



COCAINE – THINGS ARE CHANGING!

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There appear to be changes occurring in the Australian cocaine market, particularly in NSW, according to new research released today. The number of people reporting using the drug had increased and in NSW in particular, those who had used the drug were using it more often.

The number of injecting drug users (IDUs) reporting using cocaine in the previous six months has risen since 2004 across almost all jurisdictions (apart from the Northern Territory where it remained stable), with significant rises occurring in NSW, ACT, Victoria and SA.

- The proportion of the NSW IDU sample reporting using cocaine in the past 6 months rose from 47% in 2004 to 60% in 2005
- Nationally, there was an increase from 16% to 22% of those reporting using cocaine in the past 6 months
- ACT saw a rise from 10% to 20%, Victoria from 10% to 15% and South Australia 6% to 16% of their IDU sample reporting use of cocaine
- Cocaine availability was highly variable across jurisdictions. Nationally 61% of the sample believed it was very easy/easy to purchase the drug, 28% felt it was difficult and 11% found it very difficult
- In NSW, 71% believed it was very easy/easy to purchase cocaine, 21% thought it was difficult and 7% found it very difficult

In NSW the median number of days cocaine was reported being used by this IDU sample in the previous six months had doubled from 6 to 12. Data was variable from the other states and territories.

Dr Louisa Degenhardt, Senior Lecturer from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at the University of New South Wales said that this is trend that we need to follow closely.

“Although the figures are far higher in NSW than in other states and territories, we do know from experience that trends that we see occurring in NSW often follow in other jurisdictions down the track.”

“It is important to note that the cocaine usage figures are not as high as they were during the heroin shortage, but they are gradually creeping up to the same level and that is of great concern. This is a trend we need to follow closely.”

These are the findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), a research project co-ordinated by NDARC and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund. The IDRS monitors the price, purity, availability and use of the four main illicit drug types – heroin, amphetamine, cocaine and cannabis.

To provide timely information on emerging illicit drug trends, interviews are carried out with people who regularly inject drugs, and with professionals in drug-related fields. The results of these interviews are compared with trends observed in other indicators of drug use, such as drug seizures, overdoses, arrests and treatment numbers.

“From what we’ve seen with this year’s reports from both ecstasy users and IDUs, cocaine use appears to have slightly increased compared to the previous couple of years,” said Dr Degenhardt. “This increase was concentrated in Sydney, which is where we think cocaine availability is greatest in this country.”

It does appear that there may be two distinct markets for cocaine in Australia, as although there are similarities between the reports from the ecstasy users and the IDUs, there are also some major differences.

Firstly, the prices can vary between the two markets even in the same state and the way it is marketed and bought is quite different. Ecstasy users do not report buying it in caps and none of the respondents reported buying the drug from a street dealer. On the other hand the majority of injecting drug users stated that they had bought from either a street dealer or mobile dealer, reflecting their reliance upon a ‘street drug market’.

Secondly, the injecting drug user sample believed cocaine to be much easier to obtain than the ecstasy users. In NSW 71% of the IDUs interviewed stated that they found the drug very easy or easy to obtain, whereas only 52% of the ecstasy users believed the same thing.

“Although it seems relatively concentrated at this point, it’s important that we keep an eye on this in the future,” said Dr Degenhardt. “When cocaine use increased significantly in 2001 among injecting drug users in Sydney, it caused significant harms to some users, and many services reported significant increases in demands upon their services related to this drug.”

“In particular, is important that we communicate the potential risks of cocaine injection to those who have begun or are considering injecting drug.”

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