Screening for Drugs in Oral Fluid: Illicit Drug Use and Drug Driving in a Sample of Queensland Motorists

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OBJECTIVE: Police Services in a number of Australian states and overseas jurisdictions have begun to implement or consider random road-side drug testing of drivers. This paper outlines research conducted to provide an estimate of the extent of drug driving in a sample of Queensland drivers in regional, rural and metropolitan areas.

DESIGN AND METHODS: Oral fluid samples were collected from 2,657 Queensland motorists who volunteered to participate in the study after proceeding from a Random Breath Test site (RBT). Illicit substances were screened using the Cozart® RapiScan oral fluid drug test device and included cannabis (δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol [THC]), amphetamine type substances, heroin and cocaine. Drivers also completed a self-report questionnaire regarding their drug-related driving behaviour.

RESULTS: Overall, 3% of the sample (n = 80) screened positive for at least one illicit substance, although multiple drugs were identified in a sample of 29 respondents. The most common drugs detected in oral fluid were methamphetamine (n = 43), cannabis (delta 9 THC) (n = 36) followed by amphetamine (n = 26). A key finding was that cannabis was confirmed as the most common self-reported drug combined with driving and that individuals who tested positive to any drug through oral fluid analysis were also more likely to report the highest frequency of drug driving. Furthermore, a comparison between drug vs drink driving detection rates for the study revealed a higher detection rate for drug driving (3%) vs drink driving (0.8%).

CONCLUSIONS: This research provides evidence that drug driving is relatively prevalent on Queensland roads, and may in fact be more common than drink driving. The paper will further outline the study findings and present possible directions for future drug driving research.

Keywords: Drug driving, Oral fluid, Roadside drug screening