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A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF EROWID GABAPENTINOID FORUM POSTS

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INTRODUCTION

With increased controls on opioid prescribing, the CDC has suggested prescribing gabapentinoids (gabapentin and pregabalin) as a first-line alternative to opioids for pain.¹ However, there have been an increasing number of reports of gabapentinoid misuse.² Drug use forums are online spaces where individuals can anonymously post about their drug use experiences and may provide insight on gabapentinoid misuse. The purpose of this study was to extract and analyze posts from the drug use forum, Erowid, to examine reports of gabapentinoid misuse.

“Pregabalin has been touted as non-addictive, which is a bald-faced lie. This drug has been hard to quit once I was hooked... Only now, after years of generous prescription practice, are doctors catching on to its addictive potential. And recreational users barely have it on their radar. Perhaps they should, and perhaps doctors should be more on alert about dependence and addiction.” -24, Male (taken in combination with alcohol)

METHODS

Data for the study was drawn from the drug forum, Erowid, and included 53 pregabalin and 89 gabapentin entries posted under unique usernames. In order to be considered for the study, the user had to report taking the medication recreationally instead of for the intended therapeutic purpose of physical or neurological pain relief. The first posts on gabapentin and pregabalin were posted in 2002 and 2007, respectively. Posts were analyzed according to gender, age, gabapentinoid source, concomitant substances, and subjective experiences. A descriptive qualitative approach was used to report data patterns.

CONCLUSION

Erowid users who post about gabapentinoid misuse report obtaining the drugs from multiple sources including family/friends, prescribers, and drug dealers through a variety of means such as stealing and misreporting symptoms to obtain a prescription. Gabapentinoid misuse occurred largely in combination with other substances to achieve a range of subjective experiences. Medical professionals should be aware of the abuse potential of gabapentinoids and their increasing popularity within the drug use community. Future studies should be conducted in order to better understand the abuse liability and risks of gabapentinoids.

“This drug [pregabalin] makes benzos look like child’s candy and it is somehow on a lower schedule.” –Male

RESULTS

Figure 1: Genders Reporting Gabapentinoid Misuse

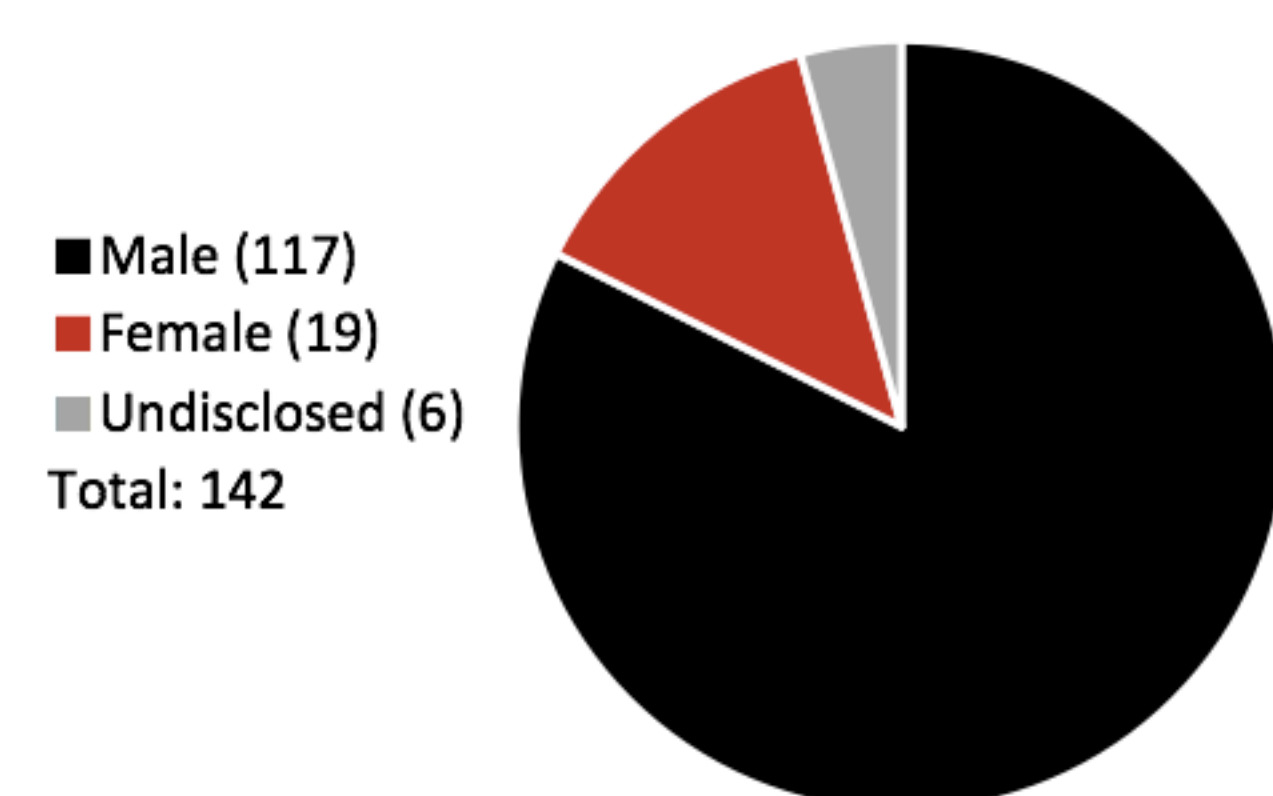


Figure 3: Ages Reporting Gabapentinoid Misuse

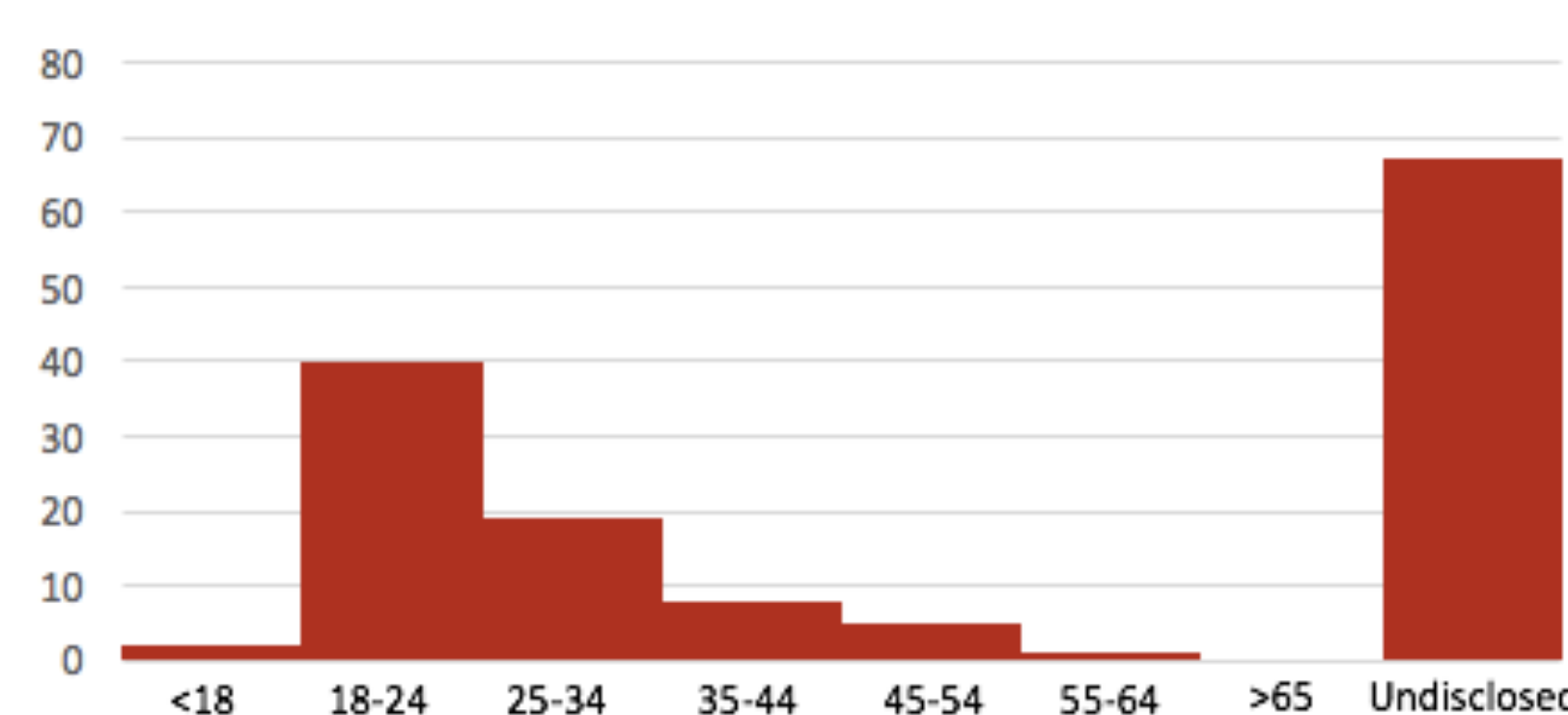


Figure 2: Gabapentinoid Sources

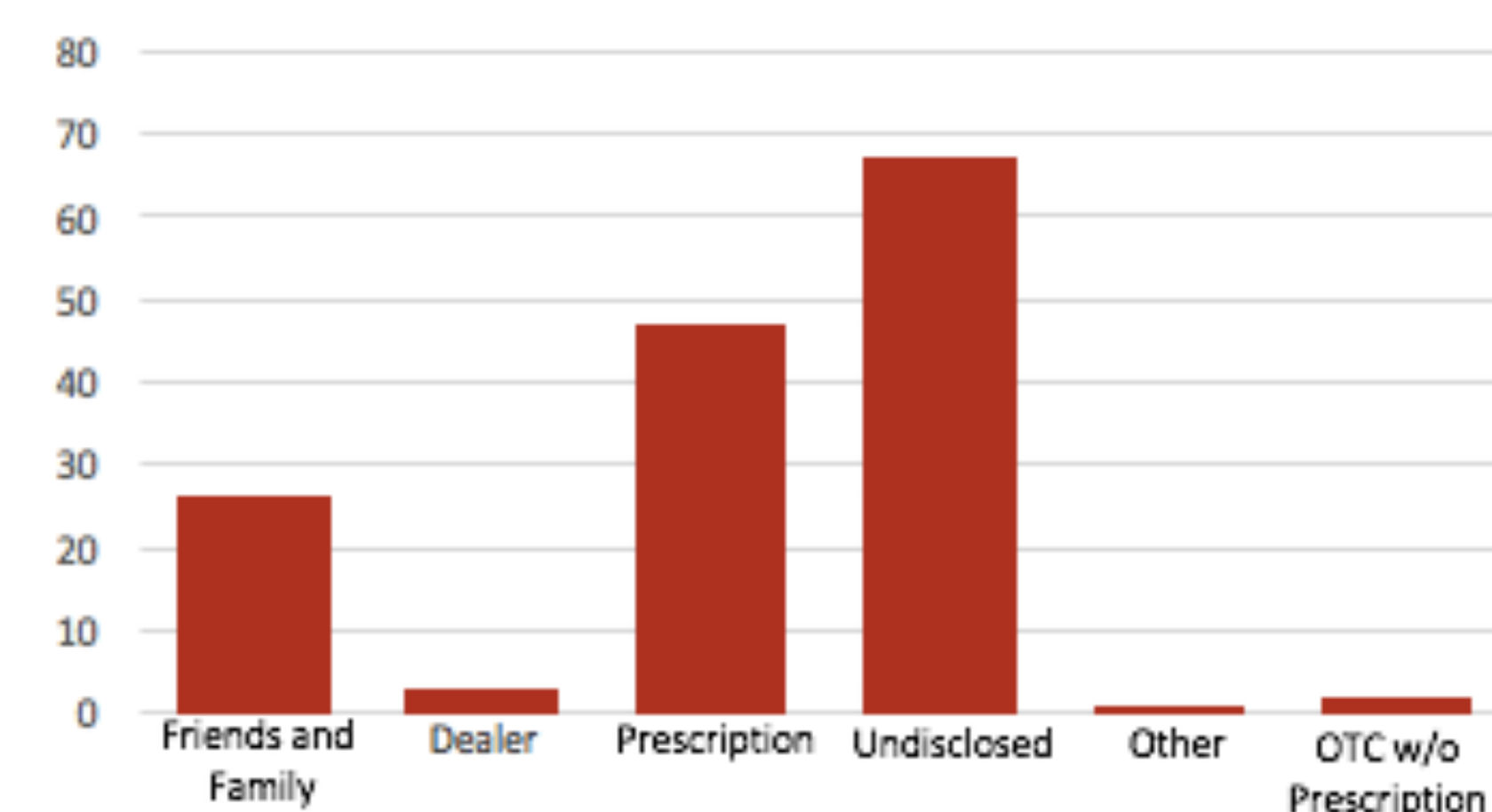


Figure 2: 26 Erowid users reported obtaining gabapentinoids from friends and family. 15/26 of these users admit to stealing gabapentinoids from friends and family. 1/15 of these users admit to using their pet’s prescription. 11/26 of these users report that the gabapentinoids were given to them by friends and family. 3 Erowid users report that they purchased gabapentinoids from a dealer. 47 Erowid users obtained gabapentinoids with a prescription. 6/47 of these users admit to falsifying symptoms to their provider in order to obtain a prescription. 67 Erowid users did not disclose the source of their gabapentinoids. 1 Erowid user found gabapentinoids while dumpster diving. 2 Erowid users report obtaining gabapentinoids OTC without a prescription.

Subjective Experiences

“Everything appeared as if I were in a movie... My field of vision seemed narrowed. I experienced mild hallucinations, such as objects warping shape, and tracers that weren’t there.” -24, Male (gabapentin taken in combination with alcohol)

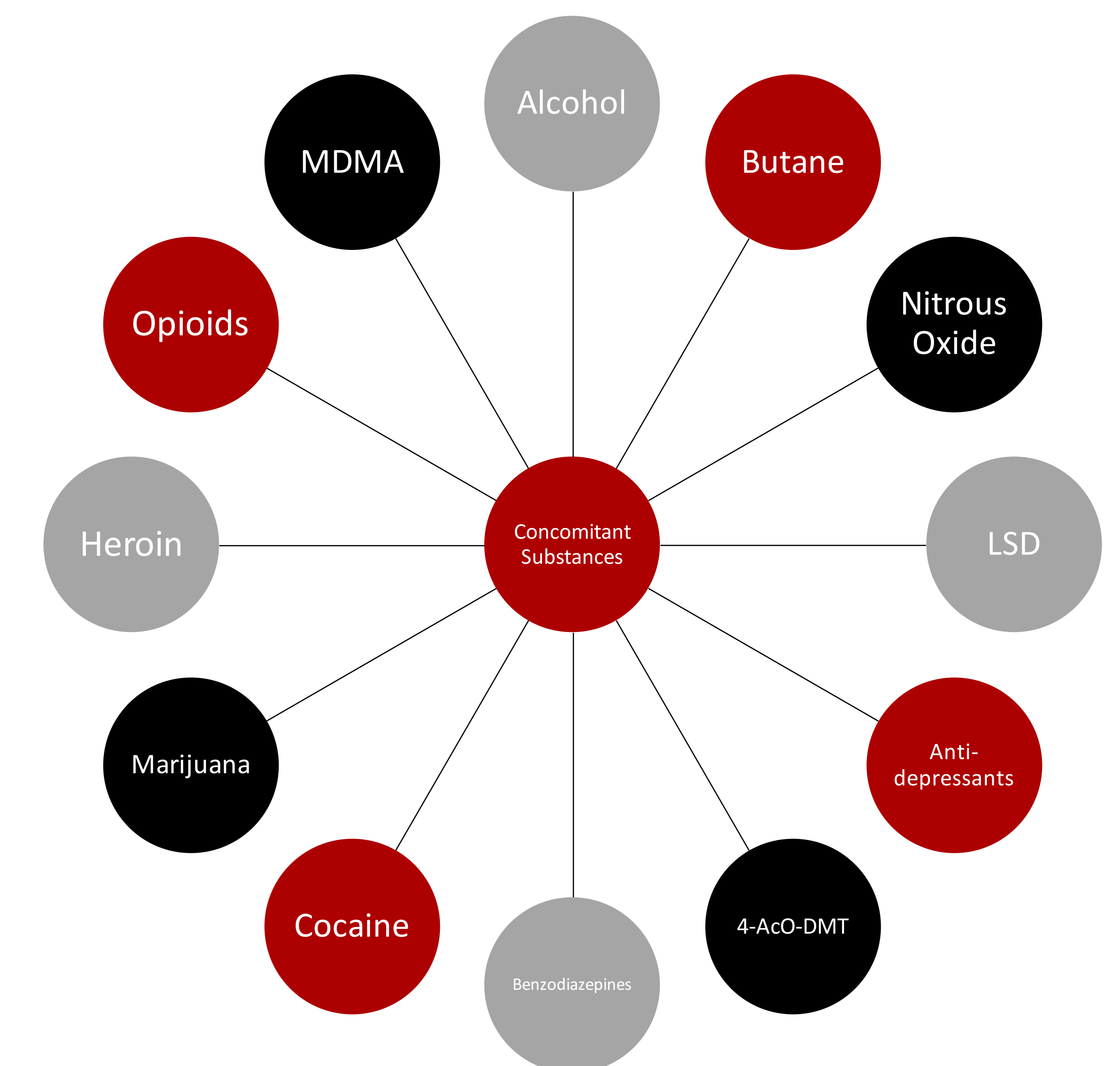
“Colors seemed a little deeper and all the senses a bit magnified in a pleasurable way.” -40, Male (gabapentin)

“Just the feeling of blood rushing in the extremities and like seeing the world through pink glasses. That ‘s’all good’ feeling. No troubles. No problems. Living the moment kind of feeling.” -Male (gabapentin)

“The relaxed feeling was overwhelming and I was so happy and content with everything. My head was filled with only positive thoughts, and anything negative that was happening or entering my mind was quickly brushed away.” -15, Male (gabapentin taken in combination with marijuana, caffeine, cigarettes, and alcohol)

“I was wearing pink-tinted glasses. It felt like I was walking on air and God was touching me with every move I was making.” -18, Female (gabapentin)

“I’ve experienced quite a few drugs in my time. But if I could choose a drug that I could label ‘The Perfect Drug’ Gabapentin would be my first choice.” – Male



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2. Morrison, E.E., Sandilands, E.A., & Webb, D.J. (2017). Gabapentin and pregabalin: Do the benefits outweigh the harms? *J R Coll Physicians Edinb*, 47(4), 310-313. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4997/jrcpe.2017.402>.