Reviewer’s report

Title: Careers in ecstasy use: do ecstasy users cease of their own accord? Implications for intervention development

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Reviewer: Silvia Martins

Reviewer’s report:

The article attempts to address an important topic in the area of illegal drug use, their study investigates whether Ecstasy users in the Netherlands cease their use automatically and what would be the implications of this cessation for intervention among Ecstasy users. While this is an interesting well elaborated qualitative study, particularly for researchers in the area of Ecstasy use research, there are a few points that need to be clarified before the article is accepted for publication.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Abstract- After the first citation of Ecstasy use the authors should list Ecstasy’s pharmacological name (MDMA, 3, 4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine). This should also be done when Ecstasy is first cited in the Background section of the full manuscript.

2. Abstract- The authors should briefly cite here the lifetime and past-year prevalence of Ecstasy use in the Netherlands, to make the case of why it is important to study cessation of Ecstasy use.

3. Background- In the first sentence of the background section the authors should briefly describe which are the potential health damages caused by ecstasy use. This should be followed by a description of the lifetime and past-year prevalence of Ecstasy use in the Netherlands, particularly among young adults. If possible, please add the proportion of the Netherlands population that attends dance events. It would be interesting if the authors also compared the prevalence of Ecstasy use among young adults and dance event attendants in the Netherlands with the prevalence of Cannabis use (which is legalized in the Netherlands) in the same subgroup.

4. As is, the Background section is relatively short. I believe the authors could add a new paragraph in this section (right after the second paragraph) and briefly describe results from references number 6 and 8, which are extremely important to support this current study.

5. Background, last paragraph- I believe the article would be more appealing to international readers if the authors included here a description of the findings of ecstasy cessation studies that have been conducted in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) or Australia. The authors also need to include the
reference citations for these studies in this paragraph.

6. Method, first paragraph- I suggest the authors clarify here how they classified a respondent as an ex-Ecstasy user. For instance, what would be the definition for the last Ecstasy use for these respondents to be considered ex-users? Did they stop using Ecstasy for one month, 2 months, 6 months or more prior to the interview?

7. Results, first paragraph- I suggest including here data on the average length of time that current and ex-users of Ecstasy have been using/used Ecstasy. If possible, it would be interesting to mention later on in this section whether there were any differences in attitudes towards Ecstasy use and Ecstasy cessation between recent-onset Ecstasy users and more chronic Ecstasy users.

8. Results, first paragraph- I suggest the authors clarify the sentence: “During the interviews, however, it became clear that not all self identified ex-users had decided to never use ecstasy again.” Please clarify how many of those classified as ex-users might be considering using Ecstasy again and how interviewers identified this behavior.

9. Discussion, first paragraph- The sentence: “It is important to note here that most users only used ecstasy once a month or less.” should be moved to the first paragraph of the results section and better explained there (since this is the first time that the authors mention frequency of Ecstasy use in the article). It also would be important to add here information on the median amount of Ecstasy used in each dance event by current and former Ecstasy users.

10. Discussion- overall the discussion is too much centered simply in the study’s findings. I suggest that in this section the authors further compare their findings to findings from qualitative studies and Ecstasy cessation studies conducted in other countries and discuss the similarities and differences between their study and these other studies.

11. Discussion- before the final paragraph of the Discussion the authors should include a paragraph listing all the potential limitations of their study.

Minor Essential Revisions

12. Results, first paragraph- I suggest including here data on the average length of time that current and ex-users of Ecstasy have been using/used Ecstasy. If possible, it would be interesting to mention later on in this section whether there were any differences in attitudes towards Ecstasy use and Ecstasy cessation between recent-onset Ecstasy users and more chronic Ecstasy users.
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests