

Use of Illicit Drugs: West Australian Adults, 1998

**WA Drug Abuse Strategy Office
Department of Health**

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Introduction

This publication is intended to provide an overview of drug prevalence of West Australians aged 14 years and older, based on State results from the 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS). The data was published in August 2001 in an amended version of the report, *1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Western Australian Results*, produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Note: Caution needs to be used in the interpretation of some of the NDSHS survey data due to the relatively small samples for some drug groups. See the Methodological issues section at page 5.

Number of users

It was estimated that in 1998 there was a total of 741,565 West Australians who had used any illicit drug in their lifetime (Table 1, page 2). Of these persons, a total of 373,225 (50.3%) had ever used any illicit drug other than cannabis.

It was estimated that in 1998 there was a total of 364,175 West Australians who had used any illicit drug in the past year (Table 2, page 2). Of these persons, a total of 184,685 (50.7%) had used any illicit drug other than cannabis in the past year.

Lifetime use of illicit drugs other than cannabis

Of the total of 373,225 persons who had ever used any illicit drug other than cannabis (Table 1, page 2), a total of:

- 38,675 (10.4%) were from the 14 to 19 age group;
- 144,360 (38.7%) were from the 20 to 29 age group;
- 78,920 (21.1%) were from the 30-39 age group; and
- 111,275 (29.8%) were from the 40 years and older age group.

A comparison between age groups of ever use of any illicit drug other than cannabis found the highest frequencies occurred in the 14 to 19 and the 20 to 29 age groups. The proportion of those who had ever used was:

- 47.6% (38,675 persons) for the 14-19 age group;
- 67.2% (144,360 persons) for the 20-29 age group;

- 42.3% (78,920 persons) for the 30-39 age group; and
- 43.0% (111,275 persons) for the 40 years and older age group.

Annual use of illicit drugs other than cannabis

Of the total of 184,685 persons who had used any illicit drug other than cannabis in the past year (Table 2, page 2), a total of:

- 27,555 (14.9%) were from the 14 to 19 age group;
- 90,545 (49.0%) were from the 20 to 29 age group;
- 28,040 (15.2%) were from the 30 to 39 age group; and
- 38,545 (20.9%) were from the 40 years and older age group.

A comparison between age groups of annual use of any illicit drug other than cannabis found the highest frequencies occurred in the 14 to 19 and the 20 to 29 age groups. The proportion of those who used in last year was:

- 48.3% (27,555 persons) for the 14-19 age group;
- 63.2% (90,545 persons) for the 20-29 age group;
- 38.8% (28,040 persons) for the 30-39 age group; and
- 42.1% (38,545 persons) for the 40 years and older age group.

Age related patterns

Higher frequencies of annual use for heroin, amphetamines, cocaine, hallucinogens and ecstasy/designer drugs occurred in younger than older age groups (Figure 1, page 2) as follows.

Note: As this data involves small samples, it should be regarded as indicative of age related trends in the use of drugs such as heroin and cocaine, pending confirmation by other surveys.

14 to 19 year olds

Overall in this age group, 5.4% had used heroin, just under one in five (17.5%) had used amphetamines, 1.7% had used cocaine, just over a quarter (26.5%) had used hallucinogens and one in ten (10.4%) had used ecstasy/designer drugs.

continued on page 4

Figure 1: Frequency of annual use (%) by persons aged 14 years over who have used any illicit drug other than cannabis, Western Australia, 1998

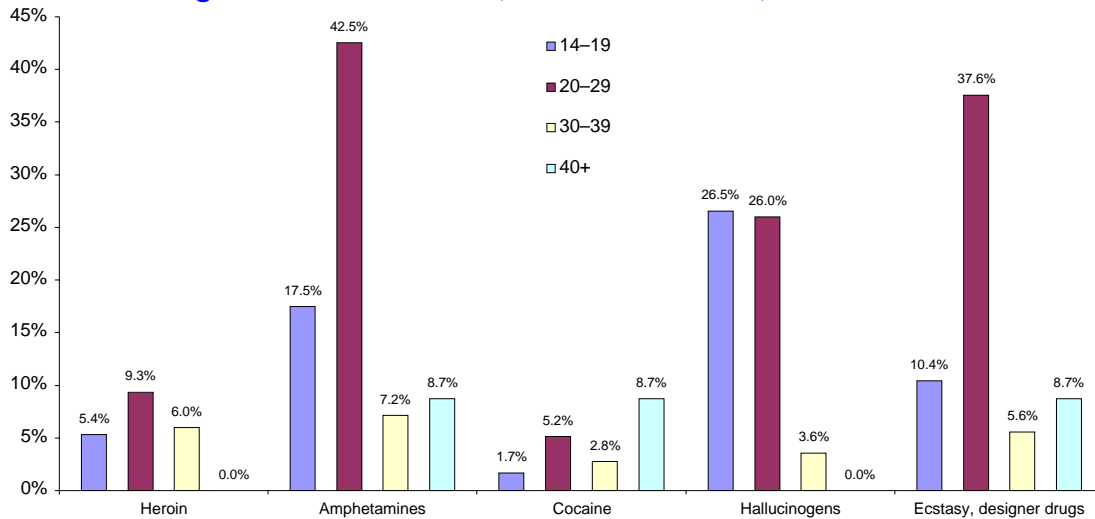


Table 1: Estimated number of persons aged 14 years and over who have ever used illicit drugs, Western Australia, 1998

	14-19	20-29	30-39	40+	All ages
Cannabis	69,130	207,000	176,340	190,550	643,020
Analgesics ^(a)	23,365	40,715	30,640	64,728	159,448
Tranquillisers ^(a)	9,025	20,215	22,550	20,365	72,155
Steroids ^(a)	-	3,130	2,310	4,365	9,805
Barbiturates ^(a)	965	14,235	7,515	8,000	30,715
Inhalants	5,480	28,190	15,320	13,090	62,080
Heroin	4,190	20,215	10,120	10,910	45,435
Methadone ^(a)	2,415	3,700	4,915	-	11,030
Amphetamines ^(a)	11,120	84,565	33,825	20,365	149,875
Cocaine	2,095	18,510	18,790	19,640	59,035
Hallucinogens	19,500	85,135	39,605	31,275	175,515
Ecstasy/designer drugs	5,960	62,640	19,370	8,000	95,970
Any illicit drug	81,215	214,690	186,745	258,915	741,565
Any illicit drug (excl cannabis)	38,675	144,360	78,920	111,275	373,230

^(a) For non medical purposes

Table 2: Estimated number of persons aged 14 years and over who have used illicit drugs in the past year, Western Australia, 1998

	14-19	20-29	30-39	40+	All ages
Cannabis	54,950	142,935	58,685	62,545	319,115
Analgesics ^(a)	10,315	13,665	14,165	25,455	63,600
Tranquillisers ^(a)	8,220	9,110	14,455	12,365	44,150
Steroids ^(a)	-	1,140	1,155	-	2,295
Barbiturates ^(a)	-	3,130	1,155	-	4,285
Inhalants	2,415	8,255	2,310	5,820	18,800
Heroin	3,060	13,390	4,335	-	20,785
Methadone ^(a)	1,290	1,140	1,155	-	3,585
Amphetamines ^(a)	9,990	60,930	5,205	8,000	84,125
Cocaine	965	7,405	2,025	8,000	18,395
Hallucinogens	15,145	37,300	2,600	-	55,045
Ecstasy, designer drugs	5,960	53,815	4,045	8,000	71,820
Injected illegal drugs	2,095	20,215	3,180	-	25,490
Any illicit drug	57,045	143,220	72,270	91,640	364,175
Any illicit drug (excl cannabis)	27,555	90,545	28,040	38,545	184,685

^(a) For non medical purposes

Table 3: Estimates of lifetime and annual prevalence of persons aged 14 years and over who have injected drugs, Western Australia, 1998

	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	All ages
Prevalence					
Ever used	2.7 [#]	7.9 [#]	4.4 [#]	0.4 [*]	3.1 [#]
Used in past year	1.3 [#]	7.1 [#]	1.1 [*]	-	1.8 [#]
Number of persons					
Ever used	4,350	22,495	12,720	2,910	42,475
Used in past year	2,095	20,215	3,180	-	25,490

* RSE > 50% (unreliable), # RSE 25% - 50% (treat with caution)

Table 4: Estimates of lifetime prevalence (%) of illicit drug use by persons aged 14 years and over, Western Australia, 1998

	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	All ages
Cannabis	42.9	72.7	61.0	26.2	44.8
Analgesics ^(a)	14.5	14.3 [#]	10.6	8.9 [#]	11.0
Tranquillisers ^(a)	5.6 [#]	7.1 [*]	7.8 [#]	2.8 [*]	5.0
Steroids ^(a)	-	1.1 [*]	0.8 [*]	0.6 [*]	0.7 [*]
Barbiturates ^(a)	0.6 [#]	5.0 [*]	2.6 [*]	1.1 [*]	2.2 [#]
Inhalants	3.4 [#]	9.9 [#]	5.3 [#]	1.8 [#]	4.4
Heroin	2.6 [#]	7.1 [#]	3.5 [#]	1.5 [*]	3.2 [#]
Methadone ^(a)	1.5 [#]	1.3 [*]	1.7 [*]	-	0.8 [*]
Amphetamines ^(a)	6.9 [#]	29.7	11.7	2.8 [*]	10.6
Cocaine	1.3 [*]	6.5 [#]	6.5 [#]	2.7 [*]	4.1
Hallucinogens	12.1	29.9	13.7	4.3 [#]	12.3
Ecstasy, designer drugs	3.7 [#]	22.0	6.7 [#]	1.1 [*]	6.9
Any illicit drug	50.4	75.4	64.6	35.6	51.4
Any illicit drug (excl cannabis)	24.0	50.7	27.3	15.3	26.0

^(a) For non medical purposes

* RSE > 50% (unreliable), # RSE 25% - 50% (treat with caution)

Table 5: Estimates of annual prevalence (%) of illicit drug use by persons aged 14 years and over, Western Australia, 1998

	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	All ages
Cannabis	34.1	50.2	20.3	8.6	22.3
Analgesics ^(a)	6.4 [#]	4.8 [*]	4.9 [#]	3.5 [*]	4.4
Tranquillisers ^(a)	5.1 [#]	3.2 [*]	5.0 [#]	1.7 [*]	3.1 [#]
Steroids ^(a)	-	0.4 [*]	0.4 [*]	-	0.1 [*]
Barbiturates ^(a)	-	1.1 [*]	0.4 [*]	-	0.3 [*]
Inhalants	1.5 [#]	2.9 [#]	0.8 [#]	0.8 [#]	1.3 [#]
Heroin	1.9 [*]	4.7 [#]	1.5 [*]	-	1.5 [#]
Methadone ^(a)	0.8 [#]	0.4 [*]	0.4 [*]	-	0.2 [*]
Amphetamines ^(a)	6.2 [#]	21.4	1.8 [*]	1.1 [*]	6.0
Cocaine	0.6 [*]	2.6 [*]	0.7 [*]	1.1 [*]	1.3 [#]
Hallucinogens	9.4 [#]	13.1 [#]	0.9 [*]	-	3.9 [#]
Ecstasy, designer drugs	3.7 [#]	18.9	1.4 [*]	1.1 [*]	5.1
Any illicit drug	35.4	50.3	25.0	12.6	25.4
Any illicit drug (excl cannabis)	17.1	31.8	9.7 [#]	5.3 [#]	13.0

^(a) For non medical purposes

* RSE > 50% (unreliable), # RSE 25% - 50% (treat with caution)

20 to 29 year olds

Overall in this age group, 8.3% had used heroin, just over one in four (42.5%) had used amphetamines, 5.2% had used cocaine, just over a quarter (26.0%) had used hallucinogens and nearly one in four (37.6%) had used ecstasy/designer drugs.

30 to 39 year olds

Overall in this age group, 6.0% had used heroin, 7.2% had used amphetamines, 2.8% had used cocaine, 3.6% had used hallucinogens and one in 20 (5.6%) had used ecstasy/designer drugs.

40 years and older

Overall in this age group, <0.1% had used heroin, 8.7% had used amphetamines, 8.7% had used cocaine, <0.1% had used hallucinogens and just under one in 10 (8.7%) had used ecstasy/designer drugs.

Injecting drug users

It was estimated that in 1998 a total of 42,475 West Australian adults had injected a drug in their lifetime, of whom 25,490 (60.0%) had injected in the past year (Table 3, page 3).

In relation to the 25,490 persons who had injected drugs in the past year, the majority, 20,215 (79.3%) involved the 20 to 29 age group. Much lower

proportions occurred in the other age groups, with 2,095 (8.2%) of the 14 to 19 year age group and 3,180 (12.5%) of the 30 to 39 year age group having injected drugs in the past year.

Prevalence

Lifetime use

Overall, 51.4% of all adults had used any illicit drug in their lifetime (Figure 2). If cannabis is excluded then 16% West Australians had used any other illicit drug in their lifetime (Table 4, page 3).

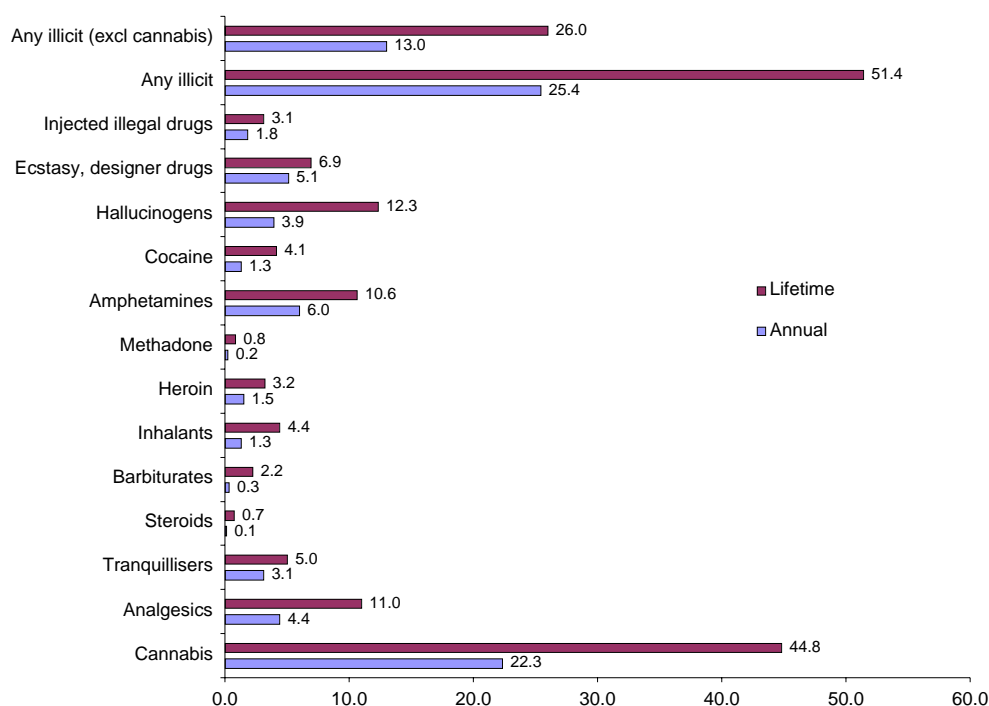
A breakdown of frequency of use by age group shows that the highest frequencies of lifetime use involved persons in the 20 to 39 age range, with three quarters (75.4%) of 20 to 29 year olds and nearly two thirds (64.6%) of 30 to 39 year olds reporting ever use of any illicit drug.

It was also found that half (50.4%) of 14 to 19 year olds and just over one third (35.6%) of persons aged 40 years and over had ever used any illicit drug.

Annual use

Overall, 25.4% of all adults had used any illicit drug in the past year (Figure 2, page 4). If cannabis is excluded then 8.7% West Australians had used any other illicit drug in the past year (Table 5, page 3).

Figure 2: Annual and lifetime use (%) of illicit drugs by persons aged 14 years and over, Western Australia, 1998



A breakdown of frequency of use by age group shows that the highest frequencies of annual use involved persons in the 14 to 29 year age range, with half (50.3%) of 20 to 29 year olds and just over one third (35.4%) of 14 to 19 year olds having used any illicit drug in the past year.

Methodological issues

The 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) was the sixth in a series of national prevalence surveys. The survey occurred between June and September 1998 and was undertaken by the Roy Morgan Research Centre under contract with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) who managed the overall survey.

A total of 10,030 persons participated in the national survey, of whom 764 were surveyed in Western Australia. The survey employed a split sample design with random household selection from a sample of private dwellings and a mixture of random and targeted respondent selection, as follows.

Sample 1

A random selection of households where a person aged 14 years or more was randomly selected by the next birth date. Data were collected by personal interview and self completion booklets for more sensitive issues. There were 239 persons in sample 1 in WA.

Sample 2

Same as in sample 1, by selection of the youngest person aged 14 years and older, other than the sample 1 respondent. Data were collected by self completion booklets. There were 126 persons in sample 2 in WA.

Sample 3

A random selection of persons aged between 14 and 39 from households in capital cities only. Data were collected by self completion booklets. There were 399 persons in sample 3 in WA.

Reliability of estimates

As estimates are based on a sample they are subject to sampling variability. Tables of standard errors and relative standard errors (RSEs), ie ratio of sampling error to the population estimate, are published in Appendix 2 of the report, ***1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Western Australian Results***, published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Data in Tables A2.1 and A2.2 in Appendix 2 of the report provide estimates of reliability for the total State population by sex and for the total population by age group.

Estimates presented in this publication in Tables 3, 4 and 5:

- are assumed to be reliable if the RSE is less than 25%;
- should be interpreted with caution if they have RSEs between 25% and 50% (marked #); and
- should be considered unreliable if they have RSEs >50% (marked *).