



Experiences with recreational drugs amongst first-year students at Auckland University

The NZMJ recently published data from the National Drugs Survey on the rise of amphetamine and ecstasy use amongst young adult New Zealanders.^{1,2} As part of a study into the recreational use of nitrous oxide recently published in the *Lancet*,³ we interviewed 1782 first-year law, engineering and health science students at Auckland University on recreational drug use. The full methodology is published elsewhere,³ though these results have not been previously reported.

Surveys took the form of simple 'check-the-box' questionnaires. One of the questions asked 'Have you ever used other recreational drugs?' and check-boxes were provided for 'marijuana', 'stimulants (including ecstasy, speed)', 'hallucinogens (eg, LSD)', 'cocaine', and 'heroin'.

1360 questionnaires were completed and consistent (76%) and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Use of recreational drugs by first-year students at Auckland University

Drug	No. students	% (95%CI)
Marijuana	415	30.9 (28.4–33.4)
Stimulants	164	12.2 (10.5–14.0)
Hallucinogens	92	6.9 (5.6–8.3)
Cocaine	48	3.6 (2.6–4.7)
Heroin	27	2.0 (1.3–2.9)

The correlations between use of the different drugs were highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and ranged from 0.17 to 0.60. The use of marijuana, the most popular drug, was analysed for associations with sex, age and ethnicity. Users were more likely to be older (mean age 20.3 years compared with 18.9 years for non-users, $p = 0.0001$), and there was a trend towards less use amongst females (odds ratio (OR) 0.79; 0.58–1.02, $p = 0.07$). There were higher rates of use in NZ European students than Pacific students (OR 0.35; 0.20–0.64), or Asian students (OR 0.08; 0.05–0.12), but not Maori students (OR 0.77; 0.39–1.52).

Although this survey may not be representative of the wider community, these results add evidence to the high incidence of stimulant and ecstasy (an amphetamine with hallucinogenic properties) use reported amongst young adult New Zealanders.^{1,2} European males are again demonstrated to be amongst the principle users. The results also demonstrate the continuing high incidence of marijuana use.

Of interest are data, published in the NZMJ 26 years ago, from a comparable though slightly older and more male-weighted sample.⁴ While use of most drugs by university students has changed only modestly between 1977 and today, stimulant use has more than doubled: from 4.9% to 12.2%.

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