

## No immediate effect on cost of UK heroin from bumper Afghan poppy crop

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**The increased 2006 poppy harvest in Afghanistan will not immediately flood UK streets with cheap heroin**, although the impact may be felt some months down the line, says DrugScopes Harry Shapiro.

Speaking to the Independent, Shapiro said: "The price of heroin has been consistently low for several years and the supply line is very long, so we aren't expecting an immediate effect on the price of heroin on the streets. It could take six or nine months to feed through. The reason heroin is cheap can be summed up in one word: availability. It is the law of supply and demand. There has been an increase in supply, and so far as we know - though obviously we can't know this for certain - the number of problem users has remained roughly constant at between 250,000 and 280,000.

"What has gone up is the amount the Government is spending on treating addiction, because it is seen as a law and order issue, and that has kept the number of heroin users constant. It also seems to have pushed up their average age, by getting young people off heroin.

"We have seen years when we expected a fall in the price of heroin because of a bumper harvest in Afghanistan. Then in 2001, when the Taliban clamped down, we expected the price to rise, but that didn't happen because the gangs had stockpiles, and supply was interrupted only for one year and recovered in 2002."

Afghanistan is the source of approximately 95 per cent of the UKs heroin, and the revival of the poppy trade since the fall of the Taliban has kept street costs low. In a research paper published by the House of Commons library, it was acknowledged that the economic difficulties faced by Afghan farmers since the Taliban were overthrown had led to a rise in poppy cultivation.

**Source:** [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)

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