

Expert opinion on the Ph.D. Thesis

Title of Thesis: Individual, social and cultural factors shaping the use of amphetamine-type stimulants in Europe

The author of the Thesis: Marcus-Sebastian Martens

Field of study: Addictology

Author of the Expert review: PhDr. Josef Radimecky, Ph.D., MSc.

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Ph.D. Thesis Review

The main objective of the thesis is to complement and expand current knowledge about the different patterns of ATS use and the full range of bio-psycho-social factors that may influence them. The main reason is - as also the author states - the existing lack of empirical data about ways of using stimulants and its dynamic. The author of the thesis managed to achieve this goal in the presented research and findings from it.

It is however fair to mention, that the thesis does not map the patterns of stimulant use and the factors that influence it throughout the Europe, as the title states, but in five European countries where the prevalence of ATS use is very likely higher than in other European countries. Therefore, the more appropriate title of the thesis probably could be as follows: "Individual, social and cultural factors shaping the use of amphetamine-type stimulants in five European countries".

The undisputed strength of the thesis is robust integrated research combining findings from qualitative and quantitative research. In the first, 279 individuals were interviewed, whereas in the latter, 1656 respondents from five European countries were involved. In both parts of the research a wide and comprehensive range of standardized research tools was used, corresponding to the author's effort to map diverse individual, social and cultural factors that may influence the use of ATS, as well as resistance to their use. Thanks to this approach, the author offers a wide range of evidence-based findings about the initiation, continuation, increase or decrease of the use of the ATS until its potential termination, including the entire spectrum of influences that can play a significant role in different phases of ATS use.

In doing so, the author offers clinicians a unique and comprehensive data set on the phenomenon of ATS use and inspiration for preventive, therapeutic, and harm reduction services. This places this thesis in the category of works that bring completely new, to such an extent, hitherto lacking scientific knowledge about different patterns of ATS use and the factors that influence them. However, the author emphasizes that research efforts to understand stimulant use must continue.

However, the question arises as to whether it would not be more appropriate for the chosen research to narrow down the relatively broad and diverse spectrum of amphetamine stimulants. This group of substances includes, in addition to the often risky used amphetamines and methamphetamine, also Methylphenidate (a drug prescribed for ADHD) or MDMA as a drug typical of dance parties, as well as synthetic cathinones - derivatives of the Khat plant. The diversity of these substances as well as the typical context of their use may

have contributed to the potential distortion of presented research findings. This point seems to be good for a possible thesis defense question.

It seems that no weak point can be found in the thesis in terms of the used methodology, procedures, results or interpretation of the obtained data. Nevertheless, the author's recommendation that therapy forms specifically designed for ATS users should be created in the current system of addiction services seems to me to be debatable. This conclusion of his leads me to propose another question for the defense of the thesis.

The conclusion of the evaluation is to state that the assessed thesis shows a high degree of the author's creative scientific work, innovation, and indisputable contribution to the field of addictology. Thus, the thesis proves the author's prerequisites for independent creative scientific work and for the award of the title "Ph.D." after his name.

Therefore, I recommend the thesis for the defense.

Questions and remarks on the defense of the thesis:

1. Do you think that narrowing the research focus to only amphetamine and methamphetamine use might produce different results than the findings you presented?
2. In Conclusions you recommend that "therapy forms specifically designed for ATS users should be created in the current system of addiction services". Don't you think that the specific needs of ATS users should - within the framework of an individual approach - be sufficiently handled by the existing integrated addiction services?

Date: September 10th, 2023

Name, surname, signature: Josef Radimecký,

