

Research briefing



The Socio-Economic Impact of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) in New Zealand: Part III – Future trends in the use and supply of methamphetamine

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Introduction

This research briefing summarises findings concerning the future trends in the use and supply of methamphetamine from recent research into the socio-economic impact of ATS in New Zealand. ATS are a group of synthetic illicit drug types which include methamphetamine, MDMA/Ecstasy and crystal methamphetamine (known as 'ice'). The research was completed over twelve months in 2003/4 by researchers at SHORE, Massey University and was funded by the New Zealand Police.

Two other research briefings have been produced from this project. The first reports the results related to the population level use and harms from ATS (Part I); and the second, the findings concerning the black market for ATS and use of ATS by arrestees (Part II). The full report of the project, and other information on drug use, can be downloaded from the websites of the New Zealand Police (www.police.govt.nz), National Drug Policy site (www.ndp.govt.nz) and SHORE, Massey University (www.shore.ac.nz).

Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the project was to assess the socio-economic impact of ATS in New Zealand. The objectives included identifying future trends in the use and supply of methamphetamine in New Zealand.

Method used

A series of key informant surveys were conducted nationwide in 2003/4 with drug treatment workers (n=46), drug enforcement officers (n=74) and regular methamphetamine users outside of treatment (n=53) about how the use and sale of methamphetamine in New Zealand had changed in the previous six months. Each group of key informants was asked the same set of questions about how a particular aspect of methamphetamine use and supply may have changed during this time. Information from three groups of key informants was used to minimise the bias and weaknesses associated with any one source. Valid trends

Key Trends

New users of methamphetamine include business people, young women, Maori and lower socio-economic groups

More users are injecting methamphetamine

Methamphetamine was considered easily available

A greater cross section of people are now selling methamphetamine

Methamphetamine dealers are selling the drug in smaller cheaper weights

Methamphetamine use was linked to violence and property crime

concerning methamphetamine were identified through a process of triangulation of the answers from the three key informant sources. The greater the congruence in the answers to a question between the three groups of key informants, the higher the confidence that an actual trend had been identified. Particular weight was placed on the opinions of regular methamphetamine users, as they possess the best first hand knowledge of the use and purchasing of methamphetamine.

The figures and tables presented combine the answers from all three key informants groups to each question. The figures show the proportion of key informants who answered in a particular way and the number of key informants who answered the question. Key informants were directed to answer a question when they had direct knowledge of a phenomenon. The tables present the number of key informants who indicated they had noticed a change and detail the proportion of these key informants who indicated the same changes. In a number of instances the total percentage of key informants indicating changes add up to more than 100%, reflecting the fact that one key informant can report more than one change.

Findings

Changes in the type of people using methamphetamine

All three key informant groups were asked if they had noticed any new groups of people using methamphetamine in the last six months. About half of users, 60% of enforcement key informants and about one-third of treatment key informants had noticed new groups of people using methamphetamine. The new user groups most commonly reported by all three key informant groups were 'teenage users' and 'business people' (Table 1). User key informants also noted more 'young women', 'lower socio-economic' and 'Maori/Polynesian' users. Treatment key informants commonly noticed more 'young women' users. Enforcement and treatment key informants indicated new users came from a 'broad cross section of society'.

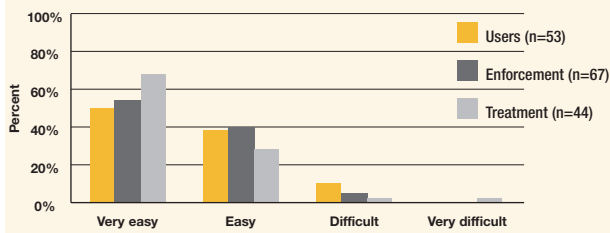
Table 1: New groups of people using methamphetamine in the last six months

Change	Users % (n=25)	Enforcement % (n=45)	Treatment % (n=13)
More younger people/ school students/teenagers	48	33	46
More of cross section of society/more all types	-	24	15
More business people/ higher socio-economic/ white collar/well educated	20	9	31
More young females	-	9	-
More Maori/Polynesian	12	9	-
More middle class	-	9	-
More 'boy racers'	-	9	-
More users in general	-	7	-
More lower socio-economic	12	7	-
More traditional cannabis users	-	7	8
More early 30s/ older people	8	4	-
More active criminals	-	4	-
More previously intravenous drug users (with poor injecting habits)	-	2	8
More white males aged 20-25	-	2	-
More sports players	-	2	-
More young pub patrons	-	2	-
More gang members	-	2	-
More couples	-	2	-
More females/teenage girls/women 20s	20	-	15
More Arabs and Koreans	4	-	-
More wealthier teenagers	4	-	-

Current availability of methamphetamine

All three groups of key informants were asked about the ease of obtaining methamphetamine at present. There was strong congruence between the three groups of key informants, with the overwhelming majority from all three groups describing the availability of methamphetamine as either 'very easy' or 'easy' (Figure 1). Fifty-one percent of user key informants rated the availability of methamphetamine as 'very easy'.

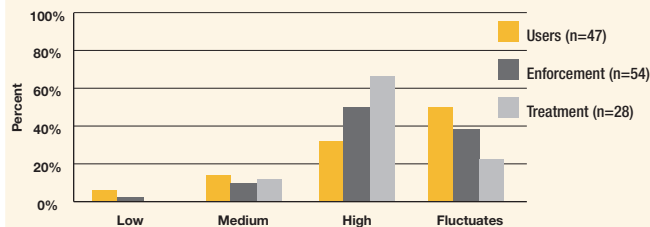
Figure 1: Current availability of methamphetamine



Purity

All three groups of key informants were asked how strong or pure they would say methamphetamine was at this time. Figure 2 shows that most treatment and enforcement key informants thought purity was 'high' with treatment key informants most likely to believe this (68%). User (49%) and enforcement (39%) key informants were more likely to say that purity 'fluctuates'.

Figure 2: Current purity of methamphetamine



Change in type of people selling methamphetamine

All three groups of key informants were asked if they had noticed any changes in the type of people selling methamphetamine in the last six months. About one third of user and drug enforcement key informants, and one-fifth of treatment key informants, had observed changes in the type of people selling methamphetamine (Table 2). All three key informant groups noted more of a 'cross section' of people now selling methamphetamine. Drug enforcement and drug treatment key informants commonly reported more 'gangs' selling, more sales from 'drug houses', and more 'sales by teenagers'. User key

informants reported less 'gangs', more 'professional people', more 'young females' and more 'violent types' now selling methamphetamine.

Table 2: Changes in the type of people selling methamphetamine

Change	Users % (n=17)	Enforcement % (n=31)	Treatment % (n=10)
More gangs selling/ gangs have a wide influence	6	32	30
More sales from 'tinny'/ drug houses	-	29	30
Heavy amphetamine users dealing to sustain habit	-	19	-
More young people/ students selling	6	16	20
More young females selling	18	13	-
More ordinary people selling/cross section of society/more socially acceptable	30	13	20
Previous cannabis dealers now selling methamphetamine	-	6	-
More criminals selling	-	6	-
More solo mums selling	-	3	-
More prostitutes selling	-	3	-
More middle management/ professionals selling	18	3	-
More males last 20s/ early 30s selling	-	3	-
More middle class users selling	-	3	-
More manufacturers selling	-	3	-
Less people selling as many burnt out users	-	-	10
More Maori/Pacific Islanders	6	-	-
More paranoid/violent types	18	-	-
Less gang members	18	-	-
Less strictly criminal world	6	-	-

Change in the way methamphetamine is sold

User and enforcement key informants were asked whether there had been any change in the way methamphetamine was being sold in the last six months. Treatment key informants were not asked this question as they had no direct knowledge of selling behaviour. About a quarter of user and one-third of enforcement key informants indicated there had been changes (Table 3). Many user (47%) and drug enforcement (24%) key informants reported the ‘repackaging’ of methamphetamine into smaller weights at lower prices. User key informants also reported the sale of methamphetamine in half gram units. Many enforcement key informants noted the increasing sale of methamphetamine from cannabis drug houses.

Table 3: Changes in the way methamphetamine is sold

Change	Users % (n=15)	Enforcement % (n=25)
More drug houses/ 'tinny' houses selling methamphetamine	-	32
Sold in smaller weights than point called 'clicks' (0.07 gram)/ smaller weights cheaper prices (\$20/\$50)	47	24
Dealers giving free taste to new users	7	8
Dealers more careful who sell to now it is Class A	-	8
Cannabis laced with methamphetamine	-	8
Sold from methamphetamine houses	-	8
Party packs (e.g. meth/ecstasy/ LSD, meth/LSD/ecstasy/cannabis)	-	8
Cannabis dealers switching to methamphetamine/ less cannabis sold	7	4
Methamphetamine sold with syringes	7	4
More non-gang sellers	-	4
Methamphetamine available from more places (e.g. bars/ restaurants)/more available/ easier availability	13	4

More paranoia amongst sellers	7	-
More sold in larger quantities (1/2 grams)	20	-
Getting 'cut' more	7	-
More selling crystals rather than powder	7	-
Selling by the puff (\$20)	7	-

Change in the type of crime committed by methamphetamine users

All three key informant groups were asked whether they had noticed any change in the type of crime committed by methamphetamine users in the last six months. About one third of user and treatment key informants and two-thirds of enforcement key informants indicated there had been changes in the type of crime committed by methamphetamine users (Table 4). All three groups of key informants were most likely to report increased 'violent crime' and increased 'property crime' by methamphetamine users. Enforcement key informants also reported increases in 'burglary', 'domestic violence' and 'fraud' by methamphetamine users.

Table 4: Changes in the type of crime committed by methamphetamine users in the last six months

Change	Users % (n=18)	Enforcement % (n=49)	Treatment % (n=14)
More violent crime	33	73	36
More theft/property crime/ to get money for drugs	22	29	64
More burglary	-	24	-
More domestic violence	-	14	7
More theft of identity cards/fraud	-	12	-
More use of weapons/ firearms	6	10	-
More car crime	6	10	-
More aggravated robbery	-	8	-
More chemist break ins	-	6	-
More home invasion	-	4	-
More kidnapping	-	4	-
More solicitors stating clients using methamphetamine	-	2	-
More rapes	-	2	-
More disorderly conduct	-	2	-

More road rage	-	2	-
More drug deals gone wrong	-	2	-
More shop lifting	-	2	-
More drug dealing by users	-	-	7
More crime by women	-	-	7
More crime in general	22	-	7
More murders	6	-	-
More irrational crime	6	-	-
More theft of specific	6	-	-
More serious crime	11	-	-
More stealing off friends	6	-	-

Conclusions

The new groups of methamphetamine users identified by the key informants are consistent with the spread of methamphetamine use from the 'originator' sub-cultures (i.e. the dance party community and motorcycle gangs) to broader society, which includes lower socio-economic groups and Maori and Polynesian peoples. The increase in use by teenage girls is consistent with trends in amphetamine use identified overseas, where young women have used the drug for its weight reduction properties (Klee, 2001). As methamphetamine use spreads to broader sections of society a greater cross section of people will naturally become involved in selling the drug in order to finance their own use. The sale of smaller weights of methamphetamine and the selling of methamphetamine from cannabis drug houses suggest marketing strategies aimed at lower socio-economic groups, teenagers (with low disposable incomes) and traditional cannabis users. These target groups are consistent with the new user groups identified earlier.

Methamphetamine users were considered to be involved in more 'violent crime' and more 'crime in general'. The role methamphetamine use may be playing in encouraging violence and criminality must be interpreted with caution. Any pharmacological relationship between the ingestion of a drug and violent tendencies must take into account an individual's general tendency to be violent, their mood at the time of use, the context and situations they face while under the influence of a drug, and any other drugs they may have used or be withdrawing from at the time (MacCoun et al., 2003). The relationship between methamphetamine and criminality is also complex. Methamphetamine can impact on criminal offending in three very different ways: (i) psychopharmacologically – an intoxicated drug user commits a crime; (ii) economic-

compulsive – a drug user engages in criminal offending to obtain money to purchase drugs; and (iii) systemic – violence is used as part of the process of carrying out 'business' in the illicit drug market, such as threatening drug debtors or assaulting rival drug dealers (Goldstein, 1989).

Identifying the principal way a drug is impacting on crime is important for developing the most effective law enforcement response. For example, if most of the criminality related to a drug is economically compulsive, then enforcement strategies which drive up the price even further may increase the criminality related to the drug by requiring addicts to commit more crime to finance their use. The complex nuances of these relationships are very difficult to identify with official crime statistics and demand specialised data collection systems. To this end, New Zealand Police have commissioned a national pilot of a New Zealand Drug Abuse Monitoring System (NZ-ADAM) to be completed in 2005 to inform law enforcement strategy on these important issues.

References

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