



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

NSW 'PARTY DRUG' ECSTASY USERS – 2002 STUDY

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Regular NSW 'party drug' users are experimenting with an increased variety of different drugs than in previous years according to preliminary research released today.

The results of the NSW Party Drug Trends study will be released today at the NDARC Annual Symposium, which will be held at the Masonic Centre in Sydney. The study has been conducted in NSW each year since 2000, and the results are comparable to a study conducted in 1997. A full report of the findings will be released early in 2003.

The study, which interviewed 88 NSW party drug users, collected information on the demographic characteristics and patterns of drug use among regular party drug users, their criminal behaviour, and perceived party drug-related harm. It also involved interviewing key informants who had regular contact with "party drug" users, and comparisons with indicator data such as seizure purity, arrests data, and calls to drug help lines.

The results of this year's study indicated that an increasing proportion of the party drug users interviewed have experimented with a range of illicit drugs such as methamphetamine base, "ice" and GHB, as well as pharmaceutical products such as anti-depressant medications.

Ketamine, an anesthetic used primarily in veterinary surgery, had also been used by almost two thirds of those interviewed.

Mr Paul Dillon from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre believes the results are unexpected.

"We have always known that ecstasy users traditionally use a variety of drugs in combination," said Mr Dillon. "However, these have usually been drugs such as speed, LSD and cannabis. Drugs such as GHB, which are relatively new on the scene, have taken a comparatively short time for some party drug users to discover. Meanwhile, the use of LSD and inhalants such as amyl nitrate appears to have decreased."

“The rise in experimentation with some of these drugs is quite surprising. In 2000, 25% of the sample reported they had ever used ketamine, this year that figure had leapt to 59%, with 20% reporting they usually used it when they took ecstasy. In 2000, less than 1% reported ever using GHB. This year, 35% said they had tried it, with 7% of them reported usually using the drug when they took ecstasy.”

Every weekend, across Australia, tens of thousands of young people attend nightclubs, dance parties and a range of other entertainment venues. For some of them this also means taking what have become called ‘party drugs’ – a range of substances that are used to ‘enhance’ the party environment.

The use of ecstasy and other ‘party drugs’ appears to be increasing in many parts of the world. In Australia, general population surveys indicate an increase in those ever having tried ecstasy between the years 1998 and 2001: from 4.8% to 6.1%.

“This is a large market and if you look at the figures for 20-29 year olds, a staggering 20% of that age group have tried ecstasy. This is a growing and constantly changing market that we need to continue to monitor, particularly as we know so little about the harms associated many of the newer drugs that they are now experimenting with.”

The NSW Party Drug Trends continues to provide valuable information on the growing party drug market.

“We have been collecting data on this market since 1997 and can now track the changes that have occurred since that time,” said Mr Dillon. “Information that we collected back then on the use of drugs such as ketamine and GHB has led to specific projects in those areas to understand and inform users of the harms. Although the use of antidepressants and other pharmaceuticals appears to be small at this time, it is important to identify these new trends so that we can try to pre-empt any problems that may arise.”

“Obviously, messages about the harms associated with some of these drugs are not being taken on board by some young people. One thing that we do know is that using drugs in combination increases the risks. This is a message that we need to get across to the growing number of party drug users.”

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