

# Databases



# Databases

## Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Surveillance Database

### Description of Database

Information on new HIV diagnoses is sought directly from three sources: laboratory reports of new HIV diagnoses from the testing laboratories; reports as a result of callback to all diagnosing doctors; and, since 1996, notification by diagnosing doctors. A range of demographic, exposure and behavioural information is collected through the notification process and through the callback process by utilising partner notification officers from the Victorian Department of Human Services. HIV became a notifiable disease in 1996, although information has been collected since, and can be accessed back to 1984.

The variables that were available to determine ethnicity include country of birth (COB), a person's cultural/ethnic background, and language other than English spoken at home. HIV-infected individuals with a history of injecting drug use (IDU) were determined by examining the notification forms that included questions pertaining to past and current IDU.

Prior to September 1996, when HIV became a notifiable disease, information relating to COB and language spoken at home was only opportunistically collected, therefore there is very little information available.

### Results

A total of 4,085 individuals were identified as diagnosed with HIV in Victoria from 1983 to the end of 1998. Of this number, 323 (eight per cent) individuals identified having a history of IDU.

### Country of Birth

Amongst the 323 individuals who reported a history of IDU, 152 (47 per cent) provided information about COB. The COB can be broken down as follows:

- 20 (13 per cent) were from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).
- Mean age: 31 years (range: 17–66 years).
- 18 (90 per cent) were male.

- 133 (87 per cent) were main English speaking backgrounds (MESB).
- Mean age: 29 years (range: 18–48 years).
- 113 (93 per cent) were male.

For those individuals for whom no COB could be determined, the average age was 28 years (range: 14–60 years) and 151 (89 per cent) were male.

Excluding those with missing and unknown data on COB, the overwhelming majority of IDUs were from Australia (N=128; 83 per cent) with another five individuals born in New Zealand, England, Scotland and the United Kingdom. Among the NESB individuals, the COB include Cuba, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Macedonia, Malaysia, Malta, Portugal, Ukraine and Vietnam. Those born in Vietnam constituted the greatest number of those from NESB (N=5).

### **Cultural Background**

Thirty four (11 per cent) of the 323 reporting a history of IDU provided information regarding their ethnic background as follows:

- 22 (63 per cent) identified as MESB (that is, Anglo-Saxon, Celtic)
- 13 (37 per cent) identified as NESB (includes European, Italian, Greek, Vietnamese, Asian and Lithuanian).

### **Languages Spoken At Home**

Only nine individuals (three per cent) provided information about a language other than English spoken at home.

### **Sexuality and Injecting Drug Use**

The percentage of IDUs who, regardless of ethnicity, responded that they were homosexual or bisexual, was 57 per cent. Regardless of ethnicity, 25 per cent of the total number of IDUs responded that they were heterosexual, while the rest did not indicate their sexual orientation.

Of the total number of NESB who were IDUs, 40 per cent responded they were homosexual, 55 per cent as heterosexual and five per cent responded only to being an IDU. Of the total number born in Australia, 69 per cent responded they were homosexual, 23 per cent were heterosexual and eight per cent identified only as IDU.

### **Summary**

Among those diagnosed HIV positive, eight per cent have a history of IDU. Of those with a history of IDU, over 50 per cent were either homosexual or bisexual. The low rate of HIV infection among those with a history of IDU in Victoria has largely resulted from highly successful, targeted education programs and accessible facilities

for IDUs; not sharing injecting equipment; and the establishment of widely used needle exchange programs throughout the State.

Determining the cultural/ethnic background of individuals has been restricted, as over half the respondents did not provide information on the notification forms about their COB. Further, cultural/ethnic identification data were missing or unknown for 89 per cent of the cases. Eighty-seven per cent of those responding to having HIV infection and with a history of IDU were from an English speaking background. The small number of NESB individuals did not permit statistical analysis for each separate record by COB and therefore the need for aggregation.

Those born in Vietnam with a history of IDU and infected with HIV were found to be statistically over-represented when compared with those of other NESB countries. An explanation for this may be due to longer-established ethnic groups becoming invisible in the database, as those of second or more generations are recorded as being born in Australia. Additionally, research does report on significant sharing of needles among Vietnamese IDUs, and anecdotally, there are reports of Vietnamese IDUs returning to Vietnam for holidays or attempted detoxification, and sharing needles with other IDUs. In these instances, the HIV infection rates amongst these groups can rise to 37 per cent and over (Louie, Krouskos, Gonzalez and Crofts, 1998; Crofts, Reid and Deany, 1998).

There was no significant difference in the age of IDUs, regardless of being from a NESB or a MESB (31 and 29 years respectively). Likewise, most of those with a history of IDU, infected with HIV, were male. However, those from a NESB with a history of IDU were significantly less likely to declare homosexuality compared with those for a MESB (40 per cent and 69 per cent respectively). This might be the result of NESB males being reluctant to identify with being homosexual compared with those of an English speaking background (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998).

### **Recommendation**

- An encouragement to all doctors and partner notification officers from the Victorian Department of Human Services to complete all the ethnicity variables, in order to enhance the quality of the HIV/AIDS surveillance database.

## **The Victorian 1996 Secondary Students Alcohol and Drugs Survey**

### **Description of Database and Methodology**

The Victorian 1996 Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drugs Survey collected data from just over 4,700 participants, of which the total valid cases (those responding to drug use questions) numbered 4,432. Secondary students were from Government, Catholic and independent schools, Years 7 to 12. Schools were selected using a random sampling methodology. A total of 69 secondary schools participated in the

study. The ethnicity variables used in the questionnaire were the country of birth of mother and father and languages spoken at home. Ninety per cent of students completing the survey were born in Australia. Thirty per cent of students' mothers and 36 per cent of students' fathers had been born overseas. Eighty-one per cent of students lived in households where English was the only language spoken, 17 per cent lived in households where both English and another language were spoken at home, and two per cent of students lived in households where no English was spoken.

Few secondary students who spoke languages other than English at home – and indicated their father's country of birth (COB) was not an English speaking background – reported use of illicit substances. This meant all language and COB groups had to be re-classified for statistical analysis to have any meaning. A new variable 'language group' was created: individuals whose father's COB was Australia, New Zealand and Britain/Ireland were labelled as 'mainly English speaking background' (MESB). Those whose father's COB was Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Turkey and the 'other' were labelled 'non-English speaking background' (NESB). For the purpose of this analysis, those speaking languages at home other than English – or no English at all – have been classified as NESB.

## **Results**

The number of secondary students who spoke only English was 3,626 (82 per cent). The total number of secondary students who spoke a language other than English at home was 806 (18 per cent). One hundred and fifty-six individuals provided no response to the question of primary household language. The number of students whose father was born in an English speaking country was 3,212 (73 per cent) compared with 1,188 (27 per cent) students in which the father's COB was classified as NESB. Thirty-four students did not know their father's COB.

Students were asked questions concerning drug use over their lifetime. A series of questions was asked about how many times, if ever, they had used or taken a substance. The time periods examined were: the last four weeks; the last year, and lifetime. Substances asked about were heroin, LSD, cocaine, speed, marijuana and ecstasy.

### **Substances Used in the Last Four Weeks**

The number of Victorian secondary students surveyed who spoke only English at home and had used heroin in the four weeks preceding the survey was 18 (<1 per cent). Those who had used heroin and spoke a language other than English at home numbered nine (one per cent). Two per cent of English-only students had used LSD, compared with one per cent of NESB. The percentage of English-only speaking students having used, separately, cocaine and speed, was less than one per cent, while it was slightly more for those of NESB (two per cent). Percentage use of ecstasy for both language groups was less than one per cent. Marijuana was the most noted illicit substance. Six hundred and fifty-three English-only speakers indicated it had been used (representing 18%; 95% CI 16.8, 19.2). This compares with 100 people of

non-English speaking background who indicated it had been used (representing 12%; 95% CI 10.1, 14.7).

For secondary students whose father's COB was either English language-based or NESB, the use of heroin and cocaine were the same (two per cent). Similarly, the percentage rates between the English based and NESB COB groups were barely different for the use of LSD (three per cent and two per cent respectively), ecstasy (two per cent and three per cent respectively) and speed (two per cent and three per cent respectively). Marijuana use by students where the father's COB were English language-based was 19 per cent, compared with 16 per cent of the students with NESB fathers.

### **Substances Used in the Last Year**

Two per cent of English-only speakers (n=73) and those of NESB (n=20) had used heroin in the last year. The use of LSD was barely different among English-only speakers (n=18; five per cent) compared with NESB (n=30; four per cent). Cocaine use was reported to be barely different among those of NESB (n=30; four per cent) than English-only speakers (n=73; three per cent). Four per cent of English-only speakers (n=145) and those of NESB (n=35) reported the use of speed. The percentage of those of NESB having used ecstasy was barely different (three per cent) than for English-only speakers (two per cent). Marijuana use for English-only speakers was 32 per cent (n=1,160; 95 per cent CI; 30.5, 33.5) compared with 24 per cent among NESB (n=193; 95 per cent CI; 21.0, 26.9).

Whether the father's COB was English-based or of NESB, there were no differences identified among students regarding the use of heroin (three per cent), cocaine (three per cent) and speed (five per cent). For those having used LSD there were 220 (seven per cent) students whose father's COB was English-based compared with 62 (five per cent) students of NESB fathers. There was a higher prevalence of marijuana use among those whose father's COB was English-based, compared with those students with NESB fathers (33 per cent and 28 per cent respectively).

### **Substances Used in Their Lifetime**

There was little difference in the prevalence of heroin use among those of NESB (four per cent) compared with English-only speaking secondary students (three per cent). There was a higher percentage of LSD use among English-only speakers (seven per cent) compared with NESB (five per cent). The use of cocaine was reported to be greater among those of NESB (five per cent) compared with English-only speakers (two per cent). There was no reported difference in the use of speed (five per cent) or ecstasy (three per cent) among both NESB and English-only speakers. Marijuana use was reported to have been used by 1,305 (36 per cent; 95 per cent CI; 34.4, 37.6) English-only speakers and 215 (27 per cent CI; 23.6, 29.7) NESB.

Of those who reported having used heroin and speed, there were marginal differences between the two COB groups (four per cent and six per cent respectively). There were only slight percentage differences on the basis of the

students father's COB, either English-based or NESB, for the use of cocaine (four per cent and five per cent respectively), ecstasy (three per cent and four per cent respectively) and LSD (eight per cent and six per cent respectively). There were 1,173 (37 per cent) students whose father's COB was English-based compared with 367 (31 per cent) students of NESB fathers.

## Summary

Aggregation of all the fathers' COB and NESB language groups was necessary because of the small number of students who reported their fathers' COB were of NESB and speaking another language other than English at home. This has not permitted an analysis of specific ethnic groups. To examine the various ethnic groups separately would have been pointless, because of the very small numbers in each ethnic language group. Confidence intervals on the proportions of students using illicit drugs in both language and father's COB groups, in the three time periods, almost always overlap significantly. However, in the case of marijuana use, there are statistical differences for English-only speakers and those of NESB for all time periods.

Except for the use of marijuana, there are generally no contrasts in substance use between the English-only speakers and those of NESB. The data reveal that each language and fathers' COB group is exposed to the use of marijuana, while not all ethnic language groups are reported to be using heroin, speed and ecstasy. The percentage of students from both English-only speakers and NESB using substances does vary between the different time periods. The number of individuals who have used substances does increase with examination of longer time periods for both language and fathers' COB groups, as might be expected.

It needs to be noted that the methodology used to represent a broad selection of students remains open to bias when used to represent a range of different ethnic groups. This is due to small numbers: random sampling was able to provide accurate national and state-specific estimates for each age group and sex, but the results, in relation to patterns of use for particular ethnic groups, must be interpreted cautiously.

## Recommendations

Low student numbers from many ethnic groups limited analysis of the data. While the survey did ask about the country of birth of both parents and about the language spoken at home other than English, the following are recommended for inclusion in further surveys:

- Use of the variable 'self-identified ethnic or cultural background'.
- Sampling for ethnic composition of students to improve comparisons with English-only speaking students and to obviate the need to combine all language groups. This would also enable comparison between ethnic groups.

# The Victorian Emergency Minimum Data Set (VEMD)

## Description of the Database

The Victorian Emergency Minimum Data Set (VEMD) is a computerised collection of data about persons attending Victorian hospital emergency departments from 1995 onwards. Currently, information for the database is collected from 25 hospitals representing 80 per cent of Emergency Department presentations in the State. Prior to 1995, data were paper-based and maintained as the Original Victorian Injury Surveillance System (VISS). The present database constitutes a program of ongoing surveillance of both the number and severity of injuries in the community by identifying hazards (that is, poisons and traffic accidents).

VEMD reports that in June 1998 there were 410,000 cases on the database, and that between January 1996 and December 1997 there were 10,257 cases of poisoning, which include all drug-related entries.

For the Drugs in a Multicultural Community project the researcher analysed information on the VEMD for the period January 1996 to June 1998. The ethnicity of individuals was determined by the variables 'country of birth' (COB) and 'preferred language'. The most appropriate way to determine illicit drug-related entries was found to be by analysis of the character text narrative. A total of six drug names were selected: amphetamines, ecstasy, heroin, cocaine, LSD and inhalants. Most of these drugs can be described either by the use of slang terms—for example, 'chroming' can be used as a text word for inhalants, 'smack' can be used to describe heroin—or they can be grouped under a particular drug category. With this in mind, a total of 45 drug names was used for the character text narrative. A triage nurse, medical staff or a medical clerk most often wrote the narrative text.

A range of problems relating to consistency and validity in the VEMD database was identified. They included: a lack of availability of information; the low priority assigned to this task in busy emergency departments; and unreliable information with variables frequently being incomplete or duplicated.

## Results

A total of 1,366 individuals were found to have illicit drug use in their character text narrative. Of this number, COB was missing for 237 individuals (17 per cent). Of the individuals who did provide information on COB, 103 (nine per cent) were of non-English speaking background (NESB). Those born in Vietnam (28), Italy (11), Chile (6), Greece (5), Germany (5) and Turkey (5) were the most represented of the 45 countries or continents nominated by individuals. One thousand and twenty-six (91 per cent) of those providing information about their COB were from English speaking backgrounds. Most individuals were born in Australia (976; 86 per cent), with others born in New Zealand, England, Scotland, Ireland and the United States.

The preferred language variable was missing, not known or wrongly coded in more than half of the total cases on the VEMD (746; 55 per cent). Where information about preferred language was given, 99 per cent (615) indicated English.

Of the 101 NESB individuals providing COB information, 89 (86 per cent) were male. Of the English speaking individuals, 665 (65 per cent) were male. Of the 237 individuals who were missing data for COB, 183 (77 per cent) were male.

The mean age for those of NESB was 26 years, with a range of 13 to 69 years. Total number of individuals with information available on age and English speaking COB was 1000. Mean age for this group was 25 years with a range of 11 to 66 years. For those with missing data on COB there were 197 individuals who also had a completed age variable, mean age was 26 years, with a range of 15 to 46 years.

## Description of Drug Use

The total number of valid cases for people of NESB (with correct coding and responding appropriately to illicit drug references) presenting at an emergency Department with drug problems, was 101. Of these, 90 (89 per cent) were assessed for having a heroin-related problem. The remaining 11 cases were treated for using amphetamines, LSD, ecstasy, chroming or the inhalation or ingestion of petrol. Two individuals had an invalid word narrative text.

Out of the total number of English speaking individuals (1,026), four cases which initially appeared to be illicit drug-related proved, on closer examination, to be otherwise (for example, the word *speed* also related to the motion of a car involved in an accident), and these were deleted from the sample. Of the remaining valid cases, 867 (85 per cent) involved heroin use, 58 (six per cent) involved amphetamines and cocaine, 44 (four per cent) involved chroming – including inhalation of petrol, glue, lighter liquid and paint thinners, 15 (one per cent) involved hallucinogens – including LSD and magic mushrooms, 16 (two per cent) involved ecstasy and 13 (one per cent) related to marijuana or overdosing on various prescription tablets (Valium, Temazepam, Rohypnol).

In the majority of cases where COB data was missing (237), 227 (96 per cent) were related to heroin use. Ten cases (four per cent) involved amphetamines, hallucinogens or ecstasy.

## Further Analysis

Analysing the data by COB by demographic profile and type of drug used was not possible due to the small numbers involved. However, limited analysis was possible after re-classifying records on the basis of COB into the categories of European, Asian and English speaking countries.

The total number of individuals born in European countries was 34. Countries were: Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, former Yugoslavia, Germany, Romania and the Russian Federation. The total number of individuals born in Asian countries was 43. Countries included: Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos,

Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and China. The largest number of individuals (1,026) was from English speaking countries, the majority of whom were born in Australia.

Males comprised 79 per cent of the European-born, 90 per cent of Asian-born and 65 per cent of those born in English speaking countries. The mean age was 31 years for those born in Europe, 23 years for those of Asian birth and 25 years for those born in an English speaking country.

Of the 34 Europeans presenting with a drug use problem, 26 (76 per cent) were for heroin. Similarly, of the 43 Asian cases, 34 (79 per cent) were related to heroin. Eighty-six per cent of those born in an English speaking country presented with a heroin-related problem.

### **Local Government Areas (LGAs)**

When data was examined by LGA, Moreland (129) and Yarra (103) were found to have the greatest number of people presenting at hospital emergency departments for illicit drug use. For an analysis of attendance at hospital emergency departments for illicit drug use by people of NESB, LGA were selected only if the total number of individuals from NESB was six or greater, and if the percentage of NESB presenting at an emergency Department and living in the LGA was 20 per cent or above. The LGA of Greater Dandenong, Moonee Valley, Casey and Maribyrnong met these criteria.

Fifty-eight individuals lived in the LGA of Greater Dandenong; of the 49 cases providing COB information, 35 per cent were from NESB and 65 per cent were from English speaking countries. In the LGA of Moonee Valley there were a total of 54 individuals, of whom 15 per cent did not provide COB information. Of the 46 cases with valid information, 22 per cent were from NESB. Similarly in the LGA of Maribyrnong, of the 35 individuals providing information about their COB, 20 per cent were from NESB. In the LGA of Casey there were a total of 20 individuals of whom 20 per cent had missing COB data. Of the 16 individuals providing information about their COB, 38 per cent were from NESB.

### **Health Regions**

The health regions with the greatest proportion of residents presenting at hospital emergency departments with illicit drug use were Northern Metropolitan Region (352 people), Southern Metropolitan Region (297 people), Eastern Metropolitan Region (259 people), and Western Metropolitan (204 people).

In the Western Metropolitan region there was a total of 204 individuals assessed for drug-related incidences, of whom 19 per cent had missing data on COB. Of the 164 individuals providing valid information on COB, 15 per cent were from NESB.

In the Eastern Metropolitan region there was a total of 259 individuals assessed for illicit drug-related problems, of whom 12 per cent had missing data and five per cent were from NESB. In the Northern Metropolitan region 27 (nine per cent) of individuals for whom there was COB information were from NESB. In the Southern

Metropolitan region 33 (13 per cent) individuals for whom there was COB information were from NESB.

## Summary

The VEMD database has some severe flaws in relation to any analysis of ethnicity. Reliance on COB to define ethnicity identifies only those with a recent migration history and takes no account of people born in Australia who nevertheless have strong cultural ties, such as in the case of Italian and Greek communities.

Relying on COB to define ethnicity has a major flaw in that the longer-established ethnic groups become invisible in databases as second generations are recorded as being born in Australia. It could be suggested that the high percentage (91 per cent) of people from English speaking backgrounds attending hospital emergency departments does not in fact accurately reflect the ethnicity of the clients. Many of those born in Australia may nevertheless identify with a wide range of ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

The ethnicity variables of COB and preferred language are missing for a large number of individuals presenting at emergency departments: 17 per cent of the COB data and 55 per cent of preferred language data are missing for those entered as illicit drug use. The poor response to the preferred language variable has severely limited any assessment of individuals' ethnicity or cultural background. Where information on preferred language was recorded (in less than half of all cases), English was nominated in 99 per cent of these cases. This figure gives rise to speculation about whether recording of preferred language is in any way related to assessment about the need for an interpreter. Given the large number of languages present in Victoria, it is highly likely they will still be able to be treated and therefore will be omitted from the data system, and this may explain their preference for English.

The small number of NESB individuals did not permit statistical analysis for each country of birth. Aggregation and homogenising of differing ethnic groups into NESB and English speaking background categories, and then division into categories of European, Asian and English enabled some limited analysis to be done. Findings are summarised below:

- Fewer women of NESB attend hospital emergency departments for illicit drug-related incidences than do women of English speaking backgrounds.
- Mean ages for NESB and English speaking background groups are very similar, being 25–26 years.
- People of Asian and English backgrounds in the database are younger than are people of European background – 23 to 25 years of age, compared with 31 years for people of European background.

An analysis of the word narrative text indicates that heroin was overwhelmingly the most reported illicit drug used by Victorian people of both NESB (89 per cent) and English speaking backgrounds (85 per cent) presenting at emergency departments.

The number of people being treated for heroin use in hospital emergency departments would be much greater but for the fact that many of those treated by ambulance crews elect not to go to hospital. Other illicit drugs recorded in the narrative text were amphetamines, inhalations, hallucinogens and ecstasy.

Of the 58 local government areas examined, the LGAs of Moreland and Yarra had the greatest number of residents presenting at hospital emergency departments for illicit drug use (129 and 103 people respectively). The LGAs of Greater Dandenong, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong and Casey had the greatest number of residents of NESB presenting at hospital emergency departments for illicit drug use. Relative to other health regions, people presenting at emergency departments with illicit drug-related problems from the Western Metropolitan Health Region were more likely to be of NESB (15 per cent). However, overall, this region had the fourth largest number of residents presenting for illicit drug use (204 people). The health regions with the greatest number of residents presenting at hospital emergency departments with illicit drug use were Northern Metropolitan Region (352 people), Southern Metropolitan Region (297 people) and Eastern Metropolitan Region (259 people).

## **Recommendations**

- Staff in hospital emergency departments should be encouraged to complete information on ethnicity variables in order to enhance the quality of VEMD data.
- The variable 'preferred language' should be re-worded to 'language(s) spoken at home'.
- A self-report ethnic/cultural background question should be included to capture the ethnic/cultural background of second generation Australians who identify with an ethnic/cultural group.

# **1995 Victorian Drug Household Survey**

## **Description of Survey and Database**

The 1995 Victorian Drug Household Survey (VDH) was undertaken in parallel with the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDS). Additional interviews were conducted in Victoria using a few specific Victorian questions about alcohol and drug treatment services. A total of 600 interviews were completed throughout Victoria and these were supplemented with an additional 600 Victorian interviews as part of the NDS: the total sample size was 1,200. Information was collected from persons aged 14 years and over. One person was randomly selected from each household involved in the survey.

The first section was an interviewer-administered questionnaire, which included ethnicity variables: country of birth (COB) and languages spoken at home other than English. To gauge the use of drug and alcohol treatment services, questions related to accessing information about drug and alcohol problems were used (only in the

VDH). The second section was a self-completed, sealed questionnaire, focusing on personal drug use.

## **Methodology**

As will be shown in the results section, the number of respondents in the ethnic group is small. To perform any meaningful statistical analysis it was necessary to classify the records by COB into those who were of main English speaking background (MESB) countries and those who are from non-English speaking background (NESB) countries. For the purpose of this study countries classified as MESB were Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), Ireland, US, and South Africa. The NESB countries were China, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Turkey, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, and 'other'.

For further analysis COB was used to create a new variable. Region of birth and the regions were compared with the classified MESB countries. The regions chosen were Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

Before analysis on the basis of major languages spoken at home, records were classified into MESB only and into NESB languages. The NESB languages included Italian, Greek, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Arabic (including Lebanese), German, Vietnamese, Spanish and Croatian. The use of broader categories was necessary due to the small numbers in each language group. However, there were sufficient respondents who spoke Italian and Greek for them to be independently analysed.

## **Results**

Data were first analysed on the basis of COB and then by language.

### **Country of Birth**

There were 1,200 respondents in the survey. Of these, 56 respondents (four per cent) had missing or unknown COB data. The majority was born in Australia (76 per cent). Eighty-five per cent were from MESB countries and 15 per cent were of NESB. The respondent numbers for regions under the category of NESB were Europe (96), the Middle East (17), Asia (55) and Latin America (4).

As can be seen in Table 19 (below), most of the illicit drugs used indicated small differences between those of MESB and NESB. However, a significantly high proportion of MESB respondents had at some stage of their lives tried cannabis (MESB 95 per cent CI; 29.7 per cent to 35.6 per cent and NESB 95 per cent CI; 8.5 per cent to 18.9 per cent). Similarly, there were significant differences identified for those who had ever tried amphetamines between those of MESB (95 per cent CI; 5.4 per cent to 8.65 per cent) and NESB (95 per cent CI; 0.0 to 1.7 per cent).

**Table 19 Illicit drug use by COB–MESB and NESB**

Drug	MESB %	NESB %	Significant difference
Cocaine	3	1	
Heroin	2	< 1	
Ecstasy	2	1	
Cannabis	33	14	T
Amphetamines	7	1	T
Inhalants	2	0	

Records were classified by region of birth. The two major regions were Europe and Asia. Those who were born in India and other countries of the subcontinent (not specifically identified in the data) were included as Asian. The numbers of respondents from the Middle East and Latin America and the number reporting use of illicit drugs were too small to allow any worthwhile analysis.

The percentage of respondents of European and Asian birth ever having used cannabis were only marginally different (12 per cent and 15 per cent respectively), but significantly lower than those of MESB (33 per cent). Over 98 per cent of those born in Europe and Asia had never taken the following illicit drugs: cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, inhalants or amphetamines.

Of those who provided valid information (1119) few people of MESB (one per cent) and no reported respondents of NESB had ever injected illicit drugs.

Specific questions related to drug and alcohol services were only asked in the Victorian component of the household survey and were not undertaken in the NDS. The result was the sample size was reduced to 600 respondents, of whom 574 gave information. Of those providing information about seeking help for a drug- or alcohol-related problem, either for themselves or for another person, most people of MESB and NESB had never sought assistance (89 per cent and 93 per cent respectively). Of those seeking assistance, four per cent of MESB had sought assistance for themselves compared with two per cent among people of NESB. Percentages of respondents seeking assistance for someone else were the same for both MESB and NESB (four per cent). Even when the regions are divided into Europe and Asia, most had not sought assistance for alcohol and drug problems (95 per cent and 88 per cent respectively).

Of the number of people of a MESB who had sought drug and alcohol assistance, 29 respondents (58 per cent) had done so in the past five years. Of those with a MESB having sought assistance in the past five years, 14 per cent had done so for themselves. Only six of those of NESB had sought any assistance for themselves or for others in the past five years.

## Languages Spoken

Eighty-one per cent of the respondents spoke only English at home, with 19 per cent speaking another language, Italian and Greek being the most common. Other languages spoken were Chinese, Arabic, German, Vietnamese, Croatian, and Spanish. Few languages were available for nomination by the respondents of the survey. The two language groups used for analysis were English-only and non-English (spoke a language other than English).

**Table 20 Illicit drug use by language spoken**

Drugs	English only %	Non-English %	Significant difference
Cocaine	7	2	
Heroin	2	< 1	
Ecstasy	2	< 1	
Cannabis	32	19	T
Amphetamines	7	2	T
Inhalants	2	0	

As can be seen in Table 20, there were significant differences for cannabis use between those who spoke English only (95 per cent CI; 29.3 per cent to 35.2 per cent) and for those non-English speakers (95 per cent CI; 14 per cent to 24.4 per cent). A statistical difference was also identified for the use of amphetamines between non-English speakers (95 per cent CI; 0.3 per cent to 4.2 per cent) and for those who spoke English only (95 per cent CI; 5.2 per cent to 8.4 per cent).

The only illicit drug for which there was a significant difference when comparing English-only, Italian and Greek speakers was cannabis. Of those speaking English-only, 32 per cent (95 per cent CI; 29.3 per cent to 35.2 per cent) had ever used cannabis compared with 18 per cent (95 per cent CI; 8.0 per cent to 28.4 per cent) among those who spoke Italian. There were no statistically significant differences between English-only and Greek speakers. Analysis of all other illicit drugs by those speaking either Italian or Greek identified insignificant numbers of respondents ever having tried illicit substances.

Of those who spoke English-only and provided information about seeking drug and alcohol services, 12 per cent had sought assistance compared with five per cent among non-English speakers. Only six speaking respondents of non-English had sought assistance for themselves or for others.

Statistical analysis of available data by the type of assistance and where assistance was sought for drug and alcohol problems, regardless of ethnicity, was not possible as 98 per cent of the data were either missing or unknown.

## Summary

As with a number of other databases, it was necessary to aggregate records by COB and language into MESB and NESB. This improved statistical analysis but it also meant that ethnic diversity was ignored. Separate analysis of the various ethnic groups, except for the Italian and Greek speakers, was not possible, due to the small numbers.

Eighty-five per cent of the respondents were of MESB. The COB variable is not wholly satisfactory for identifying NESB because its use means that second generations of long-established ethnic groups, born in Australia, are made invisible in the databases.

Cannabis was the most-used illicit drug by both MESB and NESB people (33 per cent and 14 per cent respectively). While amphetamines were the next most used illicit drug by those of MESB (seven per cent) there was little use among those of NESB (<1 per cent). Prevalence of all other illicit drugs by respondents of NESB ranged from one to less than one per cent. Those of European and Asian birth were compared in order to assess if there were any major disparities in their use of illicit drugs. There was very little difference identified between these two groups of having used cannabis and for all other illicit drugs there was no significant difference.

Although the second section of the survey was a self-completed, sealed questionnaire it is possible the illicit nature of the drugs under review inhibited those of NESB from answering with more frankness than those of MESB. The issue of illicit drugs generally among those of NESB is a taboo topic and the shame and stigma associated with using illicit substances can often prevent the truth from being told (Ja and Aoki, 1993; Mudaly, 1997). Additionally, as a result of often poor proficiency in English, which has been reported amongst this group (NSW Health, 1993), it may be that those of NESB did not fully understand the questions.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to distinguish the nature of an alcohol or illicit drug problem, as the questionnaire did not permit the respondent to identify the focus of the problem (that is, alcohol *or* illicit drugs). The vast majority of both MESB and NESB people had never sought assistance either for themselves or for others. Only six NESB had sought assistance for themselves or for others. However, while the numbers are small, seven per cent of those identifying their COB as NESB sought assistance once in their lives, compared with 11 per cent among those of MESB. Interestingly, when examining the regions, 11 per cent of those born in Asia, compared with five per cent of European-born, had sought assistance.

For those providing information, non-English speakers were less likely to seek out assistance compared with English-only speakers (five per cent and 12 per cent respectively). An explanation for this, based on extensive literature reviews, is that non-English speakers encounter language and cultural barriers and therefore are reluctant to seek out external assistance to address alcohol and drug problems (Dollis, Gifford, Henenberg and Pirkis, 1993; Jackson and Flaherty, 1994).

## Recommendations

- The inclusion of a self-reported, ethnic/cultural background question, to capture the ethnic/cultural background of second generation Australians who are otherwise rendered invisible.
- For those who speak a language other than English, it is important that the sealed section of the survey is completely understood before self-completion is undertaken.
- There is no mention in the survey methodology of alternative language translations of the sealed questionnaire. Translations of the sealed questionnaire should be undertaken in the major alternative languages.

## Victoria Police Statistics: Illicit Drugs

### Data Sources

Victoria Police statistics have been derived from Victoria Police Crime Statistics publications, from additional tables purchased from Victoria Police and from the Australian Bureau of Criminal intelligence Illicit Drug Report.

### Results

It is evident from the statistics reported below that there has been a significant change in statistical patterns for illicit drugs over the previous few years. Whereas previously police concentrated mostly on the effects of alcohol on crime, and on cannabis, there has now been a change in police focus so that heroin is the number one priority (Senior Victoria Police officer). The increased focus is clearly reflected in the arrest statistics.

Total arrests for trafficking heroin have increased in Victoria from 348 in 1994–95 to 928 in 1996–97, and 1,857 in 1997–98, so that Victoria now has the highest heroin-related arrest rate per 100,000 population in Australia – more than double that of NSW (see Table 21).

The high priority held by heroin offences in Victoria is also illustrated by the enormous decrease in drug offences involving cannabis.<sup>12</sup> There were 9,034 reported cannabis offences in Victoria in 1997–98, down 53.1 per cent from 1995–96, when there were 19,210 cannabis offences reported in Victoria (ABCI, 1999: 20). Of the eight Australian jurisdictions, Victoria had the second lowest rate for cannabis offences per

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<sup>12</sup> Note also the different mode of detection of cannabis from heroin offences. Criminal justice key informants considered that cannabis offences were detected most commonly in situations where police had arrested the person for another offence and subsequently found cannabis was present as well. In the case of heroin-related offences the offender was more likely to be detected directly for the drug offence (Police and court key informants).

100,000 population in 1997–98 (see Table 22). This rate was similar to that of the previous year, but represents a considerable decrease from 1995–96, when the rate was 417.38 (ABCI, 1999: 21).<sup>13</sup>

**Table 21 Heroin – consumer and provider arrests, by jurisdiction and per 100,000 population, 1997–98**

Arrests 1997–98				
Jurisdiction	Consumer (use heroin)	Provider (traffic heroin)	Total	Arrest per 100,000 pop.
Victoria	3,636	1,901	5,537	119.7
NSW	2,651	685	3,336	52.9
Queensland	207	216	423	12.3
Western Australia	393	193	586	32.4
South Australia	136	56	192	13.0
Tasmania	1	0	1	.2
ACT	58	28	86	27.8
NT	6	0	6	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,088</b>	<b>3,079</b>	<b>10,167</b>	

(Source: ABCI 1999: 39)

**Table 22 Cannabis offences by jurisdiction, per 100,000 population, 1997–98**

Cannabis offences 1997–98			
Jurisdiction	No. of cannabis offences	State population	Offences per 100,000 pop.
Victoria	9034	4,627,303	195.23
NSW	15,460	6,306,334	245.15
Queensland	13,021	3,430,384	379.58
Western Australia	11,487	1,811,126	634.25
South Aust.	13,452	1,482,869	907.16
Tasmania	1,196	471,789	253.50
ACT	374	308,990	121.04
NT	635	189,185	335.65

(Source: ABCI 1999: 20)

<sup>13</sup> Police statistics in relation to drug offending in Victoria show clearly that drug crime rates are related primarily to police activity and focus rather than being an accurate reflection of actual drug offending rates.

The enormous increase in heroin-related arrest rates in Victoria in recent years, that is out of all proportion to those of other states, is attributed by Victoria Police to an increase in 'special police operations'. These have predominantly been in the most well publicised, visible drug areas around Melbourne, Footscray, Frankston, Springvale and Dandenong during the reporting period (ABCI, 1999: 40). These areas all have high Vietnamese residency. The greatest majority of arrests are of street level dealers<sup>14</sup> (Senior Victoria Police officer).

A considerable proportion of people arrested for traffic heroin offences are born in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> (See Table 23.<sup>16</sup>)

**Table 23 Number and proportion of offenders aged 15–49 years arrested in Victoria for trafficking heroin, by year and country of birth**

	1994–95		1995–96		1996–97		1997–98	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Born in Vietnam	131	37.6	328	47.7	451	48.6	679*	36.6
Born in Australia	123	35.3	201	29.2	254	27.4	679*	36.6
Total arrests for traffic heroin	348		687		928		1,857	

\*These figures were re-checked with Victoria Police and are correct

Rates per 100,000 population shown in Table 4 were calculated using the ABS 1996 Census data by country of birth for people living in Victoria. The numbers are very small in the more established ethnic communities, which would be expected, given that most people in the peak offending ages of 15–44 years in these communities are second generation and thus would be included in the 'Australian born' category.

<sup>14</sup> Because police performance indicators include number of arrests as a measure of success it may be that police will, from time to time, focus on the visible street level dealers to boost their arrest figures. The group most visible and predictable, and therefore the easiest to target and arrest, are arguably those of Asian background who tend to gather in the same geographical areas (Victoria police key informant).

<sup>15</sup> Note that the figures are numbers of arrests not numbers of individuals. It is possible that a smaller number of individuals are being arrested on multiple occasions.

<sup>16</sup> Criminal justice statistics, like other government databases, use 'country of birth' rather than self-identified ethnic/cultural background. Thus reports are biased toward recent migrant/refugee groups. Second and third generation people, even while identifying strongly to their ethnic origins, are categorised within the 'Australian born' category and are thus invisible in any statistical analysis.

**Table 24 All drug offences by country of birth of alleged offenders of all ages in Victoria, 1997–98**

	Country of birth								Total
	Australia	Greece	Italy	Lebanon	Somali	Turkey	Vietnam	Other	
Drug cultivate, man, traffic	3,529	41	44	26	8	22	701	<b>1,146</b>	5,517
Per 100,000 population	109.7	66.3	44.4	185.1	565.0	148.6	1267.6		
Drug (possess, use)	341	38	54	41	4	38	552	<b>1,732</b>	10,800
Per 100,000 population	259.4	61.4	54.5	291.9	282.5	256.7	998.2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,870</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>1,253</b>	<b>2,878</b>	<b>1,6317</b>
Total per 100,000 population	369.1	127.7	98.8	477.0	847.5	405.4	2,265.8		

### Age of Alleged Drug Offenders in Victoria

The peak offending age for alleged offenders with drug offences in Victoria is 15–44 years, with most of these in the 15–29 year age group. (Sixty-three per cent of alleged offenders for drug traffic/manufacture/cultivate offences are in this latter age group, as are 77 per cent of alleged offenders for drug use and possession offences.) In 1997–98 there were 11,738 alleged drug offenders aged 15–29 years, compared with 3,628 aged 30–44 years. The number of alleged drug offenders decreases as age increases. Only 571 alleged drug offenders were aged over 44 years in 1997–98. The same pattern is observable in previous year data. Whether these statistics reflect less offending by people of older age, or whether it is simply that young offenders are more likely to be noticed by police, is unknown.

The rates of offending shown in Table 25 have been calculated using crime statistics for alleged drug offenders aged 15–24 years and Victorian Census population figures for persons aged 15–24 years. The rates in the table below indicate that a disproportionate number of people being processed by police for drug traffic offences are people of Vietnamese background, who are aged 15 to 24 years. Of the total 679 Vietnamese-born, alleged offenders for trafficking heroin in 1997–98 (see in Table 25), 77 per cent were aged 15 to 24 years. Given their young age and taking into account the comments of court-based key informants about the backgrounds of Vietnamese appearing in court, it may be assumed that the greatest majority of these offenders are at the lower, street dealing level.

**Table 25 Number of alleged traffic heroin offenders in Victoria, by age, by selected countries of birth, per 100,000 ethnic population 1997–98**

	Alleged traffic heroin offenders					
	Total pop 15–24 years (96 Census)	Total pop 25–44 years (96 Census)	15–24 years (No.)	Rate Per 100,000	25–44 years (No.)	Rate Per 100,000
Australia	518,643	970,311	429	82.7	248	25.5
Greece	976	13,964	0	0	3	21.5
Italy	901	18,239	0	0	4	21.9
Lebanon	664	7,315	0	0	3	41.0
Somalia	425	515	8	1,882.0	0	0
Turkey	1,695	8,000	5	294.9	7	87.0
Vietnam	12,183	28,775	524	4,301.1	153	531.0

## Conclusion

Victoria Police drug crime statistics show an enormous increase in heroin-related offences and a decrease in cannabis offences. To a large degree, drug offences are detected directly by police because of police initiative, as opposed to having the crime reported to them by the public. (This assumption is supported by the key informants and by the 97.5 per cent clearance rate reported for drug offences.)

The drug offence statistics reflect a disproportionate number of Vietnamese-born people. The explanation for this may be related to several interrelated factors, including the apparent police focus on heroin-related offences in areas of high Vietnamese residency. The explanation may also be related to the fact that the Vietnamese community has a very high proportion of its members in the peak offending age group. (Seventy-four per cent of the Vietnamese-born community in Victoria is aged between 15 and 44 years, compared with 46 per cent of the Australian-born population.) Ninety-two per cent of alleged offenders processed by police for drug traffic/cultivate/manufacture offences are in the age group 15–44 years, and 96 per cent of offenders processed for drug use/possess offences are in the 15–44 year age group.

Another reason for the high representation of Vietnamese-born people in drug offence statistics may be due to the fact that they are a recently arrived migrant group, and by the fact that ‘country of birth’ is used as the definer of ethnicity in the statistics. People of Vietnamese background show up much more prominently in the statistics than do people from other ethnic communities who have been in Australia for a longer time. This is because these communities tend to have the greatest proportion of their young people (in the peak offending age group) incorporated into the ‘born in Australia’ category.

Whether drug offending by people from the Vietnamese community is actually any higher than that by other communities is very much open to debate. Certainly, police

crime statistics are not as good an indicator of actual offending as they may be of police activity (as discussed above).

To a large degree, police are the gateway to the criminal justice system. As such, statistics from Juvenile Justice Services and Prisons also reflect a growing proportion of Vietnamese-born in their statistics as the offenders pass through the criminal justice system. What is apparent from the Juvenile Justice statistics (and it is suspected in the prison statistics too, which are yet to be finalised) is that Vietnamese drug offenders are less likely than their Australian counterparts to also commit offences involving violence and property. It is also suspected that a majority of the Vietnamese drug offenders being processed through criminal justice are involved at the lower end of the drug trafficking chain. These offenders are considered by many in the justice system to be receiving custodial sentences at a much earlier stage of their involvement with the criminal justice system than are offenders of Australian background. This may represent a serious inequity in the criminal justice system (Court and Juvenile Justice key informants). This area deserves further research.

## **Juvenile Justice Client Information System (SSCIS)—Illicit Drugs**

### **The Data**

The Juvenile Justice Client information System (SSCIS) is used to track clients through their supervised court orders with the Juvenile Justice program. The database assists decisions about the appropriate care of clients and fulfils a case management function. Data comes from assessment forms filled in by regional Juvenile Justice staff, who supervise community-based orders, and from reception staff at youth training centres. Offence data is drawn directly from the Court Order/Warrant, as recorded by the Clerks of Court. The Youth Parole Board also enters data directly onto the SSCIS. Most court orders originate in the Children's Court (for 10–16 year olds), although adult courts may issue custody orders to 17–20 year old offenders, for serving in the Juvenile Justice system. Note that the variable 'ethnicity' is recorded by Juvenile Justice workers and may reflect a subjective judgment by the worker. Ethnicity was stated in 97 per cent of the Orders.

### **Caution**

Offence data relies on the accuracy and thoroughness with which the Clerk of the Court enters offences. There may be occasions when not all offences are recorded, or if considered relatively minor, listed as 'other'. Also, an offence could be committed to support a drug habit but if no drug-related charges are made at the time of the arrest, nothing can be recorded. The offence data analysed is therefore likely to be understated.

## Results

An analysis of 1997–98 Juvenile Justice data shows that seven per cent of clients are ‘Vietnamese’ (N = 109) and 84 per cent of these have drug offences. This compares with only 17 per cent of ‘Australian’ clients who had drug offences. An examination of clients with drug offences shows that ‘Vietnamese’ clients are *less* likely also to have property or violence offences than are ‘Australian’ clients with drug offences.

## Juvenile Justice Clients

Nearly three out of every four clients under Juvenile Justice supervision were nominated as ‘Australian’. Next most numerous were ‘Vietnamese’, followed by ‘Cambodian’. (See Table 26.)

**Table 26 Total number and percentage of *clients* supervised by Juvenile Justice Service 1997–98, by ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Number	Proportion
Australian	1,088	74
Vietnamese	109	7
Cambodian	34	2
Maori	18	1
Turkish	15	1
New Zealand	13	0.9
Filipino	13	0.9
Greek	11	0.8
Italian	11	0.8
Lebanese	11	0.8
42 other ethnic backgrounds	143	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,466</b>	<b>99.2</b>
<b>Total individuals with no ethnicity variable</b>	<b>64</b>	

## Drug Offending

Three hundred and sixty-one clients (24 per cent of all clients) had been charged with one or more drug offences in 1997–98. Of these, 51 per cent (N=185) were designated ‘Australian’; 26 per cent (N=92) ‘Vietnamese’; and seven per cent (N=26) ‘Cambodian’. (See Table 27.) (Because the age categories are incompatible, it has not been possible to calculate what these figures represent per 100,000 population.) The remaining drug offenders were from 27 different ethnicities. Of the total 109 Vietnamese Juvenile Justice clients, 92 (or 84 per cent) had drug offences, compared

with the total 1,088 Australian clients of whom 185 (or only 17 per cent) had drug offences.

Approximately half the clients with drug *use* offences were 'Australian', while one quarter was 'Vietnamese'. For drug *traffic* offences, however, this pattern is reversed: approximately half the clients with drug traffic offences were 'Vietnamese', while 20 per cent were 'Australian'. Only seven per cent of 'Cambodian' clients had any drug offences, or drug use offences, and 14 per cent had drug traffic offences. (Note that numbers are very small for 'Cambodian' ethnicity.) (See Table 27.)

**Table 27 Drug offences of Juvenile Justice clients by ethnicity, 1997–98**

	Drug offences							
	Any drug offence		Drug use		Drug traffic		Drug man./grow	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Australian	185	51	169	53	33	20	7	64
Vietnamese	92	26	79	25	80	49	-	-
Cambodian	26	7	21	7	23	14	-	-
Other	58	16	51	15	29	17	4	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: a client who has more than one type of drug offence will appear in more than one column. Thus, if an individual had an offence of drug use and drug traffic, they would appear in the drug use and the drug traffic columns and in the 'any drug offence' column. 'Any drug offence' includes any client who has one or more of the three offence types.

### Drug Offending and Concurrent Offences

Sixty-eight per cent of Juvenile Justice clients with drug *use* offences also had property offences or violence offences (35 per cent). Of the 117 clients who had drug use and *violence* offences, 76 (65 per cent) had one or two violence offences and 41 had three or more violence offences. Offenders with drug traffic offences were less likely also to have property or violence offences. Only a minority had property offences (32 per cent), or violence offences (23 per cent). All Juvenile Justice clients with *drug manufacture or grow* offences also had property offences (100 per cent) and 36 per cent had violence offences.

**Table 28 Drug offence by type of concurrent offence, Juvenile Justice clients 1997–98**

	Type of drug offence					
	Use illicit drugs		Traffic drugs		Man/grow drugs	
Concurrent offences	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Property offences	224	68	54	32	11	100
Violence offences	117	35	39	23	4	36
Sex offences	2	.6	1	.6	-	-
Other offences	180	54	67	40	8	73

Note: some individuals are counted more than once where they have more than one type of concurrent offence. For example, where a client has a drug offence and both a property offence and a violence offence, they will be counted twice in the above Table.

Juvenile Justice clients with drug offences *and* violence offences, or with drug offences *and* property offences, were more likely to be 'Australian' (68 per cent and 73 per cent respectively). Only 17 individuals of 'Vietnamese' ethnicity who had a drug offence also had a violence offence. (This group represents 16 per cent of the total Vietnamese clients and 14 per cent of clients with drug and violence offences.) Only 17 clients of 'Vietnamese' ethnicity who had a drug offence, also had a property offence. (This represents 16 per cent of total 'Vietnamese' clients and eight per cent of clients with drug and property offences.) (See Tables 29 and 30.)

**Table 29 Juvenile Justice clients with drug and violence offences, by ethnicity 1997–98**

	Drug offences and violence offences							
	Any drug offence and violence		Drug use and violence		Drug traffic and violence		Drug man/grow and violence	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Australian	84	68	79	69	14	37	4	100
Vietnamese	17	14	15	13	13	34	-	-
Cambodian	3	2	3	3	3	8	-	-
Other	20	16	18	15	8	21	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 30 Juvenile Justice clients with drug and property offences, by ethnicity 1997–98**

	Drug offences and property offences							
	Any drug offence and property		Drug use and property		Drug traffic and property		Drug man/grow and property	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Australian	166	73	156	72	20	39	7	64
Vietnamese	17	8	17	8	14	28	-	-
Cambodian	3	1	3	1	2	4	-	-
Other	42	18	40	19	15	29	4	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>

Number of drug use offences for each Juvenile Justice client with drug offences 1997–98:

- ‘Australian’ Juvenile Justice clients with drug use offences had an average of 1.7 drug use charges each. Range was one to seven drug use offences each.
- ‘Vietnamese’ Juvenile Justice clients with drug use offences had an average of two drug use charges each. Range was one to six drug use offences each.
- ‘Cambodian’ Juvenile Justice clients with drug use offences had an average of two drug use charges each. Range was one to seven drug use offences each.

Number of drug traffic offences for each Juvenile Justice client with drug traffic offences 1997–98:

- ‘Australian’ Juvenile Justice clients with drug traffic offences had an average of 1.2 drug traffic charges each. Range was one to three drug traffic offences each.
- ‘Vietnamese’ Juvenile Justice clients with drug traffic offences had an average of 1.4 drug traffic charges each. Range was one to four drug traffic offences each.
- ‘Cambodian’ Juvenile Justice clients with drug traffic offences had an average of two drug traffic charges each. Range was one to seven drug use offences each.

## Conclusion

The majority of Juvenile Justice clients with drug offences is ‘Australian’ (51 per cent), compared with 26 per cent being ‘Vietnamese’. However, a large majority of the total ‘Vietnamese’ Juvenile Justice clients (84 per cent) has drug offences. The analysis has shown that ‘Vietnamese’ drug offence clients are much less likely than ‘Australian’ clients to have concurrent property or violence offences. Only 17 (or 16 per cent of total Vietnamese clients) have drug offences and concurrent violence

offences and 18 per cent have drug offences and concurrent property offences. In contrast, 68 per cent of Australian-born Juvenile Justice clients have drug offences and concurrent violence offences and 73 per cent have drug offences and concurrent property offences. It therefore appears as though 'Vietnamese' drug offenders are much less likely than 'Australian' clients to have committed violence or property offences.

## Prisoner Information Management System—PIMS: Prison Statistics: Illicit Drugs

### The Prisoner Population

Victoria has the second lowest per capita rate of imprisonment in Australia. The rate is almost half that of New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia, and that of Australia as a whole (Table 31). As at 30 June 1998, there were 2,858 prisoners in Victoria, (ABS, 1999). Victoria has the highest proportion of *secure custody* prisoners: 87.8 per cent of all prisoners in Victoria. (No proportions were given for other states.) (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, 1999: 530.)

**Table 31 Prisoners in custody, per 100,000 adult population, as at September 1998, by State or Territory**

States and Territories	Imprisonment rate per 100,000 pop.
NSW	140.4
VIC	79.1
QLD	188.7
SA	125.9
WA	185.1
TAS	93.2
NT	459.3
ACT	52.4
AUST	136.7

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, December 1998: 7)

### Most Serious Offence a Drug Offence

The national prisoner Census shows that in mid-1997 there were 188 male and ten female prisoners in Victorian prisons whose most serious offence was a drug offence (4.5 per 100,000 Victorian population). This was considerably less than in NSW prisons where the numbers were 867 male and 67 females (15.4 per 100,000 NSW

population) (ABS Sept, 1998: 21–23). Victoria has the lowest rate of imprisonment for *drug consumption* in Australia, with these offences usually resulting in a community-based order rather than imprisonment (Victorian Prison Service, 1996: 24). In Victoria the number of prisoners with drug offences as their *most serious offence* has remained relatively stable over the previous decade and has declined slightly as a proportion of all prisoners (Table 32). However, in 1998 the number and proportions have risen sharply.

**Table 32 Number of prisoners in Victoria and proportion whose most serious offence was a drug offence, by year**

Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
No. of prisoners	2,256	2,316	2,310	2,277	2,272	2,522	2,467	2,440	2,643	2,858
No. with a drug offence	237	250	226	223	232	255	237	239	232	346
Per cent of prison pop.	10.5	10.8	9.8	9.8	10.2	10.1	9.6	9.8	8.8	12.1

(Source: ABS June 1999: 99)

The number of Victorian prisoners in prison for drug trafficking offences increased dramatically in 1998, up almost 50 per cent on the previous year (see Table 33).

**Table 33 Sentenced Victorian prisoners whose most serious offence was a drug offence, by type of drug offence, sex and year of incarceration**

(Mid-year)	1995		1996		1997		1998	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Possess or use	14	1	12	1	12	-	19	1
Deal or traffic	173	14	175	10	166	10	238	16
Manufacture or grow	2	-	4	-	10	-	12	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>17</b>

(Source: Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner, February 1999: 11)

## Ethnicity of Prisoners

Approximately 15 per cent of the total prisoner population have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDB). This proportion remained relatively stable from 1987 through 1997, but rose to its highest point in 11 years in 1998 when it reached nearly 20 per cent of the male prisoner population (Table 34).

**Table 34 Ethnic background of Victorian prisoners by sex and year, 1995–98**

	1995		1996		1997		1998	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
No. from NESB	1,958	97	1,918	109	2,031	135	2,150	132
Per cent	83	85	84	86	83	89	81	87
No. from CLD	378	17	376	18	432	16	518	19
Per cent	16	15	16	14	17	11	19	13
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>2,336</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>2,294</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>2,463</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>2,668</b>	<b>151</b>

(Source: Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner, February 1999: 11)

It is suspected that the rise in the proportion of prisoners from CLDB is associated with the rise in the number of prisoners whose most serious offence is traffic illicit drugs, and the rise in the number of prisoners born in Vietnam. Vietnam is the only country of birth that showed a consistent rise in numbers and proportions. The number and percentage of prisoners born in Vietnam rose steadily from 1987 through 1996 but then increased dramatically over the next two years (Table 35).

**Table 35 Number of male prisoners in Victoria, born in Vietnam and proportion of all prisoners, by year**

Year	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Number	9	22	22	39	41	39	42	58	66	98	139
Proportion %	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.7	2.5	2.9	3.9	5.1

(Source: Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner., February 1999: 11 and ABS 1999)

### **Analysis of Prison Information Management System Data 1997–98**

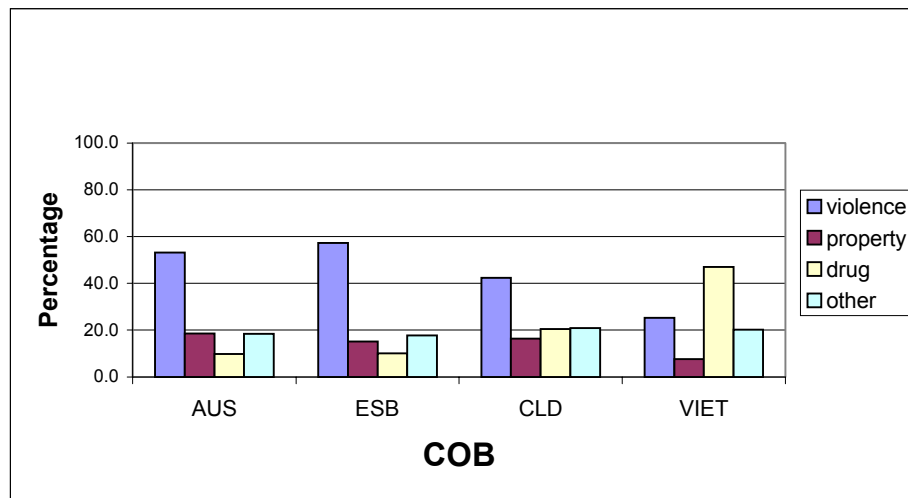
A specific analysis of Prison information Management System (PIMS) data was conducted. The data set contained information on the latest prison episode for *all* persons who were in prison during the period 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998—a total of 8,915 individuals. Some of these people may have been in prison for the entire 12-month period, others may have had short sentences, and others may have finished or started their sentences during the study year period. The information referred to below is from each individual's latest entry into prison. Thus, if a person entered prison twice in 1997–98 the information will have been taken from their latest ('current episode') intake record. Each time a prisoner enters prison they are interviewed and their current details entered onto the PIMS database. Primarily the data is used for prison management purposes.

Of the 8,915 people who had an episode of imprisonment during the year 1997-98, 7,639 or 85.7 per cent were born in Australia. This is a rate of 23.7 per 100,000 Australian-born, Victorian population. Two hundred and twenty-two (222), or 2.5 per cent of prisoners, were born in Vietnam. This is a rate of 401.4 per 100,000 Vietnam-born, Victorian population. Four hundred and seventeen (417) prisoners, or 4.7 per cent of all prisoners, were from other English speaking backgrounds, and 574, or 6.4 per cent, were from CLDB other than Vietnam.

### Prisoners' Most Serious Offence

Most prisoners enter prison with a string of charges for which they have been convicted and sentenced. The offence which has the most severe penalty attached to it is recorded as the 'most serious offence'. This variable appears in most of the published statistics on prisoners. A majority of prisoners born in Australia, or born in other English language countries, have violence as their most serious offence (53 per cent and 58 per cent respectively), and 41 per cent of prisoners from CLD countries have violence as their most serious offence. In contrast, only 25 per cent of Vietnamese-born prisoners had violence as their most serious offence.

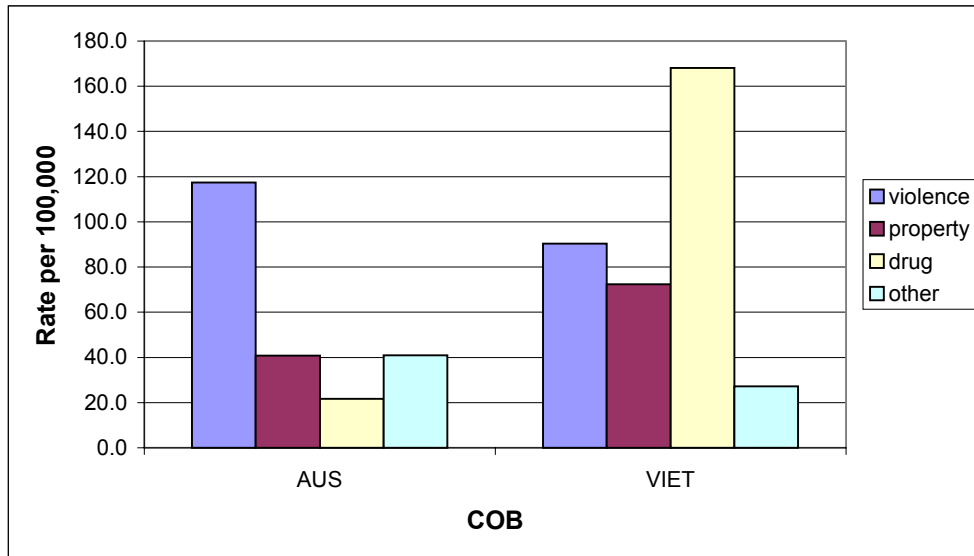
Proportions of prisoners with offences of property as their most serious offence were similar across groups, although much lower for Vietnamese born prisoners (approximately eight per cent compared with 18 per cent). However, while only ten per cent to 20 per cent of prisoners in other ethnic categories had drug offending as their most serious offence, 48 per cent of Vietnamese born prisoners had drug offending as their most serious offence. (See Figure 3.)



**Figure 3 Prisoners' current episode most serious offence by COB, 1997-98**

Because the numbers for other countries of birth were low, only Vietnamese and Australian-born prisoners were calculated per 100,000 population. It can be seen in Figure 4 (below) that rates per hundred thousand population were higher for Vietnamese-born prisoners, except in the case of 'violence' and 'other' crime categories. The greatest discrepancy was for most serious offence: drugs. The rate was 168 per 100,000 Vietnamese population, compared with 22 per 100,000 Australian-born population. Violence as most serious offence was 60 per 100,000 for Vietnamese-born prisoners, compared with 117 per 100,000 for the Australian-born.

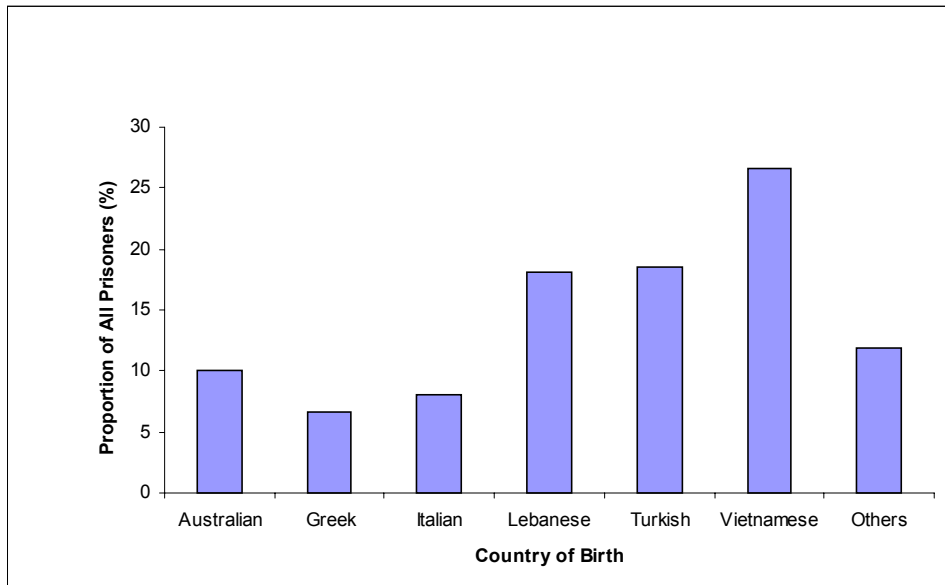
**Figure 4 Prisoners' current episode most serious offence by COB, rate per 100,000 ethnic population**



### Drug Offending

Twenty-seven per cent of the Vietnamese-born prisoner population had a drug offence as their most serious offence. For other backgrounds the proportions were: approximately 18 per cent of prisoners born in Turkey, 18 per cent of prisoners born in Lebanon, ten per cent of prisoners born in Australia, eight per cent of prisoners born in Italy, seven per cent of prisoners born in Greece and 12 per cent of prisoners born in other countries. Thus, while just over one in four prisoners who were born in Vietnam had a drug offence as their most serious offence, only one in ten of the Australian-born prisoner population had a drug offence as their most serious offence. (See Figure 5.)

**Figure 5 Prisoners' country of birth/most serious drug offence  
1997-98**



An examination of the 933 prisoners who had a drug offence as their most serious offence shows that 75 per cent are born in Australia and ten per cent are born in Vietnam (Table 36).

Prisoners who had drug traffic charges among their string of offences numbered 1,034. Of these, 748 (72 per cent) were born in Australia and 112 (11 per cent) were born in Vietnam.

Table 36 shows that a majority of Vietnamese-born prisoners, whose most serious offence was a drug offence, were aged under 26 years (53.4 per cent). (For all prisoners, the proportion in this age group is 33 per cent.) In comparison with the Vietnamese-born, a majority of Australian-born prisoners, other English speaking background prisoners and prisoners born in cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds (excluding Vietnam), whose most serious offence was a drug offence, were aged 26 years and over.

**Table 36 Age distribution of prisoners by ethnicity, whose current episode most serious offence is a drug offence, 1997–98**

Age	18–21		21–25		26–30		31–40		41+		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Australian-born	63	9.0	158	22.7	124	17.8	207	29.7	145	20.8	697 (75%)
Other ESB	3	7.7	6	15.4	4	10.3	14	35.9	12	30.8	39 (4%)
Other CLD	7	6.7	17	16.3	16	15.4	32	30.8	32	30.8	104 (11%)
Vietnamese-born	18	19.0	32	34.4	20	21.5	16	17.0	7	7.5	93 (10%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>933</b>

Missing variable 'country of birth' = 20 cases

### Total Drug Offending

Prisoners who had drug charges among their string of offences numbered 2,059. This figure is perhaps a better indication of prisoner drug offending than is 'most serious offence' because, in many cases, drug offending is subsumed by other types of offending, such as violence and property, which may be deemed to be more serious. This is particularly the case for the Australian-born prisoner where there is a high proportion with more serious violence offending, which masks the extent of their drug offending.

While Australian-born prisoners were equally likely to have drug use and drug traffic offences (44 per cent and 46 per cent respectively), the Vietnamese-born prisoners were less likely to have drug use offences and more likely to have drug traffic offences: 15 per cent and 84 per cent respectively. This may lead to an assumption that Vietnamese-born drug traffickers are less likely to be drug users than are the Australian-born prisoners. However, this may be a wrong assumption given the findings for drug use shown below.

### Illicit Drug Use by Drug Offender Prisoners

On entering the prison system prisoners are asked a number of questions about drug use (including alcohol). However, two questions were considered to point to illicit drug use exclusive of alcohol. These were: 'Have you injected in the previous 12 months?' and 'Did you commit your present offences to support a drug habit?' For the purposes of this analysis, where a 'yes' answer was given to either of these questions, the prisoner was considered to be a user of illicit drugs.

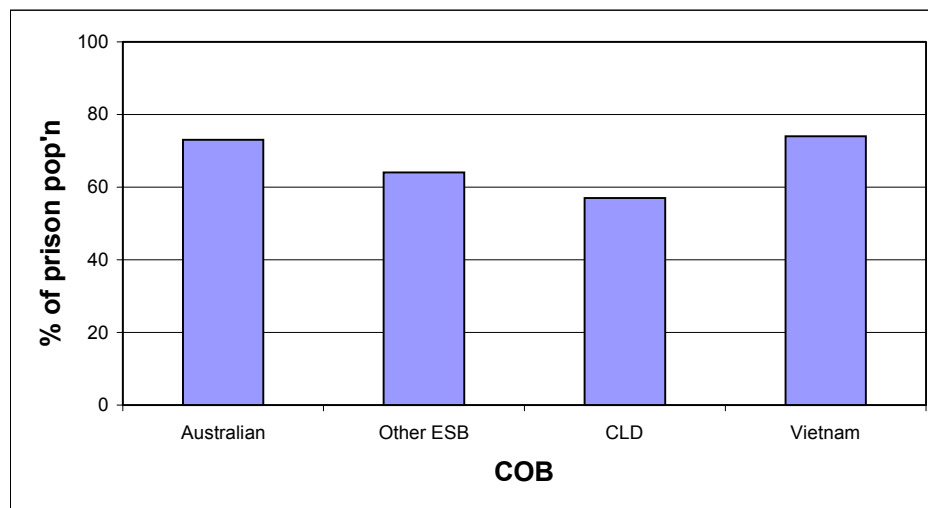
Drug use among Australian-born prisoners with *drug traffic* charges was 65 per cent, compared with 82 per cent for Vietnamese-born drug traffickers. A similar pattern is observed among prisoners whose most serious offence was a drug offence. Seventy per cent (70 per cent) of Australian-born prisoners, whose most serious

offence was a drug offence, indicated that they used illicit drugs, compared with 83 per cent for the Vietnamese-born. From the analysis of drug use, it appears that Vietnamese-born drug offending prisoners are more likely than drug offending Australian born prisoners to be using illicit drugs.

### Illicit Drug Use of All Prisoners

When the drug use of the entire prisoner population was looked at (using the definition of drug use as described above), 72 per cent of Australian-born and 73 per cent of Vietnamese-born prisoners indicated they used illicit drugs. Prisoners from non-English speaking backgrounds (exclusive of the Vietnamese-born) had the lowest proportion of illicit drug use (58 per cent). (See Figure 6.) Thus overall, drug use by prisoners is extremely high, with this analysis indicating that fewer than three out of every four prisoners had used illicit drugs before their imprisonment.

**Figure 6 Prisoners' illicit drug use by COB, 1997-98**



### Some Further Observations

The rise in the number of prisoners born in Vietnam is consistent with:

- An enormous increase in heroin-related arrests by police in Victoria and the concentration of Victoria Police on areas of high Vietnamese population, including Footscray, Frankston, Springvale and Dandenong (ABCI, 1999: 39).
- An apparent trend in courts to sentence higher proportions of drug traffic offenders to periods of incarceration than any other category of offender. (An analysis of court outcomes for defendants with proven charges, by offence categories, in the Magistrates Court in July to October 1998, shows that incarceration rates are highest where the offence is one of 'drug cultivate, manufacture or traffic'.)

- Just over 50 per cent of offenders whose principal proven offence was so defined received a disposition of incarceration. This is considerably higher than other common categories of offences heard in the Magistrates Courts. For example, only approximately five per cent of (non-rape) sex offenders receive sentences of incarceration, less than five per cent of assault offenders receive incarceration, approximately ten per cent of burglary offenders receive incarceration and 20 per cent of robbery offenders receive incarceration (Criminal Justice Statistics and Research Unit, 1998).
- The increase in rates of Vietnamese offenders appearing in the Juvenile Justice system and the Corrections system corresponds to the introduction of legislation which gives tougher sentences to drug offenders and creates a 'serious drug offender' category for repeat drug traffickers. (*Sentencing and Others (Amendment) Act 1997*. No. 48. Victoria, Australia.)

## **Corrections—Community-Based Court Dispositions (OASIS): Illicit Drugs**

### **The Database OASIS**

The OASIS database contains data on all persons sentenced to community-based dispositions by the Courts. Convicted offenders sentenced to a community-based order by the Courts are interviewed by Community Corrections assessment staff before commencing their disposition. All the client's details, including demographic data, are entered onto the electronic OASIS database. The database is used to manage an individual through the disposition period until it is completed. Data may be added throughout the sentence, as required.

The computerised database was commenced in the early 1980s. The database has records for approximately 150,000 past and present clients. The average *daily* number of offenders on community-based orders was 7,063 in 1996–97.

Where drugs are indicated and the client is on a more serious community disposition, such as parole or intensive care order, or there are conditions from the court for treatment, the client is referred for a full assessment and linking into drug treatment. Clients with less serious community-based orders, even if for drug offences, or where the client is having problems with drugs, they are not assessed for drug treatment.

The data analysed below contains information on all persons who received a community-based order in the period 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. This was a total of 40,433 individuals. Some of these people may have been on a community-based order for the entire 12-month period, others may have had shorter-term community orders and others may have finished or started their community dispositions during the study year. If a person received two or more separate community-based dispositions within the study year, only their latest entry data is counted.

## Clients' Ethnicity

The variables 'country of birth' and 'nationality' are the variables used on the OASIS database to indicate ethnicity. Of the 40,433 clients on community-based orders during 1997–98, 38,914 (96 per cent) had country of birth specified. Of these, 32,100 (82.5 per cent) of clients were born in Australia, 2088 (5.4 per cent) clients were born in other English language countries, 3,836 (9.8 per cent) clients were born in CLDB countries, and 890 (2.3 per cent) clients were born in Vietnam.

## Clients with Drug Offences

Excluding clients where no country of birth was stated, 5,845 (15 per cent) of all clients (38,914) had a drug offence. Drug offences were present for 14.5 per cent of clients born in Australia; 13.8 per cent of clients born in other English speaking countries; and 13.9 per cent of clients born in CLDB countries. For the clients born in Vietnam, however, the pattern was quite different, with 42.2 per cent of the Vietnamese-born clients having drug offences.

The number of clients with drug offences who were born in Australia was 4,657, a rate of 144.8 per 100,000 Australian born population in Victoria. The number of offenders with drug offences who were born in Vietnam was 367, a rate of 663.6 per 100,000 Vietnam-born population in Victoria.

As can be seen in Table 37, clients born in Vietnam were more likely to have drug offences and while type of drug offence was relatively evenly spread for each of the different backgrounds, for the Vietnamese-born the greatest proportion had drug traffic offences (some of whom may also have had drug use offences).

**Table 37 Offenders on community-based orders for drug offences, by country of birth 1997–98**

Country of birth	Type of Drug Offence									
	No drug offences		Drug use offences		Drug traffic offences		Drug man./grow offences		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Australia	27,443	85.5	2,663	8.3	779	2.4	1,215	3.8	32,100	100
Any other English speaking country	1,799	86.2	161	7.7	48	2.3	80	3.8	2,088	100
CLDB county	3,304	86.1	260	6.8	178	4.6	94	2.5	3,836	100
Vietnam	523	58.8	95	10.7	268	30.1	4	0.4	890	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>33,069</b>		<b>3179</b>		<b>1,273</b>		<b>1,393</b>		<b>38,914</b>	

Country of birth not specified for 1,519 clients. Note: individual clients appear only once in the above table. Drug offences have been classified into a hierarchy. Thus, if a client has a drug man./grow offence and also has other traffic or use drug offences, they will only appear in the drug man./grow column. If a client has drug use and traffic offences they will only appear in the drug traffic column. If a client has drug use offences and no other drug offences they will appear in the drug use column. It was not possible in this analysis to determine how many drug traffickers were also drug users.

Of the clients who had drug use (only) offences, 2,663 (83.8 per cent) were born in Australia, 161 (5.1 per cent) were born in another English language country, 260 (8.2 per cent) were born in CLDB countries and 95 (three per cent) were born in Vietnam.

Of the clients who had drug traffic offences (and had no drug manufacture or grow offences, and may or may not have had drug use offences), 799 (61.2 per cent) were born in Australia, 48 (3.8 per cent) were born in another English language country, 178 (14 per cent) were born in CLDB countries and 268 (21.1 per cent) were born in Vietnam.

Of the clients with drug manufacture or grow offences (and who may or may not have had drug traffic or drug use offences), 1,215 (87.2 per cent) were born in Australia, 80 (5.7 per cent) were born in another English language country, 94 (6.7 per cent) were born in CLDB countries and 4 (0.3 per cent) were born in Vietnam.

### **Clients' Country of Birth by Other Types of Offences**

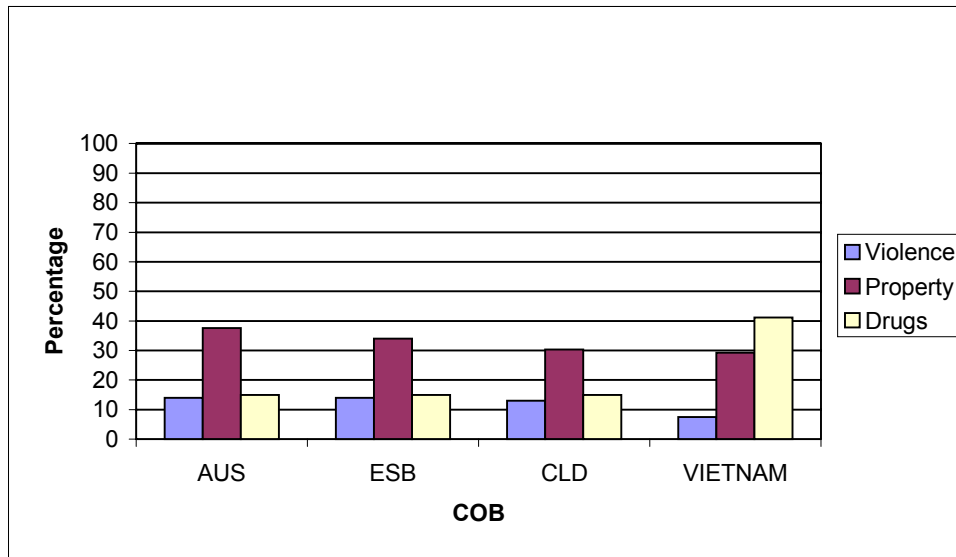
Of the 5,845 clients who had drug offences, and where country of birth was indicated, 3,854 (65.9 per cent) had no other offences except those relating to drugs. Of these, 77.4 per cent were born in Australia, five per cent were born in other English language countries, 9.7 per cent were born in CLDB countries and 7.9 per cent were born in Vietnam.

A different pattern emerges when the proportions are calculated within each birthplace category. For the Australian-born, 9.3 per cent had drug offences alone; 9.2 per cent of clients born in other English language countries had only drug offences, and 9.8 per cent of clients born in CLDB countries had only drug offences. For the clients born in Vietnam, 34 per cent had drug offences only.

As can be seen in Figure 7, the proportion of clients with violence offences was similar for all background groups except for those born in Vietnam. While approximately 14 per cent of clients from other background groups had violence offences, only 7.5 per cent of the Vietnamese-born clients did. A more even distribution was found for property offending, although a higher proportion of clients born in Australia and other English language countries had property offences (37.6 per cent and 34 per cent respectively) while this rate was a little less for those from CLDBs (30.4 per cent) and the Vietnamese-born (29.2 per cent). As shown above, proportion of clients with drug offences was similar for all background groups except for the Vietnamese-born, where the proportion was much higher (approximately 14 per cent for other backgrounds and 41.2 per cent for the Vietnamese-born).

Thus Vietnamese-born clients are less likely to have violence offences, more likely to have drug offences, and more likely to only have drug offences.

**Figure 7 Offences of offenders on community-based dispositions by COB, 1997-98**



### Age of Drug Offenders

Analysis of the age of clients with drug offences also showed distinct patterns. Drug offenders born in Vietnam tended to be much younger than drug offenders in other background categories are. Drug offences for the other background categories were relatively evenly spread across age groups and of a similar distribution pattern. However for the Vietnamese-born, the greatest majority of clients were aged under 26 years.

Of the Australian-born clients with any drug offences, 45.7 per cent were aged under 26 years compared with 79 per cent of the Vietnamese-born who were aged under 26 years. This pattern is similar for clients with drug use and drug traffic offences.

Of the Australian-born clients who had drug use offences as their only drug offence, 47 per cent were aged under 26 years, compared with 71.6 per cent of the Vietnamese-born who had drug use only offences. (For other ESB clients the rate was 37.3 per cent and for clients from CLDB countries, 40 per cent.)

Of the Australian-born clients who had drug traffic offences (and who had no drug manufacture or grow offences, and who may, or may not, have had drug use offences), 59.9 per cent were aged under 26 years, compared with 81.8 per cent of the Vietnamese-born. Fifty-three per cent (53.4 per cent) of the Vietnamese-born clients with drug traffic offences were aged under 21 years, compared with 30 per cent of the Australian-born who had drug traffic offences.

Numbers were too small to make any meaningful comparisons between Australian-born offenders and Vietnamese-born offenders with manufacture or grow drug offences. (Only three individuals of Vietnamese birth and nine from CLDB had these offences.) Of the 1,215 Australian-born offenders with manufacture or grow drug offences, 78 per cent were aged between 21 and 40 years, and 55.3 per cent were aged 26 to 40 years.

Overall, the patterns found in the OASIS database mirror those of the police, prisons and Juvenile Justice databases. The Vietnamese-born are over-represented in comparison with their size in the community. Vietnamese-born offenders are more likely than any other group to be in the criminal justice system as a result of drug offending. They tend to have fewer violence offences or other types of offending, and they are of a younger age demographic than are other offenders.

## **Statistical Profile of Victorians from Main and Non-Main English Speaking Countries, 1996 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics)**

### **Introduction**

Social and economic characteristics of ethnic groups (where ethnicity is determined by country of birth), which may determine vulnerability to illicit drug use, were examined. For the purpose of this section of the report, culturally and linguistically diverse communities are described as Non-Mainly English Speaking Countries (NMESC) in accordance with the term used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Census data examined included unemployment and labour force status (15–24 and 25–64 years), proficiency in English (15–24 and 25–64 years), education (15–24 years), proficiency in English by labour force status (15–24 years) and labour force status by local government area (15–24 years). For the purpose of this report, the term ‘youth’ will be 15 to 24 years of age.

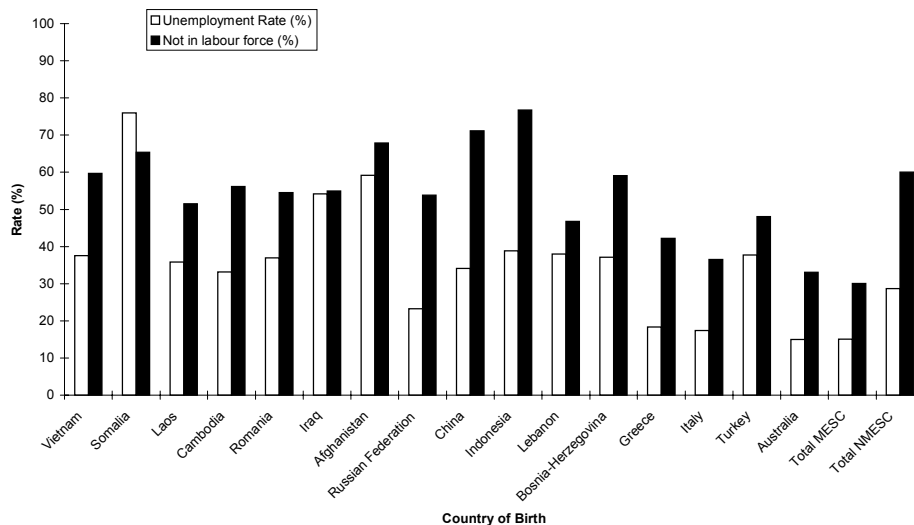
Our analysis included data for Victorians born in Vietnam, Somalia, Laos, Cambodia, Romania, Iraq, Afghanistan, Russian Federation, China, Indonesia, Lebanon, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Turkey and Australia. This selection of countries of birth encompassed those migrant groups with more established links to Australia, those who arrived during the 1980s and lastly those who arrived in the 1990s. These countries of birth were then grouped into Main English Speaking Countries (MESC) and NMESC. The reason for the age categories was largely due to the belief that those aged 15 to 24 years were perceived to be more vulnerable to using drugs as a result of various factors, in contrast to those aged 25 to 64 years.

## Unemployment and Not in Labour Force Rates for Persons Aged 15 to 24 Years

### Unemployment

Over all 62,000 youth (15–24 years) born in MESC and NMESC were unemployed in 1996, an unemployment rate of 16 per cent. This is in contrast to the unemployment rate recorded at the 1991 Census (21 per cent).

**Figure 8 Unemployment and not in labour force rates for persons aged 15 to 24 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**



- The unemployment rate for MESC youth was 16 per cent, a decrease from 20 per cent in the 1991 Census. The unemployment rate for NMESC youth in 1996 was 29 per cent, down from 34 per cent in 1991.
- In 1996, over 50 per cent of the youth labour force of those born in Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan were unemployed, although youth labour force numbers from these countries was small. High unemployment rates were also found among youth born in Indonesia (39 per cent), Lebanon (38 per cent), Turkey (38 per cent), Vietnam (38 per cent), Bosnia-Herzegovina (37 per cent) and Romania (37 per cent). Figures from the 1991 Census show unemployment rates among these groups, excluding Bosnia-Herzegovina (which were not available), have changed little except for those from Vietnam and Romania, which were above 50 per cent. In 1996, the unemployment rate for those born in Laos, Cambodia and China was approaching 35 per cent. The lowest unemployment rate was

found among those born in Italy and Greece (18 per cent). The unemployment rate for Australian-born was 15 per cent.

### **Not in the Labour Force<sup>17</sup>**

- In 1996, the proportion of MESC youth not in the labour force was 33 per cent, a rate similar to that of 1991. However, this was in marked contrast to youth from NMESC, where up to 60 per cent were not in the labour force in 1996, up from 51 per cent in 1991.
- Reasons for the high percentage of NMESC youth not in the labour force are not clear. It may be a result of a high proportion of the population being engaged in studies, house duties or family responsibilities. However, there is probably a significant number of hidden unemployed who may like to work but are not actively seeking work.
- A large number of NMESC youth was not in the labour force. Rates ranged from 45 per cent to 60 per cent. For youth not in the labour force who were born in Somalia, Afghanistan, China and Indonesia, the rates were greater (65 per cent and above). There was little change in the rates of those not in the labour force for those born in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Romania and Lebanon when compared with the 1991 Census. However, there was an increase by over ten per cent for youth born in Turkey between the 1991 and 1996 Census. In 1996, the lowest rate not in the labour force was found for Australian-born (33 per cent).

## **Unemployment and not in labour force rates for persons aged 25 to 64 years, 1996**

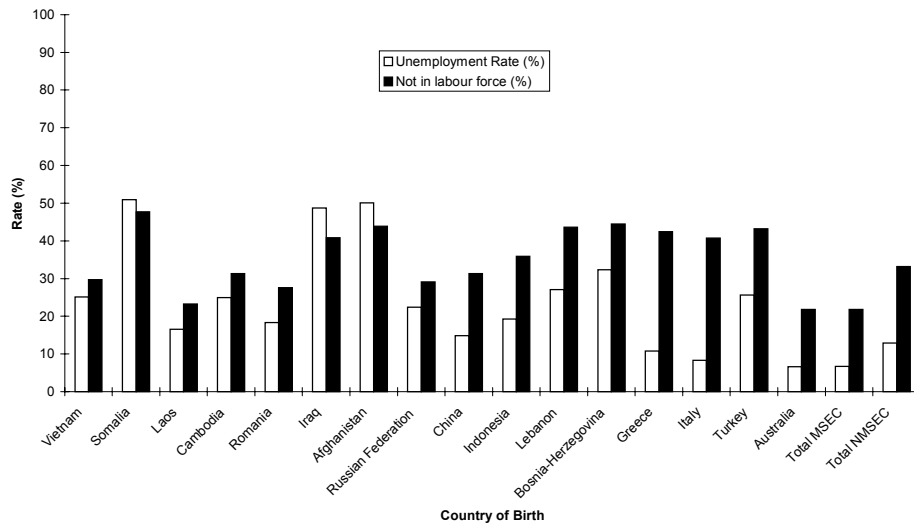
### **Unemployment**

Over 1.6 million working adults in Victoria were in the labour force in 1996. Of these, eight per cent were unemployed; a lower rate than in the 1991 Census that indicated ten per cent were unemployed.

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<sup>17</sup> Not in the labour force includes those persons who, during the Census week, were not in the categories 'employed' or 'unemployed'. These categories can include people who are retired; inactive people; people permanently unable to work; trainee teachers; person in hospital or in unpaid voluntary work for charitable organisations. They can also be persons with marginal attachment to the labour force (i.e. wanted to work and were available to work within 4 weeks; although claiming to have looked for work in the four weeks up to the end of the survey week, had not taken active steps to find work.) They can also be discouraged job-seekers. These were people who wanted and were available for work but whose main reason for not taking active steps to find work was they believed they could not get a job for some of the following reasons: they were considered by employers too young or old; difficulties with language or ethnic background; lack of skills or experience. (For further details, see Census Dictionary 1996 and A Guide to Labour Statistics ABS 1986).

**Figure 9 Unemployment and not in labour force rates for persons aged 25 to 64 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**



The unemployment rate among those from MESC was seven per cent, compared with 13 per cent for persons from NMESC.

Unemployment rates for those born in Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq were highest (rates above 48 per cent) while at the other end of the scale those born in Greece and Italy were lowest (just under 11 per cent). In 1996, the unemployment rate for those born in Vietnam was 25 per cent, a decline from 38 per cent in 1991. A similar declining unemployment rate was found for those born in Cambodia (33 per cent to 25 per cent) and Romania (31 per cent to 18 per cent). There was a slight rise in unemployment rates for those born in Lebanon and Turkey. Australian-born had an unemployment rate of seven per cent.

### **Not in the Labour Force**

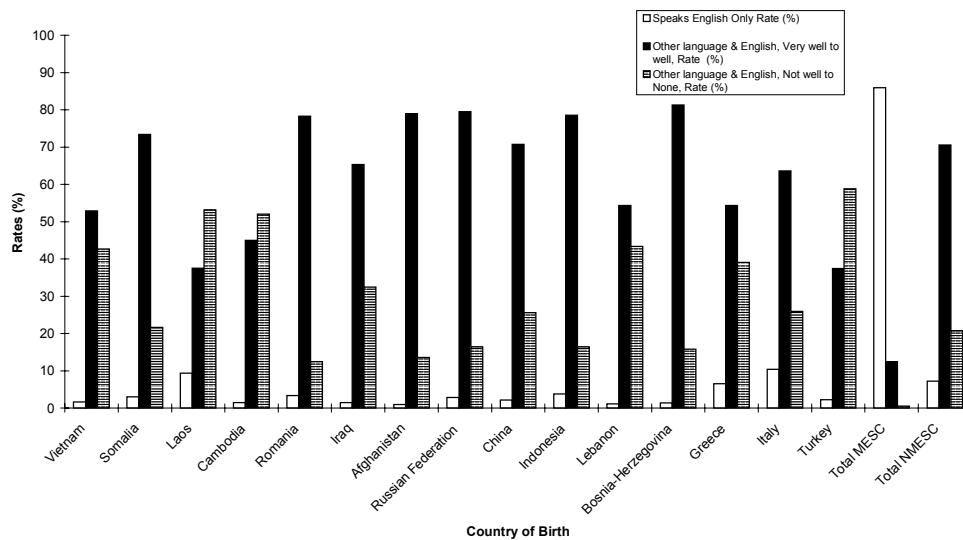
The total number of adults from MESC not in the labour force was over 1.6 million (22 per cent). This is in contrast to those of NMESC where 33 per cent were not in the labour force. Those from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Italy and Turkey had rates above 40 per cent, while 21 per cent of Australian-born were not in the labour force.

### **Summary of Unemployment and Not in Labour Force**

The unemployment rate for youth and adults born in NMESC was considerably greater than for those born in MESC. Unemployment among NMESC youth was higher among newly arrived migrant groups in Victoria than migrants who are well

established in Victoria. Generally, the unemployment rate among the various NMESC decreases as people become older. While the unemployment rate was generally less than in the 1991 Census among NMESC youth, this was not the case for those not in the labour force. The reasons for not being in the labour force were varied. This makes it difficult to establish why youth of NMESC experienced nearly double the rate of not being in the labour force compared with youth born in MESC.

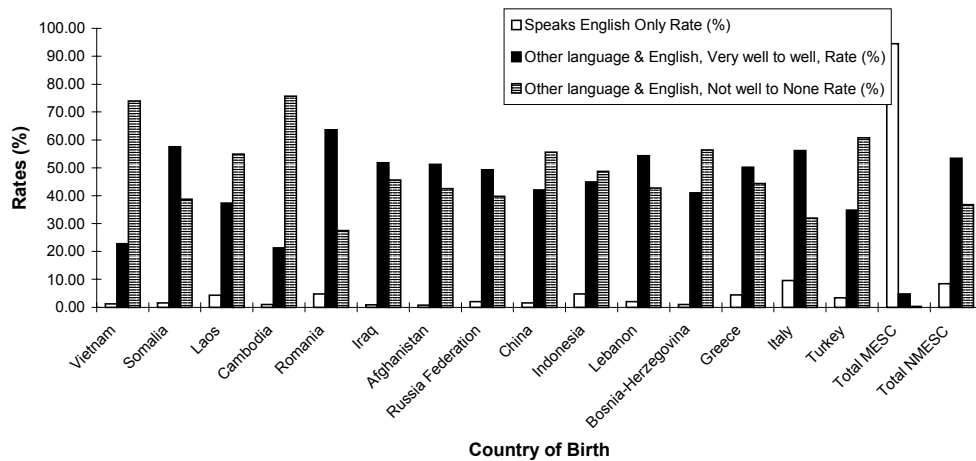
**Figure 10 People aged 15-24 years who arrived in Australia between 1991–1996: Proficiency in English by Birthplace, 1996 Census, Victoria**



- Seventy-one per cent of people from NMESC who arrived between 1991–1996 and were aged 15–24 years spoke other languages and indicated they spoke English well to very well. Twenty per cent of NMESC spoke another language and indicated their English was poor or not spoken at all.
- Over 65 per cent of recent arrivals from Somalia, Romania, Iraq, Afghanistan, Russian Federation, China, Indonesia and Bosnia-Herzegovina reported they spoke another language and spoke English well to very well. Fifty-two per cent (52 per cent) of recent arrivals from Vietnam and fewer than 38 per cent of those from Laos and Turkey reported they spoke English well to very well.
- A substantial number of people arriving from Turkey, Laos and Cambodia reported that their spoken English was poor or not spoken at all (over 50 per cent). Over 40 per cent of those from Vietnam reported poor proficiency in English.

- Those of Indo-Chinese origin generally indicated difficulties with English when compared with most of the other countries (excluding those from Turkey, Lebanon and Greece).

**Figure 11 People aged 25–64 years who arrived in Australia between 1991 to 1996: Proficiency in English by birthplace**



- Fifty-three per cent of recent arrivals (of an older age) from NMESC spoke other languages and rate their English well to very well. Thirty-seven per cent indicated their English proficiency was either poor or not spoken at all.
- Most older recent arrivals from Romania indicated they spoke English well to very well (64 per cent) as did up to 50 per cent of those from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Russia Federation, Lebanon, Greece and Italy. Only 35 per cent from Turkey and 21 per cent from Cambodia reported they spoke English well to very well.
- Over 73 per cent of older recent arrivals from Vietnam and Cambodia, and 60 per cent of those from Turkey, indicated their English proficiency was either poor or not spoken at all. Fifty-five per cent of those who arrived from Laos and China reported poor or no English.

### Summary of Proficiency in English

Overall, a majority of youth from NMESC who arrived to Australia between 1991–1996 reported they spoke English well to very well. A substantial proportion of Indo-Chinese youth indicated their spoken English was poor. As might be expected, the ability to speak English was poor for a substantial proportion of older recent arrivals

from NMESC. Adults arriving from Vietnam and Cambodia had a particularly high proportion having poor or no spoken English.

### **Secondary Education: Government, Catholic and Non-Government by Birthplace for Persons aged 15 to 24 years**

- There was very little difference between the percentage of MESC (61 per cent) and NMESC (63 per cent) students attending government schools or between MESC (17 per cent) and NMESC (19 per cent) attending non-government schools. Students born in Somalia, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Romania, Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon indicated the highest attendance at government schools. Students born in Indonesia had the lowest attendance at government schools (45 per cent).
- Attendance at Catholic schools was greatest among those from Italy (29 per cent) Vietnam (22 per cent) and Greece (21 per cent). Those from Somalia, Afghanistan and Turkey had no students attending Catholic schools.
- Those from the Russian Federation (37 per cent) and Indonesia (42 per cent) had the highest percentage of students attending non-government schools. This was followed by those from Australia (16 per cent), China (15 per cent) and Greece (14 per cent).

### **Summary of Those Attending Secondary School**

The majority of students from MESC and NMESC attended government schools. While there was little difference between the percentages of students from MESC and NMESC attending non-government schools, there were significant differences identified for country-specific birthplaces. As reported, 42 per cent of students born in Indonesia attended non-government schools in contrast to 16 per cent of students born in Australia.

### **Education Attendance**

(Full-Time and Part-Time): Secondary School; Technical or Further Education Institution; University or Other Tertiary Institutions; Other (Not Specified); Not attending any schooling. By birthplace, Aged 15 to 24 Years.

- There were similar proportions of MESC and NMESC students attending secondary school (26 per cent and 27 per cent respectively) and attending technical or further education (eight per cent and ten per cent).
- A significant difference was identified for those attending University or other tertiary institution. Among the MESC it was 14 per cent, compared with 29 per cent for NMESC.
- Forty-eight per cent from MESC compared with 28 per cent among the NMESC did not attend any schooling (perhaps it may be that those from MESC were

more likely to be working). (The ABS has defined not attending any schooling as including being employed, unemployed, not in the labour force or staying at home.)

- Those from Afghanistan showed the highest proportion attending secondary school (43 per cent) in contrast to those from Australia (26 per cent). The lowest proportion was for those from Lebanon (14 per cent), Italy and Turkey (15 per cent).
- A relatively high proportion from Indonesia (20 per cent) attended technical and further education, followed by those from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Somalia and Laos (10 per cent-12 per cent). The lowest proportion was found among those from Iraq (5.8 per cent).
- Highest proportions attending University or other institution were from Indonesia (36 per cent) and China (28 per cent). (It may be that a number of those were overseas students.) The proportion from Vietnam (25 per cent) and Laos (19 per cent) was also higher than for Australian-born (14 per cent).
- People from the most recently emerging migrant groups, Somalia, Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina, had the lowest proportion attending University or other institution (four per cent, three per cent and seven per cent respectively).
- The proportion of those not attending any schooling was highest among those from Lebanon (63 per cent), Italy (59 per cent), Turkey (57 per cent) and Greece (50 per cent). For those born in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia the proportions ranged from 32 per cent to 37 per cent. The lowest proportion was found among the Indonesian-born (12 per cent). For the Australian-born the proportion was 47 per cent.

### **Summary of Secondary Schooling, Advanced Tertiary/University Education and Not Attending Any Schooling**

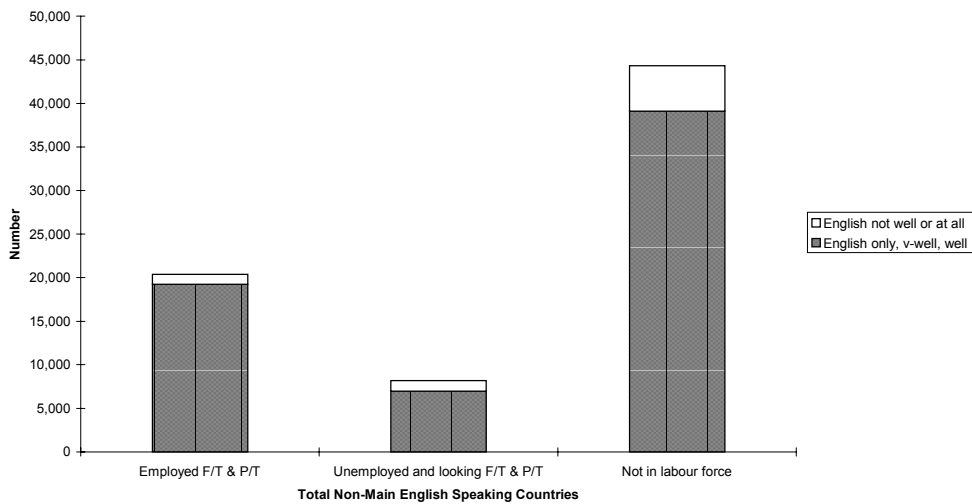
Of particular note was the higher percentage of people from NMESC attending university or other tertiary institutions, in contrast to those from MESC. A higher percentage of those from MESC was not attending any schooling but it may be that many of those people were employed. The proportion attending technical and further education was similar for NMESC and MESC. However, the proportion among Australian-born attending university or other tertiary institution was often lower in contrast to a number of other countries. The most recently arrived migrant groups tended to be less likely to attend university or other tertiary institution.

### **Persons Aged 15 to 24, by Birthplace, by Proficiency in English, by Labour Force Status**

Of the total NMESC who indicated they spoke poor or no English, 15 per cent were found to be unemployed in contrast to <1 per cent among the total MESC. Disparity was also found among the NMESC and MESC having poor English proficiency and

not being in the labour force (12 per cent and <1 per cent respectively). Although six per cent of those from NMESC with poor English were employed, the figure was significantly less than for those of MESC (0.1 per cent).

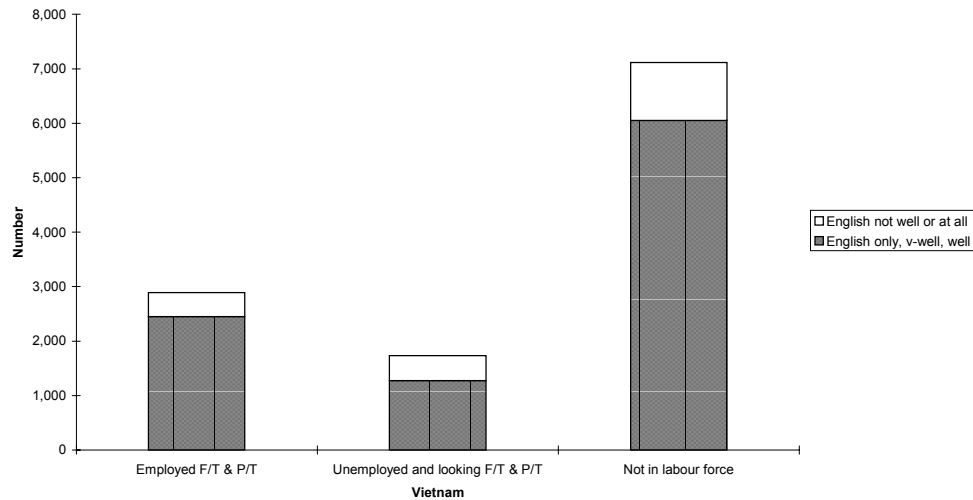
**Figure 12 Persons aged 15 to 24, by birthplace, by proficiency in English, by labour force, 1996 Census, Victoria**



Analysis of the data indicated 12 per cent of people of NMESC not in the labour force had poor or no English compared with six per cent of NMESC people who were employed, and 15 per cent of people unemployed but looking for work.

For those with poor or no English and born in Turkey, Cambodia and Iraq, the unemployment rates were between 30 per cent and 34 per cent. For others with poor or no English and born in Afghanistan, Somalia, Russian Federation, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Indonesia and China, the unemployment rates were between 18 per cent and 24 per cent. Vietnam-born youth with poor or no English had an unemployment rate of 26 per cent. For the Australian-born with poor English, the unemployment rate was <1 per cent.

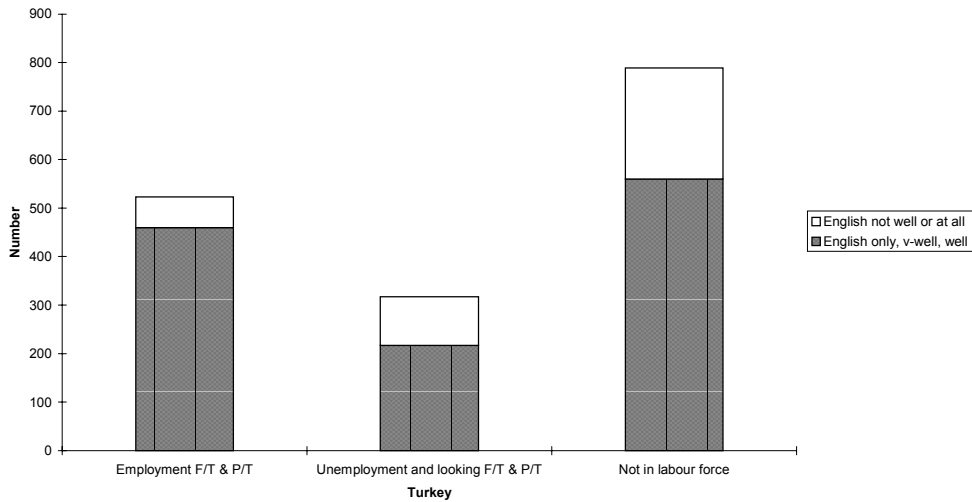
**Figure 13 Persons aged 15 to 24, by birthplace, by proficiency in English, by labour force status, 1996 Census, Victoria**



Analysis of the data indicated 15 per cent of Vietnamese-born people not in the labour force had poor or no English, compared with 26 per cent of Vietnamese born people unemployed and looking for work. For Vietnamese-born people employed and with poor or no English it was 15 per cent.

A relatively high proportion of those born in Turkey and Somalia who had poor or no English were not in the labour force (26 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). For those born in Lebanon, Iraq, Cambodia, Vietnam, Italy and China with poor or no English, the rates of those not in the labour force ranged from 15 per cent to 21 per cent.

**Figure 14 Persons aged 15 to 24, by birthplace, by proficiency in English, by labour force status, 1996 Census, Victoria**



Analysis of the data indicates that 29 per cent of Turkish-born not in the labour force had poor to no English, compared with 12 per cent of people who were employed and 31 per cent of people unemployed but looking for work.

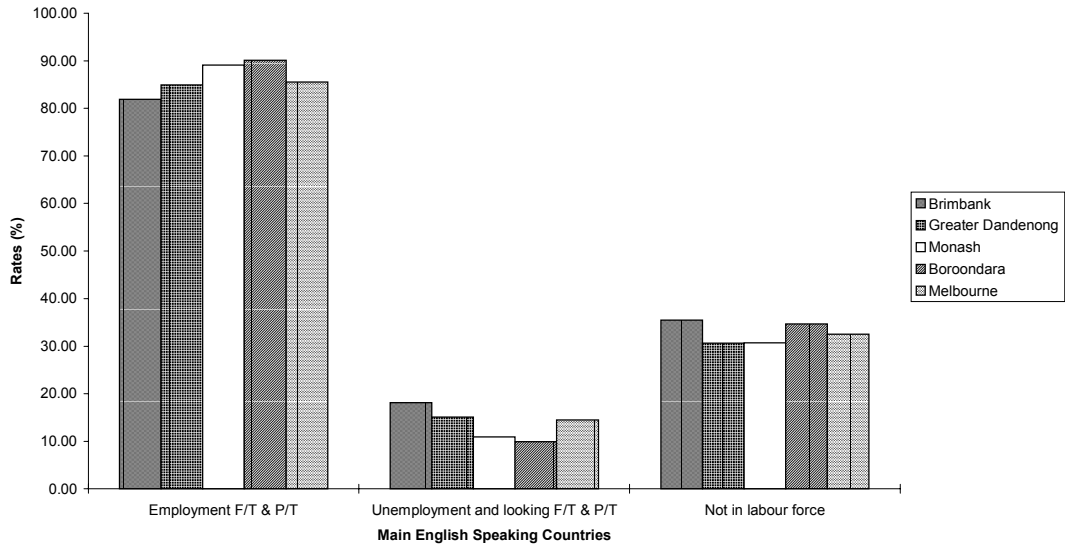
### **Summary of Proficiency in English by Labour Force Status**

The ability to speak English well or very well appears to have been an advantageous factor in having employment. The consequence of poor or no English significantly increases a person's likelihood of not being able to find employment. (Other graphs of persons aged 15 to 24, by birthplace, by proficiency in English, by labour force status are to be found in Appendix 1.)

## Total NMESC Groups, by Labour Force Status, in Select Local Government Areas, Melbourne, Aged 15 to 24 Years

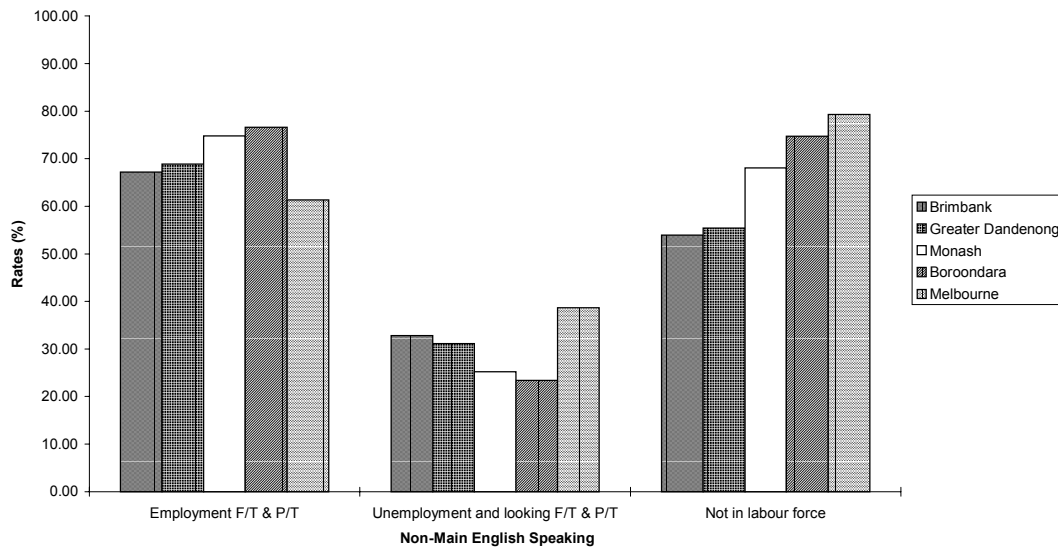
The criteria for selecting the various local government areas (LGA) by ethnic groups, by labour force status, were based upon higher concentration of ethnic population size.

**Figure 15 Total main English speaking country groups, by labour force status, in select local government areas, Melbourne, ages 15 to 24 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**



Among people from MESC, unemployment levels in the LGA of Brimbank, Greater Dandenong, Monash, Boroondara and Melbourne ranged from nine per cent to 18 per cent. For those of NMESC in the same LGA, the unemployment rates ranged from 23 per cent to nearly 39 per cent. The largest disparity was in the LGA of Melbourne where MESC unemployment was 15 per cent compared with 39 per cent for the NMESC.

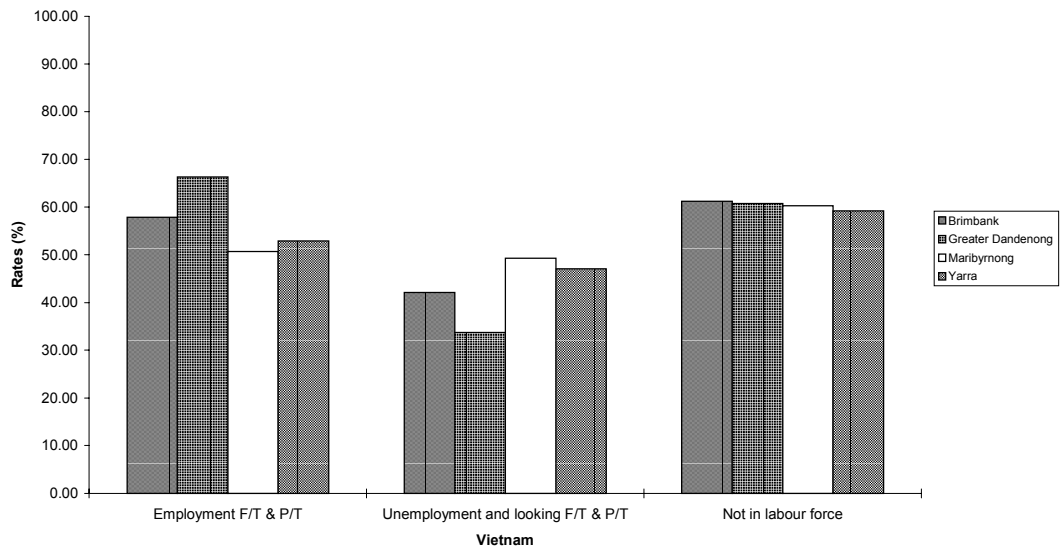
**Figure 16 Total non-main English speaking groups, by labour force status, in select local government areas, Melbourne, ages 15 to 24 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**



Rates of not being in the labour force, for people from MESC, were lowest in Greater Dandenong (31 per cent) and greatest in Brimbank (36 per cent). This in contrast to the total NMESC where 'not in the labour force' rates ranged from 53 per cent to 79 per cent. The greatest percentage of people of not being in the labour force was found in the LGA of Melbourne (79 per cent) followed by Boroondara (75 per cent).

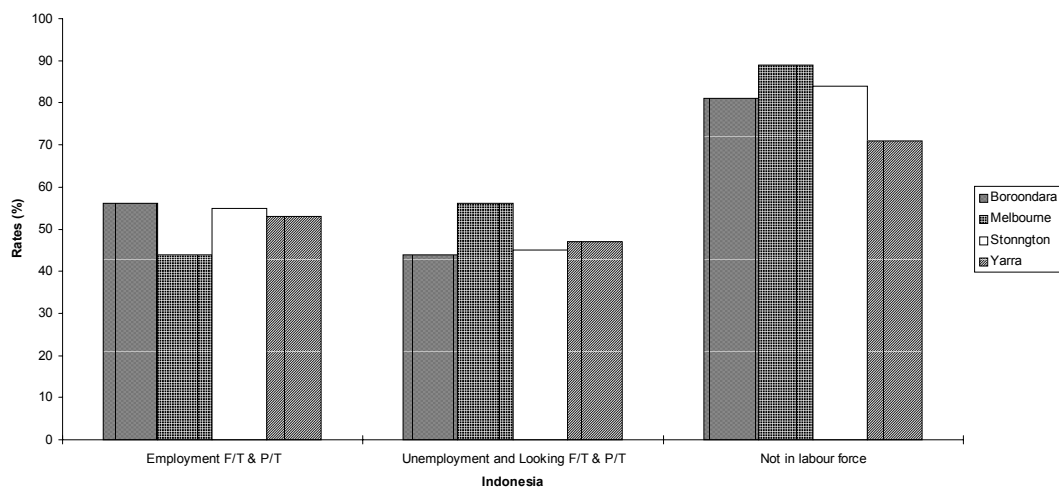
High unemployment among NMESC was identified in the LGA of Greater Dandenong, Maribyrnong, Darebin and Yarra. In Greater Dandenong the unemployment levels for those from Cambodia, Romania and Afghanistan ranged from 37 per cent to 67 per cent respectively.

**Figure 17 Main ethnic group by birthplace, by labour force status, in select local government areas, Melbourne, ages 15 to 24 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**



In the LGA of Maribyrnong, unemployment rates were high among those from Bosnia-Herzegovina (58 per cent), Vietnam (49 per cent) and Somalia (100 per cent). It must be emphasised there were only eight Somalian youths in the labour force.

**Figure 18 Main ethnic group by birthplace, by labour force, in select local government areas, Melbourne, ages 15 to 24 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**

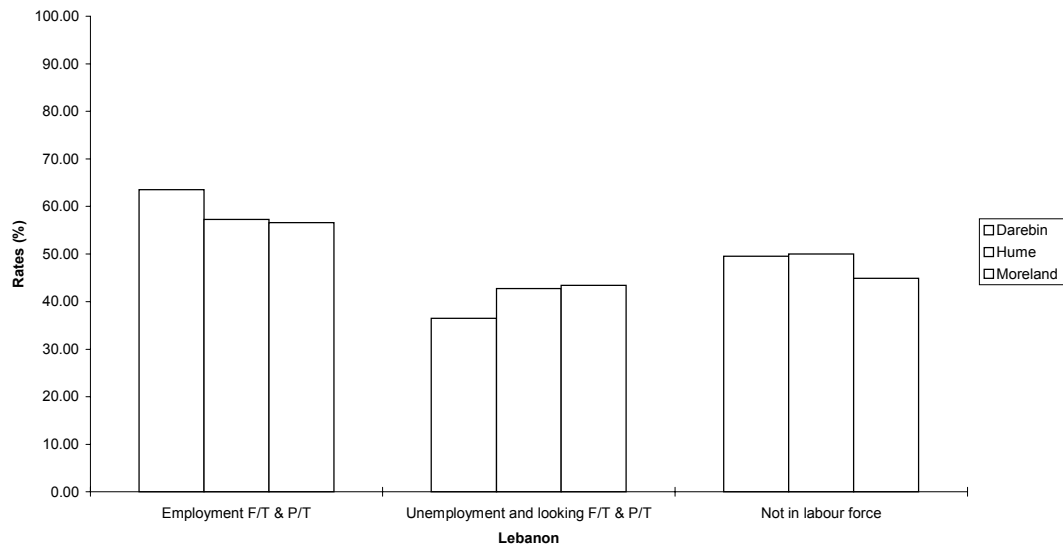


In the LGA of Darebin there were four major ethnic groups. Unemployment levels were highest for those from Iraq (88 per cent), Greece (58 per cent), China (41 per cent) and Italy (36 per cent).

In the LGA of Yarra unemployment was high among those from Laos (81 per cent), Vietnam (47 per cent) and Indonesia (46 per cent).

Unemployment levels in various LGA were found to be high among Indonesian born people living in Melbourne (56 per cent), among Lebanese-born in Moreland (43 per cent), among Russian Federation born in Port Phillip (35 per cent) and among Turkish-born in Hume (39 per cent).

**Figure 19 Main ethnic group by birthplace, by labour force status, in select local government areas, Melbourne, ages 15 to 24 years, 1996 Census, Victoria**



Higher rates of not being in the labour force were found among all the ethnic groups and across many LGA. The highest levels were found in Melbourne for Indonesian-born (88 per cent) and in Monash for Chinese-born (80 per cent). For those born in Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq and residing in the LGA of Hume, 50 per cent and above were not in the labour force.

### **Summary of Birthplace, by Labour Force in Select LGA**

An examination of ethnic groups by employment status identified that people from NMESC were significantly disadvantaged in various selected LGA by their inability to find employment in contrast to those from MESC. For people of NMESC this pattern continued with higher rates of not in the labour force and lower rates of having employment. There were generally high rates of unemployment and not in the labour force among most of the ethnic groups studied across various selected LGA. (Other graphs by labour force status, in select local government areas, Melbourne, aged 15 to 24 years, by country of birth are to be found in Appendix 2.)

## Discussion

As was the case with many other databases the variable used to identify ethnicity was country of birth (COB). The COB variable, while being useful in identifying ethnicity, still remains problematic as it identifies only the first generation or recent migrant groups. Thus there was a bias towards recent arrivals.

The profile of those born in NMESC, following an analysis of particular social and economic characteristics, has clearly indicated they are experiencing various disadvantages in contrast to those from MESC. Literature has suggested unemployment is a vulnerability that can place people at risk of the use and trafficking of illicit drugs. While the unemployment rate among youth from NMESC had decreased somewhat, when compared with the 1991 Census, their rates were still nearly double that of youth who are from MESC. As would be expected, ethnic groups with long-established links with Australia had the lowest rates of unemployment. This may be a result of increased acculturation of these ethnic groups as a whole. However, for the more recently arrived migrant groups, unemployment rates were over three times those of Australian-born people. It can be assumed these rates of unemployment will decrease over time following longer settlement, as they have done previously with other ethnic groups. However, it can also be suggested the economic hardships associated with the major dismantling of the manufacturing sector (previously an area that absorbed many migrant workers both young and old), will have a significant and prolonged impact upon those from NMESC in their ability to find work.

Youths are the most vulnerable group for exposure to using illicit drugs, regardless of ethnicity. While youth unemployment rates among those of NMESC remain significantly higher, their risk of exposure to drug use may also be higher. While the definition of those not in the labour force remains broad, a larger proportion of youths and adults from NMESC fall into this category in contrast to those from MESC. It could be suggested that many in this category would like to work, but for various reasons are not classified as part of the labour force. This group may be potentially vulnerable also. There is a need to have an improved categorisation for those not in the labour force in order to better determine the proportion of those who are part of the 'hidden unemployed' (particularly given the very large numbers in this category).

To gauge level of English proficiency can be difficult as determined by the Census process. However, while many youths of NMESC declared their spoken English good to very good, there was still a substantial proportion from various ethnic groups who indicated a poor ability to speak English. The literature review has suggested a lack of English proficiency may act as an obstacle to obtaining employment and consequently contributes to poverty. Analysis of the Census has indicated people from NMESC who could not speak English well were disadvantaged when looking for work. Lack of English skills and exclusion from the labour force clearly places many from NMESC (particularly young people) into a vulnerable position in relation to risk of involvement with drugs.

Attendance at university and/or other tertiary institutions was significantly greater among those from NMESC compared with those from MESC. A common expectation among ethnic groups is of higher academic achievements for their children, and this may explain the disparity between those of NMESC and MESC. However, as has been reported by Watson (1998), achieving higher educational qualifications does not necessarily remove all the obstacles towards achieving employment for those of NMESC, in contrast to those of MESC. In 1993, the incidence of long-term unemployment for those of NMESC with tertiary education was 35 per cent. This was nearly double the rate for the Australian-born (Watson, 1998).

An assessment of the labour force status in selected LGA indicates the youths of NMESC were at a disadvantage compared with youth of MESC. The LGA that have been identified with larger ethnic communities do have substantially higher youth unemployment in contrast to those of MESC. The labour status findings should provide impetus to LGA administrators to address some of the unemployment inequities and not in the labour force disparities encountered by various ethnic communities. This may be achieved through implementation of appropriate programs and policies.