

MONITORING PSYCHOSTIMULANT USE AND ONLINE MARKETS: DATA FROM THE EDRS AND DNET

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Aim of Abstract: Drug Trends is a program of work that involves monitoring illicit markets in Australia. This symposium will present data from two components of Drug Trends – the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) and Drugs and New Technologies (DNeT) program. The most recent data collected from an annual survey of regular psychostimulant users conducted in every capital city of Australia will be presented. There will be discussion regarding the use and purchasing patterns of a range of drugs including New (and emerging) Psychoactive Substance (NPS). In addition, data from monitoring online market places will be presented.

PRESENTATION 1 – DRUG USE AND HARMS AMONG REGULAR PSYCHOSTIMULANT USERS (RPU)

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Introduction / Issues OR Introduction and Aims: The EDRS involves an annual survey of regular psychostimulant users (RPU) to collect information on the markets for ecstasy and related drugs. Data has been collected in capital cities of all states and territories in Australia for 13 years. This presentation will present an overview of the 2016 RPU survey results and discuss recent trends in drug use and harms.

Method / Approach OR Design and Methods: An annual survey with regular psychostimulant users is conducted in every capital city of Australia. Data on drug use, harms, purchasing patterns and other market characteristics is collected.

Key Findings OR Results: Results from survey data collected in March- May 2016 will be presented. The demographics of this sample have remained relatively stable over time and the sample represents a young, reasonably educated population that are often in work or employment. A small proportion of the sample report injecting drugs. Ecstasy and cannabis are the two most commonly reported drugs of choice. Data on ecstasy, methamphetamine, ketamine, cocaine, GHB, LSD and NPS use and markets will be presented. Health and risk behaviours will also be reported.

Discussions and Conclusions: Trends in patterns of drug use and harm will be discussed. Information on the forms of drugs being used and reported risks associated with use and what this means for regular psychostimulant users will be discussed.

PRESENTATION 2 – MOVING ONLINE? THE SUPPLY AND PURCHASING PATTERNS OF NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

Rachel Sutherland

Introduction / Issues OR Introduction and Aims: Over the past decade, Australia has witnessed the rapid emergence of an alternative drug market which contains substances collectively referred to as 'new psychoactive substances' (NPS). Although the growth of the NPS market has been facilitated by the emergence of online marketplaces, previous research suggests that dealers and friends remain the primary source for obtaining NPS. The aim of this paper is to explore the characteristics of the supply and purchasing patterns of NPS among a sample of regular psychostimulant users in Australia.

Design and Methods: This paper uses data from the Ecstasy & Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS); a national monitoring study which is aimed at detecting emerging trends in illicit drug markets. Data from the 2016 annual survey will be examined.

Results: In 2014, six percent of NPS users reported that they had purchased their last NPS from an online source with NPS users more than six times more likely than non-NPS users to have purchased an illicit drug online in the past year (21% vs. 4% [OR 6.35 95% CI 3.74-10.79]).

This paper will also present first release findings from the 2016 EDRS, focusing on:

- 1) NPS purchasing patterns – source; whether other drugs were obtained from this source; and nature of the exchange (e.g. purchase, non-monetary exchange, obtain for free).
- 2) Supply of NPS – what proportion of the sample supplied NPS; who did they supply NPS to; and what was the nature of the exchange (e.g. social supply vs. dealing for cash profit).

Discussion and Conclusions: To be finalised pending results.

PRESENTATION 3 – MONITORING ON THE DARK NET

Joe Van Buskirk and Amanda Roxburgh

Introduction / Issues OR Introduction and Aims: Darknet markets have changed markedly since the original Silk Road gained notoriety in 2011. There have been major disruptions to the operation of darknet markets, including the FBI seizure of the Silk Road in 2013, Operation Onymous (2014) which seized many markets and servers, and the shutdown of Evolution in 2015, with moderators withdrawing millions of dollars from retailers and consumers. This paper aims to monitor and assess the impact these disruptions have had on darknet market operations over time.

Method / Approach OR Design and Methods: Data were collected from up to 20 darknet markets over a 3-year period, capturing the number of unique retailers on each market selling illicit and pharmaceutical substances, and the number of listings on each market. Interrupted time series analysis will be conducted to examine the changes in the total number of retailers, and number of markets operating across the time of each law enforcement operation, and the closure of Evolution.

Key Findings OR Results: In the wake of the Silk Road seizure, many smaller marketplaces proliferated, with 2 in particular dominating – Agora and Evolution. The number of retailers operating on Agora and Evolution increased markedly. There was also an increasing diversification among retailers, whereby greater numbers of retailers began to operate on more than one darknet market at a time.

Discussion and Conclusions: Darknet markets are highly dynamic, and continue to evolve within the context of both external (law enforcement operations) and internal (withdrawal of funds by market moderators) disruptions. Rapid growth on alternative markets immediately following these disruptions was evident in the context of Operation Onymous, however, such growth appears to have slowed more recently.

Discussion Section: There will be facilitated discussion relating to the use of the data to answer clinical and policy-relevant questions. Symposium attendees will be encouraged to offer thoughts and ask questions regarding the data collected.

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