

INFORMATION BULLETIN

DRUG USE AND VEHICLE CRIME -
AN ANALYSIS OF DUMA DATA ON
OFFENDERS ARRESTED FOR
MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

DECEMBER 2005

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CARS 

comprehensive auto-theft research system



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Of the detainees who participated in the DUMA study between January 2003 and December 2004, approximately 7% were arrested for a motor vehicle theft offence. Comparison between these individuals and those arrested for other offences revealed a number of distinguishing characteristics.

MVT offenders were charged with nearly twice as many offences recording an average of 4.6 charges compared to 2.6 for other offenders. Over 40% of MVT offenders recorded five or more charges compared to 16% of other offenders. The MVT offenders were also younger at the time of their first arrest with an average age of 17 years (compared to 19 years) and were twice as likely to have been imprisoned in the past 12 months (39% had been imprisoned compared to 18%).

Level of education attained also differed among the two groups. The majority (56%) of MVT offenders reported Year 10 or earlier as their highest level of education completed (compared to 48% of other offenders) and less than one in five reported that they were working full-time (14% compared to 27%).

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of MVT offenders reported receiving a government benefit (compared to 66% of other offenders) and one-quarter (24%) reported receiving income from drug-related crime, which was double that of other offenders (11%).

Urinalysis was available for 83% of the sample. Nine out of ten (91%) MVT offenders tested positive to at least one drug and nearly six out of ten (59%) tested positive to two or more drug types. This is a much higher proportion compared to the other offenders, of which three-quarters tested positive to at least one drug and two out of five (41%) tested positive to two or more drug types.

Cannabis was the most frequent drug that both offender groups tested positive to (69% for MVT offenders and 57% for other offenders) followed by amphetamines (52% compared to 32%) and benzodiazepines (34% compared to 24%).

Of those who provided a urine sample, nearly half (47%) of MVT offenders reported that they received income from a crime related source in the past 30 days compared to 23% of other offenders. Furthermore, 63% of MVT offenders who reported receiving income from a crime-related source tested positive to amphetamines (compared to 52%).

MVT offenders were nearly twice as likely to report that most to all of the offences they had committed in the past 12 months were drug related (42% compared to 24% of other offenders) and of those who reported that half or more of their crime was drug-related, 65% tested positive to amphetamines.

The findings of the study indicate that MVT offenders have a higher incidence of drug use than other offenders and show a strong link between drug use and criminal activity. This suggests that current interventions which are targeted toward MVT offenders may benefit from the incorporation of a drug and alcohol counselling component. More detailed research would be useful in order to determine what factors contribute to the differences between the two groups.

INTRODUCTION

The Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program is a partnership between the Australian Institute of Criminology, State Police Services and local researchers and involves the measurement of drug use among people recently apprehended by police. The data from DUMA is used to examine the relationship between drugs and property and violent crime, monitor patterns of drug use across time, and help assess the need for drug treatment amongst the offender population. Information is collected by trained, local staff on a quarterly basis in seven sites across Australia. The sites are; Adelaide, Bankstown, Brisbane, East Perth, Elizabeth, Parramatta and Southport. Data from the project is based on interviews with detainees who have been arrested in the previous 48 hours and are being held in custody. In addition to the completion of a questionnaire, participants are asked to provide a urine sample, which is tested for six main classes of drugs. Participation is entirely voluntary and detainees' responses to the questionnaire and urine test results are confidential.

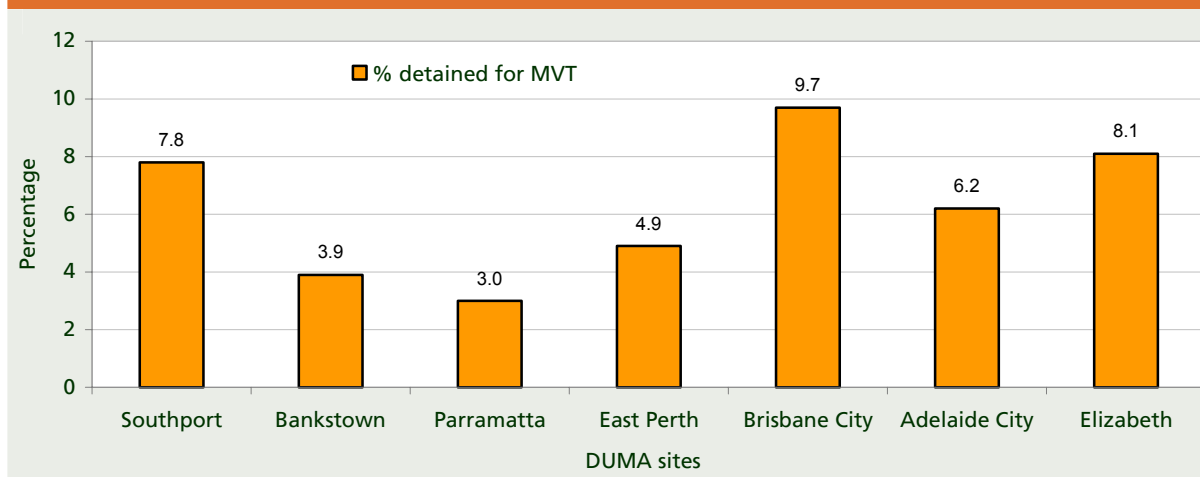
It is important to note that this method of sampling is not representative of the offender population. A number of States and Territories do not participate in the DUMA program so the study cannot provide an accurate reflection of all arrestees in Australia. Likewise, the population of offenders interviewed is influenced by police practices, interview schedules and set criteria, which may exclude certain offenders.

This report has a specific focus on motor vehicle theft (MVT) and contains both self-report and urinalysis data from participating adult detainees interviewed in all sites between January 2003 and December 2004. It provides a summary of the characteristics of detainees apprehended for a MVT offence and compares these characteristics to detainees apprehended for other offences. An individual was classified as a motor vehicle theft offender if either 'theft of a motor vehicle' (for the purpose of profit) or 'illegal use of a motor vehicle' was listed as a charge for that individual. Included is a comparison of self-reported drug use and criminal activity, prior contact with the criminal justice system and drug related crime. Around 83 per cent of the detainees provided a urine sample.

FINDINGS

A total of 7,263 adult detainees were interviewed between January 2003 and December 2004 and of these, 481 (7%) were arrested by police for a MVT offence. Figure 1 shows the proportion of detainees apprehended for a MVT offence within each site. Approximately 10% of apprehensions at the Brisbane site involved MVT while Parramatta recorded the lowest proportion of MVT apprehensions (3%).

Figure 1. Percentage of adult detainees apprehended for a motor vehicle theft offence



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Summary Profile

The majority of the detainees included in the study were male (84%) with a slightly higher proportion noted for those apprehended for MVT (87%). Table 1 below provides a summary profile of the two groups of offenders. It shows that:

- The average age of detainees apprehended for MVT was 27 years compared to 30 years for those charged with other offences¹.
- There was an over-representation of Indigenous detainees (15% of MVT offenders and 13% of other offenders).
- Around one-third of MVT offenders were living in public housing compared to one-quarter for other offenders.
- Just over one-quarter (27%) of other offenders were working full-time compared to 14% of MVT offenders.
- A higher proportion of MVT offenders were receiving some form of welfare or government benefit (72% compared to 66%).
- MVT offenders were two to three times more likely to have received income in the past 30 days from illegal activity. A total of 14% of MVT offenders received income from shoplifting (compared to 8% for other offenders), 24% received income from drug related crime (compared to 11%) and 32% received income from other illegal activities, such as burglary or robbery (compared to 11%).
- A higher proportion of MVT offenders reported that they had been arrested in the past year (68% compared to 55%) with around 40% having been imprisoned over the same period compared to 18% for other offenders.
- Around one in four (26%) detainees apprehended for MVT indicated that they had gambled at least once a week in the past 30 days compared to one in five other detainees.

¹ The other offender group includes 220 offenders (3.2%) who reported being arrested for a MVT offence on another occasion in the 12 months prior to their participation in the DUMA study.

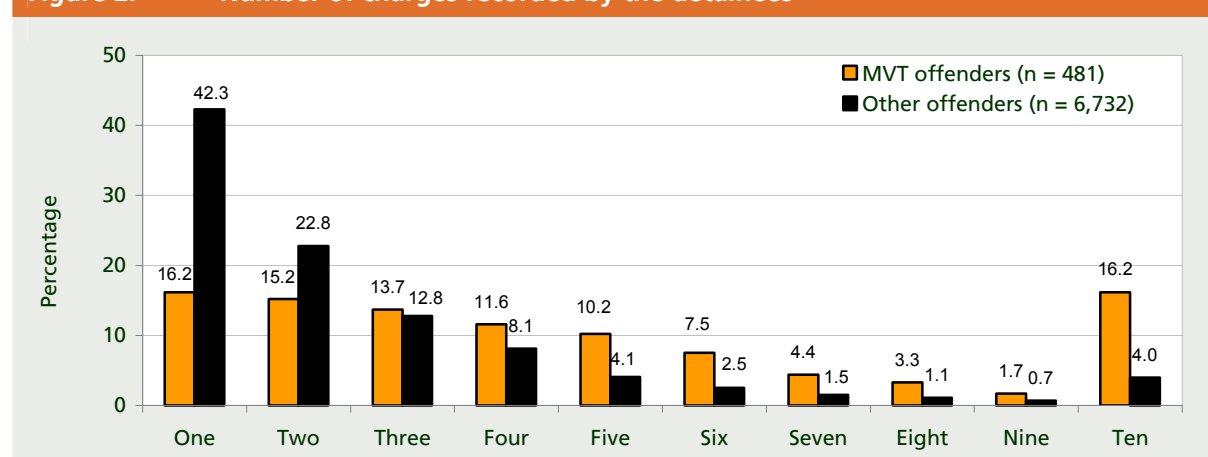
Table 1. Summary profile of detainees interviewed, January 2003 - December 2004

| | MVT Offenders | Other Offenders |
|--|---------------|-----------------|
| Number interviewed | 481 | 6,782 |
| Provided urine sample | 84.4% | 82.7% |
| Male | 86.7% | 83.9% |
| Mean Age | 27 years | 30 years |
| Indigenous | 15.4% | 13.2% |
| Highest level of education completed - Year 10 or less | 55.9% | 48.2% |
| Living in public housing | 32.4% | 23.7% |
| Income in past 30 days from: | | |
| - working full time | 14.4% | 26.8% |
| - working part time | 24.9% | 22.3% |
| - welfare/government benefit | 72.1% | 66.4% |
| - shoplifting | 14.0% | 8.4% |
| - drug dealing/other drug crime | 23.9% | 10.8% |
| - other illegal activities | 32.1% | 10.5% |
| Previously arrested in past 12 months | 67.5% | 55.4% |
| Imprisoned in past 12 months | 39.1% | 18.0% |
| Gambling at least once a week | 25.5% | 20.4% |

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Figure 2 shows the number of charges the offenders were detained for. MVT offenders were more likely to record multiple charges compared to other offenders. Two in five (43%) MVT offenders recorded five or more charges with 16% recording 10 charges. In comparison, 14% of other offenders recorded five or more charges while only 4% recorded 10 charges.

Figure 2. Number of charges recorded by the detainees



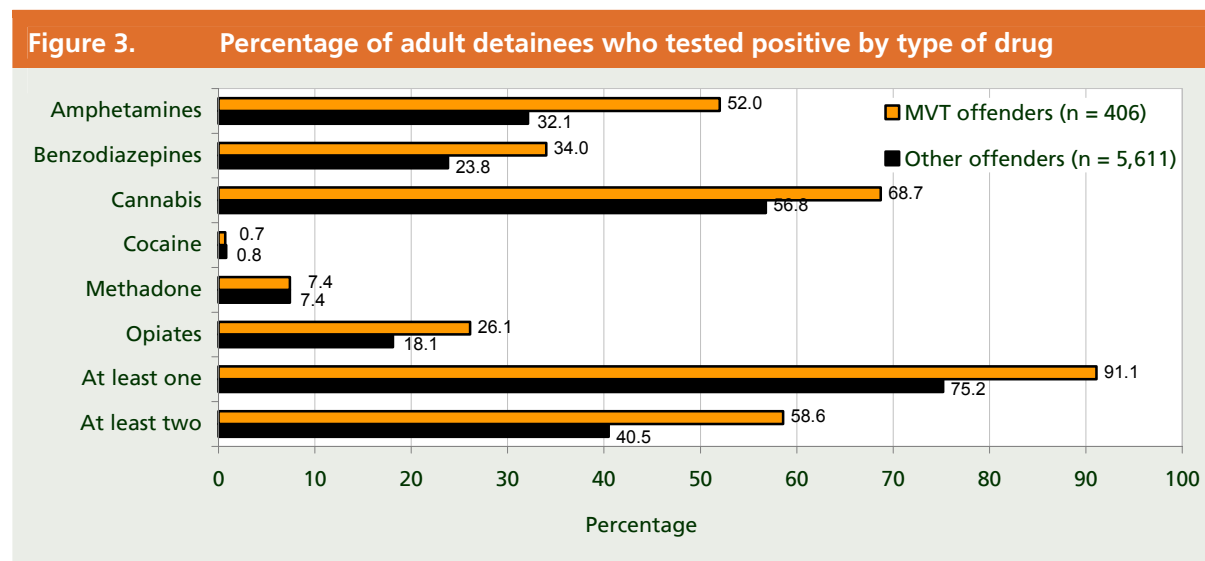
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

The most common charges that the other offenders were detained for included; *Offences against justice procedures, government security and government operations* (66%), *Theft and related offences* (37%), *Road traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences* (35%), *Illicit drug offences* (21%), *Deception and related offences* (19%) and *Acts intended to cause injury* (19%).

Urinalysis

This section provides a summary of the types and quantity of drugs that were recorded through urinalysis. The samples are screened for six types of drugs. These are; amphetamines, benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, methadone and opiates. If the drug or any of its by-products are detected at the cut-off levels set out in the Australian Standard standard 4308, a positive test is recorded. Of the detainees included in the study, 84% of the MVT offenders and 83% of the other offenders provided a urine sample for testing. Figure 3 outlines the types of drugs that the MVT and other offenders tested positive to. It shows that:

- Approximately nine out of ten detainees with a MVT apprehension tested positive to at least one drug and nearly six out of ten tested positive to two or more drug types. In contrast, three-quarters of the other offenders tested positive to at least one drug and four out of ten tested positive to two or more drug types.
- The most common drug that both offender groups tested positive to was cannabis (69% for the MVT offenders and 57% for the other offenders), followed by amphetamines (52% compared to 32%), benzodiazepines (34% compared to 24%) and opiates (26% compared to 18%). For each of these drug types, the MVT offenders were significantly more likely to return a positive test result than detainees apprehended for other offences (cannabis, $t(3466)=3.86$, $p<.001$; amphetamines, $t(2010)=5.07$, $p<.001$; benzodiazepines, $t(1470)=2.64$, $p<.005$; opiates, $t(1120)=2.00$, $p<.05$).



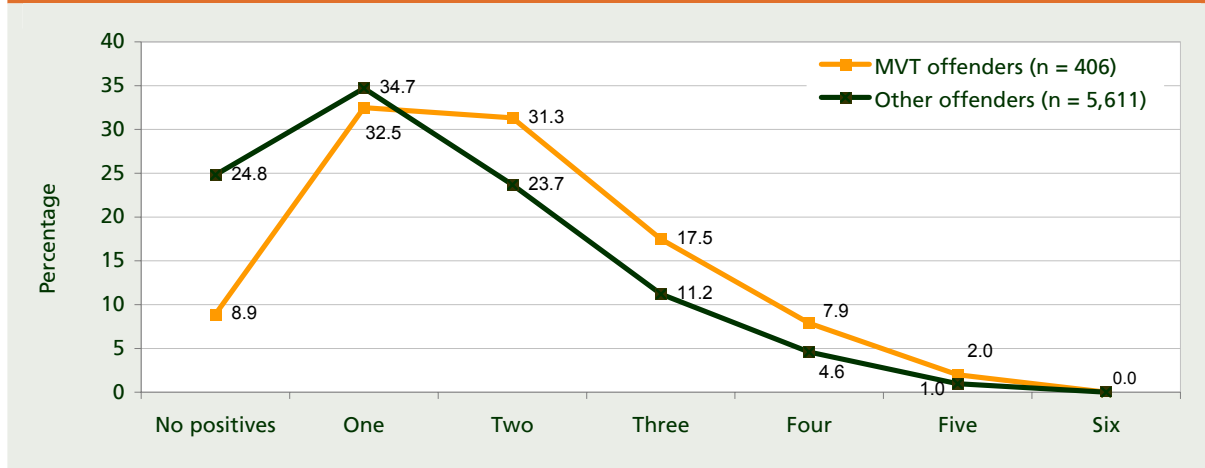
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Note: Due to the low number of detainees who tested positive to cocaine and the same proportion of MVT and Other offenders testing positive to methadone, further analyses by drug type will not include these two drug types.

The following graph shows the number of drug types that each offender group tested positive to. It shows that:

- One in ten of the detainees apprehended for MVT and one-quarter of other detainees did not record a positive test result.
- In comparison to the other detainees, a significantly higher proportion of MVT offenders tested positive to two or more types of drugs (59% compared to 41%, $t(2506)=5.38$, $p<.001$).

Figure 4. Number of classes of drugs that detainees tested positive to



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

As the above figure shows, the majority of the MVT offenders tested positive to more than one drug. Table 2 looks solely at the MVT offenders and outlines the number of drugs that they tested positive to by the type of drug used. It shows that:

- Of the MVT detainees who tested positive to cannabis, 30% tested positive to one drug only.
- Of those who tested positive to amphetamines, over 40% tested positive to amphetamines plus one other drug and a further quarter tested positive to amphetamines plus two other drugs.
- Two in five MVT detainees who tested positive to opiates tested positive to opiates plus two other drugs and 26% tested positive to opiates plus three other drugs.

Table 2. Number of classes of drugs the MVT offenders tested positive to by type of drug

| Number of drugs | Amphetamines % | Benzodiazepines % | Cannabis % | Opiates % |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| One only | 17.1 | 2.9 | 29.7 | 8.5 |
| Two only | 42.7 | 29.7 | 34.8 | 17.9 |
| Three only | 24.6 | 39.1 | 21.5 | 40.6 |
| Four only | 11.8 | 22.5 | 11.1 | 25.5 |
| Five only | 3.8 | 5.8 | 2.9 | 7.5 |
| Six only | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Number | 211 | 138 | 279 | 106 |

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Table 3 outlines the drug combinations that the MVT offenders tested positive to. It shows that:

- Of the 138 MVT detainees who tested positive to benzodiazepines, nearly three-quarters (71%) tested positive to cannabis, 60% tested positive to amphetamines and 50% tested positive to opiates.
- Of the 106 detainees who tested positive to opiates, over half tested positive to amphetamines, benzodiazepines and cannabis.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation between the types of drugs the MVT offenders tested positive to

| Drug category | Amphetamines % | Benzodiazepines % | Cannabis % | Opiates % |
|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| Amphetamines | 100.0 | 60.1 | 52.0 | 53.8 |
| Benzodiazepines | 39.3 | 100.0 | 35.1 | 65.1 |
| Cannabis | 68.7 | 71.0 | 100.0 | 67.9 |
| Opiates | 27.0 | 50.0 | 25.8 | 100.0 |
| Number | 211 | 138 | 279 | 106 |

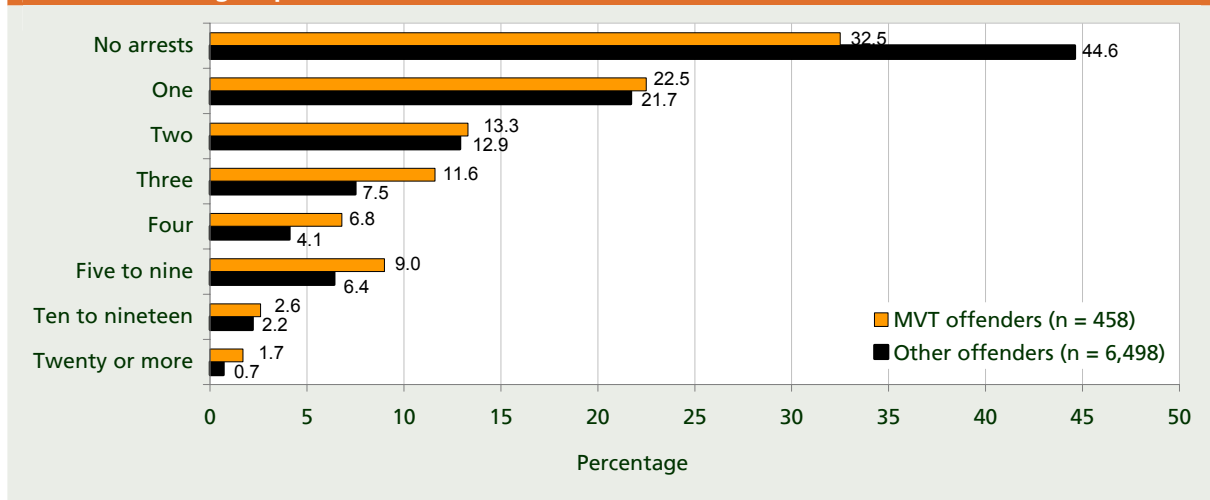
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Drug use (urinalysis) and offending

This section examines the offending history of the MVT and other detainees including an analysis of the detainees age at first arrest and frequency of arrest in the past 12 months. It also looks at frequency of imprisonment in the past 12 months and crime related income and compares these variables with the detainees' urinalysis results. Figure 5 highlights the number of times the detainees reported being arrested in the past 12 months. It shows that:

- Less than one-third (33%) of the MVT offenders reported that they had not been arrested during the past 12 months compared to nearly half (45%) of the other offenders.
- One in five MVT offenders were arrested four or more times over the period compared to 13% of other offenders.

Figure 5. Self reported frequency of arrest during the past 12 months by offender group

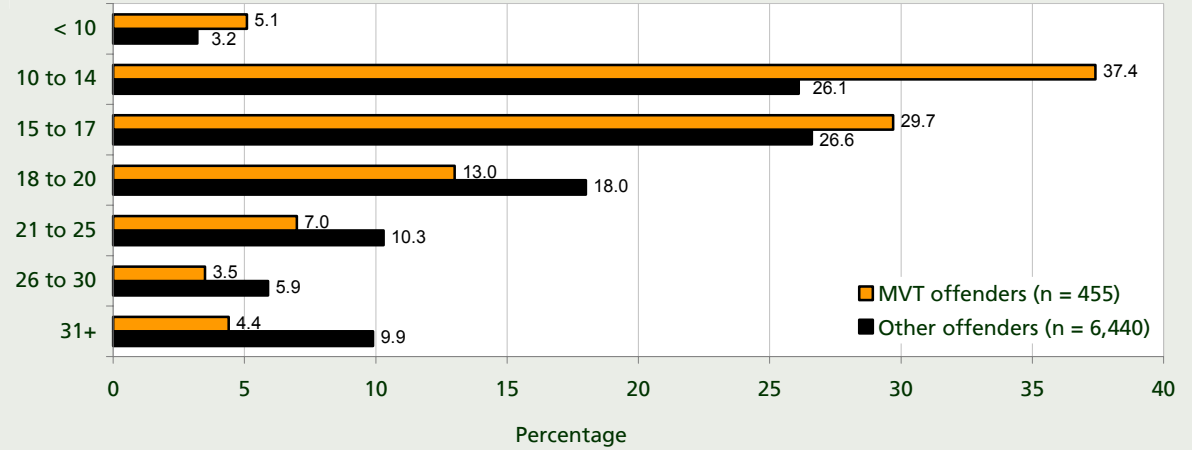


Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Detainees were asked how old they were on the occasion of their first ever arrest, regardless of whether they were charged for the offence(s) or not. Figure 6 shows that:

- MVT offenders were more likely to be juveniles at the time of their first arrest with over 40% aged 14 or younger at first arrest, compared to 29% for other offenders.

Figure 6. Self reported age at first arrest by offender group



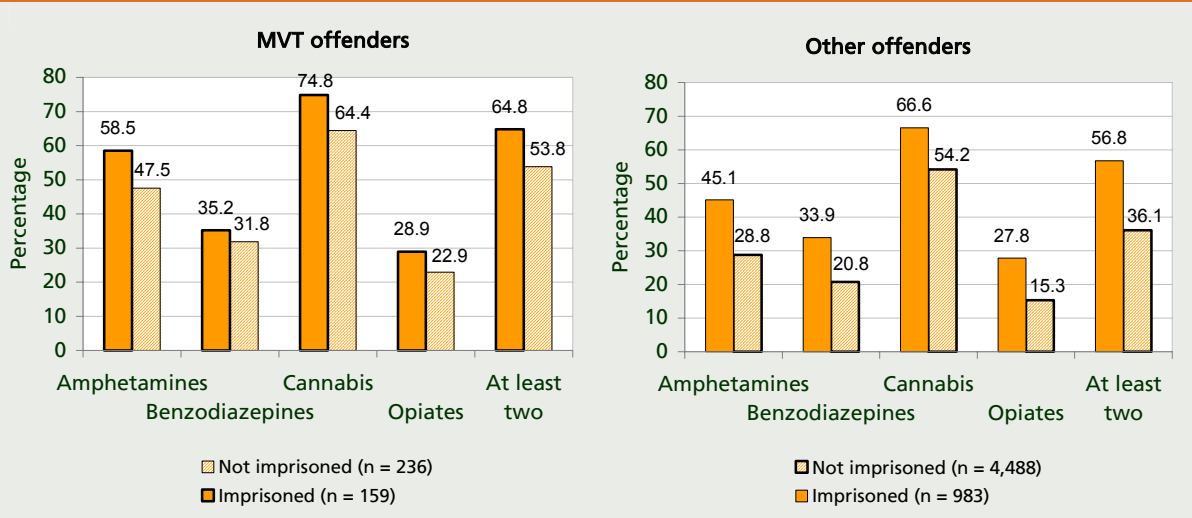
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Note: 368 detainees did not report how old they were at the time of their first arrest. While detainees cannot be arrested before the age of 10 in South Australia, detainees were allowed to report any age when their first arrest occurred.

Of the detainees who provided a urine sample, two in five MVT offenders and around one-in five (18%) other offenders reported that they had been imprisoned during the past 12 months. Figure 7 details the types of drugs the detainees tested positive to based on whether or not they had spent time in prison. It shows that:

- A significantly higher percentage of MVT detainees who had been imprisoned tested positive to amphetamines (59% compared to 45% of other detainees who had been imprisoned, $t(1139)=3.15, p<.005$) and cannabis (75% compared to 67%, $t(1139)=2.04, p<.005$).

Figure 7. Percentage of detainees testing positive by whether they had been imprisoned during the past 12 months

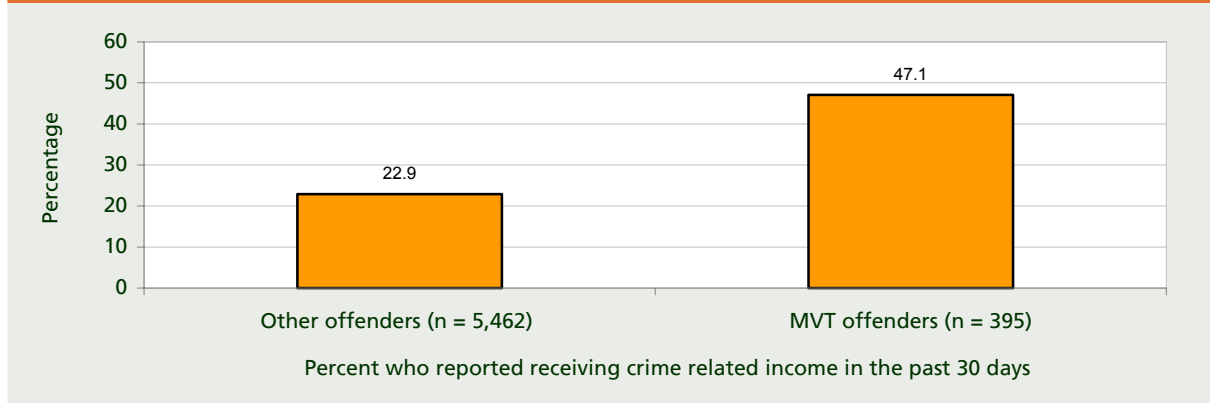


Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Detainees were asked whether they had received income from a crime related source in the past 30 days. Figure 8 shows that:

- Of those who provided a urine sample, nearly half (47%) of MVT offenders reported that they received income from a crime related source in the past 30 days compared to 23% of other offenders.

Figure 8. Percentage of detainees testing positive who reported receiving income from a crime related source in the past 30 days

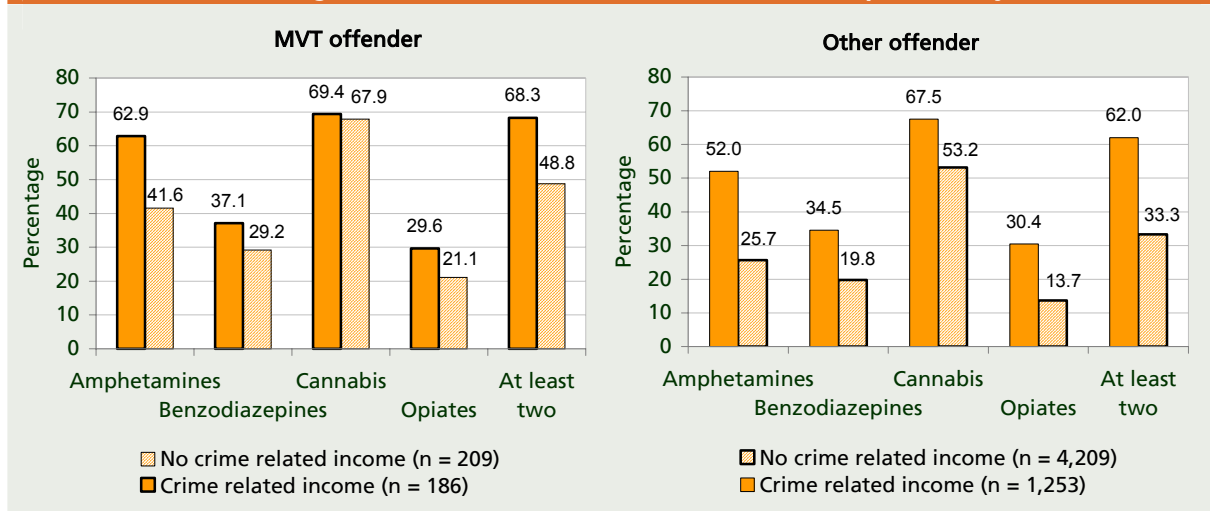


Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Figure 9 details the types of drugs the detainees tested positive to based on whether or not they had reported receiving crime-related income. It shows that:

- Of those who provided a urine sample, over three in five (63%) MVT offenders and over half (52%) of the other offenders who received income from a crime related source, tested positive to amphetamines. Of those who did not receive income from an illegal source, around two in five (42%) MVT offenders and one-quarter of other offenders tested positive to amphetamines.
- The proportion of detainees who tested positive to any drug was lowest amongst those without a MVT apprehension and who did not report receiving income from a crime related source.

Figure 9. Percentage of detainees testing positive by whether they had reported receiving income from a crime related source in the past 30 days



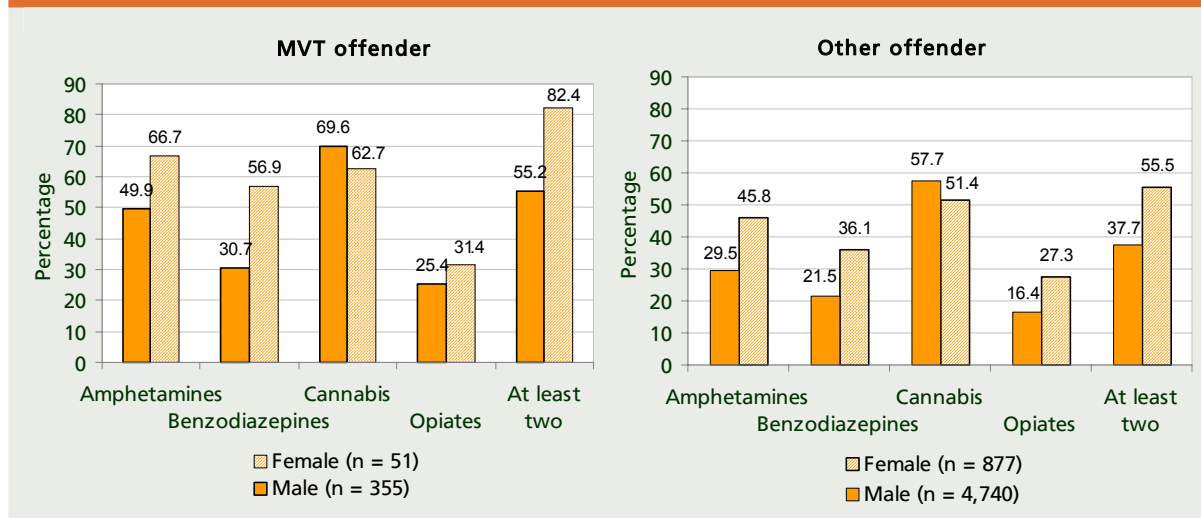
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Drug use (urinalysis) and socio-demographic characteristics

This section compares detainees' urinalysis results with selected social and demographic characteristics including sex, age, employment status and level of education. Figure 10 shows that:

- Regardless of whether or not detainees had a MVT apprehension, a higher proportion of females tested positive to amphetamines, benzodiazepines and opiates, than males. Of those with a MVT apprehension, two-thirds of females tested positive to amphetamines compared to half of males. Of the other offenders, 46% of females tested positive to amphetamines compared to 30% of males.
- Of the detainees who tested positive to two or more drugs, 82% were female MVT offenders and 55% were male MVT offenders while of the other offenders, 56% were female and 38% were male.

Figure 10. Percentage of detainees testing positive by sex



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

The age profile of the detainees who provided a urine sample are displayed below. A larger proportion of MVT detainees were aged 18 to 20 years (24% compared to 16% for other detainees) and 26 to 30 years (24% compared to 19%).

Table 4. Number of drugs the MVT offenders tested positive to by type of drug

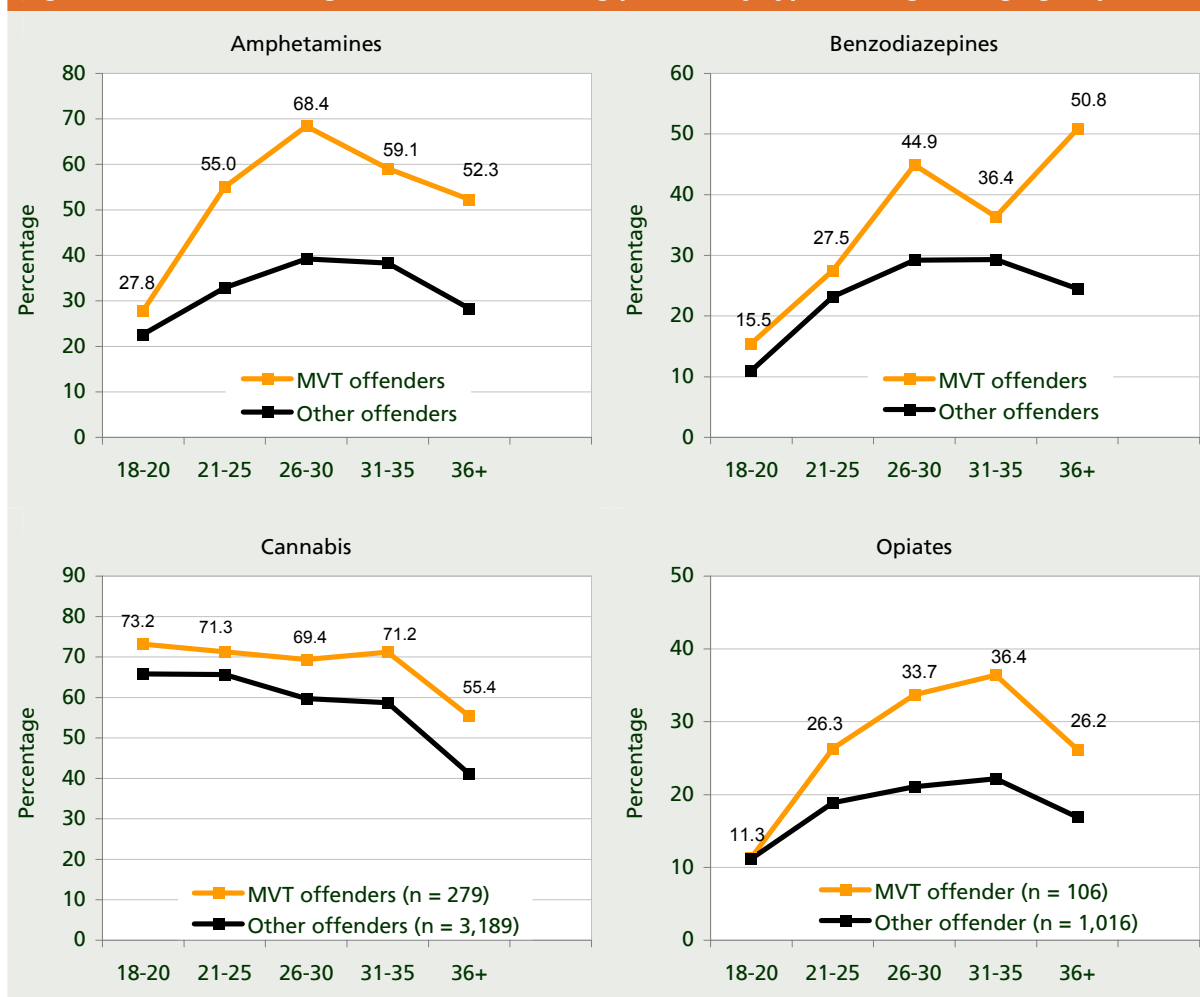
| Age | MVT offenders | | Other offenders | |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| 18 to 20 | 97 | 23.9 | 878 | 15.6 |
| 21 to 25 | 80 | 19.7 | 1,279 | 22.8 |
| 26 to 30 | 98 | 24.1 | 1,064 | 18.9 |
| 31 to 35 | 66 | 16.3 | 857 | 15.3 |
| 36+ | 65 | 16.0 | 1,540 | 27.4 |
| Total | 406 | 100.0 | 5,618 | 100.0 |

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Figure 11 shows the percentage of detainees who tested positive by drug type and age. As shown:

- Benzodiazepine usage was highest amongst MVT offenders aged over 35 (51% compared to 25% for other offenders in the same age group).
- For both offender groups, a lower percentage of detainees aged 18 to 20 years tested positive to amphetamines, benzodiazepines and opiates compared to other age groups.
- Amphetamines use was highest amongst MVT offenders aged 26 to 30 years (68% compared to 39% for other offenders in the same age group).

Figure 11. Percentage of detainees testing positive by type of drug and age group



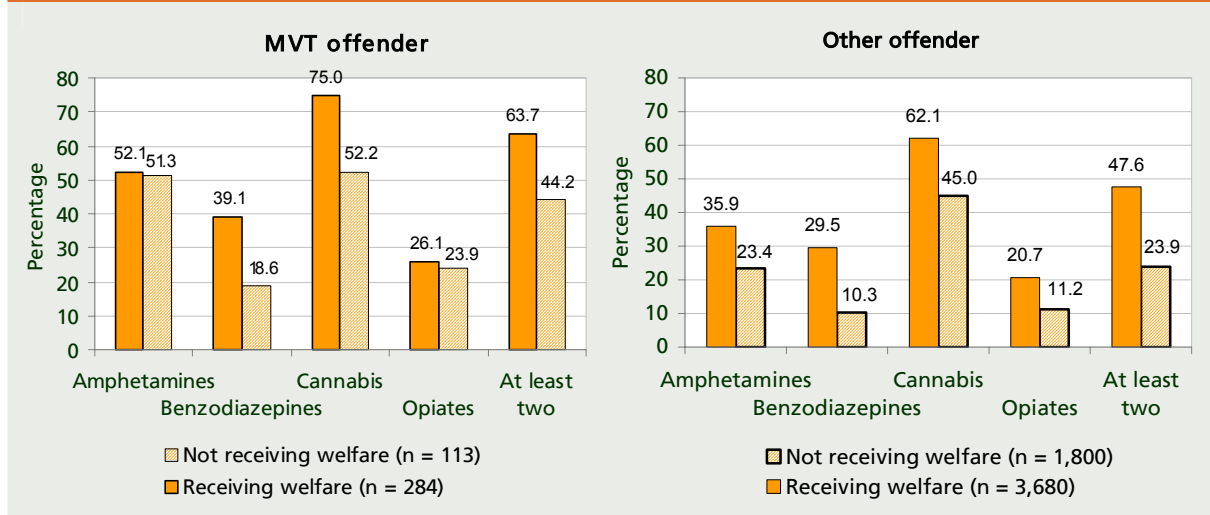
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Detainees were asked to report on their source of income and whether they had received some form of welfare or government benefit in the past 30 days. A total of 397 MVT offenders and 5,473 other detainees provided a urine sample and reported on their source of income. Figure 12 shows that:

- Cannabis usage was highest amongst MVT offenders who reported receiving some form of welfare (75% compared to 62% for other offenders who reported receiving welfare).
- For both offender groups, a higher percentage of detainees on welfare tested positive to at least two drugs, compared to offenders who did not report receiving a welfare benefit.

- Amongst MVT offenders, those on welfare were twice as likely to test positive to benzodiazepines (39% compared to 19% for MVT offenders who did not report receiving a welfare benefit).

Figure 12. Percentage of detainees testing positive by whether they were receiving some form of government benefit in the past 30 days



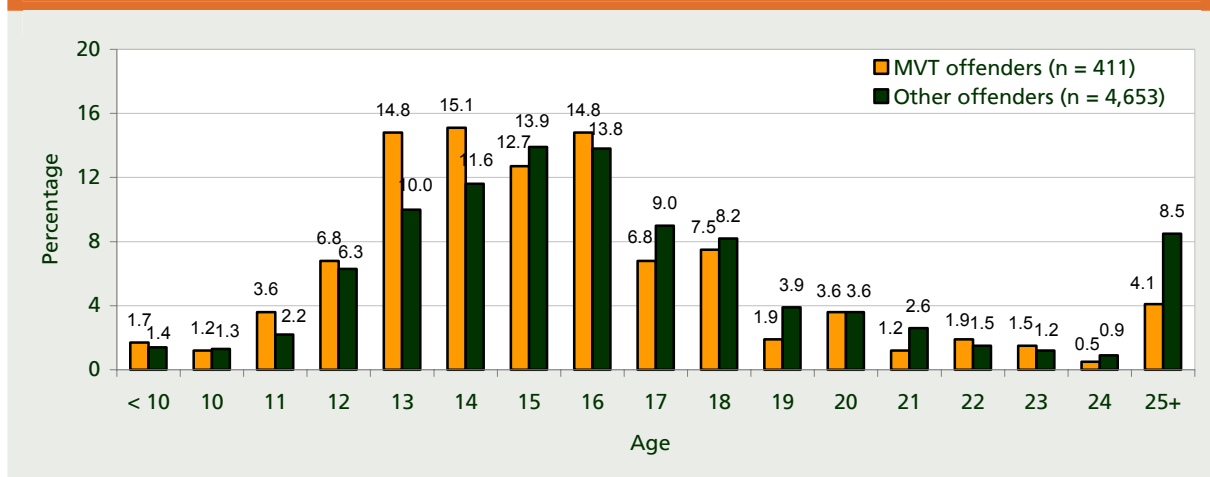
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Self reported drug use and drug related crime

Detainees were asked at what age they first began to use any drug on a regular basis (three or more days per week). As Figure 13 shows:

- MVT offenders began using any drug on a regular basis at an earlier age than other offenders. Over half (56%) of the MVT offenders reported using drugs regularly by age 15 compared to 47% for other offenders.

Figure 13. Age at first self-reported regular use



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

The proportion of detainees who reported ever being involved in the manufacture, transportation or selling of illegal drugs is detailed in Table 5 and Figure 14. They show that:

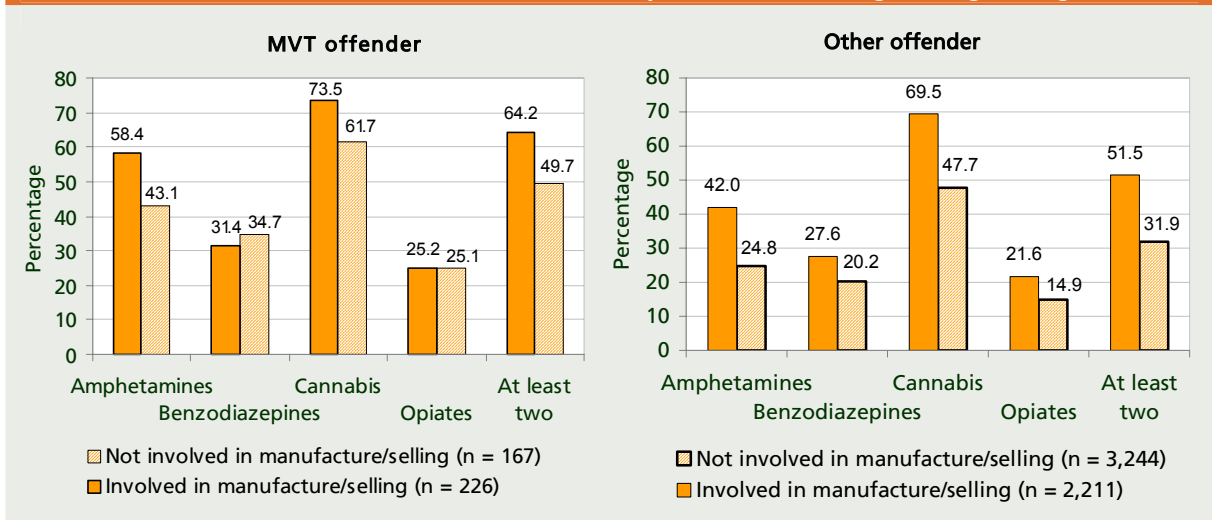
- Over half (56%) of the MVT offenders reported that they had ever been involved in the manufacture, transportation or selling of illegal drugs, compared to 39% for other offenders.
- Amphetamines use was highest amongst MVT offenders who reported being involved in the manufacture, transportation or selling of illegal drugs (58%)
- MVT offenders were also more likely to test positive to multiple drugs (64% compared to 52% of other detainees who reported involvement in the sale or manufacture of illegal drugs).

Table 5. Proportion of detainees who reported ever being involved in the manufacture, transportation or selling of illegal drugs

| | MVT offenders | | Other offenders | |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| No | 203 | 44.1 | 3,954 | 60.6 |
| Yes | 257 | 55.9 | 2,576 | 39.4 |
| Total | 460 | 100.0 | 6,530 | 100.0 |

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Figure 14. Percentage of detainees testing positive by whether they reported ever being involved in the manufacture, transportation or selling of illegal drugs

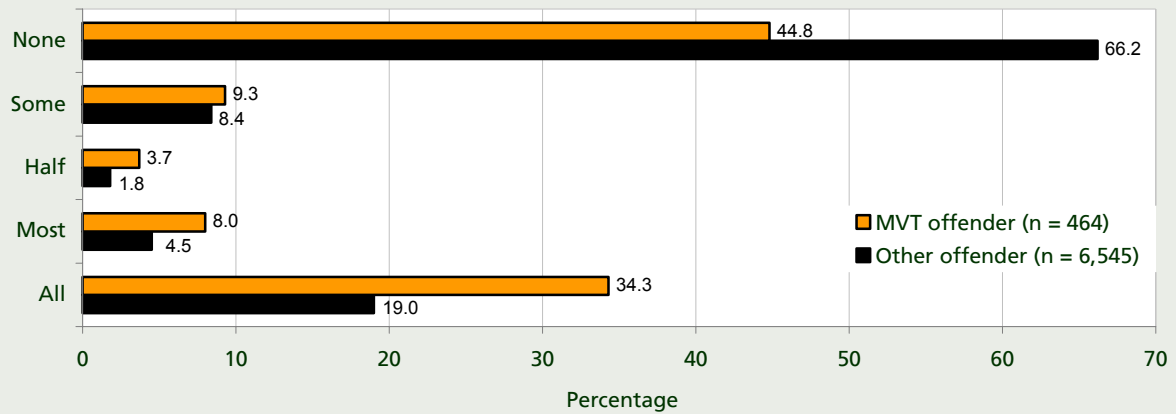


Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Detainees were asked to estimate what proportion of the offences committed in the past 12 months were drug related. Figure 15 shows that:

- Less than half (45%) of the MVT offenders reported that none of their offending over the past 12 months was drug related compared to two-thirds of other offenders.
- MVT offenders were nearly twice as likely to report that most to all of the offences committed were drug related (42% compared to 24% of other offenders).

Figure 15. Proportion of offences committed in the past 12 months that were drug related

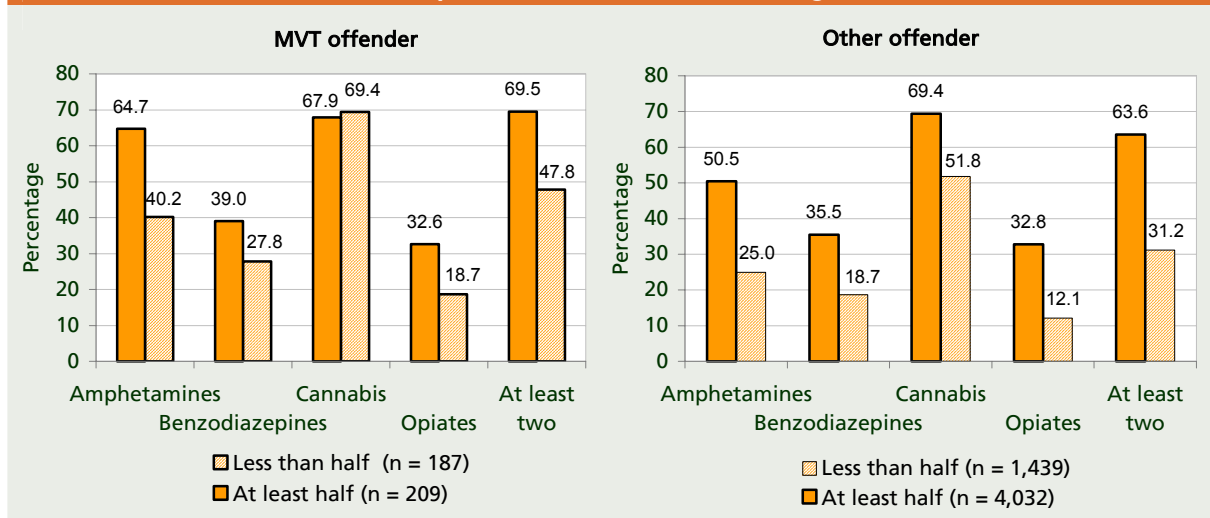


Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].

Figure 16 shows the percentage of detainees who tested positive according to how much of their offending in the past 12 months was drug-related. As shown:

- Amphetamines use was highest amongst MVT offenders who reported that half or more of the crime committed in the past year was drug-related (65%)
- Both the MVT and other offenders who reported that at least half of their offending was drug-related were more likely to test positive to multiple drugs (70% and 64% compared to 48% of MVT offenders and 31% of other offenders who reported less than half of their offending as being drug-related).

Figure 16. Percentage of detainees testing positive by the proportion of offences committed in the past 12 months that were drug related



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUMA Collection, 2003-2004 [Computer File].



DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that MVT offenders are more likely to have earlier and more entrenched contact with the criminal justice system. MVT offenders recorded higher rates of imprisonment, were more likely to earn income from illegal activity and to perceive their involvement in crime as drug-related. They were also younger, less educated and more likely to be living on welfare than other offenders in the study.

Given the clear association between vehicle crime and drug use, interventions that are designed to rehabilitate recidivist vehicle theft offenders may benefit from the inclusion of a drug and alcohol component. Likewise, it would be useful for further research to investigate the factors that contribute to the drug use/ crime relationship for these offenders.