



METHAMPHETAMINE ARRESTS IN NSW DOUBLE OVER THE PAST DECADE

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For immediate release

The number of people arrested for methamphetamine in NSW has more than doubled over the past decade, according to figures released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC).

In 2005 there were 3,091 arrests for methamphetamine, or 46 per 100,000 persons in NSW. This represents a 253% rise on the 1,114 methamphetamine arrests in 1995 (18 per 100,000 arrests per 100,000 persons).

Methamphetamine is a synthetic stimulant drug sold under various street names, including 'speed', 'base', 'meth', 'ice', 'crystal' or 'crystal meth', and 'amphetamines'. Ice, which is also known as 'crystal meth', is methamphetamine in its purest form, typically has a purity of around 80 per cent.

The lead author of the report, Dr Rebecca McKetin, Senior Research Fellow at NDARC, explains "there has been much conjecture about whether the increased popularity of ice has led to a rise in violent behaviour".

Over the past decade, the assault rate in NSW has risen from 522 per 100,000 persons in 1995 to 942 per 100,000 persons in 2005. The report explains how methamphetamine use can lead to violent behaviour in some situations, but it is likely to be one of a number of factors contributing to the increasing assault rate in NSW.

"The best evidence we currently have suggests that the drug's use would only be implicated in a small proportion of assaults," said Dr McKetin.

Most of the violence associated with methamphetamine use occurs when users' of the drug experience drug-induced psychosis. "There is no direct evidence that simply taking this drug makes people become violent. Rather, it's a case of chronic users of the drug, who are experiencing drug-induced paranoia, reacting to situations in a violent way" says Dr McKetin. Personality, drug withdrawal, alcohol use, and circumstantial factors, all play a role in precipitating violence.

Frontline policing and health bear the brunt of drug-induced psychosis, and there is a need to improve the capacity of the work-force in how to manage the aggressive behaviour that often co-occurs with this condition.
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