

What drug is more available in New Zealand: Cannabis or Methamphetamine?

KEY POINTS

- Methamphetamine is currently more available than cannabis throughout New Zealand
- Higher availability of methamphetamine was found in the Northland, Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Waikato, Manawatu-Wanganui, West Coast, and Southland regions
- Our findings suggest a need to further prioritise the focus on methamphetamine rather than cannabis

Purpose of this bulletin

This short research bulletin presents preliminary findings from the first online **New Zealand Drug Trends Survey (NZDTS)** conducted by Massey University. Further bulletins covering other key findings from the survey will be forthcoming. All the bulletins will be freely available on our Facebook™ page [www.facebook.com/NZDrugTrends].

Background

There have been a number of anecdotal reports around the country that methamphetamine is currently easier to obtain than cannabis. However, to date, there has been no data available to verify these claims, or confirm the extent of this state of affairs throughout New Zealand.

Aims

To measure and compare the availability of methamphetamine and cannabis in all regions of New Zealand.

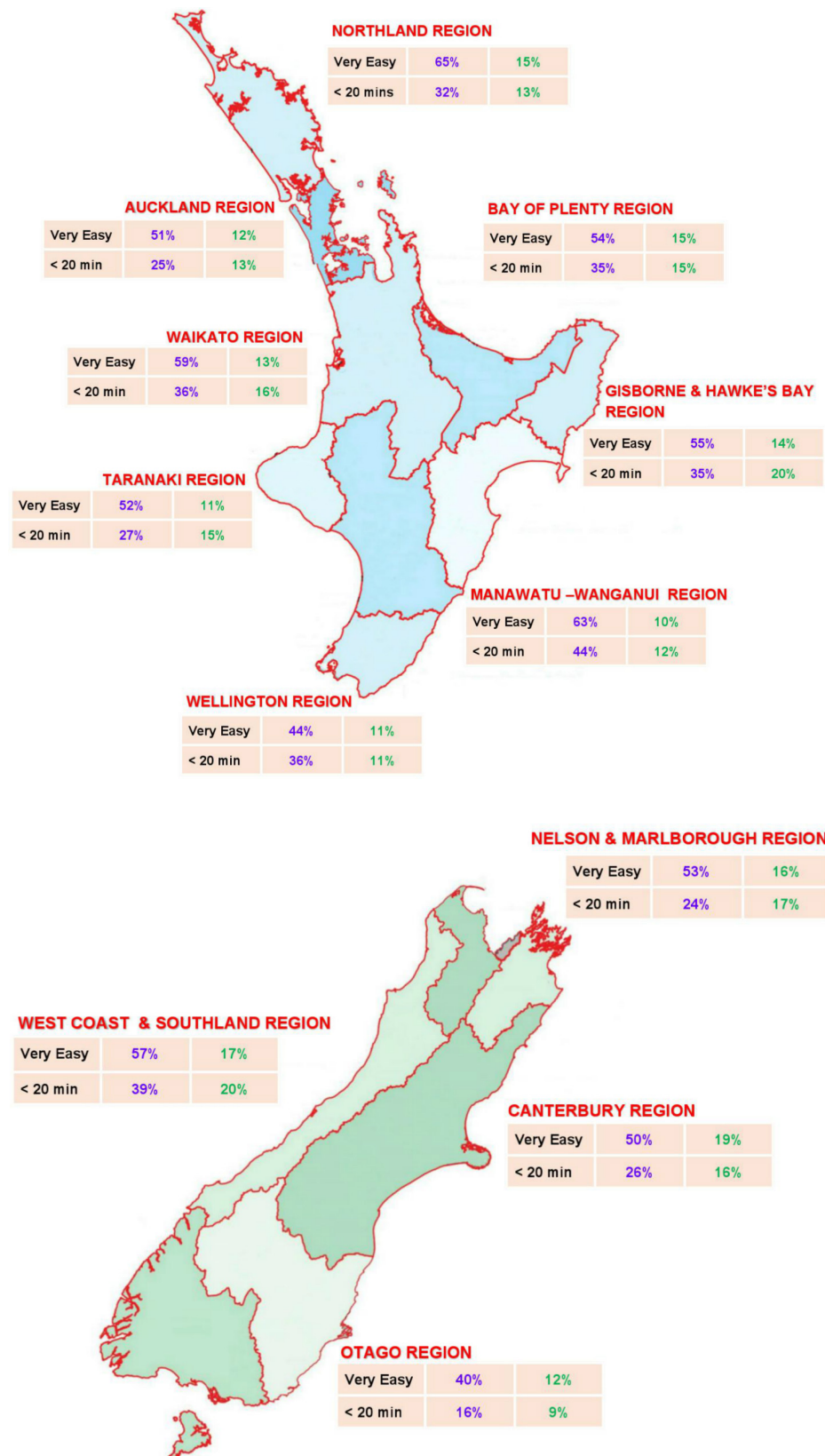
Method

An anonymous online survey promoted via a targeted Facebook™ campaign was conducted from November 2017 to February 2018. A total of 6,100 people completed the survey. Respondents were asked a series of questions about the availability of the drug types they had used in the past six months. These questions included the current availability of the drug (i.e. 'very difficult', 'difficult', 'easy', or 'very easy'), and how long it would take them to purchase the drug (i.e. 'months', 'weeks', 'days', '1 day', 'hours', '1 hour', or 'less than 20 minutes').

Results

Forty-five percent of the sample was female. The average age was 29 years old (range 16-87 years). Twenty-one percent were Maori and 72% Pakeha. Thirty-five percent had completed high school education, 33% a polytech or trade qualification and 28% had a university degree. Eighteen percent were

The availability & time taken to purchase Methamphetamine & Cannabis



students, 11% unemployed or on a sickness benefit and 65% were employed. Overall, 14% of those who used cannabis described the current availability of cannabis to be “very easy”. In contrast, 54% of those who used methamphetamine reported the current availability of methamphetamine as “very easy”. Only 14% of the cannabis users could purchase cannabis in 20 minutes or less, while 31% of the methamphetamine users were able to purchase methamphetamine in 20 minutes or less. Higher availability of methamphetamine relative to cannabis was found in all regions (see map). For example, in Northland, 65% of users described the current availability of methamphetamine to be ‘very easy’ compared to only 15% for cannabis. Thirty two percent of the Northland respondents could purchase methamphetamine in 20 minutes or less, compared to only 13% who could purchase cannabis in 20 minutes or less. Higher availability of methamphetamine was reported in the Northland, Bay of Plenty, Hawke’s Bay, Gisborne, Waikato, Manawatu-Wanganui, West Coast, and Southland regions. Conversely, lower availability of methamphetamine was found in the Auckland, Taranaki, Wellington, Nelson and Marlborough, Canterbury and Otago regions.

Limitations

The survey is not intended to be a representative survey of the drug using population. Rather, it seeks to engage with people who use drugs from around the country to provide a timely ‘snapshot’ of the current situation.

Conclusions

Our findings support the understanding that methamphetamine is currently more available than cannabis throughout New Zealand. This raises tantalising questions concerning the supply of drugs and policy settings in relation to different drug types. For example, is the higher availability of methamphetamine the result of an intentional strategy by drug dealers who are seeking to maximise profits by promoting the sale of a more addictive drug type with a higher profit margin? Secondly, does the current supply reduction strategy need to be refocused on methamphetamine rather than cannabis? Methamphetamine is widely considered to be the more harmful drug, but cannabis is more vulnerable to routine law enforcement activity due to the space and time required to cultivate it, and its bulky and distinctive physical appearance and smell.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of the Community Action on Youth and Drugs (CAYAD) with special thanks to the Te Runanga O Ngai Te Rangi Iwi Trust.