

Into the Pleasuredome...

Multiple drugtaking is part of Brighton's Pleasuredome lifestyle. Its casualties became part of DAIS's caseload.

The 'Pleasuredome' is Brighton's central entertainment area with young people's clubs, pubs and music venues. An open drug market developed involving cannabis, LSD, ecstasy and amphetamines. Use of these drugs became part of the area's youth leisure culture and 'casualties' approached DAIS with problems related to stimulant and hallucinogen use. Health education strategies were devised to incorporate risk reduction messages into this group's lifestyle.

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NINE O'CLOCK on a warm summer evening and Brighton's 'Pleasuredome' marketplace is crowded with traders and customers. Business is brisk as style-conscious young people mill around the traders' pitches – but the goods on sale aren't look-alike designer labels or bootleg cassettes – they're drugs.

The 'Pleasuredome' is our nickname for the entertainment centre of Brighton – an area of less than a tenth of a square mile which forms the focus of local young people's leisure activities. A magnet for young people, the area is a complex network of narrow lanes and pedestrian precincts lined with boutiques, 'in' pubs, wine bars, live music venues, fast food outlets, bordered by Brighton pier with all its attractions and amusement arcades.

Use of drugs is considered by many young Pleasuredomers as a valid component of their leisure, along with their dress style, choice of friends, music and clubs.

Development of a visible, organised street drugs market catering specifically for Pleasuredome customers posed unique problems for the police. Because of the narrow, low age-band of both customers and traders, undercover work by plain clothed officers was impractical and intelligence from the market was of poor quality. The street market employed look outs, runners and minders; dealers used radio pagers and public call boxes to conduct business. Overt uniformed police action would have been fruitless.

As the only practical option, an expensive, labour-intensive video surveillance operation led to the conviction of a number of the street dealers for possession and supply of cannabis, amphetamine sulphate, ecstasy and LSD.

The dealers' response was to retreat from the streets into the clubs and pubs of the Pleasuredome. In April a TV programme demonstrated that it was still possible to score drugs in less than a minute by just

asking any young person walking in the Pleasuredome.

Last year DAIS began to see an increasing stream of young drug casualties from the Pleasuredome. They came with the classic symptoms of problematic use of hallucinogenic drugs or stimulants – paranoia, disorientation, panic attacks, depression, anxiety, flashbacks, or simply trips that didn't stop – reminding older staff of festival medical tents in the '60s.

A younger DAIS worker commented that the Pleasuredome drug scene had "brought in a different and nicer type of drug user into DAIS". To test whether they really were "different" we examined the data sheets for 92 Pleasuredome 'casualties' who presented to DAIS from June to December 1990.

“Nice, middle class young people, but at weekends drug bingeing – the 1990s version of the lager lout”

Most lived within a 15-mile radius and were aged 18-22. Equal numbers of men and women use the Pleasuredome, but more young men than women came to DAIS. This may be explained by more frequent drug use among young men, or by male peer groups encouraging excessive drug use while young women's groups discourage it as unacceptable.

The casualties were almost all in employment or further education. Living at home with their parents meant that, even on low wages, they had significant disposable income for leisure. A very small percentage either had a history of offending or a criminal record.

Over 90 per cent of the young Pleasuredomers said they came to DAIS because of problems caused by the use of either cannabis, amphetamine sulphate, or

