

METHAMPHETAMINE USE IN THE WORKPLACE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION & TREATMENT

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Introduction and Aims: There is increasing concern in Australia about methamphetamine use, in particular crystal methamphetamine (ice). This concern places pressure on health and community services to respond appropriately. To inform response strategies, a study was undertaken that examined prevalence and patterns of methamphetamine use among employed Australians.

Design and Methods: Secondary analysis of 2013 National Drug Strategy Household Survey data (N=23,855).

Results: 2.3% (weighted n=231,893) of the paid workforce and 1.6% (weighted n=111,359) of those not in paid employment reported past 12 month methamphetamine use. Prevalence levels varied substantially between workforce groups with young workers, males, tradespersons and those employed in warehousing, construction, mining, manufacturing or hospitality at high risk with prevalence levels ranging from 3.2%-5.8%. Compared to employees who used other drugs, methamphetamine users were significantly ($p<.01$) more likely to absent from work and to use drugs at work or attend work under the influence. Compared to those not in paid employment, employed Australians were significantly ($p<.01$) less likely to be frequent methamphetamine use or to use in large doses.

Discussion and Conclusions: Results indicate that most methamphetamine users are employed with high prevalence levels among particular workforce groups. Variations in prevalence may be due to differences in workforce demographics and working conditions. Compared to those not in paid employment, employed users are more likely to be occasional or infrequent users and may be less likely to experience associated harms. Raising awareness of the harms associated with methamphetamine use and treatment/support options may prevent the uptake of use or the escalation of use associated with high risk including dependence.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The workplace offers an ideal setting for prevention and early intervention strategies targeting high risk groups. The workplace also offers an opportunity to improve pathways to treatment and overcome barriers to treatment seeking. As methamphetamine use has significant negative implications for safety, productivity and worker wellbeing, such strategies are likely to receive substantial employer support.

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