

From Dr A Majid Katme

Nearly a million employees in the UK 'have drugs in their system at work'

- Between 2007 and 2011 screening firm sees 43% increase in number of workers testing positive for drug use



Adults aged between 25 and 34 were more likely to test positive for Class A drugs including cocaine

More than a million Britons are going to work with drugs in their system, a study suggests.

Around one in 30 employees tested at work last year had taken narcotics, with the most commonly-used drugs being cannabis, opiates and cocaine, figures from a drug-testing firm have revealed.

Drug-use among employees was up 43 per cent from 2007, rising to 3.23 per cent of the workforce last year.

The country's most senior police officer told employers earlier this year to consider drug-testing middle-class professionals to help stem Britain's spiralling cocaine trade.

Bernard Hogan-Howe, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said affluent workers were fuelling the £1billion annual market in the drug. He said many of them are working in roles, including surgeons, teachers and drivers, where cocaine use risks lives.

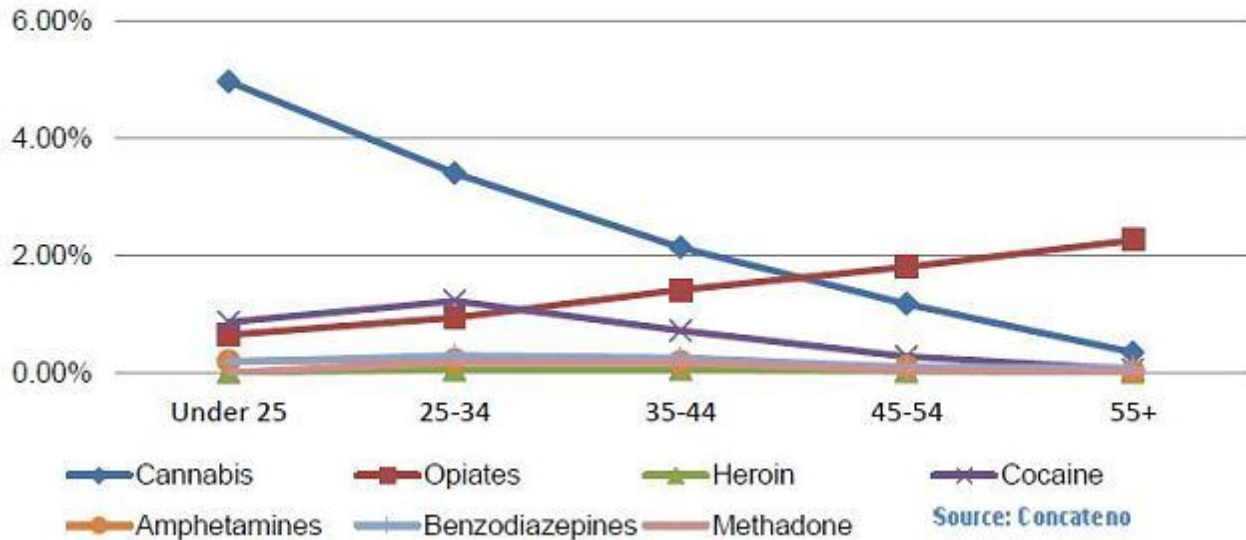
The Scotland Yard chief said he did not want to be operated on by a 'high' surgeon or travel on a bus driven by a cocaine addict.

The latest figures come from an analysis of 1.7 million tests carried out by the company Concateno for 856 UK

employers, including public transport firms, freight hauliers and the emergency services. Its laboratory director, Dr Claire George, said: 'These are conservative figures when you consider how many companies do not have a screening programme in place.'

But more and more businesses are seeking help to set up drug and alcohol-screening programmes, she added. Mr Hogan-Howe has urged bosses to consider introducing compulsory regular drug- testing as a condition of employment.

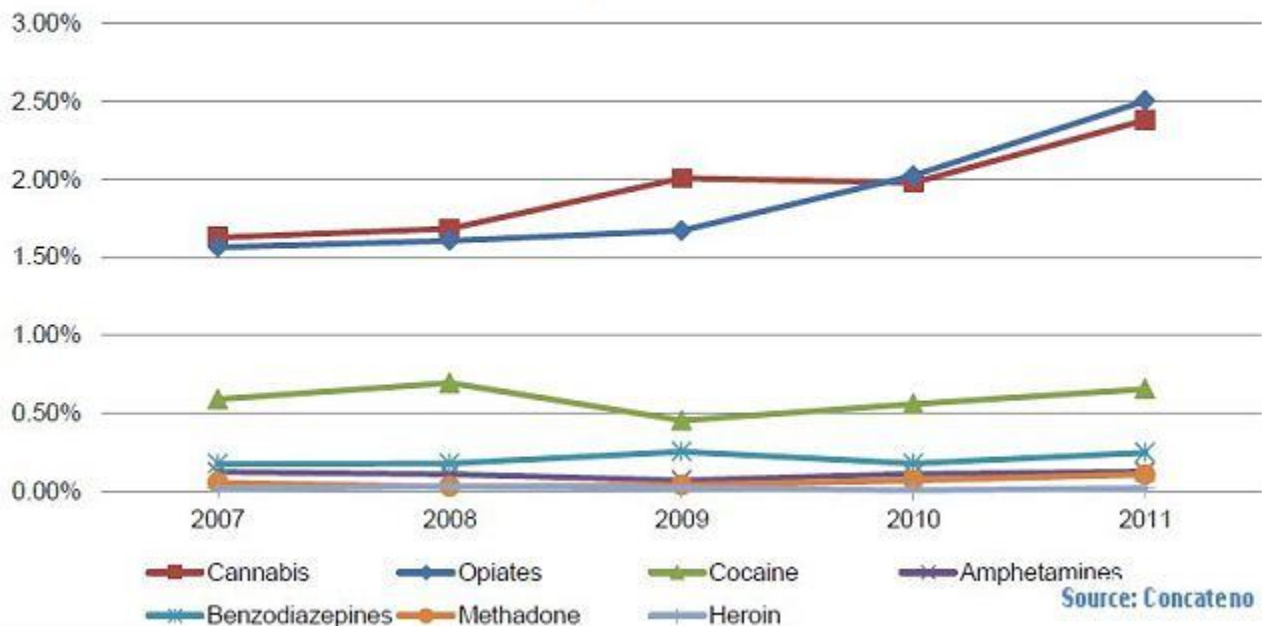
Workplace Drug Prevalence Across Age Groups 2007 - 2011



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Cannabis use was highest in under25s, while opiates were more commonly used by the over 55s

Workplace Drug Prevalence Over Time



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While cocaine use dropped between 2008 and 2009 it has steadily increased again since

He said those employees who test positive could be given the choice between changing their lifestyle or having the police informed.

The latest study found the most likely age group to test positive for Class A drugs were 25 to 34-year-olds – not the under-25s – as they were likely to have more access to disposable income.

The Government is desperate to stem the cocaine trade in the drug because it is co-ordinated by powerful gangs and fuels low-level crime.

Speaking at the think-tank Policy Exchange in May, Mr Hogan-Howe said employers don't know how many drug addicts they employ.

Speaking about the thriving market for drugs, he added: 'Where does somebody think these millions of pounds come from?

'The cocaine-use money is coming from people that are employed, generally, or from something getting stolen.

'A significant amount is coming from people that hold a job down.'

The total size of Britain's drugs market is estimated at £6billion a year, with up to 30 tonnes of cocaine, worth up to £1billion, imported annually.