

Ketamine overdose among people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants in Melbourne, Victoria

Authors:

WILSON, JOANNA¹, DIETZE, PAUL^{1,2}, WHITESIDE, BIANCA¹, RAFFAELE, DORIANO¹, COWMAN, MATTHEW¹, EDDY, SARAH¹

¹Burnet Institute, ²National Drug Research Institute

Presenter's email: joanna.wilson@burnet.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Findings from the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) suggest that the recreational use of ketamine has been increasing in Australia. EDRS surveys show rates of ketamine use are highest in Melbourne, with 81% of people who regularly use ecstasy and other stimulants reporting recent (past 6-month) use in 2021. High levels of ketamine use can lead to overdose particularly in the context of concurrent alcohol use. In this presentation, we examine reports of ketamine overdose in a sample of people who regularly use psychostimulant drugs.

Design and Methods: Data were drawn from the 2022 survey of people who regularly use ecstasy and other illicit stimulants (EDRS). We examined reported past-year ketamine overdose rates in the Melbourne sample. Characteristics of those who reported a past-year ketamine overdose will be compared to those who did not.

Results: Initial analyses suggest around 18% of participants experienced a past-year ketamine overdose in 2022, an increase from 1% in 2021. Further work will determine some of the key characteristics of those experiencing overdose.

Discussions and Conclusions: Reported ketamine overdoses among people who use ecstasy and other stimulants in Melbourne have increased in 2022. This may reflect decreased tolerance coming out of lockdowns or other factors related to the ketamine market or related consumer behaviours. Novel harm reduction strategies should explore ways to minimise the risk of negative outcomes and to raise awareness about safe ketamine use.

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