



Attitudes towards drug use among gay and bisexual men in Australia: evidence for normalisation?

Never Stand Still

Arts & Social Sciences

Centre for Social Research in Health

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Introduction

- High rates of drug use among gay and bisexual men (GBM)
- Often “early adopters” of new drug trends (Measham et al, 2011)
- Unique historical and cultural contexts of use
- Distinctive drug use and sexual practices



Normalisation thesis

- Deviant or stigmatised practices become part of 'normal' or everyday life
- 5-year cohort study of adolescents in UK in 1990s (Parker et al, 1998)
- Recreational drug use as “unremarkable” in lives of young people
- Accommodation of “sensible” drug use (Parker et al, 2002)
- Widely accepted but some critics



Evidence for normalisation thesis

- Availability and accessibility
- Drug “trying” (i.e. lifetime use)
- Recent and regular use
- Intended future use
- Social accommodation of drug use
- Cultural accommodation in wider society and drug policy



Method – Flux study

- Prospective, observational cohort study of recreational drug use among GBM
- Automated follow-up every 6 months (up to 5 data points)
- Eligible participants were men who:
 - Identified as gay, bisexual or had sex with a man in previous 12 months
 - Lived in Australia
 - Aged at least 16 years
- Enrollment from Sep 2014 – July 2015
- Factor analysis to examine attitudes towards drug use



Sample characteristics

Mean age (SD)	33.0 (12.6)
Gender <i>n</i> (%)	
Male	2234 (99.2%)
Transgender or intersex male	17 (0.8%)
Sexual identity <i>n</i> (%)	
Gay	1990 (88.4%)
Bisexual	199 (8.8%)
Heterosexual / other	62 (2.7%)
HIV status <i>n</i> (%)	
HIV positive	171 (7.6%)
HIV negative	1623 (72.1%)
Untested / unknown	457 (20.6%)
HCV positive <i>n</i> (%)	43 (1.9%)
Anglo-Celtic cultural background <i>n</i> (%)	1620 (72.0%)
Completed university degree <i>n</i> (%)	1180 (52.4%)
Employed full-time <i>n</i> (%)	1217 (54.6%)

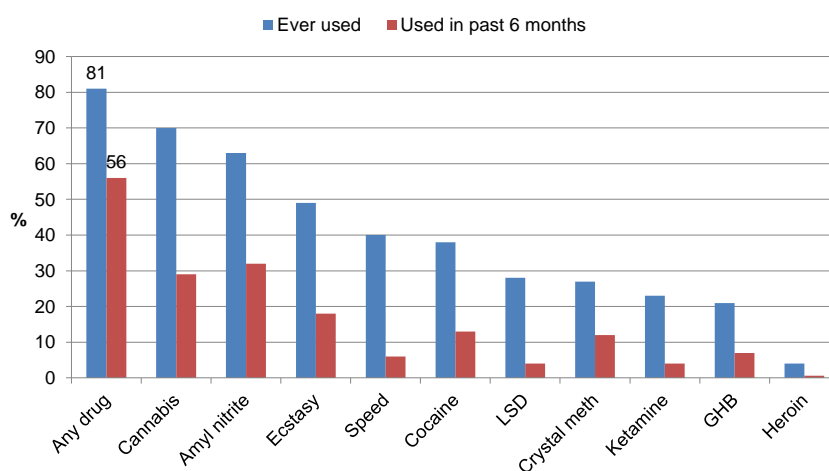


Drug availability

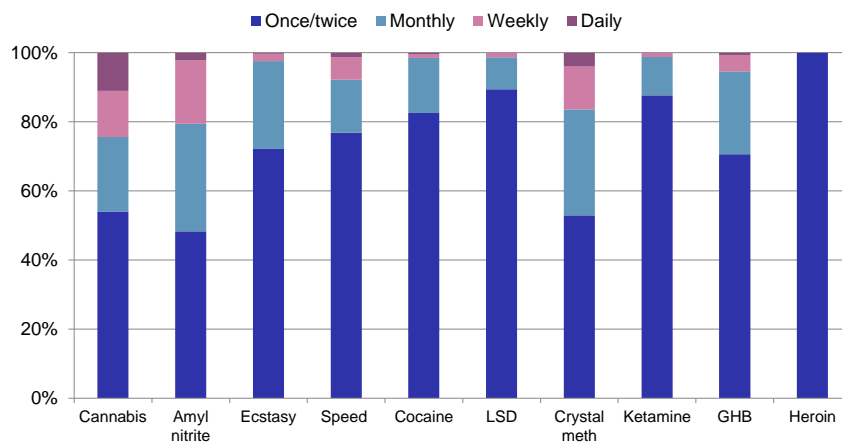
	%
Difficulty in obtaining party drugs (n=617)	
Not at all	58.5
Slightly difficult	30.0
Somewhat difficult	8.8
Very difficult	2.8
Used because it was available	
Crystal meth (n=605)	43.6
GHB (n=69)	15.0
Got drugs in past 6m most often via (n=967)	
Dealer	27.7
Straight friend	26.8
Gay friend	21.9



Drug "trying" and recent use



Frequency of drug use in previous 6 months



Interest in trying drugs not yet used

	All men (%) N=2251	Mean age (SD)	Lifetime abstinence (%) N=414
Not at all	74.3%	34.1 (12.9)	88.2%
Somewhat	22.2%	30.4 (11.3)	11.6%
Very much	3.5%	26.4 (10.4)	0.2%



Creation of attitudes scales

- Positive attitudes towards recreational drug use (8 items; $\alpha=.88$)
- Negative attitudes towards crystal meth use (4 items; $\alpha=.72$)
- Safety of recreational drug use (3 items; $\alpha=.81$)
- Benefits of drug legalisation (4 items; $\alpha=.86$)
- Acceptability of drug use among gay friends (10 items; $\alpha=.89$)



Social accommodation of drug use

	No recent drug use (n=1114) M (SD)	Recent drug use (n=1136) M (SD)	P
Positive attitudes towards drug use scale (1-6)	2.3 (1.0)	3.6 (1.0)	< .001
Negative attitudes towards crystal scale (1-6)	4.3 (1.1)	4.0 (1.1)	< .001
Safety of recreational drug use scale (1-6)	3.3 (1.3)	4.3 (1.1)	< .001
Benefits of legalisation scale (1-6)	4.3 (1.3)	4.8 (1.1)	< .001
Acceptability of drug use among gay friends scale (1-40)	17.3 (6.4)	23.1 (7.0)	< .001



Acceptability of using party drugs with gay friends

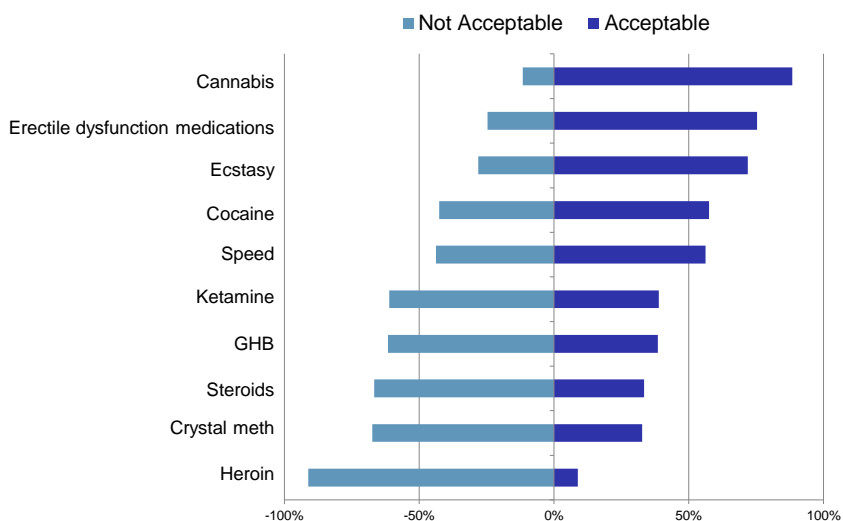
- 63% of men who reported recent party drug use vs 19% of men who reported no use reporting that it was acceptable to use party drugs with gay friends ($p < .001$)
- Accepting attitudes towards using party drugs with gay friends associated with:

	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Party drug use in past 6 months	9.64 (7.64-12.16)***
Stronger connection to gay community	1.31 (1.21-1.43)***
HIV-positive status	1.71 (1.14-2.57)*

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



Acceptability of drug use among gay friends



Summary and future work

- Ease of availability among men who used drugs
- High rates of lifetime and recent drug use
- Infrequent use of most drugs
- 1 in 4 men interested in trying new drugs
- Negative attitudes towards crystal
- Support for drug policy reform
- Longitudinal analysis once data available
- Impact of lock-out laws on Sydney gay life
- Examine 'denormalisation'



Thank you

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The Flux Study

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