



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

“Dial to Stop Drug Dealing Campaign”

Report of focus groups held with members
of minority ethnic communities.



1. Introduction

The HSE is a partner in the current Dial to Stop Drug Dealing Campaign. This campaign is supported by the National Drug Strategy Team through the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Dormant Accounts Fund and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The goal of this campaign is to encourage people to report instances of drug dealing taking place in their local communities so that appropriate action may be taken to address these situations. Phone calls may be made to a specified Freephone number and are guaranteed to be confidential, while callers may also provide information anonymously.

Ireland's population comprises more than 10% of people from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds. In an effort to ensure that ongoing conduct of the campaign is inclusive of the needs, views and priorities of all community members, a series of focus groups was held with members of minority ethnic communities. Participants were asked their views on the current campaign and on means of ensuring that members of minority ethnic groups would participate in the campaign. This report provides a picture of the views of participants in this regard. The outcomes will be used to inform this and any subsequent campaigns.

The HSE National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007 – 2012 (NIHS) promotes principles of partnership working, cross sectoral collaboration and capacity building among communities. The strategy recognised addiction issues among minority ethnic groups as an emerging area of concern, and the synergies gained through collaboration in the Dial to Stop Drug Dealing Campaign offered scope for progressing recommendations of the strategy to ensure that the campaign and is inclusive of all our population.

New Communities Partnership and Akidwa – both migrant led community organisations – were supported in hosting two focus groups each around the Dial to Stop Drug Dealing Campaign. The same sets of questions were used in all focus groups and responses were collated into a composite report by Dr. Jane Pillinger.

A total of 66 participants attended the focus groups. These participants represented more than 12 nationalities, including Poland, Belgium, Somalia, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Romania, Sudan, Cameroon and Iraq:

- A focus group with the New Communities Partnership held in Dublin was attended by twenty-two people. The majority of people were from Dublin, others were from Drogheda, Tullamore and Galway.
- A focus group with the New Communities Partnership held in Cork was attended by twenty-two people. The participants came from Cork City, West Cork, Limerick and Waterford.

- A focus group with the women from Akidwa with minority ethnic women held in Dublin was attended by nine women.
- A focus group with the women from Akidwa with minority ethnic women from the WOMB group in Balbriggan was attended by thirteen women.

The majority of those participating in the focus groups stated that they thought it was a good idea to have a campaign to address drug dealing and to encourage the community to pass information onto the Gardai via a confidential help line.

2. Living in a neighbourhood affected by drugs and drug dealing

New Communities Partnership focus group: Dublin

The majority of people attending the Dublin focus group live in neighbourhoods or had friends that lived in neighbourhoods that were affected by drugs and drug dealing. Drugs are very prominent in some communities in public places.

Comments included:

- Several people avoided going into areas where there was drug dealing.
- Many believed that drug use and dealing had increased in recent years, partly to do with the low cost of drugs.
- Several people stated that alcohol abuse was more prevalent than drug abuse / dealing and that this is a more important issue to tackle. One comment was that alcohol abuse results in more violent, racist and abusive behaviour.
- Several people said that the quality of life was affected and the areas they lived in were marginalised because of drugs. In particular, minority ethnic people did not go into one particular area because of fear of racism and attack. Many people live in fear of danger all of the time. One person stated that he had lived in a state of fear and had moved out of his area because of drug dealing.
- Several people stated that drug dealers were using ethnic minorities as the front line for drug running, for example, by targeting black taxi drivers. Nigerian men living in direct provision were also being targeted by drug dealers to deliver drugs. The weekly €19.10 allowance given to people living in the direct provision system, together with the lack of opportunity to work created risks of poverty, with this resulting in a vulnerability to being targeted by drug dealers.

New Communities Partnership focus group: Cork

People attending the Cork focus group stated that living in a neighborhood where drug dealing is common meant that it was unsafe and dangerous.

Comments included:

- People felt insecure, they did not go out alone at night and avoided certain areas.
- Mobility is restricted and also affects where it is safe to live. It 'creates fear in you'; 'it creates fear in people's minds'
- There is a connection made between drug abuse and racism on the streets.
- Drug abuse results in anti-social behaviour and violence.
- Drug addicts are seen in public places a lot – 'you can tell by their eyes'.
- Drug addiction results in more crime; one person had been robbed by a drug user, another had been attacked in his car.
- One person lived next door to a drug dealer and had had the windscreen of his car smashed on several occasions; he endured ongoing harassment and he and his family were terrified.
- Children are unable to play outside as it is not safe.
- There should be more attention given to stopping drugs coming into the country.

Akidwa focus group: Dublin

Many of the women participants attending the Akidwa focus group stated that they lived in neighbourhoods affected by drugs. Drug dealing was visible in their local neighbourhoods and in public places. One participant had experienced the negative effects of drug dealing and drug use from their neighbours.

Comments included:

- Participants felt unsafe to use certain roads at night and in some places during the day.
- There is a fear of crime, as drug dealing and crime go hand in hand.
- They had a persistent fear of being hurt as the people they said were using drugs are normally very rude.
- Participants with children said that they feared that their children would get hurt or get involved in bad company, which will introduce them to drugs.
- The participants also felt exposed and there was always the fear of the unknown.
- One participant said that the people involved in drugs are always looking for recruits and this makes the minorities exposed and tempted, as they are often poor and vulnerable.
- One participant said that the people in her neighbourhood were abusing hard drugs like heroin and cocaine. These substances appear to be very prevalent in the area.

Akidwa focus group: Balbriggan

The participants said that they lived in neighbourhoods which were affected by drugs.

Comments included:

- One participant in particular said that there is a particular route she fears using at certain times as there are always people 'who cannot be trusted in a certain corner'.
- There are feelings of insecurity, fear of crime and its effects, and concern about children in school.
- As minorities, people feel targeted mostly by rowdy youths in the streets who are at times very rude and can hurt someone with little or no provocation.
- Drug users are fond of using derogatory racist language in the streets. This makes people feel unsafe and insecure.
- One participant said that her next door neighbour introduced to her a friend who requested her to do him a favour of keeping some drugs in her house for a fee of Euro 1,000 per week. As tempting as it was, the participant wondered why she was being paid so much for the favour and she backed off and she started avoiding her neighbour. She felt that she was being targeted.
- The participants said that they knew some people from ethnic minorities who are involved in drug dealing. They attributed to the lure of quick and easy money. Because the majority of ethnic minorities are poor, it is hard to resist the temptation when it presents itself. Also the fact that some minority people without status are not allowed to work, means that drug dealing can be an easy – if risky - source of income, though risky.

3. Attitudes to the Gardai

In all of the focus groups there was a widespread mistrust of the Gardai and their ability to respond to drug dealing in communities affected by drugs. This was reflected in a negative attitude towards the Gardai and perceptions of discrimination against minority ethnic groups. Many people stated that the response of the Gardai to the drug problem is slow and they believed that in many cases drug dealers were known to the police.

Comments from New Communities Partnership Dublin focus group included:

- Gardai are no good; police don't do anything; they don't turn up when complaints are made; don't trust the police; it's an issue of trust.
- Gardai don't have the power to act and therefore drug dealing doesn't get dealt with.
- Ringing the police doesn't guarantee action; how do we know that the police are not corrupt; how can we trust them?
- Drug addicts are not charged for using drugs – they are let off – there should be more control of drug use.
- I could be vulnerable if calling the police – how do I know that they are not part of drug dealing?
- There is a gap in the law – drug dealing needs to be more effectively controlled and targeted by the police.

Comments from New Communities Partnership Cork focus group included:

- The Gardai are too slow to respond.
- People feel intimidated by the Gardai.
- The Gardai are also afraid of drug dealers.
- The community can work closely with the Gardai and in passing information onto them.
- But there is also fear of the Gardai having more power.

Comments from Akidwa groups: Dublin and Balbriggan

- The women participants attending the Akidwa focus groups were divided as to whether they would be prepared to pass information onto the Gardai. Some felt that there was a need to inform the Gardai while others expressed directly opposing views.
- Reasons ranged from lack of confidentiality and trust in the police, the information may not be taken seriously, or that a person may put him/herself at risk, given the view of members that drug dealers have a very tight and established network.
- Complaints coming from ethnic minorities are never taken seriously.
- One example given was that whenever the people living in Finglas complained about a person who was suspected of drug dealing, the Gardai said that the person was known to them. This made the people who had reported the issue feel that it was not worth the effort.
- When a person from a minority ethnic background is making a phone call to complain to the police, the police are either slow to respond or the complaint is ignored. This is because people of diverse minority backgrounds are identified by their accents and pronunciation of words. Several examples were given of a slow response or no response from the police, compared to the responses given to white people making complaints to the police.
- One participant gave an example of a drug dealer who operated a drug cartel from prison. She wondered how that could have been possible without a lot of help from powerful people who were on the outside.
- The participants said that they did not trust the police. They said that the drug dealing network was very strong and organised; hence it was likely that action will not be taken by the police when a report is made.
- Several people stated that the police are powerless when it comes to dealing with drug dealers, particularly in terms of prosecuting drug dealers. Some felt that the police were probably involved with drug dealers.
- As ethnic minorities, they said that at times they feel it is better to leave things the way they are in order to avoid problems or recriminations. An example was given of a boy in the Balbriggan area who is under Gardai protection to protect the family from threats from gangs, after the boy revealed the activities of some drug dealers to the Gardai.

4. Review of the posters /leaflet

The posters / leaflet were reviewed in break-out groups, followed by report backs with summaries of main points.

General comments: New Communities Partnership Dublin

- Several people said that it was good idea to have a confidential line and to see drug dealing being dealt with.
- However, there is some doubt about the confidentiality of the line, particularly because the numbers of telephones can be traced.
- Several people said that they would not use their own phones, and would only consider phoning from a telephone box just in case their number was traced.
- Several people said that they found the posters / leaflet to only be relevant to white Irish people. Minority groups would not see it as being relevant or directed towards them. 'Ethnic minorities would ignore it – there is nothing that would attract us'.
- How does a caller know that there has been follow up?
- Several people were distrustful of whether the Gardai would respond to a call.

General comments: New Communities Partnership Cork

- Participants stated that the posters catch attention.
- They appeal to mothers and those who saw drug dealing on the street.
- The poster with an image of a woman on it appeals rather more to the Irish community than other minority communities.
- There is a need for more explanation about the number displayed.
- Clearly seen frustration and anger of the young man from the picture causes strong reaction (his friends might be in danger of addiction).
- The message coming from the leaflets is that the anti drug campaign is a community issue (not only the work for the Gardai).
- The posters should have a group of people of different ethnic backgrounds so that everybody will feel included in the campaign.

General comments: Akidwa Dublin

- Some participants said that the posters had a lot of words which did not appeal to the people at first glance.
- The posters need to be 'catchy' so that the people will automatically read the message. They gave an example of the "Drink aware" campaign which has posters in Dublin buses.
- The posters are not responsive to the needs of ethnic minorities. This was particularly relevant in terms of the words used, which is important because some people do have difficulties with English.
- Some participants felt that the target group for the posters may not attend meetings; this may result in the material being rendered ineffective.
- The issue of trust came up again and one participant said that although the message in the poster was clear, there would exist a doubt whether any action would be taken at all to address the drug issue.

General comments: Akidwa Balbriggan

- While the posters are appealing, some participants felt that the same could not to be said of the leaflet. They felt that the leaflet was crammed with a lot of words hence making it hard for a person to be receptive to the main message.
- The posters and leaflets are not targeting people from minorities.
- There was strong mistrust of the police with the participants saying that chances were slim that any information from the ethnic minorities would be acted upon without stigmatising the person who gave the information. The participants said that there is need to have a method of tracking down whether any action is being taken at all after making the confidential telephone call.

Specific comments about the text of the posters and leaflet

- Many participants stated that there is too much text - too many words and too much information in both the posters and the leaflet. This makes the information difficult to digest, particularly if one is walking down a street or on the bus; it is also not appealing to the eye.
- The leaflet in particular contains too much text and should be more concise (there are repetitions). Many people will not read it as it takes too much time to read.
- The posters and leaflet should state the nature of a freephone number – not everyone will know that 1800 is freephone.
- One person stated that the reference to 'girlfriend' in one poster could be viewed negatively by the Muslim community.
- The text 'anonymous and safe, you dial, we act' is too small and needs to stand out more.
- Some people may not understand the word anonymous. Terms such as confidential and safe may be better words to use.
- If somebody doesn't speak English – the message on the picture is not strong enough; maybe simpler visual messages could be used instead

Photographs in leaflets/ posters

- A large number of participants stated that the photos did not reflect cultural diversity or target minority ethnic groups; they highlighted the need for photos that represent minorities.
- It is important to ensure that the photos are culturally representative.
- The photos are too large on the posters.

The Slogan

There were varying reactions to the slogan 'Dial to Stop Drug Dealing':

- Some participants found the text, 'DIAL TO STOP DRUG DEALING' too long and some people may not remember it.
- A suggested text is 'DIAL TO STOP DRUG DEALING: worried about drug dealing and use in your neighbourhood? Dial 1800 220 220, no name and number required'. Another suggestion was 'Kick out drugs'.

Telephone number

There were mixed views about the telephone number. In the New Communities Dublin focus group and the Akidwa focus groups people stated that the number was not easy to remember, while in the Cork focus group participants stated that the number was memorable.

Specific comments included:

- It should be underlined that the number is anonymous and safe. This should be written in bigger text.
- There is nothing to say that it is a freephone number. It should be stated that 1800 is a free number
- There should be different numbers to dial for different language groups.
- The people most likely to use the number would be people directly affected, those whose friends are affected and parents.

What would help / hinder you in passing on information - to who and how?

A number of issues were raised about what may hinder people from making a call.

- This included issues of mistrust, fear, safety, anonymity, and a general frustration and mistrust around the outcome of the investigation process.
- People might be hesitant to dial as the issue of drug dealing is very complicated. The chance is high that one might be asked for some sort of identification or where one is calling from.
- Participants also said that in a bid to explain exactly what is happening, one is likely to be overheard, hence putting the caller at risk.

What happens at the other end of the phone?

- Many participants highlighted the issue of trust and a concern that the information will not be acted upon or taken seriously.
- A strong concern expressed in all focus groups was the issue of confidentiality and anonymity.
- Language was raised as a potential significant barrier to participating in the scheme.
- Several people stated that they would not assume that the person at the end of the phone would understand them, take them seriously or be aware of cultural differences. As a result, there could be an issue about who will be answering the phone and whether having a different accent could influence the attitude of call centre people. Examples were given from Cork and Dublin of problems that some African people had in dealing with the Gardai.
- Phone line with *options will not work - an instant answer is necessary as people will not wait for the phone to be answered or even to be transferred to another line.
- Having a nationwide number was seen to be important to anonymity.
- Several participants stated that if they made a call they would feel nervous or scared as they would not know the outcome. There should be a system in place to find out if the information given was actually used and if any charges were made against a drug dealer.

5. Suggestions / recommendations

Changes to the posters and leaflet

- Simplify and shorten the text – use simple English to ensure that the text is more accessible to those who have limited English.
- Different photos should be included to capture and represent different minority ethnic groups. One suggestion is to reduce the size of the photograph and include a wider diversity of people in a group so that they reflect the community.
- Posters and leaflet could be translated into Chinese, Romanian, French, Polish, Arabic, Spanish and Russian.
- There should be a multi-lingual call centre service, with a different number that can be dialled for different languages.

Training and awareness

- Training on cultural awareness should be given to staff running the telephone lines.
- The police should be trained on how to handle drug related issues with the confidentiality the issues deserve as they are very sensitive and complex. This will safeguard the people giving information and at the same time will ensure more trust is placed in the Gardai.
- More awareness to be created to people living in local communities as they are also affected by drug dealing and also to ensure that there is awareness of the adverse effects of drugs.

The role of the Gardai

- The Gardai should be more empowered on how to deal with drug issues as they appear currently to be very toothless.
- Introduce a “culturally sensitive” desk in the Gardai stations which will be charged with handling ethnic minority issues – this could help to overcome misunderstandings when cases are reported or when confidential calls are made.

Publicising the campaign

- The campaign should be publicised through all media, ie. TV, cinema, newspapers, posters, radio etc.
- Leaflets should be distributed to all households – not all minority groups will access the leaflet in public places. The posters and leaflets should be taken to schools and other places where minority ethnic people meet.
- There are other ways that could also be used to inform the police about drug dealing, including texting, if no phone number will display; email, if the email address will not disclose; and writing by letter.
- Finally, it is important for the community to identify whether there is a problem around drug dealing, to inform concerned groups and organisations, to support building of community groups and to take more actions, where appropriate.

Acknowledgements: Facilitation of focus groups, designed to elicit views of service users from minority ethnic backgrounds around issues of drug dealing in their neighbourhoods, was supported by the HSE Social Inclusion Unit, based in the Office of the CEO. Issah Husein of New Communities Partnership and Salome Mbugua were key people in organizing the focus groups, while the efforts of Mella Magee and Caroline Muthoni in facilitating the group discussion should also be applauded. Sincere thanks are also due to Jane Pillinger for her efforts in coordinating the process around the project, facilitating one focus group and drafting the composite report which outlined the outcomes of all focus group deliberations.

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