



A qualitative approach to meanings and trajectories associated with young adults drug uses



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Portugal...

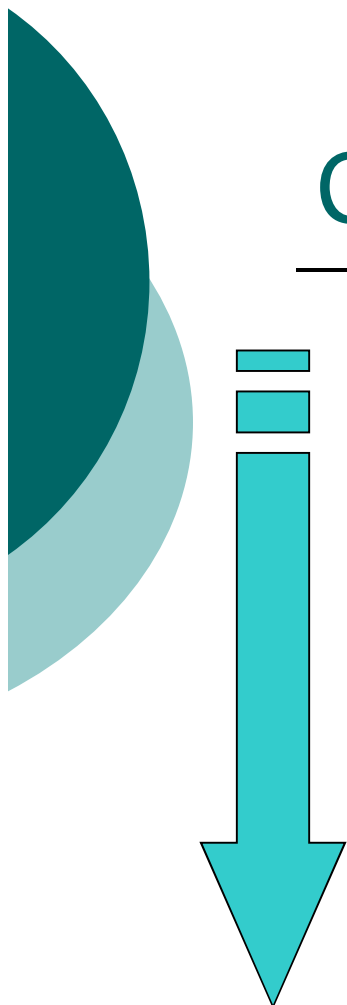
- Use has been decriminalized since 2000; criminal approach replaced by “Drug Courts” (positive results indicate increase in treatment access, reduction in problematic use; but also police becoming more focused in cannabis users)
- Monitoring on regular basis covers all main indicators (surveys on general population; school setting; treatment; crime) – except for recreational settings
- Tradition on qualitative/comprehensive approaches (focused on problematic drug users), but interest in youth drug use in recreational settings is still low.



General study goals

- Drawing from their PAS use experience, what specific meanings do young adults associate with the use of different products?
- Are there distinct typologies of users? Which dimensions contribute the most to differentiate them?
- Is meaning associated with PAS use contributing to such distinctions?

Conceptual Framework



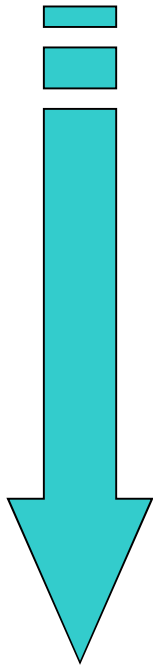
Epidemiology shows that PAS use is becoming *normalized*

(Parker, Aldridge & Measham, 1998)

- Major shift in user profiles (from problematic and *outsider* to non-problematic with recreational use pattern) (Duff, 2005; Gourley, 2004; Measham, 2004; Pilkington, 2007; Parker, Williams & Aldridge, 2002).
- Changes in drug use patterns; main PAS being used; contexts associated with drug use; increased use of drugs; reduction in problematic USE (IDT, 2007; Balsa, Vital, Urbano & Pascoeiro, 2008; Carvalho, 2007; Negreiros & Magalhães, 2009)
- Decrease in current use; increase in non-current USE (Balsa, Vital, Urban & Pascoeiro, 2007) and **decrease in problematic use**
- Heroin “pandemic” surpassed by other substances such as ecstasy and cocaine (IDT, 2006; EMCDDA, 2007; Balsa et al, 2007).



Conceptual Framework

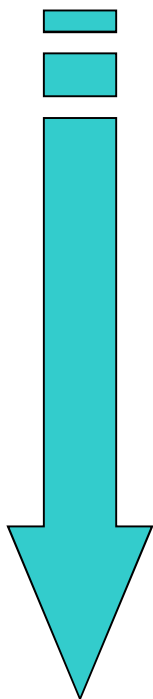


Lack of more comprehensive / qualitative approaches that document such transitions of drug use phenomenon

- Need for procedural (time) and narrative knowledge on meanings related with PAS use (focusing on individual level as well as cultural practices) (Bernardo & Carvalho, in print)
 - Going beyond epidemiological studies about PAS use patterns;
 - Giving voice to individuals as a privileged way to access meaning on their PAS use;
 - Understanding such meanings helps understand motivations for use and the PAS “cultural place”.
- **Qualitative research** in the drug field in Portugal has focused in past on: (for e.g.)
 - Techniques of neutralization (D. Matza) used by heroin addicts to justify their behavior (Tinoco, 2005)
 - Meanings heroin users attribute to heroin use and heroin use abstinence (Mendes & Manita, 2006)
 - Meanings university students associate with their drug uses (cannabis and ecstasy) (Fonte & Manita, 2003)



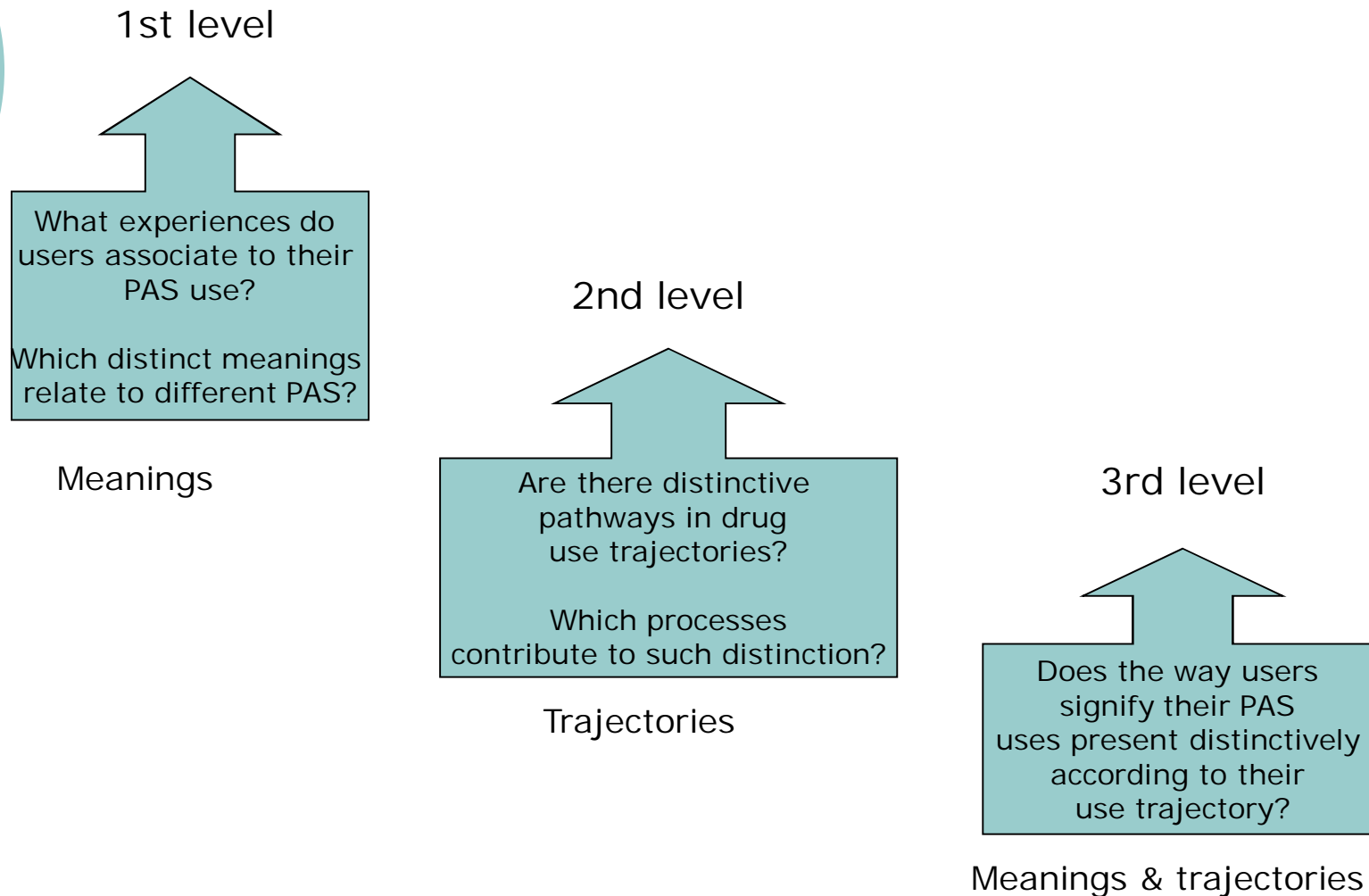
Conceptual Framework



Knowledge on life trajectories of young people using drugs is still needed

- Classic studies have extensively documented heroin use and problematic drug use careers (for e.g. Biernacki, 1986; Zinberg, 1984; Faupel; 1991)
- Contributions to knowledge on life paths of young people using drugs is still needed. Evidence shows:
 - Amphetamine users reduced or interrupted definitely their PAS use after a relatively short space of time (Uitermark & Cohen, 2005)
 - The use of ecstasy is strongly motivated by curiosity of the effects of substance use and cessation arises automatically (Peters & Schaalma, 2008)
 - *Starting-switching-slowng-and-stopping* is a probable evolution for youth drug use careers (Measham, Parker & Aldridge, 1998)

Research Design & Method

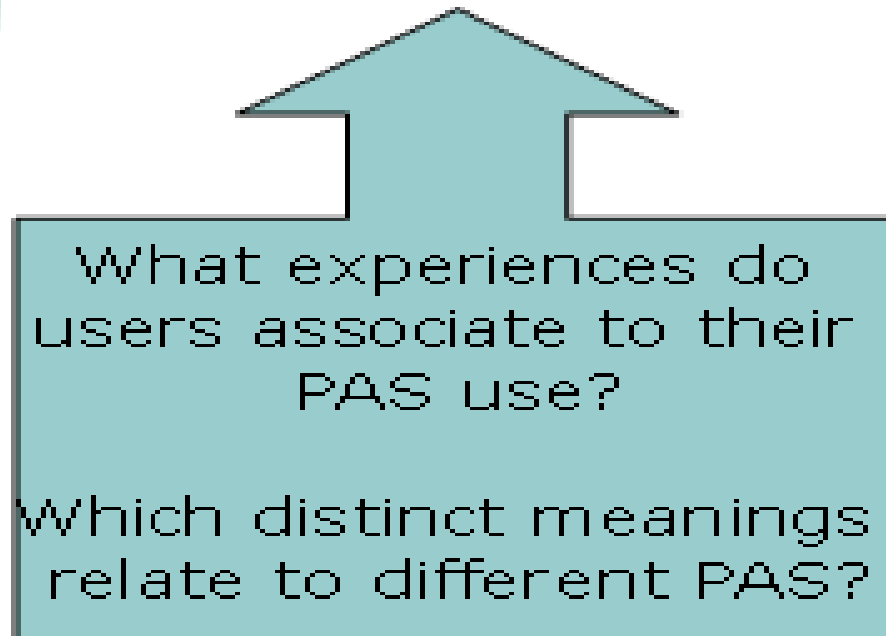


Research Design & Method

Sampling	Participants (N=22)	Data collection	Data analysis
<p><u>Snowball sampling:</u> 12 chain-referrals; different progression levels (2 chains with 3 levels of respondents)</p> <p><u>Sampling Criteria:</u> >20 years old</p> <p>Present or previous PAS use (any illegal PAS); exclusion of single past use of single PAS</p>	<p>Male (n=15) and Female (n=7)</p> <p>Ages between 20 and 34 years old</p> <p>All from Northern Portugal</p> <p>Living with their families (n=11)</p> <p>Graduated or still in university (n=13)</p>	<p>In-depth semi-structured interviews in naturalistic setting</p> <p><i>"Life history and drug use script"</i> (Carvalho, 2008 - adpt. from McAdams, 2000; Fernandes e Carvalho, 2003; Matos, 2008)</p>	<p>Semi-inductive analysis to the content of respondents speech, oriented for discovery of relevant themes (<i>grounded principles</i>)</p> <p>Qualitative data analysis software support (Nvivo8)</p>

Results

1st level



Meanings

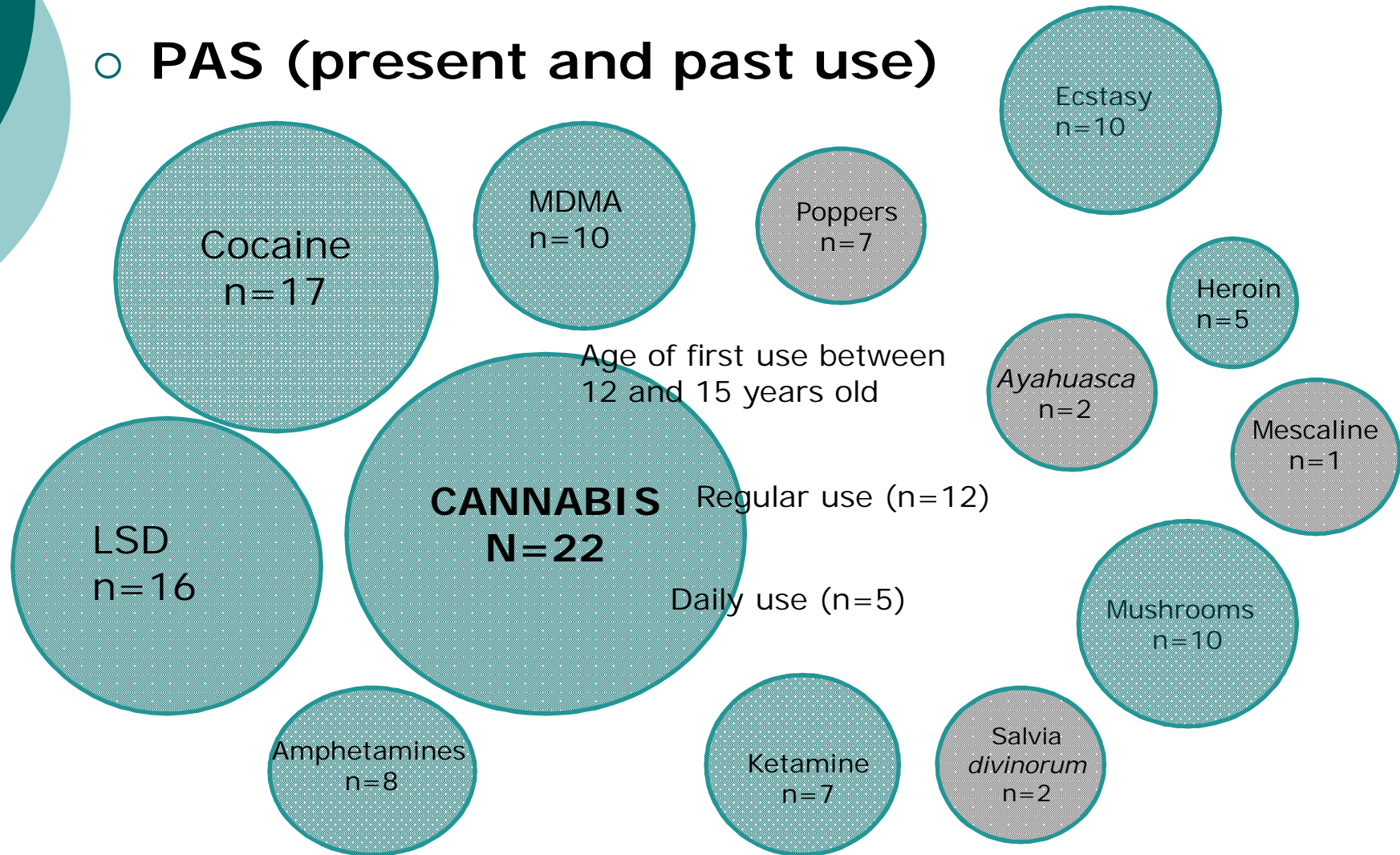


Results

- Analysis of PAS associated meanings was collected through focus on: (Carvalho, 2008)
 - Use patterns
 - Use contexts (spatial and relational) and strategies for ingestion
 - Use “management” and related problems
 - Drug use scene
 - PAS scene
 - Etc.

Results

○ PAS (present and past use)



Results

Associated to the use of snorted cocaine: parties and use seen as unproblematic

Fun

Mainly associated with MDMA: related to enhancement of emotions and sensuality. Sensory levels are increased and reality is perceived in a more pleasant way

Happiness

POSITIVE MEANINGS

"Cocaine is easier. It's anywhere, really. On the university residence, bars, same places as heroin..."
(male, 26)

Use has functionality and utility (cannabis). PAS is used with a purpose, and in multiple and diverse contexts.

intentional use and creative inspiration

"i use it (cannabis) to go and make stuff, get it? If I didn't used it, i'd probably go and make them all the same, but probably without the same satisfaction" (male, 29)

Cannabis is also used with a therapeutic function

Results

"I found myself totally hooked up in heroin, realizing I was destroying all my life around me – family wise, love life, academic life..." (male,29)

Associated to the use of heroin, cocaine and cannabis.

"something I've decided long ago is that there's one I'll never try – and that's heroin" (female,24)

Associated to the use of heroin. This PAS is considered as distinct from the others

Addiction

Degradation and aversion

NEGATIVE MEANINGS

Addiction and decadent contexts of use

"Decadence... By myself, alone at the end, and decadent... Train stations... bad places..." (male,26)

Lack of meaning

Fear

Experience of use is *empty* in terms of meaning for their lives (associated to Ketamine and amphetamines)

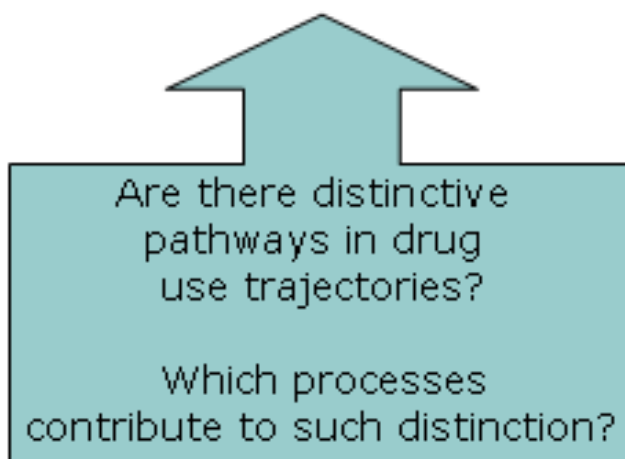
"It proves that sometimes it's just the drugs for the drugs... and it's totally worthless..." (male,29)

Unpredictability of the experience of use and relation with intense and unexpected effects (e.g. LSD)

"It was such a screwed up high!! Because I wanted to control myself, I only started to get better after 12 hours!" (male,20)

Results

2nd level



Trajectories



Results

- Analysis of life trajectories focused on:
(Carvalho, 2008)

- Personal and familiar background
- Community integration and social life-contexts
- Course of PAS use over lifetime
- Transgression/anti-social activity
- Other dimensions

Results

Background (personal & familiar)

- 20-29 years
- Past experience of school failure
- Positive family support

Community integration

- Weaker community integration (less stable jobs; less occupational activities)
- Nightlife habits change with end of drug related problems.

Course of PAS use

- Initiation under 14 or 14-16
- Cannabis is first PAS used
- Fewer products
- Former addiction period, currently ceased
- Current use (last year) of occasional cannabis, opiates and cocaine

Transgression

- Past anti-social activity related to drug addiction

Group 1

Results

Background (personal & familiar)

- 21-35 years
- University studies
- Positive family support

Community integration

- Employment is more stable, more well-paid
- Interest in art-related activities
- Nightlife habits are very diverse (interest in different scenes)

Course of PAS use

- Initiation at 14-16, but also very early (before 10 years) or later (between 16-18 years or 18 years later)
- Cannabis is first PAS used
- Poly-use; but cannabis and cocaine with stable central role, as well as variety of less popular products.
- No perception of problematic use or addiction.
- Current use of cannabis and of large variety of products.

Transgression/ Other..

- No past anti-social behavior
- Peers described as normative.
- Psychopathology and mental health issues

Group 2

Results

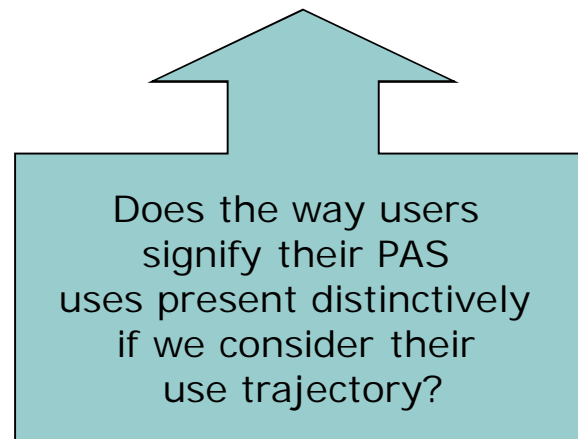
Past addiction
experience

Former
Problematic
Trajectory
(n=4)
(Group "1")

Non-Problematic
Trajectory
(n=18)
(Group "2")

Results

3rd level



Meanings & Trajectories

Results

Former Problematic Trajectory (FPT) (n=4)

Fear (n=19)

(impairment, desorientation,
difficulty keeping in control,
PAS's "power")
(mushrooms; ecstasy; LSD)

Aversion and Avoidance Addiction

(n=15)
(cocaine; ecstasy;
heroin)

Happiness (sexuality)

Non-problematic
(n=11)
(cannabis; cocaine;
ecstasy; ketamine;
poppers)

Happiness ("the best drug"; profound joy; contact with divinity; feeling overwhelmed)

(n=10)
(cocaine; mushrooms;
ecstasy; heroin)

Fun

(having a good time;
mixing drugs; feeling
energised) (n=9)
(cannabis; cocaine;
ecstasy; heroin)

Results

Non-Problematic Trajectory (NPT) (n=18)

Fun (n=46)

(feeling energized; having a good time; mixing drugs; social drug; funny drug)
(cocaine; mushrooms; ecstasy; ketamine; LSD)

Fear

(of "power of substance"; of impairment; of dissociation)
(n=14)
(cocaine; ecstasy; ketamine; LSD)

Avoidance Addiction

(n=9)
(ecstasy; heroin)



Discussion

- Patterns of use translate expected tendencies presented by epidemiology - Low prevalence of heroin use (IDT, 2006; EMCDDA, 2007) and high prevalence of cannabis use in very diverse contexts
- Extremely negative meanings associated with heroin, in contrast with all other PAS (Fernandes & Carvalho, 2003; Fonte & Manita, 2003)
- High frequency, intensity and diversity of products, defined by time frames, very specific contexts and normative nature of the trajectories
- Experience of addiction as a major theme
- Positive structure and normativity of the life trajectories in general



Future directions

- Continue exploring trajectories of FPT and NPT (life chapters, life-events, childhood, adolescence, adult life, turning points)
- Intencional sampling of contrasting groups:
 - Non-users
 - Former problematic users
 - Urban marginalized youth



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Thank You!

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