



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

RESULTS FROM AUSTRALIA'S FIRST NATIONAL STUDY OF PARTY DRUG TRENDS

26 November, 2003

For release: 27 November, 2003

'Party drug' users across Australia are experimenting with a wide variety of different drugs according to the most comprehensive and detailed study of party drug markets in Australia, and possibly the world.

The results of the first Party Drug Initiative (PDI) study will be released today at the Masonic Centre in Sydney. The PDI is a national study funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund and conducted in the capital city of every state and territory in Australia to monitor emerging trends in party drug markets. The PDI monitors emerging trends in the use, price, purity and availability of ecstasy and other party drugs such as speed, crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, GHB and ketamine.

The study, which interviewed 809 regular ecstasy users found over half reported that they typically used more than one tablet and almost half reported bingeing on ecstasy, i.e. using the drug on a continuous basis for more than 48 hours without sleep. The similarities across jurisdictions on patterns of ecstasy use were noteworthy, although those in Queensland reported a greater frequency of ecstasy use.

One hundred and thirty nine key informants who had regular contact with party drug users were also interviewed including health professionals, law enforcement personnel, youth workers, DJs, party promoters and drug dealers. Other indicator data such as seizure purity, arrests data, and calls to drug help lines were also used.

The results of this year's study indicated that a significant proportion of the party drug users interviewed have experimented with a range of illicit drugs. About three quarters had used methamphetamine powder (speed) in the previous six months, with snorting and swallowing being the most common routes of administration. Other drugs such as crystal methamphetamine ('crystal'), cocaine and ketamine had also been used by those interviewed.

The findings surprised researchers who did not expect to see some of the newer drugs across all states and territories, according to Chief Investigator for the project, Dr Louisa Degenhardt, Lecturer at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of NSW.

"Previous research suggested that ecstasy users traditionally use a variety of drugs in combination, and we have previously identified newer drugs being used in markets such as

NSW,” said Dr Degenhardt. “However, the PDI has provided evidence that the newer drugs such as ketamine and GHB are used across the country.”

“Victorian figures were interesting, with the proportion of those interviewed reporting recent use of GHB, ketamine, and cocaine being similar to those of NSW,” said Dr Degenhardt. “Also interesting was the recent use of crystal methamphetamine, reported by at least a third up to three quarters in every state and territory.”

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 learn more about the harms associated with many of the newer drugs that they are now experimenting with,” said Mr Paul Dillon, Information Manager for the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

The PDI will provide valuable information on the growing party drug market.

“Party drugs continue to grow in popularity and it is important to identify new trends so that we can try to pre-empt any future 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” said Mr Dillon. “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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