

Executive Summary

The Queensland (QLD) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisements on websites and via word-of-mouth in Brisbane and the Gold Coast, QLD. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2021 from April-August. Interviews were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, due to COVID-19 restrictions being imposed throughout the data collection period. This methodological change, which also impacted interview modality in 2020, should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020 and 2021 sample, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The QLD EDRS sample (N=73) recruited from Brisbane/Gold Coast, Queensland, was largely similar to the sample in 2020 and in previous years; the sample comprised predominantly young, educated males (60%), most of whom were living in a rental house/flat (67%) or residing with their parents/at their family home (19%) at the time of interview. Participants had an older median age of 24 years in 2021 (IQR=20-32), an increase from 20 years in 2020 ($p=0.012$). Cannabis and ecstasy were the predominant drugs of choice (33% and 26%, respectively), and were also the drugs used most often in the preceding month (47% and 18%, respectively) in 2021.

COVID-19 Impact

This brief section was included to summarise data collected specifically related to COVID-19 and associated restrictions; subsequent sections reflect standard annual reporting. Forty-eight per cent of the QLD sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2 in the past 12 months, though no participants had been diagnosed with COVID-19. Few participants ($n\leq 5$) had received at least one-dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at the time of interview, and 27% reported that they were 'slightly' worried about contracting COVID-19.

Ecstasy

In 2021, 92% of participants reported recent use of any ecstasy, with a significant decline in frequency of use (16 days in 2020; $p=0.001$). A significant change was observed in the chosen route of administration (ROA) for ecstasy powder, whereby the majority of those who had recently used powder reported swallowing it (79%; 39% in 2020; $p=0.031$), and 50% reported snorting, the most common ROA in 2020 (84%; $p=0.044$). There was a significant change in perceived purity of ecstasy capsules, with 25% reporting purity as 'low', and 29% as 'medium' (8% and 40% in 2020, respectively). No changes were observed in the price or perceived availability of any ecstasy forms between 2020 and 2021.

Methamphetamine

Almost one-third (30%) of the sample reported recent use of any form of methamphetamine in 2021, with 36% reporting weekly or more frequent use. Recent use of powder methamphetamine remained stable (15%; 8% in 2020), as did methamphetamine crystal (16%; 14% in 2020). No changes were observed in the price, perceived purity and perceived availability for any form in 2021.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine was reported by 73% of the sample, with the most common ROA being snorting, consistent with previous years. A significant increase was reported in the median price per gram of cocaine at \$350 (\$300 in 2020; $p=0.005$). Significant differences were also observed in the perceived purity of cocaine in 2021 ($p=0.014$), with 31% reporting 'low' purity, an increase from 11% in 2020, and 27% reporting 'high' purity, an increase from 17% in 2020. Likewise, perceived availability of cocaine changed significantly in 2021 ($p=0.004$), with 28% reporting 'very easy' obtainment, an increase from 11% in 2020 and 14% reporting 'difficult' obtainment, a decrease from 40% in 2020.

Cannabis

Eighty-nine per cent of participants reported recent use of cannabis in 2021 (90% in 2020), with 26% of these participants reporting daily

use (22% in 2020). Hydroponic cannabis was the most commonly used form of cannabis (78%; 74% in 2020). The price per ounce of hydroponic cannabis increased significantly to \$375 (\$300 in 2020; $p=0.001$). The perceived availability of bush cannabis significantly changed between 2020 and 2021 ($p=0.023$), with 50% reporting 'very easy' obtainment, an increase from 33% in 2020, and 22% reporting 'easy' obtainment, an inverse decrease from 39% in 2020.

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Recent use of ketamine, LSD and DMT remained stable in 2021, with almost three-fifths (37%) reporting recent use of ketamine, 60% reporting recent use of LSD and 26% reporting recent use of DMT in 2021. A significant change was reported with regards to the perceived availability of LSD between 2020 and 2021 ($p=0.049$), with 28% reporting 'very easy' obtainment, and 21% reporting 'difficult' obtainment, a decrease from 39% in 2020.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Fifteen per cent of participants reported recent use of any NPS (including plant-based NPS) in 2021, similar to 2020 (21%, $p=0.427$), and 14% reported recent use of any NPS (excluding plant-based NPS), stable from 19% in 2020 ($p=0.474$). A significant decrease was observed in the percentage of participants reporting any phenethylamine use ($n\leq 5$ in 2021; 10% in 2020; $p=0.047$).

Other Drugs

Twelve per cent reported recent use of non-prescribed codeine, remaining stable from 9% in 2020. Similarly, recent use of any non-prescribed benzodiazepines remained stable (40%; 38% in 2020). However, a significant decrease was observed in the frequency of non-prescribed alprazolam use, from a median of seven days in 2020 to one day in 2021 ($p=0.016$). Just under half the sample (48%) reported recent use of hallucinogenic mushrooms, although use was infrequent at a median of three days in 2021. Alcohol (95%) and tobacco (72%) use remained common amongst the sample, with a significant increase in daily use of alcohol among those

who reported recent use (10%; $n\leq 5$ in 2020; $p=0.020$). Half (55%) of the sample reported recent use of e-cigarettes, a significant increase from 2020 (38%). Almost two-thirds (63%) of those who had recently consumed e-cigarettes reported that they did not use e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation tool.

Drug-Related Harms and Other Associated Behaviours

The majority (90%) of the sample reported concurrent use of more than one substance on their last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use. Almost three-quarters (73%) of the sample obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT, indicative of hazardous alcohol use. Twenty-one per cent reported a non-fatal stimulant overdose, and 22% reported a non-fatal depressant overdose in the past year. No participants reported injecting any drug in the past month and few participants ($n\leq 5$) were currently in drug treatment. Seventy-seven per cent reported engaging in sexual activity in the four weeks prior to interview, of which 25% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. Almost two-thirds of the sample (63%) self-reported that they had experienced a mental health problem in the preceding six months, the most common problems being anxiety (70%) and depression (59%). Of the total sample ($n=62$), 23% reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol and 49% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug. Reports of any criminal activity in the month preceding interview remained stable at 38% (34% in 2020). Drug dealing remained the most common form of self-reported criminal activity in 2021 (30%; 24% in 2020). Ninety-six per cent reported obtaining illicit drugs face-to-face in the 12 months preceding interview, consistent with 2020 (93%). A significant decrease was observed in the use of text-messaging (31%; 54% in 2020; $p=0.005$) and phone calls (21%; 41% in 2020; $p=0.008$) as a way of arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs.