

Males and under 30 at greatest risk of hospital admission for drug related poisonings

December 16 2015

Poisonings from recreational drug and alcohol use account for 9 percent of all poisoning-related hospital admissions, says a new University of Sydney study revealing that males and people under 30 are at greatest risk.

Published today in *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, the finding underscores the harm and prevalence associated with recreational drug use among young people following a recent string of drug and [alcohol](#)-related deaths and poisonings at Australian music festivals.

"Recreational poisonings are events arising from the use of alcohol, illicit or prescribed drugs for recreational purposes, or to induce psychoactive effects," says the study's lead author, Dr Kate Chitty, a Research Fellow at Sydney Medical School. "They represent a significant and potentially lethal form of harm associated with drug use."

The report is based on 13,805 patient records collected between January 1996 and December 2013 using data from the Hunter Area Toxicology Service (HATS), Australia's oldest toxicology service.

The report finds that stimulants were the drug class most commonly linked to recreational poisonings, followed by alcohol, opioids, sedatives, hallucinogens, cannabis, non-narcotic analgesics, ecstasy and cocaine (see table below).

Compared to other poisoning admissions, recreational drug poisonings were three times more likely to occur between 3am and 6am than 9am to 5pm and 40 to 60 percent more likely to occur from Friday to Sunday compared to a Monday.

Males were 2.8 times more likely to present to hospital for recreational drug poisonings than females and those aged less than 30 were 1.6 times more likely to present than people aged 30 years and above.

"The finding that peak recreational poisoning admissions occurred on Fridays and Saturdays reflects a 'binge' culture, associated with weekday restraint and weekend excess of alcohol and recreational drugs," says Kate Chitty who noted that the findings from the Hunter region reflected general patterns of drug and alcohol use across Australia.

"That we see these patterns most commonly in [young people](#) highlights that these potentially life-threatening hospital admissions are not the result of years of drug abuse but are largely associated with binge behaviour considered 'normal' by many of Australia's youth."

Just over half of [recreational drug](#) poisonings (51 percent) included only one class of drug, while the remaining cases (49 percent) involved two or more classes of recreational substances.

The most common co-ingested substance was alcohol, comprising almost half of all recreational [poisonings](#). Six (0.5 percent) patients died as a result of their recreational poisoning. All of these patients had taken an opioid, one patient had co-ingested benzodiazepine and three had co-ingested alcohol.

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: Males and under 30 at greatest risk of hospital admission for drug related poisonings (2015, December 16) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-males-greatest-hospital-admission-drug.html>

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