

# Intentional actions or outcomes of social regularities?

A mixed method approach in explaining  
polydrug use behavior.

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# Background

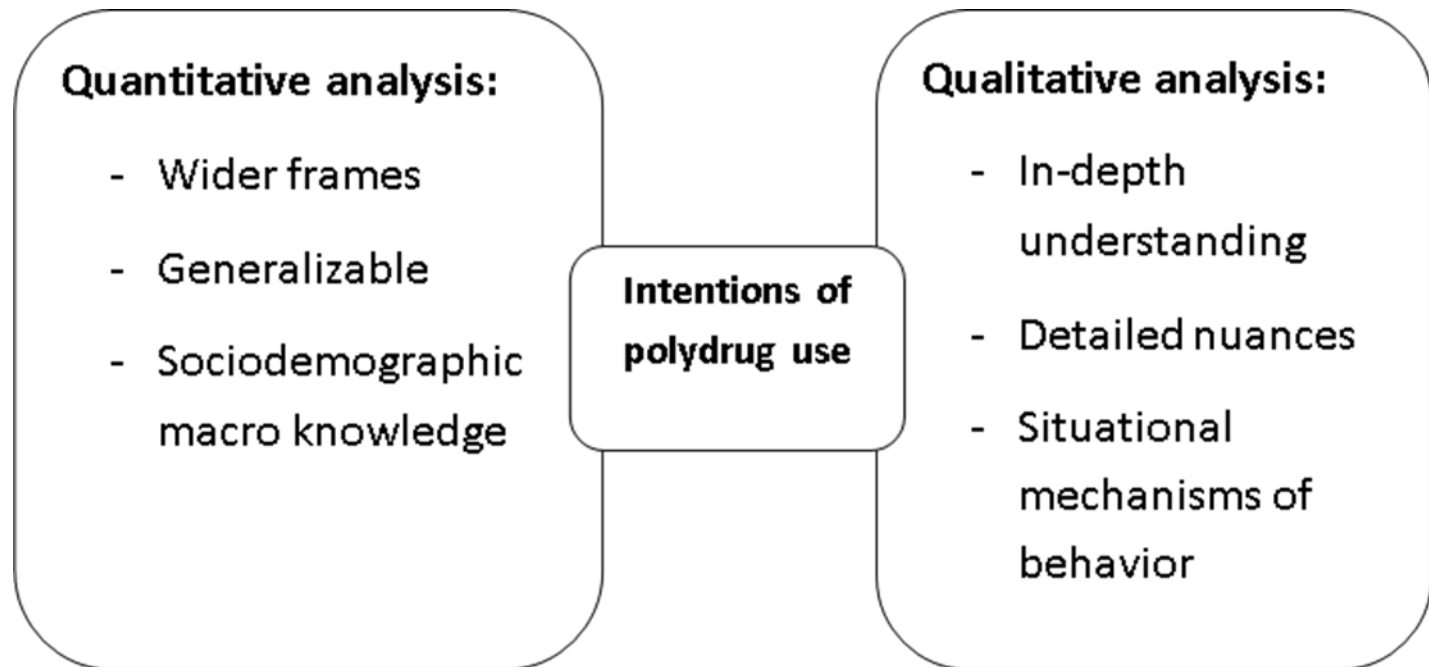
- Users of illicit drugs are often seen as passive actors or goalless drifters
- People themselves in general tend to represent their behavior as rational and logical
- Polydrug use may be seen as target-oriented and intentional action; however, it can be spontaneous and accidental (Hunt et al. 2009; Lamy 2014; Martin 2008)
  - We need more systematic research to understand different aspects of polydrug use behavior

# Aims & research questions

How much could polydrug use be seen as an individual phenomenon and to what extent it occurs at mercy of social and situational factors?

1. **Through which factors** do people explain their polydrug use behaviour?
2. **How do** the factors of different socio-demographic groups **differ** from each other?
3. **Why do** these factors between different socio-demographic groups **differ**?

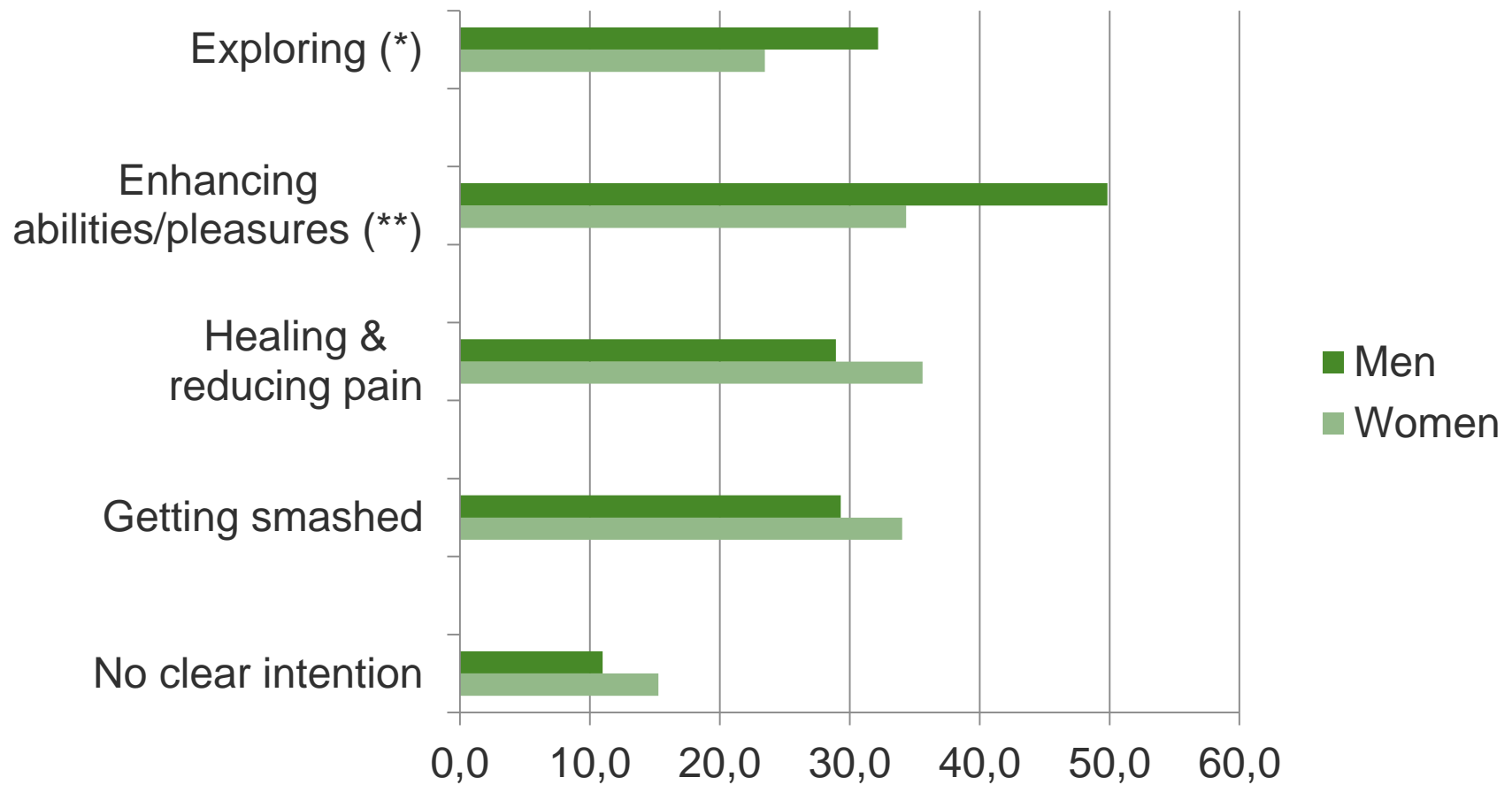
# Why mixed method approach?



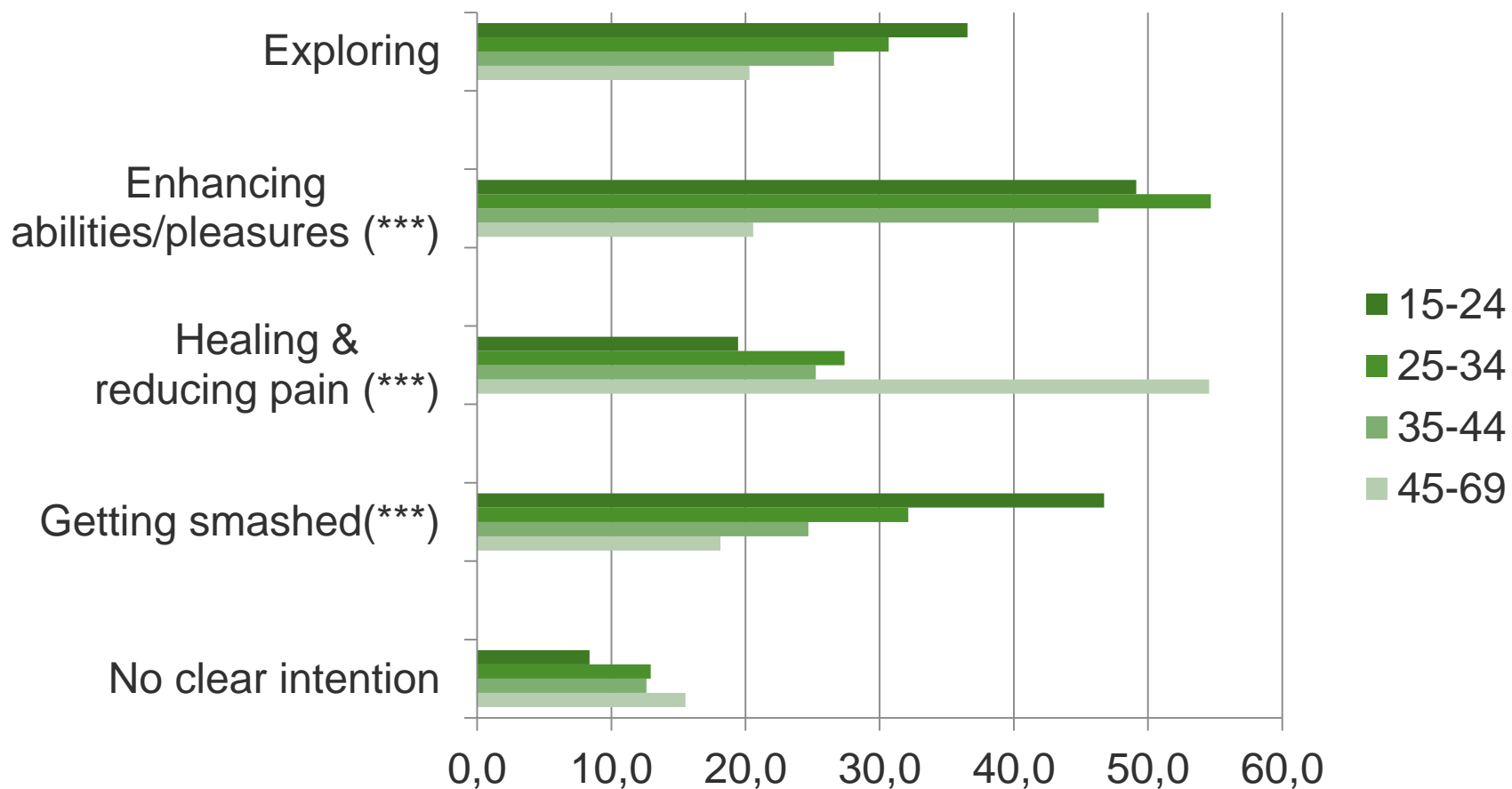
# Quantitative data

- Population-based Drug Survey conducted in Finland in 2014
  - Population aged 15–69 years;
  - Response rate 50% (N=3,485)
  - 14% of the respondents (n=512) have used at least two different substances simultaneously during their lifetime
  
- According to the typology of the intentions of polydrug use by Hakkarainen & al. (unpublished manuscript)
  - 29 % reported **exploring** as their intention for polydrug use
  - 45 % **enhancing abilities or pleasures**
  - 32 % **healing and reducing pain**
  - 31 % **getting smashed**
  - 13 % reported in open-ended question: **no clear intention!**

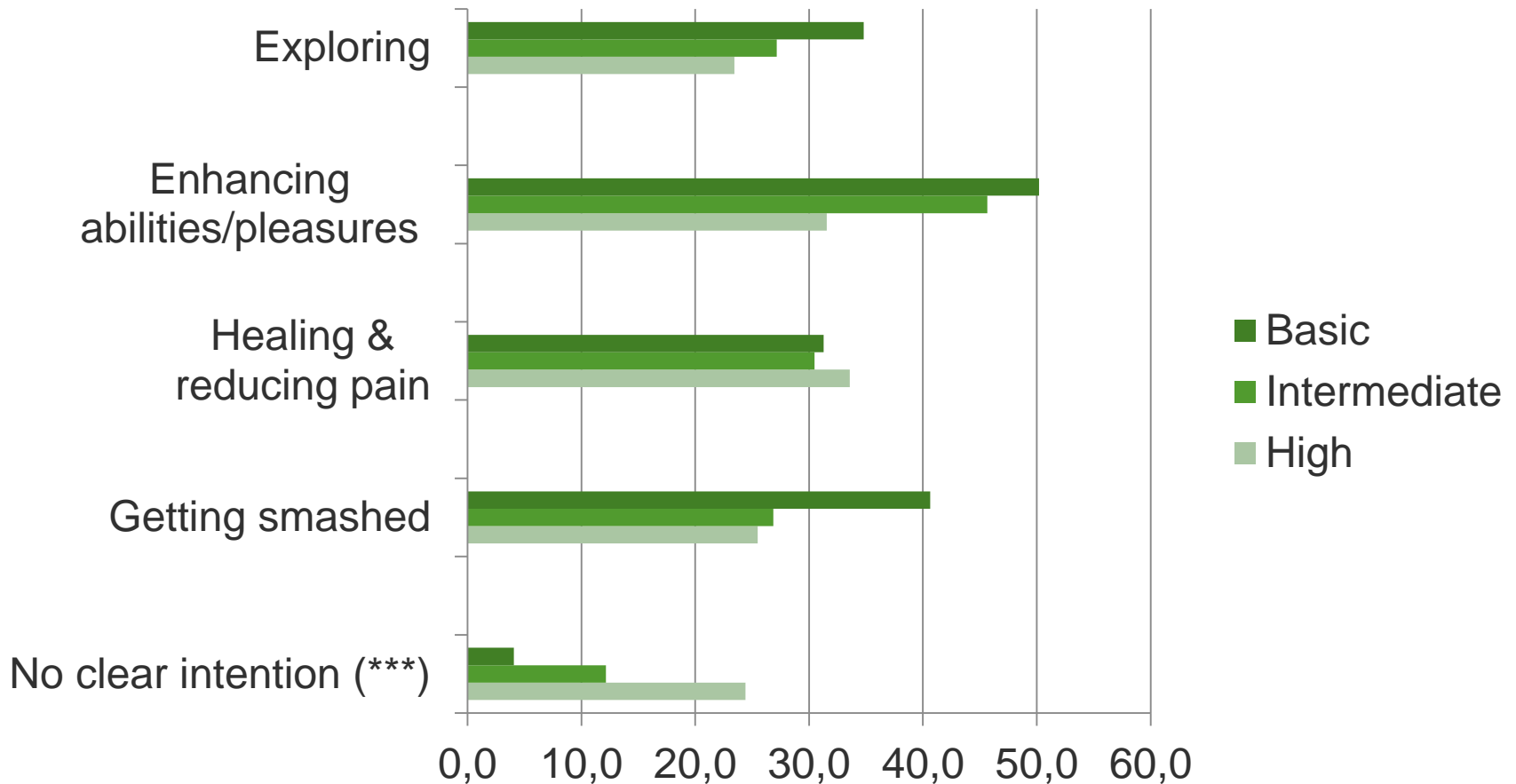
# Intentions of polydrug use by gender / %



# Intentions of polydrug use by age / %



# Intentions of polydrug use by educational level / %





# Qualitative data

- Theme interviews
  - 56 drug users (20 women, 36 men)
  - from five different cities in Finland
  - specifically selected on the basis of polydrug use
  - altogether 170 separate situational descriptions of polydrug use
- Attribution theory as an analytical tool (according to Newham & Davies 2007)
  - Locus: Internal vs. external attribution
  - Stability: stable vs. unstable
  - Controllability: controllable vs. uncontrollable

# Internal attribution / Healing & reducing pain

”As I’ve used Subutex for a long time, I do drugs when I feel I need it, I mean when I’m in pain. Benzos I also take to ease the pain. I don’t mix them with booze, ‘cause I don’t get any high from it, as some do. When I wake up in the morning, I take them right away so that I can go out and feel normal. So that I don’t need to worry about it and just stare into the floor in the tram or elsewhere as I easily get all kinds of anxious and panic attacks and stuff like that.”

## External attributions / No clear intention

”As my use occurs in cycles, it’s typical that there’s some quarreling with someone behind that makes me weak. Otherwise I could say no. But when I come across a good offer of dope, it always hits to this weak part of me.”

”When I was younger, there were guys who thought that everyone has to smoke. At those times the cannabis culture was taking root. They said: “take it, take it”. Just like people goad their pals into drinking.”

# Internal or external attribution? / Enhancing abilities or pleasures

”There was a noteworthy twist in my life last year when I got to know one person via internet who soon became a very good friend. With this friend I tried methylone the first time. We used to go to machine parties once or twice a month and there I tried also ecstasy. We had always such a good time at those parties.”

# How to interpret these findings?

- 1) **Self serving bias** behind the explanations of polydrug use?
- 2) How intentionally individuals behave in general? This depends on the theory we apply.
  - *Rational choice theory*
  - *Emergent norm theory*
  - *Behavior is the function of the individual's interaction with his environment (Lewin 1936)*

# Thank you for your attention!

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