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'ICE EPIDEMIC?' TRENDS IN METHAMPHETAMINE USE FROM THREE VICTORIAN SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

MEGAN LIM,^{1,2} SHELLEY COGGER,¹ BRENDAN QUINN,¹ MARGARET HELLARD,^{1,2} PAUL DIETZE^{1,2}¹Centre for Population Health, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, ²School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Presenter's email: lim@burnet.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Victorian media have been reporting a widespread 'ice crisis'. This concern arises predominantly from anecdotal information and data showing increasing rates of methamphetamine-related harms. We triangulate three data sources to investigate whether a possible increase in methamphetamine-related harms has been driven by an actual increase in methamphetamine (speed powder/ice/crystal) use.

Design and Methods: We analysed three, annual, cross-sectional Melbourne-based drug monitoring systems. The Big Day Out (BDO) surveys young people at a music festival. The Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) targets regular psychostimulant users. The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) interviews people who inject drugs. Trends in prevalence were assessed using Chi² test for trend. Trends in frequency of use were assessed using Poisson regression.

Results: The percentages reporting recent methamphetamine use were 8% among BDO attendees (n/N = 825/9582), 75% among EDRS participants (n/N = 452/601) and 65% among IDRS participants (n/N = 587/898). The BDO found a non-linear decrease over time in the percentage recently using methamphetamine. EDRS and IDRS data showed no significant change in prevalence of use, but the EDRS showed an increase in frequency of use between 2008 and 2014 ($P < 0.01$).

Discussion and Conclusions: These samples are not representative of the general population and are not reflective of rural populations. Methamphetamine use prevalence among the three serial cross-sectional samples remained stable from 2008–2013/14. Evidence of increasing use frequency may explain some trends in rising harms. Research that accurately characterises methamphetamine use will allow attention to focus on effectively preventing methamphetamine-related harms.

Implications for Practice or Policy: While not wanting to underplay the potential adverse effects of methamphetamine use, it is important that government takes an evidence-based response to this issue. The media, policy makers, and practitioners should be aware that increased harm is not necessarily indicative of increased population-level methamphetamine use.

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POOR MENTAL HEALTH AND USE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS AMONG YOUNG MUSICAL FESTIVAL ATTENDEES

MEGAN LIM,^{1,2} ALYCE VELLA,¹ REBECCA JENKINSON,^{1,2} PAUL DIETZE,^{1,2} MARGARET HELLARD^{1,2}¹Centre for Population Health, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, ²School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Presenter's email: lim@burnet.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Mental illness and poor mental health outcomes are highly prevalent among young Australians, and are often linked to the use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD).

Design and Methods: A questionnaire was self-completed by young people (15–29 years) at a music festival in Melbourne. The questionnaire covered health and behaviours, AOD use and mental health. Three cross-sectional annual surveys (2012–2014) were included in the analysis. Multivariable logistic regression was used to determine correlates of mental health concerns (defined as either reporting a mental health problem in the past six months or self-rating mental health as fair or poor [compared to good, very good or excellent]).

Results: Among 1673 participants, 64% were female and the median age was 19 years. One-quarter (402, 24%) reported a mental health problem in the past six months, 26% (n = 428) rated their mental health poorly, and 41% (n = 681) reported any mental health concerns. Multivariable analysis determined that mental health concerns were associated with being female (odds ratio [OR] 1.36, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.08–1.70), aged younger than 20 (OR 1.24, 95% CI 1.01–1.53), and self-reported illicit drug use in the past month (OR 1.51, 95% CI 1.22–1.86).

Discussion and Conclusions: Mental health concerns were prevalent in this sample, particularly among young women. Heavy alcohol consumption was not associated with poor mental health, possibly because of the high prevalence of risky drinking in this sample. The strongest correlate of a poorer mental health rating was recent illicit drug use.

Implications for Policy and Practice: This study suggests that music festivals are a potential site to reach young people at risk of adverse outcomes related to mental health and illicit drug use. Further research is needed to better understand the nature of the relationship between drug use and mental health.

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IMPLICIT AMBIVALENCE TOWARD ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

DANIEL LINDSAY,¹ ANNE SWINBOURNE¹¹James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia

Presenter's email: daniel.lindsay1@jcu.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Contemporary research examining drinking behaviour highlights the importance of implicit processes in the initiation and maintenance of alcohol consumption. By definition, implicit attitudes are formed through experience with a target object. It is argued that implicit attitudes toward alcohol may be ambivalent because consuming alcohol can produce various negative (e.g. feeling nauseous) and positive consequences (e.g. feeling relaxed). Therefore the aim of the current study was to examine the ambivalent nature of implicit alcohol-related attitudes.

Design and Methods: Participants (n = 343, M = 25.72 years) completed a Single-Category Implicit Association Test in which they were required to classify alcohol-related words with positively and negatively valenced words. The reaction times (RT) for each pairing were then calculated and compared. Implicit ambivalence was operationalised as having similar RTs for classifying alcohol-related words with positive words and classifying alcohol-related words with negative words.

Results: RTs for pairing alcohol with positive words (M = 752 ms) were similar to those pairing alcohol with negative words (M = 716 ms), suggesting implicit ambivalence toward alcohol consumption. Analysis of variance revealed a pattern of results suggesting that drinking more standard drinks in a single drinking episode produced greater feelings of implicit ambivalence.

Discussion and Conclusions: These findings suggest that individuals hold both positive and negative implicit evaluations toward alcohol consumption. Furthermore, implicit attitudes toward alcohol may become more ambivalent as individuals consume more alcohol. This suggests that greater alcohol consumption may produce more experiences with both positive and negative consequences and lead to the development of implicitly ambivalent attitudes.