

KEY POINTS

1. Heroin was the most commonly injected drug in Australia
2. Amphetamine injection was highest in Queensland, where the prevalence of amphetamine injection exceeded that of heroin
3. Cocaine injection was most common in NSW, where the prevalence of cocaine use in conjunction with heroin has increased in specific regions of Sydney
4. Morphine was the most commonly injected drug in the Northern Territory, its injection being rare in other jurisdictions

Drug Use Trends Among Injecting Drug Users (IDU): Findings from the Australian Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) Survey, 1995-1999

Introduction

The Australian NSP Survey has been carried out over one week each year since 1995. During the designated survey week, NSP staff asked all clients who attended to complete a brief, self-administered questionnaire and provide a finger prick blood sample. This issue of the Drug Trends Bulletin presents the most recent findings from the Australian NSP Survey, with comparisons between jurisdictions and over time. Details of the survey can be found on the back page of the bulletin¹. Drug use figures are based on self-report of the last drug injected.

National Trends

Demographics

The median age of respondents declined from 29 years in 1995 to 28 years in 1999. In all surveys the majority of respondents were male (65%) and the median age at first injection was 18 years. IDU had been injecting for a median of 8 years in 1999, less than in 1995 but stable since then (1995, 10 years; 1996, 8 years; 1997, 7 years; 1998, 7 years).

Frequency of use

Frequency of injection increased significantly between 1995 and 1999; over half (55%) reported injecting at least daily in 1999 compared with 41% in 1995-96. Frequent injection (at least daily) was more common among IDU who injected cocaine with heroin (73%), more than one other drug combination (63%) or heroin (64%), than among amphetamine (38%) or cocaine (36%) injectors. The longer respondents had been injecting drugs, the more likely they were to inject at least daily, regardless of the type of drug last injected.

Type of drug

Nationally, heroin was most frequently reported as the last drug injected (Table 1). Prevalence of heroin injection increased from 44% in 1995 to 53% in 1999, although remained stable when analysis was restricted to sites that participated in all surveys. Amphetamine, the second most commonly reported drug, also increased in 1999. Increased reporting of heroin was

apparent at sites participating in all surveys in 1998 and was sustained in 1999.

Amphetamine

As in previous surveys, amphetamine injection was more common in Queensland and South Australia than in other states and territories (Figure 1).

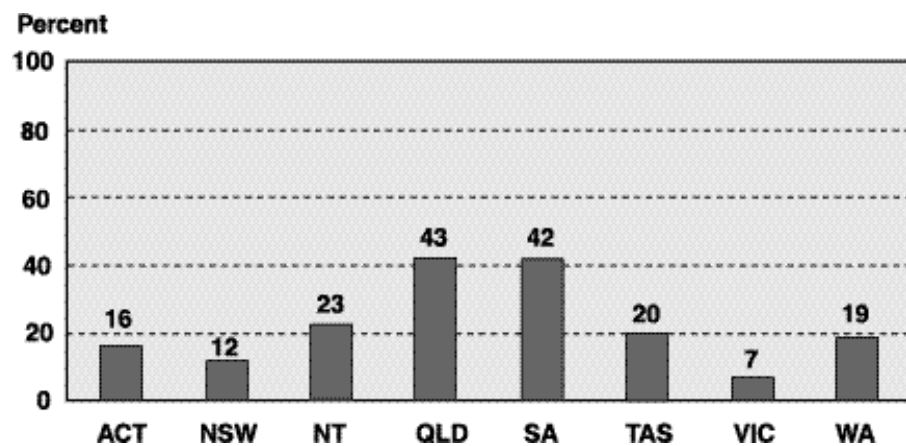


Figure 1: Prevalence of amphetamine injection by jurisdiction, 1999

Heroin

In 1999, the majority of respondents from ACT (76%), Victoria (87%), and Western Australia (66%) reported heroin as the last drug injected. Heroin was also the drug most frequently reported by respondents in NSW (59%), and South Australia (45%) but not in Queensland (43%) and NT (12%).

Table 1: Prevalence of drug type injected in Australia, 1995-99 ¹

Drug	1995 N=1072	1996 N=1497	1997 N=1978	1998 N=2665	1999 N=2491
Amphetamine*	22%	18%	19%	21%	26%
Cocaine	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Heroin **	44%	53%	55%	52%	53%
Methadone	19%	11%	11%	8%	3%
Morphine	3%	2%	3%	4%	4%
Steroids	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%
> one drug	8%	9%	7%	10%	8%
Other drugs	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Not reported	<1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

* Increased in 1998 when analysis was restricted to sites participating in all surveys: 1995 = 20%; 1996 = 18%; 1997 = 19%; 1998 = 27%; 1999 = 27%

** No increase when analysis restricted to sites participating in all surveys: 1995 = 42%; 1996 = 51%; 1997 = 53%; 1998 = 46%; 1999 = 47%.

Methadone

In 1995, methadone was reported as the last drug injected by 42% of respondents in NSW. Since then prevalence has steadily declined (Figure 2).

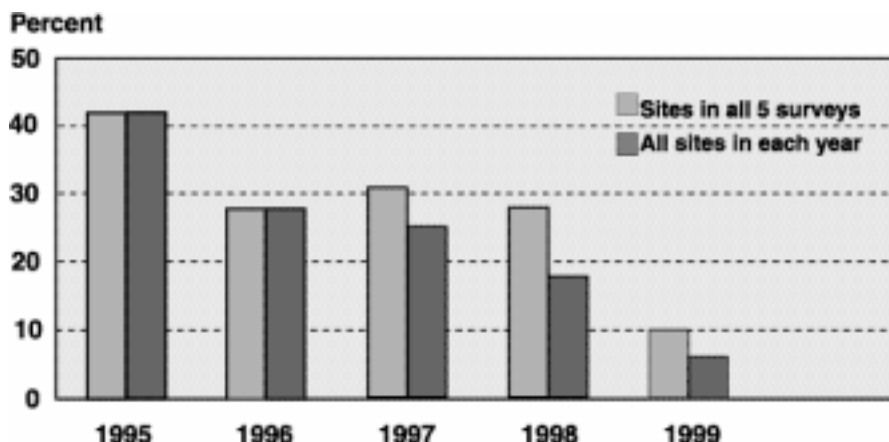


Figure 2: Reporting of methadone injection in NSW, 1995-1999.

Up to 1999, NSW was the only jurisdiction that provided large syringes, suitable for methadone injection, through NSPs. There was little evidence of methadone injection among IDU at NSPs in other states and territories (0.5% - 3%) except Tasmania, however, the sample size in this state was too small to draw any inferences.

Morphine

The most conspicuous deviation from the national average for type of drug injected was in the Northern Territory, where morphine was by far the most frequently injected drug among IDU in 1999 (60%). Only 12% of IDU in the NT reported heroin injection (Figure 3). In all other jurisdictions, the prevalence of morphine injection was very low (0% - 6%).

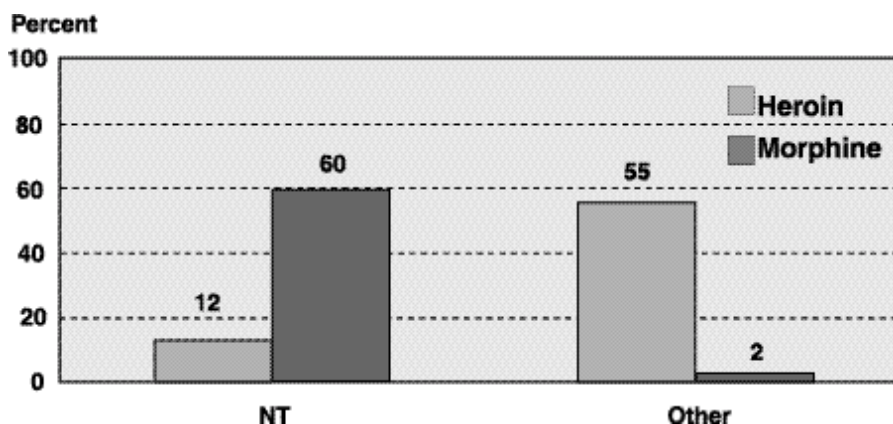


Figure 3: Prevalence of heroin and morphine injection in the NT and other jurisdictions, 1999

Cocaine

Cocaine injection was highest in NSW; 6% reported cocaine as the last drug injected and 8% reported cocaine in combination with another drug, usually heroin (Figure 4).

Injection of cocaine, either alone or in combination with another drug, has gradually increased in NSW from around 5% in 1995 to more than 10% in 1998 and 1999. Almost all (99%) respondents who injected cocaine in combination with another drug injected it with heroin, a

combination referred to as "speedball", or more recently "cocaine cocktail" or "CC". The increase in cocaine use in NSW was most apparent in the central, eastern and south-west regions of Sydney. The prevalence of cocaine injection was low and stable in other jurisdictions.

Summary

The Australian NSP Survey is one of the data sets used by the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) to establish drug trends. The 1999 NSP Survey findings confirmed several trends detected by the 1999 IDRS. First, the NSP Survey found a sustained increase in cocaine injection among IDU in Sydney, particularly the injection of cocaine and heroin as a cock-

tail. This finding supports the increase in cocaine use among Sydney IDU detected by the IDRS in 1998. Second, the NSP Survey found that IDU were slightly younger and had been using for less time - consistent with other evidence, including findings from the IDRS,

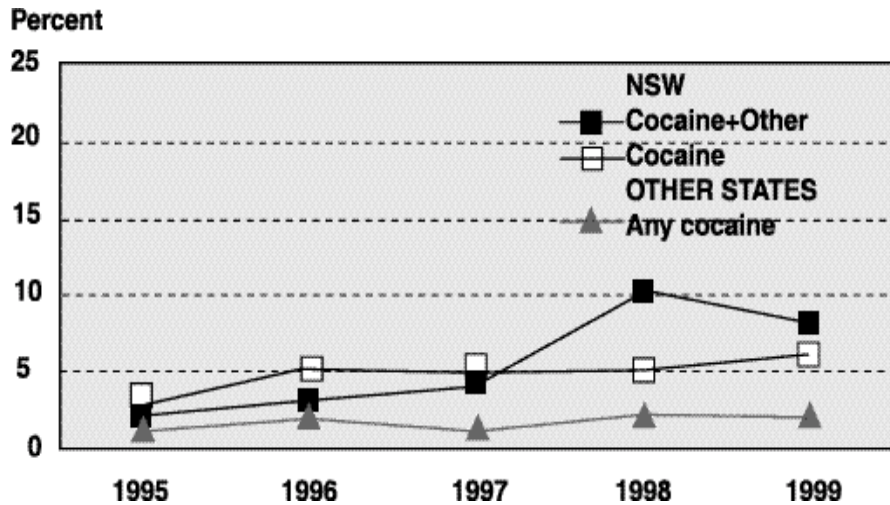


Figure 4: Prevalence of cocaine injection in NSW and other jurisdictions, 1995-1999

that the number of young injecting drug users attending NSPs has increased. Third, the NSP Survey found a significant increase in the frequency of injection since 1996. This finding supports the increase in the frequency of injection detected by the IDRS since 1996-97.

The jurisdictional differences detected by the NSP Survey also emphasise the need to monitor drug use in each jurisdiction.

¹ Sample characteristics

The number of IDU surveyed varies between jurisdictions and across years. Some jurisdictions have been omitted from comparisons due to small sample size. Please refer to the table below for sample sizes by jurisdiction, 1995-1999.

Jurisdiction	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
ACT	72	125	87	138	93
NSW	433	499	682	1001	906
NT	30	19	102	102	93
QLD	344	513	520	694	824
SA	37	45	59	230	250
TAS	6	18	23	51	25
VIC	120	195	457	288	214
WA	30	83	48	161	86
TOTAL	1072	1497	1978	2665	2491
Response rate	41%	51%	50%	48%	48%
No. of sites	21	20	24	31	33

