

# An examination of lifetime and current illicit substance use in a sample of non-frequent users



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## Background

• In 2007, 38.1% of Australians reported lifetime use of an illicit substance and 13.4% reported use of an illicit substance at least once within the last 12 months [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2008].

• The most common illicit substance used was cannabis (33.5 % reported lifetime use and 9.1% reported recent use; AIHW, 2008).

• The majority of people that use illicit substances appear to be socially and economically integrated, well educated and use a low range of illicit substances infrequently (from once ever to multiple uses infrequently; Shearer et al., 2007).

• Only a minority of people who use illicit substances are socially and economically marginalised, use large quantities of illicit substances frequently, and display addictive behaviours (Shearer et al., 2007).

• A study of past illicit substance use in pregnant women found a high proportion of lifetime illicit substance use (27.9%). Recent use of cannabis was 2.5%. This suggests the existence of a large 'infrequent' user population (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2001).

• Infrequent users are often excluded from studies examining illicit substance use, as most research is targeted towards problematic users that are more likely to suffer from the negative effects of illicit substance use. Consequently, there is much less focus on the drug use habits of infrequent and non-problematic users.

• A longitudinal study examining the effects of parental substance use on child development provides an opportunity to examine the drug use behaviors of a sample that is rarely involved in research.

## Aim

• To examine patterns of past and current illicit substance use in a sample of pregnant women and their partners rarely involved in research on illicit drug use.

• To examine the demographic characteristics associated with illicit substance use.

## Method

### Recruitment:

• Sixty-eight pregnant women and their partners were recruited through general antenatal clinics at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney into a pilot longitudinal study examining the effects of parental substance use on infant development.

• All participants were interviewed regarding demographics, lifetime and current drug and alcohol use, nutrition, social functioning and mental health.

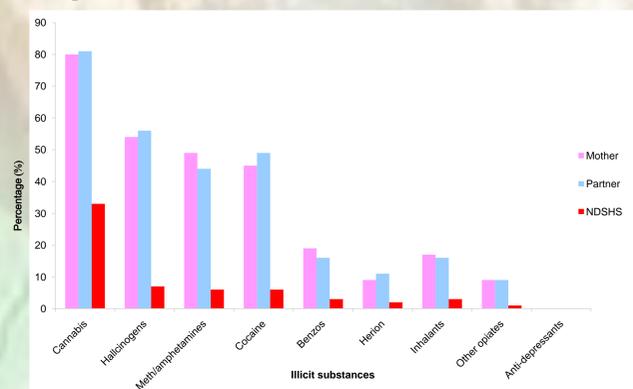
• For the purposes of the current poster demographics and lifetime and current illicit substance use were examined.

## Results

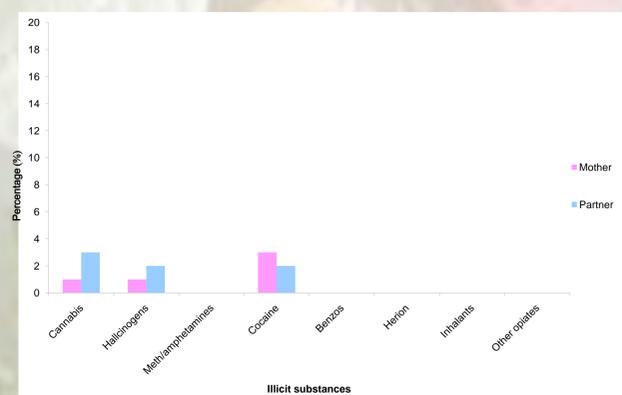
Table 1: Demographics

Characteristics	Mother	Partner
Mean Age	33.04	36.33
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander (%)	1	2
Born in Australia (%)	65	66
Median Schooling Years	12	12
Completed Tertiary Education	90	90
Employed Full-Time (%)	62	85
Mean Fortnightly Income (after tax)	\$1,622	\$2,169
Married (%)	61	67
Living in Own House/Unit (%)	52	57

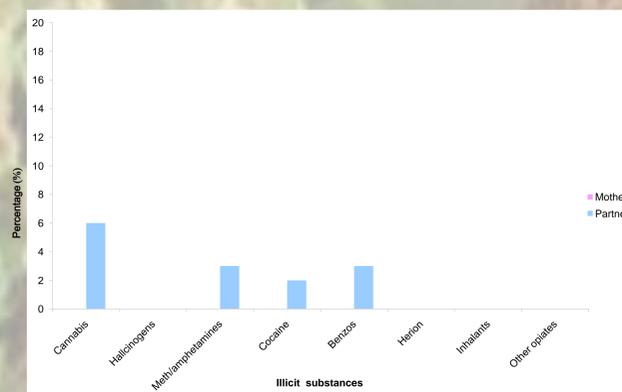
Graph 1: Lifetime use of illicit substances



Graph 2: Illicit substance use three months prior to conception



Graph 3: Illicit substance use in the month prior to interview



## Discussion

• Participants were in their early thirties, were well educated, earned a moderate to high fortnightly income and had reasonably stable living conditions, with approximately half owning their own property. Therefore the sample demographic and psychosocial characteristics were consistent with the 'integrated users' described by Shearer et al. (2007).

• A much higher percentage of the sample (consistent across mothers and partners) reported lifetime illicit substance use when compared to the national average (AIHW, 2008).

• Illicit substance use in the three months prior to conception was significantly less when compared with those who had ever used.

• No women were currently using illicit drugs. It is important to note however that these women were pregnant, and may have therefore been motivated to alter their substance use pattern. It can not be determined whether this decreased pattern of use will be maintained after the birth of their child.

• The lifetime use of illicit substances in this sample was much higher than those from the NDSHS and other research. There are a number of factors to consider. Firstly, this sample was based in the inner city of Sydney which has been found to have higher rates of illicit substance use than other areas in Australia. Secondly, it may be that the nature of the study is attracting a sample that are interested in the topic due to their past use of illicit substances.

## Conclusion

• This study examined a pilot cohort of pregnant women and partners recruited through general antenatal clinics.

• The vast majority of women and their partners were socio-economically integrated.

• The majority of women and partners reported lifetime use of illicit substances, however, reported current use was almost non-existent.

• The current study was limited with regard to the number of participants and the demographic homogeneity of the sample. The number of lifetime illicit substance users found in this study compared to the national average was much greater, though due to the small sample size caution must be taken when interpreting these results.

• Regardless, these results suggest that, consistent with previous research, there are a group of illicit substance users that appear to be socially and economically integrated and well educated that are often not the focus of illicit substance research.

• Extension of the pilot study to include a larger sample, recruited across a number of sites, would improve the generalisability of results and lead to improved knowledge of the effects of infrequent substance use.

## References

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