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

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 socio-demographic characteristics were not significantly associated.

Factors associated with recent overdose among PWUP

Unstable housing was the only socio-demographic 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 12mths
  - Main drugs: ecstasy (55%), ice/crystal (97%)
  - Main location: music festival (23%), nightclubs (15%)
  - Main symptom: vomiting, extreme anxiety & paranoia

IDRS

- Lifetime heroin overdose (n=195)
  - Median times: 2 (range 1-100)
  - Most recent time in last 12mths
  - Main drugs: alcohol (74%), benzodiazepines (4%) & GHB (4%)
  - Main location: private dwelling (39%), pubs (10%)
  - Main symptom: 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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