

'Trainspotting generation': Alarm as Scotland drug deaths spike

19 January 2018

Scotland has seen a sharp rise in the number of drug deaths as years of abuse by the so-called "Trainspotting generation" finally take their toll, prompting calls for a rethink on drug policy.

"I've seen a lot of [death](#)," said Derek Harper, 57, a former [drug](#) addict from the once drug-ridden Edinburgh neighbourhood of Leith, where the 1996 film "Trainspotting" was set.

"Half the people at school (are now) dead (from) drugs; half the people I live with in my area (are now) dead with drugs," he told AFP, estimating he had lost "hundreds" of friends in the last four decades.

The number of drug-related deaths rose to 867 in 2016 and the last comparative data showed Scotland had the highest rate in Europe at 110 deaths per million in 2014—five times higher than the European average.

"I used drugs for 38 years solid. I took cannabis, heroin, [prescription drugs](#), crack cocaine, LSD, mushrooms, all the stuff. I was spiritually bankrupt. I was ill," said Harper.

"Back in the late 1970s this place was riddled with 'China White' heroin, and people were getting found in stairs, pubs, clubs, houses, just overdosing because it was that pure."

Harper has been clean for years and now shares his experience at Serenity Cafe, a support organisation sandwiched between the Scottish parliament and a clutch of homeless hostels where discarded needles remain a problem.

The blockbuster success of "Trainspotting", based on Irvine Welsh's novel about coming of age in the 1980s in Leith, made Scotland's drug underworld famous around the world.

The area is now a noted hipster hangout with

trendy pubs and a Michelin-starred restaurant.

But some older residents still live in deprived residential towers struggling with a lifetime habit.

'Explosion of heroin use'

David Liddell, chief executive of the Scottish Drugs Forum, told AFP how years of abuse are finally catching up on long-term users.

"The 'Trainspotting generation' was coined on the back of the book and the film to highlight this group who have been using since the 1980s... when there was the big explosion of heroin use," he said.

Liddell said Scotland's drug problems are linked to poverty and deprivation, pointing out that it also had the highest drug problem per head of population at around 61,500 from a population of five million.

"We have people who have been using for 20 or more years, so their bodies have suffered as a consequence of that continued drug use, and are now more vulnerable to overdose and drug-related deaths, sadly.

"So we're seeing the majority of the deaths now in people aged 35 and over.

"In particular, recently, there has been an outbreak of HIV infection among these drug injectors," he said.

Scotland's politicians have called for the legalisation of medically supervised rooms where users can take their own drugs to inject with clean needles, but they have yet to convince a sceptical British government which is in charge of drugs policy.

"Eight European countries, plus Australia and Canada, have introduced drug consumption rooms," said Scottish National Party lawmaker

Ronnie Cowan as he demanded action to stem Scotland's rising drug deaths.

"The result has been a reduction in the spread of HIV and hepatitis C, a reduction in crime—there has never been a drug overdose in a supervised drug consumption room."

But Prime Minister Theresa May has insisted Britain's focus "should be to ensure that people come off drugs, do not go on drugs in the first place and keep clear of drugs", rather than pursuing the "liberal" policies of the Scottish nationalists.

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APA citation: 'Trainspotting generation': Alarm as Scotland drug deaths spike (2018, January 19) retrieved 31 May 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-01-trainspotting-alarm-scotland-drug-deaths.html>

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