



## **ECSTASY PURCHASING PATTERNS – NEW RESEARCH**

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Ecstasy users are more likely to buy the drug for themselves and their friends, buy in bulk once or twice a month and have at least four dealer contacts they can call on when they want to purchase their drug of choice.

The price of ecstasy had dropped or remained stable across the country with prices ranging from \$30 (NSW, Victoria, SA and Queensland) to \$50 (Northern Territory).

The results of the 2004 PDI were presented at the National Drug Trends Conference at the Hilton on the Park in Melbourne. The PDI is a national study funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 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.

This year the patterns of purchasing ecstasy were investigated, with the results being fairly consistent across all jurisdictions.

- Less than one quarter of the sample (22%) only bought the drug for themselves, with the vast majority (77%) choosing to purchase for themselves and others at the same time
- On average they were able to purchase ecstasy from 4 people
- When they bought the drug the median number of pills bought was 5
- Just under one third of the sample (32%) had bought ecstasy 1-6 times in the last six months, 36% had bought between 7-13 times and 31% had purchased ecstasy more than 13 times. Two per cent had not bought the drug at all

Dr Louisa Degenhardt, Senior Lecturer from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at the University of New South Wales said that this study gave us new insights into the ecstasy market and highlights some of the great risks users take when purchasing the drug.

“Many ecstasy users do not realize the great legal risk they take when they purchase the drug in bulk for themselves and their friends,” she said.

“Ecstasy is an illegal drug and if you get caught it does not take much to have your charge lifted from possession to supply. Buying for others is regarded as supply and can be the difference between a fine and a jail sentence. It would appear that many ecstasy users are not aware of the consequences of this practice.”

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 also indicated that ecstasy users were able to purchase a wide variety of drugs, other than ecstasy, from their dealer. National figures showed that the drugs most usually available included the following:

- Speed - 69% of the national sample reported being able to purchase this drug from their ecstasy dealer
- Cannabis – 64%
- Ice – 42%
- Base – 34%
- Cocaine – 29%
- LSD – 29%
- Ketamine – 20%
- Pharmaceutical Stimulants – 10%

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 2004: from 4.8% to 7.5%.

“This is a large market and if you look at the figures for 20-24 year olds, a staggering 21% 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.

“Obviously, messages about the harms, particularly regarding the legal consequences associated with using these drugs are not being taken on board by some young people” said Mr Dillon. “As much as we talk about the physical harms of ERDs, it is often the illegal nature of the drugs that cause the most significant problems for users.”

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