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Abstract | The data in this report were collected as part of the Australian Institute of Criminology's Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program, which is a quarterly collection of criminal justice and drug use information from police detainees at multiple sites across Australia. From January 2015 to December 2016, 4,400 adult police detainees were interviewed in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Sydney (Bankstown and Surry Hills), most of them male (83%; n=3,647). On average, recent users reported methamphetamine consumption 14 days out of the last 30 days before detention and rated the availability of methamphetamine on average at nine out of 10, while quality was given a rating of seven out of 10. A majority of recent users reported that the price of methamphetamine had not changed compared to the three months prior to interview, with a current price of approximately \$50 per point.

The methamphetamine market: police detainee perspectives

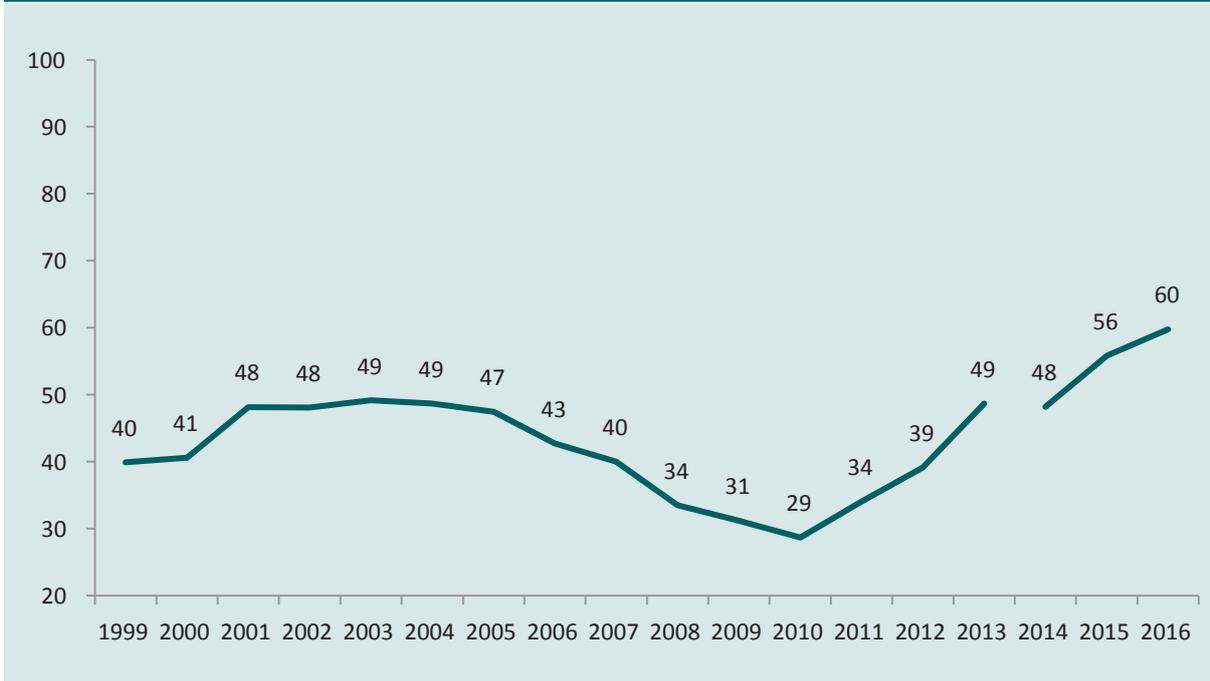
Andrew Ticehurst & Tom Sullivan

Trends in reported methamphetamine use

In 2015–16, 58 percent of detainees (n=2,543) reported that they had used methamphetamine in the previous 12 months. The percentage of detainees reporting consumption of methamphetamine in the 12 months before detention has increased since 2010 (29% versus 60% in 2016; see Figure 1). Of these 2,543 detainees, 42 percent (n=1,066) said they were dependent on the drug. Sixty percent (n=1,535) reported injecting methamphetamine, and 24 percent (n=619) reported overdosing on the drug in the previous 12 months.

Eighty percent (n=2,026) of detainees who had used methamphetamine in the previous 12 months reported that they had used the drug in the last 30 days (hereafter referred to as 'recent users').

Figure 1: Adult detainees who reported consuming methamphetamine in the 12 months prior to detention, 1999–2016 (%)



Note: Rates are calculated as a percentage of all detainees interviewed that year. In 2013, DUMA's self-report question changed from asking detainees whether they had used 'amphetamine/speed/methamphetamine' to whether they had used 'methamphetamine/speed/ice'. This change is represented in Figure 1 as a break in the time series

Source: AIC DUMA collection 1999–2016 [computer file]

Recent use of methamphetamine

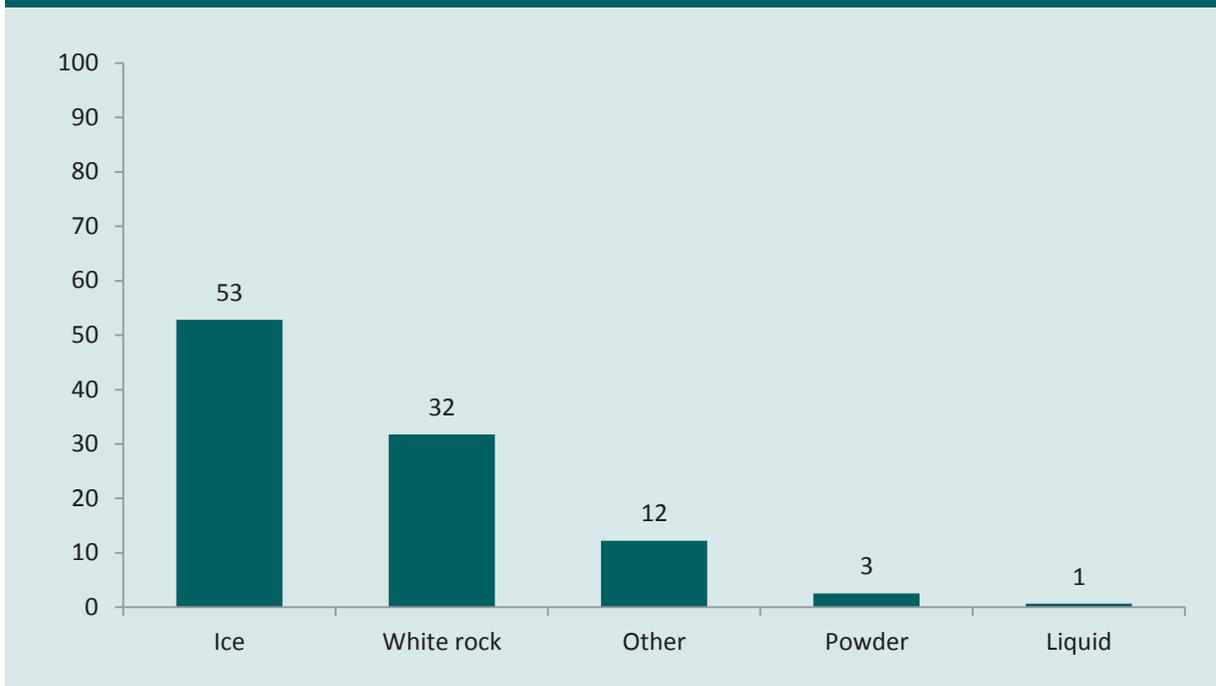
Recent users reported using methamphetamine on average three times a day, at a mean frequency of 14 of the last 30 days before their detention. The amount of methamphetamine consumed on each occasion was calculated by converting the measure specified by detainees (eg points, tablets) into grams. For instance, one point of ice is equivalent to approximately 0.2 grams, while one point of speed is 0.3 grams and one tablet is 0.09 grams—see Hughes et al. (2014) for methamphetamine weight estimates. Recent users who specified consumption rates (n=1,858) reported using, on average, 0.4 grams of methamphetamine on a typical occasion. This equates to an average consumption rate of 1.2 grams of methamphetamine per day. Eighteen percent (n=338) of recent users reported using one point (approximately 0.1 grams) or less of methamphetamine each time. A majority (82%; n=1,520) consumed more than one point of methamphetamine on each occasion. Recent users who reported consuming more than five grams were excluded from consumption rate calculations (n=29).

Half of recent methamphetamine users reported using the drug in the 48 hours before their detention (50%; n=1,013). Just over half (56%; n=1,128) also reported that methamphetamine use contributed to their detention. Of those who reported that methamphetamine contributed to their detention, 51 percent (n=572) said that they were high at the time of arrest. On average, detainees who reported being intoxicated on methamphetamine at the time of arrest rated their intoxication level at six out of 10 (where one meant sober and 10 meant so intoxicated that a person would pass out or be unconscious).

Types of methamphetamine used

Among recent users who described the type of methamphetamine they used (n=1,985), approximately half (53%; n=1,048) reported using ice (crystal methamphetamine). The next most frequently used types were white rock (32%; n=630), other forms (12%; n=243), powder (3%; n=51) and liquid (1%; n=13; see Figure 2). Some detainees reported mixing different types of methamphetamine, including combining powder and solid forms such as white rock.

Figure 2: Types of methamphetamine consumed by adult detainees on their last occasion of use, 2015–16 (%)



Note: Excludes 41 respondents where data was missing. Only adult detainees who consumed methamphetamine in the previous 30 days included in analysis. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC DUMA collection 2015–16 [computer file]

The Australian methamphetamine market

The Australian methamphetamine market is regulated on a basis of trust within social networks as well as threats or fear of retribution (McKetin, McLaren & Kelly 2005). Because of the nature of the market, drug dealing is prolific among users. Fifty-five percent (n=1,110) of recent users said they had been involved in selling, giving away or sharing methamphetamine in the 30 days before detention. One in every five recent users reported selling some (20%; n=407) or half (19%; n=397) of the methamphetamine in their possession. Fewer detainees reported selling, giving away or sharing most or all the methamphetamine in their possession (15%; n=306).

Availability

In 2015–16, recent users rated the availability of methamphetamine at nine out of 10 (where one meant it was extremely hard or impossible to get, and 10 meant it was readily available or overabundant). Detainees at each site rated availability on average at eight or nine. Most stated availability had remained the same compared with three months ago (59%; n=1,190). Another 23 percent of recent users (n=465) said methamphetamine was easier to get, while eight percent (n=159) reported that methamphetamine was harder to get.

The perceived availability of methamphetamine may be associated with recent users' perception that the number of individuals selling the drug had increased in the previous three months (54%; n=1,090), a pattern consistent across individual sites. Another 23 percent (n=466) said the number of people selling methamphetamine had remained the same, while six percent reported the number of drug dealers had decreased (n=115).

Quality

Recent users rated the quality of methamphetamine at an average of seven out of 10 (where one meant extremely poor quality or purity and 10 meant excellent quality or high purity). At each site detainees rated methamphetamine quality between six and seven. Almost half of recent users (47%; n=961) reported no change in the quality of methamphetamine compared with the three months prior, while 22 percent of recent users (n=447) stated that methamphetamine quality had decreased. Sixteen percent (n=317) reported that it had increased.

Price

Forty-three percent of recent users reported that the price of methamphetamine had not changed recently (n=880). Another 33 percent (n=673) reported that the drug had become less expensive. This pattern was consistent across all sites. Comments made by recent users indicate that the average cost of methamphetamine was approximately \$50 per point.

Summary

In 2015–16, most police detainees reported that they had used methamphetamine in the previous 12 months, and the majority of these had used the drug in the last 30 days. More than half of the detainees who reported use in the previous 12 months reported injecting the drug. Forty-two percent of detainees who had used methamphetamine in the previous 12 months also reported being dependent. A majority of recent users reported consuming more than one point of methamphetamine on a typical occasion. Most recent users had also been involved in selling, giving away or sharing methamphetamine. Detainees reported that methamphetamine was readily available and that its quality was high. Most detainees reported that the price of methamphetamine had recently remained stable or decreased.

References

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