

# Abstract

**Background:** Understanding patterns of use and the needs of young adult users of illegal addictive substances presents a challenge primarily due to the hidden nature of this problem. Individuals engaging in problem drug use (PDU) may face severe health and social problems. Prague stands among regions with the highest prevalence of PDU, yet low-threshold addiction services note an aging trend among their clients. Establishing contact with this group has the potential to reduce consequences and encourage less risky usage patterns, while simultaneously facilitating entry into further addiction care services.

**Aim:** The aim of the research was to analyze the needs of the young adult substance users in Prague, who fit the definition of PDU according to EMCDDA, with a focus on identifying patterns of usage and needs in relation to low-threshold addiction services. The research results were intended to serve as an initiative for improving the services provided.

**Methods:** A study employing the Rapid Assessment and Response (RAR) method was conducted. The research sample was obtained through purposive sampling and comprised 6 young adults in PDU in Prague (3 in contact with services, 3 from the hidden population), along with 18 key informants (peer workers, experts from low-threshold and other social services, and institutional representatives). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Data analysis involved secondary analysis of data from existing sources, and the collected qualitative data were analyzed using the method of the simple enumeration, clustering, and pattern capture.

**Results:** The experiences of young adults in PDU with substances were diverse, with cannabis and methamphetamine being the most used. The initial encounter with illicit drugs occurred before the age of 16, and repeated injectable use was observed in 4 respondents. Everyone experienced some of the bio-psycho-social impacts, and ambivalence was noted in controlling their usage. Awareness of low-threshold services was widespread among young PDU individuals. However, none from the hidden population sample utilized these services, primarily due to the absence of health and social problems requiring intervention. Conversely, the presence of these issues led to the initial utilization of services among clients in contact with service providers. 17 out of 18 key informants confirmed the concealed nature of PDU among young individuals, who generally do not seek contact with services.

**Conclusion:** The issue of risky drug use among young adults in Prague remains inadequately explored. The hidden nature and challenges in identifying the target group complicate effective interventions. Low-threshold addiction services are underutilized among young adults. There is a need for the expansion and specialization of services, not only for young adults with PDU, but also for systemic changes in psychiatric care and enhanced collaboration among services and institutions. This study prompts discussion on a comprehensive approach to this issue; however, further research on this user group is essential.

**Key words:** young adults, drug users, problem drug use, hidden population, needs analysis