

Study finds recreational drug users not what we think

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A James Cook University researcher has been investigating why Australians are among the top users of illegal drugs in the world – and has uncovered some revealing new facts about the motivations of recreational drug users.

Professor David Plummer led a study by JCU and Griffith University that interviewed [drug](#) users.

"We weren't satisfied enough work had been done to explain why there was such a high level of drug use in Australia and we decided to do smaller in-depth studies to try and understand some of the drivers," he said.

Research shows almost 40% of Australians aged 15 years and over have used one or more [illicit drugs](#) at some stage in their life, and approximately 17% within the past 12 months.

The research team concentrated on recreational drug users rather than habitual users.

"We found recreational users viewed themselves as different from people who are habitual users. The recreational drug users used drugs because they valued the benefits that specific drugs seemed to offer while considering the risks to be manageable, worthwhile and/or minimal," said Professor Plummer.

The team identified two important drivers they believe lead people to take up recreational drug use: social networking and performance enhancement.

"A common reason is performance enhancement. Not only in the physical sense of giving users greater stamina but also in making them feel more attractive and more sociable," said Professor Plummer.

He said the popular view of all drug users as anti-social loners existing on the margins of society was wrong, with [social networking](#) another powerful driver of recreational drug use.

"Recreational users take full advantage of social networks. They report their drug use as being highly social in terms of face-to-face encounters - [recreational drugs](#) are integral to the party scene and are often used to lubricate social interactions. They also depend on [complex social networks](#) for their distribution and use."

Professor Plummer said the findings presented a challenge for agencies trying to warn recreational users about the underappreciated dangers of illicit drug use.

"We have to rethink the preoccupation in anti-drug strategies with negative outcomes, as recreational users see their risks as different from those of habitual users. Current anti-drug campaigns seem to be disconnected from the actual experience of recreational drug users and this may result in a credibility gap."

More information: Amary Mey et al, What's the attraction? Social connectedness as a driver of recreational drug use, *Journal of Substance Use* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/14659891.2017.1409816](https://doi.org/10.1080/14659891.2017.1409816)

Provided by James Cook University

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