

Baseline in the Grass: alcohol, drug use and harm reduction practices among festival attendees

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Introduction and Aims: Despite Darwin's reputation as a party town, limited research has investigated alcohol and other drug (AOD) use or harm reduction in event settings. Local data are integral to informing effective prevention and harm reduction strategies. This study aimed to identify AOD use and harm reduction practices among music festival attendees.

Design and Methods: We conducted a digital survey with music festival attendees aged 16 years and over in Darwin in May 2022. We provide a preliminary description of participants, their AOD use and harm reduction practices.

Results: 539 participants completed the survey (68% female, 7% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, median age 25 years). 39% reported using illicit drugs in the past year and 22% had a high-risk AUDIT-C score. Most participants (85%) planned to consume alcohol at the festival, with almost half (47%) reporting they planned to have 7 or more standard drinks. Twelve percent of participants planned to use drugs (besides alcohol) at the festival (n=67). Of these participants, 70% reported they planned to implement harm reduction strategies including regular water consumption (31%), pre-planning the amount of drug to use (28%), ensuring they were around people who knew they were using drugs (24%), making efforts to stay cool (24%), obtaining information from friends (22%) and consuming a test dose (21%).

Discussion and Conclusions: Heavy alcohol consumption was highly prevalent among festival attendees. Similar to other studies, a minority of participants planned to use drugs at the festival and most intended to implement harm reduction strategies.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Findings suggest that music festivals are an important setting for targeting heavy alcohol consumption. Care and support are also needed for those who plan to use illicit drugs, particularly given they are open to using a range of harm reduction practices.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: AP has received untied educational grants from Mundipharma and Seqirus for study of opioid medicines in Australia. PD has received investigator-driven funding from Gilead Sciences for work related to hepatitis C treatment and an untied educational grant from Indivior for work related to the introduction of buprenorphine/naloxone into Australia. He has also served as an unpaid member of an Advisory Board for an intranasal naloxone product. PD is the recipient of an NHMRC Senior Research Fellowship.