

Differences in harm from legal BZP/TFMPP party pills between North Island and South Island users in New Zealand: A case of effective industry self-regulation?

Author(s)

Wilkins C, Sweetsur P

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Abstract

Background: Party pills containing benzylpiperazine (BZP) and trifluoromethylphenylpiperazine (TFMPP) were sold legally in New Zealand until early 2008. Prospective studies of hospital emergency department admissions appeared to suggest that the harm from party pills was greater among South Island than North Island users. The party pill industry association (the Social Tonics Association of New Zealand or STANZ) claimed these differences were due to the voluntary code of practice adopted by their members in the North Island. The aims of this study were to examine differences in harm from party pills between North and South Island users in New Zealand, and to investigate possible reasons for any differences in harm, including the impact of industry self-regulation.

Methods: A national household survey of BZP/TFMPP party pill use was conducted in New Zealand. Information on the ingredients of party pills was provided by the National Poisons Centre.

Results: In a number of instances last year users of party pills from the South Island were more likely than last year users from the North Island to report harm from party pills. There were no differences between the North and South Island users with regard to the mean number of BZP/TFMPP party pills taken, mean total milligrams of BZP/TFMPP ingested or prevalence of use of other drug types in combination with party pills. A minority of users in the South Island reported using extremely high numbers of BZP/TFMPP party pills in a single session and using extremely high potency brands of party pills. Last year party pill users from the South Island were more likely than those from the North Island to be students.

Conclusion: A number of factors may have contributed to the greater harm from BZP/TFMPP party pills among South Island users including a higher proportion of student users with higher consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Users from both Islands commonly exceeded the dosage of BZP/TFMPP recommended by STANZ suggesting the STANZ code of conduct was largely ineffective.

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