Mental illness, child abuse and drugs: the experiences of Australian women detained by police.

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Drug Use Monitoring in Australia

DUMA is...

- National illicit drug monitoring program
- Samples people detained in police custody for less than 48 hours
- Quarterly data collection in QLD, NSW, SA, WA, VIC, NT.
- Voluntary and confidential – people can and do refuse
- Data de-identified
- Counts custody episodes – not individuals
Why is DUMA useful...

- Collects illicit drug use information from ALL detainees – not just those charged with drug offences
- Early warning system for changes in illicit drug use
- Quarterly and annual data
- Geographic & temporal trends
- Started in 1999 and ongoing
What data does **DUMA** collect?

- **Survey** -
  - Demographic – including ethnicity, income (legal & illegal)
  - Illicit drug & alcohol use: history, current use, dependence
  - Illicit drug purchasing patterns
  - Illicit drug & alcohol treatment
  - Current medication use
  - Recent involvement in criminal justice system
  - Gambling habits
  - Weapons
- **Urine** – analysed for drugs
- **Current charge information**
Study rationale

- Few studies examine crime and gender
- Legal, social and political forces vary between countries
- Drug markets are localised
- Prisoner research – illicit drugs use, trauma history, poor mental health
- Prisoners are a small proportion of offenders
This study sample

- 2002 to 2006 inclusive
- Sites: Bankstown, Parramatta, Adelaide, Elizabeth, Southport, Brisbane, Perth
- Sample = 18,280 adults
- 84% = male, 16% = female
- Participants assumed independent
This study examined

- Gender
- Mental illness indicators
  - Psychoactive medications (past fortnight)
  - Psychiatric hospitalisation (ever)
- Relationship between mental illness
- Illicit drug use
- Criminal activity
- Psychological distress of a subset of detainees
- Abuse experience of a subset of detainees
# Mental illness indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychiatric hospitalisation (ever)*</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Psychoactive meds (fortnight)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking benzodiazepines</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking anti-depressants</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking anti-psychotics</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taking at least 1 of above meds*</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental illness indicator (1and/or 2)*</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AIC DUMA [Computer file 2002-2006]

* = statistical significance
Drug use

- 70% used at least 1 illicit drug during past month

- Gender differences:
  - women more likely to have used amphetamines, heroin, illegal benzodiazepines
  - women used more types of drugs
  - women used drugs more frequently
  - more women (72%) were dependent on illegal drugs compared to males (66%)
Men - mental illness, illicit drug use and criminal activity
Women - mental illness, illicit drug use and criminal activity

- Used drugs in past month
- Drug Dependent
- Charged past year
- Imprisoned in past year

Mental ill
No mental ill
Mental illness, gender and current MSO

![Bar chart showing the percentage of violent, property, and traffic incidents involving females and males with and without mental illness.]
Gender and psychological distress

[Graph showing the percentage distribution of psychological distress levels (Low, Moderate, High, Very high) among women (n=182) and men (n=1,037).]
Psychological distress in a subset of participants

- High/very high psychological distress related to
  - Recent drug use, esp illegal benzo
  - Drug dependence
  - Charged in past year
  - Mental illness indicator

- No relationship with
  - Current MSO type
  - Imprisonment in past year
Abuse experiences

- Subset answered questions about violence
- Physical/sexual abuse before age 18
- 1,606 participants (94% RR)
- Women (n=247)
  - 49% reported childhood abuse
- Men (n=1, 355)
  - 34% reported childhood abuse
Childhood abuse associated with...

- Recent drug use
  - Heroin, amphetamine and illegal benzo
- Drug dependence
- Charged in the past year
- Mental illness indicator
- Males only – imprisonment in past year

But NOT associated with

- Cannabis use
- Most serious offence for current custody
- For women – imprisonment in past year
Compared to male detainees, women were:
- More likely to have experienced mental illness
- Have high psychological distress
- Use more types of drugs & more frequently
- Be drug dependent
- Physically/sexually abused during childhood
Mental illness indicator was associated with:

- Recent drug use
- Drug dependence
- Recent recidivism
- Psychological distress
- Childhood abuse experience
Policy implications

- Need to develop better mental health measures for police detainees
- Need for mental health services for offenders who are not incarcerated
- Screening and diversion to treatment at the time of arrest
- Treatment for mental illness should be integrated and gender specific ie: substance dependence & trauma