

Definition

Callers concerned about drug or alcohol use, either their own or another's. Drug use includes prescription or illegal drugs, tobacco, inhalants etc, from experimentation to overdose. Alcohol use includes occasional use, bingeing, passing out and alcoholism.

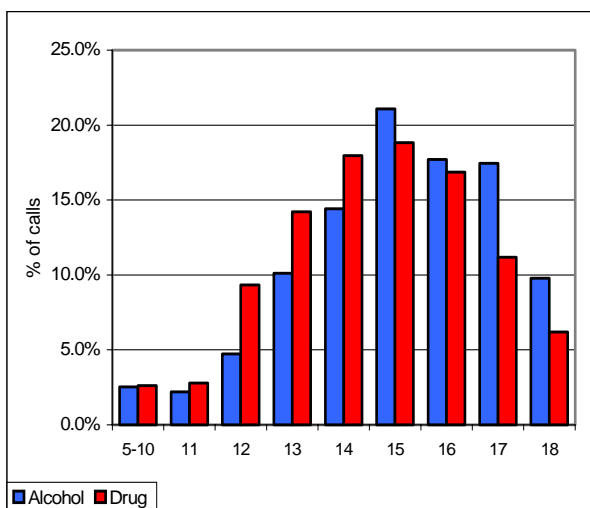
Substance use amongst young Australians is relatively common. Over 75% of young people aged between 14 and 19 have used alcohol, over 50% have used tobacco and over 40% have used cannabis (AIHW, 2000). For most young people, substance use is experimental and relatively unproblematic. However, some young people develop drug dependencies which can have major impacts on future physical, psychological and social wellbeing (Marsh, 1996).

Kids Help Line (KHL) receives over 3000 calls per year from young people with various concerns regarding drugs and alcohol. This is equivalent to over 3% of all counselling calls. Furthermore, drug and alcohol use is frequently subsumed under other problem categories including relationship difficulties, homelessness, mental health, suicide, child abuse and loneliness.

Client Gender and Age

Males make 42% of the calls relating to drug and alcohol use which is 62% greater than the proportion of calls made by males across all other concerns. Females make the remaining 58% of calls.

Older adolescents aged between 15 and 18 years make over half (55%) of all substance use calls with older males making a greater proportion of calls than older females. Further, whilst older callers make a greater proportion of calls about alcohol use, younger callers are more likely to call about drug use (see figure below).

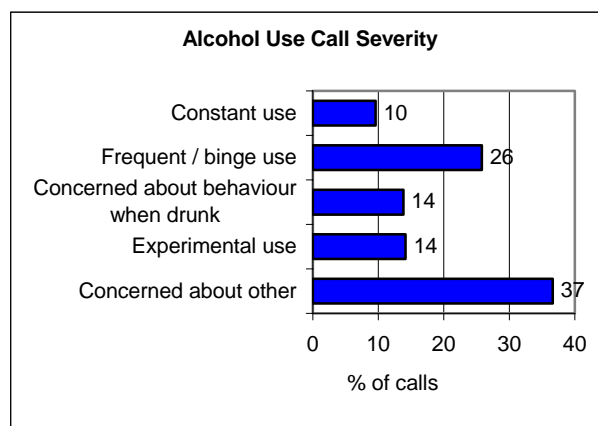


Caller Ethnicity

Young people of Anglo-Australian backgrounds make the majority of drug and alcohol related calls (89%). The remainder are of Indigenous (7%), non-English speaking (3%) and other English speaking (1%) backgrounds. Young people of Indigenous backgrounds make three times the proportion of calls about alcohol use (12%) compared to all other problem types (4%).

Nature and Severity of Alcohol Related Calls

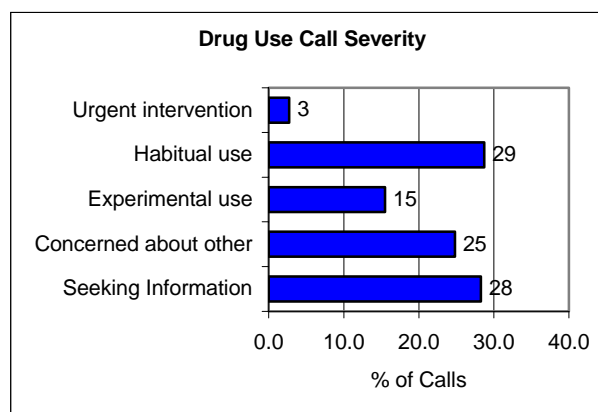
Over one third of alcohol related calls are made by young people concerned about the alcohol use of a friend or significant other. The remainder call about their own alcohol use with 14% experimenting or using occasionally, 14% concerned about their behaviour whilst drunk, 26% using frequently or binge drinking and a further 10% using constantly and requiring referral (see figure below).



When compared to male callers, females are more likely to contact KHL because they are concerned about the alcohol use of a friend, boyfriend or significant other.

Nature and Severity of Drug Related Calls

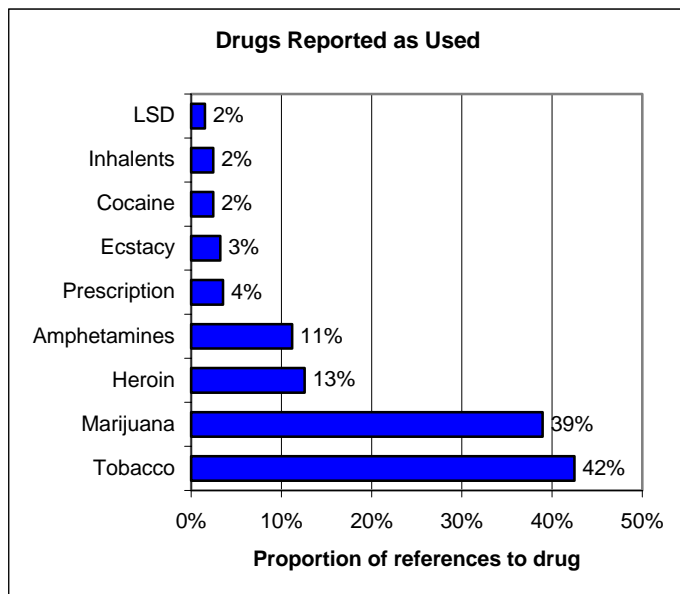
One in four drug related calls are made by young people who are concerned about the drug use of a friend or significant other, with a further 28% of callers seeking information about drugs. While 15% of callers experiment or use occasionally, 29% use frequently or habitually with 3% requiring urgent intervention or referral at the time of their call (see figure below).



As with alcohol use, females are less likely to call about their own drug use but twice as likely to ring out of concern for a friend, boyfriend or significant other when compared to males.

Drugs Used

Qualitative data is collected for 30% of drug related calls. This data is used to determine the drugs most frequently reported as used by callers to KHL. As shown in the following figure, young people who call KHL about drug use are most likely to be using tobacco (42%) or marijuana (39%).



Comparisons between male and female callers reveals that males are proportionally more likely to use marijuana or tobacco whilst females are more likely to use amphetamines, heroin or ecstasy. In addition, 13% of callers report using multiple drugs.

Male (15) is habitually using marijuana, cocaine and heroin very heavily. He is estranged from family and feels drugs are his main problem but does not feel he has adequate support to give up. He is contemplating suicide.

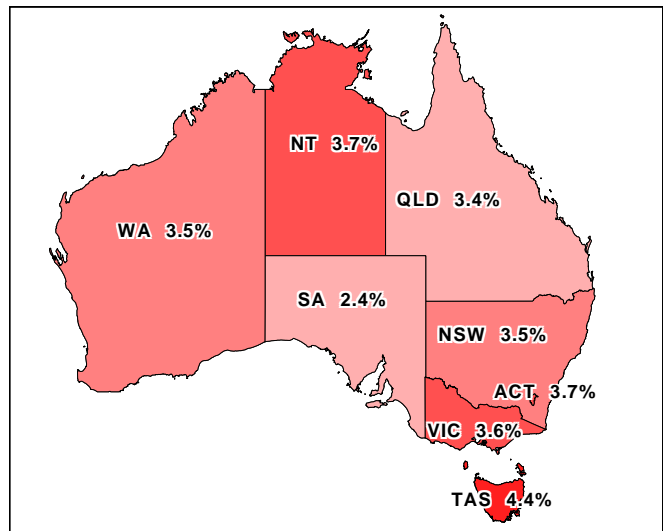
Female (15) has been off heroin for two weeks but is finding the cravings and temptation strong as her drug dealer lives near by which makes it hard.

Male (14) worried about how much pot he smokes and worries about the effects on his body. Has friends and family who are supportive.

Male (17) wanting to give up tobacco since he started paying attention to the warning signs on packets and thinking about the possible consequences of his habit. He has reduced his use from a pack a day to 10 a day.

State Breakdown of Calls

The following figure shows the rate of drug and alcohol related calls from each state and territory. Compared to the national average of 3.4% of counselling calls, South Australia accounts for the lowest proportion of drug and alcohol calls (2.4%) while Tasmania has the highest level with 4.4%. It is important to note that a higher proportion of calls does not necessarily equate to a higher level of drug and alcohol use. For example, the higher level in Tasmania may be due to young people feeling more comfortable about ringing due to drug education.



Caller Regional Location

The majority of drug and alcohol related calls come from young people living in metropolitan centres (65%). Young people also ring from rural (32%) and remote (3%) areas of Australia. This proportion of calls from rural and remote areas reflects the population distribution of 35%.

Outcome of Drug and Alcohol Calls

KHL plays a vital role in assisting young people to deal with drug and alcohol issues. By providing a safe and confidential environment, counsellors help young people to clearly identify short and long term consequences of drug and alcohol use and develop strategies for change.

Referral to appropriate local services are accepted by 25% of callers concerned about substance use - this is double the referral rate for all other problem types.

Referral Agencies and Services

The services young people are referred to include Quitline, Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS), Druginfo, Poisons Information Centre, and various treatment centres such as Community Health Centres.

Kids Help Line's Duty of Care

Kids Help Line counsellors have a duty of care when responding to serious issues such as mental health, child abuse, homelessness and overdose. If a child is in a potentially harmful situation help is provided by 3-way telephone link or immediate referral to emergency services or other authorities.

References

AIHW. (2000). National drug strategy household survey 1998. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Marsh, A. (1996). Young people with drug problems: Why some and not others? In C. Wilkinson & B. Saunders (Eds.), Perspectives on addiction: Making sense of the issues. (pp. 55-64). Perth: Montgometry.

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For more information

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