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HARM REDUCTION IN YOUNG PEOPLE USING DRUGS IN THE COVID ERA

Joint Addiction and Mental Health ECHO Sessions December 2nd, 2021

A/Prof. Gill Bedi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present with us today.



DISCLOSURES

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- Youth Support and Advocacy Service
- University of Melbourne
- Medical Research Future Fund

OBJECTIVES

To describe:

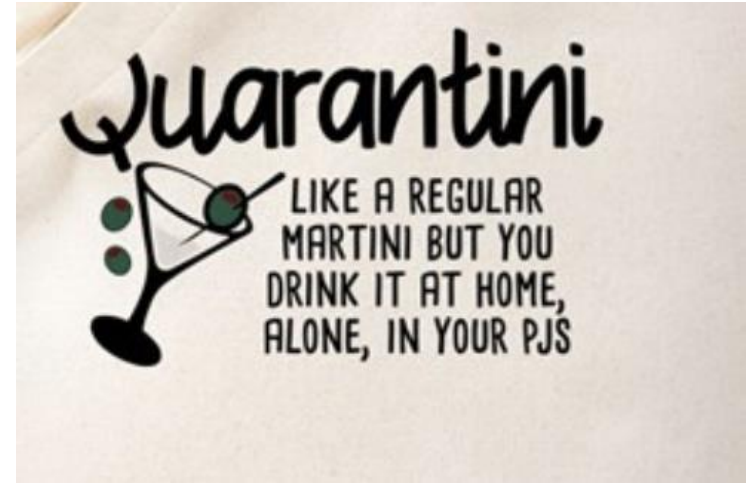
- Changes to alcohol and other drug (AOD) use in young people during the pandemic
- COVID-related harm minimisation strategies for young people who use AOD



CHANGES TO AOD USE IN YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

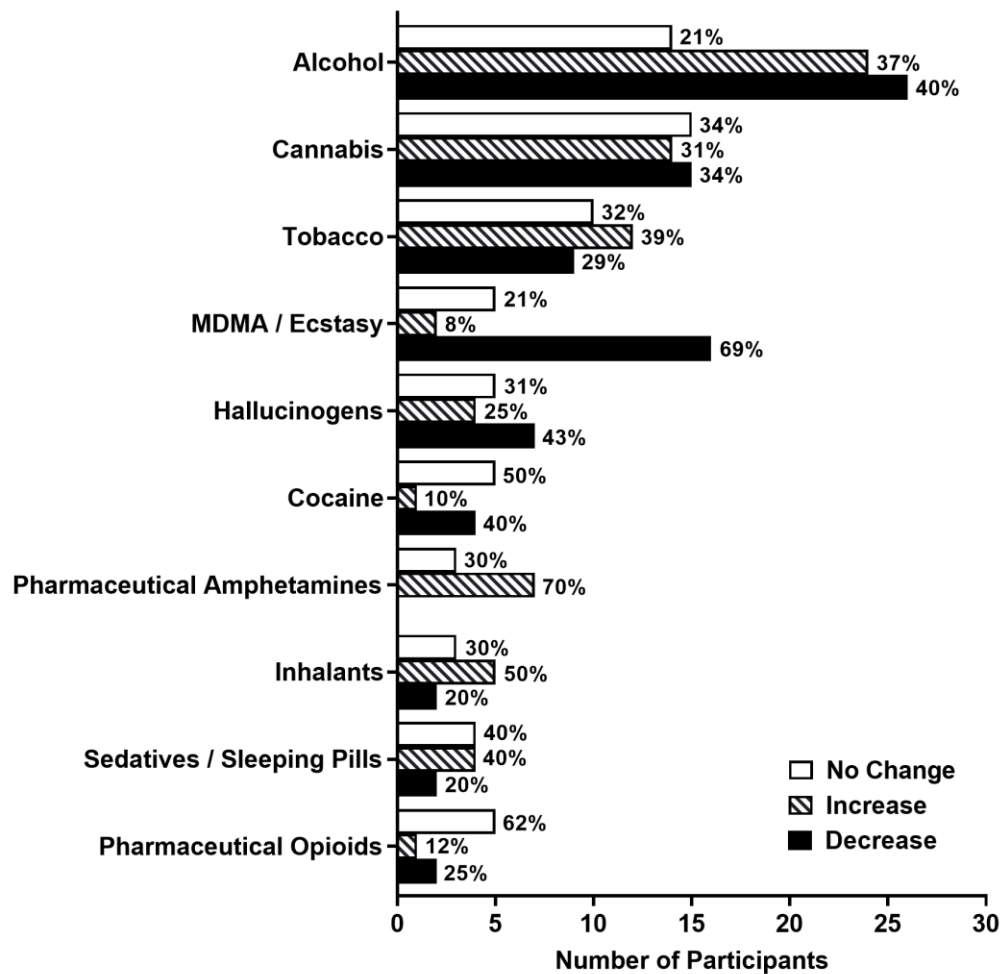
BEHAVIORAL CHANGES DURING THE PANDEMIC

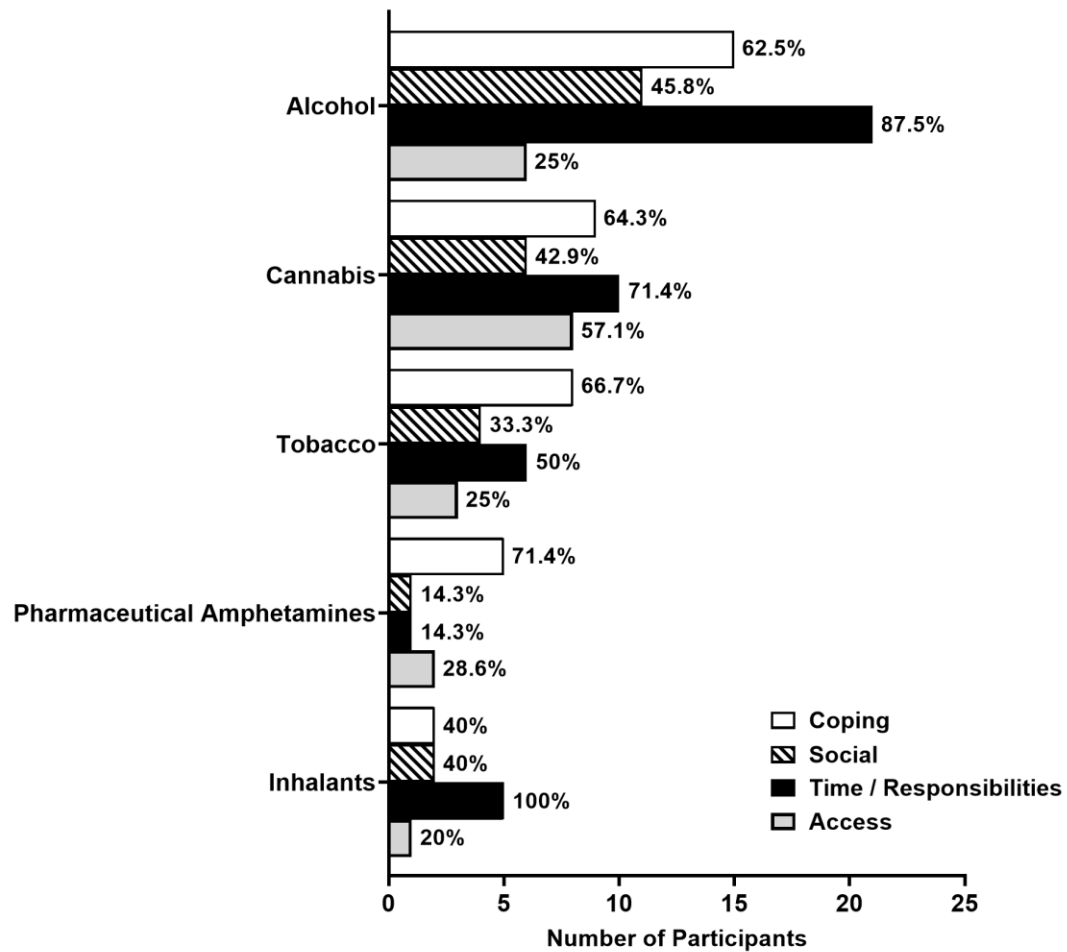
- Abrupt behavioural changes during 2020-2021
- Young people have been particularly affected by COVID-19 lockdowns/restrictions:
 - Lack of certainty
 - Social isolation – social relationships key in adolescence/early adulthood
 - Job loss/remote schooling
 - Longer-term effects on young people remain unclear



AOD USE CHANGES IN LOCKDOWN

- Australians' drug use: Adapting to pandemic threat (ADAPT) study Sutherland et al, 2020
 - 18+ Australians who use illicit drugs at least once/month
 - N=702 Wave 1 (April-June 2020)
 - Since March 2020, alcohol and cannabis use most commonly increased
 - MDMA, cocaine, and ketamine decreased
 - BUT, variability (some increased, some decreased, some stayed the same)
- Increased alcohol use during lockdown often persisted after restrictions eased ADF, 2020







HARM MINIMISATION IN THE TIME OF COVID

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Young people may have increased or decreased their AOD use, or both
- Increases in use during lockdown often persist afterwards
- Flow on effects – increased alcohol use during lockdown linked to:
 - Decreased exercise
 - Unhealthy eating
 - Disrupted sleep ADF, 2020
- Decreased use of some drugs in young people – reduced tolerance, increased risk of OD

HARM MINIMISATION STRATEGIES

- Wash/sanitise hands before and after handling drugs, cash or equipment
- Wash/wipe down drug packages and cash with disinfectant wipes, soap or sanitiser
- Sanitise equipment (e.g. vapes) frequently – especially the mouthpiece
- Avoid physical contact with others when getting or using drugs – intoxication may make social distancing less likely
- Prepare drugs yourself – for example, rolling your own joints, etc
- Avoid sharing equipment – for example, bongs, vaping devices, etc
- Avoid sharing drugs – for example, passing joints, etc

HARM MINIMISATION STRATEGIES

- Avoid touching equipment parts that contact the mouth – e.g. vape mouthpieces.
- Avoid touching face with hands at all times, in particular while using things like e-cigarettes or bongs
- Be aware that tolerance may have changed substantially if use of a particular substance has changed
- Be aware that usual dose may have unpredictable effects every time that drug is taken because of possible changes to supply chain; may be the case long after lockdown is lifted or restrictions are eased
- Consider whether changes in patterns of use during lockdown have persisted; whether additional support is needed



QUESTIONS

**REVOLUTION
IN MIND** *ory
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THANK YOU
