

# **Estimates of the Prevalence of Opiate Use and/or Crack Cocaine Use, 2011/12: Sweep 8 Summary Report**

Gordon Hay<sup>1,2</sup>  
Anderson Rael dos Santos<sup>2</sup>  
Joanne Worsley<sup>1</sup>

1 Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University

2 Glasgow Prevalence Estimation Limited

Correspondence should be addressed to Dr Gordon Hay at the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University

Telephone: 0151 231 4385  
Fax: 0151 231 4552  
E-mail: [g.hay@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:g.hay@ljmu.ac.uk)

## Overview

This report summarises the results of the fourth follow-up study to a three-year project to estimate the prevalence of opiate and/or crack use (previously defined as 'problem drug use') nationally (England only), regionally, and locally. This fourth follow-up was carried out five years after the final sweep of the original project, so could therefore be considered as 'sweep 8'. An overview of the national and regional estimates are presented in this report, as are comparisons with the estimates produced by the third follow-up (2010/11) sweep of the study.

Information about the number of people who use illicit drugs such as heroin, other opiates or crack cocaine is key to formulating effective policies for tackling drug-related harm as these drugs are associated with the highest levels of harm. It also helps inform service provision at the local level and provides a context in which to understand the population impact of interventions to reduce drug-related harm. The Drug Action Team (DAT) estimates, used for local planning purposes, are available separately at <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/Prevalence-estimates-2011-12.aspx>.

Direct enumeration of those engaged in a largely covert activity such as the use of class A drugs is difficult and standard household survey techniques tend to underestimate the extent of such activity. Indirect techniques making use of various data sources offer a more reliable way of calculating prevalence estimates for the use of opiates and/or crack cocaine. The estimates presented in this report are derived using two indirect measurement techniques: the capture-recapture method (CRC); and the multiple indicator (MIM) method – these methods are described in detail in Hay *et al.*, 2006 and Hay *et al.*, 2007a. Methodological developments throughout the course of the previous three sweeps are discussed elsewhere (Hay *et al.*, 2007b, Hay *et al.*, 2008).

The individuals covered by this study were people aged 15 to 64 and resident in each DAT area, and known to be using heroin, methadone, other opiate drugs, or crack cocaine.

## Results

Table 1 presents the 2011/12 national estimates and prevalence rates for those using opiates and/or crack cocaine or injecting.

**Table 1: National prevalence estimates and rates per 1,000 population aged from 15-64 with 95% confidence intervals<sup>1</sup>**

Drug	Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	Rate	95% Confidence Interval
Opiate and/or crack	293,879	291,029 – 302,146	8.40	8.32 – 8.63
Opiate	256,163	253,751 – 263,501	7.32	7.25 – 7.53
Crack cocaine	166,640	161,621 – 173,706	4.76	4.62 – 4.96
Injecting	87,302	85,307 – 90,353	2.49	2.44 – 2.58

1. The confidence interval shows the range of values within which we can be 95 per cent certain that the true value sits.

Overall in 2011/12 there were an estimated 293,879 opiate and/or crack users in England; this corresponds to approximately 8 per thousand of the population age 15-64.

**Table 2: Estimated prevalence (rate per 1,000 population) of opiate and/or crack use (OCU), opiate use and crack cocaine use by region**

Region	OCU		Opiate		Crack cocaine	
	Estimate	95% CI	Estimate	95% CI	Estimate	95% CI
East of England	5.79	5.30 – 6.43	5.08	4.70 – 5.63	3.47	2.82 – 4.12
East Midlands	8.10	7.44 – 8.72	7.22	6.64 – 7.78	3.93	3.40 – 4.55
London	9.55	9.35 – 10.05	7.63	7.46 – 8.08	6.96	6.65 – 7.29
North East	9.89	9.62 – 10.37	8.92	8.68 – 9.38	3.24	2.69 – 3.83
North West	9.99	9.60 – 10.48	9.07	8.74 – 9.57	5.47	5.00 – 5.94
South East	5.86	5.50 – 6.30	4.99	4.60 – 5.43	3.27	2.77 – 3.80
South West	7.69	7.39 – 8.13	6.81	6.56 – 7.24	4.00	3.58 – 4.53
West Midlands	9.45	8.94 – 10.09	8.45	7.98 – 8.99	5.48	4.90 – 6.06
Yorkshire and the Humber	10.44	10.05 – 11.02	9.30	8.91 – 9.86	5.47	5.03 – 5.99
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>8.40</b>	<b>8.32 – 8.63</b>	<b>7.32</b>	<b>7.25 – 7.53</b>	<b>4.76</b>	<b>4.62 – 4.96</b>

In terms of regional differences, Yorkshire and the Humber has the highest prevalence of opiate and/or crack use at just over 10 per thousand population aged 15 to 64 followed by the North West and the North East, both just under 10 per thousand. The East of England and the South East have the lowest prevalence of opiate and/or crack use at under 6 per thousand. When considering opiate use prevalence, the highest prevalence rates are in Yorkshire and the Humber and the North West at just over 9 per thousand. The lowest prevalence rates of opiate use are in the South East and the East of England at approximately 5 per thousand, respectively. London has the highest estimated prevalence of crack cocaine use at just below 7 per thousand population.

The national prevalence rates by age group and region are shown in Table 3. The estimated numbers in each age group are shown in Table 4.

**Table 3: Opiate and/or crack use prevalence rates per thousand population, by age group and region with 95% confidence intervals.**

Region	15 to 24 years			25 to 34 years			35 to 64 years		
	Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI	
East of England	3.57	3.08	4.42	10.67	9.63	11.82	4.95	4.45	5.50
East Midlands	5.13	4.33	6.55	19.18	17.26	20.81	5.75	5.17	6.23
London	6.99	6.46	8.18	10.76	10.33	11.41	9.82	9.42	10.26
North East	5.96	5.42	7.06	25.25	23.92	26.27	6.56	6.26	6.95
North West	3.79	3.35	4.86	14.64	13.76	15.68	10.58	9.97	10.99
South East	3.90	3.53	4.58	10.82	10.05	11.75	4.94	4.59	5.32
South West	4.72	3.75	6.60	15.66	14.61	16.80	6.33	5.95	6.72
West Midlands	4.50	4.01	5.48	22.14	20.71	23.73	7.02	6.51	7.59
Yorkshire and the Humber	4.09	3.64	5.29	22.80	21.56	24.05	8.67	8.24	9.16
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>4.50</b>	<b>5.35</b>	<b>15.18</b>	<b>14.82</b>	<b>15.56</b>	<b>7.28</b>	<b>7.11</b>	<b>7.43</b>

**Table 4**            **Estimated number of opiate and/or crack users by age group and region with 95% confidence intervals.**

Region	15 to 24 years			25 to 34 years			35 to 64 years		
	Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI	
East of England	2,546	2,195	3,157	7,775	7,017	8,617	11,631	10,461	12,921
East Midlands	3,087	2,604	3,937	10,495	9,445	11,386	10,504	9,436	11,372
London	7,648	7,076	8,957	17,660	16,957	18,732	29,677	28,452	30,988
North East	2,093	1,904	2,481	7,988	7,566	8,310	6,854	6,546	7,265
North West	3,578	3,159	4,585	13,150	12,362	14,089	29,610	27,883	30,755
South East	4,202	3,797	4,931	11,557	10,728	12,549	17,176	15,950	18,479
South West	3,123	2,482	4,365	9,515	8,871	10,204	13,413	12,620	14,245
West Midlands	3,369	3,003	4,105	15,686	14,671	16,812	15,273	14,167	16,500
Yorkshire and the Humber	2,983	2,653	3,852	15,298	14,464	16,136	17,989	17,101	19,015
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>32,628</b>	<b>31,168</b>	<b>36,992</b>	<b>109,124</b>	<b>106,530</b>	<b>111,795</b>	<b>152,127</b>	<b>148,576</b>	<b>155,156</b>

Table 3 shows that, nationally, the markedly highest prevalence rate is in the 25-to-34 age group. This was also the case across individual regions. The North East has the highest prevalence rate in the 25 to 34 age range which, at just over 25 per thousand, is greater than the other regions. London has the highest prevalence rate in the 15 to 24 age range, but at around 7 per thousand population is not much higher than that found in the North East. Meanwhile the North West has the highest prevalence rate in the 35 to 64 age range, at over 10 per thousand.

**Table 5: National estimates of opiate and/or crack use, opiate use and crack cocaine use and injecting 2010/11 (sweep 7) and 2011/12 (sweep 8)**

	Sweep 7 - 2010/11			Sweep 8 – 2011/12		
	Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI	
Opiate and/or crack	298,752	294,858	307,225	293,879	291,029	302,146
Opiate	261,792	259,260	269,025	256,163	253,751	263,501
Crack	170,627	165,877	176,892	166,640	161,621	173,706
Injecting	93,401	90,974	96,757	87,302	85,307	90,353

Overall in 2011/12 there were an estimated 293,879 opiate and/or crack users in England; in 2010/11 it was 298,752. There was a slight decrease in the number of opiate users and in the number of crack cocaine users. The decrease in the number of injectors was statistically significant. To examine whether the decrease in the opiate and / or crack use estimates is a significant one, the estimated difference can be examined in Table 6.

**Table 6: Estimated number of opiate and/or crack users by region in 2010/11 (sweep 7) and 2011/12 (sweep 8).**

Region	Sweep 7 – 2010/11			Sweep 8 – 2011/12			Difference		
	Estimate	Estimate		Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI	
East of England	23,851	21,264	26,738	21,952	20,103	24,379	-1,900	-5,531	1,624
East Midlands	24,208	22,398	26,054	24,085	22,134	25,947	-123	-2,965	2,602
London	52,623	50,844	54,660	54,985	53,831	57,864	2,362	478	5,770
North East	18,290	17,729	19,689	16,935	16,467	17,762	-1,355	-2,681	-392
North West	49,426	47,465	52,032	46,337	44,529	48,643	-3,089	-6,245	-171
South East	33,170	30,990	35,950	32,935	30,923	35,390	-234	-3,681	2,887
South West	27,379	26,334	29,106	26,051	25,034	27,561	-1,328	-3,193	401
West Midlands	34,498	32,693	36,591	34,329	32,487	36,644	-169	-2,827	2,700
Yorkshire and the Humber	35,308	33,841	37,294	36,270	34,926	38,301	963	-1,198	3,599
<b>ENGLAND</b>	<b>298,752</b>	<b>294,858</b>	<b>307,225</b>	<b>293,879</b>	<b>291,029</b>	<b>302,146</b>	<b>-4,873</b>	<b>-13,424</b>	<b>3,833</b>

\*↑  
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Table 6 shows that the decrease in the number of opiate and / or crack cocaine users in England between sweep 7 and sweep 8 was not statistically significant. There were statistically significant decreases in both the North East and the North West. There has been a statistically significant increase in London.

**Table 7: National estimates of opiate and/or crack use 2010/11 (sweep 7) and 2011/12 (sweep 8) by age group.**

	Sweep 7 – 2010/11			Sweep 8 – 2011/12			Difference			
	Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI		
15-24	41,508	39,859	43,141	32,628	31,168	36,992	-8,881	-10,219	-5,566	*↓
25-34	113,466	110,867	116,238	109,124	106,530	111,795	-4,342	-8,133	-417	*↓
35-64	143,778	140,952	147,311	152,127	148,576	155,156	8,350	2,903	12,439	*↑

Table 7 compares the age-specific opiate and/or crack cocaine estimates between sweep 7 and sweep 8. There were decreases in the 15 to 24 age group and the 25 to 34 age group estimates, both were statistically significant. There was, however, an increase in the number of opiate and/or crack cocaine users in the older 35 to 64 age group. This increase was statistically significant and may, in part, be due to an aging cohort of drug users moving from the 25 – 34 age group into the 35 – 64 age group.

## Concluding remarks

The results presented here are from the eighth sweep of a series of projects that used indirect techniques to produce the best possible estimates of an important and very hard to reach group. They show that there has been a decrease in the national estimate of problem drug use between 2010/11 and 2011/12, but this decrease was not statistically significant. There were statistically significant decreases in the younger (15 to 24) and middle (25 to 34) age group, but a statistically significant increase in the older (35 to 64) age group.

Further results and a detailed explanation of the methodology used to produce these estimates can be found here – <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/Estimates-of-the-Prevalence-of-Opiate-Use-and-or-Crack-Cocaine-Use-2011-12.aspx>

## References

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