

KURZBERICHT

Thema title	"Spice, Smoke, Sence & Co. – Smoking Mixtures Containing Cannabinoids: Consumption and Motivation for Consumption against the Backdrop of Changing Laws"
Schlüsselbegriffe key words	Drugs, cannabis, herbs, consumers, consumption motives, smoking, mixtures, spice
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project description, objectives

This study examines the consumption of 'Spice' and other so-called smoking mixtures as well as consumers of such products. These products, which were widely discussed in the media in 2008, consist of herbs enhanced with synthetic substances that mimic the effects of THC, the active substance in cannabis. The Federal Ministry of Health included various components of these products under the substances regulated by the Act to Regulate the Traffic in Narcotics (Ger. abbr. = BtmG) in early 2009 and early 2010; subsequently, new products containing substances that were still legal were introduced onto the market.

After initial information on the consumers of 'Spice' products having been provided by an externally financed pilot study (Werse/Müller 2009), one of the goals of this study was to research the general prevalence of smoking mixtures among adolescents and changes therein before and after the initial regulation under the BtmG. Another goal was to focus on repeat and regular consumers: what experience have they had with illegal drugs; what other characteristics can be identified as applying to this group as a whole? What are the essential motivations for consumption (narcotic effect, legal considerations, other)? Do 'Spice' products possibly motivate entirely new groups of users to use psychoactive substances? In addition, the survey provided insights into consumers' subjective experience with smoking mixtures as well as information concerning consumers' opinions regarding the products and the conditions under which they are consumed.

Durchführung, Methodik, Gender Mainstreaming

implementation, methodology, gender mainstreaming

Module 1: Secondary analysis of a representative survey of secondary school pupils

The quantitative segment of this study consists of a secondary analysis of data from a local survey of secondary school pupils in Frankfurt am Main (Werse et al. 2009). It provides us with a short panel study of a representative sample: the prevalence of the consumption of 'Spice' and other smoking mixtures as well as the motivation for their use within a sample of adolescents in a major German city before and after prohibition (surveys in November/ December of 2008 and 2009). The questionnaire used in 2008 already included questions concerning the prevalence of the consumption of 'Spice' products. This section of the questionnaire was augmented in 2009 by questions concerning the prevalence of other smoking mixtures and the motivation for their consumption. In each case the sample studied was a representative segment

of the population of 15- to 18-year-old secondary school pupils in Frankfurt am Main. The (weighted) size of the sample was 1,029 (15- to 18-year-olds/ target group) in 2008 and 1,157 in 2009. The anonymous survey was conducted by using a questionnaire filled out by the respondents within class groups.

Module 2: Interviews with consumers

Most of the information was gained from interviews with subjects who had extensive experience with smoking mixtures. This qualitative survey focused on current - at least on formerly regular - consumers of smoking mixtures, defined by a minimum criterion of ten consumption situations. Contact was primarily established by means of snowball sampling, a recruitment method that has proved useful in studies on the consumption of illegal drugs due to the personal character of the contact on which it is based. In addition, appeals were published on a number of websites and a notice was posted at a drug counselling centre. The type of interview used corresponds in its basic characteristics with the qualitative research method known as a focussed interview, whereby the focus was on the consumption of 'Spice' products: experience, motives, any connection to the consumption of other drugs, and opinions. Most of the interview was conducted in a semi-open form on the basis of a guideline; in addition there was a short questionnaire. The sample consisted of 25 subjects.

Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed by means of common statistical procedures with the aid of computers, the qualitative data was coded and interpreted according to the model of qualitative content analysis.

Gender Mainstreaming

Due to the small sub-samples of female consumers and experienced consumers it was not possible to implement a systematic gender-specific assessment of the collected data. As is the case with the consumption of illegal drugs on the whole, and particularly the regular consumption of cannabis products, the use of smoking mixtures seems to be a "male preserve" to a very large degree.

Ergebnisse, Schlussfolgerungen

results, conclusions

Prevalence of smoking mixtures among adolescents

In 2009, a total of 7% of the 15- to 18-year-olds in Frankfurt had had experience with smoking mixtures. While there was little change in this figure in comparison to 2008, the level of current consumption (30-day prevalence) declined from 3 % to 1 %; repeated use represents an exception. Secondary school pupils with experience in the consumption of 'Spice' are, for the most part, experienced cannabis consumers and generally exhibit a high degree of affinity to legal and illegal drugs. Only a very small number of adolescents without previous experience with illegal drugs have tried 'Spice' products. In light of the decrease in current consumption, there is evidence that prohibition and the nearly complete cessation of media coverage have had an influence on the proliferation of smoking mixtures. Despite a certain degree of consumption experience, adolescents do not seem to be the main 'target group' for these products, but instead younger to middle-aged adults.

Characteristics of regular consumers and subjective experience

Repeat (adult) consumers of smoking mixtures have, for the most part, extensive experience with cannabis and have also often at least tried, or intermittently also regularly used, various other drugs. Generally these are socially integrated subjects; a certain segment of the clientele is also recruited from members of the 'open' scene of 'hard' drug consumers with problematic consumption patterns. As was to be expected, the effects of the smoking mixtures were usually described as similar to those of cannabis. It is, in part, possible to determine differences in the quality of the effects and the intensity of different sorts of 'Spice' products, however in part, these are only differences in individual perceptions. The after effects are also described as similar to those of cannabis, although a certain segment of those interviewed described them as more serious.

Motivation for consumption

In addition to the narcotic effects, legal aspects also played a primary role in relation to the motives for consumption. These included concrete experience with drug testing or, for diverse reasons, heightened anxiety regarding drug tests, which played a central role, whereby road checks and the danger of losing a driving licence were most frequently cited. A considerable number of the consumers interviewed had already had to submit to drug tests while driving, which resulted in some of them being required to participate in a Medical-Psychological Assessment process. Some of the interviewees who formerly, or currently, had problems with opiate use, also cited drug screenings within the context of therapies and substitution as a motive for consumption. The relatively easy and legal access is also cited as a reason for use. Without such specific motives, the use of smoking mixtures apparently does not represent an alternative for most experienced cannabis consumers, particularly since the taste is generally assessed as a negative factor and the price is comparatively high.

Information, sources, opinions

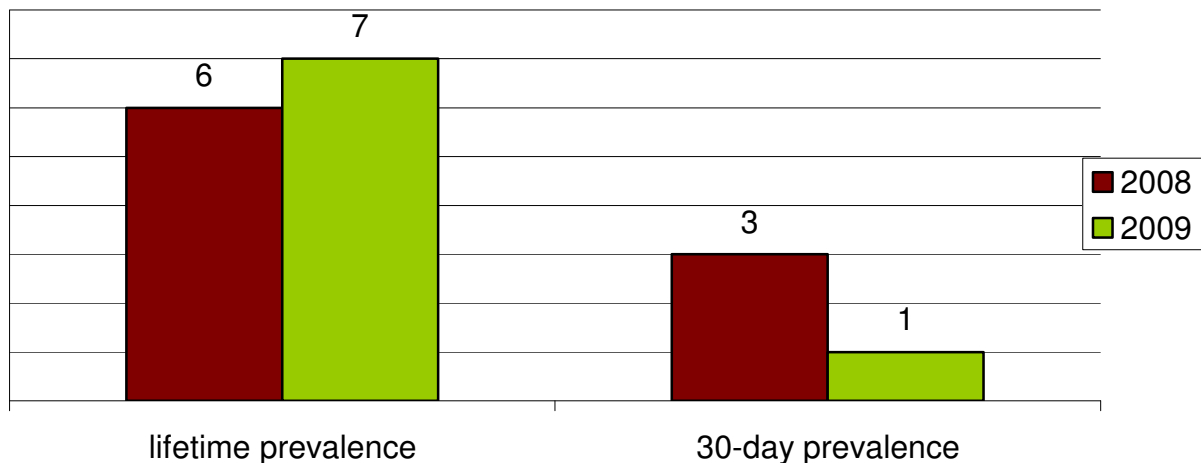
While some of the regular, particularly the more frequent, users procured information regarding new products, their contents, and their effects via Internet forums, many other repeat consumers knew comparatively little about the products they consumed. Those who consumed the products rarely were particularly often unaware of the name of the substances that they had been given by acquaintances. Otherwise, headshops along with Internet dealers were the most common sources of 'Spice' products. The synthetic active substances, which have for the most part never been studied, are viewed by some of those interviewed very critically, while many more expressed indifferent or positive opinions of them, often with the argument that they at least occasionally used other synthetic drugs. A majority of the consumers was opposed to a prohibition of 'Spice' products, and with even greater frequency the 'substitute drug', smoking mixtures, is cited as reason to call for a legalisation of the 'original' drug, cannabis.

Conclusions

So-called smoking mixtures were apparently only infrequently able to address an entirely new clientele for smokable psychotactive substances; in addition to consumption for the sake of experimentation motivated by curiosity on the part of more or less experienced drug consumers, 'Spice' products are mainly used as an immediate, non-detectible substitute for cannabis. While consumption for the sake of experimentation was apparently reduced by prohibition and the decline in media presence, this is true to a far lesser degree - if at all - for those who display a strong motivation for consumption (above all habitual cannabis consumption in connection with driving restrictions). Evidence of a partially widespread proliferation of the products in abstinence-associated drug therapies may be an indication of a considerable problem within the corresponding institutions. People whose motives for consumption were based primarily on concerns regarding traffic violations appear to be mainly found in rural regions where road checks are more frequent. Overall there is an indication that, from a quantitative standpoint, e.g. in comparison to cannabis consumption, smoking mixtures only play a subordinate role. For the small group with pronounced (above all legal) motives for consumption, on the other hand, the topic will presumably remain current for as long as these products are available.

Abbildungen, illustrations

Prevalence of 'Spice' and other 'herbal incense' among 15- to 18-year-olds in Frankfurt



Tabellen, tables

Table 1: Some basic data and prevalence rates for legal and illegal drugs among 15- to 18-year-olds who have had experience with the consumption of smoking mixtures in comparison to other interview partners (% , 2009)

	Smoking mixtures lifetime prevalence		Sig.
	yes	no	
Sex: male	63	48	*
Days missed previous month	71	57	*
Tabacco lifetime prevalence	98	73	***
Tabacco 30-day-prevalence	81	35	***
Tabacco: more than 5 cigarettes per day	41	12	***
Alcohol 30-day-prevalence	90	68	***
Alcohol >10 times in the last 30 days	36	12	***
Inibriation 30-day prevalence	77	46	***
Cannabis lifetime-prevalence	95	31	***
Cannabis 30-day-prevalence	58	9	***
Cannabis > 10 times in the last 30 days	25	2	***
'Hard drugs' lifetime prevalence ^a	52	6	***
'Hard drugs' 30-day prevalence	14	1	***

^a at least one of the following substances: amphetamine, ecstasy, cocaine, LSD, psychoactive mushrooms, crack heroin, GHB and methamphetamine

Table 2: Lifetime- and 30-day prevalence of diverse illegal drugs and substitute substances among the consumers interviewed (absolute numbers and percentages)

	Lifetime prevalence		30-day prevalence	
	N	%	N	%
Cannabis	25	100	17	68
At least one illegal drug besides cannabis ('hard drugs') ^a	21	84	9	36
Amphetamine/ Speed	17	68	5	20
Cocaine	17	68	4	16
Ecstasy	17	68	3	12
Psychoactive mushrooms	16	64	0	0
LSD	12	48	2	8
Heroin	9	36	3	12
GHB or GBL/ "liquid ecstasy"	7	28	0	0
Methamphetamine/ Crystal	6	24	2	8
Crack	3	12	2	8
Methadon or L-Polamidon	3	12	1	4

^a Amphetamine, cocaine, ecstasy, psychoactive mushrooms, LSD, heroin, GHB, methamphetamine or crack

Umsetzung
realization

Literatur
references

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