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NAHRPP - New Approaches in Harm Reduction Policies and Practices"
WS2 "Cannabis self regulation model in a harm reduction perspective"

Researchers' Workshop. Florence, 8-10 October 2017

***About research design. Notes and proposals to facilitate
our work during the workshop***

Research Design

Purpose

The aim is to investigate:
a) patterns of cannabis use and users' perceptions of "controlled"/"uncontrolled" patterns of use
b) informal rules applied by users to self regulate cannabis use
c) users' expectancies about self regulation capacities and users' attitudes about help seeking (in case of perceived diminished control on cannabis use)
d) users' beliefs about what kind of support they may need in case of diminish control

Participants

Participants will be: individuals, users informal groups and Social Cannabis Clubs. To select them different situations will be explored: users' groups; on line users groups; snowballing.

Methods and instruments

The main areas that will be analyzed will concern self regulation strategies, the needs expressed by persons, both in their everyday life and – and particularly – in critical times, as crisis, feeling to be "out of control", social and relational difficulties, barriers in seeking help professional help.

Qualitative methods will be employed. One focus group, at least, and 8 interviews, or, in alternative at least 15 interviews, in each country are expected to be carried out.

A further instrument may be the "time lining interview", helping the interviewees to better organizing their attitudes, feelings and behaviors, placing them in a significant temporal succession (see Kolar, Ahmad, Chan, &Erickson, 2015; Sheridan, Chamberlain, &Dupuis, 2011).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data will be analyzed by means of Thematic Analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2006; Braun, & Clarke, 2012).
A Report coming from outcomes will be produced.

References – Analysis methods
Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006).Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.
Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012).Thematic analysis. *APA handbook of research methods in psychology*, *2*, 57-71.
Kolar, K., Ahmad, F., Chan, L., &Erickson, P. G. (2015). Timeline mapping in qualitative interviews: A study of resilience with marginalized groups. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *14*(3), 13-32.
Sheridan, J., Chamberlain, K., &Dupuis, A. (2011).Timelining: visualizing experience. *Qualitative Research*, *11*(5), 552-569.

Some Key issues
To facilitate our work during the workshop, we suggest some key issues:

1) Differences in cannabis controls: daily use is very frequent and is not usually perceived as an indicator of "loss of control" by users (cfr. Tuscan study, 2013); similarly, one of the most important controls for other substances (cocaine for example) – limiting its use to recreational occasions with friends- does not appear to apply to cannabis, or not so rigorously. Also, the related rule "do not use alone" is hardly applied by cannabis users. Rather, in the quoted Tuscan study, the opposite is mentioned by some: *when I am alone, I just smoke one joint and that's all, when I am in a group it is easier to pass the joints* (a-ca). These findings suggest a sort of "loosening" of some common controls (such as use in recreational settings only, avoiding everyday use), following the process of "normalization" of cannabis consumption. The high prevalence of daily use seems to confirm the increasing "intertwining" of cannabis use in everyday life.

2) How can we interpret the "loosening" of these controls in cannabis use? A suggestion may be drawn by specific alcohol patterns of use: in the so called Mediterranean pattern of alcohol use, daily drinking is prevalent and the choice of milder drinks (wine or more recently beer) consumed in low doses makes drinking "flexible" and adaptable to different occasions, without interfering with life engagements.

3) While cannabis prohibition policies are shifting towards regulation in many countries, there is a persistent emphasis on "problematic cannabis use" (see 2017 Italian Report on Drug

Addiction), investigated through specific scales such as CAST (Cannabis Abuse Screening Test) in epidemiological studies (see ESPAD Italia in the quoted 2017 Italian Report). These tests have been in depth discussed, mainly because they only rely on the "drug" factor while ignoring the set and setting variables (see Asbridge et al., 2014). Also, it is important to investigate cannabis users perceptions of "problematic use", an important feature in the "control" perspective.

4) The relationship between cannabis use and synthetic cannabinoids should be examined, as SPICE follows cannabis as the second most frequent substance among students (see ESPAD Italia). Under this perspective, cannabis use allows a more in depth view on the so called "multidrug" use, in the intertwining and relationship between "traditional" and "new" substances.

5) The "normalization" process regarding cannabis use is a critical context topics to be evaluated and analyzed particularly with regard to self regulation strategies. "Normalization" deals with both users' perception of their own behaviours, and with social perception, and includes the role of cultural norms and social learning.