

# 6 Illicit drug use

## Introduction

This chapter presents data on use of any illicit drug. Illicit drugs include illegal drugs (such as marijuana/cannabis), prescription drugs (such as pain-killers, tranquillisers) when used for non-medical purposes, and other substances used inappropriately (such as inhalants). For a full list of drugs included in the survey questionnaire, see Glossary.

Two types of data are presented in this chapter: firstly data on the use of any illicit drug, and secondly data on the use of any illicit drug excluding marijuana/cannabis (the influence of marijuana/cannabis is removed due to its relatively high use compared with other illicit drugs).

The majority of recent users of illicit drugs (68.6%) had used only one kind of illicit drug in the last 12 months. When marijuana/cannabis is excluded, 58.4% of recent users had used only one kind of illicit drug in the last 12 months.

## Use of any illicit drug

### Use of any illicit drug

In 2001, almost 6 million (37.7%) Australians aged 14 years and over had used an illicit drug in their lifetime (Table 6.1):

- Males (41.3%) were more likely than females (34.2%) to have used an illicit drug in their lifetime.
- Approximately 2.7 million Australians had used an illicit drug in the last 12 months, with males (19.8%) more likely than females (14.2%) to have used in the last 12 months.
- Australians aged 20–29 years were more likely than those in the other age groups to have used an illicit drug in their lifetime and in the last 12 months.

**Table 6.1: Use of any illicit drug, persons aged 14 years and over, by age, by sex, Australia, 2001**

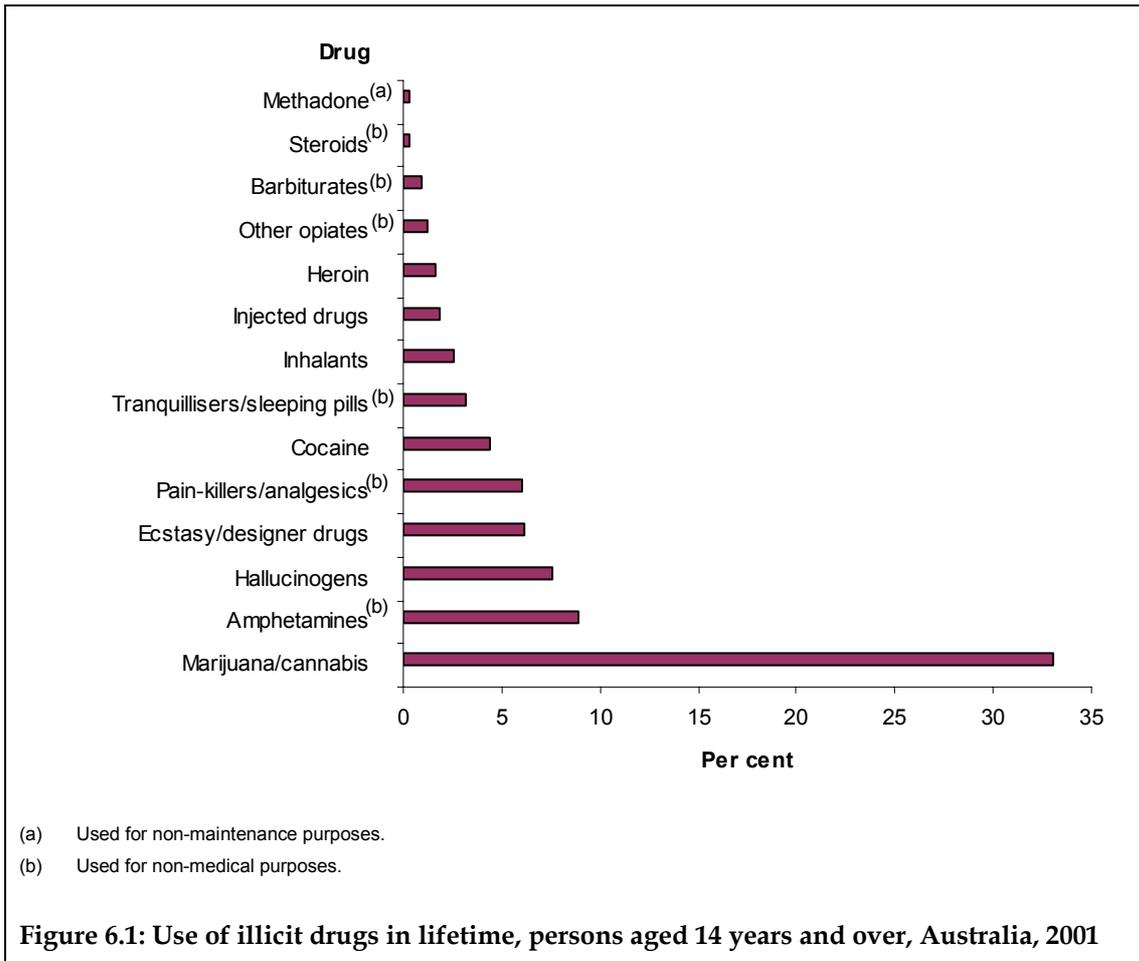
Period	Age group				Sex		Persons
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	Males	Females	
	(per cent)						
In lifetime	37.7	62.6	53.4	23.9	41.3	34.2	37.7
In the last 12 months	27.7	35.5	20.3	7.5	19.8	14.2	16.9
	(number)						
In lifetime	612,400	1,775,400	1,569,400	1,949,400	3,211,700	2,717,600	5,930,400
In the last 12 months	450,900	1,007,500	595,300	618,500	1,536,800	1,125,800	2,663,600

Note: Totals may not equal sum due to rounding.

## Type of illicit drugs used in lifetime

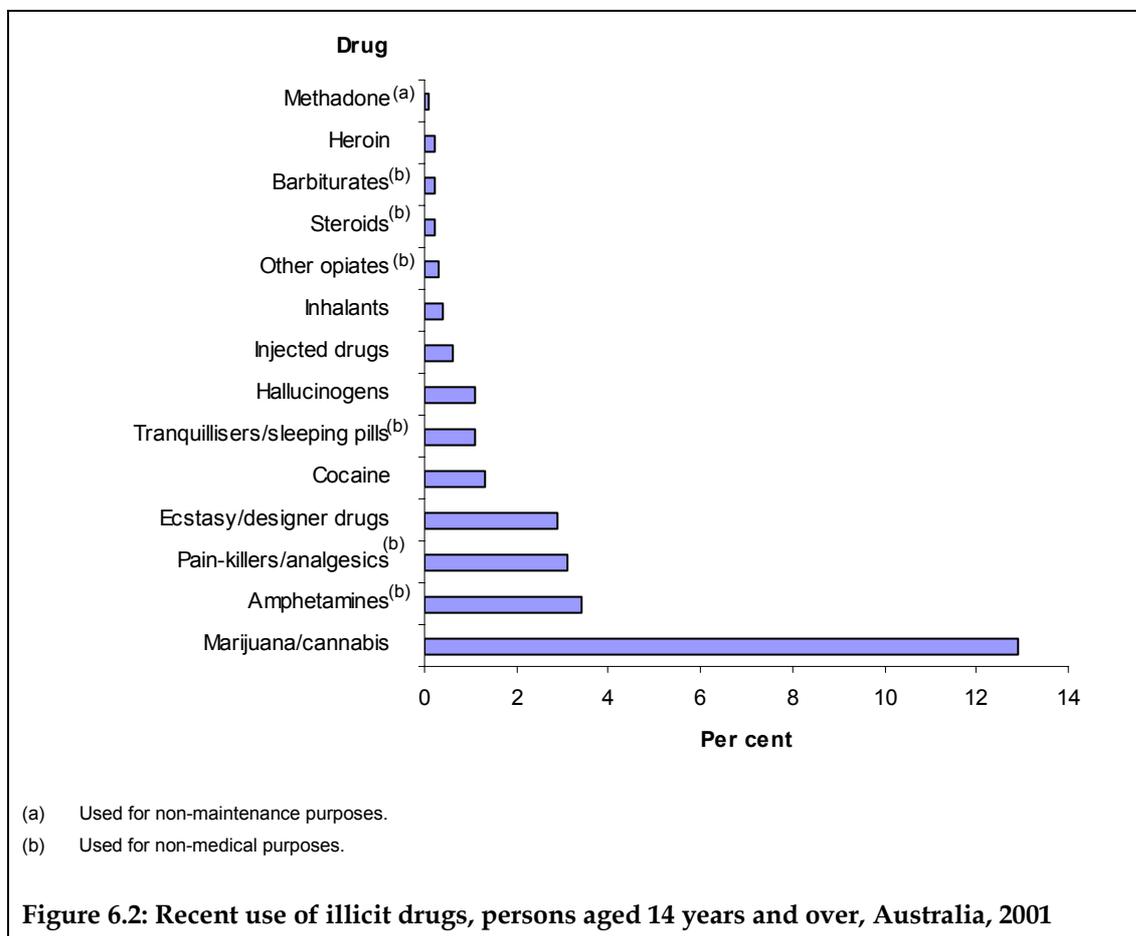
Around 38% of the population aged 14 years and over had used an illicit drug at least once in their lifetime.

Marijuana/cannabis was the most common illicit drug used, with one in three persons reporting that they had used at least once in their lifetime (Figure 6.1). The four next most commonly used illicit drugs were amphetamines (8.9%), hallucinogens (7.6%), ecstasy/designer drugs (6.1%), pain-killers/analgesics (for non-medical purposes) (6.0%).



## Type of illicit drugs used recently

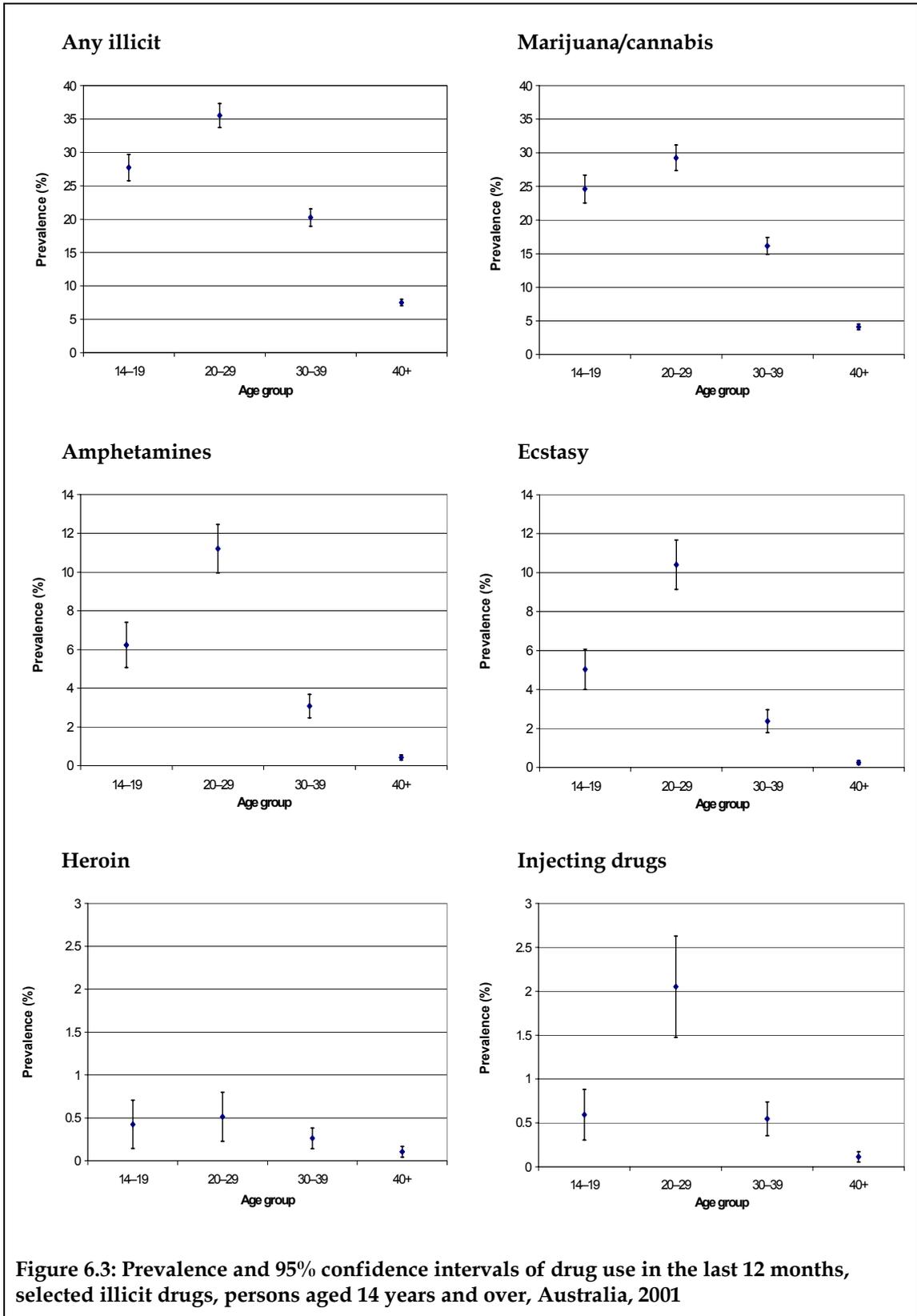
In 2001, the five illicit drugs most commonly used in the last 12 months, in order of descending prevalence, were marijuana/cannabis (12.9%), amphetamines (3.4%), pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes (3.1%), ecstasy/designer drugs (2.9%) and cocaine (1.3%) (Figure 6.2).



## Recent illicit drug use by age group

Use of any illicit drug and use of the selected illicit drugs in the last 12 months was most prevalent among persons aged 20 to 29 years (Figure 6.3):

- After peaking in the 20–29 years age group, prevalence of illicit drug use declines with age.
- Teenagers (aged 14 to 19 years) were the age group next most common to have used illicit drugs in the last 12 months. Almost one in three (27.7%) teenagers had used an illicit drug in the past 12 months. Again, marijuana/cannabis was the drug most likely to have been used, one in four (24.6%) teenagers had used marijuana/cannabis in the past 12 months.



## Factors influencing first use of an illicit drug

Australians who had used an illicit drug in their lifetime were influenced by a range of factors when they first used (Table 6.2). Respondents were asked to indicate all factors that influenced their use:

- For those who had used illicit drugs in their lifetime, curiosity was the most common factor which influenced their decision to use for the first time (82.4%).
- For over half (54.7%) of Australians aged 14 years and over who had used an illicit drug in their lifetime, peer pressure influenced their decision to use for the first time.

**Table 6.2: Factors influencing first use of any illicit drug, lifetime users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Factor	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Peer pressure	54.8	54.5	54.7
Curiosity	81.9	83.0	82.4
To feel better	8.0	9.8	8.8
To take a risk	9.9	11.1	10.4
To do something exciting	21.6	22.9	22.2
Family, relationship, work or school problems	6.2	8.8	7.4
Traumatic experience	3.1	5.1	4.0
Other	2.2	4.1	3.0

### Notes

1. Base equals used an illicit drug in lifetime.
2. Respondents could select more than one response.

## Characteristics—any illicit drug use

The survey enabled a profile on the characteristics of those who had never used any illicit drugs (62.3% of Australians aged 14 years and over), those who had used but not in the last 12 months (20.8%) and those who had used in the last 12 months (16.9%) (Table 6.3):

- A greater proportion of people without post-school qualifications had never used an illicit drug (66.2%) compared with those who had post-school qualifications (58.3%). The pattern was similar for recent use.
- A higher proportion of people who were most socioeconomically disadvantaged had never used illicit drugs, compared with the other socioeconomic groups.
- A greater proportion of people from urban areas (17.3%) had used illicit drugs in the last 12 months than those from rural or remote areas (16.1%).
- Unemployed people were more likely than those in the other employment status groups to have ever used or recently used illicit drugs.

**Table 6.3: Characteristics by illicit drug use status, persons aged 14 years and over, Australia, 2001**

Characteristics	Never use	Ever use	Recent use
	(per cent)		
<b>Education</b>			
Without post-school qualification	66.2	33.8	17.1
With post-school qualification	58.3	41.7	16.8
<b>Labour force status</b>			
Currently employed	54.4	45.6	18.3
Student	59.8	40.2	27.8
Unemployed	47.5	52.5	32.0
Retired/pension/home duties	79.0	21.0	8.5
<b>Main language spoken at home</b>			
English	61.0	39.0	17.4
Other	79.5	20.5	10.5
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>			
1st quintile	64.8	35.2	16.0
2nd quintile	63.5	36.5	16.3
3rd quintile	61.3	38.7	18.1
4th quintile	60.4	39.6	17.7
5th quintile	61.1	38.9	17.0
<b>Geography</b>			
Urban	61.9	38.1	17.3
Rural/remote	63.5	36.5	16.1
<b>Marital status</b>			
Never married	50.6	49.4	32.0
Divorced/separated/widowed	66.6	33.4	15.5
Married/de facto	66.5	33.5	10.7
<b>Indigenous status</b>			
Indigenous	42.9	57.1	31.8
Non-Indigenous	62.6	37.4	16.7

# Use of any illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis

## Use of any illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis

When marijuana is excluded from the use of illicit drugs, the number of Australians who had used an illicit drug in their lifetime drops from 5.9 million to 2.9 million (Table 6.4):

- Almost one in five (18.5%) Australians aged 14 years and over had used an illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis in their lifetime.
- Approximately 1.3 million people (8.4%) had used an illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months.
- When marijuana/cannabis is excluded, Australians aged 20–29 years were still the age group most likely to have used illicit drugs. One in five (20.0%) had used in the last 12 months.

**Table 6.4: Use of any illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis, persons aged 14 years and over, by age, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Period	Age group				Sex		Persons
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	Males	Females	
				(per cent)			
In lifetime	16.7	36.1	23.7	11.2	20.4	16.5	18.5
In the last 12 months	11.8	20.0	8.6	4.0	9.4	7.4	8.4
				(number)			
In lifetime	255,900	1,099,300	683,400	927,600	1,591,800	1,310,900	2,902,700
In the last 12 months	181,300	611,000	249,000	328,200	733,600	589,800	1,323,400

Note: Totals may not equal sum due to rounding.

## Characteristics—any illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis

The 2001 survey collected information on the characteristics of users and non-users (81.5% of the population) of any illicit drugs except marijuana/cannabis (Table 6.5):

- A greater proportion of people whose main language spoken at home was not English had never used an illicit drug (85.9%), compared with those whose main language spoken at home was English (81.2%).
- A greater proportion of people from urban areas (9.0%) had used illicit drugs except marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months than those from rural or remote areas (6.8%).
- With regard to employment status, unemployed persons had the highest proportion who had used an illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months.

**Table 6.5: Characteristics by any illicit drug except marijuana/cannabis use status, persons aged 14 years and over, Australia, 2001**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Never use</b>	<b>Ever use</b>	<b>Recent use</b>
	<b>(per cent)</b>		
<b>Education</b>			
Without post-school qualification	83.2	16.8	8.5
With post-school qualification	80.1	19.9	8.2
<b>Labour force status</b>			
Currently employed	79.0	21.0	8.8
Student	79.6	20.4	12.4
Unemployed	68.9	31.1	17.2
Retired/pension/home duties	88.4	11.6	5.0
<b>Main language spoken at home</b>			
English	81.2	18.8	8.5
Other	85.9	14.1	7.4
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>			
1st quintile	82.7	17.3	7.2
2nd quintile	81.7	18.3	8.1
3rd quintile	80.6	19.4	9.2
4th quintile	80.6	19.4	9.1
5th quintile	81.9	18.1	8.7
<b>Geography</b>			
Urban	80.7	19.3	9.0
Rural/remote	83.7	16.3	6.8
<b>Marital status</b>			
Never married	72.6	27.4	16.8
Divorced/separated/widowed	82.5	17.5	7.3
Married/de facto	85.2	14.8	5.0
<b>Indigenous status</b>			
Indigenous	74.9	25.1	12.7
Non-Indigenous	81.7	18.3	8.3

## Non-users of illicit drugs

Australians aged 14 years and over who had never used an illicit drug in their lifetime were asked to indicate the factors that influenced their decision to never try:

- The most common response was 'just not interested'. Over half (52.3%) of those who had never used nominated this as one of their reasons for not trying illicit drugs (Table 6.6).
- Two in five (38.4%) nominated reasons related to health or addiction. The proportion of males and females nominating this was similar.
- 'Didn't like to feel out of control' was nominated by one in five (19.6%) of those who had never used an illicit drug.

**Table 6.6: Factors influencing the decision to never try an illicit drug, never users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001**

Factor	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
For reasons related to health or addiction	37.5	39.2	38.4
For reasons related to the law	10.1	9.0	9.6
Pressure from family or friends	7.1	6.7	6.9
Did not want family/friends/employer or teachers to know	6.5	6.2	6.3
Didn't like to feel out of control	17.1	22.0	19.6
Didn't think it would be enjoyable	13.9	17.4	15.7
Financial reasons	7.1	7.1	7.1
Religious/moral reasons	13.0	17.0	15.0
Just not interested	48.2	56.3	52.3
Other	10.8	12.9	11.9

Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

Further information on non-users of alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs can be found in Tables 4.5, 5.9, 6.3 and 6.5.