

Drug use among Western Australian school students in 2002

Results from the 2002 Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey

Research methodology

A survey of Western Australian school students in Years 7 to 12 was conducted in 2002. The aim of the survey was to provide up-to-date data on the prevalence of smoking, drinking and other drug use among school students aged 12 to 17 years. Previous surveys on smoking and alcohol consumption were conducted in 1984, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996 and 1999. Other drug use was added to the survey in 1996.

As with the previous surveys, the target population for the survey comprised all students enrolled in school years 7 to 12 in government, Catholic and independent schools in Western Australia. All reported data have been weighted according to age, gender and school type to ensure the sample matched the population of Western Australian school enrolments for Semester 2, 2002.

The survey was administered in schools by external research staff using a self-completion questionnaire. Students were randomly selected and had no prior knowledge of the contents of the survey.

A total of 3,545 WA school students in Years 7 to 12 took part in the survey and of those surveyed, 3,315 were aged 12 to 17 years. Complete demographic data were available for 3,305 students. All results reported in this bulletin are for students aged 12 to 17 years with complete demographic data.

This bulletin reports on drugs included in the survey, other than tobacco and alcohol.

Results

Terminology

- Current use:** Use of the specified drug in the week prior to the survey.
Recent use: Use of the specified drug in the month prior to the survey.
Lifetime use: Use of the specified drug at least once in their life (i.e. had ever used the drug).

Recent drug usage

The drugs most commonly used by 12 to 17-year-old students were **analgesics (painkillers)** (72% reported using these in the last month) and **cannabis** (16%) (Figure 1).

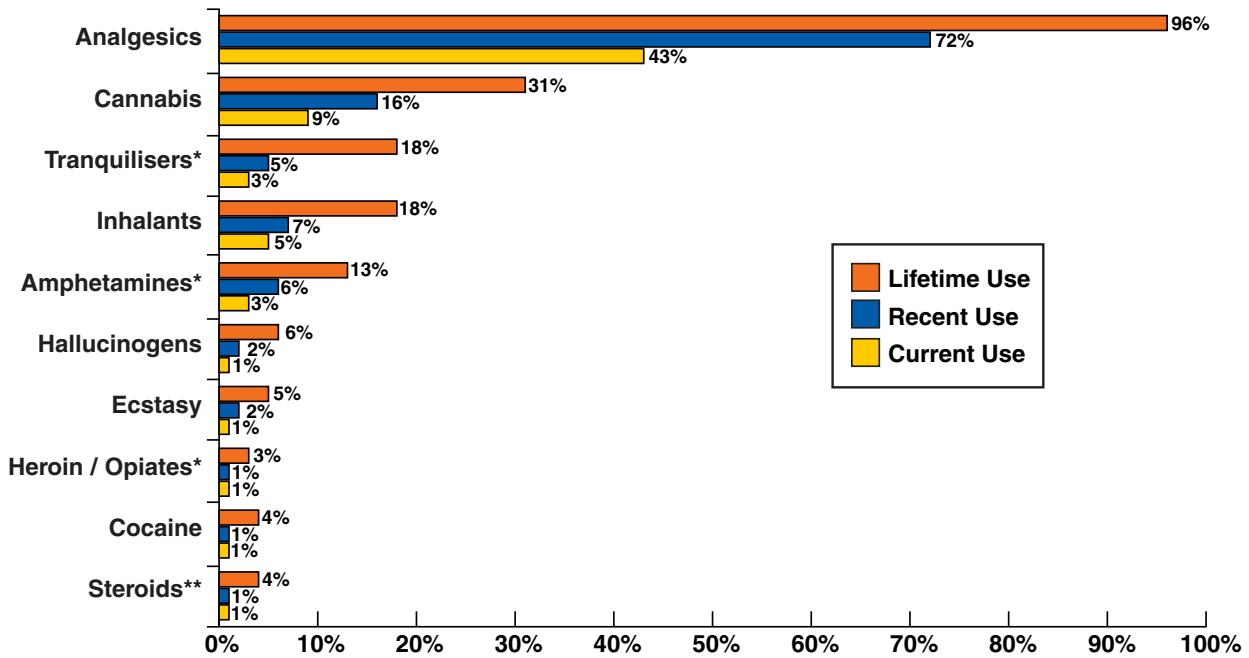
Inhalants, tranquillisers and amphetamines (used for non-medical reasons) were the next most commonly used drugs, each being used by 5% to 7% of 12 to 17-year-old students in the month prior to the survey.

Between 1% and 2% of students reported using **hallucinogens, ecstasy, cocaine, heroin** and **steroids** (used without a doctor's prescription to improve performance, muscle size or appearance) in the last month.

Analgesic use (painkillers)

Analgesics were the most commonly used drugs among students aged 12 to 17 years. Overall, almost all male (95%) and female (97%) students had used analgesics at some time in their life. Almost three-quarters of all students (72%) had taken analgesics in the last month. The proportion of students using analgesics in the week prior to the survey increased with age from 40% of 12-year-olds to a peak of 48% among 17-year-olds. In 2002, use of analgesics was generally more common among females within all time periods.

Figure 1: Percentage of 12 to 17-year-old school students who had used drugs in their lifetime/ in the last month/ in the last week



* Used *other than for medical reasons*.

** Used *without a doctor's prescription to improve sporting performance, increase muscle size or improve appearance*.

Cannabis use

Cannabis was the most widely used illegal drug among 12 to 17-year-old students. Approximately three in 10 students reported using cannabis in their lifetime (25% of 12 to 15-year-olds and 49% of 16 and 17-year-olds). Just less than one in six (16%) 12 to 17-year-olds had used cannabis in the month prior to the survey (14% of 12 to 15-year-olds and 22% of 16 and 17-year-olds), and just less than one in 10 (9%) in the week prior to the survey (8% of 12 to 15-year-olds and 13% of 16 and 17-year-olds).

In all time periods, the proportion of students using cannabis increased with age. That is, older students were more likely to report using than younger students. Lifetime use increased significantly from 10% among 12-year-olds to more than half of all 17-year-olds (53%). Recent use of cannabis increased from 4% of 12-year-olds to 25% of students aged 17 years. Current use of cannabis increased from 3% of 12-year-olds to a peak of 16% among 17-year-olds.

Males were more likely than females to have used cannabis in all time periods and age groups. Approximately 12% of males and 7% of female students aged 12 to 17 years had used it in the past week. The biggest gender difference was recorded among younger students - with males aged 12 to 15 years twice as likely as females of the same age to have used cannabis in the last week (10% of males and 5% of females).

Inhalant use

Nearly one-fifth (18%) of all students reported that they had deliberately sniffed inhalants at least once during their lives. Overall, 7% of students reported using inhalants in the last month and 5% reported using them in the last week. Unlike the use of other substances, use of inhalants tended to decrease with age. Recent use of inhalants decreased from 14% among 12-year-olds to 4% among 17-year-olds while current use decreased from a peak of 9% among 12-year-olds to 3% among 17-year-olds.

Tranquilliser use

Nearly one-fifth (18%) of all students had ever used tranquillisers (for non-medical reasons) in their lifetime. Recent and current use of tranquillisers was low, with around 3% to 4% of all students reporting tranquilliser use in the last month or week. There was a general trend towards greater use of tranquillisers by females than males in all time periods, particularly among older students.

Amphetamine use

The majority of students surveyed in 2002 had never used amphetamines (for non-medical reasons), with 13% reporting any lifetime use of amphetamines. Lifetime use of amphetamines increased significantly with age, from 4% of 12-year-olds to 22% of 17-year-olds. Similarly, recent use of amphetamines increased with age, from 2% of 12-year-olds to 10% of 17-year-olds. Three per cent of all students reported current use of amphetamines.

Recent use of amphetamines was more common among males than females at 12 and 15 years-of-age but was more common among females at all other ages. Use in the last week peaked among females at 15 years-of-age (5%), while among males current use was greatest at 16 years-of-age (4%).

Ecstasy use

Overall, 5% of 12 to 17-year-old students reported using ecstasy in their lifetime (4% of 12 to 15-year-olds and 8% of 16 and 17-year-olds). Lifetime experience with ecstasy generally increased with age, peaking at 12% among 17-year-olds. Two per cent reported recent use of ecstasy and 1% were current users of ecstasy.

At 17 years-of-age, females were more likely than males to have ever used ecstasy and to report recent use of ecstasy. However, current use of ecstasy was generally more common among males than females at all ages.

Other drugs

Overall, 6% of all students reported having used LSD or other hallucinogens in their lifetime, with 2% having taken them in the last month. Approximately 1% of students reported current use of hallucinogens. Males were twice as likely as females to have ever used hallucinogens (2% vs. 1%).

The remaining drugs (heroin, cocaine and steroids) were each used for non-medical reasons or without a doctor's prescription by 1% or less of all students in the last month, with 3% to 4% having ever used these drugs in their lifetime. Approximately 4% of students reported having ever injected drugs without a doctor's prescription and 2% reported to have recently injected drugs.

Changes in the prevalence of drug use between 1996 and 2002

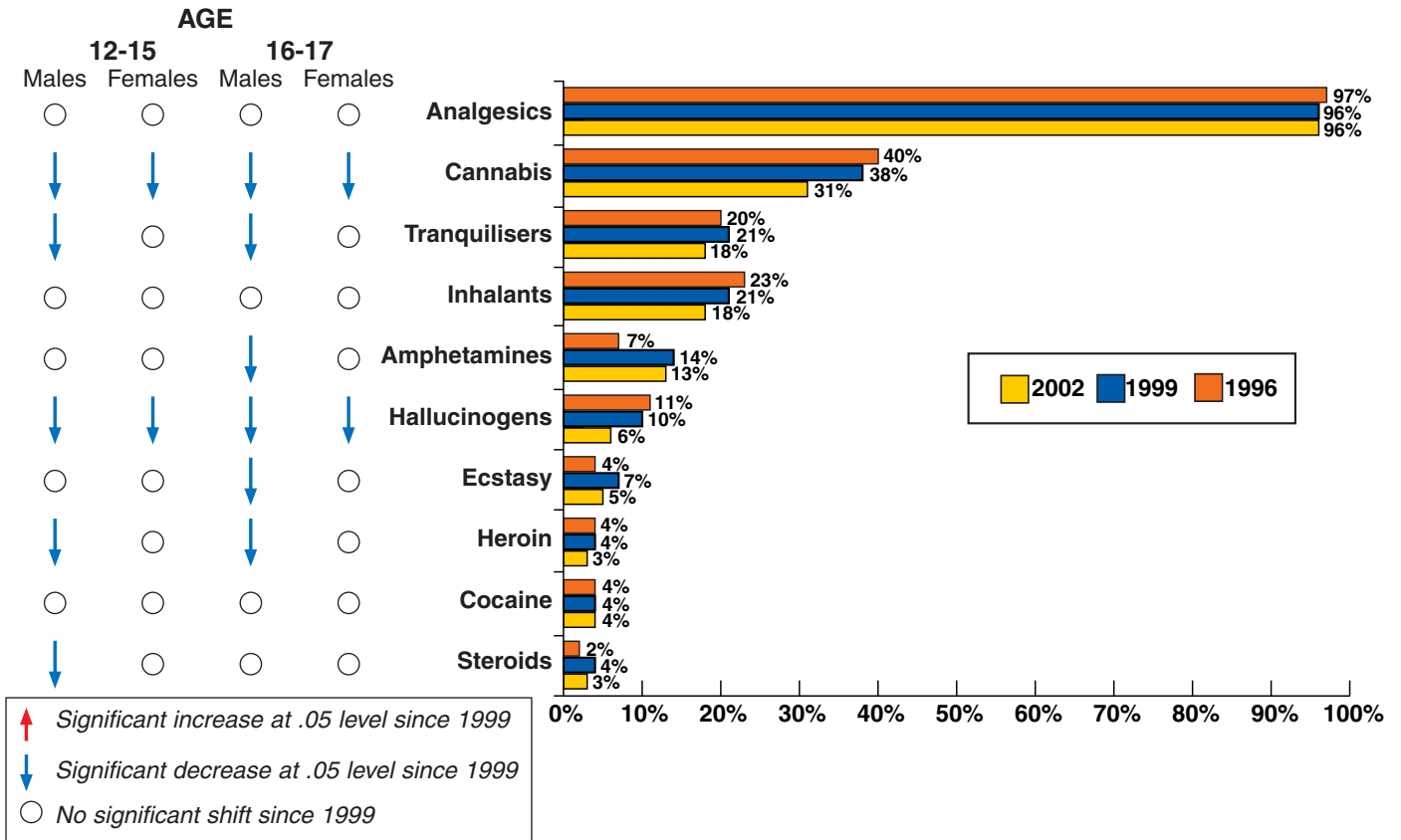
Figure 2 shows the percentage of Western Australian 12 to 17-year-old school students in 1996, 1999 and 2002 who reported having ever used drugs. The arrows represent a summary of significant shifts that occurred between 1999 to 2002 for the 12 to 15-year-old and 16 to 17-year-old age groups for both males and females.

Lifetime (i.e. ever used) use of **analgesics** was significantly lower in 2002 than 1996, due particularly to a reduction in use among younger females, but had not changed significantly since 1999.

Lifetime use of **cannabis** has continued to decrease since 1996. Lifetime use of cannabis significantly decreased by approximately 20% among all students from 1999 to 2002. Among 12 to 15-year-olds, lifetime use of cannabis declined from 34% in 1996, to 32% in 1999 to 25% in 2002. Similarly, lifetime cannabis use declined among 16 and 17-year-olds from 63% in 1996 to 59% in 1999 and then showed a substantial decline to 49% in 2002.

Similarly, lifetime use of **hallucinogens** decreased significantly between 1996 and 2002, with significant reductions evident among younger and older students of both genders. Approximately 9% of 12 to 15-year-olds in 1996 and 1999 reported having ever used hallucinogens. In 2002, this reduced significantly by approximately 40% to 5%. Lifetime use of hallucinogens among 16 and 17-year-olds went from 22% in 1996 to 17% in 1999 and declined further in 2002 by more than 50% to 8%.

Figure 2: Percentage of WA students aged 12 to 17 years who have ever used drugs, 1996 - 2002, including significant shifts by age group and gender from 1999 to 2002.



Lifetime use of **tranquillisers** (for non-medical reasons) decreased significantly between 1999 and 2002 among males only. Among older females, lifetime use of tranquillisers in 2002 was significantly lower than 1996, but no significant change had occurred since 1999.

Lifetime use of **inhalants** has continued to decrease steadily since 1996. Lifetime use of inhalants in 2002 was not significantly different to use in 1999 but was significantly 20% lower than 1996. This was true for younger and older students of both genders.

Lifetime use of **amphetamines** (for non-medical reasons) and **ecstasy** significantly increased between 1996 and 1999 and then slightly decreased in 2002 among all subgroups except older females. For both drugs, decreases in 2002 were significant among older males with amphetamine use down by 15% and ecstasy use down by 30%. Amphetamine use among 12 to 15-year-olds doubled between 1996 and 1999 from 6% to 12% and then decreased to 10% in 2002. Among 16 and 17-year-olds, lifetime amphetamine use increased substantially from 10% in 1996 to 23% in 1999 and decreased to 20% in 2002.

While there were no significant changes in lifetime **heroin** use between 1996 and 1999, there were small but significant decreases from 1999 to 2002, which were only significant among males.

Lifetime use of **steroids** (without a doctor's prescription) was higher in 2002 (3%) than in 1996 (2%) but had changed little since 1999 (4%). A significant decrease of nearly 40% occurred from 1999 to 2002 among younger males.

Lifetime use of **cocaine** has remained fairly constant since 1996.

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