



National Report on New Psychoactive Substances Expert Interviews in Poland

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1 Description of respondents and work fields

1.1 Description of respondents

In total 9 interviews were conducted, including 3 women and 6 men. The average age of our respondents was 39 and average of professional experience -11 years.

Respondents in the study were selected to ensure the diverse perspective of people representing various professions related to NPS. The sample consisted of a police officer, governmental agencies officials, therapists, representatives of non-governmental organizations, a pharmacist and a lawyer. They represented a variety of areas related to NPS: prevention, treatment and harm reduction, legal assistance, reduction of supply, toxicology, drug policy.

1.2 Description of the work fields

Representatives of therapists in our study are responsible for treatment, harm reduction activities and assistance to people with drug related problems. Their work in the area of NPS is to educate clients on the harm of NPS, assistance in completing treatment of mental disorders, visiting clients in psychiatric wards, support in difficult life situations and giving a sense of security, calling for an ambulance in a critical situation. Their task is also to educate on risk factors of HIV and HCV. One of them stressed that the work with NPS requires constant education and acknowledged that at the early phase of the NPS phenomenon he acted more intuitive than on the basis of reliable knowledge.

A lawyer is employed by the MONAR organization, which provides assistance to people with drug related problems. His task is to help to solve legal problems of MONAR's clients in a cooperation with psychologist. He informs the clients what they can expect in the courtroom, helps in the writing of official letters.

A representative of the government agency dedicated to the shaping of drug policy in Poland, National Bureau for Drug Prevention, declared that his mission is to collect and analyse statistical data, monitoring drugs and drug addiction in Poland. He specializes in NPS and his responsibility is analysis of the phenomenon in terms of legal, social and health factors.

Second representative of governmental body was Director of the Department of Monitoring of NPS in the State Sanitary Inspection. The aim of organization is protection of public health. Its activities in the area of NPS comprise of education about harmful consequences of NPS as well as control of NPS withdrawal from the market in cooperation with police. The Department monitors the problem and keeps a central register of poisonings.

A representative of non-governmental organization, Foundation of Harm Reduction, declares that her role is to promote and develop the paradigm of harm reduction with emphasis on public health and human rights issues. When it comes to specific measures, the organization conducts needle exchange, outreach and support groups and realizes research projects. At the moment a large part of their customers are NPS users.

Pharmacologist is employed at the National Institute of Medicines, which role is to protect patients from harmful medicines and preventing the falsification of medicines. It deals with the control of medicines, and conducts analysis of substances at the request of the prosecution, the police, and the General Sanitary Inspector.

The second representative of NGO is responsible for coordination of the work of the office of Ombudsman of drug users. Office offers legal advice and advocates for more liberal drug policy. Clients of the office are those in severe life circumstances, those who are not able to get help elsewhere, due to their advanced damages of physical and mental health.

One of our respondents was a police officer responsible for keeping statistics on psychoactive substances seized by the police, among which there are NPS also. According to the law, the police deal with the introduction of illegal drugs to the market, while State Sanitary Inspection is responsible for the problem of introducing NPS to the market. Both institutions cooperate and support mutually their efforts.

2 Definition of NPS

Some professionals define NPS in opposition to traditional drugs and all the newly created substances with psychoactive properties are classified by them as NPS. NPS compared with conventional drugs lead to damages, which quickly appear and grow at a rapid pace. They affect physical, mental and social functioning of users. In the opinion of interviewees, functioning of those using traditional drugs is more stable, and the damages seems to appear slower.

NPS are defined as hazardous substances because of unknown composition. More dangerous than traditional drugs:

NPS are even more harmful than drugs which are on the list annexed to the Act on Counteracting Drug Addiction. Drugs from the list are already tested and something is known about them. In contrast, NPS are constantly being modified and extremely hazardous to health. KD3

Attention was paid on the inability to define NPS as it is impossible to create a closed register of NPS because of emergence of new substances. The list is constantly verified by the State Sanitary Inspection and used by the police and State Sanitary Inspection in operational activities:

If there are substances with new names, examined by State Sanitary Inspection, we get a list of them and inform subordinate units that drew attention to it in the routine work, for example during searches of NPS premises. KD3

Therapists emphasize that from the point of view of therapeutic work it does not matter whether a substance is legal or not and whether has been included on the list of the Act. It is important that causing health damages.

From the point of view of our clients there is absolutely no difference whether the substance is legal or not. Damages that cause NPS are mainly related to the mental health. There is also the issue of much faster marginalization of such a person in comparison with users of traditional drugs. ŁW1

According to respondents concept of new psychoactive substances includes both substances in the register attached to the Act but also those substances that potentially can be registered in the future. Attention was drawn to the definitional problems associated with the unclear status of the substances, which has been present for many years on the market and is quite well recognized, such as mephedrone. The question is whether this is already a traditional drug, or still NPS.

These definitions are fluid also at European level, such in the case of Mephedrone which is present on the market for 6, 7 years. To what extent it's still NPS. It depends on the speed of the legislative process in the country. MB1

NPS are defined as a relatively new phenomenon without cultural contexts, meaning and symbolic value, typical for traditional drugs. There is no community around NPS as they are treated instrumentally, without any of social, political or moral aspects, contrary to traditional drugs that used to be considered as a manifestation of counter culture:

"NPS lack the cultural background, this is a chemistry, first of all. They give you a whack. There is a scene but I wouldn't call it a subculture. They have no culture. On the websites you get technicalities only. There is no cultural value. We used to have movies on LSD, all the psychedelic aspects of culture. Here we have nothing like this. It is a very simple level I would say" (ŁW2

Government officials emphasized that they use in everyday work the legal definition of NPS which employs the concept of substitute means. Substitute means is defined by law as: a product comprising at least one new psychoactive substance or other substance with similar effects on central nervous system which can be used instead of a narcotic drug or psychotropic substance or the same purposes as a narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.

3 Description of NPS market

In the beginning of the NPS market, it was modeled on patterns transferred from the UK and in most cases it was based on the network of stationary shops. In 2010, after the closing of stationary shops most of the people continued to sell NPS, but it is a disguised sale "under -the -counter", to the initiated customers. NPS are sold in stores or places whose names do not indicate the trade of NPS, for example sex shops, hot spots and other.

Yes, there are stationary shops but informal, for example points with slot machines, small shops, which is not known what they are selling. Besides in the Internet is a lot of shops. (MB 1)

NPS are available everywhere, in stationary shops, copy centres, on the street. Also clubs sell NPS in their area. (MB 2)

In order to buy NPS under –the- counter customer must be successfully verified by the seller:

There is a camera and someone cannot arouse a suspicion of a seller. Elegantly dressed gentleman would rather not enter there. Rather, this has be a guy who looks like a drug user. ŁW2

Access to NPS through online stores is rated as easy and comfortable. Purchases are often made through Darknet. Shopping can be done discreetly, anonymously, quickly. The order is received from an anonymous reception points of parcels. According to professionals, clients of online shops are mainly those who experiment with various substances, for example hallucinogens.

In the online shops there is a variety of these substances and generally such people who most strongly experiments also with hallucinogens, these are the ones who buy there and they are familiar with the use

of Internet, because it is necessary. Regards the cannabinoids and cathinones, they are everywhere. (ŁW 1)

Users buying online, procure larger quantities of the substance. They often buy NPS not only for themselves but also for friends.

A lot of people started to buy NPS online, as they buy, they buy more, to sell among friends.(MB 2)

The Internet is also used by problem drug users. They want to have access to greater variety of NPS and also may read about the effects of particular substances on the forums. The purchase of NPS online allows to buy at lower prices comparing to those offered in stationary shops and by private dealers.

The old junkies have learned how to use the Internet. Two years ago, they did not know and it did not come to their mind, now they know, and that is the main change. Because a source of purchase strongly affects what a person takes. On the one hand, they have greater opportunities when it comes to selection of the substances. They have better knowledge about what they take, because they bought substance which has a brand name, they can read about it, and do not go to the stationary shop and take anything. Also an important issue is the price. Because when you buy online 20 grams, well, then actually comes cheap in total. (ŁW 1)

The problem with online stores lays in reliability of retailers, who for various reasons do not always send the requested shipment. One reason may be increased activity of the police and sanitary-epidemiological services.

I think that online shops have deteriorated in relationship to a solidity. That means you can buy, pay and receive goods. It is connected with the activities of the police and other departments that work in this field. (ŁW2)

At the moment, most of the goods are imported from China. The offer of stationary and on-line stores constitutes mostly stimulants and herbal mixtures, with less availability of psychedelics. It was pointed out that the market is characterized by instability of offer. The users receive new products they do not know because those previously tested by them are disappearing from the market. In Krakow, users have difficulties in buying traditional drugs what makes the use of NPS more prevalent. Especially, it refers to experienced users of heroin and amphetamines, because there is a lack of these substances on the market, and obtaining them requires the purchase in other cities. It can be assumed that NPS to some extent replaced heroin and amphetamine.

The old junkies use mainly NPS, at least in Krakow, because there is no access to traditional drugs. So there is no heroin in Krakow at all. Amphetamine is also hard to find.. In Krakow there is a big problem with finding traditional drugs. They are available, if someone will bring it from Warsaw, but then the prices are horrendous. 99% or 95% of old users takes only or mainly NPS.(LW 1)

It is claimed that supply of NPS and traditional drugs is controlled by organized criminal groups that decide whether drugs or NPS are mainly introduced to trading. Thus, in Warsaw the market of NPS has never developed in such a scale as in Lodz or Krakow.

It should be stressed that the role of the dealer has changed completely. Previously, it usually used to be a person associated with the criminal world, and contact with him/her could be risky. At the moment it is rather a supplier who works according to customer order and delivers the goods to the indicated address.

I do not even know if they are still dealers. I call them couriers, because they are people to whom you can call and they deliver the goods on the scooter, just like a pizza. (W3)

The detection of New Psychoactive Substances is determined by the activity of the police. It happens when the police detained the criminal groups that this group is engaged in the production and introduction NPS into the market. NPS are also found during police actions against producers and sellers of traditional drugs. On the other hand during the detention of users, police use to confiscate New Psychoactive Substances, but then must return them because there is no way to test whether the substance is illegal or not.

It is a matter of police activity. Sometimes they detain criminal groups involved in NPS procurement. (MB 1)

As far as I know, the police often confiscate these substances, but in many cases they return them to clients after checking them, even if they are illegal substances. (W 1)

I have some stories of people who knew that it was an illegal substance, that it was already banned, and police stopped them, took to the police station, there examined it with a drug test. It turned out that this is not the amphetamine so they returned it and they went away with the illegal substance. Police do not have tools, because they are too expensive. So, yes there is a lot of seizures, but police absolutely does not take any actions with this. (W 1)

4 Users, patterns, motives of NPS users

4.1 Description of NPS users

Nightlife, socially integrated NPS users are often considered as curious experimentators looking for relax and fun in their spare time. They usually stay out of the focus of interviewed professionals. In general the public perception of NPS is narrowed to the young people and the phenomenon on the internet:

NPS are often recognized as a something new, something that suits the youth, linked to the phenomenon of the internet, whereas many old opiate users switched to NPS, as the access to traditional drugs has diminished. (MB1)

In fact, NPS are considered to play a major role among active intravenous users and those on methadone treatment programmes. NPS are popular among clients of substitution treatment because they may use it without a risk of being accused of consumption of psychoactive substances strictly prohibited on methadone treatment programmes.

Problem drug users switch to NPS because of problems with supply and quality of other drugs.

There is often a lack of knowledge among users about content of NPS. Sometimes they simply don't know what they use:

They come and claim that they use cocaine but it is not cocaine at all. This is something that has been around for 4 years and is called synthetic cocaine. It is for 90 zloty (ca. 20 EUR - authors) and is functioning as a cocaine (ŁW3)

The popularity of NPS affects also young people, who may initiate drug consumption with intravenous use of NPS. It is reported that due to NPS, intravenous drug use increase again.

Since the 80s intravenous drug users was the lowest in the hierarchy, deeply degraded, infected, even kind of un-human. Now, the intravenous use is obvious, maybe even fashionable... This is considered as a most reasonable form of substance use. (ŁW3)

The use of methcathinone obtained from OTC medicines is considered as NPS use (e.g. medicines containing pseudoephedrine as *Acatar*, *Sudafed*) became a serious threat for marginalized users who get a stigma of the lowest drug users caste:

*Once the NPS cropped up everyone switched to them, mostly amphetamine IDUs, then methcathinone replaced NPS. As a result we have few hundreds disabled persons with encephalopathy. When NPS gone from the shops, part of the users switched to substances obtained from medicines as *Acatar* or *Sudafed*. They became the lowest caste, get a stigma; there was nothing worse than being one of the "Acatars". Methcathinone was used much more often than amphetamine. (MB2)*

4.2 Kinds of NPS

Taking under the scope the whole NPS picture it seems that synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones dominate. They still evolve due to changes in legislation.

Among marginalized drug users the most popular NPS are stimulants as synthetic cathinones, while synthetic cannabinoids are used by them from time to time. In turn, socially integrated users use synthetic cannabinoids more often.

NPS composition is very often unknown for customers as a given substances can be in fact other substance and substance names are meaningless as they have lost their link to denoted substance:

Sometimes one thinks he bought 3MMC while in fact it is 4MMC. People who put it into the market usually know it but not a consumer. (KD3)

Someone comes to me and say he use mephedrone, while under this term you can find all synthetic cathinones. This man obviously does not know what he takes. When someone claims he takes morphine, than it is morphine but here... It does not have to be like this. (ŁW1)

4.3 Procurement of NPS

NPS are obtained via personal contact and from the internet, also by marginalized users:

They know everything very well, they are on every website (...) they get money in the group of persons, the one most nifty buy it and then they share. (ŁW1)

As another professional put it:

Someone becomes a dealer; he buys and sells to his friends from the milieu. The sale is also conducted by patients at the substitutional therapy programmes. This is often home-made products, mixed with a shovel in a bathtub. (MB2)

Substances are also prepared by users themselves, with research chemicals from the internet and the other compounds. There is also darknet where users can find everything they need. It can be concluded, that *digitalization in general made the procurement of NPS much easier (ŁW3)*

New substances are also procured from OTC medicines containing pseudoephedrine:

There is no difference between new substances and medicines remixes, this is a new for us. People buy Acatar or Sudafed which contains pseudoephedrine and reformulate it with potassium permanganate. This results in permanent changes in the body. (ŁW1);

“A guy took Acatar, put it in a paper, started hitting it with a bottle so he receives powder. Than he put it in a filthy plastic cylinder and added potassium permanganate. The conditions around reminded a car service station as well as all these substances... And then shot to the veins. (ŁW1)

Sources of purchase depends, among other, on the age of the buyers. Youth chooses stationary shops, because they do not always have credit cards and do not want to leave traces on the Internet. Older choose the Internet as the main source of supply.

4.4 Patterns of NPS use

Most of the users consume NPS incidentally, often alone. Yet as one professional declared the knowledge on patterns of NPS use is limited:

We don't know much about patterns of use and the frequency of use. It is related to the type of NPS, e.g. smoking of synthetic cannabis, vaporization. Injections of cathinones. (MB1)

The effects of NPS are strong but do not last long. This feature of NPS obviously influenced the patterns of consumption. It was claimed that intravenous use is on the rise in Poland again.

We are experiencing a renaissance of intravenous drug use, people know that it is more economically efficient form of use, as the lower dosage can have a stronger effects. (ŁW3)

NPS user must perform several injections during a day, suffering the lack of sleep and neglecting other activities:

They are hardcore. This is unbelievable. They can take 1 gram, this is a portion to use for 10-20 times for a normal man, and they shot it up at once. Moreover, they are communicative, a bit stimulated. They use intravenously as they assert that sniffing has too weak effects. (ŁW2)

The injections can be also make in a case of synthetic cannabinoids which can be bought as a powder:

There are cases of people who use cannabinoids intravenously which is a completely genuine phenomenon in a drug scene. (ŁW1)

4.5 Harms experienced by NPS users

NPS are claimed to pose health risk due to their high toxicity. They are causing several somatic and mental health disorders. Somatic health problems are headaches, lockjaw, dysfunction of the respiratory and circulatory system, mainly caused by stimulants and synthetic cannabinoids use. There are also reported dermatological problems, collapses, fainting, poisonings, neurological disorders and deaths. Yet, deaths were also declined as it was claimed by some professionals. Nevertheless, one the major NPS risks are overdoses and unknown side effects:

In the first stage, it seems that the product did not work, then the user gets more so the side effect occur. (MB3)

One of dramatic side effects was identified when methcathinone replaced NPS among IDUs. It has resulted in many cases of encephalopathy and impairment of body movement (so called bantam walk) caused by homemade mixes of pseudoephedrine with potassium permanganate..

Health problems were also stressed in terms of infectious diseases as HIV, HCV, as injecting NPS use is a risk factor (high number of injections and lack of access to clean injecting equipment).

NPS-related mental disorders as psychosis, anxiety or paranoia were emphasized as they are considered to be: *incomparable with those mental disorders related to amphetamine, or even mephedrone! (MB2)*. NPS induced psychiatric disorders may eventually lead to hospitalization.

Several interviewed professionals claim that both mental and somatic health problems occur relatively early and inevitably lead to severe degradation of health:

NPS run at such high doses, and the whole cycle of consumption, well, it always ends with the paranoid states, combined with a huge weakening of the body, as they do not eat, they take it all the time. They are constantly stressed out because they steal, this is a stressful situation, it just makes it that they are quickly progressing into a degradation, which in the case of some other substances, these traditional ones would take, I do not know, a couple of months or a few years, here we have it after a week. (ŁW1)

NPS users also suffer to the lack of sleep due to high number of injections:

Some of our clients wouldn't sleep for 3 days and they inject each hour. They make more than twenty injections in a day. (ŁW1)

Moreover, they are: *nervous, anxious, some people have a problem with speaking, they feel that squeezes the stomach - they are not hungry, they have high blood pressure, heart beating fast, sweating. (ŁW2)*

As NPS strongly affect nervous system, they might lead to unpredictable or bizarre behaviours in public spaces as aggression or getting naked.

The problem of dependence to NPS was by some professionals neglected: *It is not a question of dependence but of acute toxicity (MB1)*, while others claimed that NPS have strong addictive potential.

The occurrence of somatic and mental disorders is often linked to social problems and social marginalization as housing problems and unemployment:

If he steals and does drugs all day, well, he has no time for social life, he is totally at the bottom (...) I see that he has already declining, it's just the way it ends, he has no longer a place to live and does not have anyone next to him, he is totally sick. (ŁW1)

4.6 Motives of NPS use

The list of motives can be divided into following categories (and their subcategories): availability, affordability, the problem of supply and quality of traditional drugs, constitutional features of NPS, psychological and cultural factors.

4.6.1 Availability - general availability

Availability and easy accessibility is emphasised to be most important feature of NPS popularity:

they are easily available (...) you even don't have to access the Internet, just go outside look at the stickers, call the number and you get particular substance in 10 minutes without any problem. It is like calling for pizza when you are hungry" (ŁW3); "buying NPS is easier, quicker and cheaper, they hit hard, the initial phase is stronger" (MB2)

According to professionals, users get access to NPS both on the streets and in the clubs, via their friends and peers, during social meetings or parties.

4.6.2 Availability – internet

Webstores are claimed to play an important role in increasing the availability and affordability of NPS. The access is easy, confidential, anonymous and the delivery is fast, via parcel locker. Internet offer vast catalogue of substances at hand without making any effort by the consumer:

when typing the name of the substance in a browser you get several hits in a second with a contact number (...) In the past you got to get to the dealer, you need few hours to go in an unknown place. Now you call and wait, you don't have to go anywhere. (ŁW3)

4.6.3 Affordability

The price can be an important factor to a person who uses NPS from time to time. The relatively lower prices of NPS pile up to large amount of money in total as the users' daily consumption increases:

The lower NPS prices is the myth. They are cheaper if you smoke one joint in a life (...). When you use regularly it is just opposite: if you take amphetamine you do not shot up 20 times a day! The amount of substance you need is so vast that it makes it absolutely more expensive. (ŁW1)

4.6.4 The problem with supply and quality of traditional drugs

Drug users, particularly marginalized users are disappointed with quality of traditional drugs as amphetamine or opiates and their decreasing availability:

NPS are stronger, people are disappointed with the quality of amphetamine and heroin on the black market. (ŁW2);

New substances have displaced drugs because of availability, self-sufficiency and low price. (ŁW3);

The old junkies use only NPS, at least in Cracov, because there is no access to traditional drugs. There is no heroin in Cracov (...) The kompot (Polish heroin) is so weak that no one wants to use it. There is also no amphetamine in Cracov and if is, it's very expensive (...) The mafia is believed to have a secret warehouses here (...) If someone gets drugs from Warsaw than the prices are horrendous. (ŁW1)

The therapists and street worker from Warsaw admitted:

In these days you can buy NPS more easily than old substances as amphetamine. This is due to sources of supply. (MB2)

Another professional emphasized the role of quality of a substances:

Drug users choose verified sources of supply, they are loyal to the particular brand, they look for product meeting their expectancies. I guess if amphetamine would have been less contaminated they would still use it. (KD2)

4.6.5 Undetectability and legal status of NPS

NPS are undetectable in during tests, which makes a difference for clients of substitution treatment. The legal status of NPS is important especially for marginalized drug users, but also for young people who want to avoid conflict with the law.

Our patients have been using more and more dangerous substances. From their point of view, the important thing is that NPS are legal so when a police get them, they will be released. (KD2)

4.6.6 Psychological factors

Being curious and a need of new experiences are believed to play a major role among experimental users whereas quality and accessibility are more important to hard users. The willingness to avoid legal consequences is common in both groups.

The wide variety of offered NPS make the consumers able to choose the type of drug according to their preferences, mood and expectations:

Stimulants users want to level up their psychophysical abilities – in schools or work. Users of empathogens look for increase of pleasure from the functioning in the group. Users of psychedelics want to experience the trip inside themselves. (MB1)

Moreover, substances that are not banned, easy accessible on the market are thought to be less risky:

One of the group are young, underage people who use NPS with a sense of security, a fashion for substances, just like e-cigarettes trend with its healthy image, not addicting, selling without any limitations, the same happened with NPS. (ŁW3)

4.6.7 Psychological factors - sexual arousal

NPS are linked to sexual behaviours as they are claimed to boost sexual arousal:

“The thing that has gain popularity is that sexual behaviours are strongly related to use of psychoactive substances. It used to be restricted for cocaine users as cocaine was expensive and not everyone could afford it. Then mephedrone appeared, very cheap and very exciting – its use was strongly linked with sex-

ual arousal, abreaction of sexual stress or deep excitement. These new substances that currently come into view are in a shadow of mephedrone, they stimulate and strongly boost arousal and sexual behaviours" (ŁW3)

4.6.8 Cultural factors

NPS and drugs in general are no longer a social taboo, they are present on the market, by some youth they are treated as other commodities:

There is no problem with getting it, they are discussed, I mean it is not a taboo any longer, psychoactive substances in general. (ŁW3)

4.6.9 Cultural factors – the role of media

According to interviewed professionals media played an important role in setting the agenda of NPS problem and can inspire excitement and curiosity among their audience:

The NPS legend is important: „ this is really dreadful”, media are driving the story. This is delivered in a way which creates the notion of the problem. Some people use NPS because they are made this way. (MB2)

5 Prevention, harm reduction and risk of NPS

5.1 Definition of prevention, focus of prevention of NPS use.

The NPS prevention is mostly regarded in terms of prevention measures employed in substance use policies, comprising the set of measures *implemented to limit the consumption of various psychoactive substances or to limit the risk of their use (ŁW1); and aiming at reduction or limiting drug consumption among various groups (ŁW2)*

These measures aim at society in general as well as individuals already using NPS. As NPS are regarded as another type of psychoactive drug, it has been claimed that NPS prevention should be embedded into the wider catalogue of measures used toward other psychoactive substances.

NPS prevention tools are considered as information and education, regardless of targeted population. Yet, the proposition of distinguishing the preventive communication between receiver groups was addressed in terms of its goals, e.g. reduction of consumption level or reduction of consequences. In general, there is a common belief that universal prevention measures are not useful in NPS prevention.

The role of harm reduction has been stressed as an important tool, in opposition to the general prevention which is inefficient:

Some people consider harm reduction as prevention as well, some just opposite (MB1);

I don't believe in prevention, I believe in harm reduction and infection disease prevention. The universal prevention is a huge misunderstanding. Making people be feared brings no benefits (MB2);

It is claimed that NPS prevention in Poland focus on *showing that these substances are very harmful and they kill. (ŁW2)*

Therefore a proposal was issued that measures of prevention of NPS risk should not adopt top-down communication based on fear. Prevention has to emphasise the real consequences of NPS in context of their contingency: the role of risk dynamics in constant alterations of NPS is of crucial importance as users are simply not able to know nothing about products they consume:

I have always consider prevention as a honest conversation, not fear. This is looking into behaviours, their sources and consequences. This is what I understand as prevention. (ŁW3);

I consider prevention as reliable education, not threatening or banning because it has been already proven in Polish prevention history that these things do not work – to put it politely. (ŁW3)

5.2 Prevention strategies for specific NPS

According to interviewed professional there are no prevention measures toward specific NPS in Poland:

There is no such thing. (MB2);

I have never heard about such thing. (ŁW1);

It is mainly information. There is no explicit prevention strategies toward specific NPS. Both in Poland and abroad (MB1)

Nevertheless, the one social campaign was identified as an example of prevention toward specific NPS. It was low-budget footage posted on YouTube featuring the head of the General Sanitary Inspection who played a role of sleazy drug dealer trying to sell kids NPS stuff called *Mocarz* (eng. Strongman). This particular NPS was acknowledged as a lethal drug after alarming reports in Polish media. The idea, form and content of the video was poor and many people found it to be unsuitable and ridiculous which resulted in a storm of mocking and sarcastic comments in the Polish internet.

5.3 Measures to reduce the risk of NPS use

5.3.1 NPS prevention measures regarding supply and demand reduction - focus, targets, strategy & tools

Measures to reduce the risk of NPS use in Poland comprise activities aiming at supply, demand and to some extent – also treatment. The institution that has the major prerogatives in the NPS prevention is the General Sanitary Inspection.

Supply measures play an important role in NPS prevention in Poland – selling and distributing NPS in Poland is banned. Since 2010 most of the operating smartshops were closed by the General Sanitary Inspection and currently there is almost no smartshops explicitly selling NPS. Yet from time to time some kind of NPS outlet is revealed and reported by media. The Sanitary Inspection monitor and manage the central register of poisonings, which is eventually used by the prosecutor office.

Possessing of NPS is not a subject of criminal law in Poland (contrary to production and vending), therefore the role of the police is to inform the General Sanitary Inspection about all NPS detected (substances which failed to be identified as a traditional drugs or those not included on the list of banned substances).

The demand reduction activities are being initiated by National Bureau of Drug Prevention, the General Sanitary Inspection, the police and NGOs. The most common activities are information campaigns, websites and brochures issued by the National Bureau of Drug Prevention (MB1):

There is the website dopalaczeinfo.pl, there are brochures being issued, discussion in schools and in drug treatment clinics. (ŁW2)

The National Bureau of Drug Prevention also run the information system comprising data on new psychoactive substance. Other prevention activities are employed by NGOs, comprising either websites (e.g. nowesubstancje.pl), leaflets and educational events. One of the NGOs made an effort to create a network with NPS webstores but it failed:

We wanted to just paste a link to our website, but this was rather hard because all these website officially sell stuff that is not designed for human consumption, so it is hard to put a link on the website selling amulets or washing powder. (ŁW1)

The General Sanitary Inspection does not implement prevention activities focused on NPS, rather their activities are oriented on promotion of healthy lifestyle. As the General Sanitary Inspection is intended for reduction of supply, it also runs the info line on NPS and distribute brochures:

We do not launch action because of particular NPS appearing on the market. We consider all NPS as equally dangerous, we do not divide them according to their harm potential. GSI promotes healthy lifestyle and NPS are not a part of it. (KD1)

The prevention is also to some extent implemented by the police:

The department of prevention in the capital police headquarter is running prevention activities in schools, also for teachers. (KD3)

As education implemented in school settings is common, teachers are educated on NPS risk by the Police and the General Sanitary Inspection. The educational and training offer is also addressed to prison officers (KD1) as NPS are also used among detainees.

All in all, the strategies, measures and tools of NPS prevention mentioned above are somehow constrained. The legislative ban introduced in 2010, increased the dynamics of NPS resulting in dozens of new substances being offered to clients in various settings. Therefore, prevention activities are still being challenged: *is not that we have created a kind of strategy and we implement it, it is rather that we adjust it to what we have. (ŁW1)*

5.3.2 Definition of risk within these measures

The definition of risk within NPS prevention measures consists of three major features: constitutional characteristics of NPS, risk amplification as a consequence of the policy intervention and to some extent - individual agency of users.

The risk can be attributed to constitutional features of NPS in terms of chemical and pharmacological effects as NPS composition and quality are often unknown and therefore they carry the unpredictability and risk. The NPS are claimed to be “more harmful as any other drug but even worse as they are new, unknown” (KD3). This contingency is a key element of NPS risk:

The risk is high as there are still new derivatives coming in. There are more unintended consequences. NPS users are guinea pigs, being subjects to testing of new substances. Doctors know better how to treat traditional drugs, they sometimes call us to ask what is in the product called "green fire". (MB3)

The issue of lesser and more predictable risk from using 'traditional' drugs was often mentioned in interviews:

Traditional drugs produced less harms, because we used to know what it is exactly, doctors used to know what to do. Now they have no idea what to do. The man himself does not know what substance he has consumed. In the context of health, new substances make more harm than traditional ones. (ŁW1)

The risk amplification occurs as legislative ban on NPS enhance the creation of new risks related to novel substances occurring on the market. Adding new items to the list of blacklisted substances fosters the creation of new structures having unknown side effects and therefore amplifying the risk. Therefore, interviewed professionals were eager to admit the failure of current policy:

I do not know if it's going into the right direction, this adding to the list... Maybe it would be enough to have some substances with a proven risk. (MB3)

The drugs on the list are examined whereas new substances are being relentlessly modified. They are very dangerous to the health of users. (KD3)

The NPS risk is defined in objective terms (constitutional, chemical features of NPS) and risk amplification (creation of new risks as a result of colonizing previous risks), yet professionals to some extent also pointed at the role of individual responsibility. However, the personal responsibility has no moral dimension but it has been viewed in more practical and technical context:

Users share in risk which includes the way of administering the substances for example when they inject instead of swallowing. Here the risk is on the user himself. (MB3)

According to professionals, the individual risk perception can be utilized as a preventive measure among users milieu:

"It is more individual risk and harms as it goes to NPS use. So the risk can be managed better as consumers share their knowledge and they have to care about their security by themselves. NPS are killers, they destroy the community.

5.3.3 Limits and benefits of these measures. When are these measures successful and when do they fail?

One from the major conclusions from the Polish data is that there are no benefits from employed measures. The list of failures and limits of prevention measures is quite long. The major obstacle in formulating successful prevention measures is the dynamics and fluctuations of substances:

The offer is changing so rapidly, that one cannot detect the cause-effect relationship. This is a casuistry. (MB1)

The limits of knowledge on NPS are considered a serious obstacle in prevention activities and outreach services in the Internet, as NPS users are believed to be genuine experts in this field, leaving prevention or public health professionals without any chances to succeed:

„These guys take different substance every day, take notes on how they work, they are chemists, so no one has even a small chance to challenge their competence. So the only thing we can do is to read and compare what they are posting and then discuss it in the expert group or with <our> users. (ŁW1)

The basis of prevention of NPS risk – the ban on particular new substances is considered as pointless as it only fuels the NPS market and fosters the creation of new, dangerous substances:

I got that second thoughts that when we recommend the new substances for the Ministry of Health or Chief Sanitary Inspector, to be included in the Act, we only fuel this market. There are still new ones coming into the picture, being worse and worse, more harmful (...) We ban sells and trading but they still come up. When there is a demand, there will always be a supply. (MB3)

In the opinion of professionals, the state cannot challenge the market dynamics: *Chemists are always prepared for new regulations. You can find everything in the web: what is about to be illegal, how to be prepare for that, what will be legal. The possibility to create NPS is infinite, there will be always new substitute. (...) We are always a step behind. They got new substances when we try to identify old ones. The wide stream comes from China. They are able to synthesize everything for a clients. This is a tilting at windmills (MB3)*

These substance change dynamically, those who sell NPS are creating miracles to produce substances that are not included in the list. (KD3)

The NPS market, once legal is now managed by black market operators ready to protect their vested interests with their assets:

These are mafias, vast market, huge money. We even receive samples of NPS from vendors, through the legal offices, as they want to safeguard themselves for the next novelization of law. (MB3)

Some prevention initiatives as famous video (mentioned above) posted on social media are viewed as a mockery, as the communication on NPS risk should be more reliable and deliver positive message to the audience:

The videos are made (laugh - MB). One have to speak about what people gain from substance use, not what they lose. (MB2)

Also the prevention programmes and initiatives in schools are a subject of mockery, as *pupils do not gain any knowledge from it, they feel that it is not related to them anyway, because no one will put NPS dealer in jail; that it's not any murky backyard, but private schools, private estates, that the user is not a low life one. Contrary – those from the low life know that mephedrone is a shit and it is better to take amphetamine. (ŁW3)*

Inadequacy of prevention measures, particular school education programmes and prevention initiatives aiming at pupils and young people was emphasized several times:

These programmes are silly. Kids are painting flyers against NPS: a rainbow and the information that sober life is a great fun. This kind of stuff. This is what I see in prevention. This is making people dumb. (ŁW1);

I have a feeling that all these prevention is a crap. I saw guys rapping on NPS in a gymnasium room or a guy who was throwing cardboard cubes and speaking and these cubes and his message made me thinking I would surely die there. (ŁW1)

All in all, the general prevention is viewed to be irrelevant or even an absurd:

A general prevention as those classes in the gym room in schools are a pure nonsense in this situation. (ŁW1)

The inadequacy and absurd also concerns old marginalized users as they cannot be approached with a common safety measure method that can be simply called 'don't do drugs':

"If I got an old junkie than I cannot speak to him that one shouldn't use drugs. This is how they are talked to in hospitals. A doctor tells that drugs are no good to the man who is an intravenous drug user for 35 years" (ŁW1)

Treatment and therapy of NPS users are claimed to be difficult and unsuccessful as methods of treatment are inadequate to NPS-related problems and NPS users hardly meet the basic therapy requirements:

NPS, metkathynone impede the contact with a person, you loose the opportunity of any influence on this people. (MB2)

NGO representatives claimed that there is lack of financial assets to create effective programmes, lack of treatment options. Moreover the focus of policy is placed more on drug free approach than on harm reduction. There is even a doubt whether such limited measures employed in Poland can be still called a harm reduction:

We have only needle and syringing exchange. (MB2)

Interviewed professionals also emphasized the problem of lack of social security services for those who are excluded from therapeutic services, especially marginalized users who often break abstinence.

The problematic role in prevention is played by media, which disseminate *exaggerated information on individual NPS cases like: he killed his grandmother after using NPS... Media should inform sensibly about threats. (MB3)*

5.3.4 Definition of a successful prevention measure

Successful prevention of NPS should be founded on positive message:

There is a need to speak about what people gain from using psychoactive substances, not what they lose. (MB2)

In the view of interviewed professional, prevention should focus on making people aware of NPS effects, inform on their properties, harms and also their addictive potential. Yet, it can viewed as an obstacle as

“speaking on drugs in a honest and informative manner, is often mislead with promotion of drug use” (ŁW3)

As an example of good quality initiative in drug prevention was considered a comic book “Narko” which *delivers reliable information on drugs without moralizing and without ignorance and in a suitable form. It makes me sick when someone assert that something is more dangerous, without any idea what this <something> really is. (ŁW3)*

Professional from law enforcement proposed the introduction of measures with a wide scope on restricted substances. As a result an individual user would have an access to knowledge on NPS risk and therefore he could make informed choices on consumption which reflects a common notion in advanced liberal society on the role of self control and personal responsibility in health risks:

All of them should be present on the list and there is no problem any longer. Everyone would know about their psychoactive effects and therefore should consider taking responsibility. (KD3)

Perhaps, the most important conclusion in the issue of successful prevention comes up when comparing NPS to traditional drugs. NPS are recognized to be more dangerous, more harmful, damaging, but above all they are viewed in the context of contingency: their effects are unknown, random, incalculable. The NPS are breaking the boundaries of rationality in both prevention and medical intervention, leading to the paradoxical ascertainment that traditional drugs are far more preferable from the professional point of view:

If you have to do drugs, don’t do the new ones, you better take those traditional instead (ŁW1);

You ask people using NPS: are you under stress? This is not cool. You feel good? I see you not. This is pointless, you better have a beer or a spliff instead of this shit (...) I try to convince them to use less harmful substances. Because my talk like <NPS kill> is like a teacher speaking to a truant pupil. (ŁW2)

The drug situation as well as drug scene has changed in recent years. Therefore, according to harm reduction principles, traditional drugs are ironically a better choice for consumers:

It seems that traditional drugs became a lesser evil in this confrontation on the moment. (ŁW1);

The rule of prevention, or rather the rule of harm reduction, that haven’t been around before, is that once you decide to dope, than use drugs, not new substances. This is true in terms of using amphetamine, cocaine, cannabis, opioids or even mephedrone as we know much more about them, we know how to proceed, what are effects of these substances. I think it is much more safe and I use this argument when someone has to or feels like he needs to use, so be it a drug then (...) It used to be inconceivable as the circumstances were different, but since it has changed all along, me and my co-workers had that feeling of absurd as we speak about less harms from drugs but it is a fact that drugs have lower harmfulness than NPS. (ŁW3)

5.3.5 Harm reduction activities by users themselves

Users activity in risk reduction is shaped during interactions and exchange of information which lead to development of a knowledge base. This base can be used to reduce the risk related to consumption of psychoactive substances:

“Our clients are seasoned ones. They reduce the risk through exchanging information, sticking to verified products, obtaining NPS in trusted spots. They develop certain habits to reduce the risk. It is far worse with young people who use uncertain information from the Internet” (KD2)

Exchanging experiences with NPS use in online forums is considered to be a common way to inform about risks in a peer-to-peer communication. Some websites (hyperreal.info) as well as webstores (e.g. kolekcjoner.nl) are believed to play a great role of a forum for users who can freely exchange their experiences with various NPS e.g. their quality, dosages and prices:

“there are thousands of posts about how to use NPS well (...) how not to overdose, how to protect the heart, how to avoid attacks of panic, etc. This is a risk reduction you can say. It has an impact on community (...) If someone is a hard player he can be warned (...) it is fairly a self-restraint mechanism. In my opinion it has more impact than official programmes” (ŁW3)

On the individual level, the harm reduction activities among users comprise of taking low dosages of particular substances, so called “immune testing”, the way users administer the substances and frequency of use during one occasion. When people start to limit their NPS consumption, they try to help themselves by *looking for a drug instead of NPS or alcohol abuse instead of NPS* (ŁW3)

5.4 Measures that should be taken to minimise the potential harms related to NPS

Measures of NPS policy that should be taken to minimise the potential harms can be divided into three sets of proposals: supply measures, demand measures and harm reduction measures.

5.4.1 Supply measures

The experts don't speak one voice in the case of supply measures. On the one hand there are propositions of employing more restrictive measures on NPS operators: *we need legislative changes, to prosecute with all its severity people who market NPS, because now there is not even a possibility to fine them* (KD1), as well as on all existing psychoactive drugs: *all substances should be included in the list. There must be no situation where they're differentiated. They are all psychoactive substances damaging health* (KD2)

A role of governmental institutions was stressed as activity of Consumer Protection Office which is expected to use its powers to protect consumers from being a victim of false and unfair marketing:

tell me who sells fertilizers to artificial flowers or soporific items without a smell? (MB3)

On the other hand, there is a doubt in the effectiveness of supply control measures:

Proposition of generic definitions defining a core but it could bring the risk of creating substances beyond the core which in result would not fall within the generic definition. Only prevention can help. (MB3)

Strict policy against NPS is assumed to be a failure. Not only in context of ban on NPS but also in a wider perspective of European drug policies. It is believed that the causes of NPS problem in Poland comparing to other countries with more liberal drug policy as Portugal, Czech Republic or the Netherlands, are the consequence of strict policy measures:

The popularity of NPS would decrease significantly when at least cannabis, at least its possession will not be chargeable as it is in Portugal (...) Before 2010 we had about 1400 smartshops in Poland, I think that it was more than in the whole Europe at once.. (ŁW1)

The harsh course of Polish NPS policy is considered as an experiment on users: *This is experiment of live organism. Drug law only enhance this situation, if you would have the opportunity to possess a given amount of a drug than switching to NPS wouldn't pay off. (MB2)*

Professionals claimed that the legalization of some psychoactive substances for individual purposes as well as adopting more liberal law towards users, including police activity may effectively tackle the NPS risk. This view can be considered not as a choice but a necessity rather as side effects of existing policy seem to amplify the risk of NPS in population of users. There is a common claim that further bans will not change anything but they make the situation even worse. Proposed decriminalization of certain substances, which effects are known and therefore the risk of their use can be controlled are relatively much more safe than new substances occurring on the market. However the idea of decriminalization has been also viewed in the context of its downsides and its limitations to solve the problem of NPS.

5.4.2 Demand measures

The proposals in the area of prevention include the creation of consistent, sound and reliable information on NPS risks, educational campaigns based on dialogue and partnerships with users and offering alternatives to NPS consumption:

To create meaningful prevention – I mean not focusing on substances, but on values, one have to speak truth about substances, not talking crap (ŁW1);

If someone want to use, he will use, this is the way it goes, but offering those people alternatives and giving them a choice might make them consider their actions. (ŁW2) The dialogue with users and taking into account their perspective is of crucial importance as this may serve as a source of actual, authentic and effective prevention in opposition to outdated and unreliable methods and approaches. As interviewed professionals put it *one cannot use the same measures toward users that were once used in the 90s (ŁW3)*

5.4.3 Harm reduction measures

Harm reduction approach was often claimed to be useful in NPS area. The future actions should comprise of information on safety measures in NPS consumption; both in terms of amount and type of consumed substance and its effects as well as distribution of harm reduction items as NPS tests, needle and syringe and other stuff e.g. pipes for sniffing.

6 Legal status of NPS

6.1 Role of legality and illegality of NPS in procurement and (motives for) use

Legal status of New Psychoactive Substances is a factor which has influence on Polish drug scene, as some substances become illegal and new ones appear to take their place. Such **dynamic of legal status** has

influence on producers, sellers and consumers. Users have no knowledge about legality or illegality of particular NPS and assume that those substances which they buy are legal because they are available.

Legal status is a factor that largely influencing drug scene. The withdrawn substance is replaced by a new one. Increased dynamic has an impact on producers, retailers and consumers. (MB 1)

Young people believe that something that is available in the shop, is probably safe. As if it was not safe, it would have been banned. (ŁW 3)

In the opinion of expert, the legality of NPS is a major reason of choosing them by users, regardless of their harmfulness. Especially, it becomes important in situation of detention and search by the police.

NPS or substitute means, on the one hand are legal, and on the other hand when they appear on the list of illegal substances in the Act of on Counteracting Drug Addiction they become drugs. For users it is important that the substance is legal because when the police stop them with NPS they will be released. (KD 2)

Users would not be arrested when they possess low amount of substance for their own use, because police cannot conduct toxicology tests at the moment of detention as they are not equipped with appropriate tools. They cannot confirm if a substance is legal or not. Even if substance is illegal the detention does not result in the entry to the criminal file or the arrest. Placing the substance on the market is treated more severely:

Even if the substance is illegal, in practice it is impossible to convict user who has 1 gram of the substance because no one test it, because how to do it? This is what people are attracted to it. I rather meet with such thinking that since these substances are legal, the police do not put me in the arrest for the fact that I smoke it by myself. Perhaps it is even shit, but at least the biggest problem associated with drug use, which is a legal problem falls off. (ŁW 1)

Criminalization of particular NPS influences on their availability making their purchase difficult and results in disappearing from the market. Users have no chance to choose more preferable and tested substances, because they change very often.

Legal status has an impact that there is a risk of creation new substances that are more harmful than the old ones. In general, people cannot manage to get used to the substance, and suddenly it disappears and they take a new one, which results in some kind of chaos of neurotransmitters in their brains. Consumer has a favourite substance and suddenly they criminalize it. And then so what? Potentially they may resign, but not everyone are successful and some reach for a new substance, and a replacement is either worse or more toxic, on one knows exactly what it is. (ŁW 2)

6.2 Strategies to avoid detection or arrest.

Many NPS which are present on the market are legal and users do not need to be afraid of detention. But those substances which have illegal status are threatened in the same way as traditional drugs, which possession is criminalized. Users engage in various behaviours to avoid detection of illegal New Psychoactive Substances. But in the opinion of professionals, possessing low amount of substance for own use is generally not associated with any punishment. To avoid unpleasantness in dealing with law enforcement, users claim that purchased NPS are not for consumption but are collectibles:

Users advise to each other – in the case of contacts with the police – to tell that it is not for consumption but is purchased, eg. as a fertilizer or collectibles. (MB 3)

Users and sellers are wary of carrying the transactions in stationary shops, verifying the person who is buyer or dealer. In case of doubt or suspicion that a buyer or seller is from the police they destroy NPS.

You have to be privy, to such a degree, that if they open the window and will see someone suspicious, for example from the police or officials from State Sanitary Inspection, they could destroy NPS before opening the door. This environment begins to be hermetic because of legal responsibility (KD 3)

If NPS are ordered via Internet, users are trying to protect themselves in case of problems with the receipt of delivery, for example using secure transaction procedure, safe package and receiving, poste restante, post-boxes managed by InPost.

Users can use different strategies. There is no sanctions for possessing NPS - these uncontrolled by law. In turn, for controlled are the same sanctions as in the case of traditional drugs, so strategies are similar, eg. secure transaction procedure, safe package (MB 1)

6.3 Necessity of legislative changes (and explanations)

Experts are aware that there is a necessity of legislative changes in national drug policy, but postulated changes are focused not only on NPS but on drugs as well. In their opinion, Polish drug law is ineffective and should be based on legislative experiences of other European countries which are dealing with problem more effectively. Legislative changes should be preceded by an analysis of the consequences that may result.

Changes are necessary but the direction of these changes requires discussion. Current legislation in the collision with practical reality does not work. It may be issue of administrative actions, etc. Recently, there is a lot of changes in the EU. We do not need a legal revolution, we need to refer to the experiences of other countries, eg. so-called Blanket Ban in the UK. All legislative changes should include a complete analysis of the consequences in the area of public health, illegal market - eg. descent into the underworld, something like SWAT analysis. (MB 1)

Some experts' recommendations of changes in Polish drug policy are related to the liberalization of law. Experts recommended legalization, or at least decriminalization of cannabis possession as well as decriminalization of possession on the personal use other psychoactive substances. The amount of the substance for the own use should be based on the table of limited values.

I am convinced that the popularity of NPS would definitely decrease when the possession of marijuana and hashish would not be criminalized, as for example, in Portugal. (LW 1)

Experts recommended also decriminalization of possession of New Psychoactive Substances which would result in the improvement of quality of NPS and knowledge about their composition. Users would know what they use and what the effects of use are.

I'm not saying that decriminalization is the salvation and solve the whole problem. But it makes you think that you can buy something which is decriminalized at some point of sale and you know what you buy. I buy a substance which is described, with the effects that I want or that I would like it to be, and do not

order from the Internet something that I do not know what it is, because I have no such need. Devastating for users is that they do not know what they are buying. Certainly, they do not buy what they would want to buy.(ŁW 3)

On the other hand, experts argued for the tightening of the law. Changes, which are necessary, should include the design of new, generic definition of NPS which would facilitate the criminalization of particular substances, and improve their introduction on the list of illegal substances in the Act on Counteracting Drug Addiction. The law should focus on the prosecution of producers and sellers and withdraw from the prosecution of users. In addition, the law should introduce the legal basis which enhance the execution of sentenced financial penalties:

Legislative changes are needed, that would allow to prosecute people introducing NPS on the market, because at the moment there is not even the possibility to execute sentenced financial penalties. Users should not bear the consequences. (KD1)

7 Current drug Policy

The appearance of New Psychoactive Substances on the market imposed the change of drug prevention strategies and treatment programmes. In contrast it did not affect too much work of the police as since the substances are illegal, they treat them in the same way as drugs. The appearing of NPS influenced the way of work of professionals dealing with NPS problem, mainly increasing the number of their obligations.

Identification of new substances it is for us more work, more challenges. We need to have more and more specialized equipment but we are always behind them (producers – authors). They already have new substances when we have identified those previous. (MB 3)

Experts emphasized the need for training of various professional groups, providing knowledge to those who might have contact with NPS in their everyday work, eg. teachers, social workers, therapists.

At our local field, Malopolska, there is a lot of prevention programs dealing with New Psychoactive Substances. Mostly, we train specialists or teachers, therapists, social workers, because for them these knowledge is more necessary than for the average member of the society who might reach for something or not.(LW 1)

Individuals who works in the field of prevention claimed that the appearance of NPS forced change in implemented prevention strategies and shifted the focus of actions from substances to users and their values.

Board of MONAR from Małopolska decided to change the prevention strategies to that engage the values not the substance. It is somewhat logical (ŁW 1)

8 Summary

Description of respondents and work fields

In total 9 interviews were conducted, including 3 women and 6 men. The average age of our respondents was 39 and average of professional experience -11 years.

Respondents in the study were selected to ensure the diverse perspective of people representing various professions related to NPS. The sample consisted of a police officer, governmental agencies officials, therapists, representatives of non-governmental organizations, a pharmacist and a lawyer. They represented a variety of areas related to NPS: prevention, treatment and harm reduction, legal assistance, reduction of supply, toxicology, drug policy.

Definition of NPS

NPS are defined in opposition to traditional drugs as leading to greater harm, which in addition progress much faster. Their use is more risky because of unknown composition. Attention was paid on the inability to define NPS as it is impossible to create a closed register of NPS because of emergence of new substances.

According to respondents the concept of new psychoactive substances includes both substances in the register attached to the Act but also those substances that potentially can be registered in the future. Attention was drawn to the definitional problems associated with the unclear status of the substances, which has been present for many years on the market and is quite well recognized, such as mephedrone. The question is whether this is already a traditional drug, or still NPS.

NPS are defined as a relatively new phenomenon without cultural contexts, meaning and symbolic value, typical for traditional drugs. There is no community around NPS as they are treated instrumentally, without any social, political or moral consideration, contrary to traditional drugs that used to be considered as a manifestation of counter culture.

It has also been recalled legal definition of NPS which employs the concept of substitute means.

Description of NPS market

In 2010, after the closing of stationary shops most of the people continued to sell NPS, but it is a disguised sale "under -the -counter", to the initiated customers. NPS are sold in stores or places whose names do not indicate the trade of NPS, for example sex shops, hot spots and other.

Access to NPS through online stores is rated as easy and comfortable. Purchases are often made through Darknet. Shopping can be done discreetly, anonymously, quickly. The order is received from an anonymous reception points of parcels. According to professionals, clients of online shops are mainly those who experiment with various substances, for example hallucinogens. They procure larger quantities of the substance, often not only for own use.

The Internet is also used by problem drug users. They want to have access to greater variety of NPS and also are interested in discussions on forums. The purchase of NPS online allows to buy at lower prices comparing to those offered in stationary shops and by private dealers.

The offer of stationary and on-line stores constitutes mostly stimulants and herbal mixtures, with less availability of psychedelics. It was pointed out that the market is characterized by instability of offer. The users receive new products they do not know because those previously tested by them are disappearing from the market. In some cities NPS replaced drugs on the market.

The detection of New Psychoactive Substances is determined by the activity of the police: actions against criminal groups, against producers and sellers of traditional drugs, detentions of users.

Users, patterns, motives of NPS use

Most of the professionals focus on marginalized users as NPS are considered to play a major role among active intravenous users and those on methadone treatment programmes. It is reported that due to NPS, intravenous drug use is increasing, affecting also young people. Socially integrated NPS users are considered as party-goers who rather use NPS incidentally.

There is a lack of knowledge on patterns and the frequency of use among professionals. Patterns of use are related to the type of NPS, e.g. sniffing or injecting cathinones. The feature of NPS that influence the patterns of consumption is a price and short time of their effects which makes injecting a more efficient form of use.

Synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones dominate and constantly evolve due to changes in legislation. In fact, the factual status of particular substance is often unknown; substance names and product brands are meaningless as they have lost their link to the denoted substance.

Availability and affordability were emphasised to be most important feature of NPS popularity in general. NPS have displaced traditional drugs because of price but also due to shortages in supply and quality of traditional drugs. Also internet play an essential role in access to NPS for both integrated and marginalized users providing easy, confidential, and anonymous access to vast offer of products. Psychological motives of NPS use include curiosity, need for new experiences and willingness to avoid legal consequences as well as need for sexual stimulation. Psychoactive substances are not a social taboo any longer, use of NPS is aimed at particular purpose, without wider cultural or social context.

NPS are obtained via personal contact and from the internet. Substances are also prepared by users themselves, with research chemicals and other compounds as OTC medicines containing pseudoephedrine, which may result in permanent damages to the user's health.

NPS are claimed to pose serious health risk due to their high toxicity and unknown chemical status. Their use relatively early and inevitably leads to severe degradation of health, causing several somatic and mental disorders including dysfunction of the respiratory and circulatory system, poisonings, neurological disorders, infections of HIV and HCV, psychoses and deaths. The problem of NPS dependence was at the same time confirmed and neglected. NPS users are characterized by unpredictable, aggressive or bizarre behaviours while problem users are described in context of several social problems and social marginalization.

Prevention, harm reduction and risk of NPS

The NPS prevention is mostly regarded as a set of measures implemented to limit the consumption of various psychoactive substances. It has been claimed that NPS prevention should be embedded into the

wider catalogue of measures toward other substances as well as specific measures should be adopted. There is a common belief that universal prevention measures should not be used in NPS prevention. It is claimed that prevention and education campaigns are often based on a fear. Some campaigns have been considered as anti-campaigns because of their poor design and unreliability. The role of harm reduction has been stressed as important part of prevention.

Measures to reduce the risk of NPS use in Poland comprise of activities aiming at supply, demand and to some extent – also treatment. The institution that has the major prerogatives in the NPS prevention is the General Sanitary Inspection. Since possession of NPS is not a subject of criminal law in Poland (contrary to production and vending), therefore the role of the police is limited. The demand reduction activities are being initiated by National Bureau of Drug Prevention, the General Sanitary Inspection, the police and NGOs.

According to interviewed professionals the major obstacle in formulating successful prevention measures is the dynamic and fluctuations of substances and the limits of knowledge on NPS among professionals. They claim there are no benefits from employed measures, as the ban on NPS fuels the NPS market and fosters the creation of new, dangerous substances. The state cannot challenge the market dynamics: as the possibility to create NPS is infinite, the current policy measures have been called „a tilting at wind-mills“. Also prevention measures are viewed to be irrelevant and inadequate, particular school education programmes and prevention initiatives aiming at young people.

The definition of risk within NPS prevention consists of constitutional features of NPS, risk amplification as a consequence of the policy intervention and the to some extent - individual agency of users. The risk attributed to constitutional features relate to often unknown chemical and pharmacological effects of NPS. Risk amplification process occur because adding new items to the list of banned substances fosters the creation of new structures with unpredictable side effects. The role of individual responsibility rather marginalized and attributed to users who make choices for their own sense of safety. Yet, NPS users reduce the NPS-related risk through exchanging information and developing certain safety habits to reduce the hazardous health effects of NPS use as so called “immune testing”.

Measures proposed to effectively tackle NPS risk comprise of supply, demand and harm reduction instruments. The experts are divided in the case of supply measures: there are propositions of employing more restrictive measures on NPS as well as there is a doubt in the effectiveness of strict supply control measures because new NPS types still come up. Moreover, there are opinions that NPS consumption would decrease significantly when possession of some psychoactive substances (e.g. cannabis), considered to be relatively much more safe than new substances, become legal. According to interviewed professionals, the drug scene has changed noticeably in recent years bringing the popularity of NPS viewed as more dangerous, random, incalculable. Therefore, in the context of public health, traditional drugs are considered as a better choice for consumers.

Legal Status of NPS

According to experts, the status of NPS, associated with their legality and illegality, shapes the Polish drug scene. When some substances are criminalized in their place appear new which affect the dynamics of the market. This causes confusion because users do not know which substances are legal and which are not. The legality of the substances is one of the main reasons to use NPS. This is particularly important in

contacts with the police, who very rarely detain users with small quantities of substance for personal use. Police have no tests to check whether the NPS is legal or has already been made illegal, and sending such small doses of substance to a toxicology analysis is not profitable. In the result, users are released without suffering any consequences. Dealers, who introducing NPS on the market, are treated more restrictive. According to the police, more important motive of use New Psychoactive Substances than legality is their price and wide availability.

Frequent changes of legal status of NPS makes that substances which have already grounded position on the market and the consequences of their use are known disappear and appear new, unknown substances. Many of NPS which are on the market are legal substances and users do not have to fear that their possession is threatened by legal consequences. However, substances that are illegal police treat in the same way as drugs. Users adopt different strategies to avoid annoying consequences, but according to experts, people with a small amount of substances for personal use have nothing to fear. Generally users hide NPS in different parts of clothing, in contacts with the police they claimed that disclosed substances are not suitable for consumption, throw away or destroy them. For counteract detection of the consignment ordered via Internet by the police, they use secured transaction, package, receive, order a post office box.

Current drug policy

Experts are aware of the necessity of changes in the Polish policy towards NPS, but also against drugs. However, they do not speak with one voice on this. According to some opinions, policy in this field is inefficient and changes should be based on the experiences of western countries. The effects of that change must be analyzed. According to respondents changes must be entered into current drug policy, particularly the issue of legalization or decriminalization of marijuana was raised. Marijuana may be an alternative to the use of NPS. According to the experts, if marijuana will be legalized or decriminalized users will reach for it rather than for NPS. Experts also suggest decriminalization of NPS because the current drug policy has not brought results.

Some see the need to create a generic definition of NPS, focused on the core of the substance, consequent outlawing appearing substances, focusing on the prosecution of producers and retailers, not users as well as on creating a legal basis which allow on execution sentenced financial penalties.

The appearance of NPS affected work of professionals and prevention strategies employed. The appearing of NPS influenced the way of work of professionals dealing with NPS problem, mainly increasing the number of their obligations. Also prevention strategies have been changed and moved the way of interactions and attention from substance on user and their values.