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More than a third of people who die following a drug overdose are on substance substitutes like methadone at the time, a damning new report has revealed.

Analysis of drug-related deaths in 2016 revealed 37 per cent of the 865 people who lost their lives to an overdose were on such prescriptions.

And the vast majority of those had been receiving methadone for more than a year, the report confirmed.

That means 303 people who died as a result of a drug overdose in 2016 were already taking a substitute substance prescribed by the NHS.

That compares to 33 per cent (213) people in 2015, and 21 per cent (89 people) in 2009.

Today's 'National Drug-related Deaths Database (Scotland) Report' confirmed figures previously reported that the number of people dying as a result of substance abuse is on the rise.

It stated that the "rate is estimated to be the highest in Europe", and revealed: "Further, the trajectory of Scotland's drug-related death rate suggests that deaths will continue to increase in the future."

Most deaths in 2016 were male, although the trend of female fatalities is rising, accounting for 29 per cent in comparison to 21 per cent in 2009.

According to the data, 464 children lost a parent or parental-style figure to drugs in that year.

It revealed that 18 per cent of those who died – largely women – had been the victim of domestic abuse, while 77 per cent were already in contact with NHS and council support services.

The report also criticised the Scottish Government's Naloxone scheme, which hands addicts a kit to take when they think they might have overdosed.

It said: "Existing take-home Naloxone provision has not prevented substantial increases in opioid-related deaths in Scotland."

Fresh fears have also been raised about the role of so-called legal highs.

According to the report, Novel Psychoactive Substances deaths trebled within a year, from 112 to 346.

**Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:**

“These figures are hugely distressing, and prove the need more than ever for a new drugs strategy.

“Whatever is happening across Scotland isn’t working, and hasn’t worked for years.

“As a result, Scotland has the highest drugs death rate in Europe, and it’s only going to get worse unless urgent action is taken.

“The fact so many people are being prescribed methadone, and then dying with it still in their system, is nothing short of a disgrace.

“This is what happens when you lazily park people on a drug-substitute with no prospect of ever beating the habit altogether.

“Any new strategy also has to take into account so-called legal highs.

“The fact the number of deaths from these new substances trebled in the space of a year shows us all the scale of that particular challenge.

“The Scottish Conservatives have consistently called for a new recovery-focused drugs strategy for Scotland.

“It’s time SNP ministers got round the table to seek new ideas and interventions to address this tragic loss of life and the impact it has on individuals, families, and communities across Scotland.”