

Driving after using alcohol and drugs, roadside testing, and risk perception among people who use drugs in Australia

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The Difference is Research

Background

- Driving under the influence following alcohol and illicit drug use is a potential road safety risk.
- In all Australian jurisdictions, it is an offence to drive a vehicle if a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is over the legal limit (0.05% alcohol content) or with any trace of illicit drugs.
- Roadside breath testing (RBT) and roadside drug testing (RDT) was introduced in Australia to deter people from driving under the influence.
- People convicted can receive a penalty including loss of licence, a fine and/or imprisonment.

Aims

To present national trends in:

- driving after using alcohol and/or illicit drugs;
- exposure to RBT and RDT; and
- perceptions of crash risk and risk of police apprehension when driving after consuming alcohol and/or illicit drugs.

Among two sentinel samples of people who regularly inject drugs (Illicit Drug Reporting System; IDRS) and people who regularly use stimulants (Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System; EDRS).

Methodology

- Data were collected via annual face-to-face interviews (2007-2019) from sentinel samples recruited from all Australian capital cities.
- Drink driving was assessed by asking participants if they had driven while over the legal limit of alcohol in the six months preceding interview.
- Drug driving was assessed by asking participants if they had driven within three hours of taking an illicit or non-prescribed drug in the past six months.
- Participants were also asked to rate (from 'very unlikely' to 'very likely') risk of having an accident and of being apprehended by police if they were to drive under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, methamphetamine and ecstasy/MDMA.
- Data not available/excluded for 2014 and 2016.

Findings

- The percentage reporting drug driving has been consistently higher than reports of drink driving in both EDRS and IDRS samples.
- In 2019, 51% of recent EDRS drivers and 74% of recent IDRS drivers reported to have driven under the influence of drugs on at least one occasion in the 6 months leading up to interview.
- Experiencing RDT has increased over time in both samples, with 15% of recent EDRS drivers and 27% of recent IDRS drivers reported RDT exposure on at least one or more occasion in the past year in 2019.
- Roadside breath testing for alcohol had increased over time among the EDRS sample.
- Cannabis was the most common substance used before driving among the EDRS sample, whereas heroin was typically the most commonly used drug among IDRS sample.
- Whilst driving under the influence of ecstasy, cocaine and methamphetamine has decreased over time in the EDRS sample, cannabis remained stable. Driving under the influence of heroin and methamphetamine among the IDRS sample has fluctuated and also gradually increased over time.
- Alcohol had greatest endorsement for crash risk and being apprehended by police by the EDRS sample.
- Ecstasy had a similar perceived crash risk as alcohol in the IDRS sample and ecstasy was perceived to have a lower apprehension risk.

Implications

- RBT and RDT may have had a small deterrent effect on drink and drug driving among the EDRS sample. This effect was less clear in the IDRS.
- The EDRS sample experienced an increased level of concern around being identified as driving under the influence for ecstasy, methamphetamine and cannabis whereas the concern for alcohol remained high and stable. This could have contributed to the overall decline in rates of drug driving.

Table 1. Number of participants per year and the percentage of recent (i.e., past six month) drivers in the EDRS and IDRS samples.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	2017	2018	2019
EDRS total sample	741	678	756	693	574	611	686	763	786	799	797
EDRS n (%) reported driving	573 (77)	535 (79)	591 (79)	534 (77)	429 (75)	457 (76)	507 (74)	627 (82)	636 (81)	660 (83)	644 (81)
IDRS total sample	909	909	881	902	868	924	887	888	888	905	902
IDRS n (%) reported driving	462 (51)	479 (53)	459 (53)	423 (47)	395 (46)	409 (45)	370 (49)	383 (51)	337 (47)	348 (39)	401 (45)

Figure 1. Past six month driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, and of experiencing RDT and RBT among drivers in the EDRS and IDRS samples.

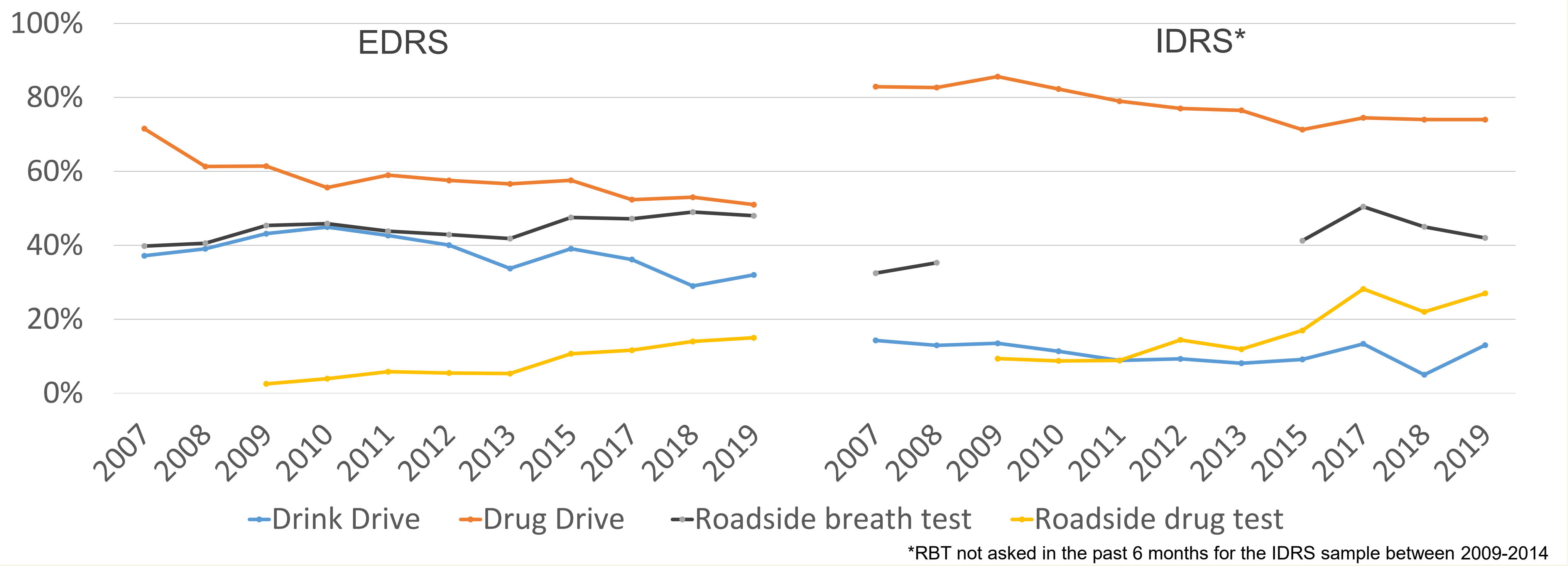


Figure 2. Driving under the influence – trends in drug types, among those who reported to have driven in the past 6 months and who reported any recent use of the drug.

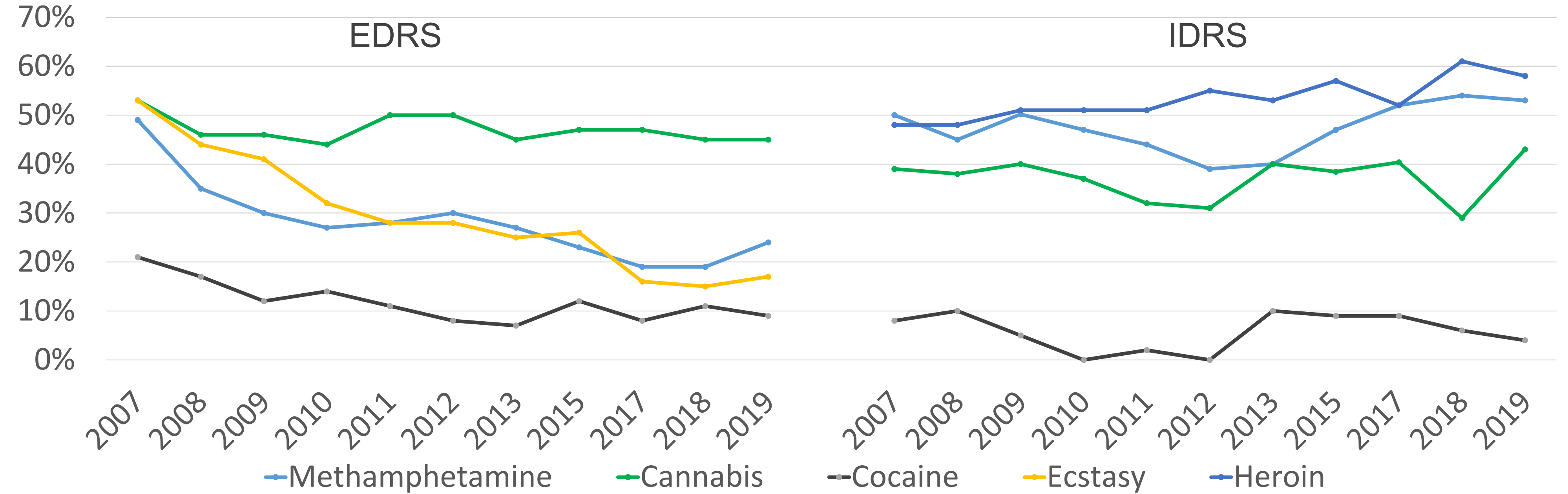
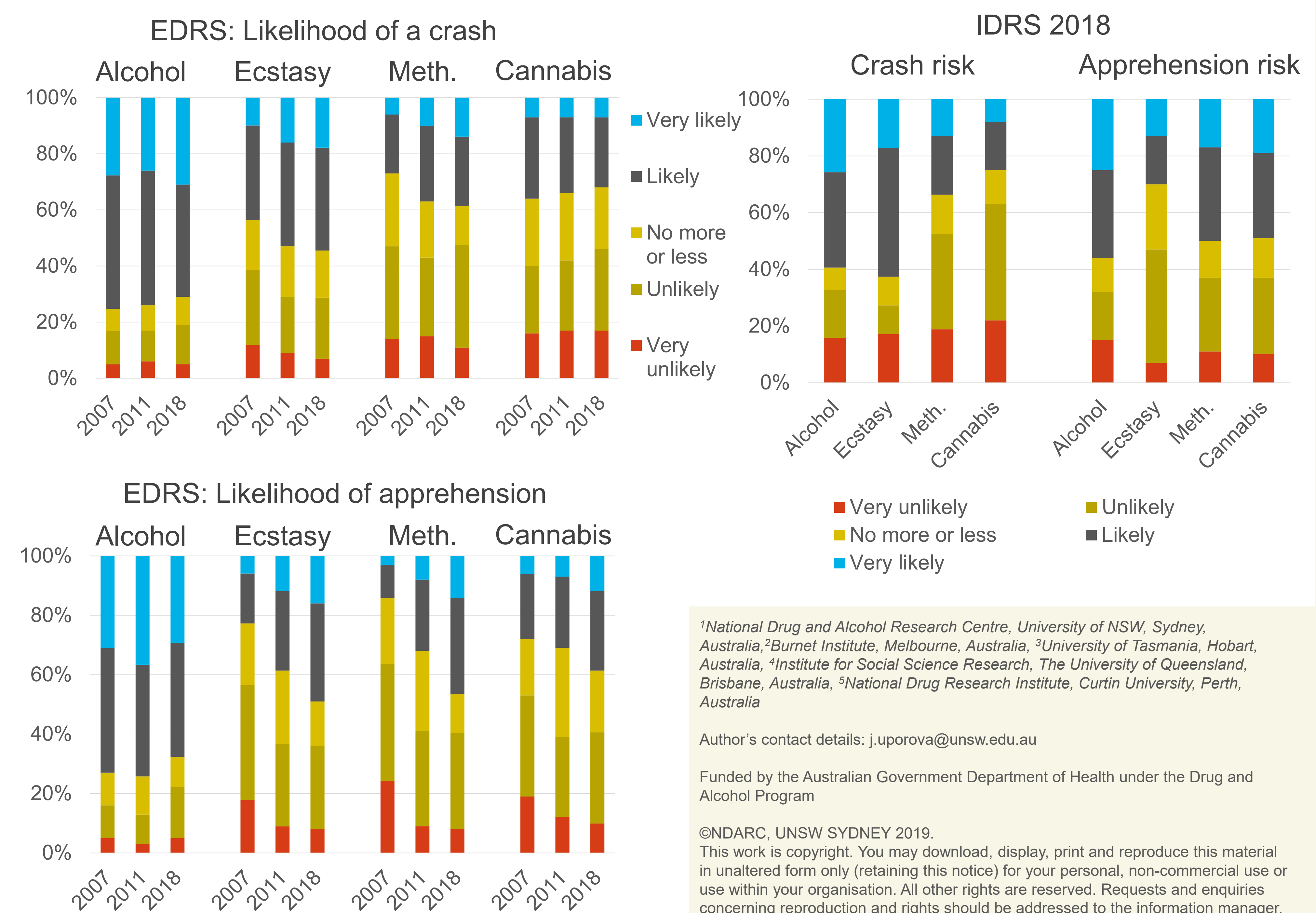


Figure 3. Perceived likelihood of a crash and of being apprehended among people who reported driving and use of each drug.



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