



Release date: 13 October 2003

MEDIA RELEASE

Driving under the influence of cannabis in a New South Wales rural area

More than 1 in 10 people aged 18-29 resident in the Lismore area have at some stage driven a vehicle while under the influence of cannabis, according to new research released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

In order to gauge the prevalence of driving under the influence of cannabis (DUIC) in an area where cannabis use is known to be widespread, the Bureau surveyed a representative sample of 502 18-29 year old people resident in the Lismore Local Government Area (LGA).

The Richmond Tweed statistical division (in which the Lismore LGA falls) has an arrest rate for cannabis use/possession which is more than two times higher than the State average.

The Bureau found that more than 1 in 10 males and about 1 in 20 females aged between 18 and 29 in the Lismore LGA had driven under the influence of cannabis in the previous twelve months.

Not surprisingly, DUIC was particularly common among current cannabis users.

Among the 130 respondents who had used cannabis in the preceding 12 months, 43 per cent had driven within an hour of using cannabis in their lifetime and approximately 29 per cent had done so within the preceding 12 months.

Weekly users of cannabis (54%) were much more likely than those who used cannabis less than weekly (32%) to have driven under the influence of cannabis in their lifetime and in the previous 12 months.

The Bureau's study did not look at the relationship between DUIC and motor vehicle accident risk.

However, according to the Director of the Bureau, Dr Don Weatherburn, other research had shown that DUIC does significantly increase the risk of a motor vehicle accident.

'These results must therefore be regarded as a matter of some concern'.

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