

FIRST IT'S BOOZE, NOW HEROIN'S OK TOO...

WHAT NEXT?



By MIKE MacEACHERAN

STUNNED politicians and anti-drug campaigners hit out yesterday after an Executive-funded report claimed heroin can be HARMLESS.

Researchers at Glasgow University discovered that 70 per cent of heroin addicts in the Glasgow area.

Their findings were revealed just days after First Minister Jack McConnell told schoolkids in Inverness to "get drunk once in a while".

The study showed that 70 per cent of the Glasgow-based addicts who had been using heroin for seven years did not suffer any drug-related health problems.

But the latest figures from the Executive show that there were 317 drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2003 - including 175 involving heroin/morphine.

Yet the new report, commissioned by the Scottish Executive's Chief Scientist Office, said that ongoing problems with heroin were 'rare'.

Spiral

It showed that almost half of users described their health as 'good' with only seven per cent describing it as 'bad' or 'fairly bad'.

Only 15 per cent thought their heroin use had been associated with family problems.

And most of the users, a third of whom looked after children, were satisfied with their health.

Only one of the addicts questioned had seen a long-term relationship break up.

Dr David Shewan, co-director of the Centre for the Study of Violence at Glasgow Caledonian University, claimed the drug did not always lead to a downward spiral for users.

He said: "The chemical properties of specific substances, including heroin, should not be assumed to inevitably lead to addictive and destructive patterns of drug use."

Last night the report provoked a furious reaction. SNP health spokeswoman Shona Robison blasted: "It seems like a waste of money to me and raises questions about how the Executive goes about commissioning research."

"It is not the first time they have been

questioned about how they throw money at projects.

"The fact is that heroin has a dramatic impact on individuals, especially when you take into account the heroin-related crime many use to feed their habit."

"Heroin has devastated communities across Scotland."

Alastair Ramsay, of Scotland Against Drugs, added: "The implications of problematic heroin use affect us all when many of them choose to fund their habit by criminal means."

And Andy Fairfield, a manager at Phoenix House drug rehabilitation centre in Glasgow, hit out: "We treat hundreds of people each year whose lives have been affected in some way by

their addiction to heroin - some have lost their jobs and families, or been involved in crime."

Figures released last August show that there are a massive 51,582 heroin users in Scotland.

A spokesman for the Scottish Executive yesterday played down the report, which they described as "a very small study of an atypical group of heroin addicts".

He added that the research would not be used to formulate new drug legislation or lead to heroin prescription.

The report comes after The Scottish Sun pictured Kate Moss's heroin addict boyfriend Pete Doherty, left, looking spaced out.

Pals have urged her to ditch the rocker for fear he'll drag her down.

● DO you agree that heroin can be safe? Phone 0141 420 9208 or write to The Scottish Sun, 124 Portman St, Kinning Park, Glasgow G41 1EJ.

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Booze message . . . McConnell