



# **An Explorative Study into Novel Psychoactive Substances and the link to Violence and Impulsivity**

*Rachael Mason, Michelle Smith, Amanda Roberts &  
Tochukwu Onwuegbusi*

# Novel Psychoactive Substances in Prisons

---

New or Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS or PS)

---

Synthetic Cannabinoids – “Spice” and “Mamba”

---

“New Normal”

---

27% increase in violence and rising

# NPS, Violence and Impulsivity

---

NPS use is widespread and causes a multitude of problems

---

Synthetic cannabinoids are the most prevalent with younger prisoners

---

NPS users are more impulsive than other drug users

---

Limited evidence to support this statement

---

What causes the NPS related violence?

# Aims

## Scope

- Scope the prevalence of substance use within the selected prison

## Identify

- Identify factors that may distinguish NPS users from other drug and non-drug users

## Investigate

- Investigate the links between NPS use, violence and impulsivity

## Explore

- Explore the prisoners' perceptions on what causes NPS related violence

# Design & Materials

---

Self-report paper based questionnaire

---

5 Sections: Demographics, Substance Use, Violence, Perceptions of Violence, Impulsivity

---

Questionnaire pack under cell doors & 2<sup>nd</sup> opportunity during education and work sessions

---

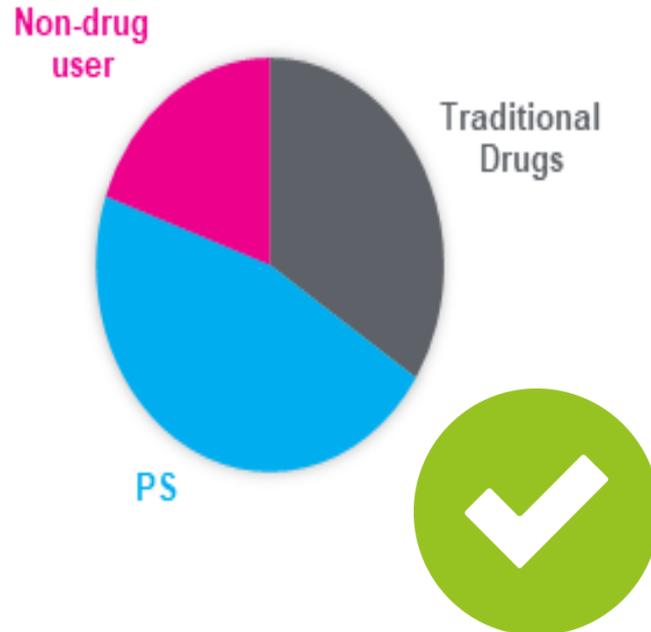
159 – 19.95% response rate

Mean age – 34.82, White – 77.85%, Single – 54.43%

# Scope

NPS would be the primary substance used within the prison compared to other illicit substances

## SUBSTANCE USE ON SENTENCE



	Used on sentence	Seen substance used
NPS	47	97
Cannabis	40	79
Alcohol	32	71
Barbiturates	19	48
Opiates	16	46
Crack cocaine	15	41
Cocaine	14	37
Heroin	10	33
Ecstasy	6	25
Amphetamines	1	26
Psychedelics	0	14
Solvents	0	14

# Scope

## Top 5 NPS used

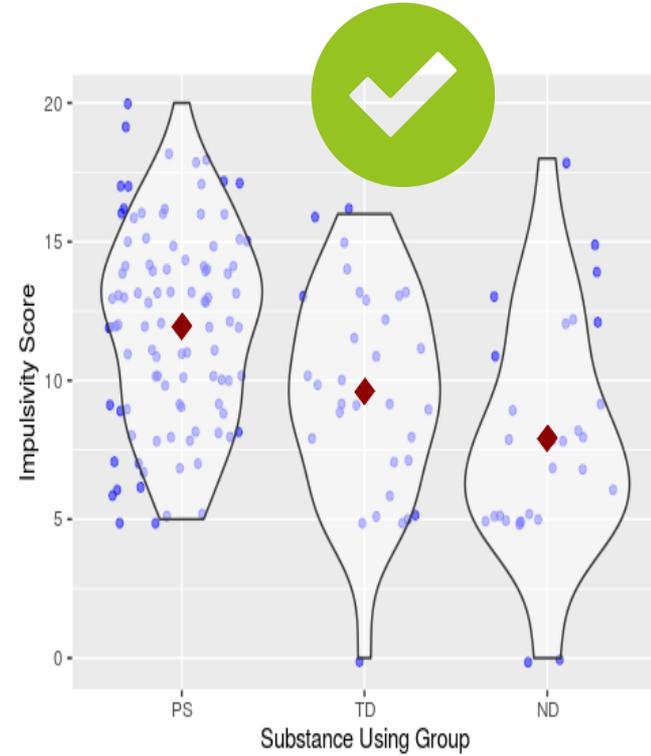
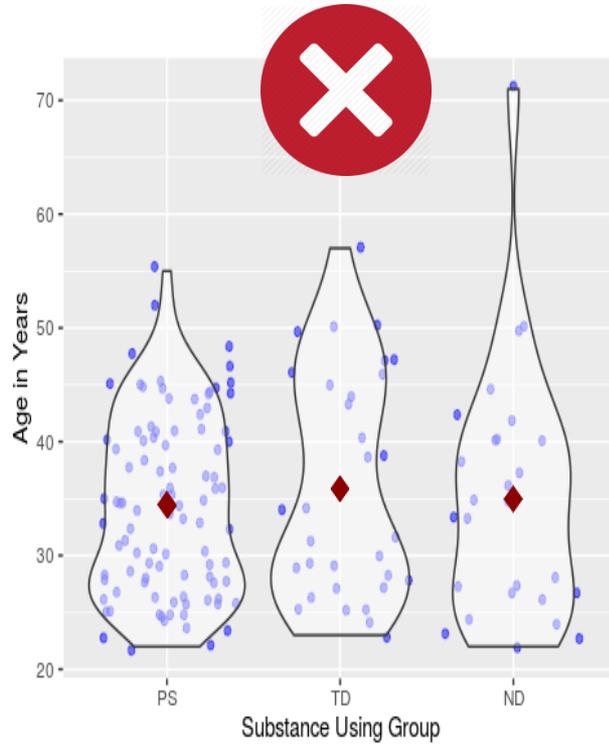
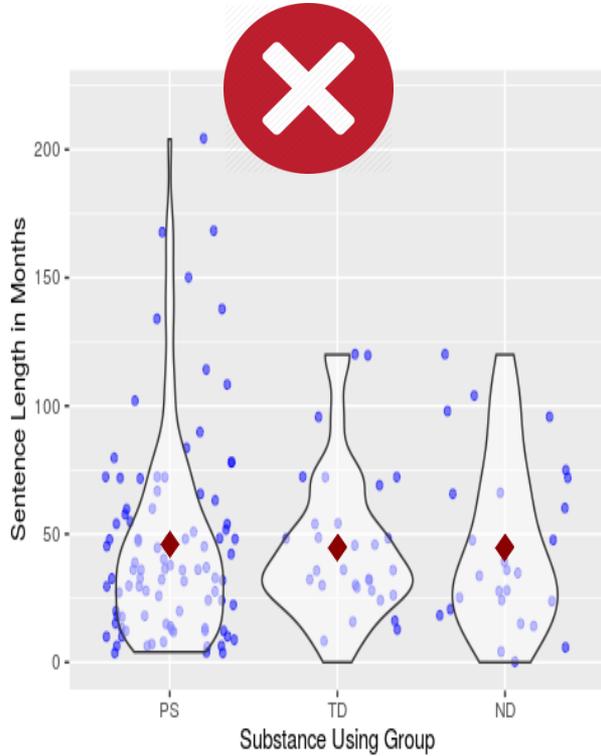
NPS name	Number of participants used on sentence
Spice	66
Mamba	23
Fentanyl	9
M-Cat	7
Benzo-furry	4

## Primary method of use



# Identify

A younger age, serving a shorter sentence length and having a high impulsivity score would increase the chance of a person being an NPS user



# Investigate

NPS users would be more likely to engage in institutional violence towards other prisoners, staff and property than traditional drug users and non-drug user

## Rates of violence

Physical Assaults	52 (33%)
Verbal Assaults	110 (70%)
Violence to prisoner	100 (63%)
Violence to staff	83 (53%)
Property	32 (20%)

### Prisoner

- Increased odds for PS users compared to traditional and non-drug users



### Staff

- Increased odds for PS users compared to non-drug users



### Property

- Increased odds for PS users compared to traditional and non-drug users



# Explore

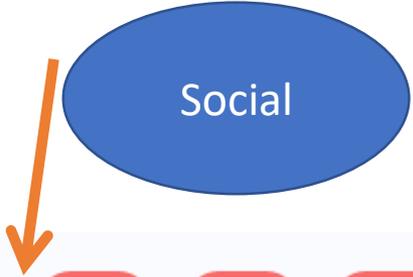
NPS use would be linked to violence equally due to behavioural change and due to the social circumstances associated with substance use



70% of perceived violence was due to NPS use



Being an NPS user, violent in prison, convicted of violent or substance related crime, and having a high impulsivity score –  
No impact



# Explore

## Top Reasons for Violence

Reason category	Number of comments
Prisoner relations and gang culture	98
Money and debt issues	54
Regime and facilities	52
Staffing, experience, and staff relations	48
Emotions and mental health	25

# Implications of Results

---

Treatment programmes to focus on impulsive thinking, aggression and social factors

---

Rehabilitative environments and holistic approaches

---

Caution: this may just be with this sample, in this prison

# How to take it forward?

---

Implications of Covid on NPS use

---

Impact of setting

---

Social climate, rehabilitation efforts, staff-prisoner relations

---

NPS specific treatment programme

---

Ideas?

# References

- Auty, K. M., & Liebling, A. (2019). Exploring the relationship between prison social climate and reoffending. *Justice Quarterly*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1538421>
- Ceranic Ninic, K., Jejcic, K., Galvnik, E., & Pustoslemsek, M. (2017). Use of new synthetic drugs in Slovenian prisons. *European Psychiatry*, 41, S584. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eurpsy.2017.01.882>
- Coid, J., Yang, M., Roberts, A., Ullrich, S., Moran, P., Bebbington, P., Brugha, T., Jenkins, R., Farrell, M., Lewis, G., Singleton, N. (2006). Violence and psychiatric morbidity in the national household population of Britain: public health implications. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 189(1), 12–19. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.189.1.12>
- Crown Prosecution Service. (2018). *Psychoactive substances*. Retrieved from <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/psychoactive-substances>
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addictions. (2018). *New psychoactive substances in prison: Results from an EMCDDA trendspotter study*. Retrieved from <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/8869/nps-in-prison.pdf>
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. (2017). *Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for England and Wales: Annual report 2016-2017*. Retrieved from [https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/07/HMIP-AR\\_2016-17\\_CONTENT\\_11-07-17-WEB.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/07/HMIP-AR_2016-17_CONTENT_11-07-17-WEB.pdf)
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons. (2018). *Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for England and Wales: Annual report 2017-2018*. Retrieved from [https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/07/6.4472\\_HMI-Prisons\\_AR-2017-18\\_Content\\_A4\\_Final\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/07/6.4472_HMI-Prisons_AR-2017-18_Content_A4_Final_WEB.pdf)

# References

- Mdege, N. D., Meader, N., Lloyd, C., Parrott, S., & McCambridge, J. (2017). The novel psychoactive substances in the UK project: Empirical and conceptual review work to produce research recommendations. *Public Health Research, 5*(4), 1-166. <https://doi.org/10.3310/phr05040>
- Prisons and Probation Ombudsman. (2018). *Annual report 2017-2018*. Retrieved from [https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/ppo-prod-storage-1g9rkhjhkjmjgw/uploads/2018/10/PPO\\_Annual-Report-2017-18\\_WEB\\_final.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/ppo-prod-storage-1g9rkhjhkjmjgw/uploads/2018/10/PPO_Annual-Report-2017-18_WEB_final.pdf)
- Smith, K. E., Bunting, A. M., Staton, M., Walker, R., Shalash, S., Winston, E., & Pangburn, K. (2017). Examination of synthetic cannabinoid and cathinone use among a drug-using offender sample, 2013-2015. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 49*(5), 436-455. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2017.1361560>
- UserVoice. (2016). *Spice: The bird killer. What prisoners think about the use of spice and other legal highs in prison*. Retrieved from <http://www.uservoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/User-Voice-Spice-The-Bird-Killer-Report-Low-Res.pdf>
- Vreeker, A., van der Burg, B. G., van Laar, M., & Brunt, T. M. (2017). Characterising users of new psychoactive substances using psychometric scales for risk-related behaviours. *Addictive Behaviours, 70*, 72-78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2017.02.010>
- Woicik, P. A., Stewart, S. H., Pihl, R. O., & Conrod, P. J. (2009a). Substance Use Risk Profile Scale [Measurement instrument]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t17202-000>