

Social Factors of Amphetamines Use from the Perspective of Users: The Qualitative Arm of the ATTUNE Research Study in the Czech Republic

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BACKGROUND: High-risk methamphetamine use is frequent in the Czech Republic and includes long-term injecting use. Relatively, the Ústí nad Labem region shows a higher level of methamphetamine use in comparison to other regions in the Czech Republic, which makes it possible to study the trajectories of drug use and its determinants in a unique manner mirroring the social situation of the region and its numerous social problems. **METHODS:** Interviews were transcribed and coded in NVIVO. The coding approach was thematic analysis and the coding framework was based on the biopsychosocial model and consumption periods.

RESULTS: The dependent and remitted users described family, peers, and partners as significant in relation

to the use of amphetamines. Informants from other groups did not attribute significance to the family in their accounts. **DISCUSSION:** The frequent and non-frequent users related their use to nightlife settings, while the situation was more complicated in the case of the dependent and remitted users. **CONCLUSIONS:** The frequent and non-frequent users related their use to parties and music festivals. Relationships with partners, peers, and family were described by the dependent and remitted informants as a risk factor in terms of an increase in the level of use, as well as a supportive factor in terms of a reduction of use. Employment provides occupation for users and a sense of confidence and it is thus a crucial aspect of recovery.

Keywords | Amphetamines – Methamphetamine – Social Factors of Use – Qualitative Research – Biography – ATTUNE

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● 1 INTRODUCTION

The high-risk use of methamphetamine, an amphetamine-type stimulant, is a traditional drug-related problem in the Czech Republic. Methamphetamine use belongs among the most dangerous ways of using drugs, including long-term injecting use (Gibson et al., 2002). Methamphetamine users are among the most numerous seekers of addiction treatment (see Zábanský, 2007). In the Czech Republic, the users are spread around the country; however, the methamphetamine problem also has a regional dimension, including a high number of users in the capital, Prague, and in the structurally disadvantaged Ústí nad Labem region (Mravčík et al., 2020). The other amphetamine-type stimulants (amphetamines) include amphetamine (“speed”), methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (“MDMA”, “ecstasy”), and diverted amphetamine-type prescription drugs. The use of other amphetamines in the Czech Republic is related to parties and dance parties (Kubů, Škařupová, & Csémy, 2006; Novotná & Vacek, 2015). The Ústí nad Labem region is characterized by a high(er) unemployment rate, serious problems with social exclusion and poverty, more socially excluded locations, and a low level of education and relatively high level of risk and negative social phenomena (for details about the region see e.g. Krajský úřad Ústeckého kraje, 2011; Petruželka et al., 2020a). The social and economic characteristics of the Ústí nad Labem region, including its higher level of methamphetamine use relative to other regions, make it possible to study the trajectories of drug use and its determinants in a unique manner mirroring the social situation of the region and the numerous social problems that an important part of the inhabitants of the region faces or may face (Krajský úřad Ústeckého kraje, 2011). The issues present in the region, such as family breakdowns, a high risk of social exclusion, and poverty, are considered as a risk factor of the risk behaviour combining the individual and societal risk factors of drug use. The data related to the use of amphetamines is often statistical, and based to a large extent on the data of the utilization of services (for example, treatment demand indicators) and other estimates (the number of problem users) (Mravčík et al., 2020). The qualitative interviews offer a unique possibility of studying the trajectories of amphetamine use and its determinants in much deeper detail, which can lead to the better targeting of both preventive and curative services and regional as well as national drug policy.

The periods of the career of amphetamine users have been described by different qualitative studies reviewed by O'Donnell et al. (2019). This review focused on three areas of factors: individual, social, and environmental. We focus on the aspects of the users' lives in relation to social factors such as family, friends, and partners. During the continuation period the user group was considered as important in establishing the norms surrounding the use of amphetamines. The use is related to certain social or cultural circumstances and connected spaces and places such as campuses, clubs, and guest houses. In the case of street-entrenched users, it is related to a lack of stable housing, education, and employment. An increase in the use of amphetamines was related to issues in familial relationships, the loss of relationships, and a lack of social support. Further-

more, the norms of user groups and reconnection to a former drug-using network are considered to be significant factors for an increase. A decrease was related to the factors of supportive relationships such as family and non-using friends who intervene in the use of amphetamines. Furthermore, the threat of relationship breakdown was mentioned as a factor leading to desistence. It is important for desistence and abstinence to change using social networks for non-using ones. All these facts closely link the phases of continued and decreasing amphetamine use with the themes of group and social norms and social control. Perception of the definition of what is *normal* or expected plays a key role in the case of self-perception and the role played by the family and the wider social networks (Matthew et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2020).

The roles of family and peers in drug use, especially in the early stages of use, are widely described in the literature (e.g. Ferguson, Lennox, & Lettieri, 1975; Lewis, 2010; Miller-Day et al., 2014; Morera et al., 2015, etc.); attention is usually focused on adolescent users. However, in the phase of continuing use, these factors are still important factors of continued use, although their role itself and its perception can differ greatly in variously defined user groups; gender, culture, race, age, and socioeconomic status matter (e.g. Tuchman, 2010; Dangerfield II et al., 2020; Matthew et al., 2018). Family relationships and environment can have both a protective and a risk influence on substance use; an individual may learn using as a usual experience or try to cope with family conflicts/breakdown. And, in a continuing user career, the same crucial role can also be played by the family in the phase of recovery and relapse; it can help and it can make things worse (Matthew et al., 2018).

The qualitative study of Addison et al. (2020) demonstrated that during the period of continuation and increase the social network of users was more unstable and focused on drug use. The differences between users were identified on the basis of the negotiation of drug use within relationships. The non-dependent users were able to manage relationships with non-using friends and family in part by using amphetamines discreetly, while the dependent users distanced themselves from these relationships. Family or peer intervention was important for the decrease. Furthermore, the issues related to pregnancy and having children were important for the women in the decrease period. The building of a non-using social network, which was important, was difficult and challenging for some of the users.

The aim of this article is to describe, on the basis of qualitative interviews, selected aspects of social life in relation to periods of amphetamine use in the Ústí nad Labem region in the Czech Republic.

● 2 METHODS

The relatively complex research design and the description of the sample were previously described by Petruželka et al. (2020b). In this article, the transcripts of 25 qualitative biographical interviews were used to analyse selected aspects of social life (family, friends, partners, and being normal and adult) in relation to the periods of their careers (increase, de-

crease, and continuation of amphetamine use). We focus on the differences between user groups represented by four to six informants (dependent and remitted users, frequent users and ex-users, non-frequent users). The non-users are not part of the analysis in this paper.

2.1 Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were coded in the NVIVO software for qualitative data analysis. The coding approach was thematic analysis and the coding framework was based on the biopsychosocial model and on the amphetamine consumption periods. In this study, we focus on the selected periods (continuation, increase, and decrease) and aspects related to selected aspects of social life (family, friends, partners, and being normal and adult). Furthermore, the analysis is focused on the differences between user groups; for a detailed description of these groups, see Petruželka et al. (2020b). We used a thematic analysis approach (Braun et al., 2019) to analyse the coded transcripts; for an overview of the project and instruments, see Rosenkranz et al. (2019).

● 3 RESULTS

The results describe different aspects of social life from the perspective of users (family, partners, peers, being normal and adult) in the different periods (continuation, increase, and decrease). It is important to note that for intensive amphetamine users and for those who continued to use for a longer period of time it might be difficult to recollect the experiences about the periods of use.

Interviewer: “Er, and if you could somehow describe what happened to you during your active career?”

Informant: “Hey, the time went by so fast. I do not remember much of it, because I was high all the time....” (male, remitted user, No. A403)

3.1 Family

Continuation

The family relationships in the different user groups are different. The frequent users and ex-users describe what were, from their perspective, good relationships with parents and, according to their accounts, the continuation of amphetamine use had no significant influence on their family relationships. Just one informant from the group of frequent users and ex-users reported some troubles in their relationship with their family in this period.

The remitted and dependent users present accounts of dynamic family relationships that vary within these two groups. The relationships with the family members of some informants deteriorated.

Informant: “Well, as I said, my family had given up on me when I was using drugs, including my son.” (female, dependent user, No. A408)

In other cases, family members were also using amphetamines. One informant was not in any close contact with his using family members. Another one was in contact and the family member supported her use of amphetamines.

Informant: “It was kind of stupid that my mum was using drugs at the same time. The worst thing for me was that, when I think back to the time, it is totally disgusting for me, that she was able to use drugs with me, to support me in it rather than to slap me. It did not matter to her either.” (female, remitted user, No. A410)

The dynamic aspect of the family relationships of the dependent and remitted users is apparent through the example of another informant whose relationship with his family improved after the death of one parent. However, the improvement in the relationship did not lead to any change in the use of amphetamines because his father supplied the informant with more money, which allowed him to buy amphetamines. Nevertheless, this allowed him to stop making money illegally.

Informant: “Well, it changed. Until 2009, I had to steal to get money. In 2009 my mum died and dad had to promise me to give me money and to take care of me. Then dad started to give me money.” (male, dependent user, No. A409)

Increase in use

Family relationships were significant for the dependent and remitted users in this period. The informants from the other groups did not discuss family relationships as something significant for them. A number of the dependent and remitted users described coping with difficult life situations related to family issues. The accounts of the informants show that in some cases these situations escalated into the breakdown of family relationships and consequently led to a loss of housing.

Informant: “Dad forced me to work and to work even instead of going to school. When I did not have enough energy to lift the heavy wooden roof, he just beat me up. And I just went to use some drugs.” (male, dependent user, No. A405)

Informant: “I had my own flat when I was eighteen years old. I was kicked out of the house because of my friends and my parents just did not give a damn about me anymore.” (female, dependent user, No. A411)

The case of one remitted user was different. He disclosed an increased use of amphetamines that caused trouble for him with his parents and as a result he negotiated with his parents some rules for living together which later on led to a decrease and abstinence.

Decrease of use

Family relationships were significant for the dependent and remitted users in this period. The informants from the other groups did not describe any significant aspects of family relationships in this period. According to the accounts of the dependent and remitted informants, the family influenced the decrease in different ways. The trust of family members

was perceived as an important supportive element. Pregnancy was also described as a significant factor in the decrease. One informant highlighted the possibility of living with his mother and assisting her, which in turn helped him to reduce his use. Furthermore, the family was an important factor in entering treatment.

Informant: *“My mother asked me to come back home [...] My life changed for the better. I use drugs less. It just does not interest me like it did before. I barely ever use drugs.”* (male, dependent user, No. A401)

Informant: *“It was interesting. No wonder my parents did not trust me at all because I caused a lot of trouble, I was fucking up a lot [...] I mean, I caused damage to property and that’s why I have the debts now and so on. When I was under the influence of drugs, I did a lot of dumb things and of course I lied to them for a long time and I disappointed them. However, they gave me a last chance and I’m glad I could go back to a normal life.”* (male, remitted user, No. A412)

Informant: *“My dad really helped me a lot. He came. I called him that I needed him to come and to talk with him. He came and asked what was going on, what was going on? I told him I was a drug addict. He asked me how long and I said for a long time. He said you are fucking with me. He did not know, did not know. I asked him if he would help me and he took me to the [name of residential treatment facility].”* (male, remitted user, No. A403)

3.2 Partners

Continuation of use

According to the informants, partners do not seem to have a significant influence in this period of use. The informants describe change in their love lives and the lives of their romantic partners and having amphetamine-using as well as non-using partners. However, partners did not have a significant influence on their amphetamine use from their perspective.

Informant: *“Then I actually found a girlfriend in [name of socially excluded locality]. We lived there together in an apartment. I continued using methamphetamine, even though we had children.”* (male, remitted user, No. A403)

Increase in use

In the accounts of the informants, the period of increase was accompanied by two kinds of partner influence. The frequent users and ex-users and non-frequent users reported an increase in relation to a using partner, while the dependent and remitted users related the increase to relationship break-ups and coping with them.

Interviewer: *“And when you broke up, do you think that it had any influence on your amphetamine use?”*

Informant: *“Yeah.”*

Interviewer: *“And what kind of influence did it have?”*

Informant: *“I increased it. I just said to myself, I gave up and went back to normal. I just kept on using more and more.”* (male, dependent user, No. A409)

Informant: *“There were no other periods anymore. Just with that girlfriend. She used it often and I used it often with her.”* (male, frequent user, No. A416)

Decrease of use

The informants described the different roles and influences of relationships in the period of decrease (including remission). The majority of the non-frequent users and frequent users and ex-users did not describe a significant influence of their partners in this period. One account of a frequent user demonstrates that the partner relationship might not have had a significant influence on his use of amphetamines. His relationship started in the increase period and continued during his amphetamine use into the decrease period and, according to him, it did not have any significant influence on his use.

Relationships played a more significant role in the groups of dependent and remitted users, who provided more accounts of their influence. One of these influences is a decrease in the case of a break-up with a using partner or changing a using partner for a non-using partner.

Informant: *“And I met my current boyfriend at the hostel. He also lived there and he had also broken up with someone. We somehow fell in love and he wanted to help me to get out of it and he helped me.”* (female, remitted user, No. A410)

The partner also acts as important motivation for informants to consider treatment or abstain. Some of the informants were motivated to go into treatment by their partners.

Informant: *“I would have ended up somewhere else without her. I came here [outpatient treatment facility] after half a year because of her. Otherwise, I would have said ‘fuck it!’”* (male, dependent user, No. A405)

Informant: *“I had three years of abstinence in my relationship. It is like that when I have a relationship. I put these things aside. I do not say that during this relationship I did not crave sometimes or something like that. [...] What is stupid is that I really abstain only when I have a relationship. Now I’m discussing this issue with my therapist.”* (male, remitted user, No. A414)

The other aspect of partner-related issues in the period of decrease and remission is that according to the accounts of the informants it is difficult to find a supportive and understanding partner.

Informant: *“My ex-wife actually knew about me, about my drug history. And once I told her that I did not stop taking drugs to start drinking. Unfortunately, my wife did not have a problem with it and did not share my problem with drinking, my worries, and it turned out the way it did. She told me one day that she just sleeps it off and doesn’t give a damn about it, it’s just a hangover for her. At that moment, I actually understood that life with someone who will not support me and who does not really understand me probably does not make sense. Well, so we divorced.”* (male, remitted user, No. A414)

3.3 Peer group and social environment

Continuation of use

The peer groups are regularly linked to the specific place where they meet and use drugs. It is the case of the frequent users and ex-users, who, in their accounts, frequently related the use of amphetamines to music parties, festivals, and clubs. Furthermore, they highlighted the social motives of use and the related drug effects: being connected, social, emotional, and talkative.

Informant: *“We usually use it, for me it was ninety per cent, at some techno or psytrance. We usually got stuck there and talked a lot.”* (male, frequent user, No. A1818)

Informant: *“Always, it was always a party. When I took it, it was always about the dance scene. Nowhere else.”* (male, frequent ex-user, No. A404)

Compared to the frequent users and ex-users, the remitted and dependent users related their use to a variety of different places. Furthermore, their relationships are usually limited to other amphetamine users, which distinguishes them from other groups. From their perspective, the relationships are limited to other drug users because they are rejected by non-using peers.

Informant: *“I continued to use, I don’t know, normal people already rejected me and stopped talking to me. In turn, I was just hanging out with dropouts, junkies. I did not want it and I do not know how to be alone. I would have gone crazy alone. Therefore, I was hanging out with them.”* (female, dependent user, No. A411)

The dependent and remitted users describe other developments related to peers and places of use in the later stages of their drug-using careers. The informants describe using alone in secluded places without their peers and without the presence of other people.

Informant: *“I usually shunned people because I did not want anybody to see me. It is better like this. [...] Usually, it was in the bushes or woods. The places where there is a minimum of people.”* (male, dependent user, No. A401)

Informant: *“Where do I use it? Some other people buy it and use it just two metres away. I do not. If I want to have it, I’ll put it in my pocket, and I’ll do it somewhere aside, somewhere away from people.”* (male, dependent user, No. A415)

The above-described accounts of using in secluded places and alone are related to another type of account. The women from the remitted and dependent user groups describe their attempts and desire to keep their drug use unnoticed by other people.

Informant: *“Even though I was taking drugs, I always tried to have clean clothes so that nobody would notice it and when I took them, I was always somewhere further away and not where there were people.”* (female, remitted user, No. A408)

Informant: *“I did not like to go out where there were people. I thought they could see everything on me and as a result I behaved in a way that they could see.”* (female, remitted user, No. A410)

Increase in use

The period of increase was similar to the continuation period because the peer group was described as consisting mostly of amphetamine users. However, we can identify a difference between the dependent and remitted users and the frequent users and ex-users. The peers of the frequent users and ex-users were largely described as being related to music, parties, and festivals, while the dependent and remitted users did not describe having such peers.

Informant: *“Psytrance or reggae parties. At reggae parties, I did not use stimulants. At the psytrance parties or techno parties. I helped to organize these illegal free parties. In that year there were two such cases. [...] It was quite a regular thing to do. We went to parties, got to know each other. Maybe, we were doing it too much when I think back about it. Sometimes, it was every two weeks. It lasted for a year, a year and a half.”* (male, frequent user, No. A69)

Informant: *“It was roughly for around half a year that I was using it intensively at (techno) parties.”* (male, frequent ex-user, No. A404)

According to the accounts of the informants, drug use tends to increase with a change in the peer group or with finding new friends who use amphetamines, which is similar across the user groups.

Informant: *“Well, actually, when I divorced, I started to go out more and I found a younger girlfriend. [...] These people did not have any issues with drugs and they did not avoid them. As a result, I started to have a similar mode (with drugs) as I had before.”* (male, frequent user, No. A666)

Informant: *“I tried to reduce my use for half a year. I even stopped for three months. After that I started to hang out with a new group and I started to use again.”* (male, dependent user, No. A405)

The relapses and increases described by the dependent and remitted users are related not only to new friends but also to reconnections with an old peer group. The reconnection to an old peer group might have been caused by different events, ranging from returning from a foreign country to the peers being released from jail.

Informant: *“I was fine and it was the people who were dealing that were in jail. You know, and when those people got out of the joint, because, I am not sure, they got six months for dealing. They got out and immediately I got down with them and into trouble.”* (male, remitted user, No. A403)

Informant: *“I was with a friend in Belgium and I did not even have access to drugs... I was not missing them at all. And then I came back and I fell into it again.”* (female, dependent user, No. A413)

Decrease of use

This period is, according to informants from different user groups, characterized by a change of peer group. The informants have fewer friends who are using amphetamines. They switch to non-using peer groups, invest more in partners and family life, or do not have many peers and are lonely.

Informant: *“I found normal friends. Yeah, they smoke weed, but they do not use drugs and they know everything about me and it is good.”* (female, dependent user, No. A411)

Informant: *“Well, it’s just that we’re not seeing those who are just friends or buddies. I have been spending more time with my girlfriend lately. I spend a lot of time with her now.”* (male, dependent user, No. A401)

Informant: *“From my point of view, I lost a couple of friends because they stayed on the same track. I changed my life and I do not have any need to hang out with these people. We meet in the street and I say hello. We exchange a few words. However, I don’t seek them out, I do not visit them, because it’s useless from my point of view. I lost a couple of friends from the past when we were connected by the same subculture, parties, and use of these substances.”* (male, frequent ex-user, No. A404)

The peer relationships in the groups of frequent users, ex-users, and frequent users provided them with the experience of other users. The unfortunate events related to amphetamines that happened to their friends led the informants, according to their accounts, to reflect on their own use. On the basis of these experiences and events, the informants set themselves against people who “ended badly” and they mention that they “don’t want to be like them”.

Informant: *“Well, I knew a lot of people who took it ... I saw what it was doing to them, they were just becoming slaves to that and it put me off using it now and then.”* (male, frequent ex-user, No. A407)

Informant: *“The person gathers a little more experience and it is not only his own, it is mainly from what is going on around him. You can see what it does to people and you do not want to be the same as other people. You do not want to fall into it. It is very simple.”* (male, non-frequent user, No. A430)

Informant: *“The main point of the change was when I was in my early twenties. My friends were fucked up. And I was there, it was a major shock for me, when my friend committed suicide under the influence of amphetamines.”* (male, ex-frequent user, No. A406)

3.4 “Being normal and adult”

Informants’ accounts related to the period of decrease mentioned similar different priorities: functioning in society, being adult, family and partner, peace and quiet, work, education, and hobbies such as music. The ability to function as a member of society was introduced by dependent and remitted users in relation to the decrease period. Informants mention that they

want “to be normal” or “to be adult”. Accounts of being normal are given by remitted and dependent users.

Informant: *“I want to have a normal life, when I see it here, I just walk around the square here in the city and I see the greedy heads that are there every day. Although I am going here down to the [low-threshold service]. I do not want to be like them and I want to start a family.”* (male, dependent user, No. A405)

Informant: *“Well, I wanted to start living a normal life.”* (female, remitted user, No. A408)

From the perspective of informants, the period of decrease is also related to work. It is similar in the groups of remitted and dependent users, as well as frequent users and ex-users. In the accounts of informants, work is described as significant because it occupies them.

Informant: *“It changed. I was more involved at work than with drugs. I took more care of work than of drugs. Instead of doing drugs, I did something. I just had a job in my head and not just drugs. I just went to work and I did not think about getting drugs. That’s all.”* (male, dependent user, No. A401)

Informant: *“Well, I went to work on a three-shift job and I did not have enough free time. My consumption of drugs fell and amphetamines, I did not use those at all. It was only beer and weed.”* (male, frequent user, No. A1818)

The work was described not only as important because it occupies time but also because it provided the experience of trust which was acquired in contact with other colleagues.

Informant: *“I was working in a warehouse and I had this boss who trusted me and it works. And I do my job, too. He leaves me alone. Just sometimes he comes to ask if I’m all right. I tell him everything is all right and he says: if you need something, come talk to me. You know, it helps you psychologically and you function better. When you have a boss like that.”* (male, remitted user, No. A403)

● 4 DISCUSSION

This article described selected aspects of the social life of amphetamine users in the different periods of their careers from their own perspective. In addition to that, this study described the differences between various predefined user groups (dependent and remitted users, frequent users and ex-users, non-frequent users). The article identified differences between the user groups, similarly to the previous analysis of the data from the Czech part of the ATTUNE project presented e.g. in Petruželka et al. (2020b, 2021). The frequent and non-frequent users related their use to parties and music festivals, while in the case of the dependent and remitted users the situation was also influenced by other aspects of social life.

The dependent and remitted users described family as significant in relation to the use of amphetamines. In contrast to that, the informants from the other groups did not attribute significance to family in their accounts, possibly because their family

relationships were not seen as being influenced by amphetamine use and vice versa. The majority of the informants across the user groups did not attribute any significant influence to family as regards the use of amphetamines in the period of continuation. However, the family might exacerbate or improve other aspects of the situation, such as financial circumstances. Among the remitted and dependent users, a period of increase in the level of use was usually related to the breakdown of family relationships and loss of family support, such as housing. The informants perceived the desirable and expected role of the family traditionally as protective; the family was seen by the users as a potential barrier to use (Matthew et al., 2018). For example, if a parent used drugs and supported the informant in using, it was perceived as inappropriate, as “disgusting”. Furthermore, the family was found to be a significant element of support during the period of a decrease in the level of use. In certain aspects, these findings reflect the review of O’Donnell et al. (2019), who found out that an increase in amphetamine use was related to issues in familial relationships and that a decrease was related to a supportive relationship with the family. In addition to what was concluded by O’Donnell et al. (2019), our research indicates that in relation to amphetamine use the family is important for the dependent and remitted users but not for the other groups.

Partners were not described as significant in the continuation period. In their review of qualitative studies, O’Donnell et al. (2019) found out that an increase was related to the loss of relationships. In our study, we found that in the increase period the frequent users and ex-users and non-frequent users reported an increase in relation to an amphetamine-using partner, while the dependent and remitted users usually related an increase to breakups and coping with breakups. In the decrease period, the informants found partners important in the case of the dependent and remitted users. Partners were described as a motivation for a reduction in use or a shift to non-using partners was described as important for such a reduction. O’Donnell et al. (2019) note that the threat of the breakdown of a relationship was a factor leading to desistance. The remitted users also stated that it was difficult to find an understanding and supportive partner who would respect ex-users’ needs.

Peers and the social environment are related and distinguish the groups of dependent and remitted users from the groups of frequent users and ex-users. This supports the findings of a previous study (Petruželka et al., 2021), which found similar results when focusing on the period of initiation into amphetamines. For the frequent users and ex-users, it was typical that in the continuation and increase periods they related their amphetamine use to music parties, festivals, and clubs, while the dependent and remitted users described use in a variety of different places. The use of amphetamines alone and in secluded places is typical for later stages of the careers of dependent and remitted users. Tuchman (2010) points out gender-specific drug-use patterns, with female informants not using in public places, for example, which has also been shown by our research. Hidden drug use connected with perceived failure in ascribed female roles could also prevent access to services and treatment (Arpa, 2017; Collins et al., 2020).

O’Donnell et al. (2019) associate the use of amphetamines with certain areas and places, such as campuses, clubs, and guest houses and, in the case of street-entrenched users, to a lack of stable housing, education, and employment. Using in a social group at parties or alone and unseen is described differently in the interviews by those in the groups of frequent users and ex-users and dependent and remitted users. If we choose from the possible concepts of normality a variant that the social norm is the usual behaviour (Jackson, 1965, as cited in Gelfand, Harrington, & Jackson, 2017), specific parties and festivals create an environment where amphetamine use can be taken as a group social norm (Palamar et al., 2019) in the group of frequent and non-frequent users, while those in the group of remitted and dependent users who use the drug alone perceive non-use as their social norm. In our study, it was typical for the dependent and remitted as well as frequent and non-frequent users that their peers were limited to amphetamine users in the period of increase, while the dependent and remitted users were typically rejected by non-users. Similarly, Addison et al. (2020) report that the non-dependent users were able to manage their relationships with non-using friends and family in part by using amphetamines discreetly, while the dependent users distanced themselves from these relationships. Furthermore, our findings are in line with O’Donnell et al. (2019), who found that reconnection to a former drug-using network is considered to be a significant factor in terms of an increase in the level of use. In all the groups, the decrease period is characterized by the reduction of contacts with using peers, in some cases intentional and built on discouraging examples (whether gradual or sudden) (Harris et al., 2020). It supports the findings of Addison et al. (2020) and O’Donnell et al. (2019) that the building of non-using social networks was important for a decrease. However, as Addison et al. (2020) note, it is difficult and challenging for some users.

From the perspective of the informants, the decrease period is characterized in all the groups by similar priorities: functioning in society, being adult, family and partner, peace and quiet, work, education, and hobbies such as music; simply a desire to succeed in their expected social role. The perceived level of social control or supportive social pressure plays an important role in the decreasing phase of a drug-using career (Goodman et al., 2011). The ability to function as a member of society was noted by the dependent and remitted users in relation to the decrease period. The informants mentioned that they wanted “to be normal” or “to be adult”. This is in line with other studies that described employment as an important source of routine and respectability (O’Donnell et al., 2019) and related successful abstinence to fitness, hobbies, and personal interests that provide purpose and meaning in life (Addison et al., 2020). Social services that are relevant for amphetamine users involve both the provision of low-threshold services (e.g. needle exchange programmes) and the basic and specific social counselling that may play a vital role in the users’ and ex-users’ social rehabilitation and in fulfilling their complex needs.

This research was limited by the fact that intensive amphetamine users and those who had engaged in prolonged use may find it difficult to recollect their experience of different periods of use. Similarly, Addison et al. (2020) observed that their in-

formants had difficulty in distinguishing periods of continuation and increase. In general, biographic interviews tend to be affected by situational bias and reflect the perspective of the speaker at the time and in the situation of the interview (Vaněk & Mucke, 2015). We do not possess any other “objective” information, e.g. about drug use among the informants’ parents. The interviews should take this into consideration. Another limitation of the exploratory character of our research is the fact that no direct comparison with users from other regions of the Czech Republic is possible.

● 5 CONCLUSION

The article identified differences between the user groups that were interviewed, similarly to the previous analysis of the data from the ATTUNE project. The frequent and non-frequent users related their use to parties and music festivals, while in the case of the dependent and remitted users the situation was more complicated. Relationships with partners, peers, and

family were described by the dependent and remitted informants as a risk factor for an increase in amphetamine use, as well as a supportive factor for reducing their use. This points to the fact that interventions should be provided in all of these areas, with consideration being given to the specific situation of the informants. Among the remitted and dependent users, a period of increase was usually related to the breakdown of family relationships and the loss of family support, for example housing. Similarly, as with the initiation period, it is important to provide social services. A period of decrease tends to be related to troubles with the establishing of new relationships with non-using partners and friends because their networks consisted exclusively of them. Thus, it is important, and difficult, for them to find new relationships. Furthermore, it was important for them to become part of society again and find employment, which provides not only occupation but also confidence. Thus, the interventions should be focused on the employment of individuals and also on the hobbies and interests which might provide the informants with an important sense of purpose and meaning in life.

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