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The Party Drugs Initiative (PDI) is a national study conducted in the capital city of every state and territory in Australia to monitor emerging trends in party drug markets. The study uses a similar methodology to the **Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS)**. The PDI monitors the price, purity and availability of 'ecstasy' (MDMA) and other party drugs such as 'speed', crystal methamphetamine, cocaine, GHB and ketamine. It also examines trends in the use and harms of these drugs. The data collection includes: surveys with regular ecstasy users, surveys with key informants who have contact with party drug users through the nature of their work; and the analysis of existing data sources that contain information on party drugs.

A total of 809 regular ecstasy users were interviewed in 2003; 136 from QLD, 104 from the NT, 102 from NSW, 101 from SA, 100 each from VIC, TAS and WA and 66 from the ACT. One hundred and thirty nine key informants were interviewed, including health professionals, law enforcement personnel, youth workers, DJ's, party promoters and drug dealers. Data sources on the purity, number of seizures and party drug harms are being collated. The PDI is the most comprehensive and detailed study of party drug markets in Australia and possibly the world. This bulletin presents an overview of the 2003 findings of the PDI, the first year the study was conducted nationally.

Ecstasy

Patterns of use

Participants in the 2003 national sample first used ecstasy at an average of 18 years and had been using ecstasy for a median of four years. Half (51%) of participants had used between monthly and fortnightly, 32% between fortnightly and weekly, and 17% had used ecstasy on more than one day per week in the six months preceding interview. Over half (57%) of the national sample reported that they typically used more than one tablet and almost half (46%) of the national sample reported bingeing* on ecstasy.

Table 1.
Patterns of ecstasy use by jurisdiction, 2003

	Median days	Median tablets	% use with other drugs usually used	% bingeing* on stimulant drugs
NSW	12	2	89	37
ACT	12	2	88	46
VIC	15	1.5	98	60
TAS	14	1.5	98	45
SA	12	2	93	44
WA	12	1.5	85	62
NT	12	1	92	69
QLD	24	1.5	85	45

* bingeing defined as using the drug on a continuous basis for more than 48 hours without sleep.

The vast majority of participants (90%) report mainly swallowing ecstasy, 5% mainly snorted, 4% injected and 1% mainly shelved or shafted ecstasy (inserted into the vagina or anus). Half (52%) of the national sample nominated ecstasy as their favourite drug. The similarities between jurisdictions are noteworthy regarding patterns of ecstasy use (Table 1), but users in QLD reported a greater frequency of use. The majority of ecstasy users report using other drugs while taking ecstasy, most commonly tobacco (59%), alcohol (58%), cannabis (45%), speed (35%), and crystal methamphetamine (17%).

Price, purity and availability

The median price of a tablet of ecstasy ranged from \$30 in VIC to \$50 in the NT and TAS (Table 2). The majority of ecstasy users in all jurisdictions reported that the price of ecstasy had remained stable in the preceding six months. Substantial proportions in NSW, the ACT and VIC reported a recent decrease in price.

Over half (56%) of the national sample reported that the purity or strength of ecstasy was medium or high and a third (32%) reported that the strength fluctuated (Table 2).

Ecstasy was considered to be 'very easy' to obtain by over half of the national sample (54%), 26% considered it to be 'easy' and 16% 'moderately easy'. Only 3% reported that ecstasy was 'difficult' to obtain. The majority reported that the availability had either remained stable (64%) or become easier (17%) to obtain in the six months preceding interview. Again the similarities between jurisdictions are noteworthy (Table 2). Although a smaller proportion in the NT reported the availability of ecstasy to be 'very easy', 28% reported that it was 'easy' and 29% 'moderately easy'.

Table 2.
Price, purity and availability of ecstasy by jurisdiction, 2003

	Price (\$)	% Purity medium to high	% 'very easy' to obtain	% availability stable
NSW	35	60	63	73
ACT	35	62	67	64
VIC	30	56	59	75
TAS	50	42	43	53
SA	35	49	61	61
WA	40	53	61	63
NT	50	56	29	53
QLD	35	66	57	66

Other party drug use

Polydrug use was the norm among the national sample, with a mean of 9.4 drugs (SD 3.3; range 1-18) ever tried out of a possible 19 drugs, and a mean of 6.7 drugs (SD 2.3; range 1-15) used in the preceding six months.

About three quarters (73%) had used methamphetamine powder (speed) in the preceding six months on a median of six days. There was some variation across jurisdiction ranging from 57% in QLD to 89% in VIC reporting recent speed use. Snorting and swallowing were the most common routes of administration, except in the NT where more users reported injecting it.

The recent use of crystal methamphetamine (crystal) was commonly reported in all jurisdictions (Figure 1). Smoking was the most commonly reported route of administration in all jurisdictions but the ACT and SA where more users reported swallowing it and in the NT where it was injected. Swallowing was also commonly reported in the other jurisdictions.

Substantial proportions in NSW, SA, VIC and the ACT reported recent cocaine use (Figure 1). Frequency of cocaine use was sporadic and may indicate more opportunistic use. Most users reported snorting cocaine.

Recent ketamine use was reported by over 20% of samples in all jurisdictions but WA, the NT and QLD (Figure 1). Ketamine was mainly snorted, although swallowing was also commonly reported in TAS, WA and the NT. Frequency of use was sporadic; a median of two days for the national sample.

Small proportions of users in all jurisdictions reported recent GHB use. All participants reported recently swallowing GHB, except one participant in VIC that injected it. Of those that used GHB, the median number of days used was two, ranging from having used GHB once in the preceding six month to two participants using GHB every second day.

Figure 1:
Proportion reporting recent use of GHB, ketamine, cocaine and crystal methamphetamine by jurisdiction, 2003

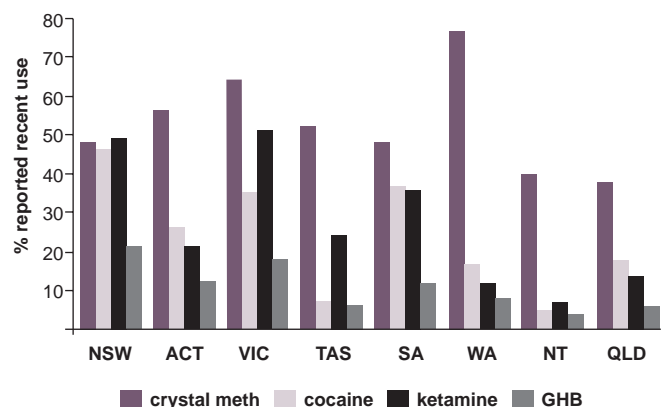


Table 3.
Median days used of those that reported recent use by jurisdiction, 2003

	Speed	Crystal	Cocaine	Ketamine	GHB
NSW	5	3	2	3	2
ACT	4	2	1	2	3
VIC	8	6	3	4	4
TAS	4	3	2	3	1
SA	8	5	2	3	2
WA	8	8	2	3	2
NT	12	5	6	1	8
QLD	6	4	5	2	1

Other party drug prices

Relatively small numbers commented on the price of party drugs in some jurisdictions which may reflect limited or infrequent use and the following results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

The price of a gram of speed ranged from \$40 in SA to \$300 in TAS. Most participants described the price of speed as stable. Participants also reported the purchase of speed in points (except in NSW); prices ranged from \$25 in QLD and SA to \$50 in TAS and WA and \$60 in the NT.

Crystal methamphetamine was also cheapest in SA (\$25 a point) and substantial proportions reported price as stable. Large proportions also responded that they did not know if the price of crystal had changed in the preceding six months, which may reflect recent commencement of crystal use. Half (52%) reported having first tried crystal a year or less prior to the interview.

The price of a gram of cocaine ranged from \$200 in NSW to \$250 in VIC, QLD and the ACT. Substantial proportions did not know if the price had changed. Cocaine price was reported as stable in NSW and the ACT.

Ketamine ranged from \$150 a gram in NSW to \$200 in VIC and SA. Half of the national sample that commented responded that they did not know if the price had changed. Over a third (39%) reported the price of ketamine had remained stable in the preceding six months.

GHB was most commonly purchased in mls. Only eighteen participants of the national sample commented on the price of a ml of GHB and therefore the results should be considered with caution.

Table 4.
Price of party drugs purchased in the last six months by jurisdiction 2003

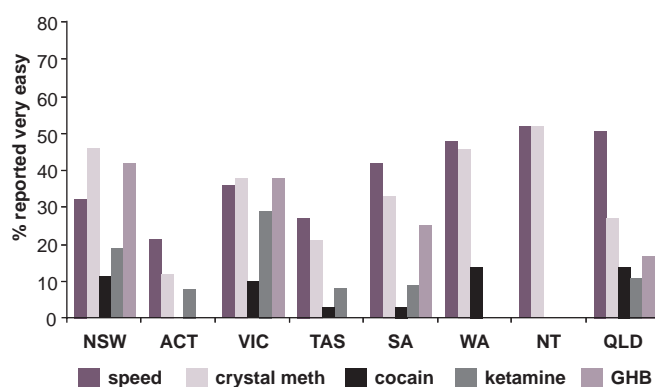
	Speed (gram)	Crystal (point)	Cocaine (gram)	Ketamine (gram)	GHB (ml)
NSW	\$55	\$50	\$200	\$150	-
ACT	\$175 [^]	\$45	\$250 [^]	-	-
VIC	\$180	\$40	\$250	\$200	\$3 [^]
TAS	\$300	\$50	\$250 [^]	-	-
SA	\$40	\$25	\$210	\$200	\$4.50 [^]
WA	\$200	\$50	\$325 [^]	-	-
NT	\$50	\$65	\$280 [^]	-	-
QLD	\$200	\$40	\$250	-	-

[^] Small numbers (n<10) commented on price – results should be interpreted with caution. Dashes represent less than five reported purchases.

Other party drug availability

Substantial proportions of users in all jurisdictions but the ACT reported that speed and crystal were 'very easy' to obtain. Cocaine was reported by less than 15% in all jurisdictions as 'very easy' to obtain. GHB was considered 'very easy' to obtain by over a third of those that commented in NSW and VIC. There was some jurisdictional variation in reports of availability of other drugs (Figure 2).

Figure 2.
Proportion of users that reported availability as 'very easy' by jurisdiction, 2003



*Of those who commented on availability

The highest proportion in each state reported speed availability had remained stable, ranging from 47% (ACT) to 71% (NSW). Substantial proportions reported it had become more difficult in the ACT (27%) and easier in the NT (22%).

A third (35%) reported that the availability of crystal had remained stable in the preceding six months, ranging from 23% in TAS to 46% in the NT. Thirty one percent reported the availability had become easier, ranging from 8% in the NT to 52% in TAS.

Almost half (46%) of the national sample and the highest proportion in every jurisdiction reported the availability of cocaine as stable. About half of those that commented reported the availability of ketamine (49%) and GHB (45%) had also remained stable over the preceding six months nationally.

Harms

Substantial proportions reported that their party drug use caused social or relationship problems, financial problems and work or study problems. The majority of these problems were relatively minor including arguments or mistrust, no money for luxuries or being in debt and feeling unmotivated, trouble concentrating or reduced work performance. More serious problems such as ending relationships, no money for rent or food and being sacked or unable to find work were attributed to party drug use by smaller proportions of users. Legal problems were not as commonly reported (Table 5). The largest proportions nominated ecstasy as the drug attributed to their social (66%), financial (82%), occupational (75%) and legal (42%) problems.

Table 5.
Party drug use causing social, financial, occupational and legal problems, by jurisdiction, 2003

	Social	Financial	Occupational	Legal
NSW	28	30	38	3
ACT	32	46	43	3
VIC	39	39	38	10
TAS	40	47	47	5
SA	38	33	50	11
WA	29	42	44	9
NT	31	48	18	14
QLD	35	42	29	9

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