

Head Shops: A study of public knowledge and opinion on Head Shops and Legal Highs in Ireland.

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Abstract

Recent media attention illustrated Head Shops creating a senseless milestone in drug culture in Ireland. Popularity by the public proved their disregard for public health warnings against Legal Highs. It is the aim of this study to illustrate public knowledge and opinion on these new phenomena's. It will do so by discovering which categories in society are largely knowledgeable and tolerant towards Head Shops.

Introduction

The first Head Shop opened in Ireland in 2000 selling paraphernalia but Head Shops only began to gain public attention in 2005 and 2006 as regards the selling of legal psychoactive substances such as magic mushrooms and Legal Highs (Clark, 2007). Legal Highs are intoxicating drugs that are not controlled or prohibited in Ireland under the Misuse of Drugs Act. Head Shops grew in popularity throughout 2009 and 2010 with the sales of Legal Highs such as Mephadrone skyrocketing.

Mephadrone which has been described as worse than Heroin (Cosgrove, 2010) caused many health concerns throughout society.

“People are taking their life in their own hands, but people are still willing to take these drugs. Really they are walking guinea pigs.”(Dr Cryan, as cited in O'Keefe, 2010).

11th of May 2010, the government moved to control the sale of psychoactive substances under The Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 and 1984, and the newly drafted Criminal Law (Psychoactive Substances) Bill. Since the ban, Head Shops have replaced the banned drugs and continue to sell Legal Highs.



Despite public health warnings the public continued to consume Legal Highs. No previous studies illustrates public opinion on Head Shops. This study will examine public knowledge and opinion on Head Shops and social issues around them to see are participants from a younger age group and men more tolerant towards Legal Highs in society.



Method

A Quantitative Research questionnaire was used in this study.

It consisted of 25 yes no questions for the participants to fill out.

The participants used in this study were Dublin Business School Students.

Participants were reached throughout classes within the college.

Permission was granted from lecturers to hand out surveys during their class time.

200 students were surveyed ranging from 17-53.

The surveys were then divided into groups containing 100 participants under 25 and 100 over 25.

Surveys were also divided into gender categories.

The findings from each question was imputed into SPSS.

A univariate analyse was carried out for this study.

The findings were created into graphs to show the percentage of participants who responded yes and no to each question.

Results

Over all people perceive Head Shops are bad for society. Younger participants show less tolerance towards Head Shops with 73% showing they feel Head Shops are bad for society compared to 63% of older participants. Men illustrate most knowledge with figures showing 71% of men know someone who has used Head Shops compared to just 48% of women.

Discussion

Legal Highs have not been accepted into Irish culture as all categories in this study responded with high responses to no when asked if they thought Legal Highs were as socially acceptable as alcohol.5% more of the younger age samples feel Legal Highs are not safe then the older portion of samples. The results of this study also show the younger age category responding more strongly in opinion as regards to Head Shops normalizing drugs in society. The younger age category answered 12% higher to this compared to the older group. Gender differences illustrate females view Head Shops in a more harmful position than men. 17% more woman than men see Head Shop owners in the same light as illegal drug dealers. Theses results display that younger participants and females are less tolerant towards Head Shops in society. This study could not illustrate why females and younger participants have these views. It is recommended that future studies may examine this and to see if user experience or social class may have altered the opinions of the female and younger participants.

References

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