



Drug Use and the Drug Trade

A snapshot from Rural Ireland

Based on information provided by Community Projects across all regions of the Country



May 2021

There is a widespread problem...

Yes, there is evidence of drug use in all rural communities.

There is a drug issue in rural areas...it's an issue both with young people and adults.

Yes, it is an issue with all ages of the community.

This is a major issue in local communities, it is sometimes very hidden and hard to identify...

Yes, drug use is a huge issue with families. Across the county I feel drugs are now hitting all the rural villages as well as the towns.

This is a huge issue in rural communities, it is across the board regardless of background.

There is a belief that drug use is more prevalent in urban areas, but this is not the case, it is just that the dealing is more hidden in rural areas and users are not as visible and services do not provide outreach to rural areas due to lack of resources.

There are pockets of extensive drug use that are known to people throughout the County, but there are individuals using everywhere, in towns, villages, housing estates and increasingly more in their own homes alone.

Yes, I work with Local Employment Services, many clients presenting to our service have drug issues, some from recreational use to full blown addiction...It affects their motivation, mood and consistency.

Yes, many of our SICAP clients are presenting with multiple barriers, and substance misuse is one of those.

We have experienced anti-social behaviour incidents in the community as a result of drug taking.

A whole mix of drugs is being used...

Any kind of drug is available. From heroin to cocaine... and prescription drugs.

Mainly alcohol, cocaine, cannabis... and abuse of prescribed medication like Xanax, Valium opioids etc.

In my experience, alcohol, cannabis and coke are the primary substances used in rural areas.

The most common drugs are weed, painkillers, cocaine and benzos.

Cannabis misuse among younger teenagers is becoming normalised and they are progressing onto other drugs as they get older.

Adult and parental drug misuse are also issues in the area.

Kids as young as 12 gathering in the village and vaping, smoking weed and being offered Tablets.

My experience working with young people from 15-18 is that weed is the drug of choice. It isn't viewed as a drug, its seen as harmless. Many young people I work with are having difficulty separating the weed and their personal struggles. they don't see the weed as an issue

Young people are engaging in drug use from an earlier age...Poly drug use is an area for concern.

We can see Cannabis use among young people, and a mixture of alcohol and drugs among homeless and other target groups.

There is evidence of prescription drugs being used for highs in addition to illegal drugs.

In the early hours, the village was awakened by the sound of ambulance and Garda sirens. Four young men were rushed to hospital, one young man died at the scene with a drug overdose.

Small villages have large drug problems from Cannabis (weed), sometimes own grown, to Cocaine and Heroin.

Alcohol and Cocaine use has become the norm for young men and women who are managing to maintain jobs. Poly drug use is on the increase, at the weekends with benzos to manage the low mood and anxiety that follows, with the process continuing the following week

Strong Link to Disadvantage...

Drug use is in every part of society but more so in disadvantaged areas.

The reasons behind problem drug use are widely known, those reasons are the same - whether rural or urban.

Yes, drug use happens among the middle class - however the huge inequalities that exist mean that young people who are at a socio-economic disadvantage are far more likely to develop problems with drug use, get involved in crime, leave school early, have few opportunities for training and employment and have peers with similar issues.

Local drug dealers are honing in on families in poverty and disadvantaged communities.

Yes, also, with housing issues and the lack of availability of same in the local towns, people engaged in active addiction are being placed in more rural communities, which is a challenge for the active drug user and the community. Individuals with an opiate addiction seem to be particularly affected by this and they often struggle to access support services when in rural communities, particularly time specific ones (e.g.) clinics.

Shame and Stigma...

There is a lot of shame and stigma for people, especially in rural areas, in relation to reaching out for support, and many families try to hide, cover up and minimize the issue for fear of perception and judgement within their family & community. Families often present at crisis point or where they have been dealing with it for a long time.

Yes, from our experience, families in rural areas do not disclose if a family member or sibling has a drugs issue due to the stigma attached to drug issues. Families affected try to deal with the situation within the family unit itself and may be slow to come forward and ask for help. They may feel isolation by others in their own communities as it is not a topic discussed openly within rural communities.

Extent of the drugs trade

Yes, there is significant drug trade across rural areas in the county. A lot of young people and young adults have found themselves getting into dealing to pay for their use and some end up getting heavily involved in holding and dealing to pay off their drug bills...this can cause serious pressure and, in turn, increased use to deal with this pressure.

There is also a significant rise of drug related intimidation during Covid and a lot of families I link with are living in fear of consequences of money been owed.

Young men ascend from buses from the city with back pack containing alcohol and drugs which are sold to waiting teenagers.

Yes. It is visible. Vans and cars pull up in particular areas and people exchange money and drugs.

From where I live, I can see drugs being openly bought and sold on street corners from passing cars and from taxis

Trade - yes, coming from the cities providing drugs in our rural communities.

Trade - yes, local dealers are known in the area, but many also get their drugs in local towns.

Trade - Anecdotal evidence but use shows supply easily available, if not in the local area itself, supplies are got through internet or in the large towns.

People also buy drugs online - synthetic sedatives were the most recent one I heard about - purchased online and sold locally.

Particular groups are selling prescription drugs...over-reliance on medicated drugs.

Trade - Yes, drugs are openly available in town areas and local communities, even during daytime, there seems to be no fear associated with distribution by these individuals, there's

wealth associated with drugs which is not good, some parents are unaware that young children can be pulled into this environment.

Young people are being offered drugs in the community play park.

Trade - Yes, there is a drug trade in rural areas, there are a number of people identified in the area who people purchase their drugs from. Very few people need to travel to larger / urban areas for their drugs.

Trade - Absolutely yes, there is a thriving drugs trade throughout the whole County.

Trade - working with young people in rural communities, my experience is that it's easy to get.

Trade - There are known drugs dealers living and distributing drugs within the community, this issue has been raised to the housing section of Co Council and An Garda Siochana but the issue is still ongoing.

Yes. Drugs are visibly for sale around the town.

Drugs are easily sourced, ordered by text and delivered to your door... small grow houses for Cannabis are also on the increase.

Due to our proximity to the border and a reduced Garda presence in the village, all forms of black-market activity and anti-social activity are increasing.

Range of Services Available...

- Community Based Drug Workers employed through Regional Youth Services, including Outreach Workers
- HSE Addiction Counselling and Treatment Services in each CHO area
- Referral By local GPs to HSE Addiction Services
- Voluntary organisations funded by RDATFs to provide Drug Treatment Services in some areas
- RDATF Drug and Alcohol Forums involved in education and awareness work
- SICAP support for Substance Misusers

The drug services are primarily located in the towns, due to premises issues. The outreach service provides support in the local towns to facilitate rural communities in a better way, but it still isn't ideal. Since Covid, phone support has become a very large part of the work and many people who have transport issues have been facilitated through same.

The needs on the ground require a lot more public services and co-ordination due to the size of the county and population and issues presenting in communities.

We are really conscious that a lot of people do not know where to access services, when they find out there is often (but not always) long waiting lists, also there are many people who are enjoying their drug use and they do not seek support. However, there are many that are too

chaotic to search for support themselves and who have no support structures in place to help them identify these services

The local drugs worker for the area is doing a wonderful job but the demand is beyond her capacity.

Comment & Recommendations

- Drug prevention is not about simply stopping young people taking drugs - it is about creating a better environment and better opportunities for young people. It is about addressing the disadvantages that some young people face - it is about supporting parents to address these same disadvantages. It is about providing practical supports like after school services as well as sports and artistic opportunities - for all young people. In rural areas transport is an issue but cost is too. It is about breaking the cycles of disadvantage in some areas.
- This is much more than a single addiction service can do - it needs government leadership. Also - placing young people who have left school early in warehouse-like structures at the edge of towns with little or no green space is a pretty poor way to address training needs of these young people.
- This area has a very high incident of youth unemployment and early school leaving. Drug users in their 30 and 40s are now selling drugs to young teenagers to feed their habit. People turn a blind eye. There is no Garda presence or any serious effort to deal with the problem.
- Build community. Invest in community groups. Develop youth crisis cafes and support youth in other ways.
- This is a health issue not a criminal issue. We need to ask why people use drugs. We need to invest in our communities, provide youth services in each town, a youth worker, counselling, education, free access to gyms, early intervention. Alcohol is still the biggest problem in Ireland passed down from generation to generation.
- We need a different approach, need to separate supplies of less harmful drugs, and acknowledge developments worldwide.
- Main concern is the lack of treatment available to people who want to stop - they have to travel to other towns and don't always have the means to do so.
- Rural communities can be difficult to engage in my experience, the stigma and the visibility of drug support services can be seen and met with resistance. However, there is a huge need to facilitate same.
- Issues of transport constantly arise when it comes to addiction, with treatment centre access being a particular issue also. The ability of outreach workers to maybe work out

of a school for a day (consent dependent) may be something that might encourage youths to access help and normalise support service involvement.

- Through the work of our organisation, we provide referrals for families to Services to support them in their crisis. We deliver the Strengthening Families evidence based Parenting programmes... More funding is required to provide resources and treatment for individuals affected by Drugs & Alcohol.
- We have noticed a lot of our clients are not from stereotypical social backgrounds, but their commonalities are diagnosis (or not) of being on autism spectrum. This includes all diagnosis from autism to dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD, ADHD, ODD, etc. The commonality is low/ lack of social skills. The supports put in place for these need to be from early childhood as the longer they are entrenched in drug use, the harder it is to change, not impossible, just harder. This is for the user as well as the service providers who may not have the correct skills to support appropriately.
- The divide between Mental Health Services and addiction services is an area for concern - perhaps the new strategic plan will address this but, in the meantime, people are falling between the gaps. Mental health not providing a service as they say it's the addiction that has the person the way they are.
- There is a particular need for support for dual diagnosis, there is also a concern for single men and women who have addiction and mental issues, but family members are helpless because of the present Mental Health Act and this needs to be addressed at National Level.
- There is a national neglect to addressing rural issues, the first step to address this would be to have a rural seat/representative on all PPN's and the establishment of a working interagency group in all local authority areas with a rural representative sitting at the table with the CEOs of all agencies to address county wide issues. Approach issues with a holistic mindset that involves all agencies and their remit to deliver services and address issues such as drug use etc.
- Education and resources need to be available to young people and their families in this area and an alternative to 'earning' money from the drugs trade needs to be shown, as some young people see drug dealers wearing designer clothes and driving expensive cars and they want that. As community workers, we need to show the available alternatives to our young people.
- The rural aspect of this issues is one of growing importance, and we would appreciate any information on new needs and data, and are very open to working together on awareness raising or other supports required.

Contact Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign: @drugscrisis info@citywide.ie
www.citywide.ie