

PATTERNS OF HEALTH SERVICE UTILISATION IN A COHORT OF CHRONIC METHAMPHETAMINE USERS

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Introduction and Aims: We examined the relationship between methamphetamine use and health service utilisation in a cohort of chronic methamphetamine users to better understand the impact of this drug on the health sector.

Design and Methods: A longitudinal prospective cohort study of methamphetamine users (N = 501) was used to estimate the past year rate of health service utilisation (general hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, emergency departments, general practitioners, psychiatrists, counsellors and dentists) by level of methamphetamine use (no use, up to weekly use, more than weekly use) while adjusting for other substance use.

Results: After adjustment for other substance use, greater methamphetamine use was associated with greater utilisation of emergency departments (up to weekly use IRR 1.3, 95% CI 1.0 – 1.8, p = 0.085; more than weekly use, IRR 1.6, 95% CI 1.2 – 2.2, p = 0.003) and psychiatric hospitals (up to weekly use, IRR 5.0, 95% CI 1.7 – 14.7, p = 0.003; more than weekly use, IRR 6.9, 95% CI 2.3 – 20.4, p < 0.001) but not general hospitals, psychiatrists or ambulances (p > 0.05); there was a concurrent significant reduction in the use of general practitioners, dentists and counsellors.

Discussions and Conclusions: More frequent methamphetamine use is associated with increased utilisation of emergency departments and psychiatric hospitals and a reduction in the use of various other health services. This could suggest a need to strengthen pathways between acute care and other health services.

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