

PARALLEL SESSION 3B

Raves and resorts

Backpacking and drug use

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Increasingly, young people from the UK and elsewhere are taking time out from education or employment to spend extended periods (typically a year) abroad, often combining travel and work in long haul destinations such as Australia. Whilst alcohol and drug use is known to increase in young people visiting international nightlife resorts for shorter periods, little is known about substance use during longer trips abroad.

We surveyed 1008 British backpackers (age 18-35) in Australia in 2005 to identify levels of substance use and how alcohol and drug use changed between the UK and Australia. Frequency of alcohol use increased significantly in Australia with 40% drinking alcohol five or more days per week during their stay. Over half of those surveyed used an illicit drug in Australia. However, frequency of illicit drug use did not increase in Australia and, where frequency of use differed from that in the UK, users tended to use less often in Australia than at home. Risk factors for illicit drug use by backpackers included regularly attending nightclubs in Australia, being Sydney-based, travelling without a sexual partner or spouse, and drinking or smoking five or more days per week.



Backpacking and drug use

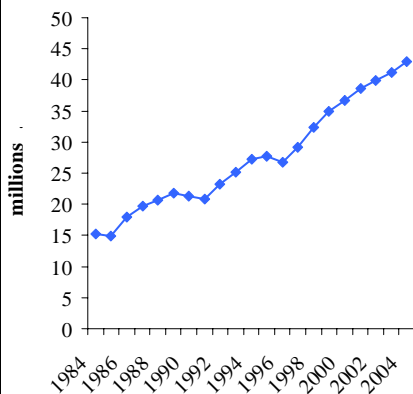
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International Travel

UK residents' visits abroad



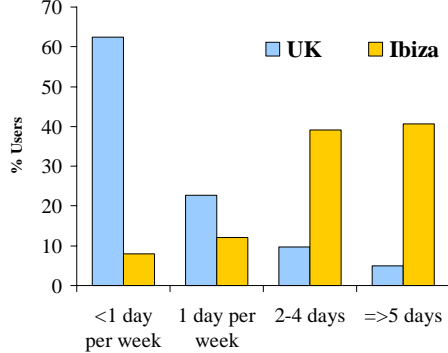
- 4 million UK 18-30 year olds travel abroad each year
- Typically short stay holidays
- Young people taking 'gap year' increasing annually
- In Australia, number of backpackers ↑ 25% between 1999 and 2003



Drug Use Abroad

- Most research conducted on short stay holidays
- Periods of indulgence and excess, e.g. Ibiza

Frequency of ecstasy use in UK and Ibiza by ecstasy using holidaymakers



I'm a frequent party goer who may use a few Es on a wild night. However when that ship left the harbour, it felt like a real vacation where you could cross your own limits. I took 14 Es during these 48 hours. The people who were on that ship were totally wiped out"

Bellis et al, 2003



Backpackers

- Low budget, long stay
 - often involving multiple destinations and casual work
- Research on backpackers:
 - Mainly qualitative
 - Not limited to one location/population
- Israeli study of long-term travellers to tropics:
 - Over 1 in 3 used drugs;
 - 1 in 3 of were new users





Drug Use Abroad








Reasons for drug use:


- Hedonistic
- Exploring culture
- Fitting in / making friends
- Integration









Reasons for not using drugs?:

- Limited financial resources
- Work commitments
- Safety
- Mobility





Methods









- Target Population
 - British backpackers aged 18-35
- Anonymous Questionnaire
 - Target Sample 1000 (actual 1008)
- Levels of Substance Use
 - Drug Using behaviour in UK & in Australia over period of stay
- Sexual activity in UK & Australia
- Location of Study
 - Backpacker hostels in Sydney and Cairns








Sample Characteristics

- 66% male
- Mean age 21.4
- 74% in Sydney
- 21% visiting with partner
- 23% Australia only
- Mean stay to date 13 wks
- Mean total stay 30 wks
- 80% partying 2+ days/wk

Cairns
N=259



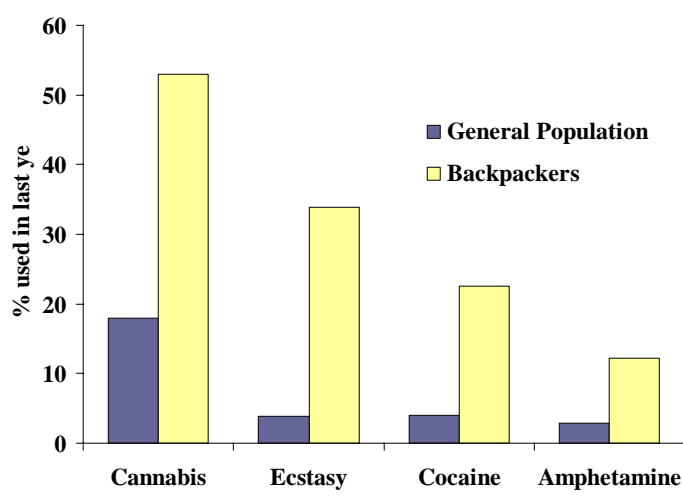
Sydney
N=749








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Drug use among backpackers

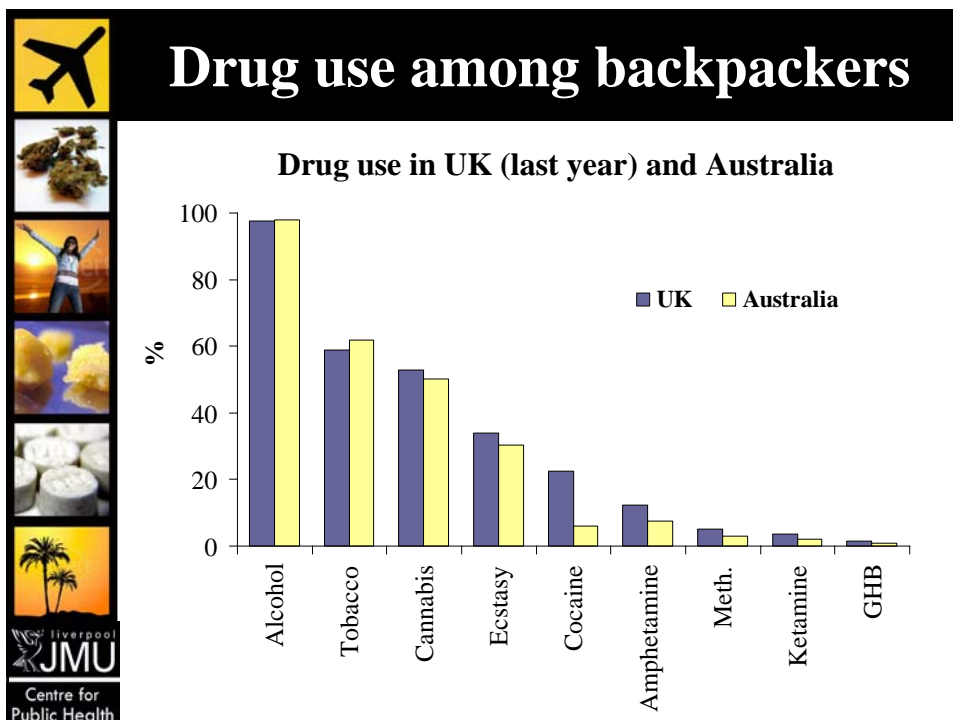
Drug use in the last year among 16-34 year olds



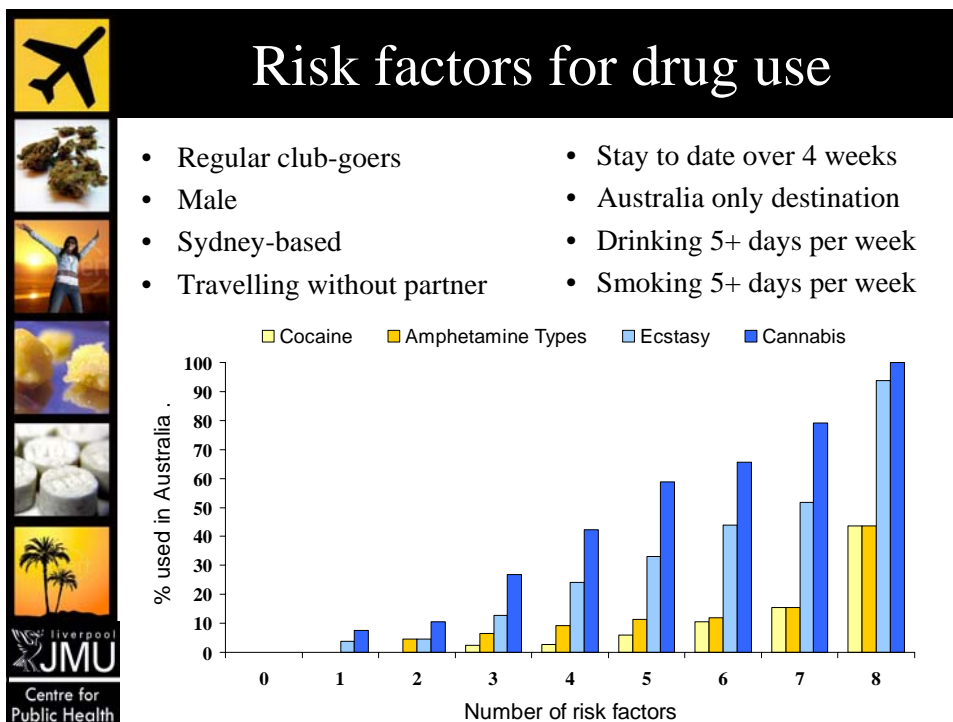
| Drug | General Population (%) | Backpackers (%) |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Cannabis | ~18 | ~53 |
| Ecstasy | ~4 | ~34 |
| Cocaine | ~4 | ~23 |
| Amphetamine | ~3 | ~12 |

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- ## Frequency of substance use
- Alcohol, cannabis and tobacco
 - Frequency of use increased in Australia
 - 10% used cannabis 5+ days in Australia
 - 40% drank 5+ days in Australia cv 20% in UK
 - All other drugs
 - Frequency of use in Australia declined
 - Ecstasy
 - Number of tablets used declined in Australia (2.5 UK; 2.0 Australia)
 - Experimentation
 - 2.7% of all backpackers used Ecstasy for the first time in Australia
 - Meth / crystal meth 0.7%
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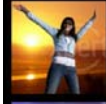
Discussion

- Backpackers high drug using population
- Frequency of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use increased in Australia
 - Sociable and meeting new friends
 - Cannabis seen as safe drug
 - Alcohol links with accidents, violence, unsafe sex....
- Frequency of all other drugs decreased
- Some recruitment into drug use in Australia
- Important target group for health promotion / harm reduction
- Transient population – missed by home / host country health services
- International partnerships between governments, health services, travel and tourism agencies
- Information – trends in drug use, prevention evidence

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Thank you



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