

10 Heroin, methadone and other opiates

Introduction

This chapter presents data on use of heroin, methadone for non-maintenance purposes and other opiates such as morphine and pethidine for non-medical purposes. The survey's section on use of other opiates was not the same as for use of heroin and methadone, hence some of the tables presented below do not include other opiates.

About four in five recent users of opiates had used only one kind of opiate in the last 12 months.

The average age at which Australians first used heroin was 20.7 years and for methadone 21.8 years.

Use of heroin, methadone and/or other opiates

In 2001, about 365,000 Australians aged 14 years and over had used heroin and/or methadone and/or other opiates in their lifetime (Table 10.1):

- Of those who had used these drugs in their lifetime, approximately two-thirds (241,000) were male and one-third female (124,200).
- Only 0.5% of the population had used these drugs in the last 12 months. The proportions for males (0.6%) and females (0.5%) were similar.
- Compared with other age groups, Australians aged 20–29 years were the group most likely to have used any of these drugs in their lifetime and in the last 12 months.

Table 10.1: Heroin, methadone and/or other opiate use, 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	1.7	4.6	3.1	1.4	3.1	1.6	2.3
months	0.9	1.1	0.5	0.2	0.6	0.5	0.5
	(number)						
In lifetime	25,600	139,500	90,700	119,700	241,000	124,200	364,700
months	13,800	34,800	14,000	20,500	44,700	36,100	80,800

Note: Totals may not equal sum due to rounding.

Frequency of use of heroin, methadone and/or other opiates

The frequency at which the 80,800 recent users of heroin, methadone and/or other opiates used these drugs varied by age and sex (Table 10.2):

- Approximately two in five (39.0%) used any of these drugs every day or every week.
- Females (44.6%) were more likely than males (33.1%) to use any of these drugs every day or every week.

Table 10.2: Frequency of heroin, methadone and/or other opiate use, recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, by age, Australia, 2001

Frequency	Age group				Sex		Persons
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	Males	Females	
				(per cent)			
Daily or weekly	34.7 *	32.7	47.9	67.3	33.1	44.6	39.0
Monthly	21.8 *	41.5	21.5 *	–	45.3	15.4	30.1
Once or twice a year	43.4	25.8	30.7 *	32.7	21.6	40.0	31.0

Note: Base equals recent users.

Form and quantity of heroin, methadone and other opiates used

- Recent users of heroin are equally as likely to usually use heroin powder (69.6%) as heroin rock (70.5%).
- Methadone syrup (85.8%) was more likely to be used by recent users of methadone than physeptone tablets (36.2%).
- The most commonly used type of ‘other opiates’ used by recent users was morphine (58.7%).
- On a day heroin was used, the majority of recent users of heroin used one or two hits per day. This trend was the same for recent users of methadone.

Method of use of heroin, methadone and other opiates

- The majority (86.7%) of recent users of heroin had injected this drug. Fewer than half (43.3%) of recent heroin users had smoked this drug. Heroin was snorted by 16.4% of recent users.
- Similarly, injection (78.0%) was the most common method of use by recent users of methadone.
- For other opiates, similar proportions of recent users had injected (47.7%) and had swallowed (46.5%) these drugs.

Source of supply of heroin and methadone

Recent users were asked to indicate where they usually obtained heroin or methadone:

- Recent users of heroin were most likely to obtain this drug from a dealer, either on the street, at the dealer's house, at user's house or at another location (70.2%).
- Recent users of methadone for non-maintenance purposes were most likely to obtain this drug from a friend or acquaintance (79.6%).

Usual place of use of heroin and methadone

Recent users were asked to indicate the locations they usually used heroin or methadone:

- Recent users of heroin were most likely to use this drug in their own home or at a friend's house (43.3%).
- Similarly, recent users of methadone were most likely to use this drug in their own home or at a friend's house (63.0%).

Concurrent drug use with heroin, methadone and other opiates

Recent users of heroin, methadone and other opiates were asked if any other drugs were used (on at least one occasion) at the same time as these drugs:

- Two-thirds (67.4%) of recent users of heroin had used marijuana/cannabis at the same time as heroin.
- Nine in 10 (92.1%) recent users of methadone had not used another drug at the same time as methadone.
- Marijuana/cannabis was the drug most commonly used at the same time as other opiates by recent users of other opiates (64.2%).

Substitution of other drugs for heroin and methadone

Recent users of heroin and methadone were asked if they had used another drug when their drug was not available:

- Recent users of heroin had most commonly used marijuana/cannabis when heroin was not available (56.6%).
- When methadone was not available, recent users had most commonly not substituted another drug for methadone (44.0%). However, about one in five (22.6%) substituted tranquillisers for methadone.