

9 Use of heroin

Lifetime and recent use of heroin

According to the 1998 survey, the number of recent users of heroin was estimated at around 113,000 persons, or 0.8% of the total Australian population aged 14 years and over (Table 9.1). Since the prevalence is very small, care should be taken when interpreting the survey results. The survey further showed that:

- Males were twice as likely to be recent heroin users as females.
- Among the youngest age group (aged 14–19 years), females were twice as likely to report being a recent user compared with males.
- Among those aged 30 years and over, as age increased, the reporting of heroin use decreased.

Table 9.1: Lifetime and recent use of heroin: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Age	Lifetime use (per cent)	Recent use
Males		
14–19	1.1	0.5
20–29	6.5	3.2
30–39	4.2	0.8
40+	1.6	0.4 *
All ages	3.0	1.1
Females		
14–19	2.3	1.3
20–29	3.2	1.2
30–39	2.1	0.4 *
40+	0.3 *	0.1 *
All ages	1.4	0.5
Persons		
14–19	1.7	0.9
20–29	4.9	2.2
30–39	3.2	0.6
40+	0.9	0.3 *
All ages	2.2	0.8

Types of heroin used and methods of consumption

The survey showed that heroin in the form of powder was the most frequently used (66%) type of heroin among recent users (Table 9.2). The preferred method of consumption was through injection (68%). There were very few sex differences in the types of heroin used and the methods of consumption. Age-wise, there appeared to be some differences in the types of heroin used and methods of consumption, but care in interpretation is necessary since the figures are based on small numbers of cases (Table 9.3).

Table 9.2: Type of heroin used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Type/method	Males	Females	Persons
Type			
Heroin powder	64.3	72.1	66.3
Heroin rock	53.6	54.4	53.9
How consumed			
Smoked	28.3	29.6	28.6
Snorted	11.6 *	21.4	13.8
Swallowed	6.3 *	24.4	10.5 *
Injected	67.4	68.8	67.7

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Table 9.3: Type of heroin used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998

Type/method	Age group				All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	
(per cent)					
Type					
Heroin powder	98.2	77.4	69.5	27.3	66.3
Heroin rock	32.6 *	39.7	76.1	79.9	53.9
How consumed					
Smoked	19.5 *	46.0	7.9 *	—	28.6
Snorted	44.4 *	16.4 *	7.9 *	—	13.8
Swallowed	1.8 *	16.3 *	7.5 *	—	10.5 *
Injected	72.0	46.3	100.0	100.0	67.7

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Usual place of heroin consumption

In 1998, of those Australians aged 14 years and over who had used heroin in the last 12 months, more than a third (36%) reported that the usual place of consumption was their own home or a friend's house (Table 9.4). For more than half (53%) of all recent users, the usual place of consumption was away from home, clubs or work; that is, probably in public places.

Table 9.4: Where heroin usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Place	Male	Female	Persons
Own home, friend's house	30.3	58.9	35.9
Parties, restaurants or licensed premises	3.7 *	—	3.0 *
School/work	10.2 *	—	8.2 *
Other	55.8	41.1	52.9

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Frequency of heroin use

In 1998, of all Australians aged 14 years and over who were recent users of heroin, nearly one in six (18%) reported using daily (Table 9.5). Approximately one half (48%) of all recent heroin users reported using less frequently than once a month.

Table 9.5: Frequency of heroin use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998

Frequency	Age group				All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40+	
	(per cent)				
Every day	—	7.3 *	22.8 *	31.4 *	17.5
Once a week or more	—	2.9 *	9.3 *	23.6 *	10.5 *
About once a month	5.6 *	52.1	—	—	24.3
Less often	94.5	37.6	68.0	45.0	47.7

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Source of supply of heroin

In 1998, of those Australians aged 14 years and over who had used heroin in their lifetime, more than four-fifths (84%) obtained their first dose from a friend or acquaintance, while only one in 12 (8%) obtained it from a street dealer (Table 9.6).

The data on current source of heroin revealed a slightly different picture. Although the majority of recent users (73%) still obtained their supply from a friend or acquaintance, more than one in four (27%) obtained heroin from a street dealer (Table 9.7).

Table 9.6: First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever tried heroin aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Supplier	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Friend or acquaintance	84.8	81.9	83.9
Spouse or partner	—	13.6 *	4.3 *
Street dealer	11.4 *	1.9 *	8.4 *
Other ^(a)	3.8 *	2.7 *	3.5 *

(a) Includes siblings, parents and stolen.

Note: Base equals all heroin users.

Table 9.7: Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Supplier	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Friend or acquaintance	72.4	77.7	73.3
Spouse or partner	—	—	—
Street dealer	27.3	22.3 *	26.5
Other ^(a)	0.3 *	—	0.2 *

(a) Includes siblings, parents and stolen.

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Multiple drugs use with heroin

The 1998 survey showed that Australians aged 14 years and over who had used heroin recently also used other drugs. For example, of recent users, almost all reported using alcohol (98%) and marijuana/cannabis (99%), while more than two-thirds (71%) reported using tobacco, and three-fifths (62%) reported using amphetamines (Table 9.8).

The data on concurrent polydrug use revealed that more than four-fifths (83%) of recent users smoked marijuana/cannabis while on heroin and two-fifths said that they used alcohol and heroin concurrently (Table 9.9).

Table 9.8: Polydrug use: proportion of recent heroin users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Other substances recently used	Males	Females (per cent)	Persons
Alcohol	98.5	97.1	98.0
Tobacco	80.7	52.0	71.2
Marijuana/cannabis	100.0	95.3	98.5
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	49.9	35.7	45.3
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	37.9	28.1	34.7
Steroids ^(a)	8.9 *	5.5 *	7.8 *
Barbiturates ^(a)	25.0 *	8.7 *	19.7
Amphetamines ^(a)	68.1	49.1	62.0
Methadone ^(b)	21.1	6.8 *	16.5
Cocaine	30.3 *	37.9	32.8
Hallucinogens	31.2	31.2	31.2
Ecstasy/designer drugs	23.6 *	32.7	26.4
Inhalants	6.6 *	15.7 *	9.6 *

(a) For non-medical purposes.

(b) Non-maintenance.

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Table 9.9: Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent heroin users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Other substances concurrently used	Males	Females (per cent)	Persons
Alcohol	42.2	35.2	40.1
Marijuana/cannabis	84.9	78.8	83.1
Pain-killers/analgesics	22.8	15.7	20.7
Other substances ^(a)	24.9	19.3	23.3
None of the above	11.4 *	3.2 *	9.0 *

(a) Includes cocaine, benzodiazapines, anti-depressants and barbiturates.

Note: Base equals all recent heroin users.

Correlates of heroin use

As with most illicit drugs, a person's employment status, cultural background and marital status were correlated with both lifetime and recent heroin use. In 1998, of all unemployed persons aged 14 years and over, one in 20 (5%) reported using heroin (Table 9.10).

Table 9.10: Correlates of heroin use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998

Characteristics	Never used	Lifetime use (per cent)	Recent use
Education			
No qualification	98.0	2.0	0.9
HSC or equivalent	96.8	3.2	0.8
Trade/diploma	97.8	2.2	0.8
Tertiary	98.0	2.0	0.5 *
Employment status			
Currently employed	97.6	2.4	0.7
Student	98.5	1.5	0.5 *
Unemployed	91.6	8.4	4.5
Retired/pension	98.9	1.1	0.4
Occupational status			
Upper (white)	98.0	2.0	0.4 *
Middle	97.6	2.4	0.9
Lower (blue)	97.6	2.4	1.0
Country of birth			
Australian born	97.7	2.3	0.8
Other English-speaking born	97.5	2.5	1.0 *
Non-English-speaking born	98.6	1.4	0.5 *
Socioeconomic area			
1st quintile	97.7	2.3	0.9
2nd quintile	97.5	2.5	0.8
3rd quintile	98.2	1.8	0.8
4th quintile	98.3	1.7	0.3
5th quintile	97.5	2.5	1.1
Geography			
Urban	97.7	2.3	0.8
Rural/remote	98.1	1.9	0.7
Marital status			
Never married	95.6	4.4	2.3
Widowed	99.8	0.2 *	—
Divorced/separated	98.3	1.7	0.3 *
Presently married	98.6	1.4	0.2