

National study highlights hidden causes of methamphetamine-related death

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The number of methamphetamine-related deaths in Australia doubled between 2009 and 2015 with heart disease and violent suicide identified as prominent causes of death, a study from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre has found.

The study, published in the journal *Addiction*, analysed 1649 cases of [methamphetamine](#)-related death retrieved from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) and found that in a fifth of cases (22%) death was attributed to natural disease in conjunction with methamphetamine toxicity.

The most frequent natural disease was cardiac and/or cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Lead author UNSW Professor Shane Darke said these results are indicative of a major public health issue and highlight a hidden problem.

"To see such large and significant increases in mortality rates over the study period indicates a

major methamphetamine problem.

"With so much public attention focused on violence, many users may be unaware that [heart disease](#) is a major factor in methamphetamine-related death.

"Without increased awareness of the connection between methamphetamine use and cardiac and/or cardiovascular disease we could expect to see a significant increase in cases of this kind in the coming years," Professor Darke said.

Suicide accounted for 300 methamphetamine-related deaths (18%) with specific characteristics around methods and gender.

"The impulsivity and disinhibition associated with methamphetamine intoxication may be a factor," Professor Darke said.

"Health professionals need to be aware of the prominent role of violent suicide and take appropriate steps to monitor methamphetamine users."

Other findings of the study include:

- Nearly half of cases occurring in rural and regional locations.
- The most common manner of death (43%) is accidental drug toxicity.
- Even modest amounts of methamphetamine may provoke cardiac arrhythmia.
- There were 245 deaths from traumatic accidents, including 156 where the person was driving a car or motorbike.
- Methamphetamine is a major public health problem of increasing significance, of which death represents the most severe end.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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