

A cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of substance use behaviours and emotional wellbeing in Australian senior high school students living through the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Introduction / Issues: *Substance use and emotional wellbeing are important issues among senior high school students with COVID-19-related disruptions to their exams, classes, and rites-of-passage events during their final year. We explored changes in substance use and emotional wellbeing among students of 2020 compared to 2019.*

Design and Methods: *Self-reported substance use and wellbeing outcomes were from N=1820 students of 10 schools across South-East Queensland. Students surveyed included Grade 12s of 2019, and Grade 11s of 2019 who were re-surveyed when they were in Grade 12 in 2020. Items assessing the impact of COVID-19 on substance use and wellbeing were included in the survey administered to Grade 12s in 2020. Students were also compared longitudinally from Grade 11-12.*

Key Findings: *Grade 12s of 2020 reported mixed changes in the frequency and quantity of alcohol use compared to pre-COVID-19; 31% and 27% reported a decrease and 24% and 27% reported an increase, respectively. For cannabis, more reported that they used less in frequency and quantity (46% and 44%, respectively). Longitudinally, Grade 12 students in 2020 experienced higher anxiety (Fear of Negative Evaluation ($B=1.26$ [0.72-1.80], $p<.001$)), and were more likely to use alcohol at least monthly (OR=3.07[2.40-3.93], $p<.001$) and to have had six or more drinks in one sitting (OR=3.87[2.78-5.37], $p<.001$) compared to when they were in Grade 11. Findings from the Grade 12 2019 and 2020 cohort comparison will be presented.*

Discussions and Conclusions: *Year 12 students of 2020 may have been disadvantaged by the pandemic. While the majority engaged in less or the same levels of substance use, a substantial minority proportion reported an increase in substance use and poor wellbeing.*

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): *Students who experience disruptions in schooling due to the pandemic may require extra psychosocial support through their studies and beyond.*

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *None.*