

# Psychological characteristics of opiate and non-opiate dependent adolescents in community drug treatment programmes



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# Introduction

- Psychiatric co-morbidity is common in adolescents with SUD and is of great public and clinical concern
- There remains a dearth of opiate focused literature in relation to adolescent substance abuse, particularly in Ireland



providing



adapting



nurturing



developing



leading



informing

# Relevant literature...

- Subramaniam et al (2010)- 475 youth with OUD and MAPU compared to youth with MAPU only (co-morbidity, psychiatric symptoms, trauma/victimization)
- Subramaniam et al (2009)-more depressive symptoms
- Clemmey, Payne & Fishman (2004)- more baseline problems
- Winters et al (2008)- Poorer outcomes
- ROSIE (Research Outcome Study in Ireland, 2009)
- TEDS report (SAMHSA, 2009)-32% of adolescent admissions to treatment centres reported a co-occurring psychiatric disorder and adolescent females were more likely than males to report a co-morbid disorder (37 vs 27%)

# Gender Literature

- (Edokpolo et al, 2010)- higher levels of mental health problems among females
- Brands et al (2005) female heroin users reported higher rates of psychiatric disorders (depression, bipolar, suicide attempts)
- Wilson & Widom (2009) - Generalised behaviour problem
- In a study by Rodriguez-Llera et al (2006), females drug users were more likely to have mood, anxiety and eating disorders
- Peeples and Wilkins (2007) suggest that research should focus on the vulnerability to drug use which is unique to female adolescents

# Our Aims

- Determine whether mental health symptoms are greater in adolescents with opiate abuse
- Explore gender differences in mental health symptoms among opiate abusing adolescents

# Design

- Participants
  - Adolescents attending one of two outpatient substance abuse treatment programs
  - Aged 14 to 18 inclusive
- Measures
  - The Becks Youth Inventory (2nd edition) – a self report scale of 100 items which accumulates in five scales measuring levels of:
    - Depression
    - Anxiety
    - Anger
    - Disruptive behaviour
    - Self-concept

# Drug Treatment Centre Board

- Dublin City centre
- Young Persons Programme
- Multi-disciplinary team project
- Treatment plans usually involve the prescribing of opiate substitution treatments and psycho-social intervention

## YoDA

- Community drug project of the Health Service Executive situated in South West Dublin
- Multi-disciplinary team project

# Results

- 53 abusing heroin, of whom 21 (40%) were female
- 71 patients in the non-opiate user group, of whom 17 (24%) were female
- The mean ages of the two groups were 17.1 years and 16.1 years respectively



- Non-opiate users

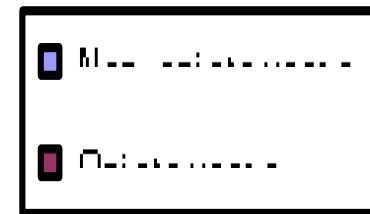
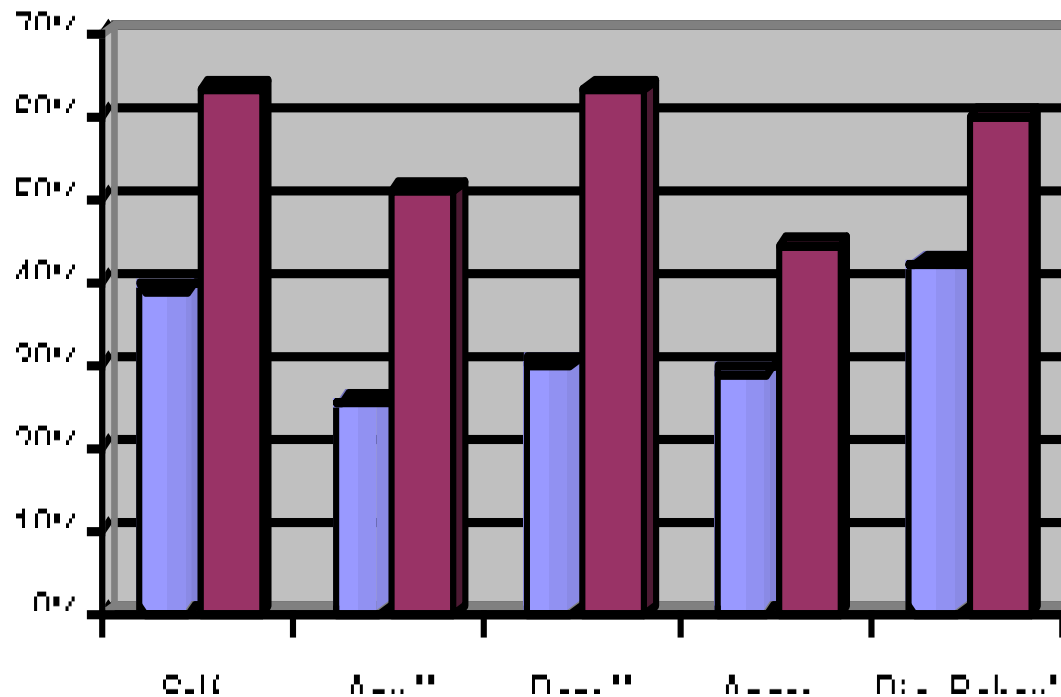
- polysubstance use was the norm

- 36 (51%) presenting with problematic use of two substances
- 18 (25%) presenting with problematic use of three substances
- The substances most commonly abused by this group were alcohol (96%), cannabis (72%), cocaine (15%), ecstasy (13%) and benzodiazepines (6%)

- Opiate users

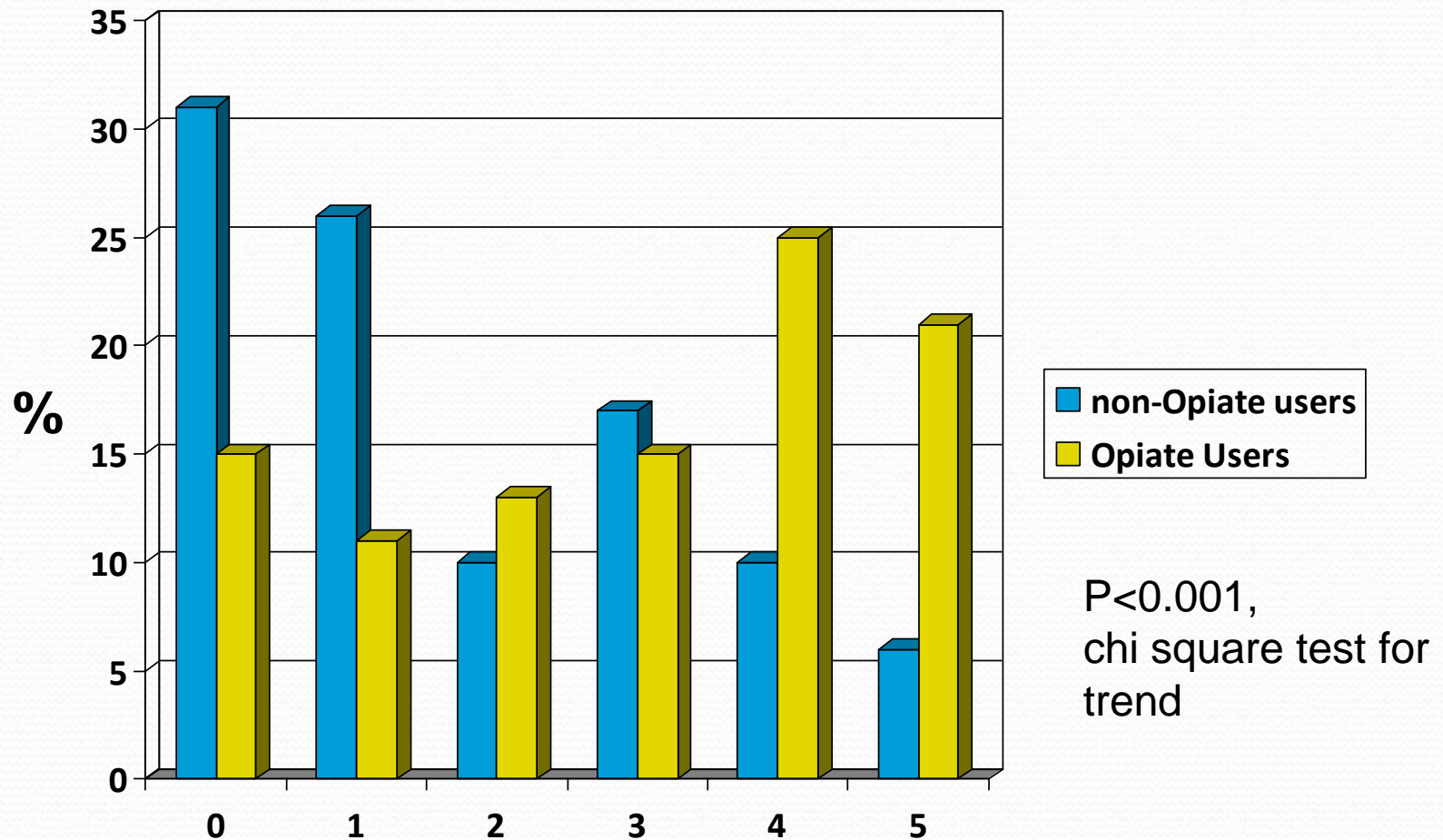
- 37 (70%) were commenced on methadone
- 10 (19%) commenced on buprenorphine
- 6 (11%) were treated with psychosocial interventions alone

# BYI-II scores: Opiate vs Non-Opiate Using Adolescents with Moderate/Severe Problems

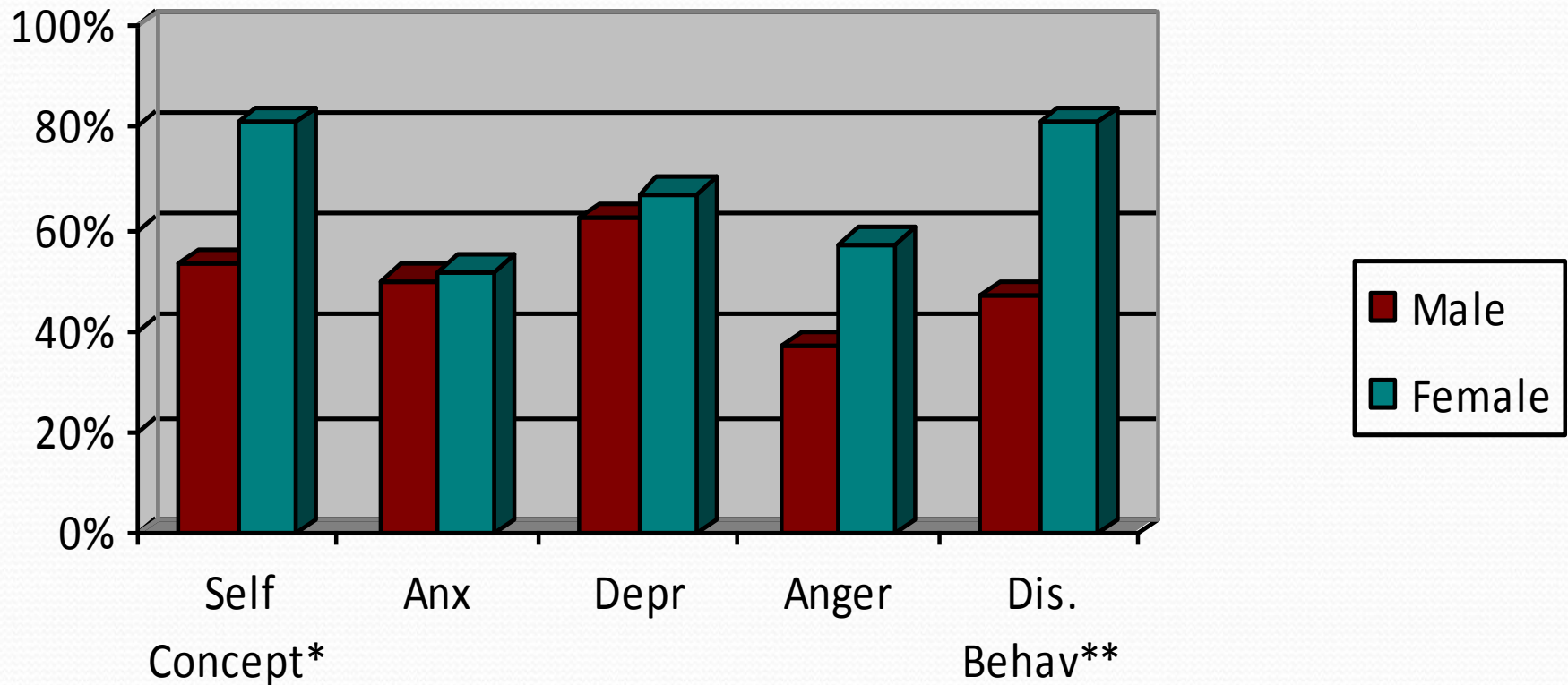


(\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ )

# Number of problems in Moderate to severe range



# Male vs Female Opiate Using Adolescents with Moderate/ Severe Problems



(\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ , \* =  $p < 0.05$ )

# Discussion

- Mental health problems were common but not universal
- Internalising problems are more prevalent among adolescent opiate users than their non-opiate using counterparts
- There was a slight excess of externalising problems, but not anger, in the opiate abusing group
- Unlike the non-opiate using group, depression and anxiety problems were equally common in male and female opiate users
- Self concept problems and disruptive behaviour were more common in female opiate users

# Limitations

- The BYI-II was used rather than DSM-IV psychiatric diagnosis, although it is well received in terms of its validity and reliability
- The small number of clients
- Causal relationships cannot be stipulated

# Clinical Implications

- Adolescents with substance abuse problems present with heterogeneous co-morbid mental health problems
- While problems occur in all groups, internalising problems are particularly common in both male and female opiate using teenagers
- Adolescent addiction services require input from staff competent in the assessment and management of co-morbid mental health problems



Thank you for listening!