

## Drug and Alcohol Misuse among Adult Offenders on Probation Supervision: Findings from the Drugs and Alcohol Survey 2011

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**Summary:** This paper is based on the analysis of the Probation Service's Drugs and Alcohol Survey 2011, conducted on 1 April 2011. The survey was completed by supervising Probation Officers based on their own knowledge or the file content of their caseloads. The results demonstrate the significance of drug and alcohol misuse as key criminogenic risk factors and targets for intervention. The study further highlights the need to carry out research consistently on drug and alcohol misuse<sup>1</sup> among adult offenders on probation consistently for the purposes of identifying trends to construct evidence-based policies to combat misuse.

**Keywords:** Alcohol misuse, drugs misuse, addiction, alcoholism, adult offenders, Ireland, Probation Service, courts, crime, supervision.

### Introduction

This report presents key findings from the first large-scale, nationwide representative survey on drug and alcohol misuse among the adult offender population carried out by the Probation Service. The Drugs and Alcohol Survey 2011 encompassed 2963 adult offenders based on Probation Officers' caseloads.

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<sup>1</sup> The Probation Service defines 'misuse' as drug taking that causes harm to the individual, their significant others or the wider community. It includes illicit drug taking and alcohol consumption that leads a person to experience social, psychological, physical or legal problems related to intoxication or regular excessive consumption and/or dependence.

The main objectives of the study were to:

- ascertain the number of adult offenders on Probation supervision who misused drugs and/or alcohol
- examine the nature and frequency levels of drug and alcohol misuse
- establish whether there is a correlation between drug misuse and the current<sup>2</sup> (index<sup>3</sup>) offence committed and to determine whether there is a connection between alcohol misuse and the current (index) offence perpetrated.

### **Methodology**

The Drugs and Alcohol Survey 2011 was completed by Probation Officers on the basis of their existing knowledge or record content of their caseloads. This type of research is crucial for the Probation Service, where professional judgements are highly regarded for informing policies and practices. The advantage of using a survey among Probation Officers was that it captured a large anonymised representative cohort based on their caseloads. Representativeness is essential in order for the study to make general conclusions about drug and alcohol misuse patterns among the adult offender population on Probation supervision.

Three documents – an information sheet, guidance notes and the survey – were circulated to Senior Probation Officers, who forwarded the documents to each member of their team. The information sheet explained the context, aims, submission of returns and outcomes of the study. Guidance notes were issued in order to provide clarifications on definitional issues. Probation Officers were directed to read the guidance notes prior to completion of the survey.

The survey looked at whether an offender had ever misused drugs and/or alcohol. Subsequently, it examined the details (i.e. the nature and frequency) of drug and alcohol misuse. The survey also explored any perceived link of alcohol misuse or drug misuse to the current offence committed.

Specific categories of offenders as part of the study included those subject to:

<sup>2</sup> 'Current' refers to the most recent offence committed by the offender.

<sup>3</sup> 'Index' refers to the most serious offence; for example, if an offender had committed a multitude of offences, the most serious offence ('index') was deployed in this analysis.

- Probation Orders
- all forms of deferred supervision
- Suspended Sentence Supervision Orders
- Post-Release Supervision Orders
- supervised temporary release

as well as life sentence prisoners on temporary release supervision.

The survey excluded offenders in custody, on Community Service, referred for assessment reports and those under 18 years of age. The number of validly completed surveys returned was 2963 (96.7%). All the data was coded by the Probation Service and was analysed using SAS software. Particular care was taken when manually coding the data, but it must be acknowledged that any large-scale transfer of data is subject to errors.

### **Limitations of the study**

As previously stated, the data from this survey is based on the case records and expert knowledge of Probation Officers. A limitation is that self-reporting or interviews with offenders were not used as part of this study. These methods might have enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings. However, self-reporting studies among offenders in the community tend to result in low participation rates, and offenders on Probation supervision may not disclose their misusing behaviour, or at least the extent of it, in case it would result in negative outcomes (especially in research commissioned by the Probation Service). Therefore, it is acknowledged that there are methodological caveats to this study. Results can only be viewed as estimations of drug and alcohol misuse patterns among the adult offender population on Probation supervision within the limitations outlined.

Research has been largely underdeveloped in the Probation Service in Ireland. Only one other study (Geiran, 1999) has been carried out on drug abuse among offenders, which was confined to the Dublin Metropolitan area, while there has been a complete absence of empirical research on alcohol misuse among the offender population. This study endeavours to add to a limited knowledge base and provide a foundation for ongoing research.

## Key findings

This section highlights some of the key findings the analysis generated with regard to the prevalence,<sup>4</sup> nature and frequency levels and the perceived alcohol and drug misuse linked to the offenders' current offence.

### *Drug and alcohol misuse*

The number of adult offenders on the caseload that had 'ever misused drugs and/or alcohol' was high among the sample, at 89% (Table 1). Due to the absence of research on misuse among offenders on Probation supervision in Ireland, there is no available comparative figure. Hence, this finding highlights the need for consistent research in order to evaluate misuse trends among the adult offender population on Probation supervision over time.

**Table 1.** 'Ever misused drugs or alcohol'

<i>Ever misused?</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	89%
No	11%

Of the sample, 69% had misused drugs (combining 'alcohol and drug misuse' and 'drug misuse only'). In the last broadly similar study carried out by the Probation Service, 55–60% of offenders who engaged with the organisation in the Dublin Metropolitan Area had abused drugs (Geiran, 1999). The inference can be drawn that drug misuse is substantially higher among the adult offender population on Probation supervision compared to the general population in Ireland, where only 27% were estimated to have used drugs during their lifetime (National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD), 2011).

Of the sample, 62% had misused alcohol (Table 2). No figures exist to compare previous alcohol misuse trends among the adult offender population on Probation supervision. 'No misuse' was reported in only 11% of cases.

Although 88% of the adult offender population on Probation supervision comprised males and 12% were female, the two genders had comparable levels of drug and/or alcohol misuse (Table 3). The level of

<sup>4</sup> 'Prevalence' refers to the proportion of the adult offender population that misused drugs and/or alcohol.

drug and/or alcohol misuse by adult female offenders is extremely high, although they constitute a relatively small proportion of the adult offender population.

**Table 2.** Overall misuse patterns

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>%</i>
Alcohol and drug misuse	42
Alcohol misuse only	20
Drug misuse only	27
No misuse	11

**Table 3.** Prevalence of drug/alcohol misuse by gender

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Misusers</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	2304	2576 (88%)	89.4
Female	332	387 (12%)	85.8

Age is a crucial determinant of attitudes and behaviours, and one of the most important indicators of personal identity (O'Mahony, 1997, p. 29). Female misuse of drugs and/or alcohol peaked later, with 39.3% in the 25–34 age category (Table 4). This suggests that females' drug misuse tends to occur later than that of males.

**Table 4.** Ages of alcohol/drug misusers

	<i>Age (years)</i>				
	<i>18–24</i>	<i>25–34</i>	<i>35–44</i>	<i>45–54</i>	<i>55+</i>
Males	41.5%	35.1%	15.1%	5.5%	2.7%
Females	35%	39.3%	18.1%	4.8%	2.0%

Table 5 highlights the proportion of adult offenders that were misusing 'drugs only' by each age category. This analysis indicates that offenders in the younger age groups had higher levels of drug misuse, with 36.3% in the 25–34 age bracket. Drug misuse declined in the older age categories. Nonetheless, 35.7% of drug misusers were aged over 35, which illustrates the chronic and long-term problem of drug addiction. As described by Mullally (2011), drug treatment centres in Ireland are now faced with a third generation of drug misusers.

**Table 5.** ‘Drug misuse only’ by age

	<i>Age (years)</i>				
	<i>18–24</i>	<i>25–34</i>	<i>35–44</i>	<i>45–54</i>	<i>55+</i>
‘Drug misuse only’	23.8%	36.3%	24.8%	8.1%	3.0%

The nature and frequency of drug and alcohol misuse among the adult offender population are now examined. It must be highlighted that data were based on the perceptions of Probation Officers and, therefore, can only be viewed as an estimate. For example, often Probation Officers may not be aware of an offender’s misuse of softer drugs such as cannabis. Comments made by Probation Officers at the end of the survey in some cases indicated that there was some uncertainty as to the ‘current’<sup>5</sup> alcohol-/drug-misusing status, for a variety of reasons, including a lack of up-to-date information. For example, some clients were recent referrals or transfers. Probation Officers were sometimes uncertain regarding the clients’ alcohol-/drug-misusing status. Some Probation Officers felt that they had no ‘proof’ to confirm ‘current’ alcohol/drug-misusing status.

Alcohol was identified as the most common substance misused on a ‘current’ (36.4%) and ‘previous’ (37.6%) basis by Probation Officers based on their caseloads (Table 6). Alcohol has also been identified as the main problem substance among the general population in Ireland, accounting for more than half of all cases treated for problem substance use during the period 2005–2010 (Carew *et al.*, 2011). The results of this study highlight the necessity to include alcohol with illicit drugs in any examination of substance issues: ‘Failure to include alcohol data in reporting systems leads to an underestimation of problem substance use’ (Long *et al.*, 2004, p. 5).

Cannabis was the most common illicit drug misused among the adult offender population on Probation supervision. This finding is consistent with similar trends in the adult offender population in the United Kingdom (Budd *et al.*, 2005).

Of the sample, 8.9% was ‘currently’ misusing opiates, and 25.9% had misused opiates in the past.<sup>6</sup> Use of heroin (the main opiate) is much lower among the general population in Ireland, where the lifetime prevalence rate is 0.8% (NACD, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Current’ in this study refers to weekly, monthly and occasional misuse.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Past’ refers to 12 months ago or longer.

**Table 6.** 'Current' and 'past' drug/alcohol misuse

Drug/alcohol	Time of misuse ( <i>n</i> = 2963)			
	'Current' (weekly/monthly/ occasional)	%	'Past'	%
Alcohol	1078	36.4	1113	37.6
Cannabis	645	21.8	937	31.6
Opiates	265	8.9	766	25.9
Stimulants	190	6.4	1002	33.8
Misused prescribed drugs	219	7.4	568	19.2
Miscellaneous	55	1.9	256	8.6

The most recent study carried out by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) (2011) indicates that heroin abuse in Ireland is highest of 17 European nations. According to Bellerose *et al.* (2011), the proportion of new opiate cases was higher in Ireland (42%) compared to Europe (31%). Given the large proportion of offenders on Probation supervision misusing opiates compared to the estimated figure for the general population, the criminal justice system should be viewed as an important site to intervene and address opiate misuse.

Misuse levels for stimulants such as cocaine and ecstasy in the past were high among the adult offender population at 33.8%. Figures in this study suggest that the proportion of offenders misusing stimulants has declined substantially, with 6.4% having 'current' misuse. This may be partially attributed to changing drug fashion trends in Ireland: for example, ecstasy was seized for the first time in 1991 and by the year 1995, over 180,000 tablets were seized (Gordon, 1995). This compares to just 398 tablets seized by the Gardaí in 2010 (An Garda Síochána, 2010) as one indicator that highlights the drug's decline. During the 1990s, ecstasy was linked to the rave dance culture in Ireland, which has now largely diminished, suggesting a wider cultural change away from the drug.

Results from the NACD (2011) also indicate a massive drop in cocaine use: the number of 25–34-year-olds who reported using cocaine in the past year was 2.5%, one-third lower than consumption levels four years previously. Hence, the overall cultural shift away from these drugs may also explain the large difference between 'current' and 'past' stimulant misuse among the adult offender population.

Of the adult offender population in the survey, 7.4% were 'currently' misusing prescribed drugs. 'Past' levels of misuse were higher, at 19.1%.

The illicit use of benzodiazepines, in particular, by offender populations has been a cause for concern in Scotland and elsewhere in recent years (MacGregor Forsyth *et al.*, 2011) and appears to be reproduced here.

Frequent use of the most harmful substances can be indicative of problematic drug use (Budd *et al.*, 2005, p. 18). Therefore, Table 7 uses 'weekly' as an indicator to identify misuse patterns by gender.

**Table 7.** 'Weekly' misuse by gender

<i>Drug/alcohol</i>	<i>Males (2576)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Females (387)</i>	<i>%</i>
Alcohol	476	18.5	48	12.4
Cannabis	372	14.4	31	8.0
Opiates	108	4.2	35	9.0
Stimulants	70	2.7	10	2.6
Misused prescribed drugs	116	4.5	33	8.5

Alcohol was the most common substance misused by the adult offender population for males (18.5%) and females (12.4%). Cannabis was identified as the most frequent illicit drug misused by adult males at 14.4%.

Although the number of males misusing opiates in the sample was higher (offenders in the sample were predominantly male), proportionately, misuse of opiates among the adult female offender population (9%) exceeded that of the males (4.2%), consistent with international research (see Adams *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, previous findings by Comiskey *et al.* (2006) disclosed that the most common drug used by Irish female prisoners was heroin.

The level of misuse of prescribed drugs was also high among the adult female offender population, with 8.5% misusing on a weekly basis. This was almost double the proportion of the adult male offender population (4.5%).

Among adult offenders on Probation supervision, the proportion of 'current' alcohol misusers was highest among adult offenders in the South West region<sup>7</sup> at 44.1% (Table 8).

Table 9 presents 'current' opiate misuse by the five Probation Service regions. The highest percentages of adult offenders misusing opiates by region were in the Dublin North and North East (12.5%), Dublin South

<sup>7</sup> In order to adjust for regional variation in offender population size, the proportion of drugs/alcohol misuse in each region was calculated.

and Wicklow (11.4%) followed by the Midlands and South East (8.4%). In a study carried out by the Health Research Board (2008) on treated problem drug use, heroin was identified as one of the main problem drugs reported by new cases in the Greater Dublin area and the Midlands region (Reynolds *et al.*, 2008). While opiate misuse has been historically viewed as centred in Dublin, the proportion of opiate misusers in the Midlands and South East region is indicative of a problem in this region.

**Table 8.** 'Current' alcohol misuse by region

<i>Region</i>	<i>%</i>
Dublin North and North East	36.2
Dublin South and Wicklow	29.3
Midlands and South East	39.0
South West	44.1
West, North West and Westmeath	35.2

**Table 9.** 'Current' opiate misuse by region

<i>Region</i>	<i>%</i>
Dublin North and North East	12.5
Dublin South and Wicklow	11.4
Midlands and South East	8.4
South West	4.2
West, North West and Westmeath	5.0

*Link between misuse and the 'current' offence committed*

Of drug-misusing offenders, 74% had their misuse perceived by Probation Officers as linked to the 'current'<sup>8</sup> offence committed. In almost a fifth (19.6%) of cases, drug misuse was noted by Probation Officers as not associated with the current offence perpetrated. This reinforces the point that not all drug misuse is linked to criminal activity. As highlighted by the United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission (2008, p. 26): 'not all drug use among offenders is necessarily directly associated with offending. For a considerable proportion of offenders it is just part of a way of life which includes both drug use and offending and reducing their drug use is unlikely to lead to reductions in their offending.' Therefore, a holistic approach is essential to ensure that all factors that lead to an individual's behaviour are addressed.

<sup>8</sup> The 'current' offence is the most recent offence committed. If more than one offence was committed, the most serious ('index') was counted in the analysis for this study.

In 6.4% of cases, no link or absence of link was specified (Table 10). These unspecified cases may be attributed to the Probation Officer's lack of knowledge as to whether the offence was a positive correlate to drug misuse, or clients were recent referrals to this Probation Officer who had insufficient information to answer the question at the time of the survey.

**Table 10.** Perceived drug link to 'current' offence committed

<i>Perceived link?</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	74.0
No	19.6
Unspecified	6.4

#### *Age, misuse and offending*

Of those who misused drugs, adult offenders in the younger age<sup>9</sup> categories were more likely to have their misuse perceived to be linked to the current offence committed. As highlighted by Connolly (2006, p. 19):

With regard to the drugs–crime link, studies of drug users have found them typically to be single, aged between 14 and 30, male, urban, often still living in the parental home, from large and often broken families, having left school before the legal minimum age of 16, with highest levels of unemployment, with their best ever job being in the lowest socio-economic class, with a high number of criminal convictions and high rates of recidivism, with a history of family members being in prison, and a profile of extreme social disadvantage characterised by being from areas with a high proportion of local authority housing and often by the prevalence of opiate drug use and high level of long-term unemployment.

Table 11 suggests that the drugs–crime link goes beyond the age of 30, with 73.6% of drug misusers in the 35–44 age category having their 'current' offence linked to their misuse.

<sup>9</sup> In order to adjust for variation in the offender population size by age, the actual proportion of drug link to the offence was calculated by the total number of drug-misusing offenders in each age category.

**Table 11.** Perceived drug link to 'current' offence by age

<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>%</i>
18–24	70.6
25–34	79.7
35–44	73.6
45–54	48.1
55–64	50.0

Findings by Hearnden and Harcopos (1999) claim that the average gap between first use of any drug and first injecting was nine years, and between first use and first perception of a problem it averaged eight years for offenders on Probation supervision in London. The findings of this study highlight the high level of drug misuse linked to crime among the younger offender population. It illustrates the importance of intervening as early as possible to address addiction in the criminal justice system. Hearnden and Harcopos (1999, p. 4) state that:

Whilst it is probably hardest to work with problem drugs users during the early stages of their drug careers, when the perceived benefits of drug use still outweigh the costs, this finding reveals the potential pay-off that might be achieved from early interventions with younger offenders.

#### *Offence types*

Of those whose drug misuse was linked to the 'current' offence committed, 31.8% of cases were 'drug offences' (Table 12). It should be noted that drug possession accounts for most 'drug offences' recorded in Ireland. According to the Central Statistics Office (2010), the figure for 'possession of drugs for sale or supply' was 4159, compared to 'possession of drugs for personal use' at 14,523, which further indicates that drug users are deeply embedded in the criminal justice system. The finding shows that the link between drugs and crime is complex. Often the drug link to the offence is related to possession of drugs being a crime. As highlighted by O'Mahony (2008, pp. 47–48):

Because the possession of illicit drugs is by definition a crime and because the association between drugs and other forms of crime is apparently very strong, there is a distinct danger of overstating the

drugs/crime nexus and slipping into the trap of automatically equating drug use with crime. In fact, there are great many drug users who do not commit crime other than ‘inherent’ drug-related crimes intrinsic to drug use.

**Table 12.** Perceived drug link to ‘current’ offence type

<i>Perceived link</i>	<i>%</i>
Drug offences	31.8
Theft	16.8
Assault	10.7
Burglary	8.3
Robbery	7.7
Public order offences	7.6
Property offences	4.0
Dangerous acts	3.5
Weapons and explosives	2.5
Road traffic offences	2.5

The perceived link between drug misuse and acquisitive<sup>10</sup> crimes is reflected in this study and corroborated in the wider literature. Of offences that were linked to drug misuse, 16.8% were theft-related. Theft was the most common type of offence committed by the 2009 drug-misusing cohort in the United Kingdom (Home Office, 2010). In the *NEW-ADAM* survey, theft & handling and drug dealing offences were strongly associated with drug use status (Bennett and Holloway, 2004).

With regard to those whose drug misuse related to the ‘current’ offence committed, 8.3% of offences were burglaries and 7.7% were robberies, contributing to the 36.8% where the perceived drug link to the offence was associated with acquisitive crimes. Goldstein’s (1985) ‘economic’ model contends that drug users need to generate illicit income from crime such as robbery and burglary to support their habits. O’Mahony (1997) found that almost all in his sample of prisoners in Ireland admitted to funding their drug use through larceny, burglary and robbery. In a study carried out in the United Kingdom, the most common reason offered by prisoners for the drug link to offending behaviour was to gain money to buy drugs (Budd *et al.*, 2005). The offence with a perceived drug link was assault in 10.9% of cases. Assault is not commonly linked

<sup>10</sup> Acquisitive crimes include theft, burglary, robbery and property offences.

to drug misuse, as highlighted by the UK Drug Policy Commission (2008, p. 25):

Such offending is strongly linked to alcohol use, but may also be exacerbated by recreation use of drugs such as cocaine. Problem drug-using offenders may often act as street dealers in order to fund their drug habit and in this role may be involved in some violence associated with markets, as victims as well as perpetrators.

#### *Gender and offence types*

In this study, the perceived drug link to the offence for female adult offenders was mainly for theft-related offences and for drug offences. The perceived drug link to the offence for male adult offenders was for drug offences. For female offenders, theft was disproportionately lower.

Robbery was double the proportion for males as for females whose perceived drug misuse was linked to offending. Burglary was higher for male drug misusers than for female drug misusers. Assault and public order offences were also higher for the male drug-misusing offender population.

#### *Opiates and offending*

Of the perceived opiate misuse, 43.6% was linked to theft, robbery or burglary (Table 13). The association between opiate misuse and criminality is also highlighted in other previous Irish studies. As noted by O'Donnell (2005, pp. 128–129):

There is evidence that crime peaks in 1983 and 1995 coincided with the crests of the two waves of the heroin epidemic in Ireland. As most crime is against property, this supports the notion of heroin addicts as primarily acquisitive criminals.

**Table 13.** Perceived opiate link to 'current' offence

<i>Offence type</i>	<i>%</i>
Drug offences	29.5
Theft	20.4
Robbery	12.0
Burglary	11.2
Assault	7.7
Public order	5.4
Dangerous acts	3.2

Of the alcohol-misusing offenders, 71.3% were linked to the ‘current’ offence perpetrated (Table 14). The figure highlights the significant role alcohol plays in offending behaviour. Central Statistics Office figures show that there were 5000 more alcohol-related crimes committed annually than there were six years previously (O’Keefe, 2011), which suggests that the misuse of alcohol and its link to crime is an ever-increasing problem for Irish society.

**Table 14.** Perceived alcohol link to ‘current’ offence committed

<i>Perceived link?</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	71.3
No	21.1
Unspecified	7.6

For over a fifth (21.1%) of alcohol misusing offenders their ‘current’ offence was not linked to their misuse. In 7.6% of cases, no answer was provided. Again, this may be attributed to the lack of certainty by Probation Officers as to whether the offence was linked to alcohol misuse.

Assault (20.9%) comprised one-fifth of cases where Probation Officers perceived the link between alcohol misuse and offending behaviour (Table 15). In a survey conducted by Alcohol Action Ireland (2011), one in 11 members of the general public reported that they or a family member had been assaulted by a person under the influence of alcohol in the past year in Ireland (with 50% not reporting the incident to the Gardaí). The results in this survey further highlight the correlation between alcohol misuse and assault offences.

**Table 15.** Perceived alcohol link to ‘current’ offence type committed

<i>Offence type</i>	<i>%</i>
Assault offences	20.9
Public order offences	18.9
Theft	12.7
Drug offences	9.2
Dangerous acts	8.0
Burglary	6.6
Property offences	6.3
Road traffic offences	3.0
Robbery	3.0

Of alcohol-related offences, 18.9% were related to public order. The psycho-pharmacological model proposes that the effects of drugs – in this case, intoxication – lead to criminal behaviour (Goldstein, 1985). A study carried out by the Institute of Criminology (2003) indicated that 97% of public order offences recorded over a five-month period were alcohol-related in Ireland. Of 50 Garda members interviewed as part of that study, 98% believed that alcohol was a primary casual factor in public order offending. However, a further analysis of 177 observed public order incidents found that alcohol played a role in just over half the total.

Although this survey confirms that there is a strong association between drug misuse and crime, and alcohol misuse and crime, this does not necessarily mean that one causes the other. The relationship is complex. There were other factors associated with offending behaviour. Many Probation Officers in this study cited the offender's anger and self-control as major concerns. Mental health and mild learning difficulties were predominantly cited as factors that contributed to criminal behaviour across the sample. Other factors such as disrupted family background, lack of parental control, low education, child abuse and domestic violence were also stated as risk factors in offending behaviour.

## Discussion

### *Identification and targeting of resources*

The research highlights the need for the Probation Service to target specialised interventions to the appropriate gender and age cohorts, as well as in specific regions. Male and female offender populations exhibit similar misuse levels, which indicates a need for tailored interventions, particularly for female offenders, though at a smaller scale.

It is clear that drug and alcohol misuse is particularly high among the younger adult offender population; however, as noted, while alcohol misuse has always been a concern among the older offender population, drug misuse is an ever-increasing problem for adult offenders in older age cohorts.

Drug misuse was particularly predominant among the adult offender populations in the Dublin North and North East and the Dublin South and Wicklow regions. Opiate misuse was highest in these Probation Service regions. The Midlands and South East region also appears to have a significant emerging problem with opiates. This has implications for all services and providers including integrated drug services within these regions.

The results of the research highlight that the South West Probation Service region has a particularly high level of alcohol misuse issues. While public concern and policy-makers have focused on the rise of illicit drug misuse and its consequences over recent decades, alcohol remains the most commonly misused substance among the adult offender population. The Probation Service, in taking cognisance of the high level of alcohol misuse, needs a developed strategy to ensure provision of and access to appropriate alcohol education, counselling and treatment services. The findings highlight the need to prioritise action to work effectively with the large alcohol-misusing adult offender population.

Responsivity is an identified key factor in the effectiveness of interventions. It necessitates the tailoring of the intervention to the learning style, motivation, abilities and strengths of the offender. It is therefore critical that interventions be based on quality assessment and matched with responsivity of the persons engaged.

#### *The need for female gender-specific interventions*

Though females made up a relatively small proportion of the adult offender population at 12%, misuse of drugs and/or alcohol was on a par with that among the adult male offender population. The study highlights that misuse of opiates and prescribed drugs was proportionately higher among the adult female offender population. Acknowledging that most programmes and structured interventions have been planned for male offender populations, the study indicates a need for gender-specific holistic interventions for female offenders. This will ensure a more effective means of addressing and managing addiction and offending issues for this cohort.

Further exploratory research may provide additional information and reasons for gender variations. Such research could inform practice and policy development and the case for gender-specific and age-specific (given that those in the 25–34 age group appear to be the most ‘at-risk’ female cohort) services and interventions.

#### *Addressing the link between misuse and crime*

The research indicates a strong association between alcohol and offences against the person, while there appears to be a link between drug misuse and offences against property. It is clearly identifiable in the research that drug and alcohol misuse are significant criminogenic factors in offending behaviour and therefore, as highlighted by Taylor *et al.* (2003, p. 271):

The monitoring and quantifying of drugs and crime is critical to policy development. There is relatively little work that has quantified how much crime is attributable to drug use. Clearly the size of the problem will dictate the level of resources that should be devoted to the problem.

It is important that in all future research alcohol be included in any drug analysis.

#### *Need for research*

This study adds to the limited knowledge base in Ireland in relation to alcohol and drug misuse among offenders on Probation supervision. It will raise awareness of the importance for the Probation Service to collate statistical information and commission robust research at regular intervals on alcohol and drug misuse among the adult offender population on supervision, to inform policy and practice. Research would, in particular, assist the Probation Service in identifying and prioritising appropriate interventions for better outcomes. Areas for follow-up research from this study include the following.

- A follow-up study on drug and alcohol misuse among the adult offender population by an independent organisation/researcher(s) where interviews or surveys on misuse levels are carried out with adult offenders on Probation supervision.
- An alcohol and drug misuse study among those under 18 years of age on Probation supervision.
- As was cited in this study, in a significant number of cases offenders have mental health problems including ADHD and mild learning difficulties. Therefore, there is a need for research on the mental health of offenders on Probation supervision, particularly dual diagnosis.
- Exploratory research on drug/alcohol misuse among the female adult offender population is required.
- An in-depth examination of polydrug misuse among the adult offender population (which, due to various limitations, could not be fully explored in this study).
- An impact evaluation of the engagement and outcomes of alcohol and drug treatment services for the offender population.

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