

Differences in methamphetamine use patterns, experiences of related harms, and utilisation of professional support among metropolitan vs. regional and rural people who use of methamphetamine in Victoria, Australia

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Background

- Limited research has examined methamphetamine use in non-metropolitan areas of Australia.
- This precludes the identification of harmful use patterns, unmet need and barriers to professional support in such regions.
- Using baseline data from the VMAX Study, we describe the characteristics, patterns of methamphetamine use, and service utilisation trends among study participants recruited in metropolitan Victoria (Melbourne) vs. three regional/rural areas (Bendigo/Loddon, Shepparton/Hume, and Moe/Central and West Gippsland).

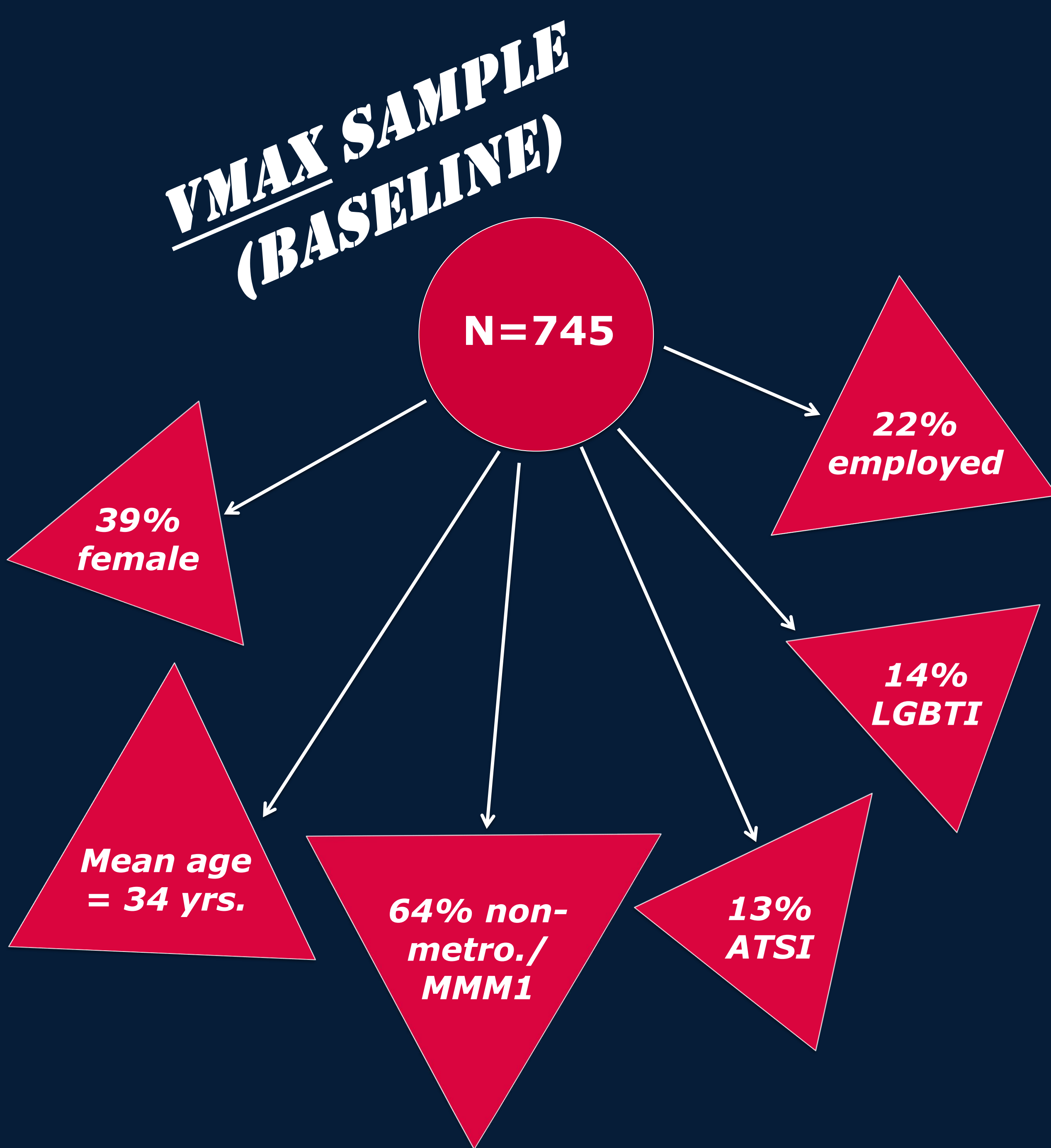
Methodology

- VMAX is a prospective cohort study. Eligible participants (N=745) were recruited between June 2016 and June 2018, were using methamphetamine at least monthly and were aged ≥ 18 years.
- A structured survey collects information on areas including: participant sociodemographics, methamphetamine and other drug use patterns, experience of methamphetamine-related harms, mental and physical health, and contact with the criminal justice system.
- Participants' geographical 'remoteness' at baseline was categorised according to Modified Monash Model (MMM) classifications of metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas in Australia: MMM1 (typically metropolitan)– MMM5 (most remote).
- Bivariate analyses investigated differences between participants' according to geographical classification.

Results

Sociodemographic & drug use characteristics by geographical region at baseline (%)

Variable	TOTAL N=745	Monash Modified Model (MMM) category				p
		MMM1 N=266	MMM2 N=146	MMM3 N=262	MMM4/5 N=71	
Female	39	38	42	40	27	0.140
Age ≥ 33 years	53	42	58	58	65	0.000
ATSI	13	3	17	24	6	0.000
Homeless last year	86	75	93	90	94	0.000
Unemployed	78	61	89	89	76	0.000
Weekly income $\leq \$399$	52	46	52	57	55	0.067
Ever incarcerated (y)	30	15	44	40	24	0.000
Methamphetamine use						
Main form used: crystal (vs. 'speed')	92	85	98	96	97	0.000
Days/wk. used meth. last month, median (range)	3 (0-7)	3 (0-7)	3 (0-7)	4 (0-7)	3 (0.25-7)	0.095
Meth. use history in yrs., median (range)	15 (0-49)	13 (0-41)	16 (1-45)	16 (0-49)	16 (1-40)	0.002
Meth.-dependent (SDS)	65	59	77	63	73	0.001
Amount last used: ≤ 0.1 gram/1 point	38	39	49	32	36	0.003
Ever accessed drug Tx for meth. (y)	41	40	40	43	44	0.824



Discussion, Conclusions, Implications

- Our findings from the VMAX Study provide a unique empirical insight into methamphetamine use in non-metropolitan areas of Victoria.
- In general, metropolitan participants were significantly less likely to be older, identify as ATSI, report a recent period of homelessness, and be unemployed compared to those recruited in rural and regional areas.
- More harmful use patterns among non-metropolitan participants and greater levels of methamphetamine-dependence, yet comparable levels of professional support utilisation, is indicative of a potential for greater experience of methamphetamine-related harms among regional/rural methamphetamine users.
- Targeted harm reduction and referral initiatives, and appropriate education of service providers, could address problematic methamphetamine use in non-metropolitan areas of Victoria.
- Further research with the cohort will examine trajectories of methamphetamine use, related harms and professional support utilisation (including a data linkage component) coming years.

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