



# Trends and factors associated with illicit drug use in South Africa: findings from multiple national population-based household surveys

**Presenter:** Kennedy Kipkoech Mutai<sup>1,6</sup>

**Co-authors:** Dr Jack Stone<sup>1</sup>, Dr Andrew Scheibe<sup>2,3</sup>, Dr Hannah Fraser<sup>1</sup>, Dr Leigh Johnson<sup>4</sup> and Prof Peter Vickerman<sup>1,5</sup>

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup> Population Health Sciences, Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom; <sup>2</sup> TB HIV Care, Cape Town, South Africa; <sup>3</sup> Community Oriented Primary Care Research Unit, Department of Family Medicine, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa; <sup>4</sup> Centre for Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Research, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa; <sup>5</sup> NIHR Health Protection Research Unit in Behavioural Science and Evaluation at University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom; <sup>6</sup> School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town

# Acknowledgment and declaration

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- The authors declare no conflict-of-interest.

# Background

- Illicit drug use has substantial ongoing impact on health and wellbeing globally and in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>.
- There is **little data on trends, predictors and outcomes** of illicit drug use in South Africa.
- Yet, such data are important for understanding the **potential health impact**, and for **developing strategies** to mitigate the consequences of illicit drug use.

# Aims

- We set out to:
  1. Describe population-level trends in recent illicit drug use.
  2. Assess predictors of recent drug use.
  3. Evaluate whether recent illicit drug use is associated with behavioral and health outcomes in South Africa.

# Methods

- We analysed data among respondents aged 15 years or older from **5 different national households surveys** conducted over 2002-2017 in South Africa<sup>1</sup>.
  - Surveys conducted in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2017.
  - Surveys are **representative** of the entire country.
- **Recent drug use** was defined as **last three-months use** of illicit drugs i.e., any use of cannabis, cocaine, stimulants, and/or opioids.

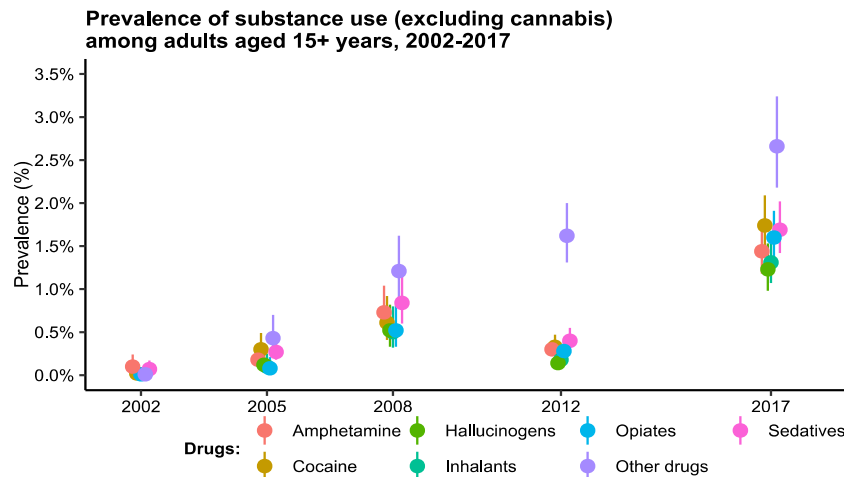
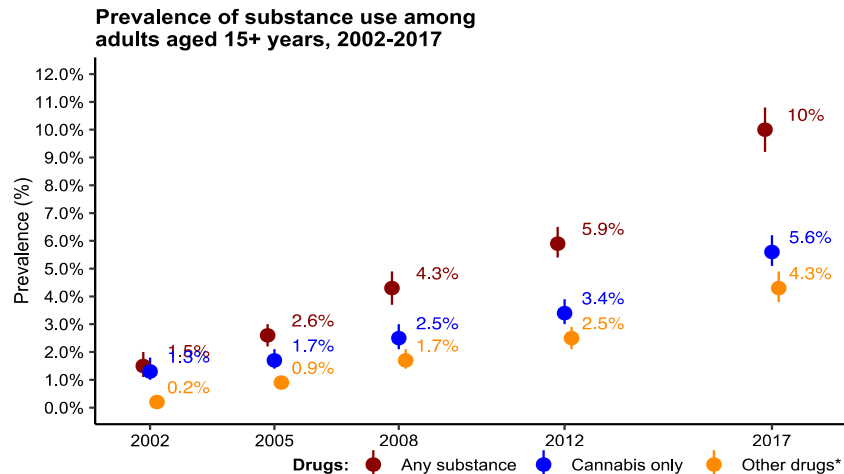
# Methods

- Multivariable logistic regression was used to:
  - Assess predictors of recent drug use – *defined as any past 3-months illicit drug use, excluding alcohol/tobacco.*
  - Evaluate whether recent drug use predicted behavioral and health outcomes – adjusted for age, sex, race, geographic area, province, education level, employment status, alcohol use and survey year.

# Results

- There were 89,113 respondents aged 15+ years from the 5 pooled surveys.
- Drug use increased from 1.5% in 2002 to 10.0% in 2017 (top panel).
  - More than 10-fold increase in the use of opioids and stimulants from 2002-2017, with about 1.7% and 1.4% reported using opiates and stimulants respectively in 2017 (bottom panel).
- The increasing trend in illicit drug use was significant across various socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, race, etc.

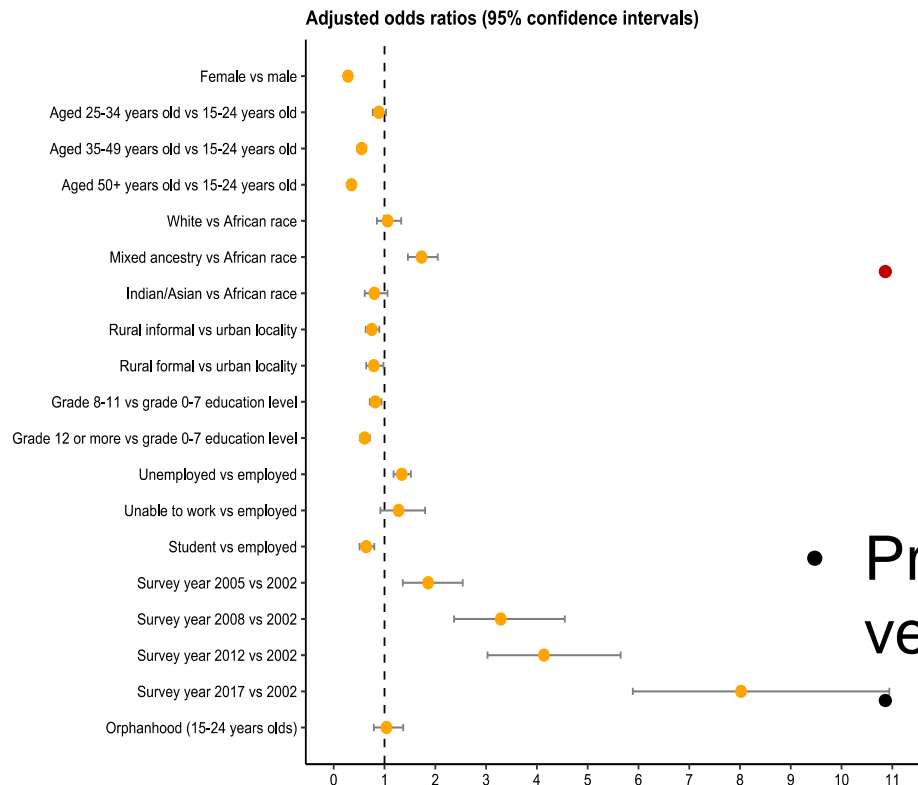
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\*Others: Includes cocaine, amphetamine, inhalants, sedatives, hallucinogens, opiates, other drugs; and cannabis with any other drugs

# Results

## Factors associated with any recent illicit drug use



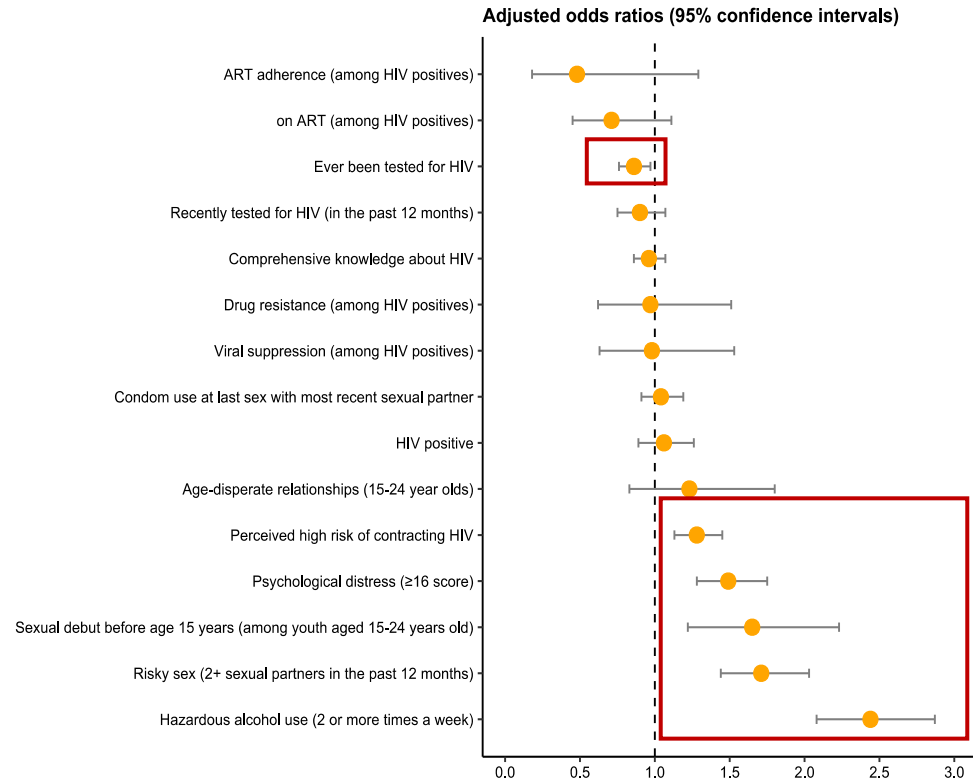
- Recent illicit drug use was:
  - **Negatively associated with** being female, older chronological age, living in rural area, and higher education attainment.
  - **Positively associated with** being of mixed-ancestry race, and unemployment.
- Prevalence of illicit drug use was very high in some groups
  - 21-33% (depending on race) among young male in urban areas.



# Results

## HIV outcomes among people who use drugs (PWUD) compared to non-PWUD

- Compared to non-PWUD, people who used drugs (PWUD) were:
  - More likely to have multiple sexual partners, high alcohol intake, earlier sexual debut, experienced psychosocial distress, and perceived high-risk of contracting HIV.
  - Less likely to have ever been tested for HIV.



# Conclusions

- Recent illicit drug use has **increased substantially** in South Africa in the last 15 years; and is **associated with numerous risk behaviors**.
  - The prevalence of recent drug use in South Africa (10%, 2017) is now **double the global average** (5.4% in past year, 2018), higher than in Kenya (6% current use, 2016), but possibly **lower than Nigeria** (14% in the past year, 2018).
- **Further research and understanding** is required to mitigate the potential impact of illicit drug use in South Africa e.g.,
  - How illicit drug use may **relate and progress to injecting drug use** and the consequences for the HIV epidemic.
  - Interventions required to **reduce high level of drug use** and meet **multiple problems** faced by people who use drugs
    - Reducing unemployment, problematic alcohol-use, and high-risk sex targeted by age and sex.

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**Kennedy Kipkoech Mutai**

[kennedy.kipkoech@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:kennedy.kipkoech@bristol.ac.uk)

University of Bristol, UK / University of Cape Town, SA



[bristol.ac.uk](http://bristol.ac.uk)

