

## **Responding to drug policing at the festival gates: Implications for the utility of drug amnesty bins**

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**Introduction and Aims:** In 2019, a coronial inquest into six festival deaths identified drug policing as a contributing factor and recommended an overhaul of drug policing at festivals, including ceasing the use of drug detection dogs and unlawful strip searches. However, these policing methods remain common at Australian festivals, despite concern about iatrogenic effects. While some governments have introduced drug amnesty bins to try and address concerns, the efficacy of this intervention is debated. This paper describes two of the most concerning iatrogenic effects of drug policing – internal concealment and panic consumption – and explores the potential efficacy of drug amnesty bins in averting panic consumption.

**Design and methods:** An anonymous online survey was completed by almost 2000 festivalgoers from Western Australian and Victoria (52% male; median age 20 years old). Multivariable logistic regression (predicting panic consumption and internal concealment) were conducted, alongside descriptive statistics.

**Results:** Among respondents who had ever used an illicit drug at a festival (n=1065), 23% reported hiding drugs internally and 17% reported panic consumption. When asked if they would have discarded their drugs into an amnesty bin had they been concerned about police detection, less than a quarter (24%) said they definitely or probably would have. Respondents who were female, living in metropolitan areas, and had a preference electronic dance music, were at greater odds of reporting internal concealment.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** This paper adds to the evidence regarding iatrogenic effects of drug policing at festivals. While some claim drug amnesty bins avert panic, the data presented here suggest this intervention has limited efficacy.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** These findings have implications for shifting away from punitive drug policies to ones focused on public health. Additionally, drug amnesty bins should not be viewed as an adequate response for averting harms from drug policing at festivals gates.

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