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Dear Editor,

We send to you our manuscript titled “Development of a micro-solid-phase extraction molecularly imprinted polymer technique for synthetic cannabinoids assessment in urine followed by liquid chromatography - tandem mass spectrometry” for publication in Journal of Chromatography A, if it is possible. The current paper is an unpublished work and it has not been submitted for publication elsewhere.

The current research describes for the first time the synthesis of molecularly imprinted polymers (MIPs) for synthetic cannabinoids (SCs), and the development of a micro-solid phase extraction (μ -SPE) procedure in which the adsorbent (MIP particles) is enclosed inside a cone shaped device made of polypropylene. Several SCs classes (AM, JWH, and RCS classes) are simultaneously pre-concentrated and further determined by high performance liquid chromatography – tandem mass spectrometry.

Waiting your news

Best regards,

Dr. Antonio Moreda-Piñeiro (corresponding author)

Dr. Sabina Strano-Rossi (corresponding author)

Highlights:

- > Molecularly imprinted polymer (MIP) for synthetic cannabinoids (SCs) assessment in urine
- > μ -SPE (cone shaped) device based on porous membrane-protected containing MIP
- > Fast SCs (AM, JWH, and RCS classes) and metabolites determination by reverse phase HPLC-MS/MS

1 **Development of a micro-solid-phase extraction molecularly imprinted**
2 **polymer technique for synthetic cannabinoids assessment in urine followed**
3 **by liquid chromatography - tandem mass spectrometry**

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17

18 **Abstract**

19 Several molecularly imprinted polymers (MIPs) have been synthesized for the first time
20 using various synthetic cannabinoids (JWH007, JWH015 and JWH098) as template
21 molecules. Ethylene dimethacrylate (EDMA) was used as a functional monomer for all cases.
22 Similarly, divinylbenzene (DVB) and 2,2'-azobisisobutyronitrile (AIBN) were used as cross-
23 linker and initiator, respectively. The prepared MIPs have been fully characterized and

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24 evaluated as new selective adsorbents for micro-solid phase extraction (μ -SPE) of synthetic
25 cannabinoids in urine. The developed MIP- μ -SPE devices consisted of a polypropylene (PP)
26 porous membrane containing the adsorbent for operating in batch mode (porous membrane-
27 protected micro-solid phase extraction), which allowed a fast and integrated extraction-
28 cleanup procedure. High performance liquid chromatography – tandem mass spectrometry
29 (HPLC-MS/MS) was used for quantifying the analytes after MIP- μ -SPE. The best
30 performances were obtained for MIPs prepared from JWH015 as a template. Optimum
31 loading conditions were found to be urine pH of 5.0 and adsorption time of 8.0 min under
32 mechanical (orbital-horizontal) stirring at 100 rpm. The composition of the eluting solution
33 consisted of 75:20:5 heptane/2-propanol/ammonium hydroxide. The elution was assisted by
34 ultrasounds (37 kHz, 325 W) for 8.0 min. In addition, studies regarding selectivity have also
35 been addressed for several drugs of abuse under optimized loading/adsorption conditions.
36 Validation of the method showed good precision and analytical recovery by intra-day and
37 inter-day assays (RSD values lower than 7 and 10% for intra-day and inter-day precision, and
38 within the 83-100% range for intra-day and inter-day analytical recovery).

39

40 **Keywords:** synthetic cannabinoids, molecularly imprinted polymer porous membrane-
41 protected micro-solid phase extraction, urine, high performance liquid chromatography
42 tandem mass spectrometry.

43

44 **1. Introduction**

45 As stated in the recent World Drug Report 2017 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and
46 Crime (UNODC), the global market for new psychoactive substances (NPSs) continues to
47 expand, and the range of drugs available on the market has probably never been wider [1].
48 The data reported for 2016 show that the major identified NPSs were cathinones and several

49 new synthetic cannabinoids (SCs) [1]. SCs share certain parts of the molecular structure of
50 drugs obtained from natural products. The psychoactive power of these new substances is
51 therefore similar, or even higher, than that exhibited by similar substances of natural origin.
52 However, these new substances have certain structural differences when compared to natural
53 drugs; thus, they go unnoticed during illicit drug market control and also during routine
54 toxicological-forensic analysis.

55 Recent literature dealing with the detection of these substances in clinical samples shows the
56 need for using highly sensitive techniques such as mass spectrometry [2,3]. However, the
57 development of analytical methodologies that favor the extraction and pre-concentration of
58 these substances from complex biological matrices is needed [2]. Selectivity obtained by the
59 available pre-concentration methods is a key factor for enhancing the performances of
60 modern mass spectrometry-based techniques. This is quite important mainly when using
61 electrospray ionization (ESI) sources because of the existence of the matrix effect (changes in
62 the ionization process of the drug due to endogenous matrix components) which results in ion
63 enhancement (gain in signal) or suppression (loss of signal) affecting the precision, accuracy
64 and robustness of the method [2]. Regarding Biological specimen analysis, conventional
65 sample pre-treatments have been proposed for isolating/pre-concentrating SCs [4-11].
66 Conventional liquid-liquid extraction (LLE) [4,6-9] and solid phase extraction (SPE) using
67 commercially available cartridges [5] have been proposed for urine analysis. Moreover,
68 recent developments have been based on dispersive liquid-liquid microextraction (DLLME)
69 [10,11]. Molecularly imprinted polymers (MIPs) have emerged as highly selective adsorbents
70 for both SPE and μ -SPE procedures. These artificial materials emulate the high selectivity of
71 the antibody-antigen and enzyme systems [12], but the preparation (synthesis) is quite easier
72 and more straightforward than the production methods required for natural receptors. In
73 addition, the cost of synthesizing MIPs is almost negligible when compared to antibody-

74 antigen and enzyme reagents. After preparing an MIP using a specific template, the
75 artificially generated recognition sites in synthetic MIPs are able to specifically rebind a
76 target molecule in preference to other closely related compounds [13]. The technology of
77 MIPs has been used extensively for separation applications, and several recent reviews deal
78 with the selective pre-concentration separation of environmental organic and inorganic
79 compounds, and also natural products and/or contaminants in foodstuffs [13-16]. There are
80 few applications, however, addressing the assessment of illicit drugs in clinical/forensic
81 samples. Recent developments have dealt with cocaine and metabolites assessment [17-20],
82 and also with natural cannabinoids [21,22] in urine and plasma.

83 The aim of the current work has been the synthesis and characterization of MIPs for the
84 recognition of twenty SCs (mainly AM and JWH class), and the development of a μ -SPE for
85 urine analysis. To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first development regarding
86 MIPs synthesis and evaluation for synthetic cannabinoids.

87 Several templates (three structurally different synthetic cannabinoids) were used for MIPs
88 synthesis. Capabilities of the three synthesized MIPs were evaluated for recognizing and pre-
89 concentrating the template molecules, as well as other related molecules so that most
90 synthetic cannabinoids can be simultaneously assessed. The developed MIP- μ -SPE (batch
91 mode) novel approach was based on using polypropylene (PP) porous membrane-protected
92 technology [23]. This μ -SPE format, first proposed by Basheer et al. [24], allows the target to
93 diffuse freely through the membrane's pores and to be retained by the solid sorbent phase;
94 whereas, the sample's concomitants diffusion (large biomolecules typically present in clinical
95 specimens) is hampered by the membrane.

96

97 **2. Materials and methods**

98 **2.1. Instrumentation**

99 Determinations were performed with an Agilent 6460 triple quadrupole mass spectrometer
100 (Agilent Technologies, Santa Clara, CA, USA) with a Jet Stream electrospray ionization
101 source operating in Multiple Reaction Monitoring (MRM) mode, and equipped with an
102 Agilent 1290 Infinity system (Agilent Technologies) consisting of a binary pump with an
103 integrated vacuum degasser, a high performance well-plate autosampler, and a thermostatted
104 column module. Chromatographic separations were performed with a Kinetex 2.6 μ C18 100
105 Å reverse phase column (100 mm length \times 2.10 mm i.d., 5.0 μ m particle diameter) from
106 Phenomenex (Torrance, CA, USA). A Boxcult temperature-controlled chamber (Stuart
107 Scientific, Surrey, UK) equipped with a low-profile roller (Stovall, Greensboro, NC, USA)
108 was used for MIP synthesis. A multi mixer 717 (Asal Srl, Milano, Italy) was used for MIP- μ -
109 SPE (loading stage). The cone-shaped PP envelope containing MIP beads was heat-sealed
110 with a TN1010 heat-sealer from Siemens (Munich, Germany). An ELMA Transonic 450/H
111 ultrasonic cleaner bath (Carlo Erba, Milano, Italy) with programmable temperature and time
112 and ultrasound frequency of 37 kHz was used for analyte elution from the μ -SPE device.
113 Other laboratory devices were: a field emission scanning electron microscope Ultra Plus
114 (Zeiss Oberkochen, Germany), a Spectrum Two FT-IR-UATR spectrometer from Perkin
115 Elmer (Waltham, MA, USA), a Basic20 pH-meter with a glass-calomel electrode (Crison,
116 Barcelona, Spain), a Reax 2000 mechanical stirrer (Heidolph, Kelheim, Germany), a vacuum
117 pump (Millipore Co., Bedford, MA, USA), an oven model 207 from Selecta (Barcelona,
118 Spain), a VLM EC1 metal block thermostat and N₂ sample concentrator from VLM
119 (Leopoldshöhe-Greste, Germany), and a R-210 rotavapor equipped with a B-491 heating bath
120 and a V-740 vacuum pump (Büchi Labortechnik AG, Flawil, Switzerland).

121 **2.2. Reagents**

122 Ultrapure water 18 M Ω cm of resistivity (Milli-Q purification device) from Millipore Co.
123 (Bedford, MA, USA). The following SCs were supplied by LGC Standards (Milano, Italy):

124 JWH007, JWH015, JWH098 (these three SCs were also used for MIP synthesis), AKB 48
125 (APINACA), AM694, AM2201, AM2233, CB13, JWH018, JWH019, JWH030, JWH073,
126 JWH081, JWH122, JWH147, JWH203, JWH210, JWH250, JWH 251, JWH302, JWH307,
127 JWH398, RCS4, RCS8, JWH073 N-(3-hydroxybutyl) metabolite, JWH073 4-butanoic acid
128 metabolite, JWH0734-Hydroxyindole metabolite, JWH0735-Hydroxyindole metabolite
129 JWH018 4-hydroxyindole metabolite, JWH018N-Pentanoic acid metabolite, JWH250 5-
130 Hydroxyindole metabolite JWH250 N-pentanoic acid metabolite, and JWH210-d₉ (internal
131 standard). Methanolic solutions (1.0 or 0.1 mg mL⁻¹) of SCs were prepared from pure
132 standards. Other drugs (methanolic solutions at 1 or 0.1 mg mL⁻¹, from LGC Standards) used
133 for cross-reactivity studies were: buprenorphine (BUP), Δ⁹-tetrahydrocannabinol (Δ⁹-THC),
134 11-nor-9-carboxy-Δ⁹-tetrahydrocannabinol (Δ⁹-THC-COOH), 11-hydroxy-Δ⁹-
135 tetrahydrocannabinol (Δ⁹-THC-OH), cannabinal (CBN), cannabidiol (CBD), amphetamine
136 (A), methamphetamine (MA), methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA), methylenedi-
137 oxymethamphetamine (MDMA), 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-ethylamphetamine (MDEA), 1,3-
138 benzodioxolyl-N-methylbutanamine (MBDB), benzoylecgonine (BEG), cocaine (COC),
139 cocaethylene (CE), ecgonine methyl ester (EME), morphine, O-6-monoacetylmorphine (O-6-
140 MAM), codeine, methylone, butylone, cathinone, ethylone, methylenedioxypropylone
141 (MDPV), pentylone, naphyrone, flephedrone, 3,4-dimethylmethcathinone (3,4-DMMC), and
142 methcathinone (ephedrone). MIP particles were synthesized by using divinylbenzene-80
143 (DVB) from Sigma-Aldrich (Steinheim, Germany), and ethylene dimethacrylate (EDMA)
144 and 2,2'-azobisisobutyronitrile (AIBN) from Fluka (Buchs, Switzerland). ACCUREL[®] PP
145 membrane was from Membrana (Wuppertal, Germany). Acetonitrile and methanol
146 (supragradient HPLC grade), heptane, ammonium acetate, neutral alumina, and sodium
147 hydroxide were from Merck (Darmstadt, Germany). Potassium dihydrogen phosphate was
148 from BDH (Poole, UK). Toluene, 2-propanol, ammonium hydroxide, and acetic acid 96%

149 (m/m) were from Panreac (Barcelona, Spain). Other consumables were: Durapore 0.20 μm
150 membrane filters (Millipore), cellulose extraction thimbles (Filtros Anovia, Barcelona, Spain),
151 and 0.20 μm cellulose acetate syringe filters (LLG, Meckenheim, Germany).

152 **2.3. Urine samples**

153 Ten drug-free urine samples obtained from laboratory staff volunteers were used for method
154 optimization. For all cases, urine samples were collected in clean sealed polyethylene vials
155 and kept at -20°C when necessary.

156 **2.4. Synthesis of MIP particles**

157 Liquid synthetic cannabinoids standards of JWH-007, JWH-015 and JWH-098 were used as
158 templates for the synthesis of three MIPs. For each MIP synthesis, 108 μL of JWH-007,
159 JWH-015 and 116 μL of JWH-098 were mixed with 67.3 μL of EDMA and 25 mL of
160 porogen (acetonitrile/toluene 3:1) into 30 mL glass test tubes. The mixture was then stirred
161 for 5 min and kept in the dark overnight to allow the self-assembly of the template and
162 monomer. DVB (1.25 mL) and AIBN (0.091 g) were then added to the pre-polymerization
163 mixture, and after stirring for 1 min the mixture was purged with argon for 5 min and
164 immediately sealed, and placed in a low-profile roller (33 rpm on its long axis) inside a
165 temperature-controllable incubator chamber (the temperature was ramped from room
166 temperature to 60°C during 2 h, and then maintained at 60°C for a further 24 hours). DVB
167 was previously treated to remove the polymerization inhibitor by passing a few milliliters of
168 the reagent through a mini-column containing approximately 0.5 g of neutral alumina.

169 Similarly, AIBN was purified by crystallization at -20°C after dissolving the reagent in
170 methanol at $50\text{--}60^{\circ}\text{C}$.

171 Once polymerization was finished, the synthesized material was vacuum filtered, washed
172 with acetonitrile, and oven-dried overnight at 40°C . Non-imprinted polymers (NIPs) were

173 also prepared as shown above, but without adding the templates. The NIPs were then
174 subjected to the same washing pre-treatment described above.

175 **2.5. Template removal procedure**

176 Templates were removed from synthesized MIPs by subjecting approximately 300 mg of
177 dried MIP to Soxhlet extraction (two 20-hour cycles with 200 mL of methanol/water/acetic
178 acid, 85:10:5). With this treatment, negligible drug concentrations were found in the washing
179 solutions when performing HPLC-MS/MS analysis. The MIP beads were then rinsed with
180 ultrapure water, and finally, the MIP particles inside the cellulose thimble were oven-dried at
181 40°C for 12 hours before use.

182 **2.6. Preparation of the MIP- μ -SPE device**

183 The MIP – porous membrane protected μ -SPE device was prepared with a PP membrane
184 using a cone-shape design with only one seal on the upper end [17]. This configuration (4.0
185 cm in height) prevents degradation of the heat seal by the solvents typically used during the
186 elution stage. An amount of 50 mg of prepared MIPs was placed into one of the closed-end
187 folds before heat-sealing. Before use, each MIP- μ -SPE device was conditioned by sonication
188 with 5 mL of 0.1M/0.1M $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4/\text{NaOH}$ buffer solution (pH 5.0) for 10 min. The MIP- μ -
189 SPE devices were stored soaked in the buffer solution.

190 **2.7. MIP- μ -SPE procedure**

191 Urine (1.0 mL) was spiked with the internal standard (JWH-210 d_9) at a concentration of 10
192 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) into 25 mL flasks. The pH was adjusted at 5.0, and the conditioned MIP- μ -SPE
193 device was placed into the buffered sample. The flasks were shaken (orbital – horizontal
194 stirring) at 100 rpm for 8 min (ten flasks can be simultaneously treated). After analyte
195 retention, the MIP- μ -SPE device was removed with tweezers and rinsed with 2 mL of
196 0.1M/0.1M $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4/\text{NaOH}$ buffer solution at pH 5.0 (orbital – horizontal shaking of 100 rpm
197 for 10 min). Analyte elution was then performed by placing the MIP- μ -SPE device into a

198 flask containing 2 mL of 75:20:5 heptane/2-propanol/ammonium hydroxide mixture, and
199 elution was assisted by ultrasounds (37 kHz) for 8 min. After MIP- μ -SPE removal, the eluate
200 was evaporated to dryness (stream of N₂, 40°C), and re-dissolved with 50 μ L of 2 mM
201 ammonium acetate in methanol (pre-concentration factor of 20). The prepared MIP- μ -SPE
202 devices can be reused for 30-35 retention/eluting cycles without losing the retention
203 efficiency.

204 **2.8. Liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry measurement**

205 Gradient elution (Table 1) was required for resolving several targets. Mobile phase A
206 consisted of 0.1% formic acid in ultrapure water, whereas mobile phase B was 0.1% formic
207 acid in methanol. MRM was used for data acquisition. Optimized ion source potentials and
208 collision energies for each MRM transition (at least two precursor ion \rightarrow product ion
209 transitions for each analyte), are listed in Table 2. Electrospray source parameters are also
210 listed in Table 2.

211 Standard addition curves were prepared in duplicate by spiking 1.0 mL of drug-free urine
212 samples with the deuterated analogue (10 μ g L⁻¹JWH-210 d₉), and analyte standards (5.0, 10,
213 15, and 20 μ g L⁻¹ each). This offers analyte concentrations within the 0 – 400 μ g L⁻¹ range
214 and a JWH-210 d₉ concentration of 200 μ g L⁻¹ in the reconstituted extract (pre-concentration
215 factor of 20). A typical chromatogram is shown in Figure 1.

216

217 **3. Results and discussion**

218 **3.1. MIP characterization**

219 As shown in the scanning electron microscopy (SEM) photographs (Figure S1,
220 supplementary section) MIPs and NIPs consisted of agglomerates of spherical particles. MIPs
221 exhibit smaller beads than NIPs (approximately 5.0-7.0 μ m), while NIP beads are 10 μ m in
222 size. The smallest bead sizes are those of the MIP-based JWH015.

223 FT-IR spectra were quite similar for all MIPs (after template removal) and NIPs (Figure S2,
224 supplementary section). This is because there are no specific functional groups in the
225 template molecules, and bands attributed to the template overlap with those exhibited by the
226 monomer and cross-linker (present in both MIP and NIP). Figure S2 shows some
227 characteristic bands in the FT-IR such as $\sim 2900\text{ cm}^{-1}$ (C-H stretch), $\sim 1450\text{ cm}^{-1}$ (C-H
228 bending), and $\sim 1731\text{ cm}^{-1}$ (C=O stretch). In addition, three weak bands (1486, 1510, and
229 1599 cm^{-1}) related to C=C stretch, and ~ 1100 and $\sim 1160\text{ cm}^{-1}$ (C-O stretch) can also be
230 observed.

231 **3.2. Optimization of MIP- μ -SPE conditions**

232 **3.2.1. Preliminary experiments.**

233 Preliminary studies were performed mainly to find the most favorable pH (acid or alkaline)
234 for target adsorption during the loading stage, and also the composition of the eluting solution
235 for an efficient elution. These studies were performed using an MIP prepared with JWH-098
236 as a template. As previously reported for common cannabinoids using MIP- μ SPE [22],
237 retention is improved when buffering the sample at acid pHs; whereas, elution is more
238 efficient at alkaline pHs. Therefore, drug-free urine (1 mL) spiked with all targets ($10\text{ }\mu\text{L}^{-1}$
239 each) and buffered at pH 6.0 were subjected to MIP- μ -SPE under non-optimized conditions.
240 The literature regarding LLE shows the effectiveness of an organic solvent such as
241 hexane/ethyl acetate (7:1) [4], ether/n-hexane/ethyl acetate (7:1:2) [9], chlorobutane/2-
242 propanol (7:3) [8], and chlorobutane [6]. Based on these proposals, less toxic solvents such as
243 heptane and 2-propanol have been selected for eluting the retained SCs. In addition, since
244 SCs are retained onto the MIP particles at acid pHs, the eluting solution was alkalized by
245 using a low proportion of ammonium hydroxide. Therefore, elution was first performed using
246 (75:20:5) heptane/2-propanol/ammonium hydroxide (pH 8.0) as eluting solution. As with

247 other developments based on MIP- μ -SPE, analyte desorption was found to be enhanced by
248 assisting the elution with ultrasounds.

249 **3.2.2. Effect of urine pH on loading conditions. MIPs comparison**

250 First, the influence of urine pH (5.0, 6.0, 7.0 and 8.0, fixed with variable volumes of 0.1
251 M/0.1M $\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4/\text{NaOH}$ buffer solutions at each pH) on target retention was evaluated using
252 drug-free urine samples (1.0 mL) spiked with $10 \mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ of each analyte and deuterated
253 analogues, and using MIP synthesized with JWH-098 as a template. Other loading variables
254 were fixed at 200 rpm for the orbital-horizontal stirring speed, 25°C for temperature, and 10
255 min for loading time; whereas elution was performed by sonication with 2 mL of heptane/2-
256 propanol/ammonium hydroxide (75:20:5) for 10 min. As shown in Figure 2 (experiments in
257 duplicate), analyte retention for all synthetic cannabinoids was favored at acid pHs (the
258 highest analytical recoveries in Figure 2), thus a pH of 5.0 was finally chosen.

259 After selecting a pH of 5.0 for buffering urine samples before loading with MIP JWH-098, a
260 set of experiments (urine pH fixed at 5.0, and other variables as shown above) was performed
261 with all prepared MIPs, and also with NIPs. Figure 3 shows results for synthetic cannabinoids
262 retention when using MIPs derived from JWH-015, JWH-098, and JWH-007 as templates
263 (and also NIPs). It can be seen that the best retention properties for all synthetic cannabinoids
264 is achieved with the MIP prepared when using JWH-015 as a template. The better
265 retention/recognition properties of MIP-based JWH015 can be attributed to the smaller
266 particle size of the MIP beads than in the case of MIP-based JWH007 and MIP-based
267 JWH098 (SEM images from Figure S1, supplementary data). Negligible responses were
268 obtained when using NIPs for all cases. These findings show that interaction between
269 synthetic cannabinoids with MIP particles occurs through the generated recognition cavities.
270 Further experiments have been therefore performed using the MIP prepared with JWH-015.

271 **3.2.3. Effect of shaking speed and time on loading conditions**

272 The effect of the loading time (Figure 4a) was evaluated by fixing the remaining variables at
273 convenient values (pH 5.0, 25°C, and 200 rpm for shaking speed; and sonication with 2 mL
274 of 75:20:5heptane/2-propanol/ammonium hydroxide for 10 min for elution). Analyte
275 retention was gradually enhanced from 4 to 8 min; however, a slight decrease in target
276 retention was observed when using longer extraction times. Therefore, a loading time of 4
277 min was finally selected.

278 After fixing the loading time at a low value (4 min), the effect of the shaking speed on
279 analyte retention (Figure 4b) shows that the highest analytical recoveries were obtained when
280 using low stirring speeds, thus 100 rpm was selected. These findings are quite similar to those
281 previously reported when using porous-membrane – protected μ -SPE [17,18,22] and also
282 when using SPE procedures based on magnetic MIPs [19,20], hollow-fiber microextraction
283 [25], and electro-mediated microextraction [26]. This is attributed to back-diffusion
284 phenomena (high speeds and long contact time between MIP particles and analytes appear to
285 promote back-diffusion phenomena).

286 **3.2.4. Elution conditions**

287 Elution conditions were studied using heptane/2-propanol/ammonium hydroxide as an eluting
288 solution along with ultrasounds assistance. Variables affecting the loading stage were fixed at
289 the convenient values reported above, and the effect of the percentage of ammonium
290 hydroxide in the eluting solution was first tested. As shown in Figure 5a, higher target
291 recoveries were obtained when using low ammonium hydroxide percentages (2 and 5%);
292 whereas, elution worsened when increasing the ammonium hydroxide percentage (and also
293 eluting solution pH) above 5%. Variations in the heptane/2-propanol proportion did not lead
294 to significant changes in the target recoveries, and the best performances were therefore
295 established using 75:20:5heptane/2-propanol/ammonium hydroxide (pH of 12.5).

296 Finally, the effect of the elution time (sonication time) is plotted in Figure 5b. Times higher
297 than 4 min were needed for eluting most of the synthetic cannabinoids, and an eluting time of
298 8 min was finally selected. Short times for elution, as well as for loading, imply fast
299 adsorption/desorption kinetics, which results appealing for performing the sample pre-
300 treatment in short times. Optimized eluting conditions have led to analytical recoveries close
301 to 100% for the thirty SCs. Improvements (high analytical recoveries) were mainly obtained
302 for JWH019, JWH98, JWH122, and JWH210, SCs which showed poor recoveries at the
303 beginning of the optimization (Figures 2, 3, and 4).

304 **3.3. Cross-reactivity and imprinting effect**

305 Recognition capacities (imprinting effect and selectivity) of the prepared material were
306 evaluated through several parameters such as extraction efficiency (analytical recovery),
307 distribution ratio (D) and selectivity coefficient ($S_{\text{JWH015/D}}$), defined as shown in Table 3. A
308 solution (1 mL) containing all synthetic cannabinoids at a concentration level of $10 \mu\text{g L}^{-1}$, as
309 well as other substances such as natural cannabinoids and metabolites (Δ^9 -THC-COOH, and
310 Δ^9 -THC-OH), cocaine and metabolites, opioids, amphetamines, and cathinones (also at $10 \mu\text{g}$
311 L^{-1}), was subjected to the MIP- μ -SPE procedure in triplicate. The same experiments were
312 also performed using NIP instead of MIP. Results after HPLC-MS/MS assessment for
313 synthetic cannabinoids (program optimized in this research), and also for other compounds
314 (optimized HPLC-MS/MS not given) show analytical recoveries (extraction efficiencies)
315 close to 100% for all synthetic cannabinoids, from 75% (JWH 203) to 90% (JWH 015).
316 Regarding NIP experiments, extraction efficiencies within the 7–30 % range were obtained.
317 This proves that SCs interact with the MIP recognition cavities of MIP particles, and pre-
318 concentration is attributed to the imprinting effect of the MIP material.
319 Table 3 also lists high distribution ratios, and hence selectivity coefficients close to the unity
320 for JWH-015 (template molecule), and also for other SCs. These findings imply that the

321 prepared material is selective for SCs (JWH and RSC classes). Regarding other
322 drugs/metabolites, including natural cannabinoids (Δ^9 -THC, CBN, and CBD) and
323 metabolites(Δ^9 -THC-COOH, and Δ^9 -THC-OH), low extraction efficiencies were obtained
324 (extraction efficiency lower than 20 and 30% when using MIP, and NIP, respectively, Table
325 3). This implies that the interaction of these drugs with MIP particles (and also with NIP
326 particles) occurs through surface adsorption. In general, high selectivity coefficients were
327 obtained for other drugs/metabolites (Table 3). We can thus conclude that MIP offers
328 imprinting properties (and is highly selective) for SCs.

329 The developed porous membrane-protected MIP- μ -SPE demonstrated to efficiently extract
330 all the SCs studied, pertaining to the classes of benzoylindoles, naphthoyl indoles,
331 phenylacetyl indoles, including those with a slightly different chemical structure, such as
332 AKB 48, a second-generation SC that shares an adamantly indazole structure.

333 This is of fundamental importance considering the variability of the SC market, as new
334 compounds are continuously being synthesized and are appearing on the illicit market [1].
335 Preparative methods for their purification and pre-concentration from biological samples,
336 coupled to sensitive analytical methods such as LC-MS/MS that give the possibility to screen
337 for a huge variety of SCs, is therefore an invaluable analytical tool.

338 **3.4. Method validation**

339 Although the method has been developed for all SCs, validation (LODs, linearity, precision
340 and analytical recovery) has been performed only on selected SCs due to their large number
341 and similar structures.

342 **3.4.1. Calibration. Matrix effect**

343 Several external calibrations (n=4) and standard addition calibrations (n = 7) obtained in
344 several days were used to check the existence of the matrix effect. Standard addition curves
345 were prepared in duplicate as shown in section 2.8, using 1.0 mL of drug-free urine samples

346 spiked with analytes within the 5.0 – 20 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ range (concentrations ranging from 100 to
347 400 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ after pre-concentration). Table 4 lists the slopes as an average value \pm standard
348 deviation. A significant decrease in slope calibrations was obtained when using the standard
349 addition technique with respect to external calibrations. The matrix effect is therefore
350 important, and analysis must be performed using the standard addition technique.

351 **3.4.2. Limit of detection/quantification**

352 The limit of detection (LOD) was established through the 3σ criterion (σ is the standard
353 deviation of eleven measurements of a blank), while the low limit of quantification (LLOQ),
354 and the limit of quantification (LOQ) were established through the 5σ and 10σ criterion [27],
355 respectively. Calculated LODs, LLOQ, and LOQs, referring to the original urine sample, are
356 listed in Table 4. Good sensitivity was achieved, LOQ from 0.106 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ (JWH073 5OH) to
357 2.49 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ (JWH019).

358 **3.4.3. Precision and accuracy**

359 Precision and analytical recovery (accuracy) were evaluated by intra-day and inter-day
360 assays. Intra-day precision and analytical recovery required the preparation of three standard
361 addition graphs (drug-free urine spiked with analytes from 0 to 20 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) in three different
362 days. The first standard addition graph was obtained by replicating the lowest analyte
363 concentration level (5.0 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) seven times; whereas, the other analyte concentration levels
364 were replicated twice. Similarly, second and third standard addition calibrations were
365 obtained by replicating the intermediate (10 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) and the highest (20 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) analyte
366 concentration levels seven times (the remaining analyte concentration levels were replicated
367 twice). Table 5 shows that good intra-day precision (RSD values lower than 5%), and
368 analytical recovery (values within the 80-120% range) were assessed.

369 Similarly, inter-day precision was established by preparing seven standard addition
370 calibrations in seven different days (each analyte concentration level in duplicate). RSD

371 values lower than 8% (Table 6) allow us to conclude that good inter-day precision was
372 achieved. In addition, analytical recoveries close to 100% (Table 6) were obtained, which
373 implies good inter-day accuracy.

374 In addition to the high SCs recognition capacity offered by the prepared adsorbents, the
375 developed MIP- μ -SPE has been found to be highly reliable (precise and accurate) and
376 sensitive. These features make the proposed sample pre-treatment procedure appealing for
377 assessing SCs, including as yet unknown SCs.

378

379 **Conclusions**

380 Several MIPs for SCs recognition have been synthesized for the first time and have been
381 applied for selective SCs pre-concentration from urine samples. The developed porous
382 membrane-protected MIP- μ -SPE has been shown to be a convenient, cost-effective and fast
383 sample pre-treatment method because several MIP- μ -SPE devices can be used
384 simultaneously (the capacity of the orbital-horizontal shaker allowed the simultaneous
385 performance of at least twenty MIP- μ -SPE devices, increasing the throughput of the method
386 when compared to MEPS and on-line SPE approaches). The conical MIP- μ -SPE proposed in
387 the current development avoids heat-sealing damage, and hence loss of MIP particles,
388 because the heat-seal in the conical μ -SPE device is not in contact with heptane during the
389 elution stage. The PP membrane for containing MIP particles also acts as a barrier and
390 prevents the interaction of large biomolecules from urine with the MIP sorbent. Therefore,
391 urine samples can be directly subjected to the MIP- μ -SPE process, and previous
392 dilution/protein separation/centrifugation stages are not required. After urine pH adjustment
393 (5.0), SCs are selectively retained onto MIP particles enclosed in a PP membrane (the loading
394 stage takes only 8 min). Retained analytes are easily released using heptane/2-
395 propanol/ammonium hydroxide (75:20:5) as an eluent, under sonication (37 kHz) for 8 min.

396 The use of an MIP as an adsorbent for μ -SPE has shown to offer selective enrichment of SCs
397 from urine samples. The high selectivity obtained together with a pre-concentration factor of
398 20 and the high sensitivity of HPLC-MS/MS, makes the proposed methods reliable and
399 appealing methodologies for NPSs assessment in complex samples.

400

401 **Acknowledgements**

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403 10CSA209042PR and 6RC2014/2017 Galician Competitive Research Group). These
404 programs are co-funded by FEDER (EU). This study was developed in part within the
405 framework of the project NEPRA – New Psychoactive Substances and Road Accidents
406 funded by the Italian Antidrug Policies Department.

407

408 **Table 1.** HPLC gradient program

409

	Kinetex 2.6 μ C18 100 Å reverse phase column (100 mm length \times 2.10 mm i.d., 5.0 μ m particle diameter)
Injection volume / μ L	20
Mobile phase composition	Gradient: 0.1% formic acid in water(A); 0.1% formic acid in methanol (B)
Mobile phase composition gradient	0.0–1.0 min: 55 \rightarrow 45 % A, 45 \rightarrow 55 %B 1.0–4.0 min: 45 \rightarrow 20% A, 55 \rightarrow 80 %B 4.0–5.0 min: 20% A, 80 %B 5.0–6.0 min: 20 \rightarrow 15% A, 80 \rightarrow 85 %B 6.6–7.0 min: 15 \rightarrow 10 % A, 85 \rightarrow 90 %B 7.0–8.0 min: 10 \rightarrow 5 % A, 90 \rightarrow 95 %B 8.0–9.0 min: 5 \rightarrow 0 % A, 95 \rightarrow 100 %B 9.0–11.5 min: 0 % A, 100 %B 11.5–12.0 min: 0 \rightarrow 10 % A, 100 \rightarrow 90 %B
Mobile phase flow rate	0.40 mL min ⁻¹

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413

Table 2. ESI source operating conditions and acquisition MS/MS parameters

Compound	Precursor ion (m/z)	Product ion (m/z)	Dwell (V)	Fragment or (V)	Collision energy (V)	Cell accelerator voltage (V)	Polarity
AKB48	366	135	10	135	20	7	positive
AKB48	366	107	10	135	50	7	positive
AKB48	366	93	10	135	60	7	positive
AM2201	360	155	10	135	10	7	positive
AM2201	360	232	10	135	10	7	positive
AM2201	360	127	10	135	10	7	positive
AM2233	459	112	10	135	10	7	positive
AM2233	459	362	10	135	10	7	positive
AM2233	459	98	10	135	10	7	positive
AM694	436	231	10	135	30	7	positive
AM694	436	292	10	135	30	7	positive
AM694	436	203	10	135	40	7	positive
CB13	369	155	10	135	10	7	positive
CB13	369	299	10	135	10	7	positive
CB13	369	171	10	135	10	7	positive
JWH007/JWH019	356	127	10	135	50	7	positive
JWH007/JWH019	356	228	10	135	20	7	positive
JWH007/JWH019	356	155	10	135	20	7	positive
JWH015/JWH073	328	127	10	135	50	7	positive
JWH015/JWH073	328	200	10	135	18	7	positive
JWH015/JWH073	328	155	10	135	22	7	positive
JWH018	342	127	10	135	55	7	positive
JWH018	342	155	10	135	10	7	positive
JWH018	342	144	10	135	45	7	positive
JWH018 4OH	358	127	10	130	55	7	positive
JWH018 4OH	358	155	10	130	25	7	positive
JWH018 4OH	358	230	10	130	30	7	positive
JWH018 NCOOH	372	155	10	130	25	7	positive

JWH018 NCOOH	372	144	10	130	40	7	posit ive
JWH018 NCOOH	372	127	10	130	60	7	posit ive
JWH018 5OH/JWH073 NCOOH	358	127	10	130	55	7	posit ive
JWH018 5OH/JWH073 NCOOH	358	155	10	130	25	7	posit ive
JWH018 5OH/JWH073 NCOOH	358	144	10	130	40	7	posit ive
JWH030	292	155	10	135	30	7	posit ive
JWH030	292	164	10	135	30	7	posit ive
JWH073 4OH	344	127	10	130	55	7	posit ive
JWH073 4OH	344	155	10	130	40	7	posit ive
JWH073 4OH	344	144	10	130	40	7	posit ive
JWH073 5 OH	344	127	10	130	55	7	posit ive
JWH073 5 OH	344	155	10	130	40	7	posit ive
JWH073 5 OH	344	216	10	130	25	7	posit ive
JWH081	372	185	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH081	372	214	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH081	372	144	10	135	45	7	posit ive
JWH098	386	185	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH098	386	228	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH098	386	157	10	135	50	7	posit ive
JWH122	356	169	10	135	18	7	posit ive
JWH122	356	214	10	135	18	7	posit ive
JWH122	356	141	10	135	18	7	posit ive
JWH147	382	127	10	135	50	7	posit ive
JWH147	382	254	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH147	382	155	10	135	50	7	posit ive
JWH302	336	121	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH302	336	214	10	135	20	7	posit ive
JWH302	336	188	10	135	10	7	posit ive
JWH250	336	121	10	135	20	7	posit

							ive
JWH250	336	130	10	135	38	7	posit
JWH250	336	200	10	135	18	7	ive
JWH203	340	125	10	135	40	7	posit
JWH203	340	214	10	135	30	7	ive
JWH203	340	144	10	135	40	7	posit
JWH210	370	214	10	135	30	7	ive
JWH210	370	183	10	135	25	7	posit
JWH210	370	144	10	135	45	7	ive
JWH250 5OH	352	121	10	135	25	7	posit
JWH250 5OH	352	186	10	135	10	7	ive
JWH250 5OH	352	91	10	135	55	7	posit
JWH251	320	105	10	135	20	7	ive
JWH251	320	214	10	135	20	7	posit
JWH251	320	144	10	135	45	7	ive
JWH307	386	127	10	135	50	7	posit
JWH307	386	258	10	135	10	7	ive
JWH307	386	155	10	135	10	7	posit
JWH398	376	189	10	135	20	7	ive
JWH398	376	214	10	135	20	7	posit
JWH398	376	161	10	135	20	7	ive
RCS4	322	135	10	135	50	7	posit
RCS4	322	107	10	135	50	7	ive
RCS4	322	92	10	135	50	7	posit
RCS8	377	91	10	135	50	7	ive
RCS8	377	144	10	135	50	7	posit
RCS8	377	121	10	135	50	7	ive
JWH018 NCOOH D ₄	376	155	10	135	50	7	posit
JWH018 NCOOH D ₄	376	127	10	135	50	7	ive
JWH073 NCOOH D ₅	363	155	10	135	50	7	posit
JWH073 NCOOH	363	127	10	135	50	7	ive

D ₅								ive
JWH210 D ₉	379	223	10	135	20	7		posit
JWH210 D ₉	379	183	10	135	20	7		ive
								posit
								ive

Electrospray operating conditions: gas temperature, 350°C; nebulizer gas (N₂), 40 psi; sheath gas temperature, 400°C; sheath gas flow, 12 L min⁻¹; capillary positive voltage, 4000 V; nozzle positive voltage, 2000 V.

414

415

416

417 **Table 3.** Extraction efficiency (%), distribution ratios (D) and selectivity coefficients (S_{JWH}
 418 $_{015/D}$) of for MIP- μ -SPE and NIP- μ -SPE.

MIP- μ -SPE			
	Extraction efficiency (%) ^a	Distribution ratio (D) ^b	Selectivity coefficient (S_{JWH} $_{015/D}$) ^c
JWH015	90	9.37	---
JWH073 5OH	83	5.04	1.9
JWH203	75	3.27	3.1
JWH210	80	3.98	2.4
RCS4	85	5.66	1.7
RCS8	77	3.68	2.8
JWH122	80	4.14	2.4
JWH019	78	3.75	2.7
AM2201	75	3.02	3.2
JWH073	85	6.04	1.7
JWH073 COOH	81	5.71	2.4
JWH018 4OH	83	5.58	2.0
JWH302	81	5.02	2.3
JWH250 5OH	75	3.27	2.9
JWH098	87	8.71	1.5
JWH018	81	5.09	2.3
JWH250	86	4.04	2.3
COC	14	0.16	59.4
CE	13	0.15	64.2
EME	3	0.03	227
BEC	17	0.20	47.0
Δ^9 -THC	9	0.10	98.5
Δ^9 -THC-OH	11	0.12	79.4
Δ^9 -THC- COOH	17	0.21	45.8
CBN	19	0.24	40.0

CBD	10	0.11	86.2
COD	11	0.13	82.1
MORF	6	0.06	175
O-6-MAM	19	0.24	39.9
4-MMC	28	0.40	23.7
BUP	16	0.18	51.6
Ethylone	17	0.21	45.4
Cathinone	15	0.18	53.0
3,4-DMMC	14	0.17	60.8
MDPV	11	0.12	78.4
Pentylone	16	0.20	48.2
Flephedrone	8	0.09	109
Methylone	12	0.14	70.9
Naphyrone	20	0.25	37.9
Methcathinone			
e	11	0.13	77.5
Mephedrone	19	0.24	39.9
Butylone	15	0.17	55.4
MDEA	3	0.03	276
MDA	1	0.01	750
MDMA	1	0.01	873
MA	2	0.02	453
A	2	0.03	373
MBDB	3	0.03	369
<hr/>			
NIP- μ -SPE			
JWH015	13	0.31	---
JWH073 5OH	7	0.07	134
JWH203	30	0.45	24.5
JWH210	21	0.26	36.0
RCS4	22	0.28	35.1
RCS8	17	0.21	51.7
JWH122	11	0.13	97.5
JWH019	22	0.42	33.0

AM2201	16	0.19	51.7
JWH073	17	0.21	65.0
JWH073			
COOH	31	0.47	21.3
JWH018 4OH	16	0.21	59.1
JWH302	30	0.43	23.6
JWH250 5OH	22	0.29	36.6
JWH098	20	0.33	75.0
JWH018	19	0.24	55.4
JWH250	16	0.20	74.3
<hr/>			
COC	15	0.17	59.4
CE	16	0.20	49.3
EME	7	0.08	121
BEC	15	0.18	54.3
Δ^9 -THC	7	0.08	139
Δ^9 -THC-OH	24	0.34	35.4
Δ^9 -THC-			
COOH	16	0.19	51.2
CBN	22	0.29	32.9
CBD	14	0.16	62.2
COD	13	0.15	63.4
MORF	13	0.15	66.5
O-6-MAM	18	0.22	43.2
4-MMC	18	0.21	44.0
BUP	14	0.16	61.0
Ethylone	11	0.12	85.3
Cathinone	11	0.12	89.7
3,4-DMMC	19	0.24	43.8
MDPV	14	0.16	60.3
Pentylone	16	0.20	54.8
Flephedrone	27	0.38	25.8
Methylone	9	0.11	99.0
Naphyrone	20	0.26	38.9

Methcathinon			
e	17	0.20	47.5
Mephedrone	27	0.37	27.7
Butylone	14	0.16	60.4
MDEA	3	0.04	265
MDA	3	0.03	301
MDMA	1	0.01	934
MA	1	0.02	700
A	6	0.06	209
MBDB	1	0.01	895

(a) $\% = (A_2 / A_T) \times 100$

(b) $D = (A_2 / A_1)$

(c) $S_{JWH\ 015/D} = D_{JWH\ 015} / D_D$

A_1 = Amount of analyte in aqueous solution at equilibrium

A_2 = Amount of analyte enriched by magnetic MIP/NIP at equilibrium.

A_T = Total amount of analyte used in extraction.

$D_{JWH\ 015}$ = Distribution ratio for JWH 015 (template)

D_D = Distribution ratio for D (D = other SCs (different to the template) and other drugs/metabolites)

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421

422 **Table 4.** Mean slopes of calibration and standard addition, and LOD, LLOQ, and LOQ
 423 values

	Slope (mean \pm SD)		LOD ($\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) ^c	LLOQ ($\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) ^c	LOQ ($\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$) ^c
	Calibration ^a	Standard addition ^b			
AM2201	0.595 \pm 0.0222	1.02 \pm 0.789	0.356	0.593	1.19
AM2233	1.42 \pm 0.403	0.132 \pm 0.0736	0.0800	0.132	0.264
JWH015	44.3 \pm 4.91	3.06 \pm 1.14	0.212	0.354	0.708
JWH018	-----	2.20 \pm 1.02	0.442	0.738	1.48
JWH018 4OH	6.19 \pm 0.838	6.32 \pm 2.12	0.260	0.434	0.868
JWH019	0.396 \pm 0.0102	1.00 \pm 0.780	0.748	1.25	2.50
JWH073	16.7 \pm 2.80	0.562 \pm 0.252	0.032	0.0533	0.107
JWH 073 COOH	24.7 \pm 3.37	8.54 \pm 2.57	0.288	0.480	0.960
JWH073 5OH	10.6 \pm 1.65	0.917 \pm 0.328	0.0360	0.0600	0.120
JWH081	0.416 \pm 0.0607	3.63 \pm 1.97	0.624	1.04	2.08
JWH098	33.6 \pm 5.77	1.87 \pm 0.999	0.216	0.360	0.720
JWH122	0.558 \pm 0.0336	1.61 \pm 0.833	0.324	0.540	1.08
JWH203	16.2 \pm 2.84	1.75 \pm 1.01	0.360	0.600	1.20
JWH210	8.76 \pm 2.23	0.432 \pm 0.254	0.318	0.530	1.06
JWH250	0.501 \pm 0.0290	0.745 \pm 0.484	0.360	0.600	1.20
JWH250 5OH	8.56 \pm 1.66	1.66 \pm 0.820	0.0540	0.0900	0.180
JWH302	15.8 \pm 3.78	3.85 \pm 1.33	0.466	0.777	1.55
RCS-4	38.9 \pm 6.13	3.28 \pm 1.17	0.0740	0.123	0.246
RCS-8	19.3 \pm 4.27	0.964 \pm 0.422	0.664	1.11	2.22

(a) n=4; (b) n=7; (c) pre-concentration factor of 20

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427

428 Table 5. Intra-day precision and intra-day analytical recovery (AR/%) of the method

	Low level (5.0 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$)		Intermediate level (10 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$)		High level (20 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$)	
	1) a		1) a		1) a	
	RSD (%)	AR (%)	RSD (%)	AR (%)	RSD (%)	AR (%)
AM2201	6	94 \pm 6	3	99 \pm 3	2	100 \pm 2
AM2233	6	98 \pm 5	2	99 \pm 2	1	99 \pm 1
JWH015	6	95 \pm 6	4	99 \pm 4	2	100 \pm 2
JWH018	5	94 \pm 5	1	99 \pm 2	1	99 \pm 2
JWH018 4OH	3	100 \pm 3	2	97 \pm 2	2	97 \pm 2
JWH019	4	97 \pm 4	4	99 \pm 4	2	99 \pm 2
JWH073	5	95 \pm 5	2	99 \pm 2	1	100 \pm 1
JWH073 COOH	4	98 \pm 4	4	96 \pm 4	1	100 \pm 1
JWH073 5OH	4	94 \pm 4	3	95 \pm 3	2	100 \pm 2
JWH081	6	94 \pm 6	5	97 \pm 4	3	99 \pm 3
JWH098	5	94 \pm 5	2	98 \pm 2	1	100 \pm 1
JWH122	4	95 \pm 4	3	98 \pm 3	1	99 \pm 2
JWH203	5	92 \pm 5	3	98 \pm 3	2	99 \pm 2
JWH210	5	99 \pm 5	4	98 \pm 4	4	99 \pm 3
JWH250	4	92 \pm 4	3	100 \pm 3	1	99 \pm 1
JWH250 5OH	3	96 \pm 3	2	98 \pm 2	2	100 \pm 1
JWH302	5	95 \pm 4	3	97 \pm 3	1	100 \pm 2
RCS-4	4	94 \pm 4	3	99 \pm 3	1	100 \pm 1
RCS-8	5	91 \pm 5	3	99 \pm 3	1	100 \pm 2

(a) n=7

429

430

431

432 Table 6. Inter-day precision and inter-day analytical recovery (AR/%) of the method

	Low level (5.0 µg L ⁻¹) ^{1) a}		Intermediate level (10 µg L ⁻¹) ^{1) a}		High level (20 µg L ⁻¹) ^{1) a}	
	RSD (%)	AR (%)	RSD (%)	AR (%)	RSD (%)	AR (%)
	AM2201	6	97±4	3	93±5	2
AM2233	8	95±8	4	93±4	2	88±2
JWH015	7	87±6	4	91±4	3	85±3
JWH018	7	88±7	4	97±4	2	89±1
JWH018 4OH	4	87±4	4	92±4	2	96±3
JWH019	5	92±4	3	97±3	4	90±4
JWH073	6	86±5	5	86±4	4	93±5
JWH073 COOH	5	88±4	3	93±3	4	96±4
JWH073 5OH	8	90±8	4	91±4	5	96±5
JWH081	7	93±6	6	93±5	5	97±5
JWH098	7	88±7	5	90±5	3	90±3
JWH122	4	90±4	4	95±4	4	91±4
JWH203	7	89±7	5	90±4	3	91±3
JWH210	5	97±5	4	98±4	4	93±3
JWH250	7	93±7	3	100±2	2	90±2
JWH250 5OH	7	91±6	5	89±4	5	100±5
JWH302	6	92±5	4	97±4	4	93±3
RCS-4	6	89±6	4	92±4	3	92±3
RCS-8	8	87±8	4	94±4	3	91±4

(a) n=7

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437

438 **Figure captions**

439

440 **Figure 1.** MRM chromatogram for a drug-free urine sample spiked with $10 \mu\text{g L}^{-1}$ of selected
441 SCs.

442 **Figure 2.** Effect of urine sample pH on the analytical recovery of SCs (use of MIP-based
443 JWH098).

444 **Figure 3.** Analytical recovery of SCs obtained with MIP-based JWH007, MIP-based
445 JWH015, MIP-based JWH098, and NIP.

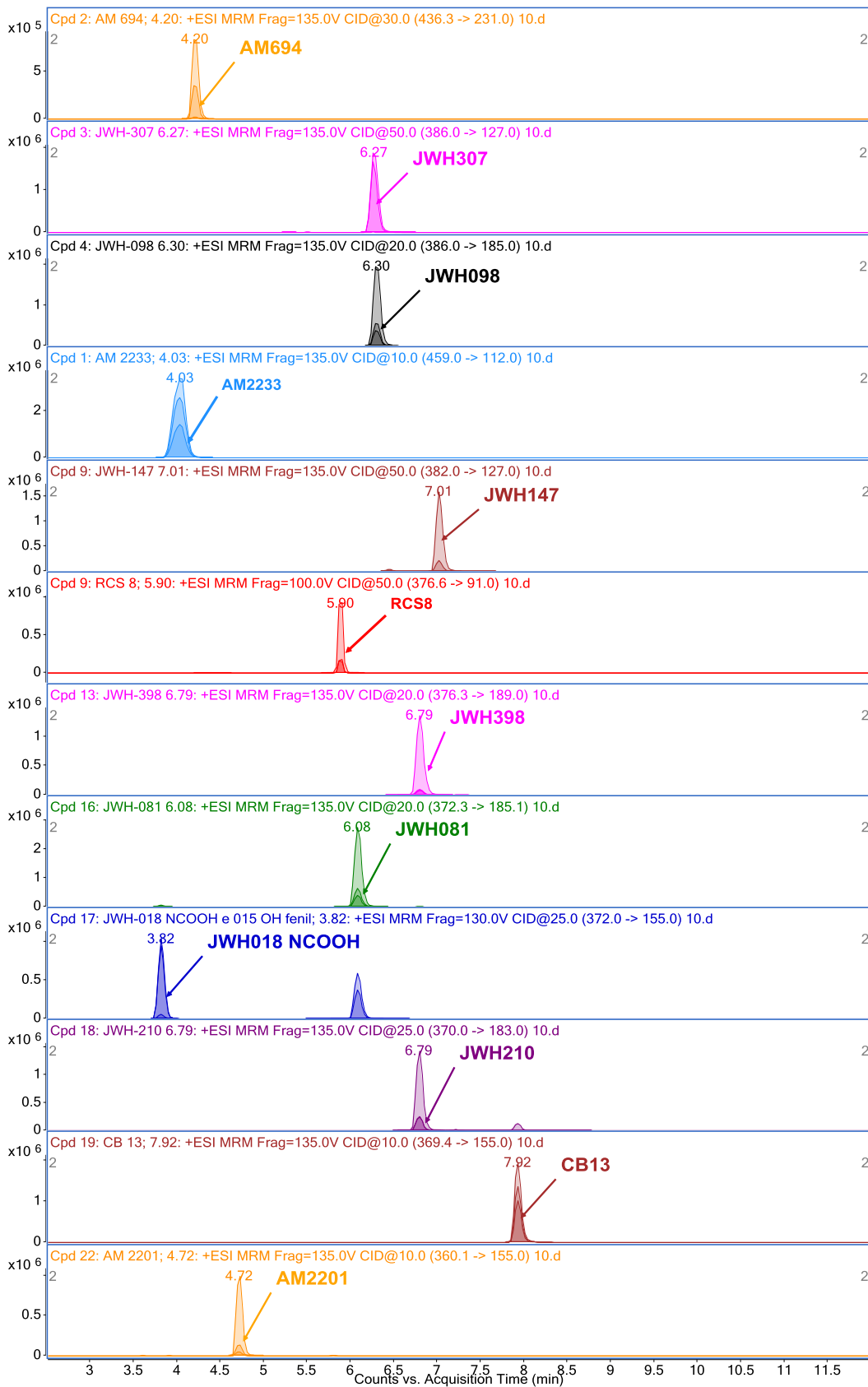
446 **Figure 4.** Effect of the loading time (a), and orbital-horizontal shaking speed (b) on the
447 analytical recovery of SCs (MIP-based JWH015).

448 **Figure 5.** Effect of NH_4OH percentage in the eluting solution (a), and the eluting (sonication)
449 time (b) on the analytical recovery of SCs (MIP-based JWH015).

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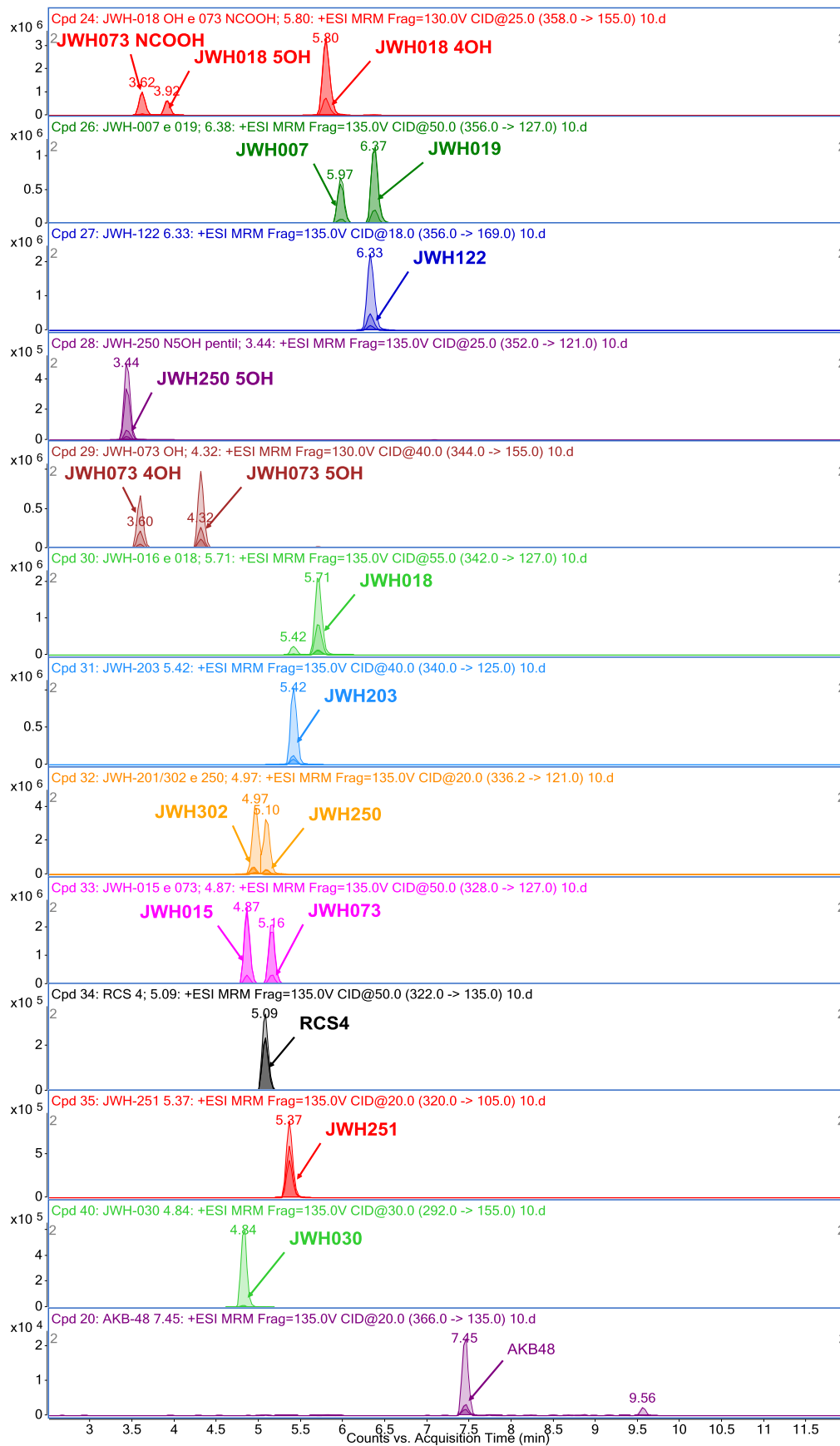
452 **Figure 1**



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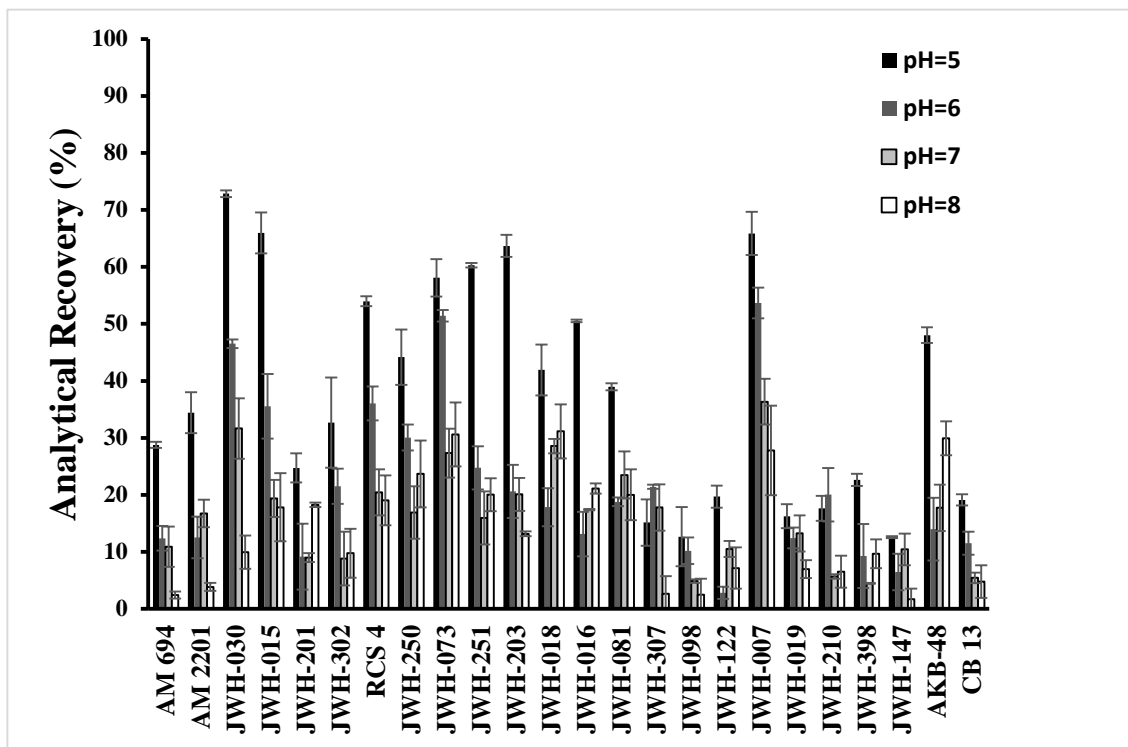
455 **Figure 1 (Cont.)**



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458 **Figure 2**



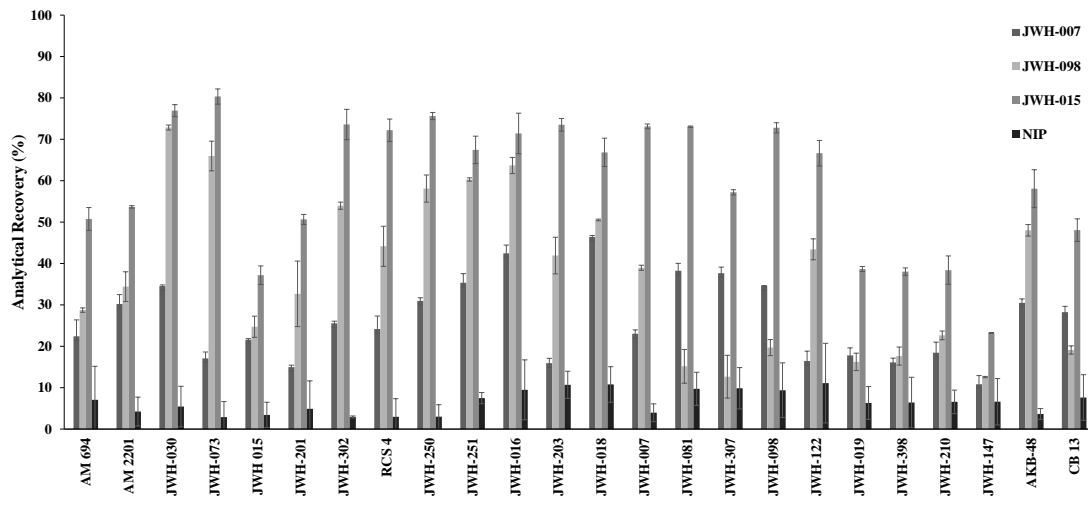
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462 **Figure 3**

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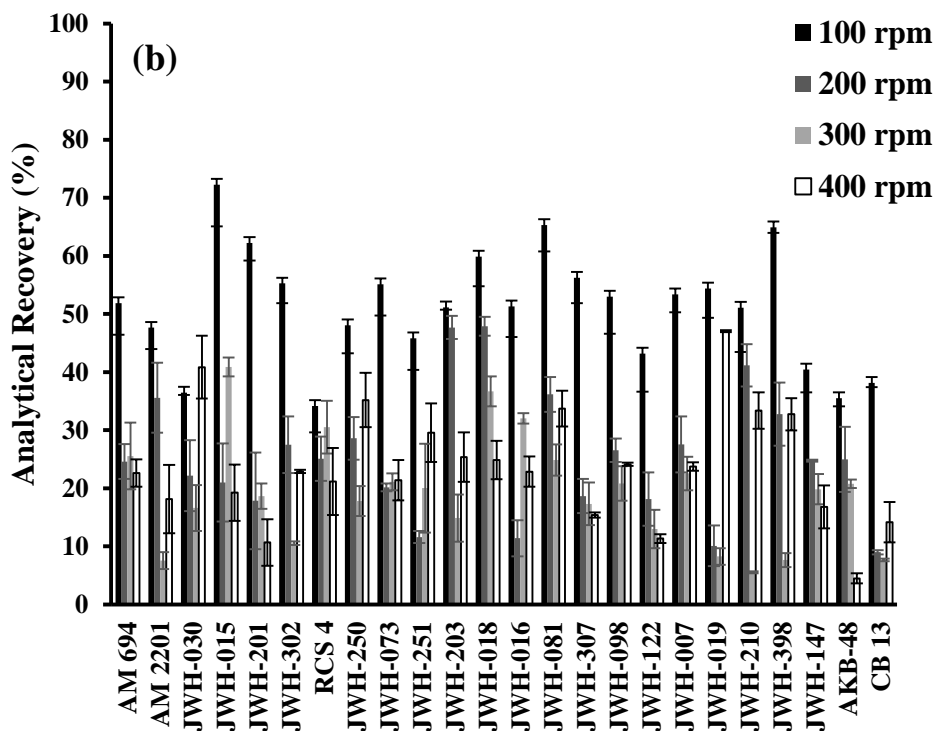
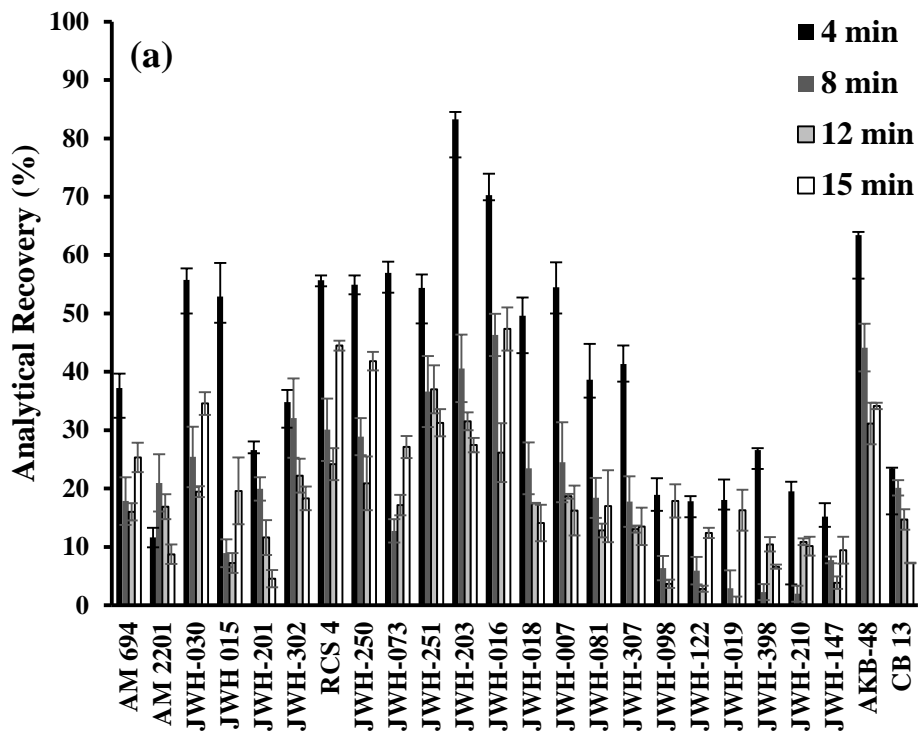


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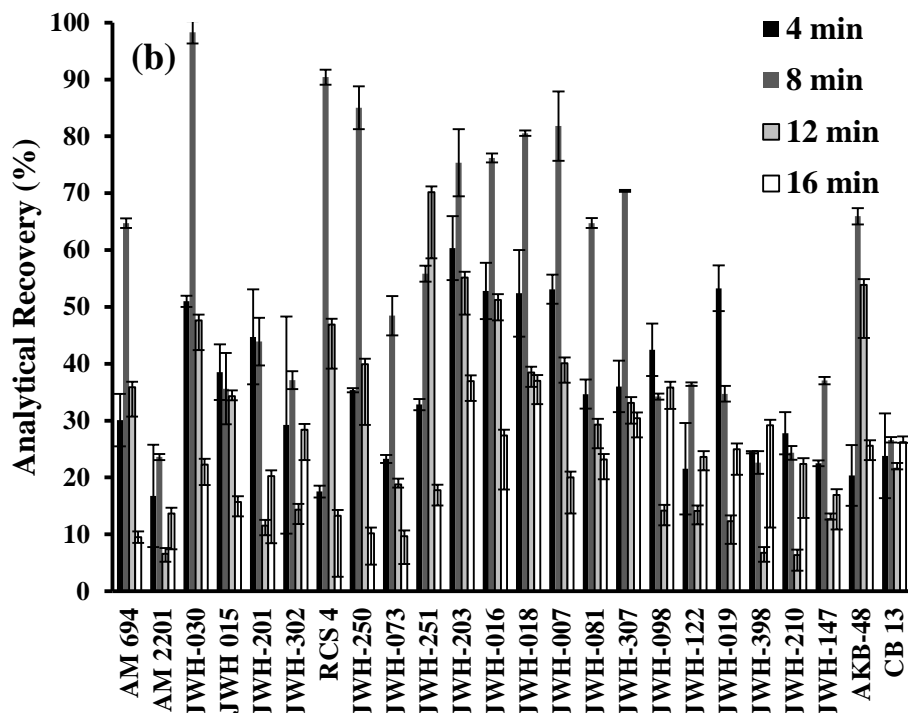
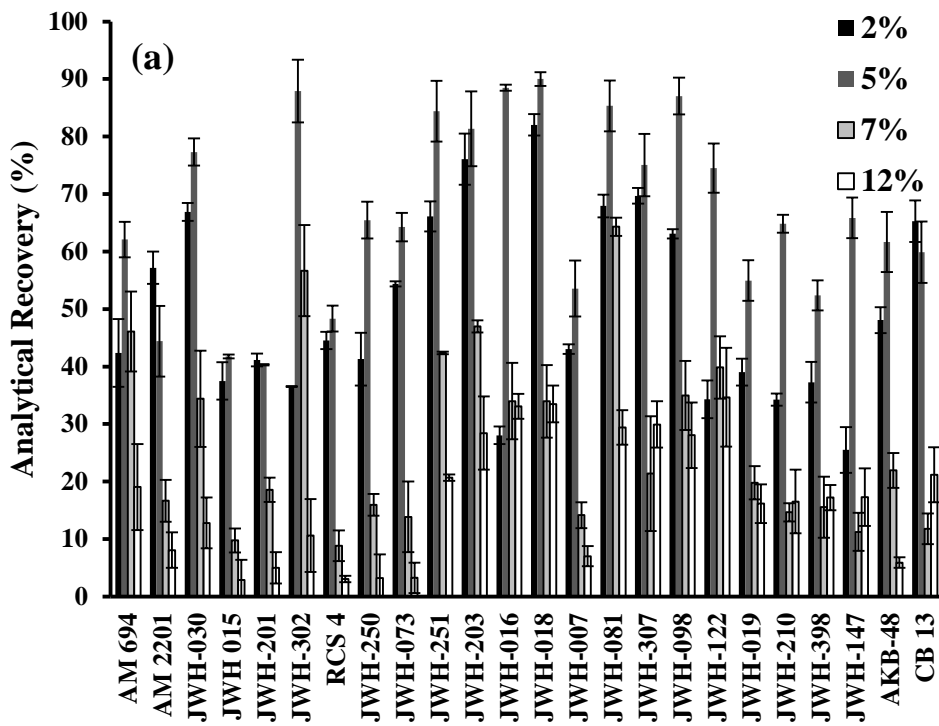
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