



Patterns of NPS Consumption and Perceived Risks and Benefits: Results of Online Survey in Georgia

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- This work represents part of David Subeliani's master's thesis at MA in Addiction Science, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia
- Questionnaire adapted from MacLeod, K., Pickering, L., Gannon, M., et al. (2016), Understanding the patterns of use, motives, and harms of new psychoactive substances in Scotland, *Final report to the Scottish Government* Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00510607.pdf>
- Protocol approved by Bio-ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Ilia state University

Georgia



- Population – 3.7 mil
- IDU – 2.2% (15-64)

Background

- Vast majority of research has focused on injecting drug use
- Lack of data on NPS use/users
- Conventional surveys (GPS, IBBSS) fail to capture less visible (non-problematic) users
- Online surveys are fast, cheap, cover diverse geographical areas, reduce researcher/participant burden

Aim and methodology

Aim:

- Explore characteristics of NPS users, types of substances used, patterns of use, and perceived health and social effects

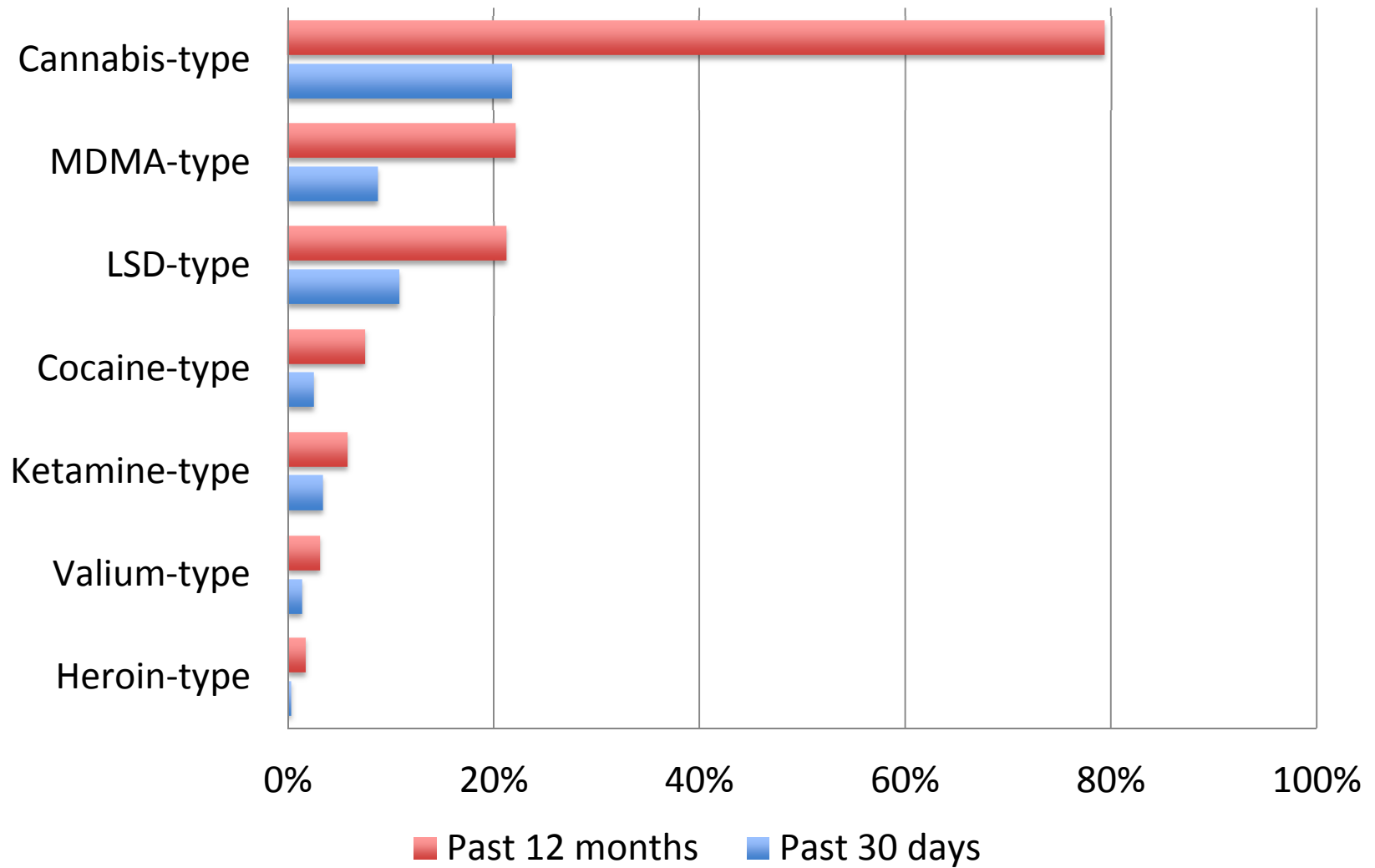
Methodology:

- In June-September 2017 online survey using a Google platform
- Targeted advertisement via Facebook
- Eligibility: used NPS during the last 12-month
- Instrument: structured questionnaire - socio-demographics, NPS and other drug use practices, and perceived effects of NPS
- Analysis: data exported into SPSS. Uni- and bi-variate analysis

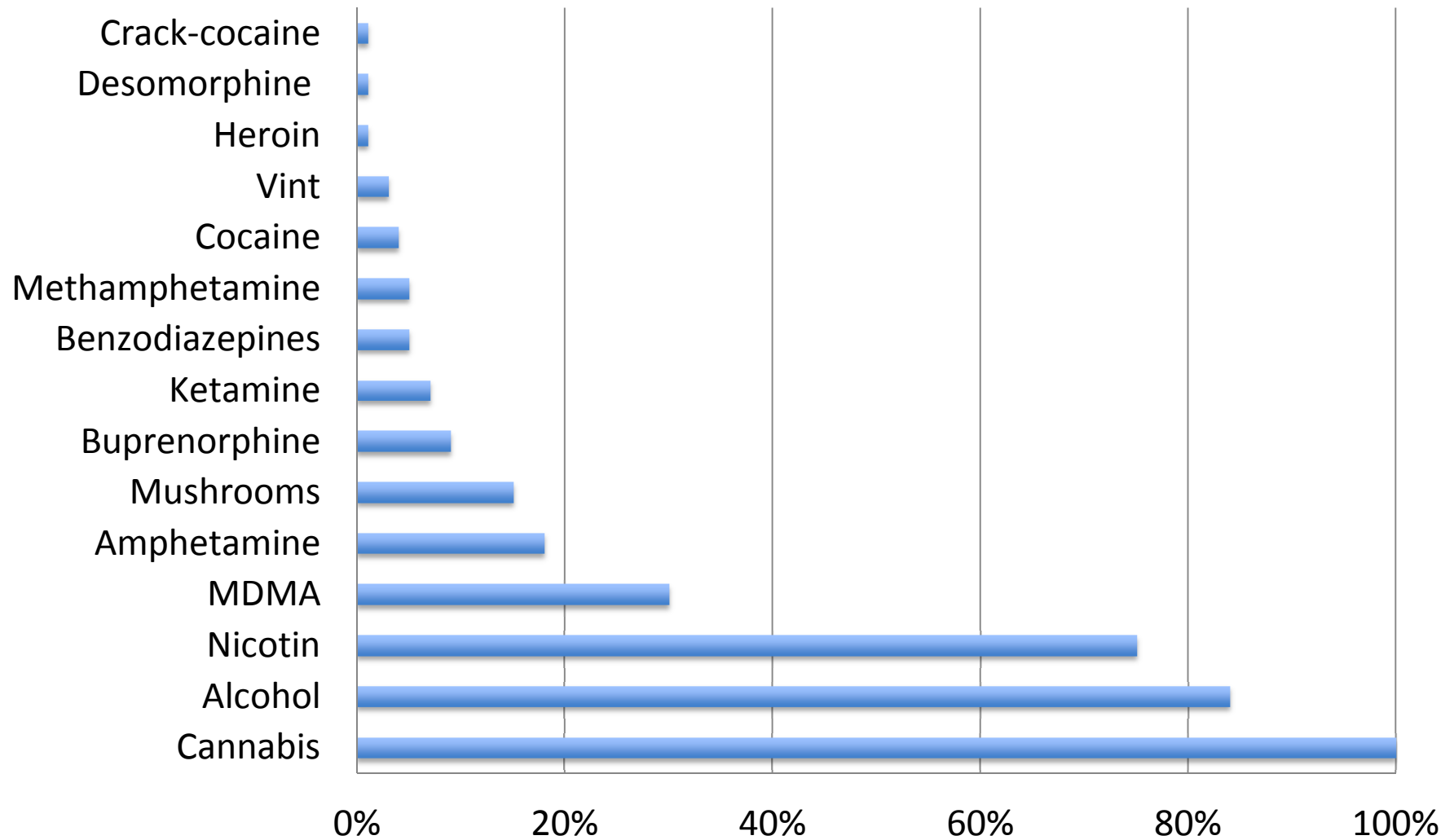
Socio-demography (N=353)

Variable	N (%)	Mean (SD)	Median (min-max)
Age		26.8 (6.97)	25 (14-58)
Gender			
Male	273 (77.3)		
Female	78 (22.1)		
Other	2 (.6)		
Sexual orientation			
Heterosexual	320 (91.4)		
Gay	6 (1.7)		
Lesbian	4 (1.1)		
Bisexual	18 (5.1)		
Other	2 (.6)		
Residency location			
Tbilisi	307 (87.0)		
Kutaisi	7 (2.0)		
Batumi	9 (2.5)		
Rustavi	11 (3.1)		
Other	19 (5.4)		

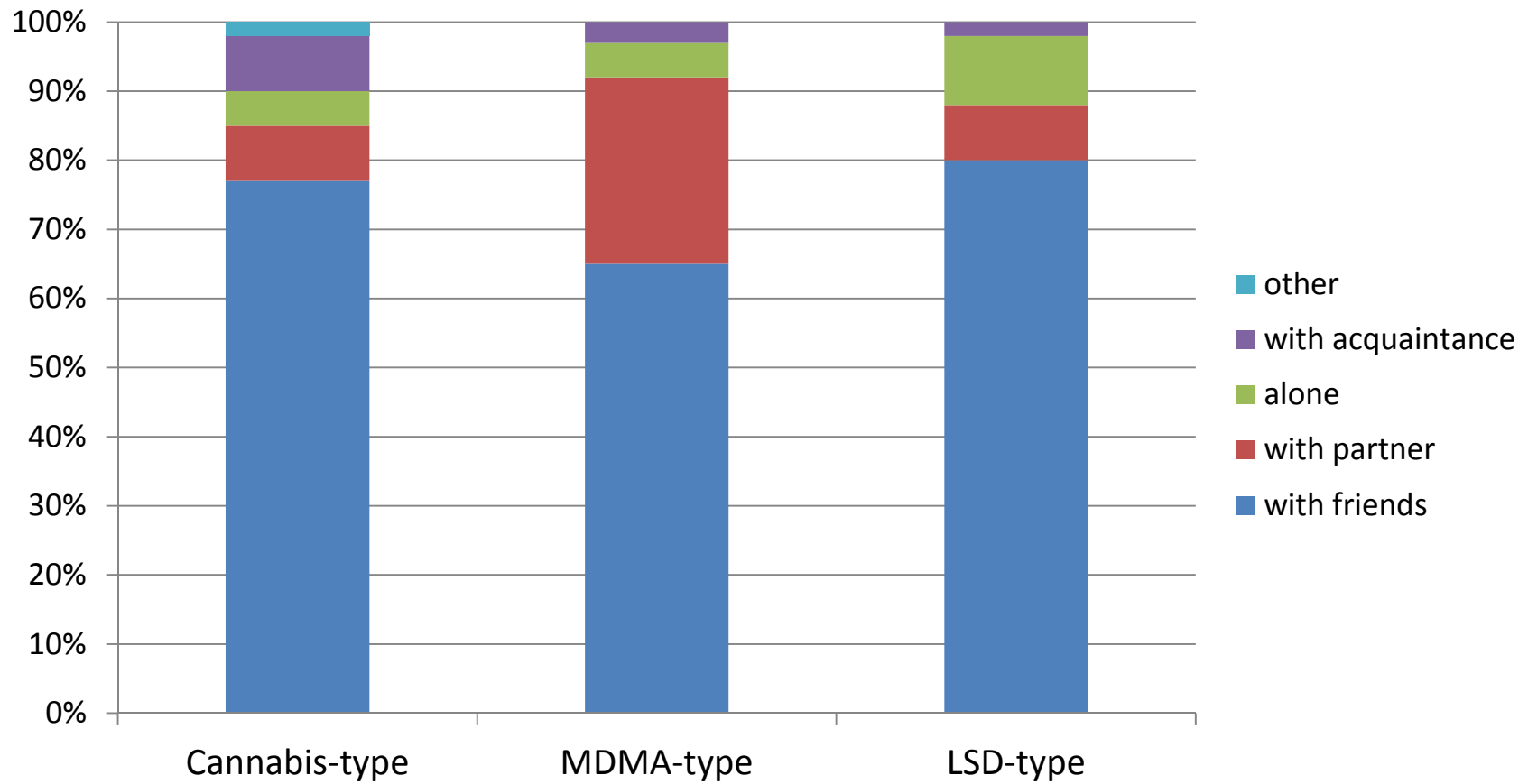
Past year and past month use of NPS



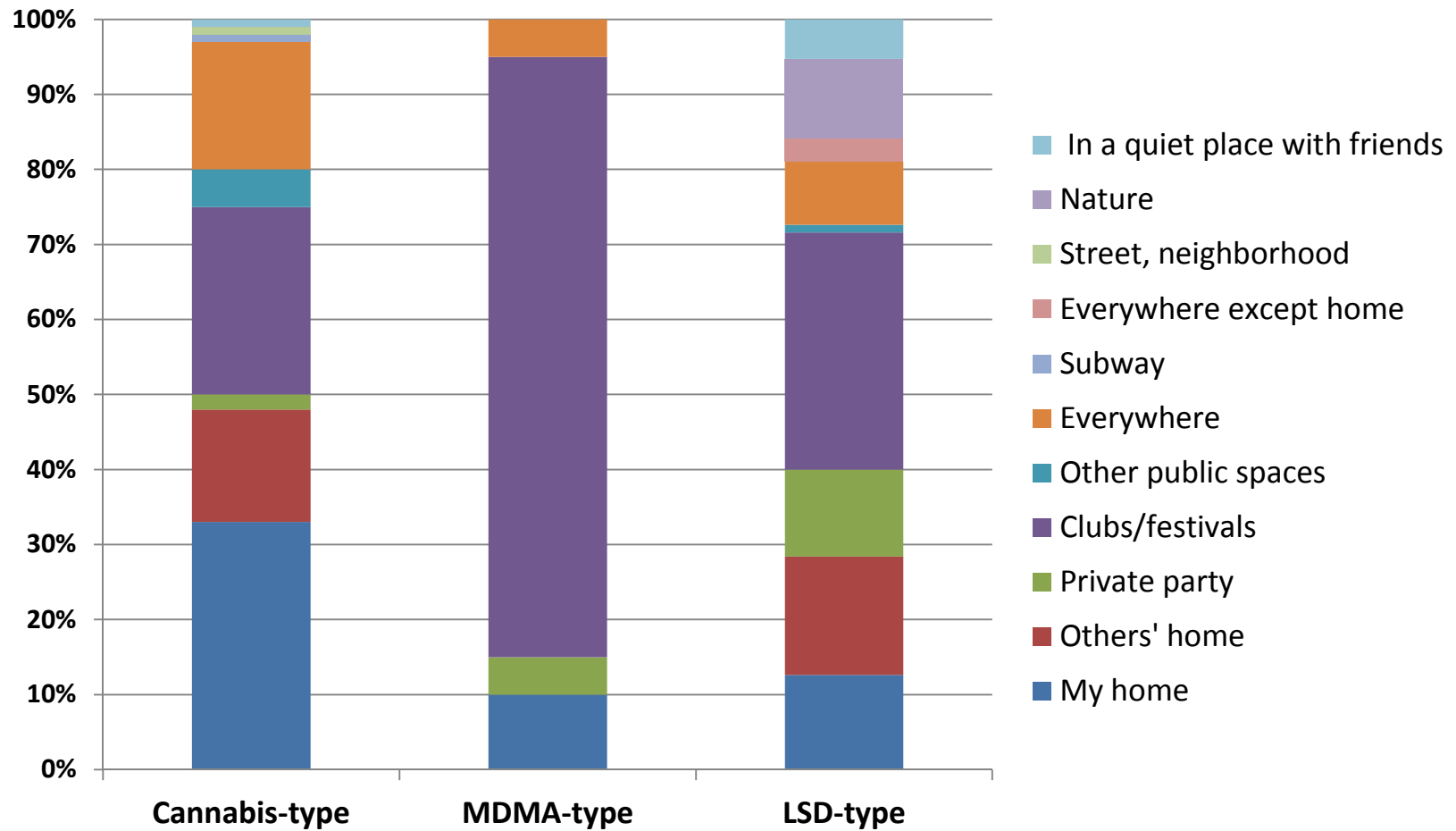
Prevalence of past month use of conventional drugs



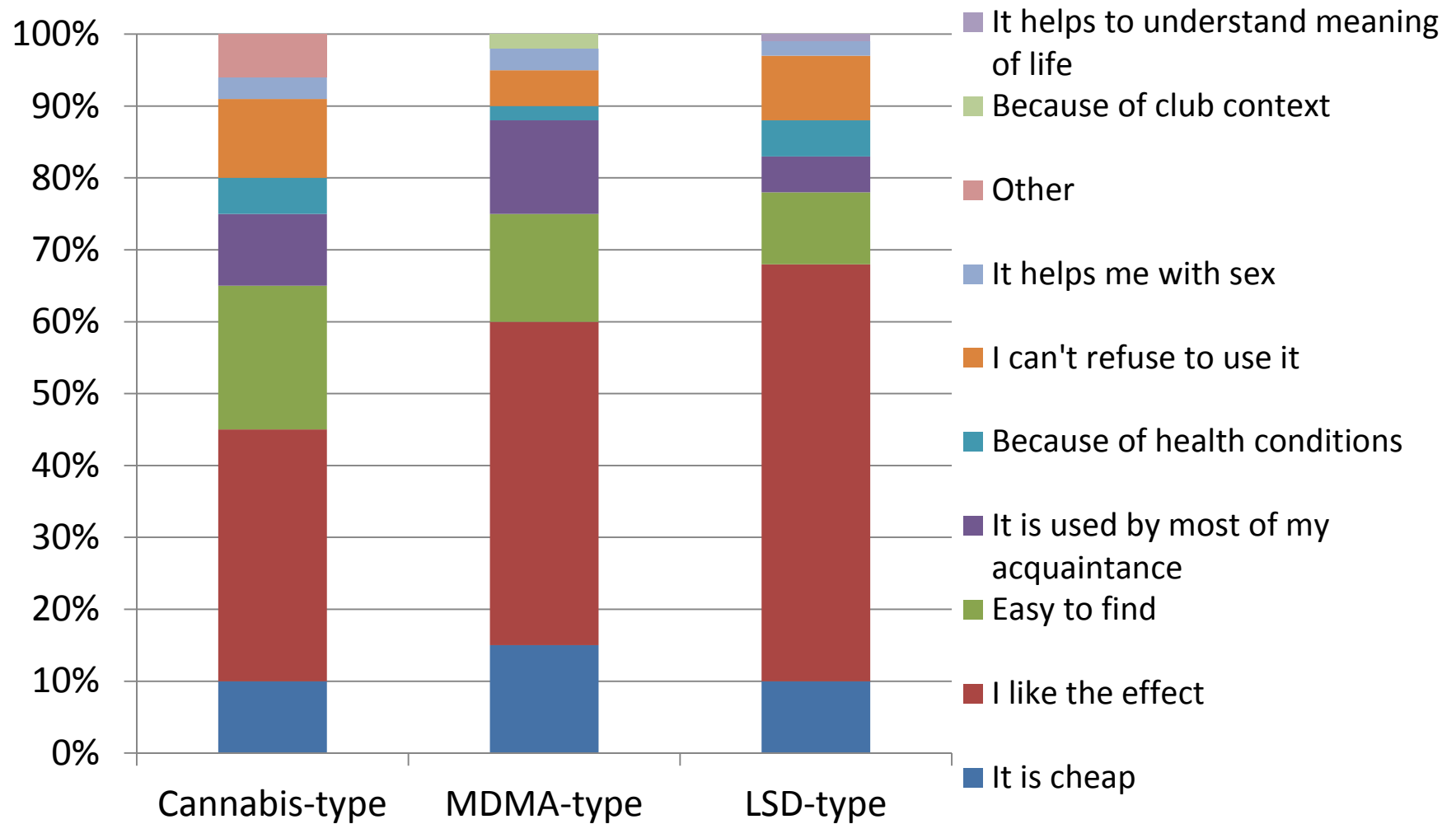
With whom did you use NPS?



Where do you usually use?

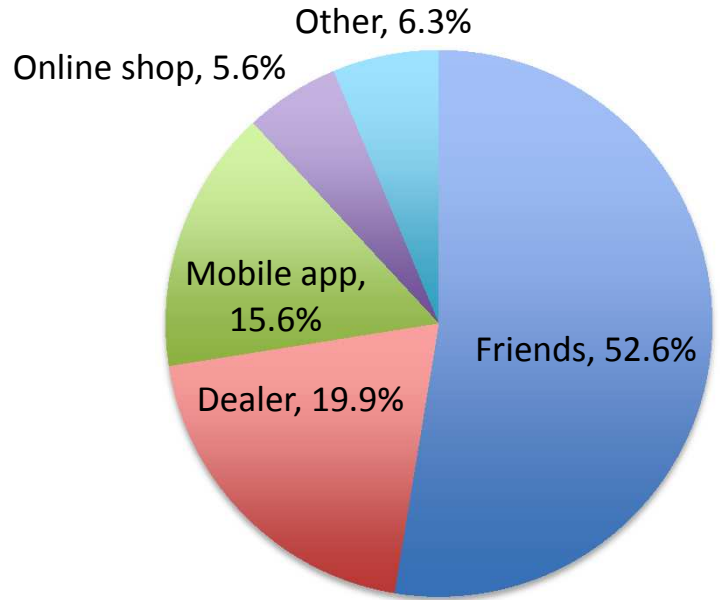


Main purpose for use

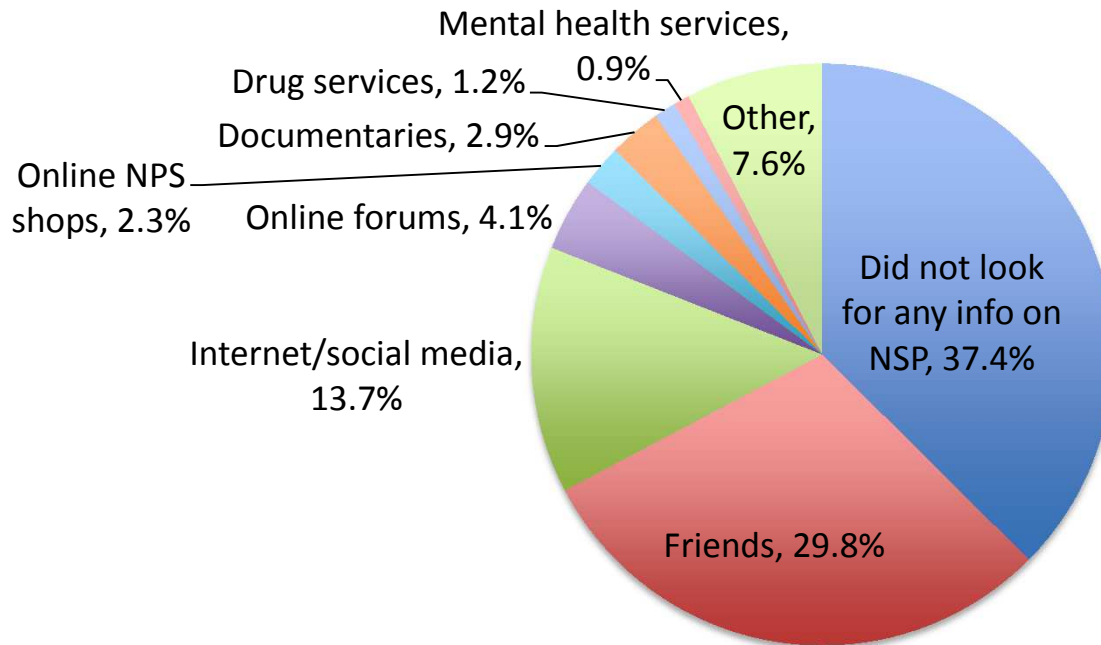


Perceived immediate and mid-term effects of NPS use on physical and mental health

Variable	Cannabis-type N (%)	MDMA-type N (%)	LSD-type N (%)	Cannabis vs. MDMA p	Cannabis vs. LSD p	MDMA vs. LSD p
I have no or negligible negative effects on my physical health	161 (58.1)	51 (68.9)	54 (75)	0.157	0.009	0.290
I have problems with coordination	58 (16.4)	1 (1.4)	3 (4.2)	0.001*	0.001	0.110*
Unstable heart rate	64 (18.1)	5 (6.8)	1 (1.4)	0.000	0.000	0.285*
Helps with sleep	150 (57.5)	20 (27.0)	15 (21.4)	0.000	0.000	0.434
Disturbs my sleep	111 (42.5)	54 (73.0)	55 (78.6)	0.000	0.000	0.434
I have more energy	46 (16.9)	54 (72.0)	44 (62.9)	0.000	0.000	0.240
I have less energy	226 (83.1)	21 (28.0)	26 (37.1)	0.000	0.000	0.340
Increased appetite	191 (70.5)	15 (20.8)	15 (21.1)	0.000	0.000	0.966
Decreased appetite	80 (29.5)	57 (79.2)	56 (78.9)	0.000	0.000	0.966
I have no or negligible negative effects on my mental health	148 (53.6)	39 (53)	43 (59)	0.888	0.420	0.449
Unstable mood	113 (40.9)	13 (17.6)	11 (15.1)	0.000*	0.000	0.682
Paranoia	35 (12.7)	1 (1.4)	3 (4.1)	0.004	0.037	0.304
Hallucinations	20 (7.2)	1 (1.4)	12 (16.4)	0.058*	0.016	0.001
Difficulties with concentration	69 (25.0)	1 (1.4)	7 (9.6)	0.000	0.005	0.028*
I am more anxious	145 (58.5)	38 (55.9)	32 (50.0)	0.702	0.223	0.499
I am less anxious	103 (41.5)	30 (44.1)	32 (50.0)	0.702	0.223	0.499
I have better mood	77 (31.3)	32 (47.8)	36 (60.0)	0.012	0.000	0.167
I am more depressed	169 (68.7)	35 (52.2)	24 (40.0)	0.012	0.000	0.167
* - N is too small to calculate statistical significance						



Where do you get NPS from?



Where do you look for information about NPS effects?

Limitations

- Self-selected sample – representativeness?
- No prevalence estimates for general population
- Perception of benefits and negative effects vs objective knowledge of risks
- Lack of “standardization” of NPS terminology (synthetic cathinones? bath salts?)

Conclusions

- First study describing the NPS use in Georgia
- Cannabis-, MDMA- and LSD-type NPS most often used
- NPS and conventional drugs used interchangeably
- Patterns, context, perceptions
- Results can guide future efforts: targeted studies, risk assessments, harm reduction strategies
- The role of peers (using with friends, social supply) shall be further explored

Thank you