DETERMINANTS OF HIGH AVAILABILITY OF METHAMPHETAMINE, CANNABIS, LSD AND ECSTASY IN NEW ZEALAND: ARE DRUG DEALERS PROMOTING METHAMPHETAMINE RATHER THAN CANNABIS?

Chris Wilkins, Jose S. Romeo, Marta Rychert, Jitesh Prasad and Thomas Graydon-Guy

Background:
Many small towns in New Zealand have reported very high availability of methamphetamine, and conversely, a shortage of cannabis. Local commentators have suggested drug dealers are promoting methamphetamine at the expense of cannabis.

Purpose:
To identify determinants of the high availability of methamphetamine.

Approach:
An anonymous online drug survey was promoted in all 16 regions of New Zealand via a targeted Facebook™ campaign. A total of 6,113 people completed the survey from November 2017 to February 2018. A logistic regression model was developed to identify independent predictors of high availability of methamphetamine, cannabis, ecstasy and LSD, including low availability of cannabis for non-cannabis markets.

Outcomes:
Significant predictors of high availability of methamphetamine were living in a small town/rural area (OR=1.38), purchasing from a gang member (OR=1.88), daily methamphetamine use (OR=2.41), Maori ethnicity (OR=1.36) and reporting low availability of cannabis (OR=1.89). Low availability of cannabis was not a predictor of high availability of ecstasy or LSD. Living in a small town/rural area was not a predictor of high availability of cannabis, LSD or ecstasy. Purchasing from a gang member was a predictor of high availability of cannabis (OR=1.80) and LSD (OR=4.61).

Conclusions:
High availability of methamphetamine was associated with living in a small town/rural area, purchasing from a gang, and reporting low availability of cannabis. It may be the case that gangs are able to gain monopoly control over drugs markets in small towns and promote methamphetamine in favour of cannabis to maximise revenue.