The Special Commission of Inquiry into the Drug 'Ice'

Submission prepared by the Australian Institute of Criminology

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is Australia's national research and knowledge centre on crime and justice. This submission comprises a summary of recent findings from the AIC's Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program on methamphetamine use among police detainees in New South Wales. The submission provides additional material to the Inquiry's Issue Paper 4: Data and Funding.

Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA)

The AIC's DUMA program collects drug use, drug market and criminal justice information from police detainees at watchhouses and police stations at several sites across Australia. Established by the Australian Government in 1999, the DUMA program is the only Australian survey of police detainees conducted on a routine basis.

DUMA data are collected quarterly using a self-report survey on detainee alcohol and drug use, drug market indicators, alcohol and drug attribution, criminal justice contact and socio-demographic characteristics. Urine samples are collected from consenting detainees twice a year and screened for five classes of drug—amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine and opiates. Amphetamines are classified as methamphetamine, MDMA, MDA or other amphetamines.

DUMA data are collected from NSW detainees at the Bankstown watchhouse (since 1999) and Surry Hills watchhouse (since 2013) on alternate quarters. Previous DUMA collections occurred at the Parramatta police station (1999 to 2012) and Kings Cross police station (2009 to 2015).

Methamphetamine use among Sydney police detainees

Methamphetamine accounts for 90 percent or more of amphetamine test positives at the Sydney site (Patterson, Sullivan & Bricknell 2019). Most detainees who self-reported methamphetamine use generally indicate 'ice' as the main form of methamphetamine consumed on last occasion of use (Patterson, Goldsmid & Gannoni 2016).

Forty-one percent of Sydney police detainees (n=46) participating in the DUMA collection in 2018 tested positive to methamphetamine (Voce & Sullivan forthcoming). The test positive rate was lower at the Sydney sites compared with Perth (62%, n=158), Brisbane (51%, n=160) and Adelaide (45%),
The proportion of police detainees in Sydney testing positive for methamphetamine quadrupled between 2008 (11%, n=41) and 2016 (47%, n=94) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Methamphetamine use among police detainees, by site, 1999–2018 (%)**

- Adelaide
- Brisbane
- Perth
- Sydney

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The proportion of detainees testing positive to methamphetamine is generally higher at the Surry Hills site (see Figure 2). In 2018, 52 percent (n=28) of Surry Hill detainees tested positive for methamphetamine compared with 31 percent (n=18) of Bankstown detainees (Voce & Sullivan forthcoming).

**Characteristics of detainees**

In 2018, 47 percent (n=7) of female detainees and 40 percent (n=39) of male detainees tested positive to methamphetamine. Sydney detainees who tested positive to methamphetamine had a median age of 38 years compared with 33 years for detainees at the other DUMA sites. Most Sydney detainees who tested positive to methamphetamine were aged 36 years or above (59%, n=27), whereas at other sites most detainees who tested positive were aged 35 years or under. Fifty-one percent of Indigenous detainees in Sydney (n=18) and 44 percent of non-Indigenous detainees (n=68) tested positive to methamphetamine.
Polydrug use

Detainees who use methamphetamine also commonly consume one or more other drugs (Patterson, Sullivan & Bricknell 2018). In 2018, 80 percent (n=37) of Sydney detainees testing positive for methamphetamine had multiple drugs in their system. Of these, 78 percent (n=29) also tested positive for cannabis, with 50 percent (n=11) reporting that cannabis was their primary (most frequently-used) drug and 36 percent (n=8) reporting methamphetamine as their primary drug.

Methamphetamine use and offending

A study of DUMA participants suggested methamphetamine use increased the risk of acquisitive offences, such as shoplifting, drug dealing and other income-generating crime (Goldsmid & Willis 2016). Detainees who had used methamphetamine in the past 30 days also reported sourcing a significantly higher proportion of their income from crime over the same period than did non-users. The study also suggested methamphetamine users were significantly more likely than non-users to be classified by most serious offence as a property or drug offender. However, the study found no significant difference between the proportion of methamphetamine users and non-users classified as violent or breach offenders. Methamphetamine use contributed to offending most commonly through intoxication or the need for money to buy drugs.

In 2018, over half of Sydney detainees with a serious property offence (53%, n=10) tested positive for methamphetamine. Forty-five percent (n=9) with a serious drug offence tested positive to methamphetamine, as did 42 percent (n=8) of detainees with a serious breach offence and 38 percent (n=14) of detainees with a serious violent offence. Thirteen percent (n=35) of Sydney
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detainees said methamphetamine had contributed to their offending, greater than for any other illicit drug. Sydney detainees were less likely than detainees from other DUMA sites to attribute their offending to methamphetamine (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Detainees attributing their offending to methamphetamine, by MSO and site, 2018 (%)

Violent Property Drug DUIb Traffic Disorder Breaches Other

a: Sydney includes data collected at Bankstown and Surry Hills
b: Driving under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs
Source: AIC DUMA collection 2018 [computer file] [unpublished data]

Drug market information

Quarterly DUMA drug market indicators of price, availability and purity generally suggest little or no change in the market. However, since April 2015 the proportion of Sydney detainees reporting that methamphetamine had become more expensive has increased (8%, n=1 vs 25%, n=3). Since April 2016 the proportion reporting that methamphetamine was harder to get than three months ago has also gradually increased (11%, n=2 vs 23%, n=3). Caution should be exercised when interpreting these data because of the small numbers.

References

URLs correct as at June 2019

Other relevant DUMA publications


