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Drug Offences 1974 & Community Comparisons

Acknowledgements

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The Bureau also acknowledges the help received from the Research Section of the New South Wales Department of Youth and Community Services.

The Bureau wishes to thank the health agencies and drug treatment centres who, while strictly preserving the anonymity of their clients, provided valuable data on the types of drug problems presented to them.

Note to the Reader

Researchers confronted with increased convictions of the magnitude disclosed in this report are obliged to ask if there are extraneous factors operating which help explain the accelerated rate of convictions. For example, could part of the variation be explained by changes in enforcement practice? That is, were there more Police Officers deployed, in 1974, to apprehend the drug offender.

The Bureau has been informed that, while there was no increase in the size of the New South Wales Drug Squad during 1974, there was a vigorous education programme launched to train Police Officers in the detection and handling of drug offenders. This has involved the training and deployment of some additional officers to Divisions throughout the Sydney Metropolitan Area.

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Background Note

Since 1972 it has been possible to publish comprehensive statistics on drug offences. The basic data is derived from the Courts of Petty Sessions throughout New South Wales. A statistical return is filed in each case where a person is dealt with under Parts III and IV of the Poisons Act. These reports have been prepared since January 1970 and useful comparisons can be made between the results for 1974 and the findings reported in earlier years (see Part I of the present report).

But a complete picture of drug convictions in New South Wales demands that attention be paid to a number of other sources of information. First, there is a comparatively small number of 'serious' cases heard by Higher Criminal Courts. An overall assessment of the penalties imposed on drug offenders needs to take account of the cases dealt with on indictment (see Part II of this report).

A somewhat larger number of cases occur in the category 'drug offences involving Commonwealth legislation'. With the cooperation of the Commonwealth Bureau of Narcotics it has been possible to prepare a separate analysis of drug offences under Commonwealth legislation, dealt with by Courts based in New South Wales. The focus in this section of the report (Part III) is upon the importation of prohibited substances.

Not all drug cases involving juveniles are prosecuted in accordance with the provisions of the Poisons Act. A comparatively small number of young people are treated as 'neglect' cases under Section 72 (h) of the Child Welfare Act. A brief note on these cases is presented in Part IV of the report.

An attempt is made in Part V of the report to present an overview of the total range of drug convictions which occurred in New South Wales during 1974 together with the ages of offenders and the prohibited substances involved in their offences.

Any agency which compiles crime statistics is under an obligation to alert the general reader to a number of factors which may need to be taken into account in arriving at a balanced interpretation of apparent trends. For example, in its annual publication UNIFORM CRIME REPORTS, the American F B I indicates the need to consider such factors as density, composition and size of the population, when interpreting crime statistics.

Moreover, in a society where policy is strongly directed towards preventing the young from becoming users of proscribed drugs, there is the possibility that official statistics will understate drug usage among older age groups.

Part 1

Offences under Parts III & IV of the Poisons Act NSW

In 1974 there was a total of 2174 persons convicted under Parts III and IV of the Poisons Act. This represents an increase of 60.7 per cent on the numbers convicted in 1973. Between 1972 and 1973 the increase was 27.8 per cent.

A balanced interpretation of the significance of this increase should include consideration of the factors mentioned in the background note.

Offenders who were under 30 years of age accounted for 94.4 per cent of those convicted. Within this group there were four who were 13 years and six who were 14 years of age. The age distribution was very similar to that noted in 1973 when 95.2 per cent of the offenders were less than 30 years.

Almost nine out of ten (87.9 per cent) of the total convictions were recorded against men which is almost identical to the 1973 figure. Less than half (40.4 per cent) of the offenders were legally represented and 95.6 per cent pleaded guilty.

Eighty six per cent of those convicted under Parts III and IV of the Poisons Act in 1974, had no previous convictions for drug offences, and three out of five had no previous convictions for other types of offence. Of those offenders with prior convictions 16.7 per cent had previously been dealt with by Children's Courts and 31.1 per cent by other Courts. In 14 per cent of cases the offender had a record of previous drug convictions.

The majority of offences were committed in company. Approximately 57 per cent occurred in these circumstances which is the same as for the previous year.

Age of Offenders

Age in years	Number	Percentage
13	4	0.1
14	6	0.2
15	24	1.1
16	75	3.4
17	145	6.7
18	273	12.6
19	314	14.4
20	270	12.4
21	252	11.6
22	190	8.8
23	165	7.6
24	114	5.2
25	86	4.0
26	44	2.0
27	50	2.2
28	24	1.1
29	18	1.0
30 - 34	57	2.7
35 - 39	14	0.7
40+	15	0.7
Not known	34	1.5

Sex of Offenders

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	1909	87.9
Female	265	12.1
	<hr/>	
	2174	100.0

Birthplace of Drug Offenders

The country of birth of drug offenders is tabulated opposite. Ninety-one per cent of the offenders were born in Australia, and only 5.2 per cent were born outside Australia, New Zealand and the U K.

By looking at the number of people who were born overseas and who were resident in New South Wales at the time of the 1971 census it is possible to put the conviction figures on a more equal footing. A comparison of the conviction rates per 1000 of population revealed, as in 1973, a high rate for New Zealanders (1.14) and Americans (0.87). The highest rate was recorded for people from the residual category (all other countries). In this group the rates may have been inflated by the presence of recent arrivals or visitors.

Substances Used

Trend

The proportion of offences involving opiates in 1974 was almost identical to the 12.4 per cent recorded for that substance in 1973. By contrast, between 1972 and 1973 there was a reduction of 7.3 per cent in the number of cases involving opiates, and 10.5 per cent between 1971 and 1972.

Hallucinogens accounted for 3.3 per cent of cases in 1974 compared to 7.8 per cent in 1973.

Cannabis was the substance involved in the majority of cases. The level of 83.9 per cent in 1974 represented an increase of 4.1 per cent over the previous year.

The number of cases in which stimulants, sedatives and cocaine were involved was virtually the same as in 1973.

Birthplace of Drug Offenders

Country of birth	Number of convictions	Number of residents in N S W at 1971 census	Rate per 1000
Australia	1980	3,708,165	0.53
New Zealand	42	36,634	1.14
U K and Ireland	43	349,443	0.12
Malta	2	22,420	0.08
Germany	10	36,709	0.27
Greece	3	53,646	0.05
Italy	4	80,416	0.04
Netherlands	4	27,033	0.14
Yugoslavia	3	52,618	0.05
Other Europe	4	102,634	0.03
Africa	3	24,873	0.12
United States	10	11,448	0.87
Asia	5	67,525	0.07
All other countries*	28	22,300	1.25

* Mainly Canada and South American Countries.

Distinct Categories of Prohibited Substances Used

Category of substance	Number of offenders	% total offenders*
Opiates	262	12.0
Cannabis	1824	83.9
Hallucinogens	72	3.3
Stimulants	28	1.2
Sedatives	55	2.5
Cocaine	14	0.6

*Because multiple drugs used adds to more than 100 per cent.

Types of Offences

Many individuals were involved in multiple offences. As part of a uniform method of handling such cases, court officers were required to base their reports on the 'principal offence' (essentially, the offence which incurred the most severe penalty).

The vast majority (84.6 per cent) of drug offences dealt with under the Poisons Act in Courts of Petty Sessions concerned either the 'possession' or 'use' of drugs (1973 = 81.0 per cent). There was little alteration from the pattern of offences described in 1973 (see Table opposite).

Types of Offences

	Principal Offence Number	Percentage (1974)	Percentage (1973)
Possess	1052	48.5	47.8
Use (i.e. take orally)	785	36.1	33.2
Administer (i.e. intravenously)	165	7.6	6.8
Distribute	22	1.0	1.8
Sell	98	4.5	6.5
Forge and/or utter prescriptions	28	1.3	2.5
Manufacture	23	1.0	1.3
Not stated	1	-	0.1
	<hr/> 2174	<hr/> 100.0	<hr/> 100.0

Court Action

Trends

Earlier reports have commented on the increasing use made by Courts of the provisions of Section 556A of the Crimes Act or Section 83(3) of the Child Welfare Act. Approximately 10 per cent of offenders were dealt with under the provisions of these Sections in 1974 (1973 = 9.3 per cent).

Fewer people (6.7 per cent) were sent to prison during 1974 compared with the previous year (10.6 per cent).

Of those offenders who received a prison term in 1973, eight out of ten were sentenced to more than three months. In 1974, approximately seven out of ten of the prison sentences were in this category.

The overall sentencing pattern in 1974 was very similar to that of 1973. Four out of five (80.2 per cent) offenders were fined or placed on some form of recognizance including probation (1973=79.1 per cent).

There was a slight increase (5.5 per cent) in the use of fines only in 1974.

Distribution of Drug Offences by Geographical Areas

In previous reports, drug offenders have been classified by area of residence. The table on page 8 lists the number of drug convictions of people resident in the various local government areas of the Sydney Statistical Division and other regions of New South Wales. This is the first year that it has been possible to show regions other than the major Statistical Divisions of Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, separately. Therefore comparisons with 1973 figures are only possible within the Sydney Statistical Division. In country regions where there were fewer than five offenders only the name of the region is given.

In 1971, 33 per cent of offenders lived either in the Municipality of Sydney or the Municipality of Waverley. By 1973 only 12.1 per cent were resident in these areas. In 1974, Sydney and Waverley's share of total convictions dropped to 9.6 per cent. There has been a corresponding rise in the conviction rates for almost all other municipalities and shires in the metropolitan area, as well as Wollongong and the country areas of New South Wales.

The relative stability of the ranking of municipalities and shires is reflected in the fact that nine of the fifteen suburbs with the highest conviction rates in 1973, reappeared in the fifteen highest ranking municipalities in 1974.

Despite the general flattening out of conviction rates there was still a wide variation in scores, ranging from 1.95 for Sydney to 0.07 for the Lachlan Sub-Division.

Court Action

		Number of Offenders	Percentage of Offenders 1974	Percentage of Offenders 1973
Fine - in default, rising of the Court	12	0.6	*	
Admonished and Discharged	32	1.5	*	
Offence proved, discharge/recognizance				
S 556A; 83(3) C W Act	212	9.7	9.3	
Fine	1085	50.0	44.5	
Recognizance	246	11.3	12.2	
Recognizance and fine	107	5.0	6.7	
Probation	162	7.5	6.9	
Recognizance and probation	117	5.3	6.2	
Recognizance, probation, fine	25	1.1	2.5	
Committed to care of a specified person	-	-	0.1	
Committed to an institution	26	1.1	0.8	
Periodic detention	6	0.2	0.1	
Imprisonment				
14 days or less	9	0.5	0.7	
Over 14 days less than 1 month	10	0.5	0.1	
1 month, less than 2 months	2	-	0.3	
2 months, less than 3 months	18	1.0	0.7	
3 months, less than 6 months	33	1.6	2.6	
6 months, less than 9 months	27	1.2	2.3	
9 months, less than 1 year	15	0.7	1.8	
1 year, less than 2 years	26	1.1	2.0	
2 years	3	0.1	-	
Not specified	1	0.0	0.2	

* These two penalties were not considered as separate statistical categories in 1973. For this reason no comparisons can be made with that year.

**Sydney Statistical Division
Comparison with 1973**

		Number of convictions	Rate per 1000 in 1974	Rate per 1000 in 1973
Sydney (City)	122	1.95	1.31	
Waverley	87	1.32	1.25	
Windsor	15	0.96	0.13	
Botany	35	0.91	0.34	
Randwick	102	0.82	0.58	
Manly	31	0.78	0.84	
Leichhardt	54	0.75	0.52	
Warringah	113	0.72	0.49	
Woollahra	39	0.65	1.07	
Blacktown	98	0.62	0.10	
Sutherland	81	0.53	0.45	
Parramatta (City)	59	0.53	0.17	
Liverpool (City)	42	0.50	0.13	
Kogarah	23	0.48	0.23	
Penrith	29	0.48	0.05	
Baulkham Hills	26	0.45	0.10	
Bankstown	71	0.43	0.18	
Hunters Hill	6	0.42	0.49	
Rockdale	35	0.41	0.13	
North Sydney	22	0.41	0.50	
Lane Cove	12	0.41	0.28	
Concord	10	0.38	0.00	
Willoughby	21	0.38	0.33	
Burwood	12	0.37	0.28	
Ashfield	16	0.35	0.18	
Hurstville	24	0.35	0.25	
Marrickville	32	0.33	0.19	
Ryde	30	0.33	0.18	
South Sydney	13	0.33	0.30	

		Number of convictions	Rate per 1000 in 1974	Rate per 1000 in 1973
Drummoyne	10	0.31	0.32	
Mosman	9	0.30	0.51	
Canterbury	39	0.29	0.16	
Campbelltown (City)	10	0.29	0.38	
Auburn	14	0.28	0.06	
Camden	3	0.26	0.00	
Hornsby	24	0.24	0.19	
Ku-ring-gai	20	0.20	0.09	
Holroyd	14	0.18	0.18	
Blue Mountains (City)	3	0.16	0.00	
Fairfield	18	0.15	0.09	
Strathfield	4	0.14	0.26	

Rest of New South Wales

	<i>Number of convictions</i>	<i>Rate per 1000 1974</i>
Clarence Sub-Division	50	0.77
Wollongong, (City)	119	0.73
Gosford	35	0.62
Hastings Sub-Division	38	0.62
Newcastle	85	0.58
Balance Hunter Statistical Division	30	0.55
Wyong	16	0.48
Lake Macquarie	55	0.44
Blue Mountains/Colo	10	0.38
Central Murrumbidgee	32	0.35
Richmond-Tweed Sub-Division	34	0.35
Kiama/Shellharbour	13	0.34
Snowy Sub-Division	6	0.33
Central Tablelands	24	0.28
Southern Tablelands	19	0.24
Northern slopes	13	0.21
Cessnock, (City) (Part)	6	0.17
Balance Illawarra Statistical Division	7	0.14
Central Macquarie Sub-Division	9	0.13
Upper Murray	5	0.10
Lachlan Sub-Division	5	0.07

As mentioned, this year the various localities which make up the following Statistical Districts have been shown separately. However, some readers may also wish to see the rates per 1000 for the total District compared with the 1973 rates.

	<i>Number of convictions</i>	<i>Rate per 1000 1974</i>	<i>Rate per 1000 1973</i>
Newcastle Statistical District	152	0.43	0.28
Wollongong Statistical District	132	0.66	0.38
Country districts in which there were fewer than five drug offenders in 1974.			
Central Murray Subdivision			
Far West Statistical District			
Land Howe Island			
Lower South Coast Subdivision			
Lower Murrumbidgee Subdivision			
Murray - Darling Subdivision			
Macquarie - Barwon Subdivision			
Maitland (City)			
North Central Plain Division			
Port Stephens			
Upper Darling Subdivision			
Wollondilly			

Occupation

The results of many sociological studies have shown that occupational prestige - the relative social standing which the Australian public accords different occupations - is an effective indicator of variation in life style and opportunities associated with the concept of 'class'. The categories of occupation range from A (high) to D (low). Estimates are available of the proportions of the Sydney metropolitan population occurring in each of the four occupational strata (see the figure on the next page).

In 31 cases, the occupation of the offender was not stated, and 143 offenders stated they were unemployed. In 7.4 per cent of cases the convicted person was said to be a student or school child.*

There were also 26 housewives and eight pensioners. This meant that 1805 offenders could be classified according to the prestige of their respective occupations. As can be seen in the accompanying figure the offender group contained very few A and B status people but unskilled workers (D category), were grossly over-represented. Again the social structure of the group was very similar to that reported in 1972 and 1973, the only difference being a slight increase in the number of D level offenders:

In connection with the very small numbers of A and B status offenders it should be acknowledged that many defendants may downgrade their occupation in an effort to avoid the repercussions of public identification.

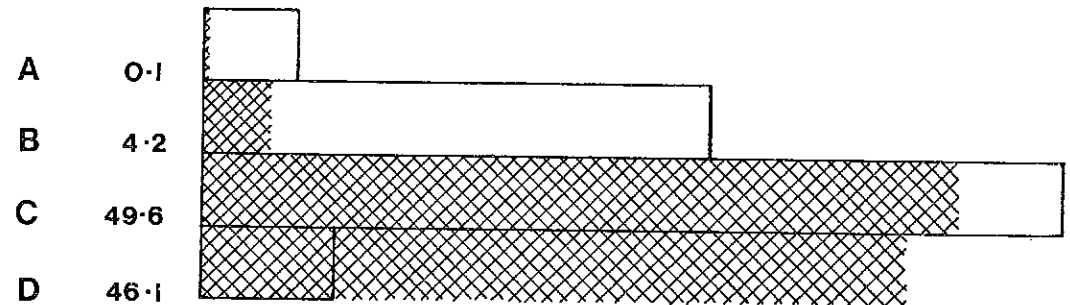
*Members of the New South Wales Drug Squad believe that only a small proportion of the people of school age who appear before Courts on drug charges actually attend, or are enrolled at schools.

Occupational Prestige

	Occupational category	Number	% drug offenders	Percentage 1974	Percentage 1973	Percentage 1972
	Professional/Managerial A	3	0.1	0.7	0.3	
	Semi-professional/middle management B	76	4.2	4.5	4.2	
	Sales, small business, clerical, trades skilled C	894	49.6	50.3	44.3	
	Unskilled D	832	46.1	44.5	51.2	

Figure 1

Proportion of drug offender (1974) by occupation shown shaded against proportion (est.) of general population in occupational categories.



Combinations of Drugs

The major individual and combined categories of drugs involved in 1974 offences are presented in the accompanying table.

There was a higher proportion of 'single drug' offences in 1973 than there was in 1972. This trend was sustained during 1974. Furthermore, offences involving cannabis alone formed a higher percentage of the total than they did in 1972 and 1973.

Combinations of Drugs

	Number	% of individuals 1974	% of individuals 1973	% of individuals 1972
Cannabis	1754	80.3	75.4	64.4
Opiates	226	10.0	10.5	18.0
Hallucinogens	47	2.1	5.0	7.1
Hallucinogens + Cannabis	17	0.8	1.8	3.3
Sedatives	43	2.0	1.6	2.4
Stimulants	20	2.0	2.3	2.0
Opiates + Cannabis	24	1.0	1.2	0.7
Cocaine	4	0.1	0.2	0.6
Cocaine + Opiates	1	0.0	0.0	0.5
Other	38	1.7	2.0	1.0

Drugs used by Penalty

The accompanying table suggests that the Courts differentiate between different categories of drugs, and also the number of prohibited substances involved when imposing penalties. Cannabis users were approximately four times less likely than the users of opiates to be sent to prison. Of course, it should be remembered that previous research has shown that opiate users are more likely to have a history of both drug and non-drug convictions.

In 1973, almost as many opiate users as those convicted for offences involving cannabis were dealt with under the provisions of section 556A of the Crimes Act. In 1974, however, cannabis users were one and a half times more likely than opiate offenders to attract a 556A dismissal. The abusers of sedatives were the least likely (2.3 per cent) to be imprisoned and most likely (25.6 per cent) to be dealt with under Section 556A.

	Opiates (N=226)	Cannabis (N=1754)	Opiates + Cannabis (N=24)	Hallucinogens (N=47)	Hallucinogens+Cannabis (N=17)	Stimulants (N=20)	Sedatives (N=43)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
556A dismissal/ discharge recognizance	7.5	12.4	0.0	14.9	5.9	5.0	25.6
Recognizance, with or without probation/fine	56.7	24.3	54.3	38.3	47.0	70.0	41.9
Fine	16.3	56.6	28.3	36.1	11.8	15.0	30.2
Institution	0.9	1.2	0.0	2.1	5.9	0.0	0.0
Imprisonment	18.5	4.7	17.4	8.5	29.4	10.0	2.3
Not stated	0.1	0.8	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

Part II

Drug Convictions in New South Wales Higher Criminal Courts

In addition to the sections of the Poisons Act which provide for the prosecution of drug offenders at Courts of Petty Sessions, section 45A of the same Act provides for the prosecution on indictment before Higher Criminal Courts of individuals involved in supplying or selling prohibited substances. Under the terms of section 45A (3), an offender is liable to imprisonment for a period not exceeding ten years.

Forty-five drug offenders - 27 more than in 1973 - were prosecuted before Higher Criminal Courts during 1974. There was only one female and more than half of the offenders were 24 years of age or older (see Appendix A).

These cases involved four categories of prohibited substances which are shown below. Cannabis accounted for three out of five cases.

Type of substance	Number
Cannabis	26
Hallucinogens	10
Opiates	8
Stimulants	1

In 1973, all but three of the 18 cases received prison terms. This year the Courts made greater use of fines, recognizance and probation. Nineteen (42.2 per cent) offenders received one or a combination of such penalties.

However, if the Courts imposed prison terms less often than in 1973 they used heavier sentences in some cases. For example, in 1974, five offenders received sentences of more than six years. In the previous year no one received a sentence in this range.

	Decision Number
Recognizance	2
Recognizance and probation	7
Fine and recognizance	7
Fine, recognizance and probation	3
Periodic detention	1
Less than 12 months	1
12 months - 18 months	6
18 months - 2 years	-
2 years - 3 years	3
3 years - 4 years	6
4 years - 5 years	1
5 years - 6 years	3
6 years - 7 years	2
7 years - 8 years	-
8 years - 9 years	3

Part III

Drug Convictions in New South Wales - Commonwealth Legislation

Section 233B (i) of the Customs Act 1901 - 1968 provides for the following drug offences:

- (a) possess on board ships, aircraft
- (b) import/export
- (c) possess prohibited import
- (c)(i) possess prohibited import - reasonably suspected of being imported
- (d) aid/abet etc. import/export
- (e) fail to disclose information.

In 1974 there were 84 offenders convicted of Commonwealth offences in New South Wales. This was 21 cases (33.3 per cent) more than for the previous year. Compared with convictions under the New South Wales Poisons Act, a higher proportion of these offenders were 30 years of age or older.

	N.S.W. Poisons Act	Customs Act
Under 30 years	94.4	84.5
30 years+	5.6	15.5

This year there was a substantial increase in the number of female offenders. In 1973, about one in ten (9.5 per cent) of Commonwealth offenders were women. This rate was comparable with the level in 1972. In 1974 more than one in four (28.4 per cent) of the convictions were recorded against women.

The Courts sentenced 28.6 per cent of the drug offenders to a term of imprisonment compared with 34.9 per cent in the previous year, and 40.8 per cent in 1972. While this represented a slight decrease in the proportion of offenders who were sent to prison there was a tendency in 1974, to use heavier sentences in some cases. For example, in 1973, of the 22 offenders who were imprisoned, four received terms of five years and more. In 1974, there were 24 offenders sent to prison, of whom nine were sentenced to five years or more.

Approximately two in five (44.1 per cent) cases resulted in a fine (with or without recognizance). Almost 28 per cent of offenders received a recognizance or a recognizance with probation. In 1973, only 15.9 per cent of the penalties were in this category.

Between 1973 and 1974 there was an increase of 13.5 per cent in the number of cases involving opiates. Opiates were mentioned in 40.4 per cent of cases in 1974 compared to 26.9 per cent in 1973. Hallucinogens were specified in 8.3 per cent of cases which is almost double the level recorded for this substance in 1973.

Unlike convictions under the New South Wales Poisons Act there was a decrease in cases involving Cannabis in Commonwealth offences for 1974. The level for this year was 63 per cent compared to 68.6 per cent for 1973.

Court Action

	Number	Percentage
Fine	35	41.8
Fine and recognizance	2	2.3
Recognizance	13	15.6
Recognizance and probation	10	12.0
Imprisonment		
Periodic detention	1	1.1
Less than 6 months	-	-
6 months less than 9 months	2	2.3
9 months less than 12 months	-	-
1 year less than 18 months	2	2.3
18 months less than 2 years	-	-
2 years less than 3 years	4	4.8
3 years less than 4 years	5	6.0
4 years less than 5 years	1	1.1
5 years less than 6 years	4	4.8
6 years less than 7 years	1	1.1
7 years less than 8 years	-	-
8 years less than 9 years	4	4.8

Part IV

Drug Offences in New South Wales — Neglect Cases Section 72(h) Child Welfare Act

Age/Sex

Four young people - two boys and two girls - were dealt with under the drug provisions of the Child Welfare Act. The girls were aged 12 and 15 years and the boys 16 and 17 years.

The substance involved in one case was heroin, while sedatives were mentioned in the other three cases.

Probation was imposed in all cases.

The number of cases dealt with under Section 72 (h) was three less than in the previous year.

Part V

The Overall Picture (1974)

The cases described in Parts I - IV of this report may be combined to provide a total picture of drug convictions in New South Wales in 1974. In all, 2307 people were convicted. Of this number, 2015 (87.3 per cent) were males and 93.7 per cent were under 30 years of age (1973 = 92.9 per cent).

Cannabis accounted for more than three quarters (79.3 per cent) of the drugs specified in the 1974 convictions. Opiates accounted for one in eight, while hallucinogens were specified approximately half as often as in 1973.

	Number*	Percentage
Opiates	304	12.7
Cannabis	1903	79.3
Hallucinogens	89	3.8
Stimulants	29	1.2
Sedatives	58	2.4
Cocaine	15	0.6
	<hr/>	
	2398	100.0

*More than one drug involved in some cases.

Part VI

Community Comparisons....

"The Dark Figure"

Based on unpublished research conducted by:

Dr. D S Bell, F A N Z G.P The Allenbrook Clinic, Mosman.
Mr. R A Champion, Research Officer, N S.W Health Commission
Dr. A J E Rowe, M A N.Z.C.P The Allenbrook Clinic, Mosman.

How valid are official Court figures as indicators of the prevalence of drug abuse in the community? Clearly they will tell us about the way society, through the criminal justice system, regards the problem, and the measures taken to deal with it. However, there are a number of offence categories about which official figures would say very little because the 'dark figure' or unreported aspect of the offence is so large. Is this the case with drug statistics compiled from Court files?

In past years the Bureau has attempted to discourage people from interpreting shifts in the number of drug convictions as being a direct indication of an increase or decrease in the prevalence of drug abuse. For some time we have recognised the need to present the Court data against a background of independently derived information concerning drug abuse in the community.

This year the Bureau is fortunate in having additional data which should shed some light on the volume of drug abuse among senior school students in New South Wales - abuse, that is, which does not necessarily come to the attention of the Police.

With the assistance of the National Health and Medical Research Council, a research team in the Health Commission of New South Wales set out to document the use of a range of drugs in a number of population groups over the period 1971, 1972 and 1973. This material will shortly be published and the authors have made available some of their findings for this report.

In an earlier section it was shown that offenders in their late teens (16-19 years) accounted for 37.1 per cent of total drug convictions. It is, therefore, useful that the groups studied by Bell, Champion and Rowe included young adults in this age range.

The material chosen for presentation in this report was collected by way of a self-administered anonymous questionnaire applied to a random sample of fourth and sixth year high school students. These findings relate only to the prevalence of cannabis and opiates within these groups. The students were, in fact, questioned about a broader range of substances than these two drugs.

In the following tables the term "users" refers to those students who have continued to use the substance mentioned after their initial contact with the drug. Other students, not described in this report, claimed that they had at some time used one or other drug but not maintained the practice.

**Table I - Users of Marihuana
and Opiates in 1973**

	Marihuana		Opiates	
	No.	%	No.	%
4th Form (N=3370)*	330	9.8	69	2.0
6th Form (N=1843)*	249	14.0	22	1.2

**Table II - Users of Marihuana
and Opiates over 3 years**

Marihuana

	1971		1972		1973	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
4th Form	196	6.1	290	8.9	330	9.8
6th Form	115	7.0	204	11.0	249	14.0

Opiates

	1971		1972		1973	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
4th Form	45	1.4	58	1.8	69	2.0
6th Form	17	1.0	21	1.1	22	1.2

*The 'balance' is comprised of students who had never used, or who had "given up" using either of the two substances mentioned.

Part VII

Community Comparison — The Treatment Agencies

Putting aside the concern felt by the community about the use of the prohibited substances mentioned in Parts I - IV of this report, it is reasonable to ask if the drugs which most often cause people to appear before Courts are the same as those which occasion people to seek treatment from the agencies which provide such help.

With the co-operation of senior staff from two community psychiatric units in Sydney it has been possible to include in this report an analysis of the number of problems which involved drugs presented to these units during 1974.

This is not to suggest always that the use of the drug in itself caused the person to seek help. Frequently, drug abuse was allied to complex domestic and social situations. It was claimed that the drug abuse was often a result rather than a cause of such a situation.

Community Psychiatric Unit - 1

Number of relevant cases = 105

Unlike the official figures in the earlier part of this report, opiates, either by themselves or in combination with other drugs, were involved in 46.6 per cent of the 'drug' cases seen at this unit. Within this opiates group of patients, men were three times more numerous than women. Slightly more than half of the men were between 20 and 24 years of age.

More than half of those whose problems involved opiates had requested the methadone withdrawal treatment programme.

Twenty-eight (26.6 per cent) sedative users were treated either as in-patients or on a daily basis. Twenty three of these patients were women and half were over the age of 25 years. The sedatives were mainly taken in the form of sleeping tablets and in some cases were combined with tranquillisers or alcohol.

The agency staff suggested that where drugs were taken in combination with others the combinations chosen reflected more the drugs that were currently available than the personal preferences of the drug user.

None of the cases involved cannabis.

Community Psychiatric Unit - 2

Number of relevant cases = 655

Of the 655 drug patients treated at this, the larger of the two community units, 60 per cent had problems which involved the use of opiates. Within this group there were 265 males and 134 females. More than half (55.3 per cent) were between 20 and 24 years of age.

The most numerous category involving drug abuse, after the opiates, was the sedative group of drugs. Patients in this category comprised 21.8 per cent of the total cases. If males predominated among patients using opiates, nine out of ten of the people using sedatives were women. Slightly more than half of the female sedative takers were more than 25 years old.

The incidence of cannabis was 3.8 per cent of the drug cases. All of these patients were less than 19 years of age and their contact with the unit was most often initiated by concerned parents.

**Table I - Community Psychiatric Unit I -
Substances Specified in Cases
Involving Drugs**

	Males		Females		Total 'drug' Patients	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Opiates	27	43.6	5	11.7	32	30.4
Opiates & others	10	16.1	7	16.2	17	16.1
Hallucinogens & others	7	11.2	2	4.7	9	8.6
Sedatives*	5	8.0	23	53.4	28	26.6
Stimulants	2	3.2	-	-	2	2.0
Other Drugs	3	4.9	6	14.0	9	8.6
Not Specified	8	13.0	-	-	8	7.7
	62	100.0	43	100.0	105	100.0

**Table II - Community Psychiatric Unit II -
Substances Specified in cases
Involving Drugs**

	Males		Females		Total 'drug' Patients	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Opiates	266	80.5	134	41.1	399	61.0
Cannabis	18	5.4	7	2.1	25	3.8
Hallucinogens	5	1.6	4	1.2	9	1.3
Stimulants	4	1.2	-	-	4	0.6
Sedatives	15	4.6	128	39.2	143	21.8
Cocaine	15	4.6	8	2.5	23	3.5
Other Drugs*	7	2.1	45	13.9	52	8.0
	329	100.0	326	200.0	655	100.0

* Mainly analgesics but includes some hypnotics & barbiturates.

* includes 42 anti-histamines.

Appendix A

Higher Criminal Courts

Age of offenders	Age in years	Number
	19	1
	20	3
	21	8
	22	5
	23	2
	24	8
	25	3
	26	0
	27	1
	28	1
	29	2
	30 - 34	5
	35 - 39	1
	40+	4
	Not stated	1

Appendix B

Commonwealth Offences

Age of offenders	Age in years	
	Number	Percentage
18	-	-
19	3	3.5
20	3	3.5
21	7	8.3
22	9	10.8
23	8	9.5
24	8	9.5
25	10	12.0
26	5	6.0
27	7	8.3
28	5	6.0
29	5	6.0
30 - 39	13	15.5
40+	-	-
Not stated	1	1.1

Sex of offenders	Number		Percentage	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Male	60	71.4		
Female	24	28.6		

Type of offence	Number		Percentage	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Possess on board ship/aircraft	0	0.0		
Import	46	54.8		
Possess prohibited import	8	9.6		
Possess prohibited import - reasonably suspected of being imported	27	32.1		
Aid/abet import	3	3.5		

Type of substances	Number of instances*		Percentage of total drugs involved	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Cannabis	53	63.0		
Opiates	34	40.4		
Hallucinogens	7	8.3		
Cocaine	1	1.1		

*More than one drug involved in some cases.