

# Trends in the prevalence of psychoactive substance use in the Russian Federation

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Between 1991 and 2000, the number of drug addicts in the Russian Federation increased tenfold and the number of people abusing narcotic drugs increased by a factor of 6.4. According to the resulting indicator, the number increased by a factor of 7.7 as the population of the country fell by 2 per cent during that period. The prevalence of drug addiction among women is rapidly increasing. Between 1993 and 2000, the number of women drug addicts rose by a factor of 12.6. Adolescents are still the social group exhibiting the most prevalent use of and dependency on narcotics and other psychoactive substances. Over the past decade, not only has there been a quantitative (seventeenfold) increase in the prevalence of drug use among adolescents, but there has also been a qualitative change: the number of adolescents using drugs has grown and the proportion with an established dependency on drugs has increased. The number of adolescents seeking treatment for the first time is almost twice as high as the equivalent figure for the population as a whole (84.5 per 100,000 adolescents compared to 50.6 per 100,000 of the population as a whole).*

*Research conducted in cities in the Russian Federation has shown that there is a clear upward trend, demonstrated by both direct and indirect indicators, in the prevalence of narcotics use in all of them. The situation requires urgent action because the incidence of hepatitis and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection among users is growing and the proportion of intravenous drug users is increasing.*

*Keywords:* illicit drugs; drug addiction; incidence; prevalence; Russian Federation; dynamics.

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The past decade has been characterized by a sharp deterioration in the drug situation in the Russian Federation, which poses a threat to the country's national security. By the beginning of 2001, 2.1 per cent of the population was under clinical observation in the country's drug clinics: more than three million patients (or 2,095.4 per 100,000 of the population) were suffering from alcoholism, drug addiction or substance abuse, including a group receiving preventive care.

A comparison of statistical data on alcoholics and drug addicts shows that alcoholism is much more widespread among the population than drug addiction. However, two factors must be taken into account here: first, there is more latent drug addiction than latent alcoholism and, second, the social risks associated with drug addiction are greater than those associated with alcoholism.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, drug addiction has become a much more topical issue, both in terms of the health of the population and in terms of society's awareness of the problem. According to sociological data for 2000-2001, the spread of drug addiction was the top social problem in many regions of the country. There are many reasons for this phenomenon, such as the aftermath of the war in Afghanistan, the porosity of the borders of the Russian Federation and the liberalization of the economy, and most specialists give discouraging projections of how the situation will develop.

The present article is intended to provide an assessment of the drug use situation in the Russian Federation, based on data compiled by the Ministry of Health. Drug treatment in the Russian Federation is provided by State drug hospitals, clinics, special surgeries, drug treatment departments in psychiatric institutions and by a network of private drug treatment centres. Information on patients who seek treatment from State drug clinics is included in the statistical records of the Ministry of Health. The following main groups of patients are registered in the statistics: (a) those diagnosed with alcohol dependency syndrome (alcoholism); (b) those diagnosed with narcotic drug dependency syndrome (drug addiction); (c) those diagnosed with non-narcotic substance dependency syndrome (substance addiction) and (d) those using alcohol, narcotic and non-narcotic substances to harmful effect (alcohol and narcotic and non-narcotic substance abuse).

According to official statistical data, the number of drug addicts under observation in drug treatment clinics increased almost ninefold in 10 years: in 2000, it stood at 269,093, or 185.8 per 100,000 of the population, whereas in 1991, it was 21.2 per 100,000 (figure I). In 22 territories, the level of this morbidity indicator was higher than the national average for the Russian Federation. The Samara region had the highest number (515.6 per 100,000 of the population), followed by the Tomsk (495.0) and Kemerovo (442.6) regions.

The number of people in the Russian Federation seeking treatment for drug addiction for the first time reached 50.6 per 100,000 of the population in 2000, having increased thirteenfold in 10 years (figure I). The number of drug addicts seeking treatment for the first time increased as a proportion of the overall number under observation, from 18 per cent in 1991 to 27 per cent in 2000.

Along with the growth in drug addiction, the number of people abusing narcotic drugs is also increasing. The number of people under observation in drug treatment clinics increased by a factor of 6.4 between 1991 and 2000 (from 13.5 to 86.9 per 100,000 of the population) (figure II).

Of the total number of those under observation in drug treatment clinics as a result of narcotic drug abuse, the proportion who had sought help for the first time was 41 per cent. In 2000, in the Russian Federation as a whole, the number of people abusing narcotic substances who sought treatment for the first time in their

Figure I. Number of drug addicts registered at year end and number of first-time diagnoses in the Russian Federation: change over the period 1991-2000 (Per 100,000 of the population)

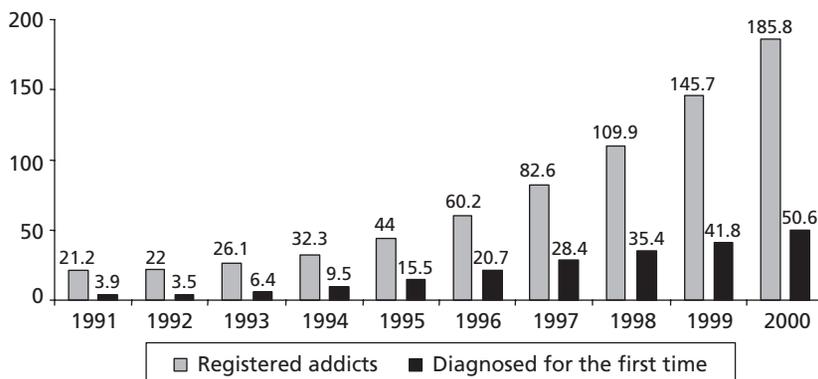
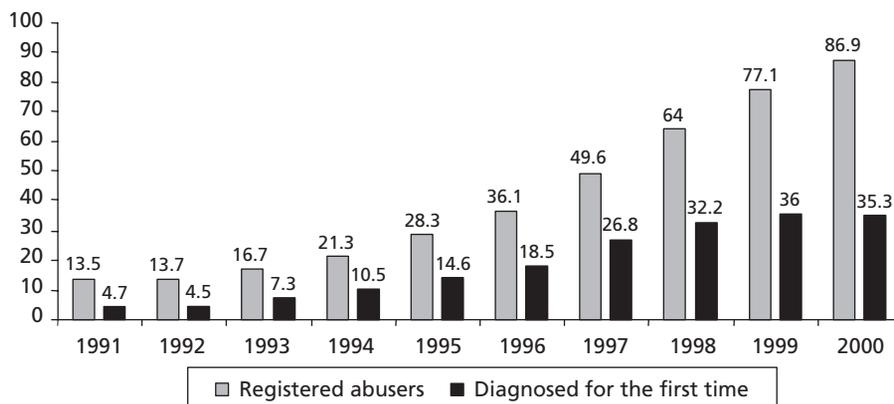


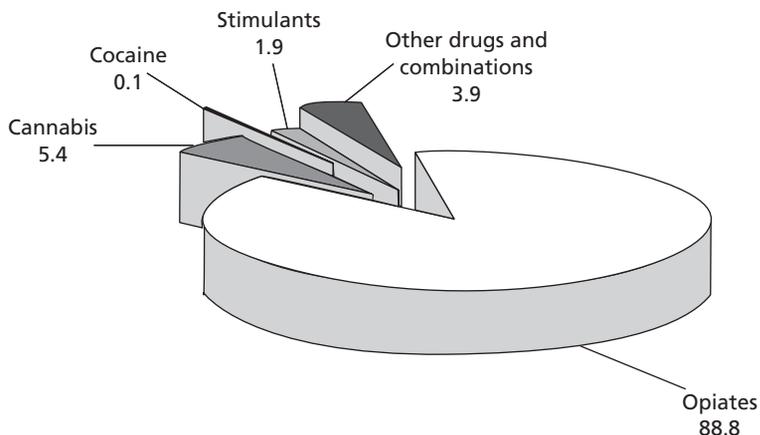
Figure II. Number of narcotic drug abusers registered at year end and number of first-time diagnoses in the Russian Federation: change over the period 1991-2000 (Per 100,000 of the population)



lives was 51,157, or 35.3 per 100,000 of the population. This indicator showed an upward trend over nine years, and between 1991 and 1999 it increased by a factor of 7.7 (in 1991, the number was 4.7 per 100,000 of the population). In 2000, the indicator was close to the level of the previous year (figure II).

The following is a breakdown of the narcotic drugs used in the Russian Federation, based on data about those who sought drug treatment in 2000: opioids accounted for 90.1 per cent of the narcotics used, cannabinoids accounted for 4.3 per cent, other narcotic drugs and their combinations 3.6 per cent and psychostimulants 2 per cent (figure III).

Figure III. Types of narcotic drug used by those undergoing treatment in the Russian Federation in 2000 (Percentage)



Note: Percentages do not add up because of rounding.

The prevalence of substance abuse is a less pressing problem because for a long period there was no substantial increase in the incidence of illnesses caused by non-medical use of non-narcotic substances in the Russian Federation. Between 1991 and 2000, the number of substance abusers who were under observation in drug treatment clinics increased by a factor of 1.9, from 4.7 to 8.4 per 100,000 of the population. In total, 12,821 diagnosed substance abusers were registered in the country's medical institutions in 2000.

The use of narcotics is becoming increasingly prevalent among women. At the end of 2000, there were 41,000 women drug addicts under observation in drug treatment clinics in the Russian Federation. That number represents 53.9 per 100,000 of the female population (figure IV).

The prevalence of drug addiction among women is subject to significant regional variations: there is a more than tenfold difference between the highest rate of prevalence and the lowest (in the Samara region it is 172.5 per 100,000 of the female population, in the Kemerovo region 135.7 and in the Tyumen region 129.6).

The change in the above indicator is caused primarily by the change in the number of women drug addicts who have been diagnosed for the first time in their lives. Between 1993 (1.2 per 100,000 of the female population) and 2000 (16.1 per 100,000) the number of women registered for the first time with a diagnosed drug addiction increased by a factor of 13.4 (figure V).

One of the main reasons for the deterioration in child and adolescent health is the increasing prevalence of self-destructive forms of behaviour, primarily the

Figure IV. Number of drug addicts registered at year end in the Russian Federation: change over the period 1991-2000 (Per 100,000 of the population)

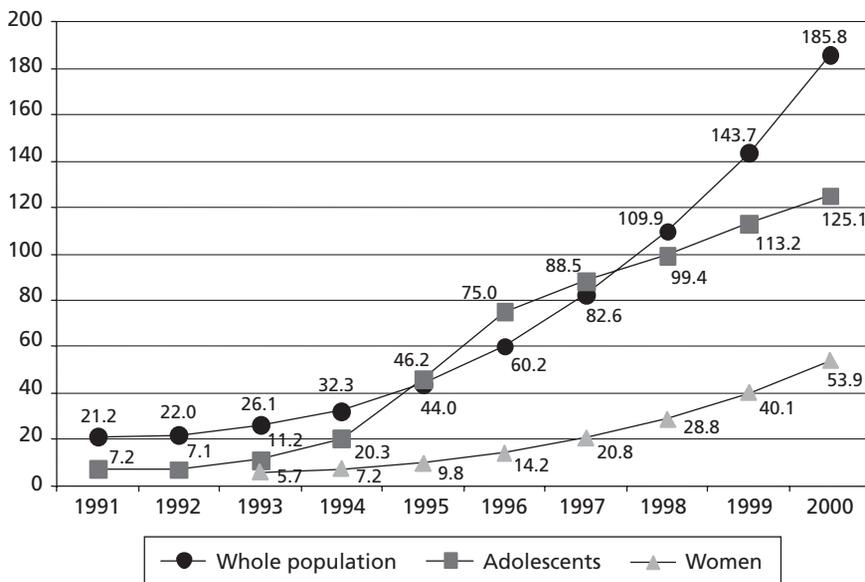
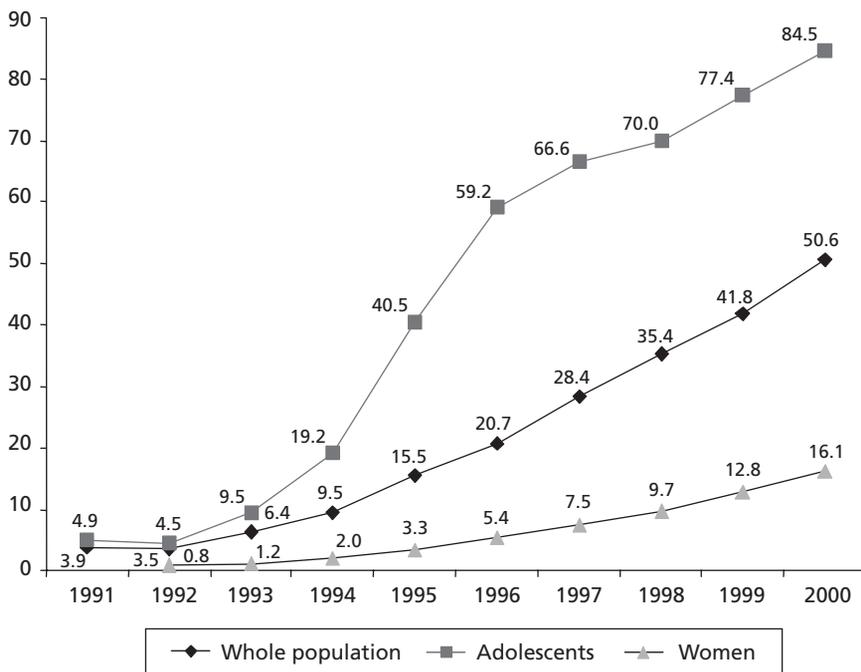


Figure V. Number of first-time diagnoses of drug addiction in the Russian Federation: change over the period 1991-2000 (Per 100,000 of the population)



use of psychoactive substances. The contemporary youth subculture is replete with information that, in one form or another, advertises the use of narcotic substances.

It is considered that drug use among adolescents is most typically occasional and non-dependent. Adolescents seek to try out a great variety of substances on themselves, from alcohol and inhalants to hashish and hallucinogens. For most of them, this period of "testing" passes as they grow up. However, for some adolescents occasional abuse becomes systematic and a psychological and physical dependency then develops. These people subsequently make up the majority of narcotics users.

In 2000, a total of 9,062 adolescent drug addicts, 125.1 per 100,000 of the adolescent population, were under observation in drug treatment clinics (figure IV). The indicator for 2000 increased seventeenfold in comparison with that for 1991. In 2000, the indicator for 18 territories was higher than the national average and in eight of those it was at least twice as high. The highest indicator was recorded in the Irkutsk region (604.6 per 100,000 of the adolescent population).

The number of adolescents seeking treatment for drug addiction for the first time went up from 4.9 per 100,000 in 1991 to 84.5 in 2000, also a seventeenfold increase (figure V).

Narcotic drug abuse indicators also show a discouraging trend: between 1991 and 2000, the number of adolescents under observation as a result of narcotic drug abuse increased fivefold.

In 2000, a forecast was made of the number of people in the 0-17 age group expected to seek treatment for drug addiction. For the analysis and forecasting, dynamic data sets of patients were selected, calculated per 100,000 of the population of the relevant age, because data sets standardized in this way are free of fluctuations in population numbers and therefore show a more stable trend. According to the patterns that emerged, the incidence of addiction in the 0-17 age group may reach 51.4 per 100,000 of the population by 2003 and the number seeking treatment for drug addiction for the first time may increase to 27.2 per 100,000. Therefore, if existing socio-economic trends are maintained, the level of these indicators will rise by 42 per cent compared to those for 2000.

Since 1994, a multi-city project has been operating in the Russian Federation, in conjunction with the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe, for the purpose of monitoring and assessing the drug situation in 11 Russian Federation cities. The data presented include a comparative assessment of data from the State records of the health and internal affairs system for 1995-2000, outlining the drug treatment situation in eight cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar, Orenburg, Yaroslavl, Novosibirsk, Kemerovo and Yekaterinburg.

As a result of the research conducted in the 11 cities, indicators emerged showing the pattern of change in the spread of drug use among the population:

(a) The number of people seeking drug treatment for the first time increased by factors of 1.3 to 5.7, while the national average was 2.5 (table 1);

(b) The proportion of women among those who sought treatment for the first time increased (by 2-10 per cent, compared to a national average increase of 3 per cent) (table 2);

(c) The incidence of viral hepatitis does not follow a consistent pattern. The indicators for Orenburg and Yaroslavl increased significantly by a factor of 9 and 6 respectively. For the remaining cities they increased by a factor of between 1.3 and 2, with the exception of Yekaterinburg and Kemerovo (since 1996), where the indicator fell slightly. The national average indicator rose by a factor of 1.2 (table 3);

(d) The number of people with HIV infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome-related illnesses is increasing in all the cities studied, but the growth patterns are not uniform: in Moscow it increased by a factor of 198, in Yekaterinburg by a factor of 174, in Yaroslavl by a factor of 88.6, in St. Petersburg by a factor of 28.5, in Kemerovo by a factor of 10.2 and in Krasnodar by a factor of 7.8. The national average for the number of people infected with HIV has increased by a factor of 78.1 (table 4);

(e) In all the cities studied, the mortality rate among registered drug addicts increased compared to 1996 by a factor of between 3 (St. Petersburg) and 14 (Orenburg), with the exception of Krasnodar, where it fell slightly (table 5);

(f) The number of drug-related arrests, including arrests for drug dealing, is increasing in most of the cities studied, as in the country as a whole (table 6).

Table 1. Number of drug addicts, substance abusers and abusers of narcotics and other psychoactive substances seeking treatment for the first time  
(Per 100,000 of the population)

City	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Moscow	34.0	54.0	82.3	122.9	135.2	115.9
St. Petersburg	12.3	12.2	30.5	55.6	64.3	62.1
Krasnodar	212.9	213.1	250.0	260.0	266.8	274.8
Orenburg	77.6	81.2	120.3	206.6	404.2	438.8
Yaroslavl	6.9	7.8	12.2	25.8	32.7	34.1
Novosibirsk	64.2	171.3	179.1	73.1	102.1	105.4
Kemerovo	46.9	44.5	77.8	190.8	130.0	181.1
Yekaterinburg	36.8	51.2	38.5	64.5	132.9	129.8
Russian Federation	36.6	47.4	67.3	79.0	83.4	90.5

**Table 2. Proportion of women among drug addicts, substance abusers and abusers of narcotics and other psychoactive substances seeking treatment for the first time (Percentage)**

City	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Moscow	13.1	13	17.9	18.5	19.8	19.7
St. Petersburg	19.6	20.6	22.2	23.6	22.2	26.7
Krasnodar	11.01	11.3	12.5	12.3	12.5	16.0
Orenburg	2.7	7.2	8.2	6.7	8.3	9.9
Yaroslavl	11.6	18.3	15.6	17.5	13.1	13.5
Novosibirsk	10.4	12.1	12.9	15.01	16.6	19.5
Kemerovo	14.2	24.5	7.7	. .	23.8	19.9
Yekaterinburg	13.1	14.3	17.9	13.0	18.1	18.4
Russian Federation	11.9	14.2	13.4	15.9	14.3	15.2

Note: Two dots (. .) indicate that data are not available.

**Table 3. Incidence of viral hepatitis (Per 100,000 of the population)**

City	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Moscow	31.6	40.05	61.2	65.03	61.1	40.27
St. Petersburg	40.0	33.4	23.6	29.8	86.9	78.1
Krasnodar	73.5	71.4	55.2	67.0	111.3	103.3
Orenburg	54.6	44.2	54.2	78.4	199.6	487.8
Yaroslavl	12.2	12.7	23.2	38.0	50.76	67.31
Novosibirsk	65.1	116.6	137.3	115.5	91.2	111.3
Kemerovo	. .	103.5	85.2	33.6	87.0	55.2
Yekaterinburg	95.6	97.5	99.1	99.3	189.8	76.2
Russian Federation	35.6	35.9	36.8	35.6	43.35	42.5

Note: Two dots (. .) indicate that data are not available.

**Table 4. Incidence of AIDS and HIV infection  
(Per 100,000 of the population)**

City	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Moscow	0.64	0.76	1.00	5.4	76.5	126.9
St. Petersburg	4.7	5.6	7.4	9.0	17.5	134.0
Krasnodar	0	1.6	2.1	6.8	8.2	12.4
Orenburg	..	..	0.38	0.38	6.1	..
Yaroslavl	1.3	0.8	1.77	3.4	20.8	115.2
Novosibirsk	0.21	0.87	1.07	2.36	2.7	..
Kemerovo	..	0.9	0.6	5.6	4.3	9.2
Yekaterinburg	0.9	1.0	1.6	1.8	3.6	156.3
Russian Federation	0.77	0.97	0.68	7.2	12.6	60.17

Note: Two dots ( . . ) indicate that data are not available.

**Table 5. Mortality rate among drug addicts, substance abusers and abusers  
of narcotics and other psychoactive substances  
(Per 100,000 of the population)**

City	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Moscow	..	1.21	1.9	3.3	3.77	4.1
St. Petersburg	1.5	1.9	2.1	1.8	2.9	5.9
Krasnodar	6	8.2	6.5	4.6	3.1	6.4
Orenburg	0.57	1.7	5.11	8.5	13.4	23.8
Yaroslavl	2 persons	0.48	0.81	2.75	..	..
Novosibirsk	0.28	3.65	3.93	5.5	9.8	19.1
Kemerovo	2.4	6.6	10.6	15.4	15.3	50.9
Yekaterinburg	6.3	5.2	5.2	10.7	21.2	30.6
Russian Federation	..	1.31	1.5	1.9	2.6	4.8

Note: Two dots ( . . ) indicate that data are not available.

**Table 6. Arrests for illegal drug dealing  
(Per 100,000 of the population)**

City	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Moscow	27.9	43.0	67.9	95.7	146.2	168.0
St. Petersburg	74.3	86.3	96.2	..	170.4	..
Krasnodar	255.4	124.8	813.5	231.3	..	243.2
Orenburg	28.9	55.9	..	..	183.4	186.4
Yaroslavl	28.7	29.6	35.5	..	91.3	95.6
Novosibirsk	..	..	187.7	..	..	295.5
Kemerovo	40.1	55.6	228.5	872.0	202.8	210.4
Yekaterinburg	132.6	170.8	459.8	522.5	802.9	..
Russian Federation	50.6	54.3	77.6	92.0	88.5	92.6

Note: Two dots ( . ) indicate that data are not available.

The research carried out showed that, in the Russian Federation as a whole and in all the cities studied, there is a clear upward trend in the prevalence of narcotics use, which is demonstrated by all the indicators analysed. The situation is so alarming that it requires urgent action because the incidence of hepatitis and HIV infection among users is growing, the proportion of intravenous drug users is increasing and the proportion of women and young people involved is also rising.

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