal for Preventive Medicine*, x(x): x-xx.