



Introduction



The relationship between drug use and crime has been studied extensively over the past few decades, with both international and Australian studies showing that drug users are more likely to engage in crime than those who do not use drugs (AIHW 2011; Bennett et al. 2008). More specifically, a meta-analysis of studies published between 1980 and 2003 found that the odds of offending were three to four times greater for drug users than non-drug users - with the odds of offending being highest among crack users and lowest among recreational drug users (Bennett et al. 2008).

However, much of the criminological research in this area has traditionally focused on users of heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine - with relatively little attention paid to those who use ecstasy, despite its high prevalence (Hendrickson & Gerstein 2005; Yacoubian et al 2004).

In addition, those studies which have specifically examined the nexus between ecstasy use and crime appear to have focused on the use of ecstasy among offenders or police detainees, rather than looking at crime among ecstasy users.

With this in mind, this poster aims to compare criminal activity among regular ecstasy users (REU) and people who inject drugs (PWID) in South Australia, from 2003-2013.

Method

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) and the Ecstasy & Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) both measure criminal activity using the Opiate Treatment Index (OTI). In particular, participants are asked about four different types of crime that they may have committed in the month preceding interview: property crime, dealing (selling drugs for cash profit), fraud and violent crime.

For the purpose of data analysis, these four categories of crime are collapsed to determine whether they had engaged in 'any crime' in the preceding month. Previous research has shown that the self reports of drug users are sufficiently reliable and valid to provide information about their drug use and related problems (such as criminality) (Darke 1998).

Results

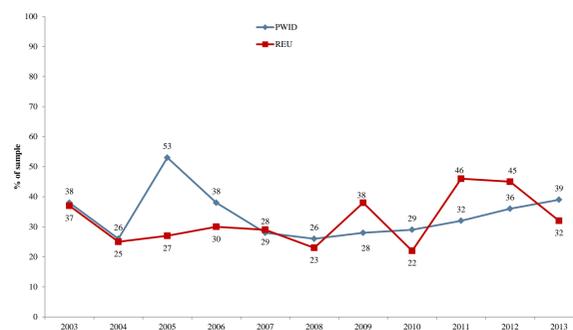


Prevalence of Criminal Activity, 2003-2013

The prevalence of criminal activity among REU and PWID has fluctuated considerably over the past decade. However, when looking at long-term trends (ignoring year to year fluctuations), it was found that the prevalence of criminal activity has remained relatively stable across 2003-2013. More specifically, in 2003 37% of REU reported that they had engaged in some form of criminal activity in the month preceding interview, compared to 32% in 2013 ($p>0.05$). Similarly, 38% of PWID had engaged in some past month criminal activity in 2003, compared to 39% in 2013 ($p>0.05$).

It is interesting to note that over the past decade the prevalence of criminal activity among regular ecstasy users has been comparable to that of people who inject drugs. This is surprising given that people who inject drugs have generally been thought to have higher rates of criminal activity than their non-injecting peers.

Figure 1: Past month criminal activity amongst PWID & REU, 2003-2013



Looking at the individual categories of crime (see Figures 2-5), it was found that **dealing has remained the most common crime committed by both PWID and REU across 2003-2013**. This was closely followed by property crime, with fraud and violent crime remaining low amongst both samples.

In terms of changes across time, there were found to be **no significant changes in the prevalence of dealing, property crime or violent crime amongst either IDRS or EDRS participants from 2003-2013**. Fraud, however, declined significantly ($p<0.05$) amongst IDRS participants, whilst remaining stable amongst EDRS participants.

In 2013, it was found that that IDRS & EDRS participants had comparable levels of dealing, fraud and violent crime. **IDRS participants, however, did have a significantly higher prevalence of property crime than EDRS participants (17% versus 7% ; $p<0.05$)**.

Figure 2: Prevalence of dealing amongst PWID & REU, 2003-2013

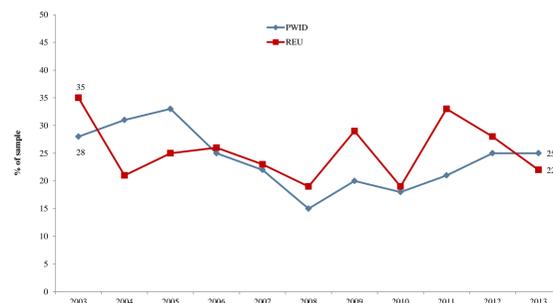


Figure 3: Prevalence of property crime amongst PWID & REU, 2003-2013

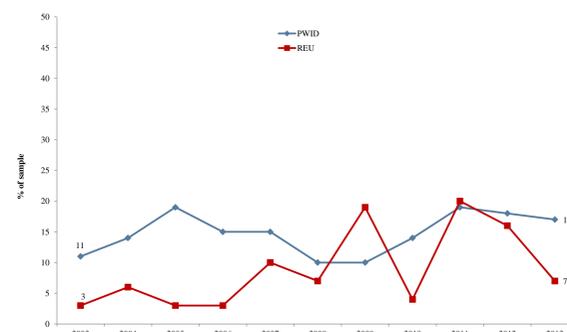


Figure 4: Prevalence of fraud amongst PWID & REU, 2003-2013

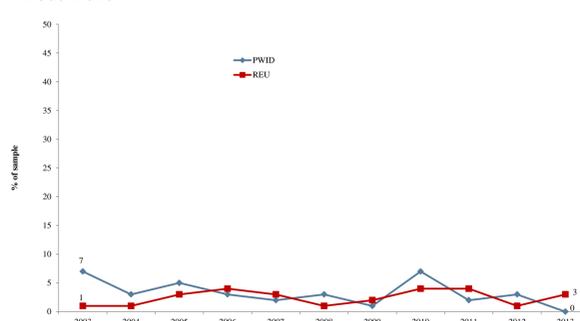
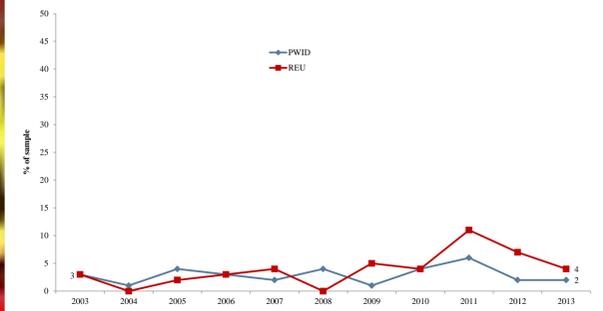


Figure 5: Prevalence of violent crime amongst PWID & REU, 2003-2013



Summary



- From 2003-2013, overall criminal activity has remained relatively stable amongst both IDRS & EDRS participants. Fraud was the only category of crime to decline significantly across this period (amongst the IDRS sample only), however, due to small figures this must be interpreted with caution.

Table 1: Changes in the prevalence of past month criminal activity, 2003-2013

	IDRS	EDRS
Dealing	stable	stable
Property crime	stable	stable
Fraud	↓ [^]	stable
Violent crime	stable	stable
ANY	stable	stable

- Dealing has remained the most common crime committed by both IDRS & EDRS participants. Fraud and violent crime have remained low.
- Surprisingly, the prevalence of criminal activity was found to be comparable amongst PWID & REU.
- In 2013, there were no significant differences amongst the two samples in terms of dealing, fraud, violent crime, or 'any' crime. The IDRS sample did, however, have a significantly higher prevalence of property crime[^].

[^]These changes lose significance when repeat participants are excluded from the analysis.

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Contact: Rachel Sutherland
National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
University of New South Wales
Ph: (02) 9385 0256
Email: rachels@unsw.edu.au
Web: <http://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au>