Introduction
The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), conducted since 2000, monitors the price, purity and availability of heroin and other opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine and cannabis. This poster provides a closer look at gender differences among people who inject drugs (PWID) interviewed in 2011 for the IDRS.

Method
The system uses data from three sources:
• Interviews with people who inject drugs (n=868)
• Interviews with key experts who work with PWID
• Existing databases on drug-related issues (indicator data) such as customs

Results
Demographics
• 575 males and 289 females
• Males were significantly more likely than females to be older (39 yrs vs. 37 yrs; p<0.05), single (60% vs. 40%; p<0.05), heterosexual (93% vs. 77%; p<0.05), unemployed (83% vs. 72%; p<0.05) and to have a previous prison history (83% vs. 37%; p<0.05) (Table 1).
• Females were significantly more likely than males to have an English speaking background (99% vs. 95%; p<0.05), to identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (18% vs. 12%; p<0.05) and to be in current drug treatment (55% vs. 46%; p<0.05) (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics by gender, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (years)^*</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>English speaking background^* (%)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>99</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander^* (%)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterosexual^* (%)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single^* (%)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed^* (%)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current treatment^* (%)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison History^* (%)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Risk behaviour and criminal activity
Injecting risk behaviours and problems
• No significant differences were found between males and females for borrowing a needle, lending a needle, sharing of other injecting equipment (excluding needles) and the re-use of their own equipment (Figure 2).
• Among those who re-used their own injecting equipment males were significantly more likely than females to re-use spoons/mixing containers (87% vs. 77%; p<0.05).
• Females were significantly more likely than males to re-use their own tourniquets (51% vs. 35%; p<0.05).
• Females were significantly more likely than males to report problems associated with injecting (68% vs. 58%; p<0.05). In particular scarring and/or bruising (55% vs. 39%; p<0.05) and difficulty injecting (46% vs. 33%; p<0.05).

Drug use
Recent use
• Males were significantly more likely than females to report recent use of cannabis (82% vs. 73%; p<0.05), illicit buprenorphine (17% vs. 10%; p<0.05) and illicit buprenorphine-naloxone (15% vs. 9%; p<0.05) (Figure 1).

Frequency of use
• Males reported a significantly higher frequency of illicit buprenorphine use (48 days vs. 32 days; p<0.05) than females.
• Females reported a significantly higher frequency of cocaine use (25 days vs. 14 days; p<0.05), illicit alprazolam (31 days vs. 230 days; p<0.05), illicit other benzodiazepines (58 days vs. 42 days; p<0.05) and illicit methadone (19 days vs. 12 days; p<0.05) than males.

Self-reported mental health problems
Participants were asked whether they had attended a health professional for a mental health problem in the last six months. A significant gender difference was found, with a greater proportion of females self-reporting a mental health problem than males (54% vs. 46%; p<0.05) (Table 2).

Figure 1: Recent use among PWID by gender, 2011

Figure 2: Borrowing and/or lending needles and sharing of injecting equipment among PWID by gender, 2011

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Conclusion
Males were more likely to be older, single, heterosexual, unemployed and to have a previous prison history than females.
Both groups were polydrug users. Males were more likely to report the recent use of cannabis, illicit buprenorphine and illicit buprenorphine-naloxone.
However females reported a higher frequency of cocaine, illicit alprazolam, other benzodiazepines and illicit methadone use.
No differences between gender were found for borrowing, lending or sharing of injecting equipment. However, males reported re-using their own spoons/mixing containers more so than females. While females were more likely to re-use tourniquets and report injecting related problems such as scarring and/or bruising and difficulty injecting.
Females were also more likely to self-report a mental health problem in particular anxiety, phobias and panic more so than males. Males were more likely to report schizophrenia.

Further information:
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