Findings on the use and users of herbal incense/ synthetic cannabinoids

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Frankfurt Spice study (pilot/ follow-up)  
(funded by the City of Frankfurt and the German Ministry of Health)

- carried out in mid-2009 (about ½ year after the German media hype)
- qualitative interviews with experts (headshop staff) and users
- media hype resulted in skyrocketing demand by mainly experimental users
- regular use of Spice mainly among young adults
- main motives for regular use:
  - non-detectability (traffic, treatment),
  - legality,
  - strong psychoactive effects
Legal status of synthetic cannabinoids in Europe

Already illegal:
- 1-5 substances
- 6-9 substances
- 10-19 substances
- 20-24 substances

Synth. cannabinoids not under legal control

No information

Substantial Spice media hype took place

Substances from this list:
- JWH-007
- JWH-015
- JWH-018
- JWH-019
- JWH-022
- JWH-073
- JWH-081
- JWH-098
- JWH-122
- JWH-147
- JWH-182
- JWH-200
- JWH-203
- JWH-210
- JWH-250
- JWH-251
- JWH-387
- JWH-398
- JWH-412
- CP 47,497 (& hom.)
- CP55,940
- CRA-13
- HU-210
- AM-694
- AM-2201
- MAM-2201
- WIN55,212-2
- RCS-4
Representative data on the use of Spice products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th><strong>Adult population</strong></th>
<th><strong>Young adults</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany (2009)</td>
<td>(18-64 years) LTP 0.8%, LYP 0.4%</td>
<td>(18-24 years) LTP 2.5%, LYP 1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England &amp; Wales (2010)</td>
<td>(16-54 years) LYP 0.2%</td>
<td>(16-24 years) LYP 0.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(18-20 years, male) LTP 1.4%, LYP 0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other representative data on legal highs use

Poland, adult population (15-75), 2009:
LTP: 6%, LYP: 5%, LMP: 4%
("Dopalacze"/ "legal highs")
Local representative data on Spice products

Frankfurt: school survey/ 15-18-y-o
("Spice"/ "herbal incense")

Vienna: general population
(over 15 y-o), 2011:

lifetime prevalence ("herbal incense such as Spice, Lava Red etc."): 3%

Hamburg: school survey (15-18-y-o), 2009:

“Spice“: LTP: 6%, LMP: 1%

Other legal highs: LTP max. 2% (2011)
Non-representative surveys on Spice products and/or other legal highs

Party/nightclub scenes (UK, Frankfurt):
Some degree of lifetime prevalence, but hardly any use in nightlife settings
And: relatively low in comparison to mephedrone and some other NPS (particularly in the UK)

Generally, the use of „party pills“, „bath salt“ or other party drugs-like NPS seems to outweigh synthetic cannabis use in several countries, while, e.g., in Germany, cannabinoids are much more prevalent
Online surveys on the use of new synthetic drugs/ legal highs in Germany and Switzerland: methods and sample

addressed to persons with experience in legal highs use, via internet resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German Ministry of Health</th>
<th>Swiss Federal Health Office</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June-September 2011</td>
<td>February-April 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>n = 860</td>
<td>n = 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(completed questionnaire and legal highs lifetime prevalence)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89% male</td>
<td>79% male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age $\varnothing = 24,2$ y.</td>
<td>age $\varnothing = 25,5$ y.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Online surveys: prevalence (%)
German online survey – prevalence

• Lifetime prevalence illicit drugs (all respondents): 99%; high rates of current use

• Current Spice users show lower rates of illicit drug use than other respondents, but, still, a majority of them are also current illicit drugs users

→ There are much less “pure” herbal incense users than expected
German online survey – most important motivations for use (only current users of Spice products, %)

- Legal availability: 77%
- Intoxication: 76%
- Recreation/relaxation: 75%
- Curiosity: 52%
- Non-detectability: 51%
- Variety/diversion: 43%
- (temporary) non-availability of other drugs: 32%
Novel psychoactive substances/ „Legal Highs“: types of users

- experimental/ occasional users
- substitutors
- potheads 2.0
- specialist psychonauts (adventurous multiple drug users)
- omnivores (intensive multiple drug users)
Online survey – regional features

- Users from Bavaria were heavily overrepresented
- among those, the shares for current and frequent herbal incense users were significantly higher
  → Bavaria is known for its repressive approach in drug policy
- **availability** as a motive for legal highs use ranks higher than elsewhere among herbal incense users
Spice use and drug policy

- **repressive drug policy** seems to encourage the use of legal highs as ‘substitute’ or ‘supplemental’ drugs.

- on the other hand, in countries with **easier availability** of **cannabis** products (e.g., NL or ESP), synthetic cannabinoids hardly play any role.
Thank you very much for your attention!