

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY

**Question No. 17**

**Senator Macdonald asked the following questions at the hearing on 18 November 2013:**

**CHAIR:** Are you aware of any research into what is perhaps not factual information but things you sometimes hear, see or read of—mainly, I guess, in American movies—about the amount of drugs within the prisons and the corrective services arena? Has there ever been any research done in Australia on whether it is in fact the case that the use and availability of drugs in prisons is widespread? Or is it just a figment of the screenwriters' imaginations?

**CHAIR:** Where would I go to find out if there has been any good research into the availability of drugs within prisons?

**Dr Tomison:** If you let me take that on notice, I am happy to provide that through our library. The JV Barry Library, which is our internal library, is a comprehensive collection of work. It is probably one of the best collections in the country, if not in the world. Certainly we could do a quick search and get my drug focused researchers to have a look for you and identify some good research. I am happy to get back to you on that, if you like, as a question on notice.

**CHAIR:** I am a bit old fashioned in these things, but it always amazes me that there are allegations of the prisons teeming with drugs. That may not be correct, as I said. There is also the fact that apparently every schoolkid knows every drug pusher around the town but the police never seem to know. Has there ever been any research on that that you are aware of? It does seem that drugs are readily available to schoolchildren and every schoolkid seems to know where to go to get them. But the police do not. I am being very generic here. I wonder if anyone has ever done any research into that aspect of crime.

**Dr Tomison:** I am not aware of any research into it. Certainly the amount of policing intelligence is different the amount of arrests that police are able to make in this area. As to involving young people in research for the purposes of identifying drug dealers and stuff like that, I am not aware of any off the top of my head. I am happy to take that on notice if you like.

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

**Part 1: Drug use in prison**

There is limited Australian research on prisoner drug use while in custody. The two main forms of supply reduction used in Australian prisons are drug detection dogs and urinalysis. Other security measures believed to impact upon drug supply include: x-ray machines and metal detectors; iris scanners; bag searches; and pat-down searches (used routinely to screen all persons entering prisons in New South Wales).

What data are available tend to be jurisdiction-specific and relies on detainee self-reports. Drug use prevalence estimates in the corrections population vary from 5% to 46% depending on whether the samples are restricted, are based only on prisoners with prior drug use histories, type of ingestion and/or type of drug. The AIC notes that there has been a recent marked increase in the detected use of buprenorphine—a drug used for opioid substitution therapy to treat heroin addiction. In 2012-13 buprenorphine was the most commonly detected drug used illicitly by prisoners, accounting for 57.7 per cent of all positive urinalysis tests. Selected references:

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) *Health of Australian Prisoners*, AIHW: Canberra
- Fetherston J et al 2012. *Rates of injection in prison in a sample of Australian-injecting drug users*. *Journal of Substance Use* 18 (1): 65-7.
- Kevin M (2005). *Addressing the use of drugs in prison: prevalence, nature and context*. Corporate Research Evaluation & Statistics, NSW Dept. of Corrective Services

- Kinner S et al (2012) *High-risk drug-use practices among a large sample of Australian prisoners. Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 126 (1–2) : 156–160
- Payne J, Macgregor S & McDonald H 2013. *Prevalence and issues relating to cannabis use among prison inmates : key findings from Australian research since 2001*. Sydney: National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre, 2013.
- Rodas A, Bode A & Dolan K (2011). *Supply, demand and harm reduction strategies in Australian prisons: an update*. Australian National Council on Drugs
- Victoria Auditor General (2013). *Prevention and management of drug use in prisons*. Melbourne: Victorian Auditor-General

## **Part 2: Drugs in schools and relationship to law enforcement**

There are numerous media stories and some research related to police intelligence gathering and the running of operations against users and suppliers in the school environment. Much of what is thought about the archetypal drug ‘pusher’ has been found to be incorrect—including that they frequently prey on schoolchildren at the school gates. Often those most closely involved in supplying drugs to young people are other young people who connect through existing youth social networks. For example, in a United Kingdom study nearly all supply events were between friends within a close age range (Coomber & Turnbull 2007).

It can be assumed that police hold more street intelligence on who is supplying drugs in a community than they are able to action. Some of this intelligence will be derived from young people and school personnel. In order to interdict more serious suppliers police then need to trace connections back from street dealers. Obtaining a disclosure from a young person, or via a teacher, can be the first step in building reliable and actionable intelligence that may enable the mounting of a successful operation to arrest drug suppliers. Cummings & Mawdsley, (2008) found that it was clear from policy documents in Queensland and NSW that schools rely on students to provide information to teachers (where systems of mutual trust have been established) on other students’ possession of illicit substances. Teachers and police work in conjunction to gain “reliable” sources of information from among the users and dealers themselves. The credibility of information provided by the informant(s) is not necessarily an issue, given the procedures that must be followed before any criminal allegation is made against a student.

### **Selected references:**

- Coomber R & Turnbull P (2007). *Arenas of drug transactions: adolescent cannabis transactions in England—social supply*. *Journal of drug issues* 37(4): 845-865
- Cummings J and Mawdsley R (2008). *Student searches in Australia : a consideration of roles, responsibilities and rights of students, school staff and police*. *Australian & New Zealand journal of law & education* 13(1) 49-69
- Mazerolle, L, Soole, D & Ronbouts, S. (2007). *Street-level drug law enforcement: a meta-analytical review*. The Campbell Collaboration.
- National Drug Strategy 2010–2015: *A framework for action on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs*. Commonwealth of Australia 2011.
- White, V & Bariola, E. (2012). *Australian secondary school students' use of tobacco, alcohol, and over-the-counter and illicit substances in 2011*. Report prepared for Drug Strategy Branch, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.