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The Difference is Research

Background

- Despite increasing evidence challenging the effectiveness and legality of police drug detection dog operations, these strategies remain common within the community.
- Primary concerns are that this policing approach constitutes an invasion of civil liberties, targets people who use drugs rather than people who distribute them and is discriminatory in the areas chosen for deployment.
- Existing literature primarily focuses on experiences with drug dogs in festival settings, with little known about experiences of drug dog encounters in other settings

Aim

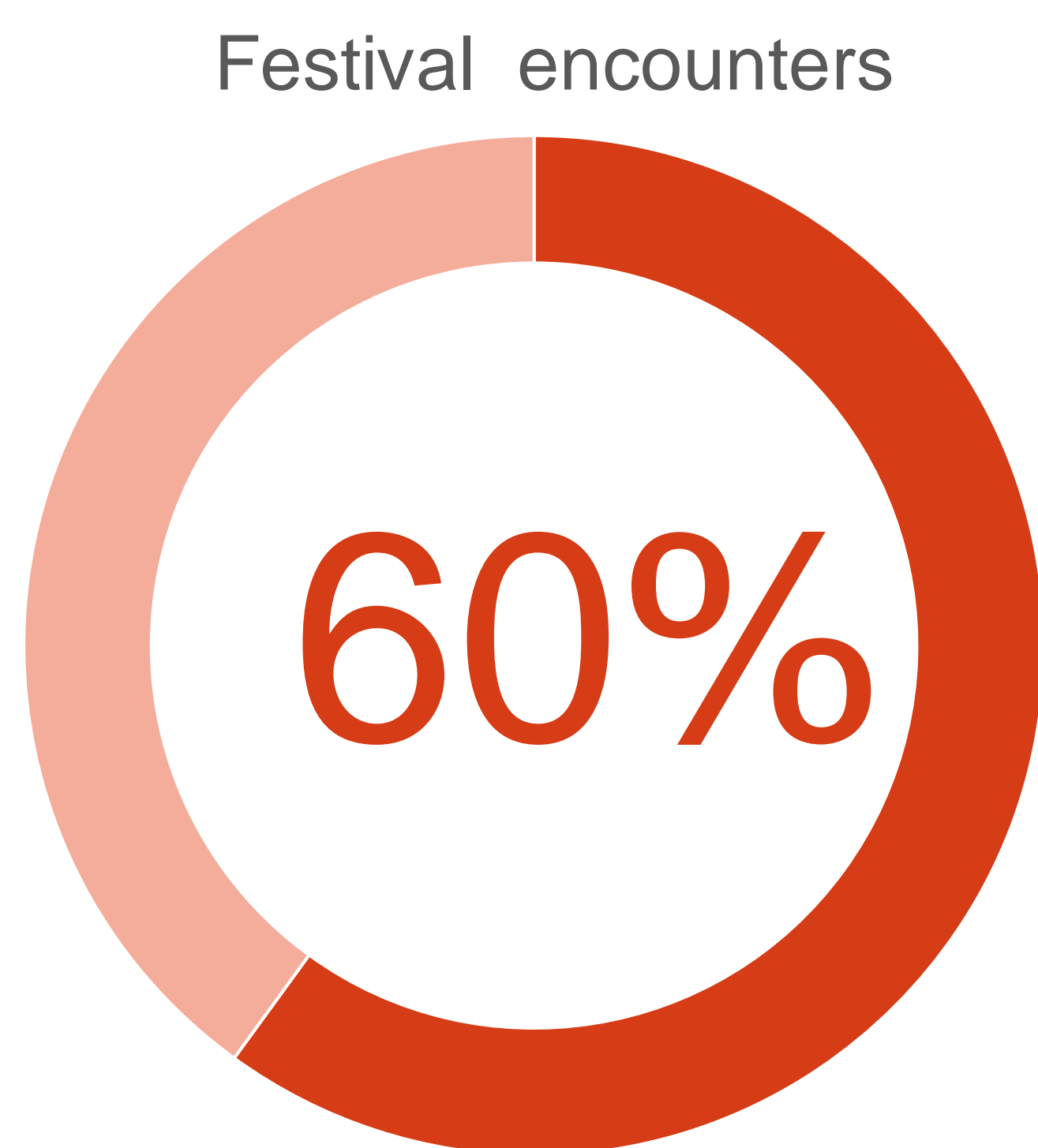
1. Describe drug detection dog encounters at music festivals amongst a sample of people who regularly use MDMA/ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants.
2. Compare non-festival encounters amongst those who regularly use MDMA/ecstasy and those who regularly inject drugs.

Methods

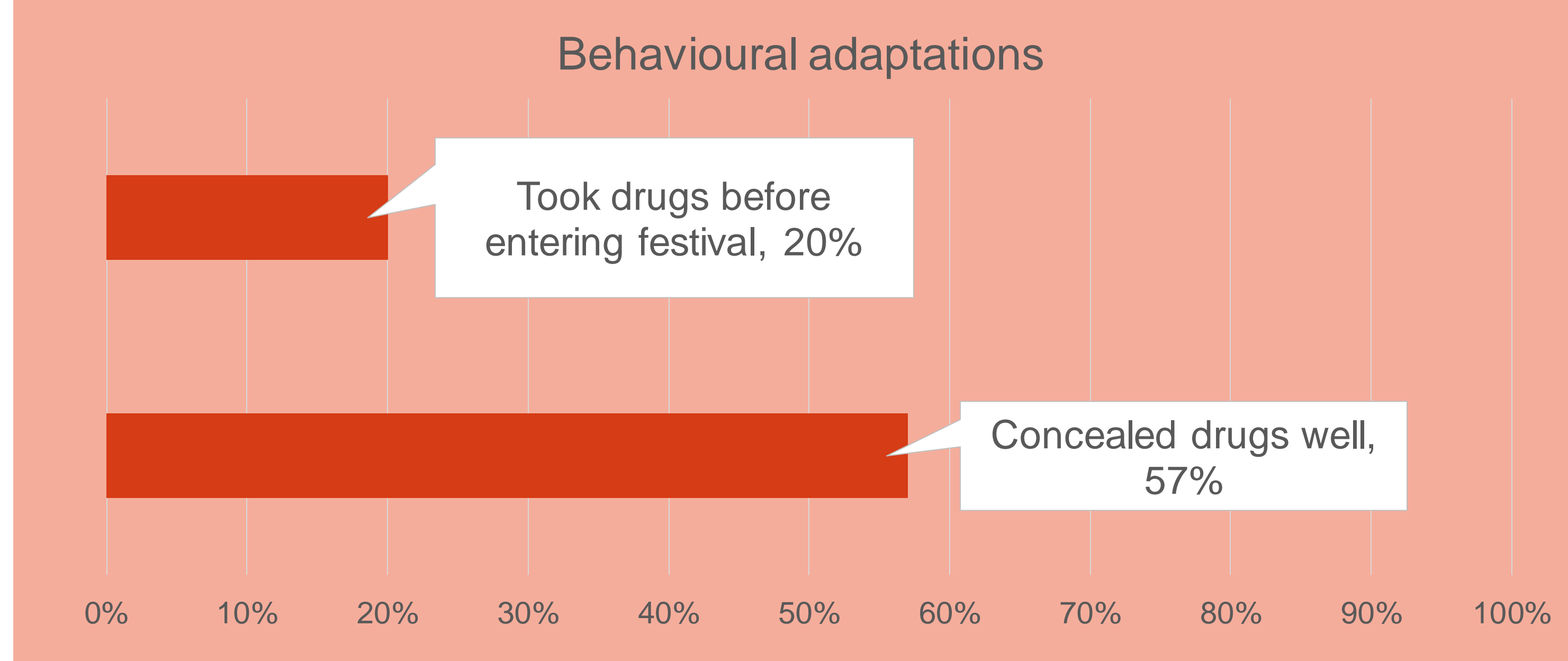
- Australians who regularly (i.e., ≥monthly) use ecstasy and/or other stimulants (n=777; Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS)) or inject drugs (n=862; Illicit Drugs Reporting System (IDRS)).
- Interviewed between April-June 2019.
- Asked about recent encounters with drug dogs, encounter settings, and actions taken in anticipation of and in response to encounters.
- Univariable regression analyses were used to test for differences in drug dog encounters between samples

Results – Music festivals, EDRS

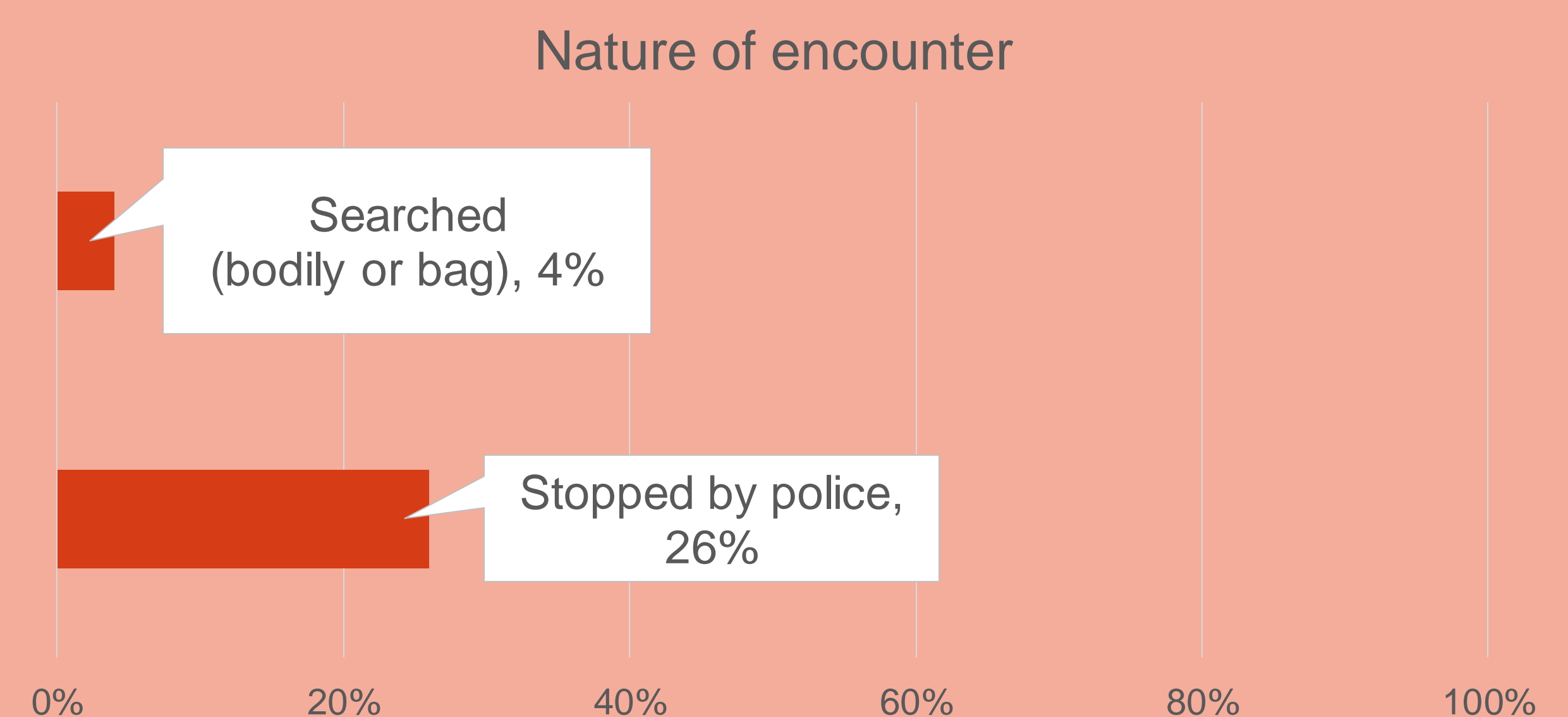
60% of the EDRS sample (i.e., people who regularly use ecstasy and/or illicit stimulants) reported an encounter with drug dogs at a music festival within the last 12 months.



86% of those who encountered drug dogs reported behavioural adaptations to avoid detection:

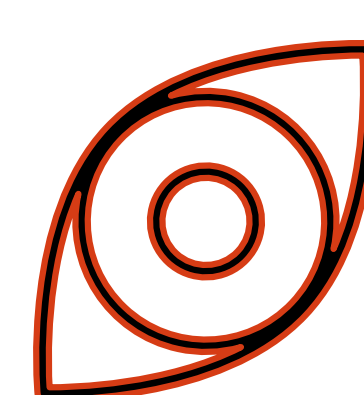


26% of those who had an encounter were stopped by police, and **4%** were searched.



For full results see: <https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13601>

Results – Non-festival settings, EDRS/IDRS



People who inject drugs were *less likely* than people who use ecstasy and/or other stimulants to report a witness only encounter with drug dogs in non-festival settings (OR 0.46; 95% CI 0.30-0.69).

Conversely, they were significantly *more likely* to report being searched by police (3.29; 1.68-6.44), and to experience criminal justice consequences (6.09; 2.00-18.54), despite being no more likely to be carrying drugs at the time of encounter.



Summary

Drug dogs at music festivals do not deter people from carrying or using drugs.

Some of the reported behaviours to avoid detection may increase drug-related harms.

IDRS participants were more likely than EDRS participants to report an intensive or invasive drug dog encounter and/or receive a formal criminal justice consequence, despite being no more likely to be carrying drugs at the time of encounter.

These findings reinforce questions about the efficacy and appropriateness of drug dog operations, and also raise new questions about the equity of these operations.

Acknowledgements and more information

The Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) and the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), falling within the Drug Trends program of work, was supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care under the Drug and Alcohol Program. We would like to thank the participants who were interviewed for both the IDRS and EDRS in the present and in previous years.

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