

## Understanding how a high-level drug trafficking network in Australia adapts to changes in its drug supply

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# Introduction

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- Most illicit drug research on use or harms
  - Less research on supply, particularly high-level
  - But, all areas important for policy
- Extant knowledge on high-level drug traffickers
  - Work in small to medium sized groups
  - Minimal barriers to entry
  - Highly resilient

# Introduction – challenges traffickers face



All can cause supply changes

# Introduction

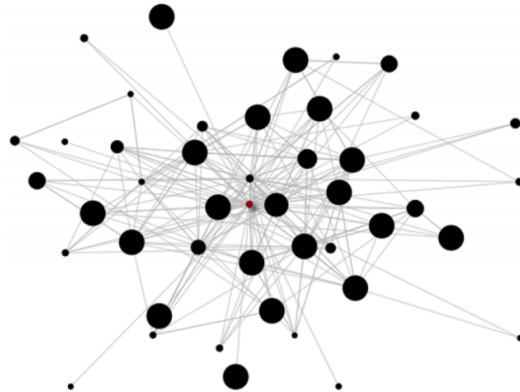
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- **Traffickers will often adapt to supply changes** (Desroches, 2005; Matrix Knowledge Group, 2007; Pearson & Hobbs, 2001)
  - Return drugs to supplier
  - Attempt to sell a different drug type
  - Reduce the price
- Some adaptations may = more harm
- Some adaptations may = less harm
- **But, limitations with past research:**
  - Focuses mostly on individual traffickers
  - Mostly overseas

# Aim and questions

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- To examine how a high-level drug trafficking network in Australia adapts to supply changes.



- What structural and functional changes occur in the network overtime?
- Does the network adapt differently to law enforcement caused supply changes compared to other supply changes?

# Method

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- **Social network analysis**
  - A tool to study the structure and characteristics of a social network, including who the key individuals are, who knows who, and network size.
- **3 data sources (de-identified)**
  - Judges' sentencing comments; biography; and media
- **Five time periods defined post-hoc**
  - T1: early-1993 to late-1998
  - T2: late-1998 to early-2000
  - T3: early-2000 to mid-2002
  - T4: mid-2002 to early-2006
  - T5: early-2006 to Mid-2007.
- **In each time period, coded supply changes, adaptations, and attributes of network participants**
  - E.g. drugs sold and primary role

# Results – Context



Melbourne: 1993 - 2007

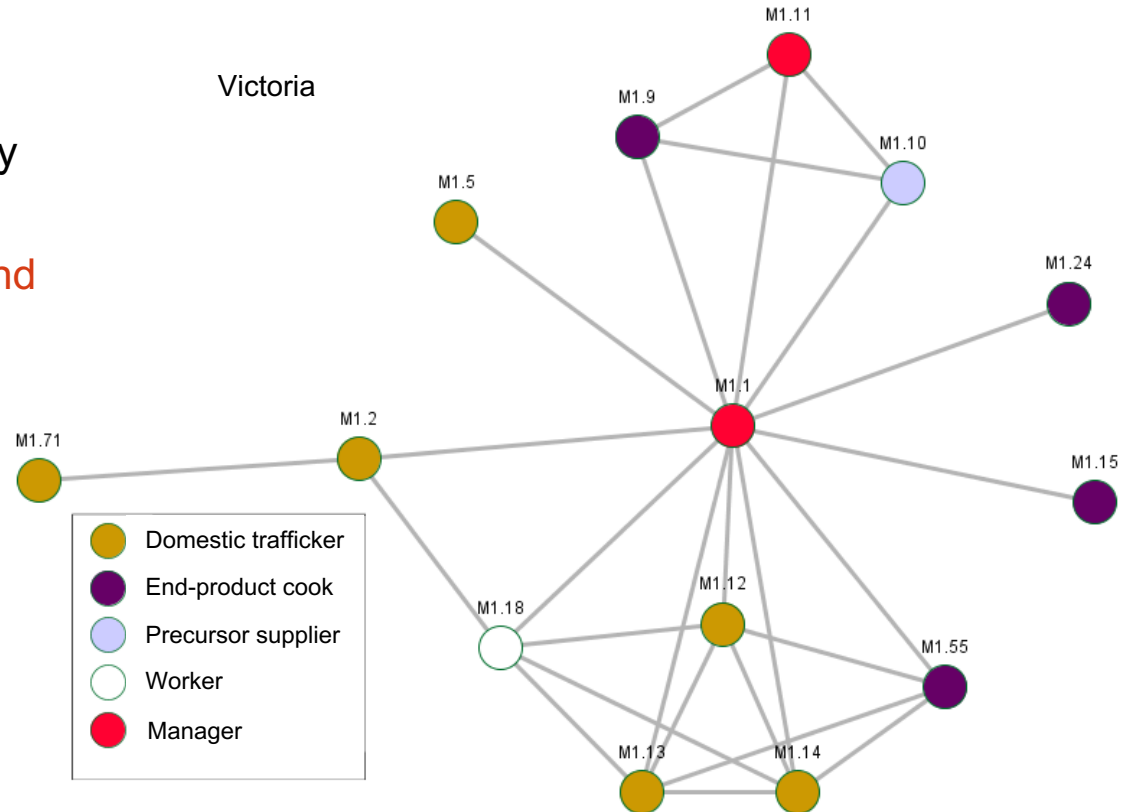
- Trafficked multiple drugs



- “one of the most significant organised crime groups not only this state but this country has ever seen” (Victoria Police).

## Results – T1: 1993 to late 1998

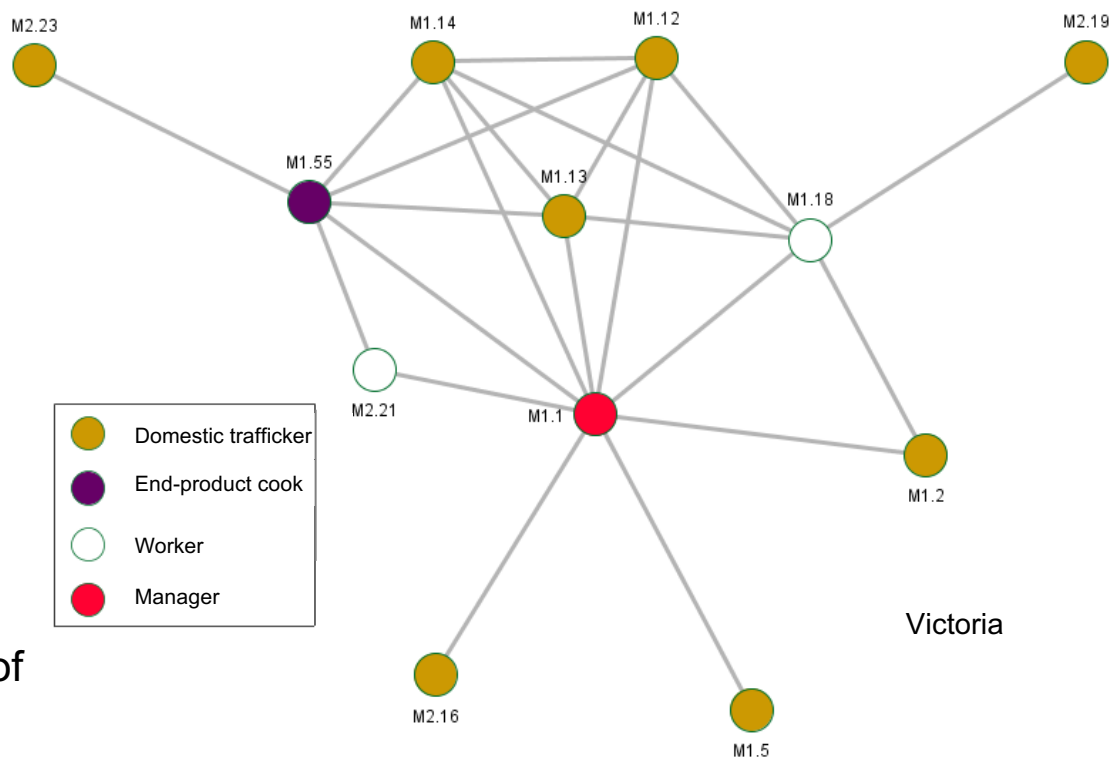
- Dealt only in methamphetamine
- Increased precursor supply
  - Buy more precursors and drugs than usual
  - Recruit new traffickers
  - Establish 2 new methamphetamine labs
- 1 seizure of methamphetamine laboratory
- A few arrests





# Results – T2: Late 1998 to early 2000

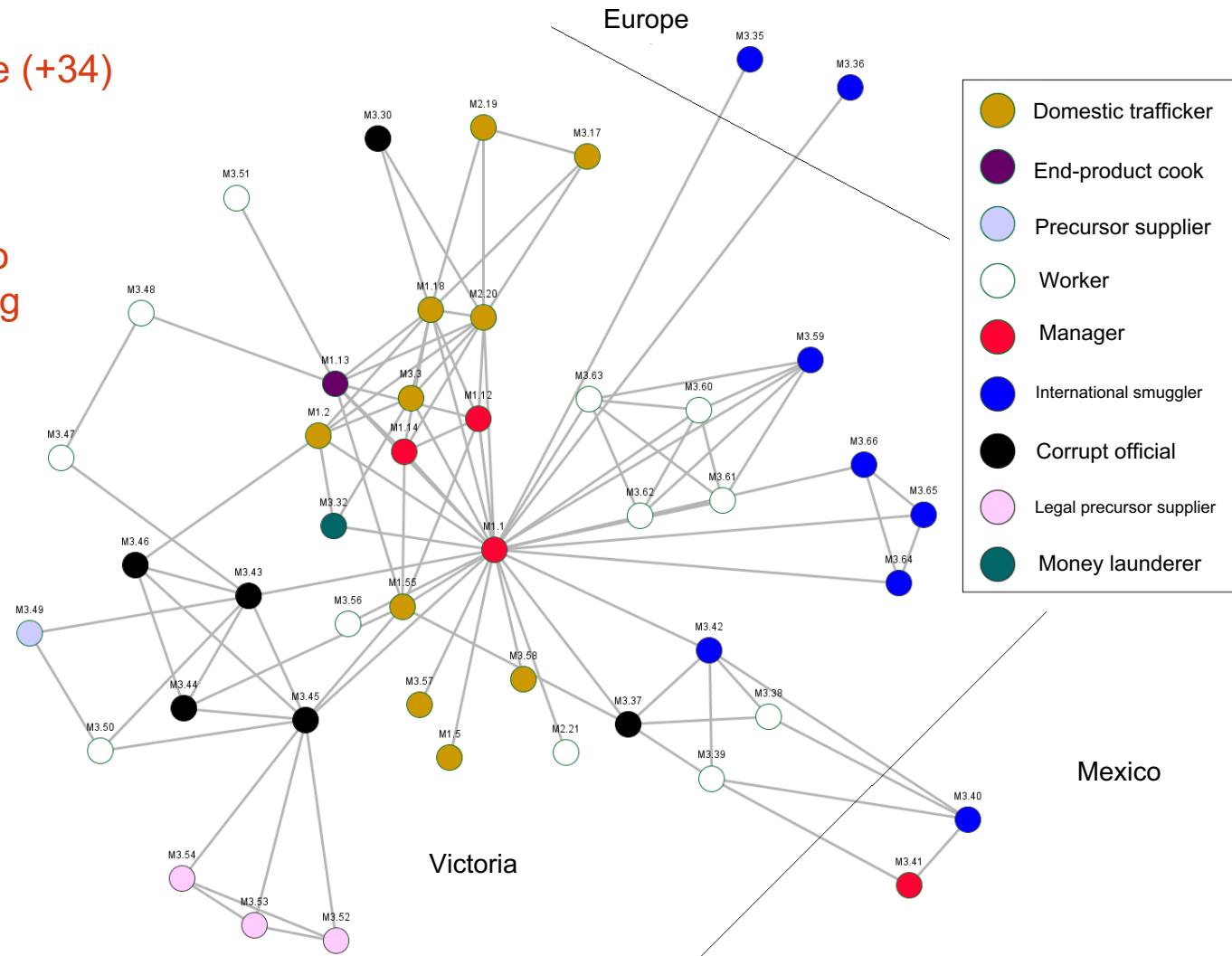
- Less centralised structure
- Less methamphetamine cooks
- Began selling cocaine, ecstasy, cannabis and LSD.
- Recruited new people into network
  - 4 more drug seizures of ecstasy, cocaine and LSD.
  - Several arrests



# Results – T3: Early 2000 to mid 2001

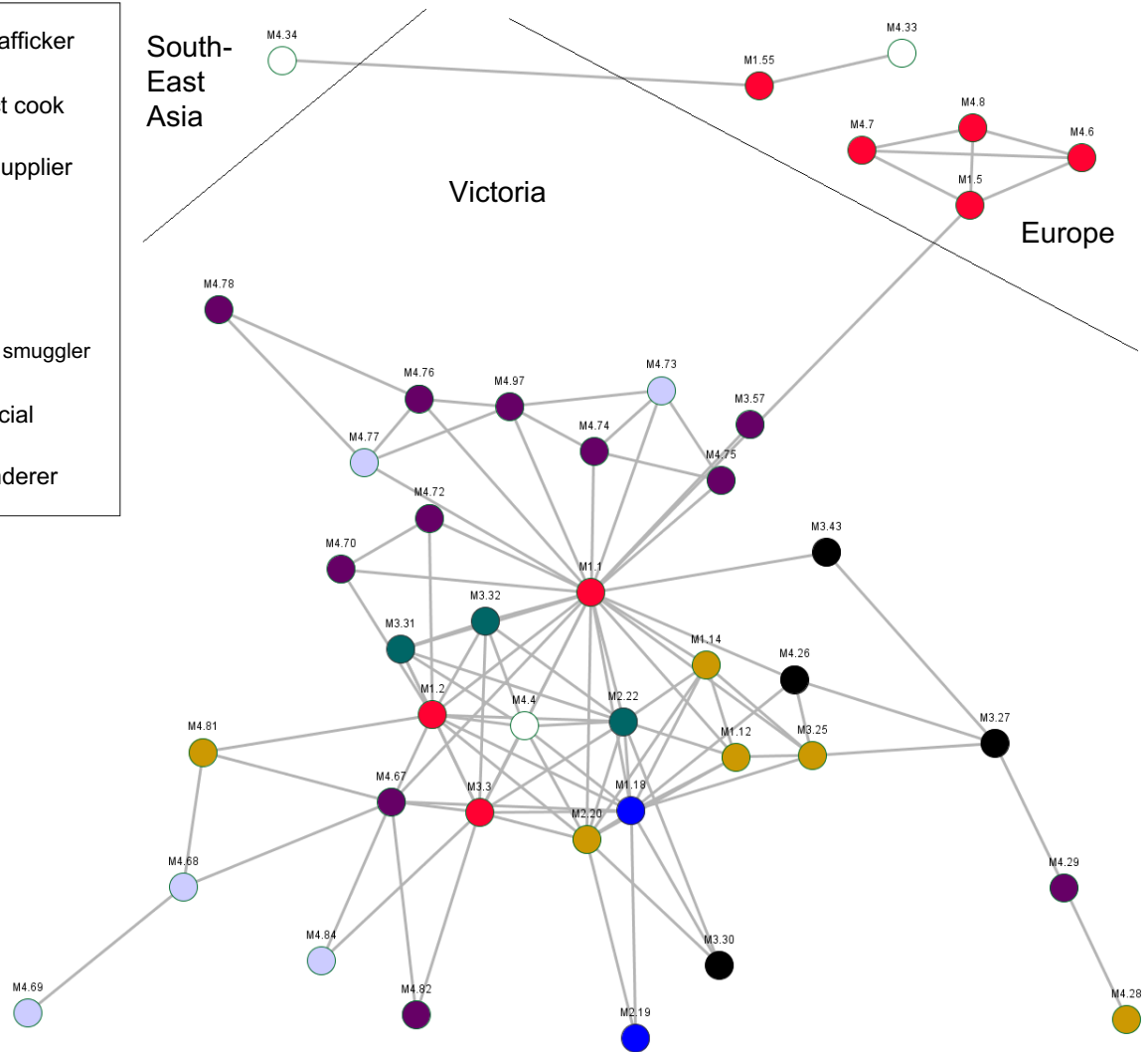
- Large increase in size (+34)
- Decentralised further
- Shift from domestic to international trafficking
- Corruption

- 5 seizures
- 4 non-LE availability and purity changes
- Large number of arrests



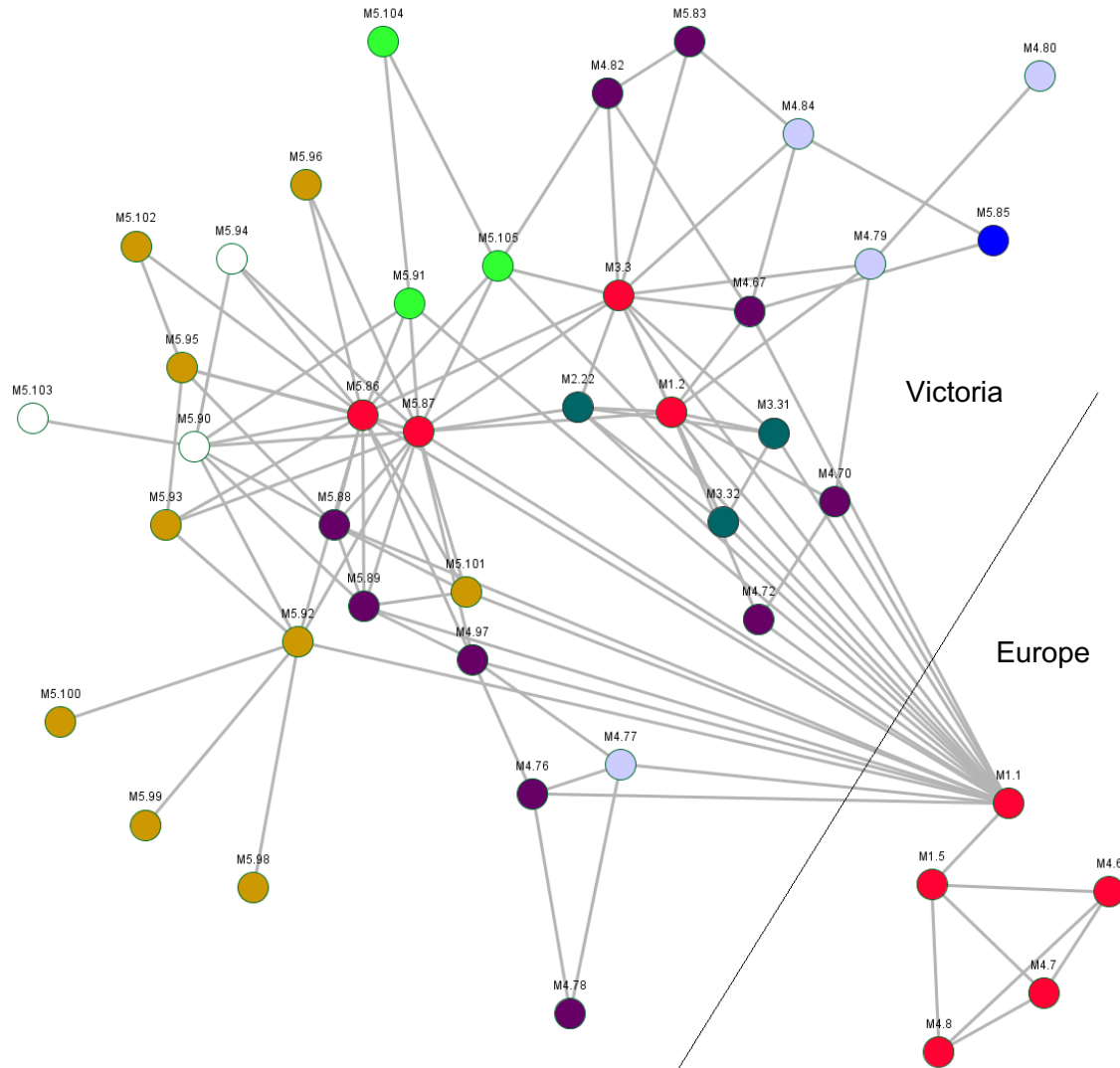
# Results – T4: Mid 2002 to early 2006

- More people recruited to replace those arrested
- Decentralised further
- Shift back to domestic manufacture, but now also ecstasy
- Role shifts: less corruption; more managers and cooks
  - 5 seizures
  - 3 non-LE availability changes
  - More arrests



# Results – T5: Early 2006 to mid 2007

- More people recruited to replace those arrested.
- Establish more labs to replace those seized
- Decentralised further
- Greater focus on domestic production: now cooking their own precursors
- Displacement
  - All central players arrested



# Discussion

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- Shown significant structural and functional changes over time after exposure to supply changes on a large scale
- Shown a range of network adaptations, many not previously known:
  - Decentralisation
  - Recruiting more people into the network
  - Change in focus from domestic to international and vice versa
  - Establish new drug laboratories
  - Corruption
  - Role changes
  - Selling different drug types.
- Despite 33 supply changes, the network continued to sell drugs for 15 years
- Adaptations appeared to be context dependent and changed over time.
  - Law-enforcement-caused supply changes appeared more likely to result in shifting from domestic to international and vice versa, or switching from one drug to another

# Implications for Law Enforcement

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- Many adaptations are possible, and some could result in harms being diverted or increased.
  - E.g. too many domestic seizures may cause traffickers to import and vice versa
  - This could increase harm
- Identifying the specifics of the network, and where the seizure is taking place, may help to predict what adaptations to expect.
- Network lens is important
  - Focusing on individual traffickers only, may mean that key adaptations are missed.
- But, the situation is complex
  - Will supply changes cause more or less harm to the public?
  - Difficult to know until after the fact

# Contact details

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