

# 11 Polydrug use

## Introduction

Drugs researchers and policy-makers are interested in two types of multiple drug use: the suite of drugs an individual user consumes over a specified time period, but not necessarily concurrently, often termed polydrug use, and the particular combination of drugs used in any one drug-taking session. This chapter reports on the former, that is data collected in the 2001 NDSHS on the consumption of multiple drugs by each respondent in the past 12 months, without specifying concurrency.

## Polydrug use and tobacco

Across the drugs reported in 2001, the prevalence of use of other drugs in the past 12 months was higher for tobacco smokers than non-smokers (Table 11.1). There was about a fourfold greater use of marijuana/cannabis and any illicit drug among smokers compared with non-smokers. There was only a moderate difference observed in the use of alcohol among the two groups.

**Table 11.1: Recent<sup>(a)</sup> use of other drugs by smokers and non-smokers: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Other substances recently used	Males		Females		Persons	
	Smokers <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-smokers	Smokers <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-smokers	Smokers <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-smokers
	(per cent)					
Alcohol	92.5	83.6	88.2	76.8	90.5	80.0
Marijuana/cannabis	35.2	9.2	27.6	5.4	31.7	7.2
Any illicit drug	41.4	12.3	33.5	9.1	37.8	10.7
Any illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis	20.7	5.4	17.1	4.9	19.1	5.2

(a) Used in the past 12 months.

(b) Consumed tobacco in the past 12 months.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001.

## Polydrug use and alcohol

The differences in recent use of other drugs by drinkers and non-drinkers broadly follow the pattern for tobacco, with drinkers having higher prevalence of other recent drug use than non-drinkers (Table 11.2). A sixfold difference in marijuana/cannabis use is observed between drinkers and non-drinkers, while drinkers have a smoking prevalence about twice that of non-drinkers.

**Table 11.2: Recent<sup>(a)</sup> use of other drugs by drinkers and non-drinkers: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Other substances recently used	Males		Females		Persons	
	Drinkers <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-drinkers	Drinkers <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-drinkers	Drinkers <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-drinkers
	(per cent)					
Tobacco	27.6	13.6	23.2	11.8	25.5	12.5
Marijuana/cannabis	17.9	3.3	12.2	1.9	15.1	2.4
Any illicit drug	22.0	5.8	16.5	5.2	19.3	5.5
Any illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis	10.3	3.2	8.3	3.9	9.3	3.6

(a) Used in the past 12 months.

(b) Consumed alcohol in the past 12 months.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001.

## Polydrug use and marijuana/cannabis

Users of marijuana/cannabis appeared to have much higher prevalence of other recent drug use compared with non-users of marijuana/cannabis (Table 11.3). While there was only a moderate difference observed in alcohol prevalence among the user and non-user groups, tobacco prevalence was three times higher in marijuana/cannabis users compared with non-users (57.0% and 18.2% respectively). This was consistent with smoking behaviour, as 'joints' were the most common form of marijuana/cannabis consumption. There were up to 100-fold differences in prevalence for drugs such as hallucinogens. The gradients were generally larger for females than males.

The relatively high use of amphetamines and ecstasy among marijuana/cannabis users (compared with non-users, or the general population) suggests a user group for which all three substances are available and used.

**Table 11.3: Recent<sup>(a)</sup> use of other drugs by users and non-users of marijuana/cannabis: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Other substances recently used	Males		Females		Persons	
	Users <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-users	Users <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-users	Users <sup>(b)</sup>	Non-users
	(per cent)					
Alcohol	97.1	83.9	96.1	77.4	96.7	80.5
Tobacco	56.9	19.8	57.2	16.7	57.0	18.2
Pain-killers/analgesics <sup>(c)</sup>	5.8	2.4	8.2	2.5	6.7	2.5
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills <sup>(c)</sup>	5.1	0.5	5.7	0.5	5.3	0.5
Steroids <sup>(c)</sup>	*0.4	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.4	0.1
Barbiturates <sup>(c)</sup>	0.8	0.1	0.6	0.1	0.7	0.1
Inhalants	2.3	0.2	1.9	0.1	2.2	0.2
Heroin	0.9	0.1	1.4	0.1	1.1	0.1
Methadone <sup>(d)</sup>	*0.4	–	0.7	–	0.6	–
Other opiates <sup>(c)</sup>	1.5	0.1	1.9	0.1	1.7	0.1
Amphetamines <sup>(c)</sup>	23.1	0.6	20.1	0.7	21.9	0.6
Cocaine/crack	8.4	0.3	7.4	0.3	8.0	0.3
LSD/synthetic hallucinogens	10.2	0.1	7.1	0.1	9.0	0.1
Ecstasy/designer drugs	20.0	0.5	18.5	0.4	19.4	0.5
Injected drugs	3.9	0.2	3.3	0.1	3.7	0.1

(a) Used in the past 12 months.

(b) Used cannabis in the past 12 months.

(c) For non-medical purposes.

(d) Non-maintenance.

\* Relative standard error greater than 50%.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001.

## Polydrug use and amphetamine-type substances

In this section, recent users of any one or more of amphetamines, ecstasy or cocaine have been grouped into users of amphetamine-type substances (ATS). Across all reported drugs, recent users of ATS had substantially higher prevalence than non-users, including three times the rate of smoking and around eight times the use of marijuana/cannabis (Table 11.4). There were only moderate differences in alcohol prevalence among users and non-users of ATS.

Recent ATS users accounted for the entire population prevalence of non-maintenance use of methadone for both sexes, and all of the heroin and steroids use among females. By definition, there was no use of amphetamines, ecstasy or cocaine for non-users of ATS.

The most common ATS used was amphetamines (72.8%), followed by ecstasy (62.1%) and cocaine (28.2%). The prevalence and distribution of ATS was similar among males and females.

These results corroborate the previous statement that ATS with marijuana/cannabis appear to be readily available to and used by a particular user group.

**Table 11.4: Recent<sup>(a)</sup> use of other drugs by users and non-users of amphetamine-type substances<sup>(b)</sup>: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Other substances recently used	Males		Females		Persons	
	Users <sup>(c)</sup>	Non-users	Users <sup>(c)</sup>	Non-users	Users <sup>(c)</sup>	Non-users
	(per cent)					
Alcohol	97.6	85.1	95.5	78.4	96.8	81.7
Tobacco	62.3	23.5	61.5	19.2	62.0	21.3
Marijuana	86.1	11.7	74.6	7.5	81.4	9.5
Pain-killers/analgesics <sup>(d)</sup>	10.6	2.5	13.2	2.8	11.6	2.6
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills <sup>(d)</sup>	12.3	0.6	11.2	0.6	11.9	0.6
Steroids <sup>(d)</sup>	1.6	0.1	2.0	–	1.8	0.1
Barbiturates <sup>(d)</sup>	2.8	0.1	2.0	0.1	2.4	0.1
Inhalants	6.8	0.2	4.0	0.2	5.7	0.2
Heroin	3.1	0.1	4.6	–	3.7	0.1
Methadone <sup>(e)</sup>	1.9	–	1.9	–	1.9	–
Other opiates <sup>(d)</sup>	4.4	0.1	4.8	0.1	4.5	0.1
Amphetamines <sup>(d)</sup>	74.0	..	71.1	..	72.8	..
Cocaine/crack	28.7	..	27.5	..	28.2	..
LSD/synthetic hallucinogens	26.7	0.3	20.0	0.1	23.9	0.2
Ecstasy/designer drugs	63.2	..	60.5	..	62.1	..
Injected drugs	12.5	0.1	9.6	0.1	11.4	0.1

(a) Used in the past 12 months.

(b) One or more of amphetamines, ecstasy or cocaine.

(c) Used amphetamine-type substances in the past 12 months.

(d) For non-medical purposes.

(e) Non-maintenance.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2001.