

## **Illicit Drug Responses – Young Survey 2: the exclusion of responses to items on use of analgesics and steroids**

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Tables 1 and 2 compare findings from a national survey of men and women (National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 1998) and ALSWH survey of young women (2000). Rows are arranged in order of decreasing prevalence of lifetime use in the national survey.

From Table 1:

- The rank order for prevalence of use is similar in the ALSWH and NDSHS samples.
- Prevalences from ALSWH are generally higher than NDSHS, when compared with the full sample for that survey, aged 14 years and older.
- Where NDSHS data are available for a similar age and sex group, prevalences from ALSWH are lower than in the national sample.

From Table 2:

- Mean age of initiation is universally lower in the ALSWH sample. Differences in means generally range from 0.1 to 1.9 years with higher mean differences for tranquillisers (3.6 years), steroids (4.9 years) and analgesics (7.2 years).
- The standard deviation for age of initiation of illicit drug use is similar for most illicit drugs (2.3 to 2.9), with higher standard deviations for analgesics (4.2) and steroids (5.7). Further, the minimum reported age of initiation for these 2 illicit drugs (0 and 2 years respectively) is implausible for recreational illicit drug use.

Although it does not seem possible to further investigate explanations for analgesic use, asthma is a common use of steroid medications and was asked in the surveys. Tables 3 and 4 show the distributions of steroid use in relation to 'contemporary asthma'. Nothing stands out for comment. However, most women reporting younger ages for starting to use steroids also reported having asthma more than 4 years ago (Table 5), possibly during childhood.

### **Conclusion**

Responses to age of initiation of illicit drug use for analgesics and steroids suggest that these items were answered in relation to both medicinal and non-medicinal uses.

It is proposed that the definitions of illicit drug use be based not on the 12 illicit drugs originally included but on the remaining 10, excluding analgesics and steroids.

**Table 1 Prevalence of illicit drug use at the ALSWH survey 2 of the Young Cohort (women aged 22-27 years) and AIHW (men and women aged 14 years or more)**

|                                 | Prevalence of Illicit drug ever used |                   |                   | Prevalence of Illicit drug used in last 12 months |                   |                   |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                                 | ALSWH                                | AIHW <sup>1</sup> | AIHW <sup>2</sup> | ALSWH                                             | AIHW <sup>1</sup> | AIHW <sup>2</sup> |
| <b>a</b> Marijuana              | 55.4                                 | 59.2              | 39.1              | 22.9                                              | 29.3              | 17.9              |
| <b>b</b> Analgesics             | 37.6                                 |                   | 11.5              | 29.6                                              |                   | 5.2               |
| <b>d</b> LSD <sup>3</sup>       | 12.5                                 |                   | 9.9               | 2.7                                               |                   | 3.0               |
| <b>e</b> Natural hallucinogens  | 4.8                                  |                   |                   | 0.7                                               |                   |                   |
| <b>c</b> Amphetamines           | 14.6                                 |                   | 8.8               | 7.4                                               |                   | 3.7               |
| <b>f</b> Tranquillisers         | 4.6                                  |                   | 6.2               | 1.7                                               |                   | 3.0               |
| <b>h</b> Ecstasy/designer drugs | 12.5                                 |                   | 4.8               | 7.8                                               |                   | 2.4               |
| <b>g</b> Cocaine                | 5.0                                  |                   | 4.3               | 2.2                                               |                   | 1.4               |
| <b>i</b> Inhalants              | 1.7                                  |                   | 3.9               | 0.2                                               |                   | 0.9               |
| <b>j</b> Heroin                 | 1.2                                  | 6.2               | 2.2               | 0.4                                               | 2.9               | 0.8               |
| <b>k</b> Barbiturates           | 0.5                                  |                   | 1.6               | 0.1                                               |                   | 0.3               |
| <b>l</b> Steroids               | 0.4                                  |                   | 0.8               | 0.1                                               |                   | 0.2               |
| <b>Any Illicit drug</b>         | <b>64.0</b>                          |                   | <b>46.0</b>       |                                                   |                   | <b>22.0</b>       |

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1999. 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First results. AIHW cat no. PHE 15. Canberra: AIHW (Drug Statistics Series)

<sup>2</sup> Miller M, Draper G 2001. Statistics on drug use in Australia 2000. AIHW cat no. PHE 30. Canberra: AIHW (Drug Statistics Series no. 8)

<sup>3</sup> National Drug Strategy Survey used the category 'Hallucinogens' which may combine ALSWH categories d & e

**Table 2 Age of initiation (years) for 12 illicit drugs at ALSWH survey 2 of the Young Cohort (women aged 22-27 years) and AIHW (men and women aged 14 years or more)**

|                                 | ALSWH         |       |      |           | AIHW <sup>1</sup> |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-------|------|-----------|-------------------|
|                                 | Mean (SD)     | Range | N    | N missing | Mean              |
| <b>a</b> Marijuana              | 17.2<br>(2.5) | 8-27  | 5213 | 46        | 18.7              |
| <b>b</b> Analgesics             | 12.5<br>(4.2) | 0-27  | 2968 | 613       | 19.7              |
| <b>d</b> LSD <sup>3</sup>       | 18.7<br>(2.3) | 14-26 | 1150 | 34        | 18.8              |
| <b>e</b> Natural hallucinogens  | 18.5<br>(2.7) | 9-26  | 427  | 25        |                   |
| <b>c</b> Amphetamines           | 19.6<br>(2.6) | 10-26 | 1357 | 29        | 19.9              |
| <b>f</b> Tranquillisers         | 19.8<br>(2.9) | 12-29 | 411  | 26        | 23.4              |
| <b>h</b> Ecstasy/designer drugs | 20.8<br>(2.5) | 13-27 | 1150 | 31        | 22.7              |
| <b>g</b> Cocaine                | 21.1<br>(2.4) | 13-26 | 456  | 21        | 22.3              |
| <b>i</b> Inhalants              | 16.2<br>(2.8) | 9-24  | 148  | 15        | 17.5              |
| <b>j</b> Heroin                 | 19.9<br>(2.4) | 13-27 | 99   | 16        | 21.5              |
| <b>k</b> Barbiturates           | 18.9<br>(2.7) | 14-27 | 37   | 14        | 19.7              |
| <b>l</b> Steroids               | 16.7<br>(5.7) | 2-25  | 26   | 13        | 21.6              |

<sup>1</sup> Miller M, Draper G 2001. Statistics on drug use in Australia 2000. AIHW cat no. PHE 30. Canberra: AIHW (Drug Statistics Series no. 8)

**Table 3 Number and percent using steroids, stratified by the presence of asthma in the last 4 years**

| Asthma in the last 4 years |          | Never used any illicit drug | Used other illicit drugs but not steroids | Used steroids but not in last 12 months | Used steroids in last 12 months | Missing | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Yes                        | <b>n</b> | 334                         | 713                                       | 8                                       | 2                               | 11      | 1068  |
|                            | <b>%</b> | 31.3                        | 66.8                                      | 0.7                                     | 0.2                             | 1.0     | 100.0 |
| No                         | <b>n</b> | 3032                        | 5268                                      | 22                                      | 7                               | 74      | 8403  |
|                            | <b>%</b> | 36.1                        | 62.7                                      | 0.3                                     | 0.1                             | 0.9     | 100.0 |
| Missing                    | <b>n</b> | 40                          | 60                                        | 0                                       | 0                               | 1       | 101   |
|                            | <b>%</b> | 39.6                        | 59.4                                      | 0.0                                     | 0.0                             | 1.0     | 100.0 |

**Table 4 Number and percent using steroids, stratified by the presence of asthma more than 4 years ago**

| Asthma more than 4 years ago |   | Never used any illicit drug | Used other illicit drugs but not steroids | Ever used steroids | Missing | Total |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|-------|
| Yes                          | n | 449                         | 796                                       | 9                  | 14      | 1268  |
|                              | % | 35.4                        | 62.8                                      | 0.7                | 1.1     |       |
| No                           | n | 2917                        | 5185                                      | 30                 | 71      | 8203  |
|                              | % | 35.6                        | 63.2                                      | 0.4                | 0.9     |       |
| Missing                      | n | 40                          | 60                                        | 0                  | 1       | 101   |
|                              | % | 39.6                        | 59.4                                      | 0.0                | 1.0     |       |

**Table 5 Age of initiation of steroid use and history of asthma, and personal injury or illness (n=26)**

| Age of Initiation | Asthma              |                       | Major Personal Illness |                         | Major Personal Injury |                         | Other Major illness |                       |
|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
|                   | In the last 4 years | More than 4 years ago | Last 12 months         | More than 12 months ago | Last 12 months        | More than 12 months ago | In the last 4 years | More than 4 years ago |
| 2                 |                     |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 8                 | Yes                 |                       |                        |                         |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 9                 |                     | Yes                   |                        |                         |                       | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 9                 |                     | Yes                   |                        |                         |                       | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 12                |                     | Yes                   | Yes                    | Yes                     |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 12                |                     | Yes                   |                        |                         | Yes                   | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 14                |                     | Yes                   |                        |                         | Yes                   | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 15                | Yes                 |                       | Yes                    | Yes                     |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 15                | Yes                 |                       |                        |                         |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 15                |                     |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   |                         |                     | Yes                   |
| 16                |                     |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   |                         |                     |                       |
| 16                |                     | Yes                   |                        | Yes                     | Yes                   |                         | Yes                 |                       |
| 16                |                     |                       |                        |                         |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 17                | Yes                 |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   |                         |                     |                       |
| 18                |                     | Yes                   |                        |                         |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 19                |                     |                       | Yes                    |                         |                       |                         | Yes                 |                       |
| 19                |                     |                       |                        |                         |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 20                |                     | Yes                   |                        |                         |                       |                         |                     |                       |
| 21                |                     |                       |                        | Yes                     | Yes                   |                         | Yes                 | Yes                   |
| 21                | Yes                 |                       |                        |                         |                       | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 21                |                     |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   |                         |                     |                       |
| 23                | Yes                 |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 24                | Yes                 |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   | Yes                     |                     |                       |
| 24                |                     |                       |                        |                         | Yes                   |                         |                     |                       |
| 24                | Yes                 |                       | Yes                    |                         | Yes                   |                         | Yes                 |                       |
| 25                |                     |                       |                        | Yes                     |                       |                         |                     |                       |