



NATIONAL DRUG AND
ALCOHOL RESEARCH CENTRE

WHERE DO PEOPLE USUALLY USE ECSTASY AND RELATED DRUGS? NEW STUDY RELEASED TODAY

13 November, 2004

For release: 13 November, 2004

According to over 850 ecstasy users interviewed in the most comprehensive and detailed study of ecstasy and related drugs (ERDs) markets in Australia, users are increasingly using their drug of choice in settings other than nightclubs. Private parties, friend's homes and their own home are becoming increasingly popular as a usual location of ecstasy use.

The results of the 2004 Party Drugs Initiative (PDI) will be delivered tomorrow at the National Drug Trends Conference at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle, Western Australia. 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 ecstasy and related drug markets. The PDI monitors emerging trends in the use, price, purity and availability of ecstasy and related drugs such as speed, crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, GHB and ketamine.

Although nightclubs (80%) and raves (including dance parties and 'doofs') (63%) continue to be the most popular usual location for ecstasy use, national figures indicate that homes and private parties are also preferred settings. Pubs were also locations where ecstasy use was reported, with almost one third of the national sample stating that they usually used in these venues.

Other drugs, often linked to the nightclub scene, were far less likely to be used in a nightclub setting such as ice (50% reporting it as a usual location of use), cocaine (41%) and ketamine (29%). Ice was reported to be usually used at a friend's home (53%) or own home (47%), GHB (40% in a nightclub setting, 36% at a friend's or 38% at own home), and ketamine (51% and 47% respectively).

Key informants across all jurisdictions who had regular contact with ecstasy and related 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 ERDs users interviewed have experimented with a range of illicit drugs. Data for the past 5 years is available across three states and this shows that ecstasy users are now using more of their drug of choice, with many of them using more regularly. For example only 53% of the NSW sample reported using more than one ecstasy tablet in 2000, compared to 85% in 2004. The NSW sample reported using ecstasy a median of 12 days in 2000, whereas in 2004 this had risen to 20 days.

The findings challenge the belief that ERDs are only used in a nightclub/dance party setting, according to Chief Investigator for the project, Dr Louisa Degenhardt, Senior Lecturer at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of NSW.

“Even though previous research has suggested that ecstasy use is now used in a variety of settings, there is the belief that nightclubs are the only place where ERDs are ever used,” said Dr Degenhardt. “However, the PDI has provided evidence that these drugs are being experimented with in a variety of other settings, some of which carry different risks compared to nightclubs.”

“Using drugs like GHB and ketamine in a home setting, where there may not be the necessary medical assistance available, could lead to potentially life threatening situations,” said Dr Degenhardt. “It is important for us to send messages to users that moving the use of these drugs to these type of settings may not necessarily be reducing harm.”

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 ERDs – a range of substances that are used to ‘enhance’ the party environment.

The use of ecstasy and related drugs appears to be increasing in many parts of the world. In Australia, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey indicates 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 ERDs market.

“ERDs 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. “Using these drugs in environments where medical help is not immediately at hand is even more risky. This trend needs to be monitored and education campaigns developed around the risks involved.”

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