



“Caught red-eyed and red-handed”
Cannabis use and criminal offending
among young people

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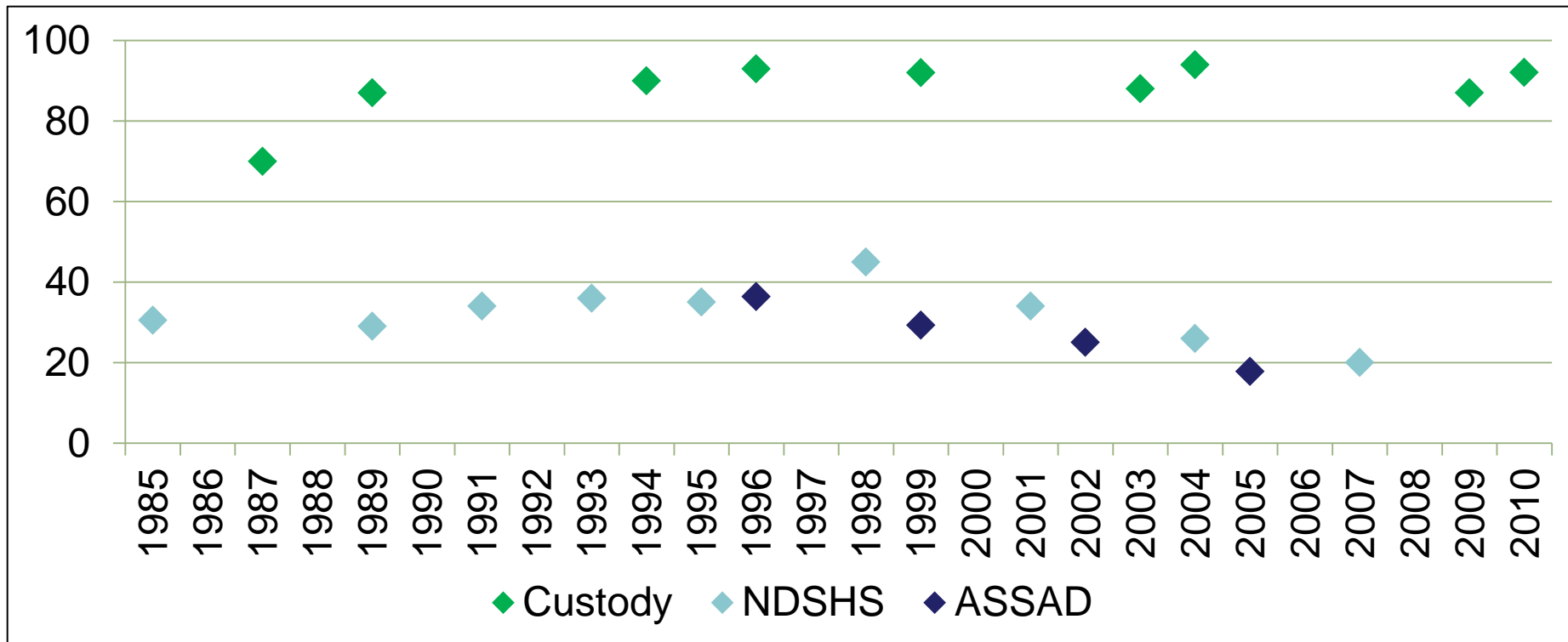
Problems associated with adolescent cannabis use

- Early adolescent cannabis use (<16 years) is associated with increased risk of:
 - substance use disorders
 - juvenile offending
 - mental health problems
 - truancy and drop-out





Cannabis use among young people





Young people & the criminal justice system

- Offending rate among 15-19 year olds is 4 x higher than the rate for all offenders
- Males x10 more likely to be incarcerated than females
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander over-representation
 - Juvenile incarceration rate
 - non-indigenous 16 per 100,000
 - indigenous 370 per 100,000 (AIC 2010, 2011)



Aims

- To compare social and motivational aspects of initiation to, and later involvement in, cannabis use and crime by temporal order
- To briefly describe contexts of 1st cannabis use and 1st criminal offence from a qualitative perspective



Method

Two part mixed-methods research design

- Quantitative follow-up study (n=302)
- Qualitative study (n=20)

Aged between - 14 & 21 years (quantitative study)

- 14 & 24 years (qualitative study)

Recruited from: - Youth services located in the community

- NSW youth detention centres

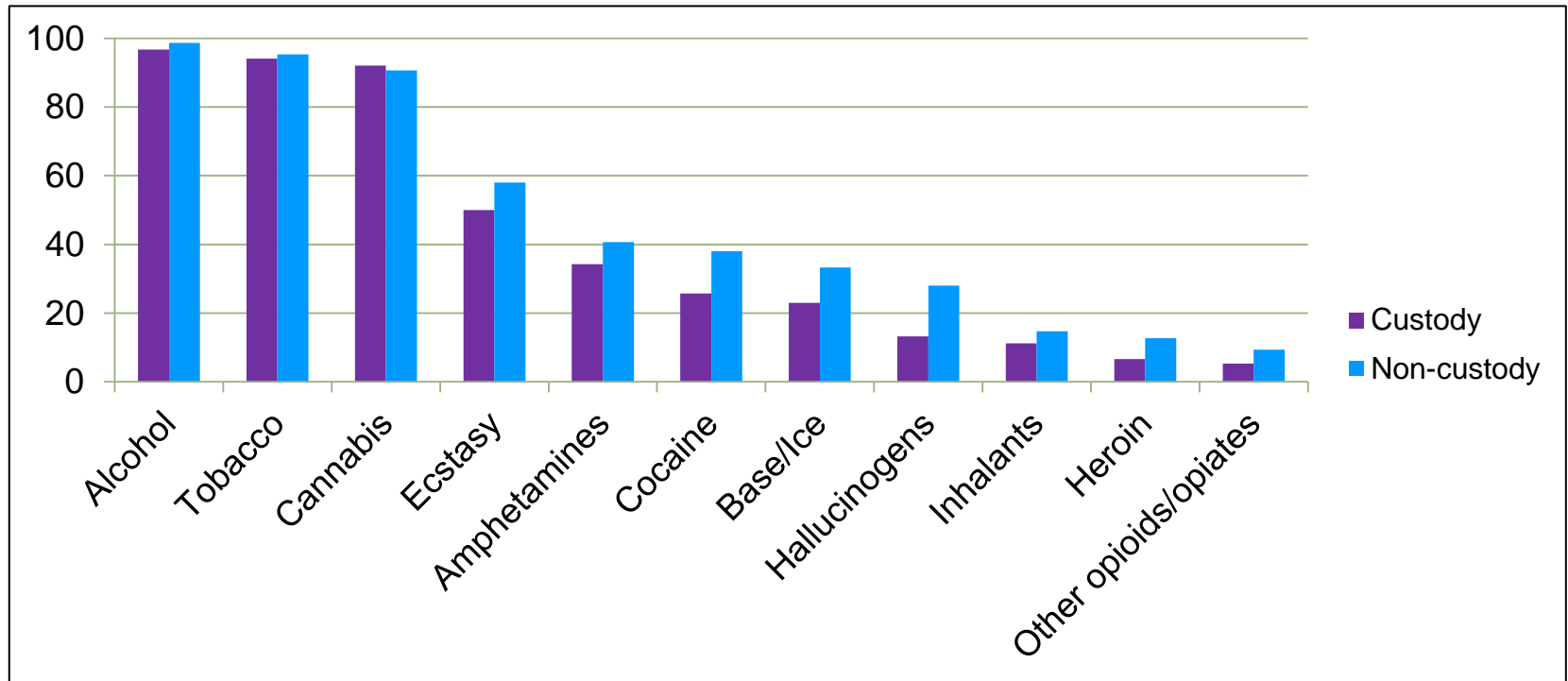
Results

Description of participants

	Total (N=302)
Male (%)	84.1
Mean age (SD)	17.0 (1.9)
Australian born (%)	88.7
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (%)	36.8
Currently in custody (%)	50.3
Median lifetime days in custody (range)	75.0 (0 days to 5 years +)
Still attending school (%)	29.1
Lives with parent(s) (%)	58.9
Government allowance – income (%)	46.7

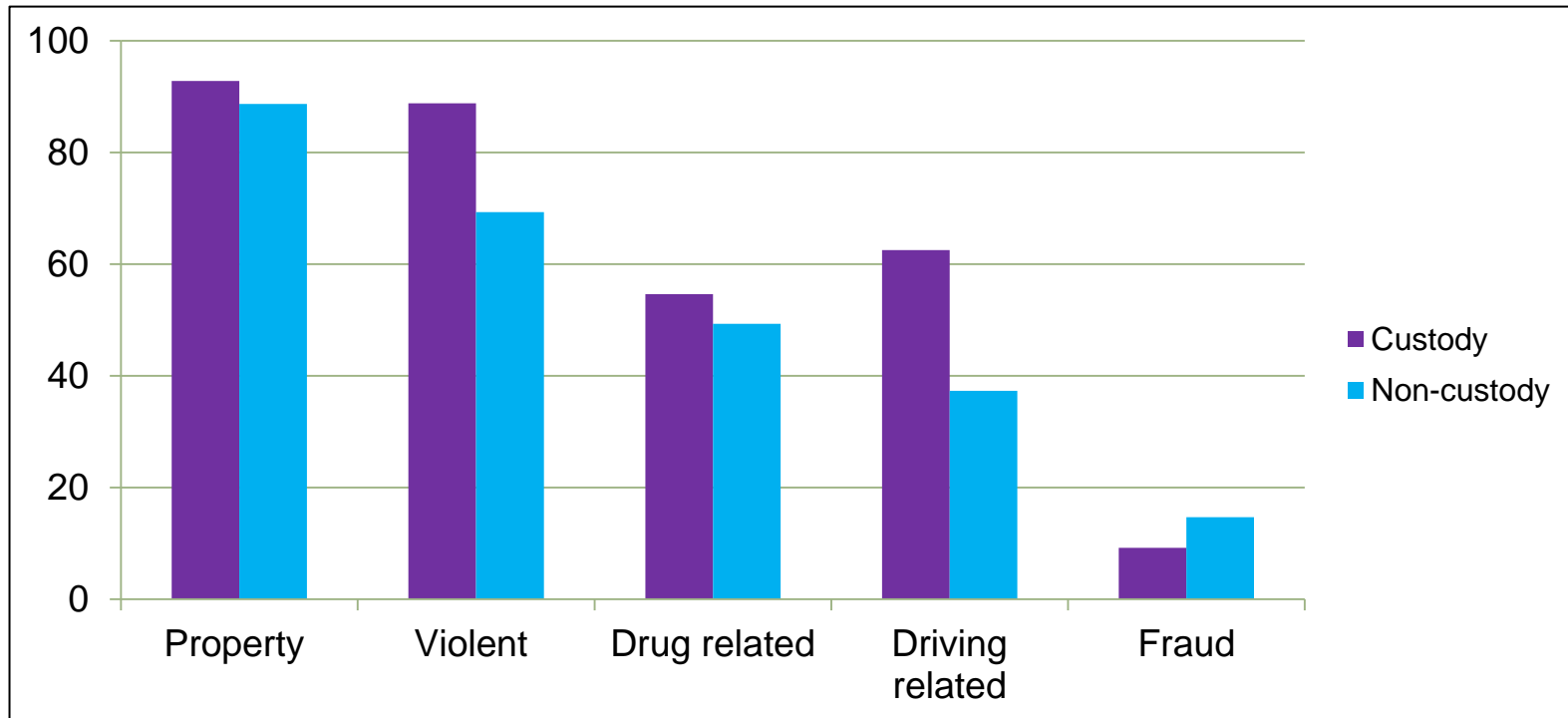
Results 2.0

Patterns of substance use (n=302)



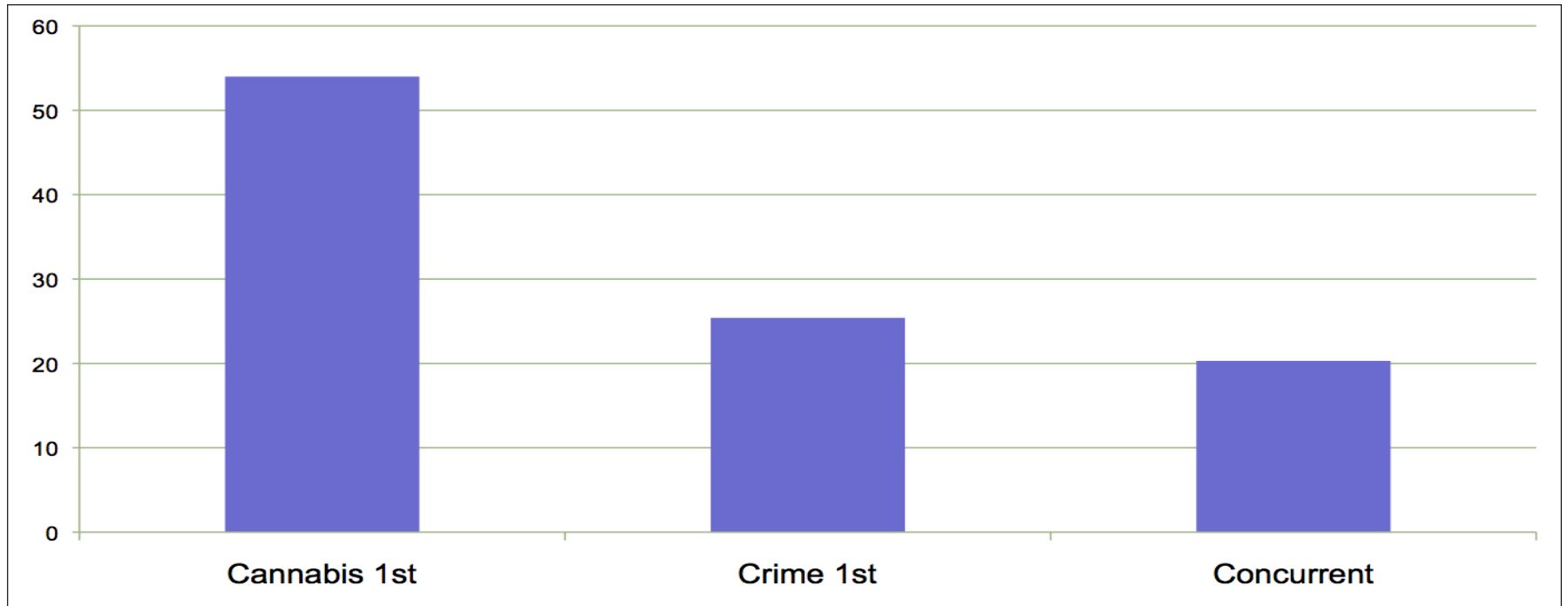
Results 3.0

Lifetime offence types (n=302)



Results 4.0

Temporal order groups (%)



early exposure to drug use

Participants were exposed to cannabis use at a young age

- 91.6% had friends who use illicit drugs
- 40.3% had siblings who use illicit drugs
- 27.5% had parents who use illicit drugs
- 32.4% offered drugs by immediate family member
- 17.9% used in front of own children and/or younger siblings

Early exposure to illicit drug use did not differ between among the cannabis 1st, crime 1st and the concurrent groups

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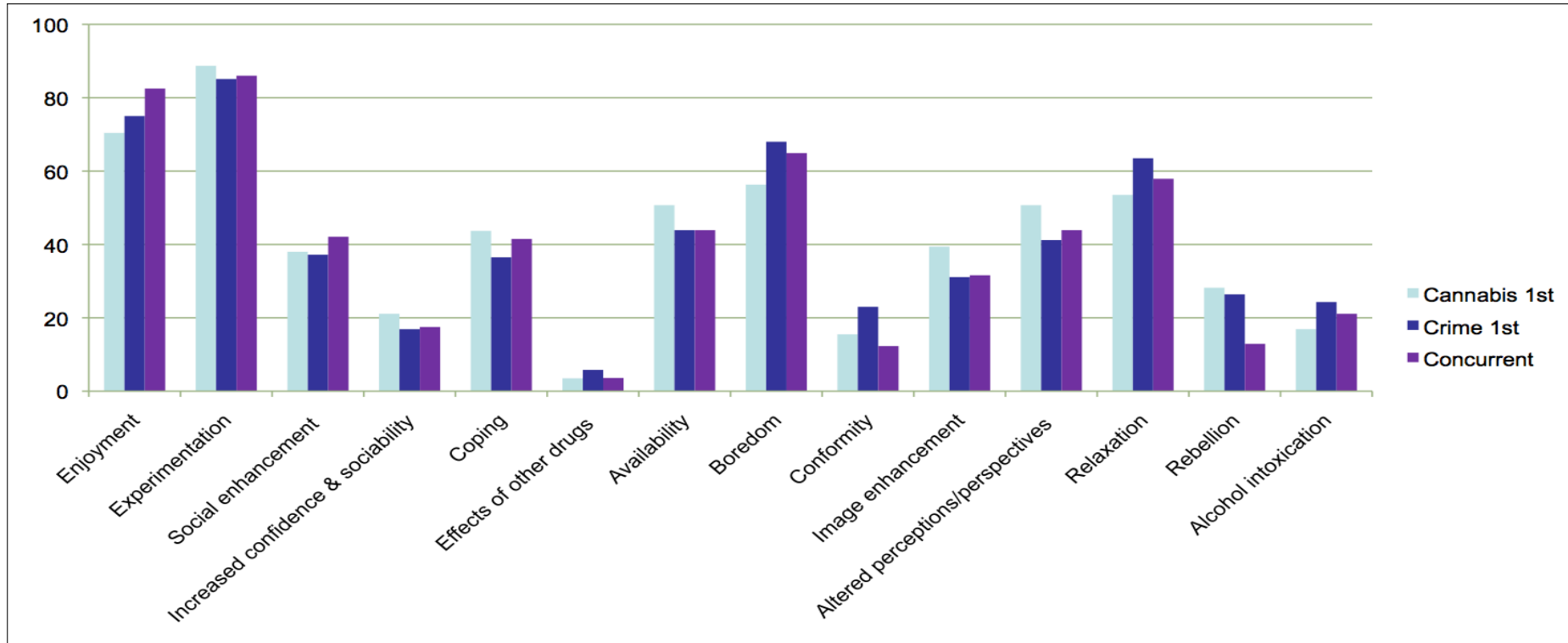
"I see they're playing Cops and Dealers again."

Early exposure to crime and the criminal justice system

- 41.1% have a history of parental incarceration
- 51.3% have a history of sibling incarceration
- 84.9% have friends who are currently or have been previously been incarcerated
- 25.2% usually live with someone who commits crime



Motivations for first cannabis use





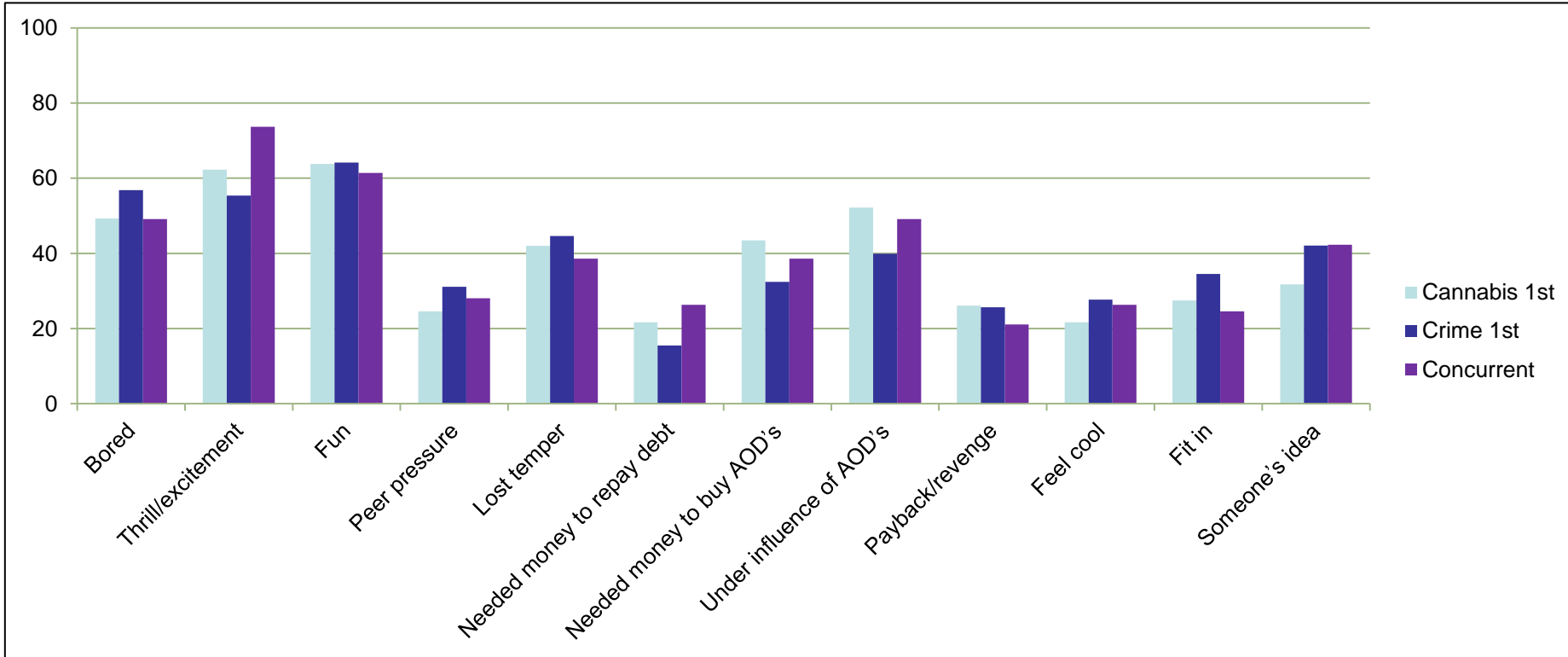
first cannabis use

Overall, no differences in measured aspects of cannabis initiation were found between the cannabis 1st, crime 1st and the concurrent groups

- Cannabis was first used with friends (75.1%) at a friends house (53.6%)
- 20% actively sought cannabis to use for the first time
- 23.6% approached a dealer to obtain cannabis for the first time



Motivations for first criminal offence



first criminal offence

Overall, there were no differences in aspects of crime initiation between the cannabis 1st, crime 1st and the concurrent groups

- Crime was first committed with friends (66.3%)
- Cannabis was the most likely drug to be used before, during or after the participant's first:
 - drug-related crime (75.7%)
 - property-related crime (58.0%)
- Alcohol was the most likely drug to be used before, during or after the participants first:
 - violent type crime (67.0%)
 - traffic-related crime (80.8%)



Overview: sequence and motivations

- Overall, there were no significant predictors of the order in which cannabis and criminal offending occurred
- This is likely to be due to the homogeneity of the sample
- Though the temporal ordering of cannabis use and crime initiation did not play a major role in differentiating the sample, the young people involved in this study initiate cannabis and other drug use and become involved in crime while very young.
- They often have immediate social environments that expose them to drug use and offending even before they become involved themselves, in effect producing a normalising and accepting attitude to such events.

Key qualitative themes

1st cannabis use

1st criminal offence

Normalisation of drug use

Creation of a reputation

Curiosity

Influence of friends/family

Encouraged to used/benefits reinforced

Necessity

Influence of friends/older siblings

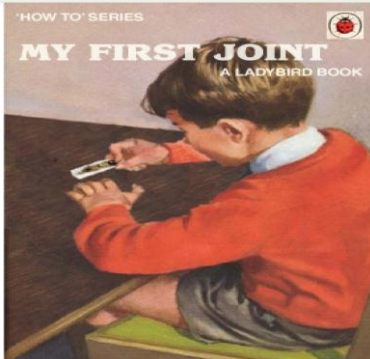
Power/adrenalin

Internal vulnerability

Funding drug use/addiction

Recruited into drug using circles

Lured into crime circles



Cannabis first: normalisation of cannabis use in family

“Seeing someone, you know, smoking a bong’s normal to me. My mum and dad, you know, used to smoke it. All my, like, I had nine brothers and sisters that used to smoke it. My mum would take me to her friend’s house, they’d be smoking it. Everyone was smoking weed in the neighbourhood, it was just normal to me” (Ella, 22)

“I was sitting there and I was like “does that taste good?” and my mum was like “here try it”, you know, she’s like “do you like that shit?” and I was like “yeah, I feel really tired right now” she used to always give it to me to go to sleep” (Mya, 16)



Normalisation of cannabis use in family

“It seemed like a very familiar thing for me..’cos I just always grown up with it..it wasn’t all that exciting, I just wanted to do what mum did”
(Becca, 21)

“I was about 9 or 10, saw him smoking again and they were only having a joint, so I had a couple of puffs..seeing him blowing smoke out of his mouth, that’s cool and shit, I want to do that”
(Koby, 18)

“They thought it would be funny for me to have one, to see how I’d react..him [my brother] and his mates were like, “ah what a hectic one”, you know, “she’s smashed”
(Sarah, 16)



Crime initiation: creating a reputation

“Spray painting on the train lines is fun, just for fun, no particular reason behind it other than to be noted. Your tag is your identity, if you see it around a lot, it kind of becomes, you know, ‘oh that guy’s cool”
(Adam, 23)

*“Cos I've got two groups of friends, one of them's like me best friends, [in] one of the groups I was the first person to steal a car, like no one in that group had stolen a car, and they're just like ‘f*** you're the only c*** that's stolen a car in this group”*
(Lawrence, 17)



Crime initiation: unplanned

“When I was younger I think the crimes that I did was more spontaneous and heat of the moment impulse, whereas I was premeditating things once I was on the harder drugs and needed bigger money”

(Danny, 22)

“It’s like your nature, it’s like instinct, I used to commit crimes without, without thinking about doing them or planned to do it, I just did it and you know, I never thought about the consequences, I used to think I was macho, drinking alcohol, thinking I was the man, on top of the world, whatever, you know what I’m saying”

(Jess, 20)



Normalisation of crime in family

*“I was like 11 and shit and me and my brothers went out to go and get this car and it was like they always taught me on my mum’s car how to steal cars, like always. They full took me out and stole a car and shit and I was like ‘f***** mad’ and ever since then I used to go steal cars” (Mya, 16)*

*“Me mum’s boyfriend, he’s in gaol for murder. He told me to burn down a house, so I did. Yeah mate, he said to me ‘oi dickhead, when I was 13 I was burning down refuges’, so I thought I would do the same thing”
(Jess, 20)*



Crime to fund drug use

“Walking the streets stealing cars, breaking into cars looking for money, looking for anything that we could pretty much sell or you know just take down to the dealers house and swap it for something”

(Becca, 21)



*“Me and my mate we went to my mates house and we’d just finished smoking drugs and we left, like oh f***, we can’t smoke anything later, how we gonna get money...well the first crime I ever committed was a robbery in company and...it was, yeah, to get drugs, you just get the idea in the back of your head and you suggest it to your mate and he’s like, ‘oh yeah sounds alright, I’ll give it a go”* (Koby, 18)

Overview: qualitative themes

- The young participants came from extremely socio-economically and emotionally impoverished backgrounds where cannabis use was normalised and criminal offending and incarceration common
- In their descriptions, the immediate social and environmental influences seem to play a stronger role in cannabis initiation than first involvement in crime



Implications

- While temporal order did not prove significant, the links of early crime and cannabis use to family and social environments where cannabis use and crime were ‘normative’ are clear enough. There is a need for:
 - general and targeted early interventions that address social inequality, social exclusion and physical settings that provide little that is positive, fun and stimulating with which to engage
 - support of ‘families’
 - positive and realistic role models and mentors, and the challenging of norms positive to drug use and crime