Overdose and drug dependency among regular illicit drug users in Australia

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Introduction

• Increase in reported stimulant overdoses in EDRS surveys.
• No increase in reported heroin overdoses in IDRS surveys, but an increase in unintentional fatal opioid overdoses.
• Unintentional drug overdoses linked to heavy drug use including alcohol use.
• A key risk factor for a drug overdose is a previous overdose.

Findings

| Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics EDRS and IDRS nationally, 2014 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                             | EDRS (N=800) | IDRS (N=898) |
| % male                      | 66            | 69            |
| % under 25 years old        | 74            | 3             |
| % unstable housing          | 5             | 21            |
| % single                    | 58            | 56            |
| % completed year 12         | 81            | 21            |
| % unemployed                | 15            | 83            |
| % in drug treatment         | 2             | 47            |

Note: Numbers may vary due to missing data.

Factors associated with recent overdose among PWUP

Unstable housing was the only sociodemographic characteristic that was significantly associated with recent overdose on any drug (p<.05).

Experiences of overdose

EDRS
• Lifetime stimulant overdose (n=217)
  Median times: 2 (range 1-100)
• Most recent time in last 12 months
  Main drug: ecstasy (57%) & ice/crystal (9%)
• Main location: private dwelling (36%), music festival (43%) & nightclub (15%)
  Main symptoms: vomiting, visual hallucinations, fever, heart racing, extreme anxiety & paranoia

IDRS
• Lifetime heroin overdose (n=355)
  Median times 2 (range 1-200)
• Most recent time in last 12 months
  Main drug: alcohol (74%), benzodiazepines (4%) & GHB (4%)
• Main location: private dwelling (39%), public (10%)
  Main symptoms: losing consciousness, collapsing

Conclusions

• PWUP were more likely to report a recent overdose than PWID.
• Those who overdosed, tended to have repeat overdoses
• Main drugs attributed for PWUP were alcohol and ecstasy versus heroin, ice/crystal, benzodiazepines for PWID
• Supports research that overdoses are more likely to occur amongst dependent users.
• Harm minimisation target groups: heavy drug and alcohol users

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Factors associated with recent overdose among PWUP

Recent overdose on any drug was associated with being at risk of dependency on alcohol and opioids (p<.05), though not for stimulant drugs.

Factors associated with recent overdose among PWUP

Being under 25 years old was significantly associated with a reported recent overdose on any drug (p<.05). All other sociodemographic characteristics were not significantly associated.

EDRS
• 82% had risky alcohol use (AUDIT score 8+), with 34% scoring hazardous or higher (16+).
• 25% were at risk of stimulant dependency (SDS score 3+).

IDRS
• 47% were at risk of alcohol dependency (AUDIT-C score 5+)
• 69% of opioid users at risk of opioid dependency (SDS score 5+)
• 41% of stimulant users at risk of stimulant dependency (SDS score 4+)

Drugs dependency

EDRS
• 56% had risky alcohol use (AUDIT score 8+), with 34% scoring hazardous or higher (16+).
• 25% were at risk of stimulant dependency (SDS score 3+).

IDRS
• 47% were at risk of alcohol dependency (AUDIT-C score 5+)
• 69% of opioid users at risk of opioid dependency (SDS score 5+)
• 41% of stimulant users at risk of stimulant dependency (SDS score 4+)