



DRUG USERS OVER-REPRESENTED IN HOMICIDE DEATHS – NEW STUDY

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Drug use appears to be strongly associated with the risk of becoming a victim of homicide, a new study released today has found. An analysis of NSW homicide victims between 1996 and 2005 has found that a range of drugs including alcohol, cannabis, opioids and psychostimulants were commonly detected during autopsy.

The study found that cases where death resulted from a physical altercation were more likely to have had alcohol and cannabis present. Illicit drugs, such as heroin and methamphetamine, were far more prominent amongst firearms deaths.

“Using illegal drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine exposes you to crime and violence,” said Professor Shane Darke from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at the University of New South Wales. “It is therefore not surprising that users are greatly over-represented in homicide deaths.”

“This study shows that alcohol and other drugs play a large role in this type of death. It would appear that many of those who died may have lived if they had been sober.”

The study was designed to determine the prevalence and circumstances of psychoactive substances amongst homicide victims, 485 consecutive cases autopsied at the NSW Department of Forensic Medicine (1/1/1996-31/12/2005) were analysed. Substances were detected in 62.6% of cases, with illicit drugs being identified in 32.8% of all cases.

Professor Shane Darke, Chief Investigator of the study believes the findings illustrate yet another risk associated with the use of illicit drugs.

“We often talk about the risks of overdose and disease when we think about illegal drugs. We also need to talk about the substantial risk of violent death.”

“A typical situation is a young man who has been drinking heavily, being out on the street late on a Friday or Saturday night,” said Professor Darke. “An argument occurs over some trivial incident, blows are exchanged and he ends up dead. There is every possibility that if he had been sober, he would probably still be alive.”

“Of course, not all homicides involve drugs and alcohol. If you are intoxicated, however, you appear to be far more vulnerable to becoming involved in violent activity, particularly if you are in a public place.”

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