

# The Use of Amphetamine Type Stimulants and the Normalization of Recreational Drug Use among People Who Attend Electronic Music Events

Uporaba stimulantov amfetaminskega tipa in normalizacija rekreativne uporabe drog med obiskovalci prireditev elektronske glasbe

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## ***Abstract***

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*The article presents the results and findings of a quantitative and qualitative research into the use of ATS and the characteristics of attending electronic music events in Slovenia. The main conclusions of the study that concern the prevalence of drug use at electronic music events point to a decrease in the prevalence of ecstasy use and an increase in the use of cocaine and methamphetamine. The analysis of the interviews in the qualitative part reflects the influence of the normalization of drug use on a specific group of people – those who attend electronic music events – and is evident among all of the subgroups included in the interview section. These young people are familiar with drugs because they have become more accessible and are a part of the*

*growing up process of every individual; this can also been seen in the attitudes the young people who do not use them have towards drugs. These young people continually put off quitting their drug use further and further into the future or else they do not even consider stopping. The analysis of the interviews shows that these young people are relatively well aware of the measures necessary for reducing the harm caused by drug use and the measures to take in case of an overdose, as well as of the available sources of help.*

**Key words:** *synthetic drugs, electronic music, drug familiarity, normalization, harm reduction.*

### **Povzetek**

*V prispevku so predstavljeni rezultati ter ugotovitve kvantitativne in kvalitativne raziskave o uporabi ATS in značilnostih obiskovanja prirediteljev elektronske glasbe v Sloveniji. Glavne ugotovitve raziskave glede prevalence uporabe drog na prireditvah elektronske glasbe se nanašajo na znižanje prevalence uporabe ekstazija ter na povišanje uporabe kokaina in metamfetamina, uporaba ekstazija pa se je nekoliko zmanjšala. Analiza intervjujev v kvalitativnem delu zrcali vpliv normalizacije uporabe drog med specifično skupino obiskovalcev prirediteljev elektronske glasbe, ki se kaže med vsemi zajetimi intervjuvanimi podskupinami. Mladi so seznanjeni z drogami, saj so postale dostopnejše in del odraščanja vsakega posameznika, kar se med drugim vidi tudi v odnosu do drog, ki ga skozi odraščanje vzpostavijo tisti mladi, ki drog ne uporabljajo. Prenehanje z uporabo drog mladi odlagajo naprej v prihodnost ali pa o tem sploh ne razmišljajo. Iz analize intervjujev je razvidno, da mladi razmeroma dobro poznajo ukrepe zmanjševanja škode pri uporabi drog in ukrepe ob predoziranju, prav tako pa tudi obstoječe vire pomoči.*

**Ključne besede:** *sintetične droge, elektronska glasba, seznanjenost z drogami, normalizacija, zmanjševanje škode.*

## Introduction

The systematic and continual research in the field of using **amphetamine type stimulants (ATS)** is an important facet of planning the suitable or altering the existent prevention programmes aimed at young people. The basic premise of the study, entitled *Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the Change in the Use of Synthetic Drugs among Young People*,<sup>1</sup> was to ensure continuity in this type of research that would make it possible to track the prevalence and trend developments concerning the use of ATS in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The starting point stems from the findings and suggestions provided by the 2000/2001 research, which was conducted with comparable methodology. The second starting point of the research is the previously established relatively high prevalence of synthetic drug use at electronic music events in our region.

Using systematic quantitative research of the use of ATS among a specific population of young people is fairly new in the European region; according to information from EMCDDA, systematic indicators of the changes in drug use in special target groups have not been established yet (despite the fact that the use of ATS is usually at its highest in these groups).

Before the year 2000, Calafat and his co-workers conducted two researches concerning drug use in recreational contexts in different European countries by using qualitative and quantitative methodology. The first focused on certain characteristics and the social representation of (the use of) ecstasy in five European countries (Calafat et al., 1998), while the second research looked into the characteristics of night life and recreational drug use in nine European countries (Calafat et al., 1999). Both international researches were conducted in the field (in club, bars etc.), polling a relatively large sample of 1600 to 2700 participants in recreational environments (clubs, bars, discotheques). The distinctiveness of the qualitative work lay in the fact that interviews were conducted with different types of people connected with night life (club owners,

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<sup>1</sup> The research was financed by the Republic of Slovenia's Office for Drugs and the City Council of Ljubljana's Office for Drug Abuse Prevention; it was conducted in 2005 within the institutional framework of the Faculty of Education and Association DrogArt.

DJs, guests, security guards, social workers, police officers etc.). The main findings of the abovementioned researches concerned explaining the social worlds of drug users, the social representation of ecstasy and the various risk factors involved. The risk factors included the low evaluation of risks involving the use of legal drugs (alcohol and tobacco). The evaluation of the risk of driving under the influence of drugs proved to be problematic: almost half of the sample had already driven under the influence of alcohol, while a third had driven under the influence of other illegal drugs.

The two above mentioned researches were relatively early in pointing out the mixing various stimulants and the different patterns of the use of ATS, which are partially connected to the social worlds of the users (Ibid.). Beside the already mentioned issues, they also pointed out the consumer-oriented socialization process of young Europeans, whose time is divided between weekends of pleasure and an arduous work week, and who in recreational environments use drugs in a 'consumerist' manner. This means that drugs serve as additional entertainment, and extra element of their partying and their music style, and even hold an element of prestige in the same way as entertainment-oriented electronic devices or clothes by big name brands (Calafat et al., 2001). Access to pleasure is no longer entirely limited by moral norms and stigmatization, but is to a certain extent reliant also on the market and its particular set of rules, aimed at increasing consumption. Because of their effects, for example sociability, relaxation, expansiveness and daring, young people connect certain drugs to social success (Ibid.). Linking drug use with marginalized groups and social exclusion are therefore no longer necessary and suitable explanations of recreational drug use in the process of its normalization. These types of changes in the perceptions of drug use and the new ways of recreational drug use also call for new preventive measures, and for including new or adapting existent help programmes.

The two researches conducted by Calafat and his co-workers (Ibid.) have also pointed out some of the drawbacks of prevention programmes: most were aimed at distributing information concerning the risks and dangers of drug use, and they experienced difficulties with establishing a connection with their target group. Despite a relatively well-established information network, personal contact with the young and their scene as well as counselling have turned out to be more

important. An important finding of the research was also that to work well in this field, cooperation between the different types of people that are part of the night life is necessary, because this is the only way to achieve more substantial improvements in this field (Ibid.).

The only research that tracked the use of synthetic drugs among those attending electronic music events in the European area after the year 2000 was the Mixmag Drug Survey (Mitcheson and Hunt, 2006), conducted in 2000 and 2005. The research targeted certain characteristics of the use of synthetic drugs and attending electronic music events among the readers of the magazine Mixmag in the United Kingdom (England and Wales). The research was limited inasmuch as the sample was confined to the magazine's readership, as well as by using only quantitative methodology. The Mixmag Drug Survey is also the only European research in the field of ATS use and electronic music events with which we can – to a limited extent – compare the results of the research presented in this article. In the nineties, the UK had the highest life prevalence of synthetic drug use in Europe in terms of the general population as well as in terms of the population frequenting electronic music events (EMCDDA, 2005). In the UK between 2001 and 2004, the life prevalence of using synthetic drugs (ecstasy, amphetamine) and cocaine among the general population (young adults between 15 and 34 years old) was still among the highest in Europe. According to the degree of ecstasy and cocaine use between the years 2001 and 2004, the UK is followed by Spain, France and the Czech Republic (the latter placing first in the category of use in the last year).

The prevalence of amphetamine use in the group of young adults in the EU is somewhere between 0.1 % and 10 %, reaching its peak at 18.4 % in the UK. In the same age bracket, the prevalence of ecstasy use ranges from 0.6 % in Greece to 13.6 % in the UK (Ibid.).

According to the EMCDDA<sup>2</sup> report, in 2004 and 2005 the use of stimulants in different age segments was measured only in the general population, where due to a specific pattern of use, the prevalence is significantly lower than in a specific population of people who attend electronic music events. In the general population, the life prevalence of amphetamine use among adults (15 – 64 years old) in the EU ranges between 0.5 % and 6 %, with the exception of the UK, where it reaches 12 %.

<sup>2</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

The general indicators of the reports show that in Europe the use of amphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine is still on the rise; the prevalence of ecstasy use is sometimes higher than the prevalence of amphetamine use, making it the second most commonly used drug after marihuana. Information regarding Slovenia is not provided in the EMCDDA report; therefore, it is important that we take a look at comparable information, gathered by Hibell and his co-workers (2004) in 2003 using ESPAD methodology. This and comparable types of methodology have been used for over a decade to establish the level of the drug use of high school students between the ages of 15 and 16 in various EU countries and the countries that were EU candidates at the time.

In 2003 the life prevalence of amphetamine use among 15 and 16 year old students in EU and EU candidate countries was less than 1 and up to 7 %. The prevalence of the amphetamine use of high school students in the European countries included in the research during the month before the research was conducted was between 3 and 4 % (Ibid.).

Up to 8 % of the students in EU or candidate countries have taken ecstasy once or more times in their lives. The life prevalence of ecstasy use among Slovenian high school students (first year students) in 2003 was 3.3 % (from those, 1.7 % tried ecstasy once or twice) (Ibid.).

Synthetic drugs are second only to marihuana when it comes to the most often used illegal drugs among high school students in Slovenia also. One domestic research, using ESPAD comparable methodology, kept track of the changes in drug use among students in their first and last year of high school in Ljubljana (from 1999 to 2002).<sup>3</sup> The results showed that the life prevalence from the first to the fourth year of high school increased from 4.4 % to 11.3 % when it came to ecstasy, from 1.9 % to 3.7 % when it came to amphetamines, and from 1.8 to 3.7 % when it came to cocaine (Dekleva and Sande, 2003; Stergar, 1999).

The main goal of the quantitative part of the research, the results of which are presented below, was to acquire information about the prevalence of the use of legal and illegal drugs at electronic music events in Slovenia. The methodology that was used is similar to the

<sup>3</sup> The changes in use were measured within the same generation, not the same population. This means that the research did not include the same students, but the same generation (students that began in the same year), which underwent certain changes (changing schools, places of residence, registration renewal etc.).

one used in our 2000/2001 research; it is partially comparable to other European researches conducted in this field (Calafat et al., 1998; Mitcheson and Hunt, 2006), so the results enable us to make international comparisons. The additional goals were to establish the level of awareness about the harmful consequences of using synthetic drugs and to evaluate the quality of the prevention efforts in the field of ATS.

In the qualitative part, we attempted to establish patterns in ATS use and the habits of the users by analysing interviews conducted with three subgroups of users (periodical users, chaotic users and former users) and those that do not use drugs. We attempted to find out which cautionary factors and risk factors affect the different types of ATS use and what helps young people stay abstinent at electronic music events. We were also interested in finding out the reasons why certain young people use drugs in a high risk manner and why some have decided to abstain.

## **Conducting research at events and with the help of the internet: the sample**

For the requirements of the research, we have formed a sample comprised of people who attend electronic music events in Slovenia. In the (main) sample, both those who use and those who do not use illegal or legal drugs were included. The sample, based on self-selection, is **not representative**; the manner in which it is comprised and the selection process enables us to compare it with previous domestic research of drug use (Sande, 2002) as well as with previous European studies in this field. The information was collected using a questionnaire, distributed to participants personally at events or included in the magazine X-press.<sup>4</sup> The questionnaires were in envelopes and the participants returned them within three months after the research began. Returning the questionnaires was not obligatory (informal environment) and depended on the individual, which is why we assume that the more motivated parts of the population were reached. The number of returned questionnaires, distributed in the two manners mentioned above, after a preliminary

<sup>4</sup> The magazine is aimed at young people who attend electronic music events; at the time of the research it was published by Association DrogArt.

survey of the data and a verification of validity and reliability, was **403**. The main sample comprised of 39.6 % of men and 60.4 % of women, who were between 14 and 42 years old. A similar percentage of the participants was attending high school (38.7 %) or a faculty or another form of higher education institution (38.2 %) during the time of the research. A relatively large part of the sample was no longer at school (22.6 %), while the remaining participants (0.5 %) were attending elementary school.

The additional sample, acquired using the internet, was collected in a three month period; we advertised on three different portals connected with electronic music and on the largest domestic search engine. In this way, after the preliminary survey of the data and verifying the validity and reliability, 213 fully filled-out questionnaires were collected. The sample acquired using the internet comprised of 61.1 % of men and 38.9 % of women, between the ages of 15 and 35. Nearly half of the participants (49.0 %) in the **additional** sample was attending a faculty or other form of higher education institution; the rest were attending high school (24.5 %) or were no longer in school (26.5 %). The following presentation only includes the results of the main sample, while any significant differences between the main and additional sample will be highlighted.

For the qualitative part of the research, 25 participants who were prepared to share their thoughts and experiences were interviewed. There were 11 girls (44 %) and 14 boys (56 %). 6 (24 %) of these interviewees had either completely stopped using drugs or only used alcohol and cigarettes, or had never used drugs at all. The oldest (male) participant was 36 years old and the youngest (female) was 16. The ages of the girls who participated averaged at 21.6 years old, while the boys' ages averaged at 24.6 years old. Compared to the quantitative part of the research, the male group was somewhat older, while the female group was approximately the same age.

## **The characteristics of attending electronic music events**

The characteristics concerning electronic music events included in the research were: age when attending for the first time, the frequency, and the duration of attendance.



The largest number of the participants first attended such an event at age 16 (20.8 %) and 15 (19.2 %). A large part (74.3 %) of the participants first attended between the ages of 14 and 18. Compared to the boys, the girls attended such events for the first time in a higher percentage at age 14, 15 and 16; however, there are no statistically relevant differences (t-test) between the genders were the age of first going to such an event is concerned.

The largest part of the participants attends such events once a month (33.3 %) or once a fortnight (23.6 %), which is similar to the information from 2001. 12.1 % of the participants attend every weekend. The highest percentage of the participants attends these events for four years or more (42.9 %). The results in this case differ from the 2001 findings, when events were attended for three or more years by only 35.4 % of the participants. Almost half of the participants (46.8 %) on average spend one of their weekend nights "out" (between Friday and Sunday), 41.6 % two weekend nights, and 11.6 % all three nights. 25.8% of the participants attend such events **during the week**.

The last of the characteristics is the **financial means** that individual participants normally designate to attending events. The participants usually get this money from their parents (27.8 %), from occasional (27.5 %) and regular incomes (26.9 %). One tenth (9.9 %) gets it from scholarships, and only a small percentage (2.5 %) gets the money by selling drugs (the rest of the 100% is presented by other sources of income).

There are statistically relevant differences (t-test at the level of  $p = 0.01$ ) between the sexes when it comes to getting the money for attending these events. Boys get the money to party from regular incomes more often than girls, while girls largely get the money from parents. For these young people, **entry fees** are the biggest expense over the weekend, as almost half (44.5 %) of the participants spends more than 12 EUR per weekend this way. One quarter of the participants (25.0 %) spends more than 12 EUR per weekend on alcoholic drinks, 26.2 % of all the participants spend it on illegal drugs, and 10.5 % of all participants spend it on transportation to and from the events. They spend the smallest amount of their weekend funds on cigarettes: 96.0 % spend less than 8 EUR per weekend this way. Statistically relevant differences between the sexes (t-test at the level of  $p = 0.01$ ) have shown that when it comes to alcohol and illegal drugs, boys spend significantly more money than girls.

The participants in the additional sample differ significantly from the participants in the main sample in that they frequent electronic music events more often ( $p = 0.01$ ) and for a longer period of time ( $p = 0.05$ ); they also spent fewer nights out during the weekend ( $p = 0.05$ ). The participants in the additional sample also differ significantly from the participants in the main sample in that they get the money to party to a lesser extent from parents and more often from regular and occasional incomes ( $p = 0.01$ ); they also spent more weekend money on alcohol and less on entry fees (in both cases  $p = 0.05$ ).

## Reasons for attending the events

As in the study from 2001, this one also included questions about the reasons behind attending these types of events; they were taken from Calafat's study entitled *Night Life in Europe and Recreational Drug Use* (1999). Seven of the reasons (table 13) for attending were selected based on the qualitative research that accompanied Calafat's abovementioned study. Every participant could mark the level of importance of each reason in the table.

As in 2001, 'social' reasons for attending events were once again the most important: listening to music (80.0 %), dancing (68.1 %) and meeting friends (50.0 %). A large number of the participants also saw breaking the daily routine as an important reason. Drug use (4.1 %), finding a partner (2.1 %) and opportunities for sex (2.9 %) were, as in 2001, among the causes that the least number of participants marked as 'very important' (table 14).

The results of the research confirm the findings of the ATS research from 2001, namely that the most important reasons for frequenting electronic music events are **dancing, socializing, listening to music, and breaking the daily routine**, while among these young people, using drugs is a significantly less important reason to attend.

Drug use was listed as a very important reason for attending these type of events by 3.4 % of those participants that also marked dancing as a very important reason, and by 7.4 % of those participants that also marked meeting friends as a very important reason, and by 4.2 % of those participants that also marked listening to music as a very important reason to attend such an event.

## Electronic music

Among the six subgenres of electronic music cited in the research, the largest number of participants preferred techno (52.6 %), followed by house (28.7 %) and trance (8.9 %). The results show that these three types of music are still the most popular among the people who frequent these types of events; compared to the research from 2001, the popularity of techno music has risen somewhat, while the results for house and trance music are similar.

## Drug use

The majority of the participants in the sample have tried both types of legal drugs. 94.5 % of the participants have tried alcohol, 88.2 % have tried tobacco. Closely following tobacco was **marihuana**, which 87.5 % of the participants have tried; this was followed by **ecstasy** (74.7 %), **amphetamine** (70.4 %) and **poppers** (70.4 %). More than half of the participants in the sample have tried cocaine (57.9 %), almost half (47.1 %) have tried magic mushrooms, and somewhat less than a quarter have tried LSD (23.6 %) and methamphetamine (23.1 %).

Comparing this information about the use of stimulating drugs by people frequenting electronic music events to the data from 2001, we can see that the (life) prevalence of **ecstasy** use has decreased from 86.0 to 74.7 %, the use of **amphetamine** has stayed on approximately the same level (71.9 % in 2001 and 70.4 % in 2005). The prevalence of **cocaine** use has increased from 46.7 % in 2001 to 57.9 % in 2005, and the prevalence of **methamphetamine** use has also increased from 9.8 % in 2001 to 23.1 % in 2005.

Among the other types of drugs, the prevalence of marihuana, heroine and LSD use has decreased, while the prevalence of magic mushrooms has increased. When it comes to legal drugs, both the prevalence of alcohol and tobacco use has decreased.

Among illegal drugs, the participants most often use **marihuana**, with 18.3 % (out of all of the participants) using it every day, 39.6 % using it once a week or more often (the combined categories of 'once a week' to 'regularly every day' in table 18). 22.6 % of the participants do not use marihuana, while 14.7 % have stopped using it.

When it comes to **amphetamine type stimulants**, the participants most often take **ecstasy**. 4.1 % take it once a week and 3.3 % use **amphetamine** (sulphate) with the same frequency. A similar percentage uses ecstasy and amphetamines several times a month (but less than once a week). With the same frequency, 12.2 % uses amphetamines and 11.4 % uses ecstasy. Nearly 12 % uses ecstasy and amphetamines once a month. The highest percentage of participants uses amphetamine (24.2 %) and ecstasy (17.3 %) less than once a month. Methamphetamine is used (several times a month) by an only somewhat larger percentage of the participants, once a month by 1.3 % of the participants and less than once a month by 4.7 % of the participants. The results show that almost a quarter (23.1 %) of the participants has had some experience with methamphetamine, while only a relatively small number of the participants actually use it.

In spite of its relatively high life prevalence (57.9 % of the participants have tried it) **cocaine** is used regularly by a relatively low number of the people that attend electronic music events. It is used once or several times a week by a little over one percent of the participants. It is used several times a month (but less than once a week) by 3.0 % of all the participants and once a month by 5.1 % of the participants. A quarter uses cocaine less than once a month.

As in the 2001 research, **the favourite illegal drug** among the participants remains marihuana, followed by ecstasy and cocaine. Interestingly, alcohol has risen from third (9.7 % in 2001) to second place (19.2 % in 2005) in the ladder of legal and illegal drugs. According to the results, alcohol is becoming increasingly popular with these young people, while the popularity of ecstasy is falling (from 24 % in 2001 to 16.5 % in 2005). The popularity of cocaine has not altered significantly.

Nearly half of the participants (49.0 %) often mixes various types of illegal drugs; 26.8 % always uses one type of drug, while 24.2 % of them have stated that they do not use illegal drugs. 6.4 % has **injected** drugs (the number of boys is almost twice the number of girls). If we only take into account the participants who have admitted to using drugs when it comes to the question of mixing different drugs together, the results are the following: 35.3 % always takes only one type of drug and 64.7 % often mixes various illegal drugs. The largest number of participants uses ecstasy together with

alcohol (44.4 %), marihuana (38.1 %) and amphetamines (31.6%). 15.9 % mixes ecstasy with more than one other type of drug.

When it comes to mixing ATS with other types of drugs, the general conclusion is that from 2001 to 2005, the simultaneous use of both ecstasy and amphetamines (each drug separately) with alcohol has increased; that the simultaneous use of ecstasy and amphetamines (both drugs together) has decreased; and that the simultaneous use of both ecstasy as well as amphetamines and marihuana has decreased. Mixing both types of ATS with cocaine has remained almost unchanged.

The largest number of participants (41.2 %) uses up to two tablets per night, which is similar to the findings from 2001. 23.2 % uses one tablet, while 15.8 % uses between three and four tablets. A relatively low percentage (5.3 %) uses five or more tablets, and only 1.3 % uses more than ten. These results are very similar to the results from 2001.

There were no statistically significant differences (t-test) between the main sample and the sample acquired using the internet concerning the frequency of legal drug use. There were also no statistically significant differences concerning the most often used illegal drugs (marihuana, ATS and cocaine).

## **Normalization of recreational drug use**

Some years ago, when the study *The Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of the Changes in Tobacco, Alcohol and Illegal Drug Use among Young People in Ljubljana in the Period of High School Education* (Dekleva and Sande, 2003) first discovered that more than 50 % of Ljubljana's high school students have already used illegal drugs, we began speaking of the normalization of drug use. When more than 50 % of young people are using an illegal drug at least once, we can no longer speak about drug use only within the context of marginalized youth or marginalized groups of young people, because drug use obviously appears at the very centre of youth culture.

Abroad, The North West Longitudinal Study that began in 1991 is cited as the first research by Parker and his co-workers (Parker,

Aldridge and Measham, 1998) that deals with normalization in a wider sociological context. In this study, the researchers kept track of a group of 700 14-year-olds from the North-West of England for a period of 5 years. The book *Illegal Leisure* (Ibid.) was the first to explain and define the normalization of drug use among young people. Before this, attempts had been made to formulate a theory of normalization, connected to drug use; after the abovementioned work was published, similar studies began to appear, which confirming the theories of normalization in various places around the world. Particularly interesting is one British study from 2003 by Hammersley and his co-workers (Hammersley, Marsland and Reid, 2003) that is based on a specific population of young (aged 15 and 16) criminal offenders. 300 interviews were conducted with young criminal offenders in England and Wales. The research is especially interesting because it attempts to determine the influence of the normalization of drug use has had in the beginning of the 21st century. The young criminal offenders had the most difficulties with excessive alcohol, marihuana and tobacco use, but not with cocaine and heroine, as is usually portrayed by the media. Even though the sample is not representative, the study does discover that the influence of the normalization of drug use also indicates that the connection between opiate use and criminal offences is beginning to dissipate, something that is happening for the first time. The authors point out that this is not necessarily good news because normalization means that the number of drugs that are used more often has increased (Ibid.).

The qualitative part of our research consisted of interviewing 11 girls and 14 boys, out of which 6 interviewees had completely stopped using drugs, only used alcohol and cigarettes, or had never used drugs at all. The oldest (male) interviewee was 36 and the youngest (female) was 16 years old.

Using descriptive analysis we have organized 10 significant thematic areas from the results. Some of the main findings concerning the characteristics of drug use and the attitude towards drugs are presented below.

Besides the fact that they defined drugs differently, the participants also had different attitudes towards drug use. We might say that some almost seemed proud of their drug use. Others spoke of it more objectively or with a slight 'moral hangover'.

Those that had not used drugs proved to be highly informed about drug use and had formed a distinct point of view on drugs in general. Because they all exist in an environment where drugs are accessible and socialize with friends who use drugs, we can conclude that they have chosen to abstain from using illegal drugs, and that their choice is based on various types of information, their life experiences and their upbringing.

In the interviews we asked where, when and with whom the individual uses drugs. We have found out that the majority of those interviewed use drugs on the weekend at parties, whether at clubs or private parties. This is especially true when it comes to illegal drugs. Only rare individuals use drugs when they are on their own.

The interviewees said that they either go to parties with friends or they have a special party group. The majority takes drugs with these friends. When it comes to drugs, they mostly adjust to the group they are in. Some do not change their social circle even if they themselves do not take drugs while the other members of their circle do. These individuals usually tolerate their friends' drug use. Some are excluded from their social circle because of their excessive drug use and the changes that this entails. Unquestionably, it is their friends' and their experiences that the young trust the most when it comes to drugs, their effects and consequences. They also believe that their friends will understand them the most if they have any problems, that they will sometimes stop them and especially that they will watch out for them when they are too high and help them if they need it.

The reasons for drug use provided by the users are very different. Some could not explain why they use drugs; others were very specific when detailing their reasons. Drug use can no longer be seen as something an individual does to try and solve his or her problems. Nowadays, young people say that they do drugs more for the purpose of having fun and socializing, what we could call 'functional use'; on the other hand, the problematic (chaotic) users, the ones who risk more, use larger quantities and mix drugs, say that they do drugs to escape from their problems and the world in general.

The young people who are involved in the party scene are relatively well informed about the consequences connected with drug use. Each and every interviewee could name some of the consequences of drug use. They find psychological and social consequences to

be worse than the type of ramifications that affect physical health, probably because the latter are not visible straight away. Many of the young people were very uncritical or non-objective when it came to describing the harmful consequences concerning themselves or their friends. The objectively very harmful ramifications to their health – physical, mental and social consequences that result from high-risk drug use – are minimalized and brushed aside. Nevertheless, they still feel vulnerable.

Parents, the organizers of prevention programmes and experts who work in the field of drug use are often faced with the question of how to make someone stop using drugs. When we asked the young people – those who still use drugs and those who have stopped – about this in our interviews, we received different kinds of answers. The reasons that were given for stopping were similar to the answers given to the questions about how and particularly why to stop with chaotic drug use or why to cut down on drug use. For some, growing up (getting older) was their reason to stop using. They explain ‘growing up’ as gaining some sort of sudden insight into their own condition and the harmful consequences of drug use. The concern for their health also becomes important. We can see from the interviews that the decision to stop using followed a mental process of weighing the odds, considering what had more advantages – continuing to use or stopping.

These young people learned about risk reducing measures from the internet, friends, fliers and youth magazines that deal with the topic of drug use. They trust these measures to be reliable and sensible depending on their own experiences and on the credibility of their source.

We asked the young people about the measures they themselves take to reduce the risk factor. Again we have found that young people know quite a number of measures for reducing risks, but only a substantially lesser number actually uses them. They usually take measures only when they are already faced with the negative consequences of drug use, when they are already too high or after a very negative experience, either their own or a friend's. Many dismiss and generalize the risk on a case to case basis – for example, if nothing bad happened once, then it will not happen the second time either. Some bad experiences prove to be sobering and force them to re-evaluate and reassess the risks. Is it worth it? Some decide



to continue using; some reduce the frequency and quantity of their drug use; some stop taking the particular drug that is linked with the negative experience; some stop using any type of drug. Because of the consequences of drug use, some need help.

Young people try to solve their initial problems themselves and with the friends they party with and who have had similar difficulties themselves. Usually, they stop using drugs or drastically reduce their intake for a short period of time. In case of more serious problems, many would seek help with a nongovernmental organization (DrogArt), as they obviously trust the team that is constantly present at parties. Some would turn to their parents; the smallest number would seek medical attention. Some find asking for help for the first time shameful, others see it as the beginning of the process of solving their problems. Those who have already sought help (with a psychiatrist, psychologist etc.) for their drug-related problems, were usually satisfied with the provided assistance. We can see from the interviews that the parents of our interviewees were prepared to help their children, but that their children, who are reaching or have already reached adulthood, do not trust them enough.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the research have shown that amphetamine type stimulants are still very popular among the people that frequent electronic music events. The life prevalence of ecstasy use has dropped somewhat, while the prevalence of amphetamine use is still at a similar level. Compared to 2001, the life prevalence of methamphetamine use has increased in 2005. In the questionnaire, a quarter of the participants stated that they do not use illegal drugs at such events.

The results also show that in our target group (young people who attend electronic music events), the life prevalence of cocaine use has increased, which corresponds to the information from different sources, which report similar trends of increased cocaine use in the EU (EMCDDA, 2005).

In 2005 young people at these types of events also use drugs in a relatively high-risk manner: nearly two thirds of those that use

drugs mix different illegal drugs together. Combining ecstasy and amphetamines has decreased, while mixing both of these drugs, particularly with alcohol, has increased.

According to the findings of the research, the stress of preventive action should be on cocaine and methamphetamine, as the prevalence of these two stimulants has increased the most in comparison to the findings from 2001. In view of the results it is also obvious that the popularity of alcohol as well as combining drug stimulants with alcohol has increased among the people attending electronic music events. Until now alcohol has been neglected in connection with preventing the harm caused by drugs at such events, because the focus was focused only on dehydration and the subsequent possibility of a heat stroke. In future more attention should be paid to excessive drinking in combination with the use of stimulants, as well as on the dangerous effect this type of mixture would have on driving to and from the event.

Providing information about the appearance of new drugs and the effects of stimulating drugs (dangerous mixtures, particularly 'strong' drugs) on the internet has turned out to be very useful; more people who frequent electronic music events looked up information on the internet before using in 2005 than in 2001. This information is important to the target group, as a large majority of those who take drugs look it up before using a new drug. More findings connected with preventive measures are presented in the third chapter of this book.

As in previous studies, we have again found that much can be learnt from direct conversations with young people and that it is important to evaluate our preventive measures and get feedback from the users themselves. It is necessary to be present on the scene and to try to understand the young. They are open to information that they can rely on and that is provided in an approachable way, which is why those who use drugs and are involved in this environment need to be included in all the stages of the prevention programmes – planning, execution and evaluation.

We have reached three main conclusions in the qualitative part of our research. **The first conclusion** is that young people who go to parties are familiar with drugs (drugwise), regardless of whether or not they use illegal drugs or not. This is a sign of the normalization of recreational drug use, which already became apparent in the

previous study conducted by this research group, and was once again confirmed. **The second conclusion** of the research is that young people put off quitting drugs more and more, or else do not even think about abstinence. On the other hand, even those who do not use drugs cannot be sure they will abstain in the future. The previous study of this research group showed that the interviewees largely put off quitting until adulthood, linked with responsibilities (the end of schooling, the beginning of employment) and starting a family. This conclusion is also a sign of the normalization of recreational drug use (Parker, Aldridge and Measham, 1998). **The third conclusion** of the qualitative part of the research is that young people are relatively well informed of the measures necessary to reduce the harm caused by drug use and the ways they can find help if they should encounter problems connected with drug use, which shows that prevention activities have been successful and that information is accessible. It would make sense to continue conducting qualitative research in the future because the direct contact with the population is the fastest way of tracking the latest trends and the fastest way of getting feedback about the execution and the effect of prevention activities directly from the target group.

As we can see, we have come across three aspects of normalization according to Parker (familiarity with drugs, putting off quitting for the future and familiarity with risk factors) in the specific group of people who frequent electronic music events. We can deduce the accessibility of drugs and a relatively high level of ATS use prevalence on the basis of the findings of the quantitative research presented in the previous section.

From the acquired information we can make out the elements of the normalization of ecstasy use in recreational environments and perhaps even in a wider context if we also take into account the results of the latest ESPAD studies concerning high school students, where the prevalence of ecstasy use among fourth year students of high schools in Ljubljana is relatively high (13.0 % in four year vocational programmes and 10.1 % in general upper secondary schools). In illegal drug prevalence, ecstasy follows marihuana

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<sup>5</sup> The research was conducted among the same generation of high school students, once in 1999 (Stergar, 1999), and again in 2002. The study did not include the same students, but two representative samples in two different periods in the 'same' generation of high school students in Ljubljana.

(50.3 % of fourth year students have tried it), with solvents in third place (Dekleva and Sande, 2003). Passing judgement on regular marihuana use has decreased between 1999 and 2002 (from the first to the fourth year of study<sup>5</sup>), while the assessment of the availability level of illegal drugs has increased. With marihuana and ecstasy, the assessment of the availability level increased by a little more than 20 %. Marihuana was accessible to 79.0 % and ecstasy to 58.5 % of fourth year students. The risk factor assessment did not change dramatically between the first and the fourth year; however, students in the fourth year saw the use of the majority of the drugs (except smoking and alcohol) as somewhat less of a risk than the first year students.

From the data acquired from the research conducted among a specific and a general population of young people, we can infer the normalization of ATS use in recreational environments (clubs and discotheques), and in more general terms, the normalization of marihuana use and elements of the normalization of ecstasy use (accessibility, the prevalence of use) among high school students in Ljubljana.

The results of the qualitative part of the study also allow us to assess the preventive actions taken in the field of synthetic drugs in our area as suitable; in part, this prevention work is aimed at peer cooperation and education (the relevance of a 'party group' and the importance of trusting friends were prominent). Again the relevance of certain familial cautionary factors (the possibility and rewards for participating in family activities, supervision in the family) point to the importance of improving family relationships and communication, rather than on the importance of informing the parents about the consequences of drug use.

The research shows that these young people are familiar with the measures that should be taken to reduce harm; however, this does not necessarily mean that they actually take them. For prevention programmes, this is a very significant piece of information, because it means that simply providing information obviously is not enough. Young people turn to these measures when some of their problems have become pronounced, which is why a key aspect of prevention programmes should be their presence on and contact with this environment, as well as establishing direct contact with the users. This makes it possible to identify problems when they are in their

early stages; it also enables counselling and other suitable forms of assistance. These types of problems are often not only linked to drugs, but also to school, poor or non-functional relationships in the family, difficulties with friends etc.

Some reasons to stop using drugs are evident from the interviews. Stopping or reducing drug use is the goal that help programmes are trying to achieve in various ways. We can see from the interviews that these reasons are often outside of our 'reach': growing up, learning from one's own bad experiences or the bad experiences of peers. The quantitative part of the research clearly showed that these types of experiences, whether good or bad, are the ones young people trust the most. The reasons that are within our reach, and which are significant in counselling techniques, for example motivational interviews, largely depend on a personal evaluation of the good and the bad aspects of quitting one's drug use and being concerned about one's health.

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