

MAKING SENSE OF POLYDRUG USE – A FINNISH PERSPECTIVE

Karoliina Karjalainen, PhD,
Senior Researcher

2018 GPS Expert Meeting



MAKING SENSE OF POLYDRUG USE: PREVALENCE, USE PATTERNS AND HARMS

- 4-year project (2014–2018) funded by the Academy of Finland
- Aim: 1) to produce new empirical evidence and 2) to contribute to a better theoretical understanding of the dynamics of combining illicit drugs, alcohol and/or pharmaceuticals
- 3 subprojects:
 1. The prevalence of polydrug use in different populations
 2. The use practices and the cultural meanings of use
 3. The harms and risks of polydrug use



DATA AND METHODS

- Both quantitative and qualitative data were used
- Quantitative: Drug Surveys, Finnish Drinking Habits Surveys, ESPAD, Surveys on Intoxicant-related cases, The Register of Driving under the Influence of Alcohol and/or Drugs (DUI) Suspects
- Qualitative: Interviews with Users, E-mail Enquiries with Professionals, Discussion Sites on the Internet
- Methods: different regression models / thematic content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative analysis

WHAT IS POLYDRUG USE?

- Complicated as a phenomenon and as a term. No established theory, no unified concept, no established measure. Definitions vary widely.
- What substances should be included? Illicit drugs? Alcohol? Pharmaceutical drugs? Tobacco?
- Should the amounts used and/or frequency of use be taken into consideration?
- Is *concurrent polydrug use* (CPU) really polydrug use?
- Or should it be restricted to *simultaneous polydrug use* (SPU)



POLYDRUG USER / USE = NEGATIVE CONNOTATION

- Stigmatized term
 - Polydrug user is either socially or mentally mixed up; polydrug use is chaotic fumbling, where different drugs are mixed without any control
 - Problematic or addictive use, the last and unwanted point on drug using career where one has ended up (Hakkarainen 1992, Tammi ym. 2011, Perälä ym. 2012, Väyrynen 2015)
- However, not only restricted to problematic use, may include many different habits of use (Seppälä & Mikkola 2004, Schensul ym. 2005)

QUESTIONS OF SIMULTANEOUS POLYDRUG USE IN THE FINNISH DRUG SURVEY (2014)

- Have you used at least two different substances simultaneously (e.g. alcohol and prescription drugs, illicit drugs and alcohol, two different illicit/prescription drugs)?
- RC: Never; Yes sometimes, but not during the last 12 months; Yes, during the last 12 month

QUESTIONS OF SIMULTANEOUS POLYDRUG USE IN THE FINNISH DRUG SURVEY

- How often during the last 12 months have you used:
 - a) Prescription drugs and alcohol simultaneously
 - b) Prescription drugs and illicit drugs simultaneously
 - c) Cannabis and alcohol simultaneously
 - d) Other illicit drugs and alcohol simultaneously
 - e) Two or more illicit drugs simultaneously
 - f) Prescription drugs, alcohol and illicit drugs simultaneously
- RC: At least once a week; 1–3 times/months; 3–10 times/year; 1–2 times/year; Not once

QUESTIONS OF SIMULTANEOUS POLYDRUG USE IN THE FINNISH DRUG SURVEY

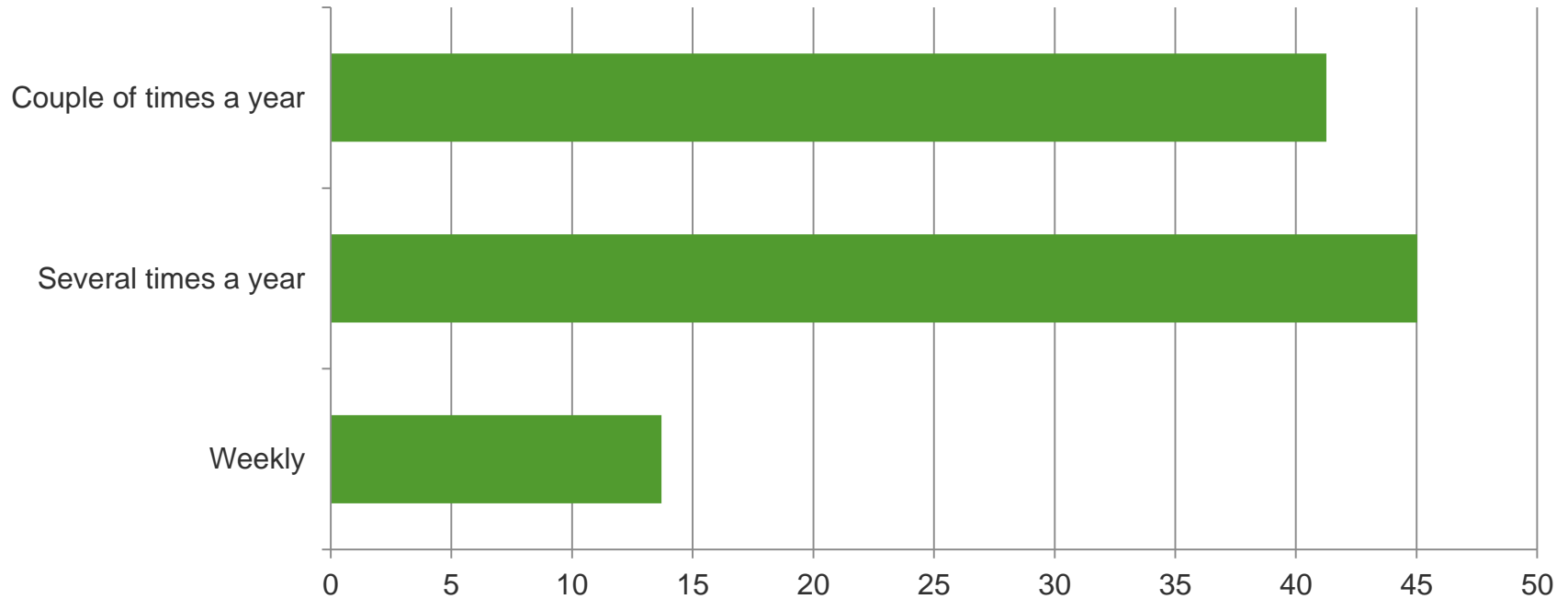
- Why have you used two or more substances simultaneously?
 - a) To experiment with the co-effects of different substances
 - b) To enhance abilities or pleasures
 - c) To heal or to reduce pain
 - d) To get smashed
 - e) Other reason, what
- RC: Yes; No

SIMULTANEOUS USE OF AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT SUBSTANCES, %

a) LTP			b) LYP				
		2014			2014		
Gender	All	14	Gender	All	5		
	Men	18		Men	7		
	Women	10		Women	4		
Age	15-24	18	Age	15-24	11		
	25-34	27		25-34	10		
	35-44	17		35-44	4		
	45-69	7		45-69	2		
Gender & age	Men	15-24	19	Gender & age	Men	15-24	13
		25-34	34			25-34	16
		35-44	24			35-44	4
		45-69	10			45-69	3
Women	15-24	17	Women	15-24	10		
		19			25-34	4	
		11			35-44	3	
		5			45-69	1	



THE FREQUENCY OF SIMULTANEOUS POLYDRUG USE DURING THE LAST YEAR, %

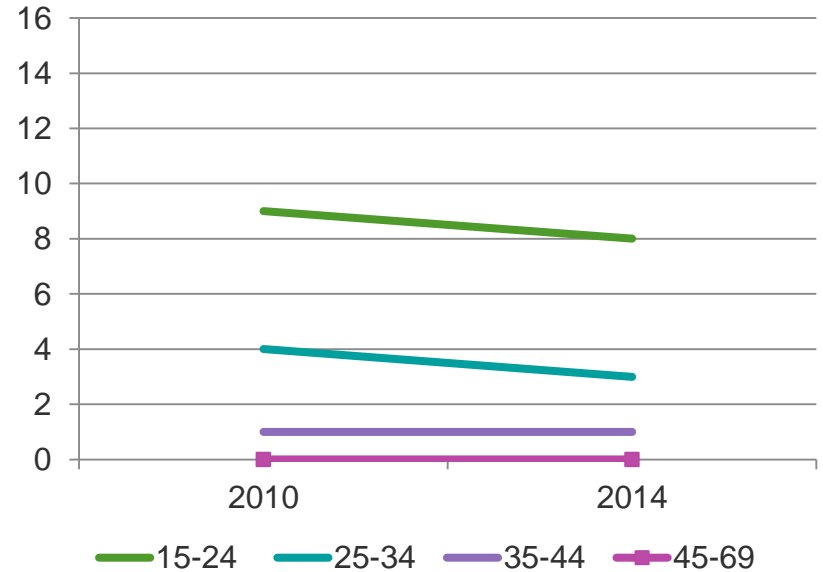


CANNABIS AND ALCOHOL SIMULTANEOUSLY DURING THE LAST YEAR

Men, %

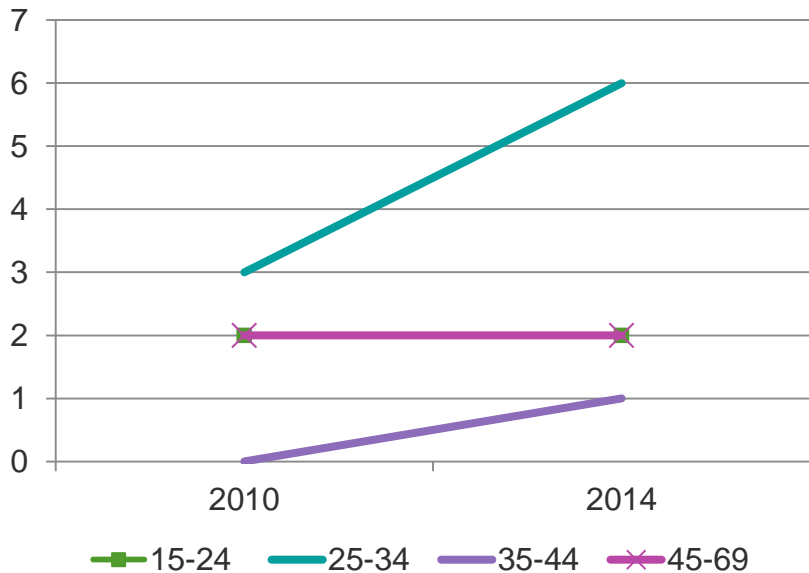


Women, %

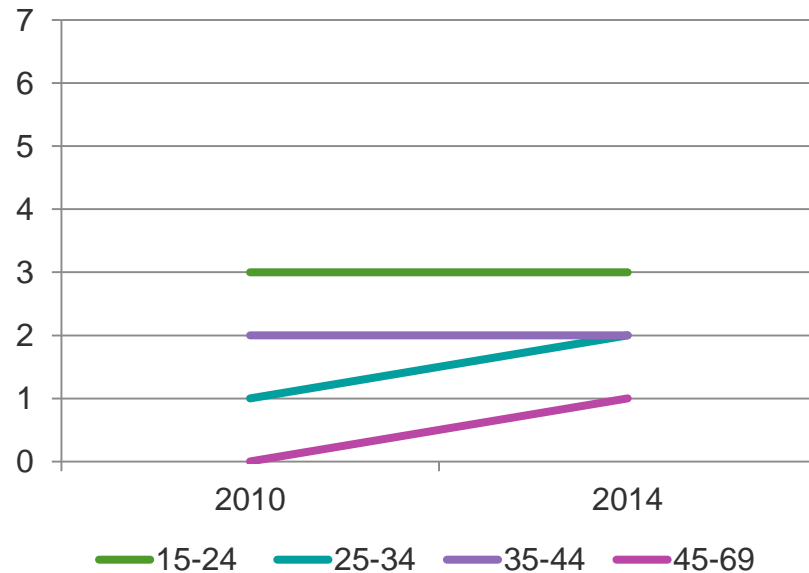


PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND ALCOHOL SIMULTANEOUS DURING THE LAST YEAR

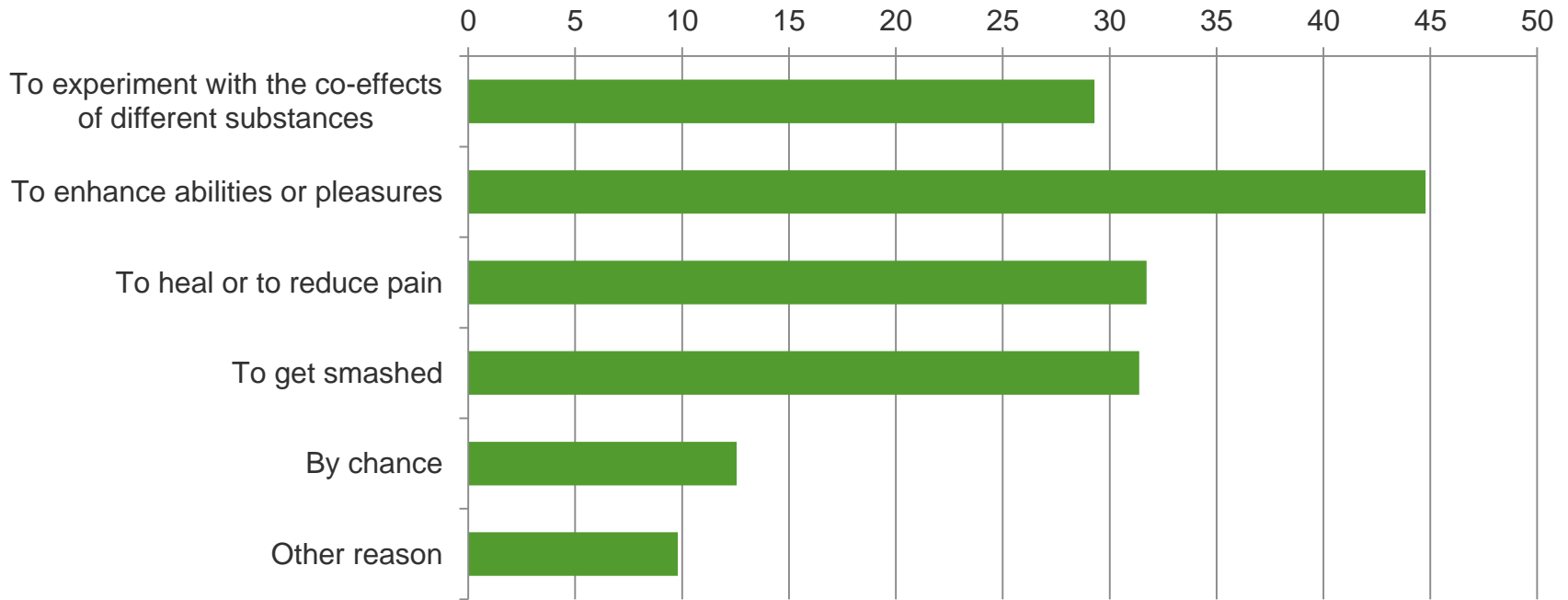
Men (%)



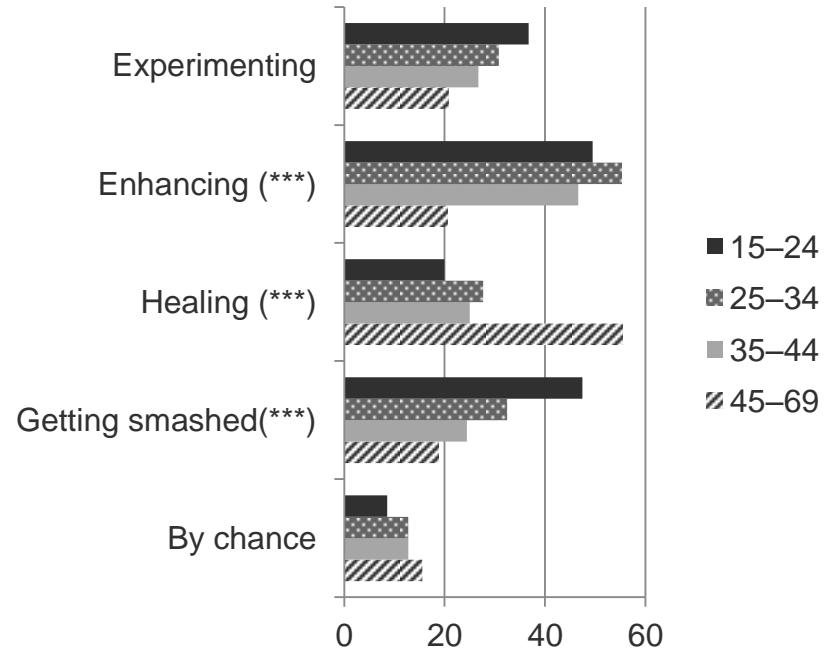
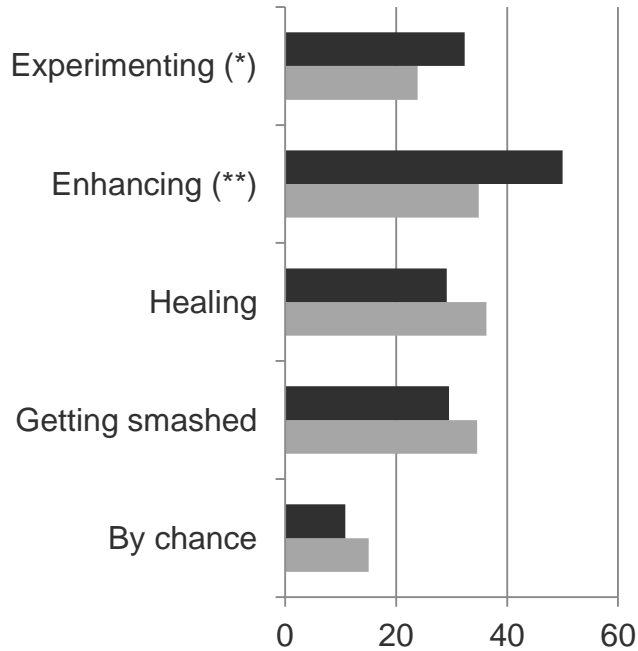
Women (%)



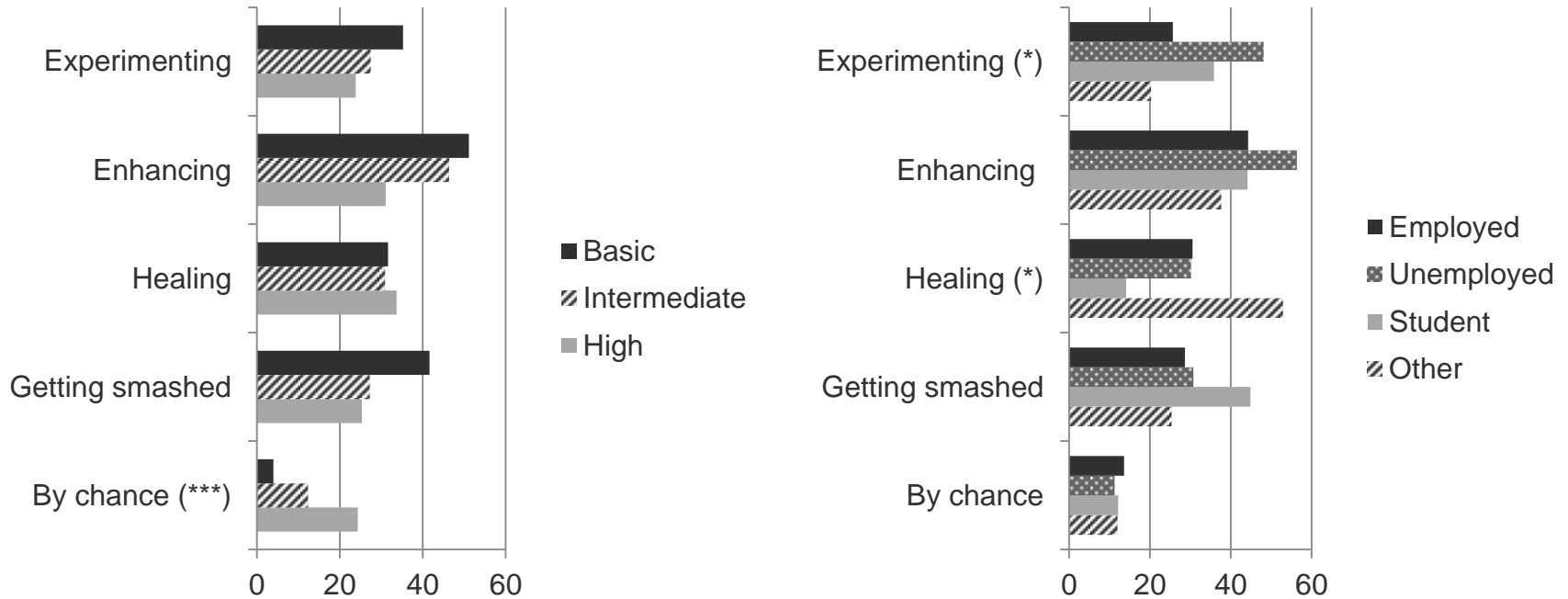
REASONS FOR SIMULTANEOUS POLYDRUG USE, %



REASONS FOR POLYDRUG USE BY GENDER AND AGE GROUP, %



REASONS FOR POLYDRUG USE BY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, %



TO CONCLUDE

- Difficult and negative concept with no clear definition
- Although it is often claimed that polydrug use has increased, there is not much research evidence to confirm that. Furthermore, comparison between different countries is difficult due to different measures used
- Noted especially among problem drug users, but needs to be recognized among the general population, too, due to its serious consequences, such as the accumulation of different social problems, health problems and premature death