



European Monitoring Centre  
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

# What I say is not what I mean: cognitive testing of the EWS questionnaire

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# European Web Survey on Drugs

## Feeding estimates of the size of the EU drug market

- » 6 countries in the first wave
- » cannabis/resin, ecstasy/MDMA, amphetamines, cocaine
- » complex details on amounts consumed and purchased
- » collected online
- » from diverse groups of drug users

**~ further extrapolations require precision**



# Guiding responses... *on cannabis resin*

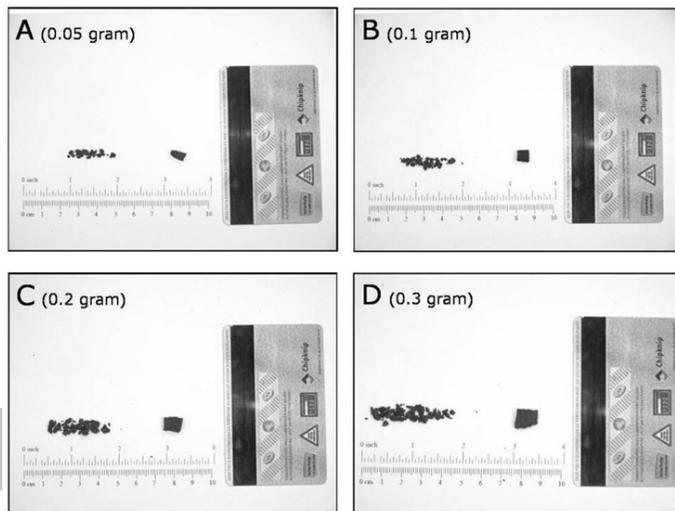
## 1. During the past 12 months, how often have you used cannabis resin?

- Daily
- Almost daily
- Not daily but more than once a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week, but at least once a month
- Less than once a month

## 2. How many days have you used cannabis...

...during the last 30 days?

...during the past 12 months?



## 3. How do you usually use cannabis resin?

- joint
- dry pipe or chillum
- water pipe
- food item
- beverage
- Other (please specify)

## 4. What do you usually put in your [joint]?

- Resin alone
- Resin and tobacco
- Other (please specify)

## 5. How many [joints] do you smoke/consume on a typical day you use resin?

« 6. This picture shows four different amounts of resin in crumbled and non-crumbled form. Which picture shows the amount of resin you usually put in your [joint]?



# Cognitive interviews

» **within a broader validation exercise**

» **Comprehensibility + habits and practices**

» **Sample (N=18+1)**

- Recreational and high risk / injecting drug users, one drug dealer
- 13 male, 6 female; aged 20-45
- LYP: Cannabis 18, resin 14, Cocaine 7, Ecstasy/MDMA 10, Amphetamines 16
- 6 were also respondents of the pilot data collection

» **PAPI (think-aloud & probing approach)**



# Cognitive interviews

## 1. Comprehensibility, clarity, and understanding

- a. Simple, clear language and comprehensibility.
- b. Unambiguity and correct understanding

## 2. Remembering and recalling

- a. Difficulties to recall consumption in the last 30 days and 12 months.
- b. Recalling strategies – how did they arrived to the answer, were there any obstacles?
- c. Usual/unusual consumption and purchasing habits, irregularities, usual/average/last-time use and purchase.

## 3. Assessment of the answer

- a. Are the questions perceived as sensitive?
- b. Do they alter the answer after the correct information is reached? What are the reasons?

## 4. Providing the answer

- a. Did the categories match the answer provided?
- b. What happened if not...
- c. Would the process, focus, and accuracy of answering differ in the online questionnaire?



# Online survey vs. PAPI

*„I didn't realize that precise answers are required...“*

» less effort and concentration, more guessing online

» omitted substances, overestimated LYP

**» motivate respondents, stress accuracy**



# Recalling & telescoping... *classical issues*

***„I did not want to create bias...“***

- » Exceptional experiences easier to recall
- » Edges blurred
- » Accounting for heavy periods in distant past
- » Identification with a pattern  
(recreational/heavy users)

**» give precise instructions**



# Irregular drug related behaviours

*„It depends...“*

- » No “usual” or “typical” dose/purchase/expense/day
- » Occasional extreme purchase and/or binge use.

» Scenarios:

- Resin in frequent cannabis users (item on amounts consumed)
- Heavy methamphetamine users/binges (frequency and amounts)
- Holiday season binges (frequency items)

**» provide space for uncertainty; ask for ranges**



# Cannabis and resin... *pipe size matters*

- » Vaporizer, dry drink
- » Purchase ≠ consumption (branches and leaves)
- » Type of resin (plastic, home-made)



# (Meth)amphetamine... *not the same drug*

***QX: During the past 12 months, how often have you used (meth)amphetamines?***

» the whole section double-barrelled for users of both substances

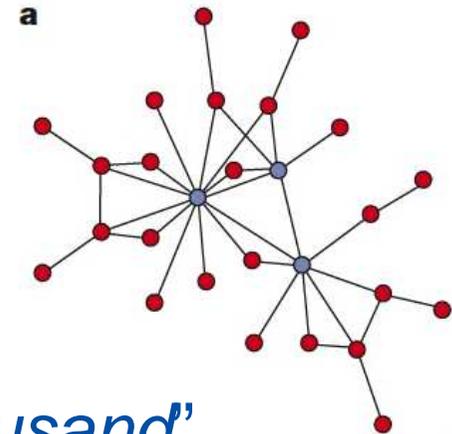
» local "home lab" production

(precursors, other goods)

» specific slang

("one gram" = 10 units in a syringe = 0.7 gram)

» purchase of "a dose", "a line", "for one thousand"



» **acknowledge diversity; "don't know" option**



# Frequency questions

## QX. During the past 12 months, how often have you used cannabis resin?

- Daily
- Almost daily
- Not daily but more than once a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week, but at least once a month
- Less than once a month

» experimenters used only once

» complex formulations

## QY. How many days have you used cannabis...

...during the last 30 days?

...during the past 12 months?

» accounts for irregular using patterns

» range allows for uncertainty

» ordering matters



# Visual clues... *overall helpful, but:*

This picture shows four different amounts of resin in crumbled and non-crumbled form. Which picture shows the amount of resin you usually put in your [joint]?

Less than A

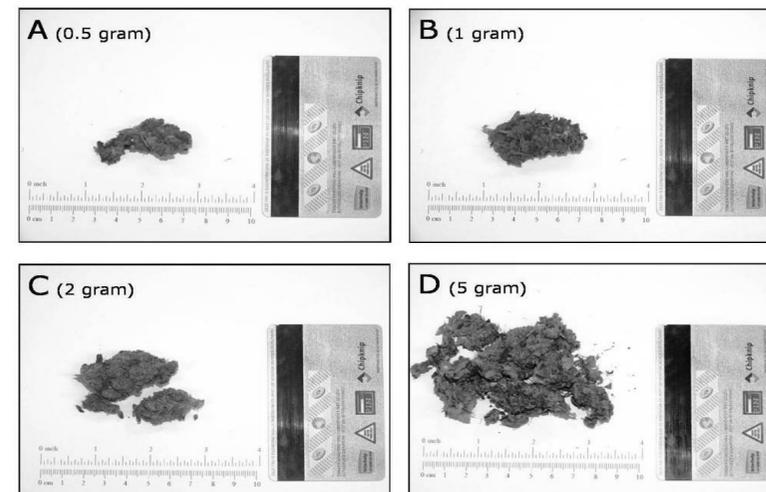
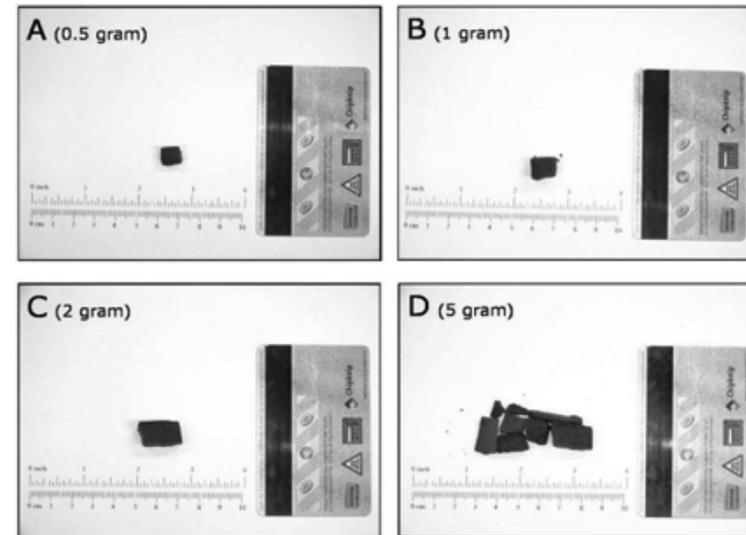
A

Between A and B

B...

More than D

- » Screen/reality ratio
- » Not representative for all types cannabis (home grown) and resin (plastic, home-made)
- » Letters vs. amounts
- » Largest amount too small for many



## In summary...

- » **Drug use is not a regular routine**
- » **Often the answer does not exist**
- » **Sometimes respondents know more than we expect them to**
  
- » **Know your target population and involve members of it in the preparation phase**





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**Always pilot questions for new populations.  
Thank you!**

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