



MEDIA REPORTING ON ILLICIT DRUGS UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

NDARC launches first national youth drug media survey

22 February 2010

Young Australians are being asked about the influence of media messages in shaping their attitudes to illicit drugs – as part of a world-first study.

The study, being run by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), aims to shed light on the impact of media reporting of illicit drugs on people's attitudes to drug use and young people's attitudes in particular.

Dr Caitlin Hughes, research fellow at NDARC's Drug Policy Modelling Program (DPMP), said that illicit drugs were undoubtedly one of the most popular topics in the Australian media.

"In a sample of only 11 newspapers, we found more than 42,000 reports referring to illicit drugs, over a six year period. Drugs are moreover one of the most common motifs in popular culture.

"We know from related fields that media messages can influence people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. But there has been very limited research in Australia or internationally into the extent to which or how media reporting on drugs influences youth attitudes to illicit drug use.

"This is surprising given the role played by the media in providing information, influencing attitudes and setting policy agendas on drugs."

"Finding out what youth think about these pervasive messages is imperative for informing future media and drugs policies."

Interested young people aged 16 to 24 are being invited to take part in an online survey that can be found at: www.drugmediasurvey.com. It is open to anyone who lives in Australia who is aged 16-24. It takes approximately 10-20 minutes to complete and is targeted at drug users and non-users alike.

"We want to get as many young people involved as possible," said Dr Hughes. "This includes youth from regional and rural areas across Australia, people who have used illicit drugs and people who have never used illicit drugs."

This is part of a broader study being conducted by The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing into trends in media reporting on drugs.

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