

# Ketamine use among people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants in Australia: trends and characteristics of use, 2009-2019

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## Background

Recreational use of ketamine was first recorded in the mid-1960s but was infrequent until its emergence in the dance music scene in Europe in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Since then recreational ketamine use has continued to rise, with reports of use emerging from many regions, globally.<sup>2,3</sup> Pharmacologically, ketamine is classified as a dissociative anaesthetic, but due to concerns raised by patients recovering from ketamine anaesthesia, medical use has mostly been restricted.<sup>1</sup> Previous studies have linked several harms with frequent use of ketamine including urological concerns<sup>1</sup>, and reduced psychosocial well-being.<sup>4</sup> In this paper we describe trends in ketamine use among sentinel cross-sectional samples of Australians who regularly use ecstasy and illicit stimulants from 2009-2019, along with the characteristics of consumers.

## Findings

In line with trends internationally,<sup>1</sup> recent use of ketamine increased from 10% to 41% among EDRS participants between 2009 and 2019, primarily driven by a large increase in ketamine use among participants recruited in Melbourne and, to a lesser extent, Sydney. Despite this increase, few participants provided responses to indicate potential problematic use. Frequency of use remained low, with a median of four days of use or fewer reported by consumers each year of monitoring, nationally. Injecting was reported by less than 10% of those reporting recent ketamine use within each year of monitoring.

Nominated route of administration in this study is consistent with findings from other studies on ketamine, where intranasal (i.e. snorting) ingestion was most commonly reported.<sup>3</sup>

In 2019, participant characteristics that distinguished between those who did and did not report recent ketamine use among this sample included being aged 20-24 years (compared to 17-20 years), being born outside of Australia, residing in Sydney or Melbourne (compared to Canberra) and completing year 12 education or a post-school qualification (compared to less than year 12), which were all associated with reporting recent ketamine use and remained statistically significant after completing sensitivity analysis.

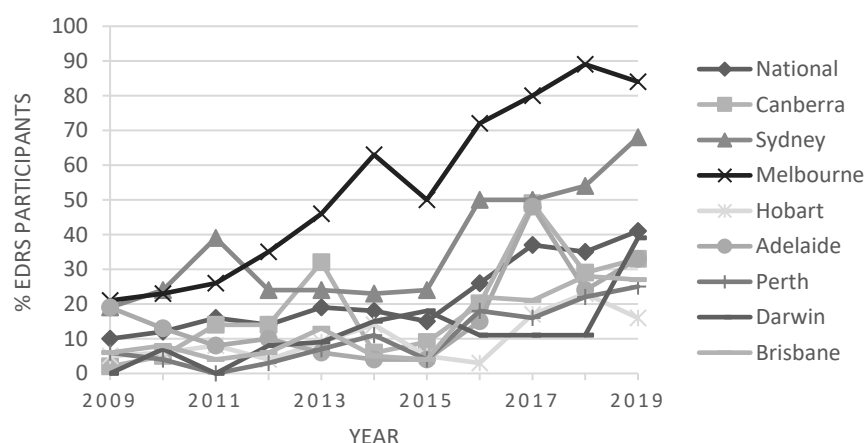


Figure 1. Recent ketamine use among EDRS participants nationally and by Australian state capital, 2009 -19.

## Conclusions

There is an increasing trend in recent ketamine use among sentinel samples of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants in Australia. However, frequency of use remains low and we did not find the trend accompanied by any markers of increased risk (e.g. a higher risk route of administration such as injecting) among this group. Understanding the motives for ketamine use and potential drivers of this increasing trend is of importance, while further research on populations of people who use ketamine experiencing harm is warranted.

## References

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