

## **Barriers to seeking help among music festival attendees in New South Wales, Australia.**

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**Introduction and Aims:** Prompt help-seeking behaviour can reduce the risks associated with drug use; however, little is known about perceived barriers to help-seeking when experiencing or witnessing illness at music festivals. We explored potential barriers and their association with key festivalgoer characteristics.

**Design and Methods:** We conducted an on-site cross-sectional survey of attendees at New South Wales (NSW) music festivals in 2019/2020. Information collected included demographics, drug use and perceived barriers to help-seeking in the hypothetical event of the respondent or a friend becoming unwell at the festival. Barriers investigated included lack of knowledge (about where to find help or how unwell someone might be), fear of trouble with police, and concern about friends/family finding out. Regression analyses were performed to identify characteristics that were associated with barriers.

**Results:** At six festivals, 1,229 people were surveyed. 83.2% perceived  $\geq 1$  barrier, fear of trouble with police (32.7%) being most common. People  $< 26$ yo were more likely to report  $\geq 1$  barrier compared with people  $\geq 26$ yo (Adjusted Odds Ratio [AOR] 2.00, 95% Confidence Interval [95%CI] 1.34-2.89). Those of diverse sexualities (AOR 1.37, 95%CI 1.00-1.86) and people who use drugs (AOR 1.73, 95%CI 1.33-2.24), historically marginalised groups, were more likely to report fear of trouble with police compared with their referent groups (heterosexual people and people not using drugs).

**Discussions and Conclusions:** We identified a number of demographic features associated with barriers to help-seeking. Our data substantiates concerns regarding policing strategies and their impact at festivals.

**Implications for Practice and Policy:** Work to minimise negative impacts of policing strategy on help-seeking behaviour is warranted, particularly to ensure that often-marginalised groups with identified barriers can access help in times of need. Education programs for young people (including peer-led education) may improve knowledge and confidence about when and where to seek help in festival and other settings.

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