

Cannabis and Cocaine: New Challenges for Australian Workplaces

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Introduction and Aims: Cannabis and cocaine use has significantly increased among workers. This study examined at-risk groups and appropriate policy and interventions.

Design and Methods: Frequency analyses and logistic regressions were undertaken of the 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey weighted data for cannabis and 2016 and 2019 data for cocaine.

Findings: Workers' cannabis use increased 17.4% (2010-2019). In 2019, 13.5% of workers (26.4% of 14-24yr olds) used cannabis in the past 12 months. Risk groups comprised males (OR:1.86), workers who smoked (OR:5.75), 14-24yr olds (OR:5.98), those with high psychological distress (OR:3.87).

Cocaine use increased 63% (2016-2019) (3.8%-6.2%). Highest prevalence occurred among workers who approved of use (47.9%; OR:12.92), smoked (14.9%; OR:2.28), were psychologically distressed (14.0%; 1.61-1.26), risky drinkers (13.7%; 27.46), and aged 18-24yrs (13.9%; 5.29). Odds of using cocaine were also higher among workers with average or above incomes (OR:1.40), who lived in NSW (OR: 3.37) and were metropolitan residents (OR: 2.30).

Significant variations occurred across industry and/or occupational groups for both substances. Odds of cannabis and cocaine use were highest among trade workers (ORs: 1.93 and 1.73 respectively). Shared predictors included age, smoking status and psychological distress, but not gender.

Conclusion: Changing patterns of use present challenges and opportunities. Cannabis use has become increasingly normalised. Greater social acceptability, more lenient legal constraints, and increased medicinal use require new approaches aligned with changing social norms and reconceptualised risk mitigation strategies. Differences in demographic profiles of cocaine and cannabis users require interventions tailored to correspond to motivations for use and the users' patterns of use.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The workplace is under-utilised as an intervention site. Nuanced approaches are required to address evolving patterns of cannabis and cocaine use and the differing social norms and market forces associated with each.

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