

Holistic Exploration of Substance Use among English Adolescents: Results from Rock Challenge 2015

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Mixed Methodology

Self report survey

- Completely anonymous
- Two versions: 16 years and older (closed questions) and under 16 (mostly open questions)
- Wide range of substance categories (not individual drugs)

Implicit Association Tests (IATs)

- Illegal/Legal drugs and Good/Bad
- Measure automatic/subconscious associations

Mini-Interviews

- Utilize cohort as informants of drug trends in ecosystem
- Promotion of a non-judgemental approach and creation of co-participating relationships

Socio-Demographic data: Overview

UNDER 16

N = 505

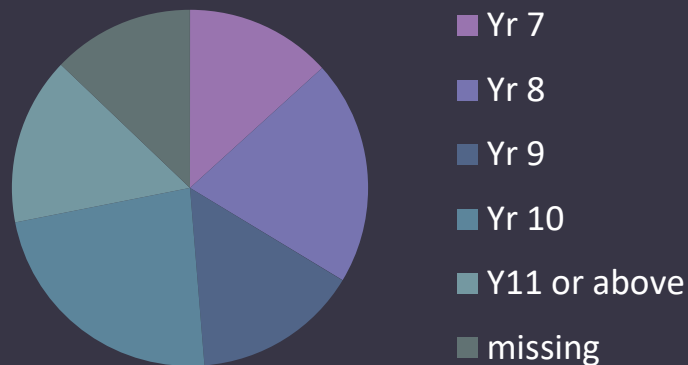
85.3% female

80.6% white

34% Hampshire school/resident

Mean age = 13.74 ± 1.54 years (range 11-17 years)

- 51 were 16 or over



16 YEARS AND OLDER

N = 226

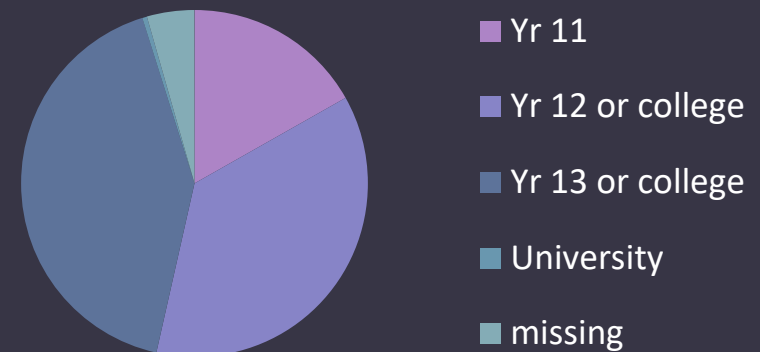
86.8% female

90.4% white

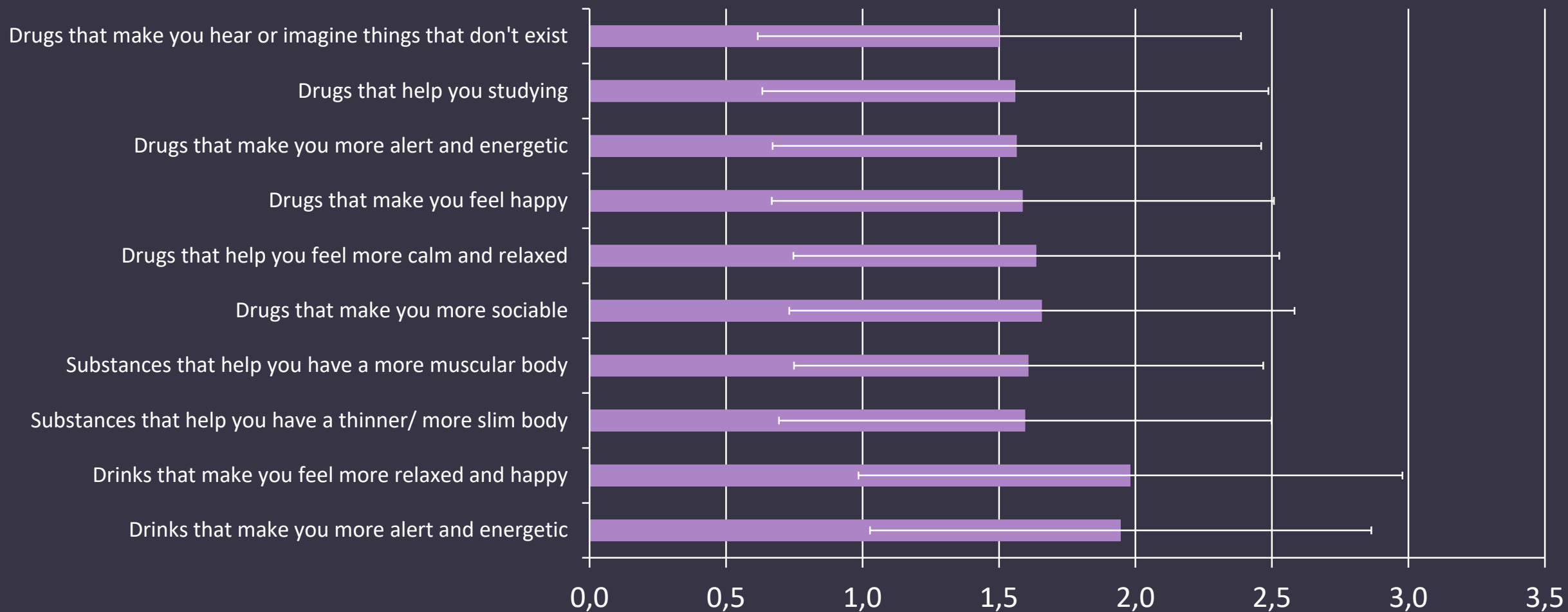
53% Hampshire school/resident

Mean age = 16.88 ± 1.06 (range 12 – 20 years)

- 11 were under 16



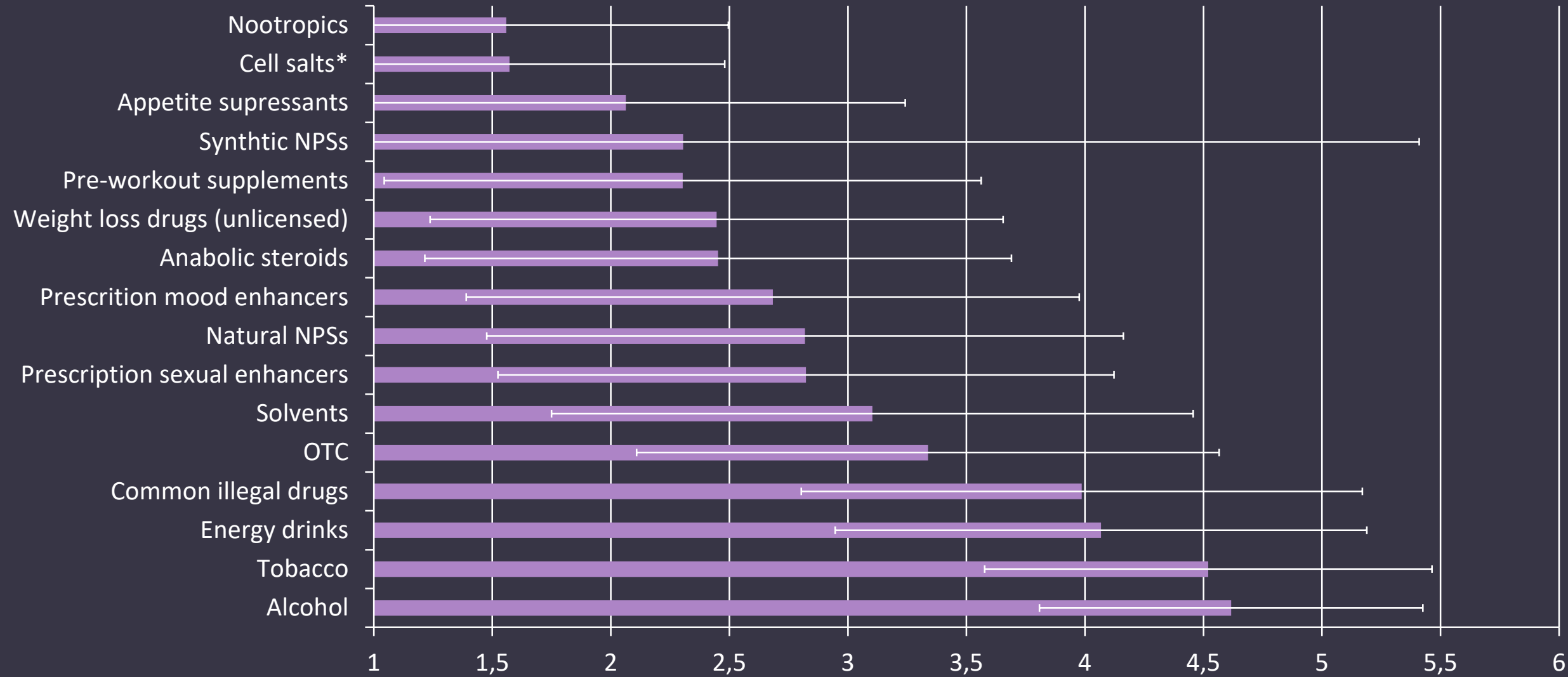
Under 16 knowledge



1 = a 'little'; 2 = 'a moderate amount'; 3 = 'a lot'; 4 = 'a great deal'



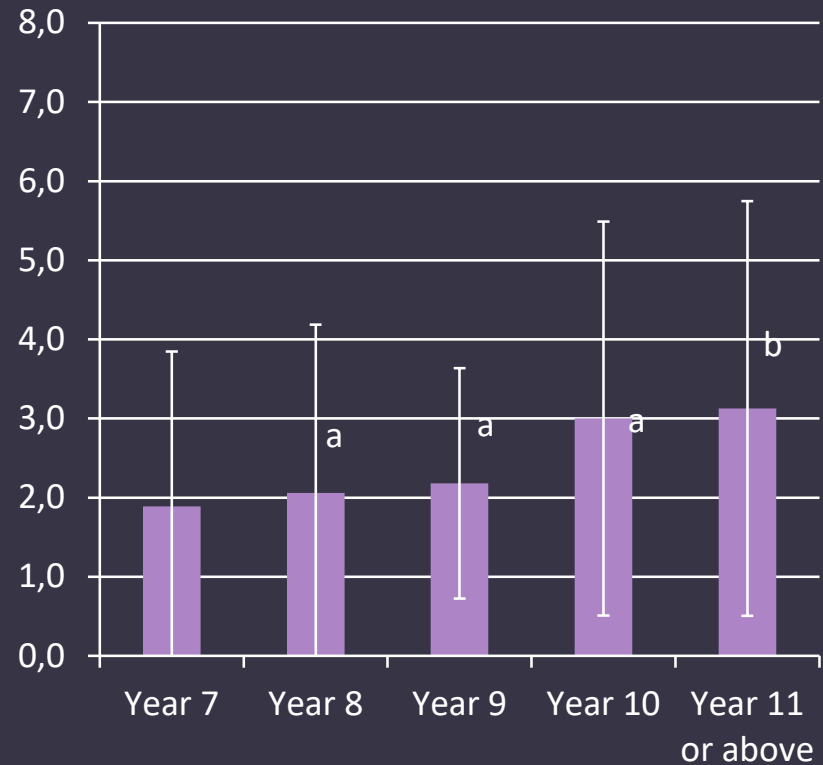
16+ knowledge



1 = 'nothing at all'; 5 = 'a great deal'

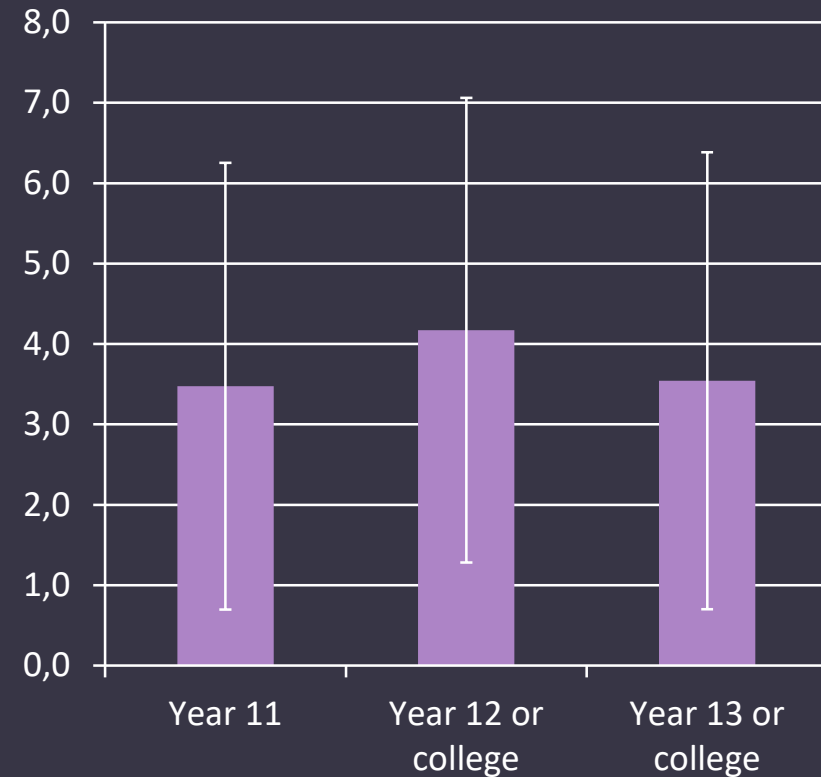
Acceptability of using drugs for fun

UNDER 16



$F(4,369) = 4.755, p = 0.001$; same letter denotes no difference

16+



$F(2,210) = 1.315, p = 0.271$

Conclusions from questionnaires

Reassurances

Younger age group is relatively 'drug naive'

Legal highs are not prevalent

Very little contact with cognitive and performance enhancing substances

Concerns

Mixing drugs

Alcohol

Shisha smoking

Ease of access to drugs

Acceptability of using drugs for having fun steadily increases across the year groups ('jump' at GCSE)



Drug Attitude Implicit Association Tests

Based on stimulus-response compatibility

Series of combinations that share the same response key

'Illegal + Good' vs. 'Illegal + Bad'

	Category label	Stimuli
Target	Legal (non-focal)	alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, energy drink
	Illegal	crack, weed, ecstasy, acid
Attribute	Good	enjoyable, fun, sociable, exciting
	Bad	wrong, horrible, destructive, boring

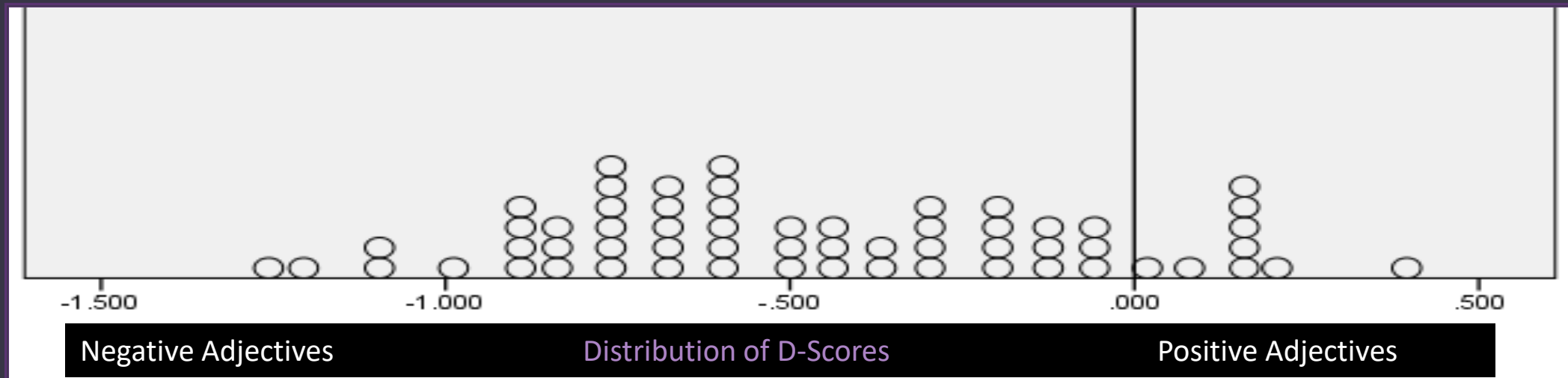
Faster response time indicates association (through easier completion)

Implicit Association Test Results

N = 61

Mean D-score: -0.46 ± 0.39 (IAT score range = 2 to -2)

- The sample preferred matching illegal drugs (crack, weed, ecstasy, acid) to negative adjectives (wrong, horrible, destructive, boring).





Mini-interviews

71 adolescents (24 males and 47 females)

N= 41 below 16 years of age (12-15 years old)

N= 30 above 16 years and above (16-18 years old)

No one had experimented with recreational or performance enhancing substances with the exception of alcohol:

- Sample bias? Rock Challenge participants may be engaged in “healthier” lifestyles
- Nature of the data collection setting? Strong willingness to hide “inappropriate” conducts

Results

Drinking alcohol in party settings was considered the “norm”. Alcohol consumption varied from light beverages (beer) to strong spirits (vodka).

Strong differentiation between the below 16s and the older subgroup: over 16s were more “drug experienced”.

According to participants, drugs were mainly consumed in party settings by peers who wanted to be perceived as “cool”:

- “Drinking and smoking is a hierarchy thing.” Female, 15.

Which drugs do your peers use?

1. Alcohol
2. Cigarettes
3. Cannabis
4. Cocaine or crack
5. MD/MA or ecstasy
6. Mephedrone
7. Ketamine
8. LSD
9. Laughing gas
10. Crystal meth

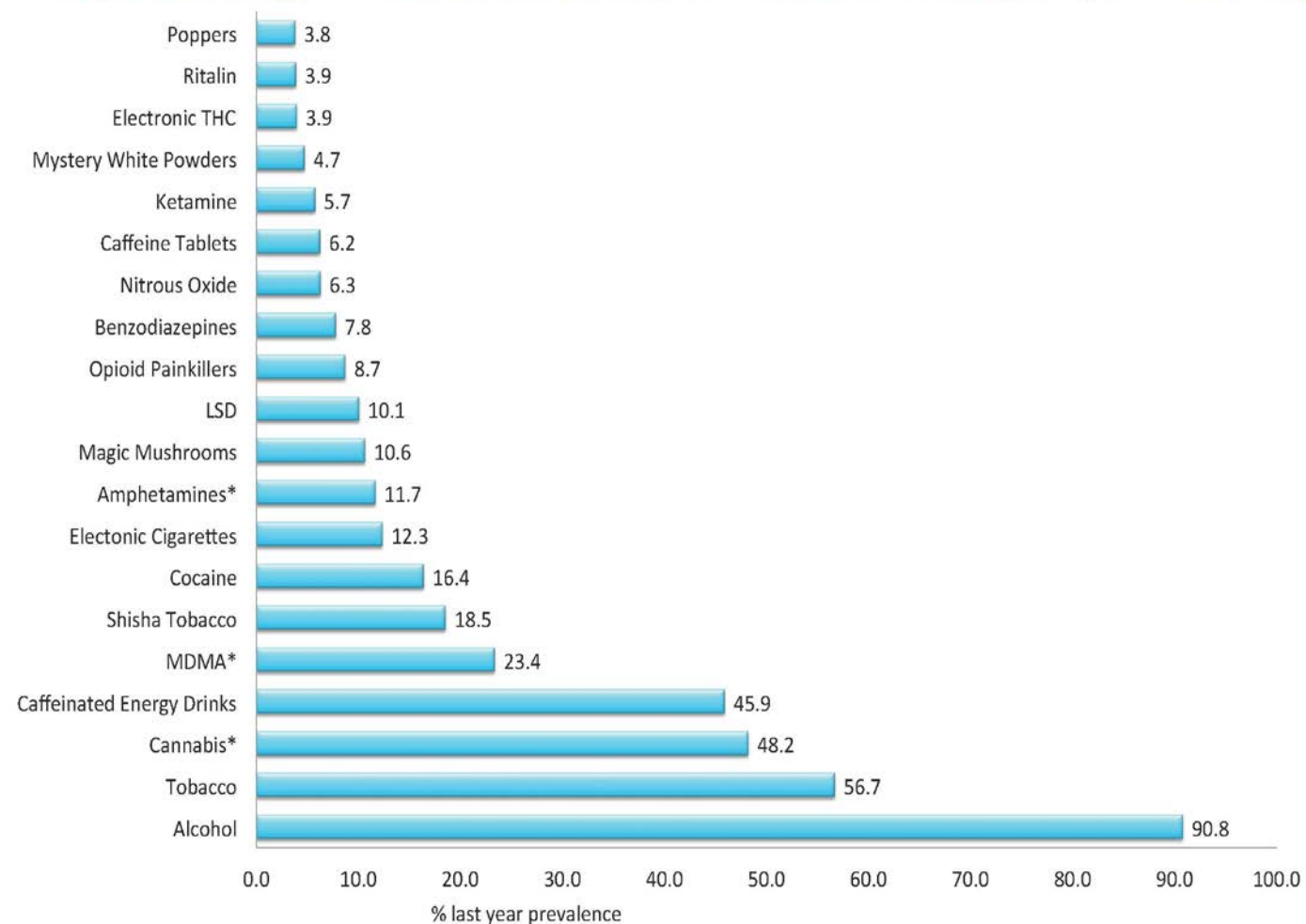
Ranking reflects the number of times the substances were mentioned in the interviews

The popularity of certain drugs (cannabis, cocaine, MD/MA) has not changed compared to the last decades, although novel trends are steadily emerging and becoming more popular:

- Mephedrone
- Laughing gas

EMCDDA(2015). European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addictions. European Drug Report.
<http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/united-kingdom>

Top 20 Drugs – Last 12 Months – Whole Sample (N=78,819)



*Denotes all types and preparations



Nitrous Oxide Canisters and balloons



Other substances

- ❖ Participants were not aware of anabolic steroid use among their peers, although they suspected that they were used within their territory.
- ❖ The cohort had no familiarity with cognitive enhancers.
- ❖ Drugs were perceived as easy to purchase (especially cannabis) if “you knew the right people”, and dealers were described as peers attending their schools.

Conclusions

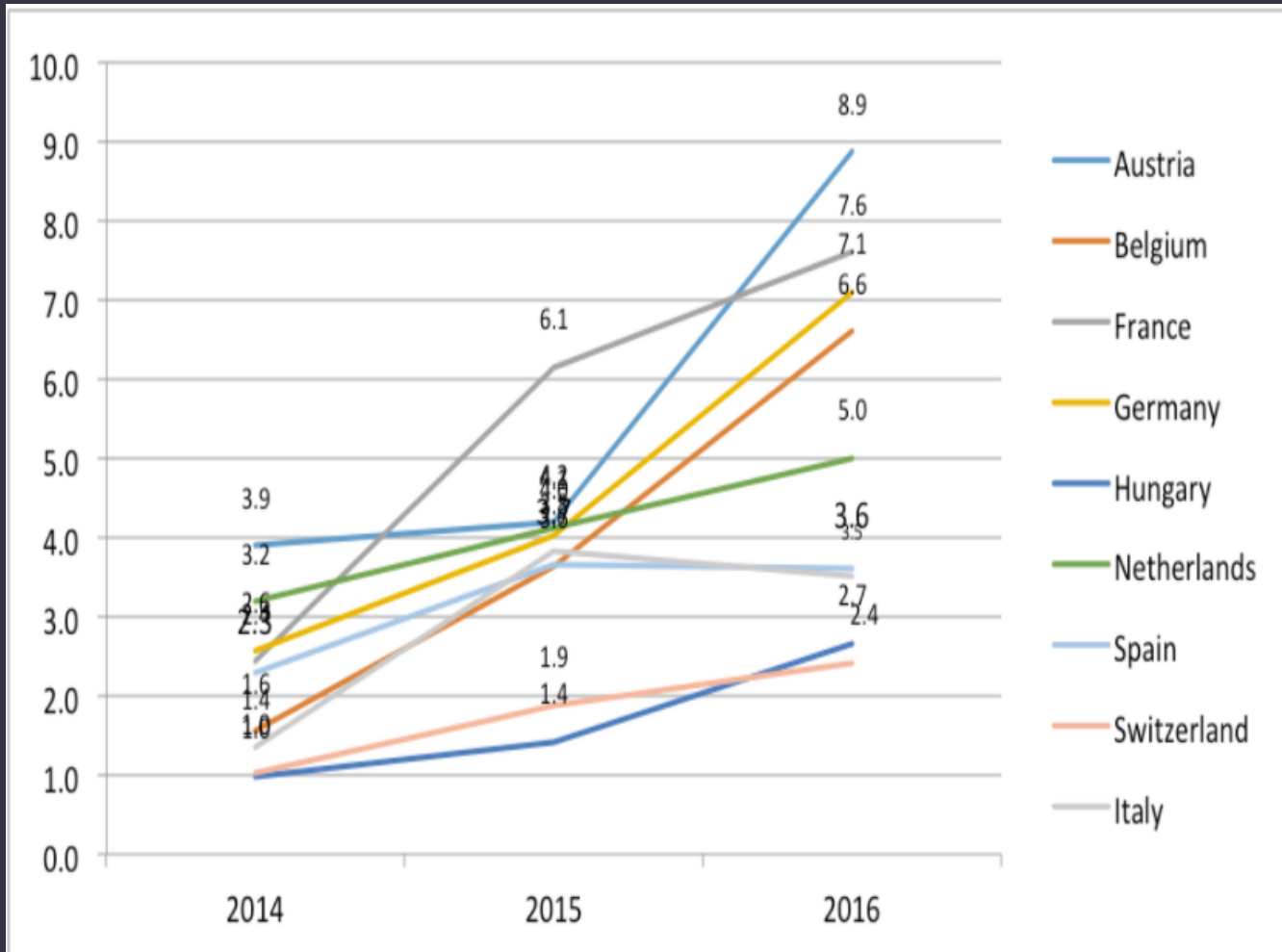
Using mixed methods designs to explore attitudes and social knowledge can reveal important information useful to prevention strategies.

Harm reduction interventions should include emerging drug trends and address the wide availability of a growing number of drugs.

Drug trends should be monitored closely and efficiently considering the speed of change and the role of the Internet in drug access.



Thank you! Questions?



Recent darknet market use includes purchasing their own and getting someone to purchase on their behalf in the last 12 months. Base: respondents reporting use of illicit/NPS/prescription drugs in the last 12 months. Only countries with N=500+ in all 3 years are included (except Italy which had <500 in 2014 and 2015)

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