

Drug Use Monitoring in Australia:

Western Australian 2000 Report on

Drug Use Among Police Detainees

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Preventing harmful drug use in Australia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Drug Use Monitoring Australia (DUMA) is a research process designed to provide illicit drug use information on those people who are detained and brought to a police station. There are three sources of DUMA information: police records, urinalysis and interview data. In this report we have presented most of the information that has been obtained from these three sources and where appropriate have linked them together in order to provide a description of the Western Australians interviewed in 2000.

DUMA in WA takes place at the East Perth Lockup. Interviews occurred over a three week period every three months (in 2000, surveying took place in February, April, September and November). Detainees who are eligible for interview are asked if they are willing to speak to an interviewer who explains the research process and asks whether the detainee is willing to take part in an anonymous and confidential interview. At the end of the interview the respondent is asked whether they are willing to provide a urine sample. In 2000, 685 detainees were approached and 83.2% agreed to be interviewed. Of these, 70.2% provided a urine sample. Urine samples were tested for amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, methadone and opiates.

Testing revealed that 60% of all respondents in 2000 were positive for cannabis; around 40% were positive for amphetamines and around 25% were positive for opiates and benzodiazepines. There were very few positive cases of cocaine, and around 5% were positive for methadone.

The majority of respondents were male, and almost half were aged between 21 and 30. One in four defined themselves as Indigenous Australians. The offences for which they were charged were most likely to be property offences, with violent and traffic offences being the second and third most prevalent categories.

More than 50% of respondents reported heavy use of alcohol¹, and use of cannabis and/or amphetamines in the last 12 months and more than 30% of respondents reported use of heroin and/or ecstasy in the last 12 months. More than 60% of those who had used heroin reported that they had felt dependent on

¹ Heavy use is defined as drinking more than 10 standard drinks per week.

heroin during the last 12 months. Around half of all respondents had taken part in a drug or alcohol treatment program at least once at some time. Around 1/4 respondents had participated in detoxification or outpatients programs at least once, while fewer had been engaged in other programs. Around 14% had been in a methadone program. Most users of heroin and amphetamines had injected these drugs.

More than 3/4 respondents reported obtaining illegal drugs in the previous month. Most drugs of most types were purchased in houses or apartments although heroin was more likely to be purchased in an outdoor venue. Most respondents purchased their drugs outside of their own suburb and most sellers, particularly of heroin, were regular sources. There was considerable similarity between the perceived risk of buying and selling drugs and between perceptions of risks associated with different drug types. Selling was perceived as more risky than buying for every drug type.

The majority of respondents obtained their legal income from welfare or government benefits. Most respondents who obtained some income from illegal activities reported doing so from activities other than drug dealing or prostitution.

Around one in three respondents stated that they had been drinking, and almost half that they had been using drugs or medication, at the time of arrest. Just under 15% were looking for or trying to buy or sell illegal drugs just prior to arrest.

A number of significant associations with age, gender, Aboriginality and most serious charge when arrested were found and are reported.