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Abstract | The data in this report were collected as part of the Australian Institute of Criminology's Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program, which is a quarterly collection of criminal justice and drug use information from police detainees at multiple sites across Australia. From January 2015 to December 2016, 4,400 adult police detainees were interviewed in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney (Bankstown and Surry Hills), most of them male (83%; n=3,647). Recent users reported consuming ecstasy on average three out of the last 30 days before detention and rated availability at an average seven out of 10, while quality was rated at an average six out of 10. Detainees reported the price of ecstasy per pill was approximately \$15 to \$25, with a majority of recent users reporting that the price had stayed the same compared to the three months prior to interview.

The ecstasy market: police detainee perspectives

Tom Sullivan & Eileen Patterson

Trends in reported ecstasy use

In 2015–16, 16 percent of detainees (n=719) reported that they had used ecstasy in the previous 12 months. The percentage of detainees reporting consumption of ecstasy in the 12 months before detention has remained stable since 2011, with slight increases in 2015 and 2016 (see Figure 1). Of these 719 detainees, two percent (n=16) stated they were dependent and 40 percent (n=290) reported use of ecstasy in the previous 30 days (hereafter referred to as 'recent users').

Recent use of ecstasy

Recent users reported taking ecstasy on average twice per day, at a mean frequency of three days out of the last 30 days before detention. The amount of ecstasy consumed on each occasion was calculated by converting the measure specified by detainees (eg pill, capsule) into grams. For example, one ecstasy pill is equivalent to approximately 0.29 grams—see Hughes et al. (2014) for ecstasy weight estimates.

Figure 1: Adult detainees who reported consuming ecstasy in the 12 months prior to detention, 1999–2016 (%)



Note: Rates are calculated as a percentage of all detainees interviewed that year

Source: AIC DUMA collection 1999–2016 [computer file]

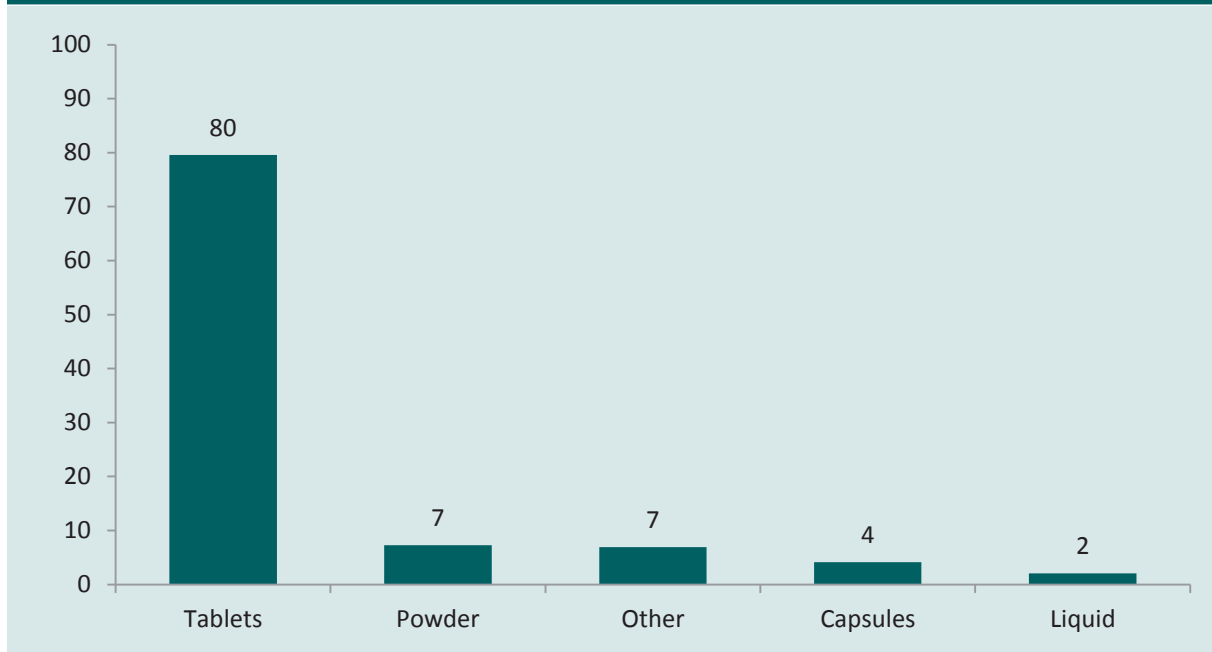
Of the recent users who reported consumption rates (n=267), the mean amount of ecstasy consumed was 0.5 grams (equivalent to about two tablets) per user per occasion. This equates to an average of one gram of ecstasy per user per day. Although most recent users reported using only one or two tablets on a typical occasion of use (82%; n=219), 18 percent (n=48) reported using between three and seven tablets. Recent users who consumed more than two grams of ecstasy per occasion of use were excluded from consumption rate calculations (n=3).

Twenty-two percent of recent users (n=65) reported having consumed ecstasy in the 48 hours before detention. Sixteen percent of recent users (n=46) also indicated that ecstasy use contributed, at least to some degree, to their detention. When asked how intoxicated or high they were on ecstasy at the time of arrest, those who reported being intoxicated (n=27) rated their level of intoxication, on average, to be six out of 10 (where one meant completely sober and 10 meant so intoxicated that a person would pass out or be unconscious).

Types of ecstasy used

Of the 289 recent users who described the type of ecstasy they used, 80 percent (n=230) indicated that they had consumed tablets. This was followed by seven percent (n=21) who reported using powder. Less than five percent reported using capsules (4%; n=12) and liquid (2%; n=6; see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Types of ecstasy consumed by adult detainees on last occasion of use, 2015–16 (%)



Note: Excludes 1 respondent where data was missing. Only adult detainees who consumed ecstasy in the previous 30 days included in analysis

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2015–16 [computer file]

The Australian ecstasy market

The ecstasy market in Australia is predominantly made up of recreational drug users, many of whom generally plan their consumption around particular events to experience effects at particular times (Fowler, Kinner & Krenske 2007). Although it is associated with raves, nightclubs and more recently music festivals, the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) reported that 42 percent of their sample purchased ecstasy at a private location. Nationally, 24 percent of EDRS participants last purchased ecstasy at a friend's home, while 17 percent purchased it at a nightclub and 15 percent at home via a dealer (Stafford & Breen 2017).

Twenty-nine percent of recent ecstasy users (n=85) participating in the DUMA program reported that they had sold, given away or shared their ecstasy in the 30 days prior to interview (12% half of it, 11% some of it, 7% most or all of it). The majority of recent ecstasy users (70%; n=204) did not give, sell or share any ecstasy.

Availability

In 2015–16, recent users rated the availability of ecstasy, on average, at seven out of 10 (where one meant it was extremely hard or impossible to get and 10 meant it was readily available or overabundant). More than half (58%; n=167) of detainees said ecstasy availability had stayed the same in the three months before their detention. On average, recent users rated ecstasy availability in Perth, Brisbane, Adelaide and Bankstown at seven out of 10, while those in Surry Hills rated it at five out of 10.

Quality

Recent users rated the quality of ecstasy at an average of six out of 10 (where one meant extremely poor quality or purity and 10 meant excellent quality or high purity). For each site, detainees rated the quality of ecstasy between six and seven out of 10 on average. Nationally, 46 percent (n=132) of detainees reported that the quality of ecstasy was the same at the time of interview compared with three months prior.

Price

Almost half of recent users (48%; n=139) reported that the price of ecstasy had stayed the same recently, while a fifth (21%; n=62) reported a decrease in price. This pattern was found across all sites. According to detainees, the price of ecstasy per pill was approximately \$15 to \$25. One-third of recent users (32%; n=94) said the number of people selling ecstasy had stayed the same in the previous three months. Another 22 percent (n=63) reported an increase in the number of people selling, and 13 percent (n=38) reported a decrease. This pattern was found in Perth and Brisbane. Adelaide detainees most commonly reported an increased number of people selling ecstasy (28%; n=16), and the pattern differed between the Sydney sites, although numbers were small.

Summary

About one-sixth of detainees reported they had recently used ecstasy, although only two percent reported dependence. On average in 2015–16, recent users reported using ecstasy three days out of the last 30 days before detention and, on these days, their average consumption was one gram of ecstasy. Those who considered themselves to be intoxicated on ecstasy at the time of their arrest rated their level of intoxication, on average, to be six out of 10. Sixteen percent of recent users said ecstasy use contributed, at least to some degree, to their detention.

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