



LIVING  
EXPERIENCE  
DRUG TRENDS

**BULLETIN**

**JULY-DEC 2024**

# INTRODUCTION

SDF have 12 living experience engagement groups currently operating across Scotland in:

- Glasgow
- West Dunbartonshire
- Highland
- Argyll and Bute
- Borders
- Fife
- East Ayrshire
- North Lanarkshire
- South Lanarkshire
- Edinburgh
- Perth and Kinross
- Moray

The groups provide a safe space for people who currently use drugs and/or are on medication assisted treatment to share issues that are important to them, including drug trends information.

This bulletin contains both anecdotal information from the 100+ weekly attendees at the groups and from testing results- both from a nitazene testing strips pilot and samples submitted to the WEDINOS postal testing service.

As part of a pilot, SDF have been disseminating nitazene testing strips and providing training on nitazene awareness and overdose prevention to at risk groups in SDF's regional living experience engagement groups.

So far we have found this has a number of benefits in that it:

- Provides real time information to allow people to make more informed decisions about using a substance
- Offers an opportunity to open up a health-based intervention with people at risk
- Engages people who may be less engaged with standard harm reduction messages or interventions.
- Allows further opportunity to promote carriage of naloxone.

Between July-Dec 13 sessions were delivered, in 7 ADP areas with a total of 116 people attending.

Group members are asked to inform staff of positive and negative results. Where a positive result is obtained, SDF support the group member to utilise the WEDINOS system for confirmatory testing.



# TESTING RESULTS

## JULY- DEC 2024

## SAMPLES SENT TO WEDINOS

The living experience engagement team have supported people attending their groups to access testing via WEDINOS. The service both supports gaining confirmatory analysis for positive samples from nitazene testing strips and more generally for any substances used by group members.

Over the period July to Dec 2024, 14 samples have been sent by attendees of the groups for testing and received by WEDINOS. There was a change to the postal system envelopes which resulted in some samples not being received by WEDINOS which has now been resolved.

Intended purchases were:

- 9 x street benzos
- 1x xanax
- 1 x heroin
- 2 x cocaine
- 1 x pink powder

## NITAZENE TESTING STRIPS

Between July and December 2024:

- 81 testing strips have been given out
- No positive results were reported from testing strips during this period.

Some participants have reported that they would change their pattern of drug use due to the presence of a nitazene, e.g. take a smaller initial dose, redose less often, reduce the overall amount consumed in a drug using session and avoid or be more cautious around mixing drugs. By providing the nitazene testing strips during groups, we have found group members are much more engaged in harm reduction discussions.

# >70%

OF SAMPLES SUBMITTED FOR TESTING, A BENZODIAZEPINE WAS THE INTENDED PURCHASE

## RESULTS

1 result not yet returned by WEDINOS., of the 13 results returned:

- 4x street benzos returned Bromazolam
- 3x street benzos returned etizolam,
- 1 street benzo returned Loratadine (anti histamine),
- 1 street benzo had no active ingredient.
- 1 x xanax- returned bromazolam
- 1 x heroin-returned heroin
- 1 x pink powder returned MDMA
- 1 x cocaine returned cocaine and phenacin

# NATIONAL TRENDS

The most commonly reported drug trends across all groups are:

- Street benzodiazepines
- Cocaine/Crack
- Heroin

There is less heroin use being reported generally across groups, this is partly due to greater availability of drugs such as cocaine/crack and due to more people being on buprenorphine who if 'topping up', would tend to do so with

cocaine/crack. There are reports of inconsistent drug quality which varies area to area, by drug type and sometimes individual batch. Using phone lines or social media contact for drop off of substances seems to be the most common method of purchase. We are also having a wider range of drugs reported as part of poly drug use than previously.

## GLASGOW

### **The group meets in Glasgow city on Wednesdays at 2pm**

Group members report various issues with cocaine/crack use including variable strength in different parts of the city and some batches causing adverse effects. These included physical effects like tachycardia, palpitations, high body temperature, shaking, feeling sick and being "wired" or mental health effects e.g. paranoia and depression. Some reported good quality crack being around, especially in the north west of the city and one noted strong cravings after use. Crack in the city centre was reported to be generally poorer quality with one person saying they travelled to Lanarkshire to purchase due to better quality. There were occasional reports about using pink cocaine earlier in the reporting period, although reports of this have seemed to have decreased more recently. Those that had used, described it as "nasty" and causing sickness.

Group members are reporting varying affects from street benzodiazepines with some stating that they're not getting the effects from them as they had hoped due to being poor in strength and therefore requiring large quantities (> 30 tablets) to be used to gain desired effects. Particular tablets that have been mentioned with these effects are white with a hard coating. There are other reports of Yellow D-10 or Roche 10 street benzos being high in strength. There are also various reports of xanax, with red and white tablets in circulation reported to be stronger and having a slight sherbet type taste. Blue bars with 4 lines marked xanax are circulating in city centre for £8 a tablet. Two people discussed green xanax bars nicknamed "hulks" being available that were strong "taking you out the game" costing around £4 a pill.

There have been several reports of stronger heroin being available in the city centre, describing extreme intoxication after smoking 3-4 lines, one reported being very sick, another being unable to stand and a third requiring naloxone to be administered. One described an unusual taste of "burning wood" off a batch although it looked and burnt the same.

## SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

### **Group meets in Cambuslang Thursdays at 6pm (monthly)**

The group reports that it is harder to source heroin locally with benzos and crack/cocaine use being the most commonly used substances and occasional reports of heroin use.

Yellow and white street tablets have been reported being in circulation. There was one report of seizures being linked to yellow tablets locally and another report of white tablets generally being better quality and strength and also being very accessible. Purchase via snapchat is common.

# NORTH LANARKSHIRE

## Group meets in Coatbridge on Mondays 10am

Group members report street benzos and crack/ cocaine are the most commonly used substances. Both are easily available in the areas. Group members report that a list of available drugs are sent via text daily and these can be dropped off at your chosen location.

Quality of cocaine/crack is reported to be variable with some reporting good quality (more commonly for powder cocaine) and others saying very poor quality, especially with crack in the most recent months. Some reported that there were dealers from Glasgow areas 'cuckooing' (taking over tenancy from vulnerable people) to avoid being a target for police enquiries or prosecution. Prices locally £20 bag crack (0.3g) and £30 for 0.5g of powder cocaine.

Street benzodiazepine quality is also mixed with recent purity levels tending to be poor. The main tablets in circulation are white 'DC10' and white 'roche' Prices are 20 for £10 or 50 for £20.

Heroin use is less commonly reported by group members currently with one person reporting poor quality heroin that doesn't burn well when smoking.

# EAST AYRSHIRE

## The group meets in Kilmarnock on Thursdays at 2pm

Crack cocaine and street benzodiazepines are reported as the most used substances. Group members advise that they can get any drugs via drop off and that they receive a text with what deals are on most days.

Participants shared that there are white street benzodiazepines in circulation, these are marked with '10' and these tend to be of poorer quality. Group members also discussed 'fake' pregabalin being sold. 15 tablets in a strip cost £30. People report heavy intoxication from these with people reporting "blacking out" and struggling to walk. They are easily accessible in East Ayrshire.

Group members report Crack is easy to get locally, mostly via phone delivery. Some report travelling to Glasgow to purchase cocaine where they feel it is stronger, they are typically paying £80 for a gram of 'prop'. The group suggested that dealers supplying cocaine in the area are mostly from Manchester and Liverpool who cuckoo across East Ayrshire.. Group members on Buvidal who 'top up' have reported an increase in their crack use.

Group members gave mixed reports about heroin, some felt that recent heroin purchased was fairly good quality but it had been generally less pure since COVID pandemic. Others suggested it was poor. Typical costs is £10 for 0.2g bag. It was also noted it is not quite as easy to get as other drugs or as it has been in the past

# WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE AND ARGYLL AND BUTE

**The Helensburgh group and West Dunbartonshire group are currently merging to meet in Dumbarton on Tuesdays at 10am and we are exploring other locations within Argyll and Bute for a further meeting.**

Crack cocaine and street benzos reported as most commonly used substances along with alcohol. Various members discussed stopping their opiate use as had transferred to Buvidal but noted they had increased their crack cocaine and alcohol use. Group members from West Dunbartonshire reported being prescribed pregabalin which they took with multiple other substances.

Pink Champagne was reported by a couple of group members in West Dunbartonshire which was sold as cocaine and ecstasy mixed. People reported the quality was poor and they preferred crack cocaine. Group members report Heroin is poor quality and sold 3x 0.5g bags for £40.

# MORAY

## The group meets in Elgin on Tuesdays at 11.30am

Participants shared there is a lack of people in Elgin using heroin and all suggested they wouldn't know where to go to purchase heroin right now as it is mostly all cocaine being used in the area and it is the easiest substance to access. The group reports that Ketamine is also readily available with one person sharing adverse affects after injecting and several group members stating use amongst young people is high with bladder issues being reported. Cannabis is reportedly hard to get currently with this being linked to a local dealer being intercepted recently.

Group shared that the drugs they buy in Elgin, or Lossiemouth are more expensive than they are in other cities such as Glasgow. Many group members said they travel to Aberdeen to buy substances. Prices for cocaine are generally around £100 per gram currently or £250 for 3.5 grams. participants shared this was expensive for freebasing cocaine to make it smokable as some of the drug is lost in the process. The price for ketamine locally is £30-40 per gram.

# PERTH AND KINROSS

## The group meets in Perth city on Fridays at 2pm

The main substances reported being used are street benzodiazepines, crack cocaine and alcohol.

There were several reports of high potency white street benzos being available locally, with people describing adverse effects after using 5 or more. There were unconfirmed reports of two possible deaths and a near fatal overdose within their peer group connected to these tablets. One group member reported experiencing a near fatal overdose themselves after taking 50 tablets which had involved a hospital admission, they also shared experiencing memory loss for around 15 hours afterwards. Typical prices for these are £10 for 20 tablets or £40 for 100 tablets. A couple of group members reported a brief drought locally which had now returned to normal. One group member raised the availability of green xanax tablets, but there was a general consensus that people had heard of ill effects after using these and therefore group members were discouraged from using them.

Some group members discussed concerns about possible nitazenes in the heroin supply with one person having experienced a near fatal overdose after sniffing street heroin. Another group member felt heroin locally was of good quality currently and can be purchased in £10 (0.1g) or £20 (0.2g) bag. A couple of group members discussed cannabis, they believed to be spice as they experienced unusual effects such as strong hallucinations and anxiety after using. Online use of Pregabalin was also discussed to be good quality with potent effects.

Some group members report travelling to either Dundee or Edinburgh due to feeling the quality of drugs was better elsewhere than in Perth.

# HIGHLAND

## The group meets in Inverness on Mondays at 1.30pm

Crack cocaine, street benzodiazepines and Pregabalin are the most commonly used substances by group members with around 70% of regular attendees reporting using cocaine or crack. There are report of cocaine being of poorer quality at moment with a suspicion that other substances are being used to bulk out cocaine. Group members also noted increased paranoia and depression from use as well as headaches and mouth ulcers. Alcohol is also commonly used by group members and in combination with other substances.

Typical prices for street benzos locally are currently 50p per 10mg tablet. Some group members also discussed using 300mg Pregabalin tablets which are available in the area for £20 for a strip of 14 tablets. People report using them on top of opiate replacement medication to enhance effects. The group reports that quality of heroin is still poor locally and group members attending are not using it.

Drugs are readily available locally via telegram messenger, where menus and pricing/deals are circulated with door to door drop off. Group members were aware of 2 near fatal overdoses happening in their peer groups, one connected to poly drug use with Pregabalin and the other from heroin, cocaine and alcohol.

# EDINBURGH

## The group meets in Edinburgh city on Tuesdays at 2pm

Crack cocaine, street benzodiazepines and Pregabalin are the most commonly used substances by group members. Crack or powder cocaine is used by all of the group; it is mostly smoked by group members but some reported it being difficult to heat for injection. Typical cost locally is £45 per half gram bag. There were also reports of cocaine turning mushy or brown when washed back to make freebase cocaine. Quality was reported to be generally poor with inconsistent effects across batches and purity having declined over the past month, with suspicion by some group members it was being cut with amphetamines or mephedrone due to the effects. Some reported effects were a speedy high, sweating, headaches with lethargy and depression after use.

Different types of street benzos are available locally, with varying effects, time period of onset of effects, appearance, packaging and cost. Blue tablets marked ROCHE 10 are reported to be of good quality costing £20 for 15 tablets with effects that "hit you very quick" after 5-15 minutes although this varies batch to batch with some taking up to 45 minutes to peak. In contrast, there were reports of loose white tablets costing 50p each which take up to 40 minutes before you feel the effects. Xanax is reported as being of poor quality locally at the moment.

Pregabalin is available locally in 450mg and on occasion 300mg tablets. Typical cost for 450mg capsules in £4 per capsule. All substances are said to be easily available in the City Centre.

Reports for heroin were mixed amongst group members with one person saying good quality heroin was available in their area since before the festive period, another suggested quality is poor, turning black on the foil, and third person discussed it turning green when left overnight after being cooked.

# BORDERS

## The group meets in Langlee on Wednesdays at 2pm

Group members predominantly report using crack cocaine/on occasion powder cocaine, street benzodiazepines and cannabis. Poly-drug use is common, with several group members combining substances alongside their MAT prescriptions. Approximately half the group also reported their alcohol consumption increased during the lead up to festive period.

Group members report the quality of powder and crack cocaine varies from dealer to dealer in the local area. Higher potency cocaine 'proper' or 'prop' sells for around £80 per gram. The majority suggest overall quality of cocaine is currently poor with some reporting IV use of cocaine. Several group members use street benzos with cocaine and often will use benzos or cannabis to come down.

One group member discussed combining street benzos with prescribed propranolol used to enhance the effects of the benzodiazepine. Xanax use is fairly common, purchased both online and on the street. One near fatal overdose was reported in the summer after a 3mg Xanax bar and 25mg 'red apple' Previous analysis from June last year found a tablet sold as a red apple locally to be the opioid Tapentadol. Intended purchase for these is generally a street benzo.

Around half the group smoke herbal cannabis daily, stating it is their primary drug. Herbal cannabis locally varies in strength but is generally of good quality with typical prices paid £10 per gram or £220 for 1 ounce of "Cali weed" (cannabis strains that originate from California and tend to be more potent). One person spoke of using a synthetic cannabinoid 'spice' locally where they experienced hallucinogenic effects.

For those using heroin, they stated it was generally poor quality locally, thus requiring the user to take more to achieve desired effects; one person stated it "did nothing for them" due to the poor purity. There was one report of use of amphetamine powder, the person reported swallowing small amounts wrapped in cigarette papers referred to as 'parachuting' and using cannabis to come down; the same individual discussed using methamphetamine on another occasion.

## The group meets in Dunfermline on Thursdays at 2pm

The most commonly used substances reported by group members are alcohol, crack cocaine, and street benzodiazepines including Xanax. Regular poly substance use is reported by a quarter of group members with MAT, street benzos and cocaine being the most common combination. Alcohol use increased over the festive period for most of the group who had been drinking with most saying this was due to feeling isolated and experiencing a low mood.

The majority are smoking crack or freebase cocaine over injecting use. There were reports of some batches of cocaine being difficult to inject when “cooking it up” as it was congealing in the barrel, this was in contrast to those smoking who tended to report more desirable effects with this route. Those substituting crack cocaine for heroin, tended to report a decline in health and felt their use had led to criminality. There were various reports of poor mental health from using crack cocaine over the longer term including paranoia, anxiety and periods of depression. One person discussed experiencing cocaine related psychosis.

There was speculation amongst some group members about the suspicion that some cocaine available locally was cut with other substances. Some felt it was cut with amphetamine or an NPS due to the effects they experienced including feeling paranoid, where they wanted to come down from it straight away and experiencing depression and sleeping for days after use. Another felt it could of been cut with some kind of opioid as they experienced withdrawal effects “rattling” after using. Group members discussed a two tier market with poor quality cocaine selling for £40 per gram and higher purity ‘prop’ or ‘proper’ cocaine selling for £80. There

Some group members reported availability of 5mg yellow street Valium. There was one report of a group member purchasing diazepam locally which had been diverted from prescription for £2 per tablet. White and blue Xanax was reported to be available in the area from a local dealer costing £10 for 5 tablets. For those using Xanax, they reported inconsistent effects, getting different effects batch to batch.

There was one report of unusual herbal cannabis with a suspicion this has been sprayed with NPS due to it tasting differently from usual and unusual hallucinations. One group member who is a parent spoke about the rise in teenagers using ketamine locally and smoking cannabis in their child's peer group.



# CONTACT US

For more information about the trends outlined in this bulletin or for further details about the regional living experience groups, please contact us:

Scottish Drugs Forum  
[peerengagement@sdf.org.uk](mailto:peerengagement@sdf.org.uk)

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Head Office  
91 Mitchell Street  
Glasgow  
G1 3LN

0141 221 1175

