

Promoting innovation and excellence to face the rapid diffusion of novel psychoactive substances in the EU: The outcomes of the ReDNet project

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Published

2013

Publisher

Human Psychopharmacology

Type

Journal article

Volume

28

Issue

4

Page(s)

317-23

Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The recent emergence of new psychoactive compounds (novel psychoactive substances (NPS)) has raised prominent challenges in the fields of drug policy, substance use research, public health and service provision. The Recreational Drugs European Network project, funded by the European Commission, was implemented to improve the information stream to young people and professionals about effects/risks of NPS by identifying online products and disseminating relevant information through technological tools. **METHODS:** Regular multilingual qualitative assessments of websites, drugs fora and other online resources were carried out using the Google search engine in eight languages from collaborating countries. These included the following: the UK, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Spain. Products were tested and prevention messages were developed and disseminated via technological tools such as interactive websites, SMS alert, social networking (Facebook, Twitter), Multimedia (You Tube), Smartphone applications

(iPhone) and virtual learning environments (Second Life).RESULTS: The Recreational Drugs European Network project established itself as the first Europe-wide prevention programme designed for NPS based on the efficacy of novel information and communication technology-based forms of intervention. More than 650 NPS products and combinations were identified; relevant information was disseminated to target population and advice was given to both European Union/international agencies and national policy makers.CONCLUSIONS: Web-monitoring activities are essential for mapping the diffusion of NPS and the use of technological tools can be successfully incorporated in specific prevention programmes. Furthermore, the involvement of multi-disciplinary international partnerships was and continues to be fundamental for responding to such a prominent challenge.

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