

Executive Summary

The South Australia (SA) EDRS comprises a sentinel sample of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants recruited via social media, advertisements on websites and via word-of mouth in Adelaide, SA. The results are not representative of all people who use illicit drugs, nor of use in the general population. **Data were collected in 2021 from April-July. Interviews were delivered face-to-face as well as via telephone, due to COVID-19 restrictions being imposed throughout the data collection period. This methodological change, which also impacted interview modality in 2020, should be factored into all comparisons of data from the 2020 and 2021 sample, relative to previous years.**

Sample Characteristics

The SA EDRS sample (N=100) recruited from Adelaide, SA, was very similar to the sample in 2020 and in previous years. Whilst we observed a significantly older population in 2021 (25 years; 23 years in 2020; $p=0.024$), the sample continued to predominantly comprise males (57%), most of whom held tertiary qualifications (62% completed post-school qualifications) and most of whom were living in a rental house/flat (49%) or residing with their parents/at their family home (40%) at the time of interview. In 2021, there were significant changes in drug of choice and the drug used most often in the past month ($p=0.023$ and $p<0.001$, respectively). Specifically, there were declines in the per cent of participants who nominated cannabis (22%; 28% in 2020) and ecstasy (19%; 31% in 2020) as their drug of choice, as well as a decline in the per cent who nominated cannabis as the substance used most often in the preceding month (51%; 29% in 2020). One-third (34%) of the sample nominated alcohol as the drug used most often in the preceding month (13% in 2020).

COVID-19 Impact

Almost half (49%) of the sample had been tested for SARS-CoV-2, with no participants having been diagnosed with COVID-19. The

majority (69%) reported that they were 'not at all' worried about contracting COVID-19, and just under one-tenth (7%) reported that they had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, at the time of interview.

Ecstasy

In 2021, significantly fewer participants (87%) reported use of 'any' ecstasy in the six months prior to interview (98% in 2020; $p=0.007$). Recent use of ecstasy capsules declined significantly in 2021 ($p<0.001$), as did ecstasy powder ($p=0.034$). Frequency of use also significantly declined, with median days of 'any' ecstasy use dropping from 10 days in 2020 to seven days in 2021 ($p=0.020$), though weekly or more frequent ecstasy use remained stable at 17% (21% in 2020). Over three-quarters (78%) reported that their last ecstasy capsule contained crystal, whilst 28% reported that it contained powder. The perceived purity of capsules significantly changed between 2020 and 2021 ($p=0.007$), whereby less participants perceived purity as 'high' (14%; 42% in 2020). The perceived availability of ecstasy crystal significantly changed between 2020 and 2021 ($p=0.014$), whereby more participants reported that it was 'difficult' to obtain (33%; 17% in 2020).

Methamphetamine

One-in-three participants (33%) reported any past six month use of methamphetamine in 2021, stable from 2020. Seventy per cent of those who had recently used methamphetamine reported weekly or more frequent use, a significant increase from 35% in 2020 ($p=0.015$). Frequency of use of crystal methamphetamine significantly increased, from a median of 12 days in 2020 to 44 days in 2021 ($p=0.047$). The vast majority of participants (94%) who had used crystal had recently smoked this form.

Cocaine

Recent use of cocaine has increased over the years of monitoring, with the largest per cent reporting any recent use recorded in 2021 (78%; 69% in 2020; $p=0.216$). One-tenth (10%) of those who had recently used cocaine reported weekly or more frequent use.

Perceived purity of cocaine significantly changed between 2020 and 2021 ($p<0.001$), with fewer participants reporting 'high' purity in 2021, compared with 2020 reports.

Cannabis

At least three-in-four participants have reported any recent use of cannabis each year since monitoring commenced. Eighty-four per cent of participants reported recent use in 2021, stable from 89% in 2020. Weekly or more frequent use amongst those who had recently used cannabis remained stable (74%; 66% in 2020), as did daily use (29%; 27% in 2020). The median price per ounce of bush cannabis increased significantly, from \$200 in 2020 to \$260 in 2021 ($p=0.010$).

Ketamine, LSD and DMT

Whilst recent use of ketamine and DMT remained stable in 2021 (28% and 13%, respectively), recent use of LSD decreased significantly, from 51% in 2020 to 35% in 2021 ($p=0.027$). Frequency of use for all three substances remained low and stable in 2021. A significant change was observed in the perceived availability of LSD ($p=0.022$), with 24% perceiving LSD as 'difficult' to obtain in 2021, a decrease from 48% in 2020.

New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Any NPS use, including plant-based NPS, has fluctuated over time, with 10% reporting recent use in 2021, stable from 2020 (17%). A similar percentage was observed for any NPS use, excluding plant-based NPS (8%; 12% in 2020). These are the lowest rates of use since monitoring of NPS first commenced in 2010.

Other Drugs

Reported recent use of non-prescribed benzodiazepines significantly decreased from 50% in 2020 to 30% in 2021 ($p=0.004$). Alcohol and tobacco use were common in the sample, though both significantly decreased in 2021, with 90% reporting recent use of alcohol (98% in 2020; $p=0.036$) and 72% reporting recent tobacco use (85% in 2020; $p=0.036$). Furthermore, recent use of nitrous oxide significantly decreased, from 49% in 2020 to 33% in 2021 ($p=0.036$). On the other hand, recent use of e-cigarettes significantly

increased in 2021, with 51% of the sample reporting recent use (34% in 2020; $p=0.023$).

Drug-Related Harms and Other Associated Behaviours

On the last occasion of ecstasy or related drug use, 86% of the SA sample in 2021 reported concurrent use of two or more drugs (including alcohol, tobacco and e-cigarettes). Seventy-two per cent of participants obtained a score of eight or more on the AUDIT (77% in 2020; $p=0.491$), indicative of hazardous use. Whilst those who had experienced a past year non-fatal stimulant overdose remained stable in 2021 (19%; 30% in 2020; $p=0.109$), there was a significant decrease in those experiencing a past year non-fatal alcohol overdose (16%; 29% in 2020; $p=0.046$). Reported past month injecting drug use remained low ($n\leq 5$), as did drug treatment engagement ($n\leq 5$). The majority of the sample (82%) reported engaging in some form of sexual activity in the past four weeks, of which 16% reported penetrative sex without a condom where they did not know the HIV status of their partner. One-quarter of the sample reported having a HIV test in the past six months, and one-third (33%) reported having a sexual health check-up in the six months prior to interview. Mental health remained stable amongst the sample, with 57% reporting experiencing a mental health problem in the six months preceding interview, with anxiety (70%) and depression (65%) most commonly reported. Almost one-quarter (23%) of the sample reported driving while over the perceived legal limit of alcohol, and 38% reported driving within three hours of consuming an illicit or non-prescribed drug, most commonly cannabis. Twenty-nine per cent of the SA sample reported 'any' crime in the past month, with drug dealing (20%) and property crime (14%) remaining the two main forms of criminal activity in 2021. Face-to-face was the most popular means of participants arranging the purchase of illicit or non-prescribed drugs in the 12 months preceding interview (83%; 72% in 2020). A significant decrease was observed in the percentage of participants reporting obtaining illicit drugs from an unknown dealer/vendor in 2021 (33%; 50% in 2020; $p=0.020$).