

## In Summary: A High by Any Other Name: Exploring the Motivations for Consumption of 'Legal Highs'

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**Received:** August 27, 2017; **Accepted:** August 29, 2017; **Published:** August 31, 2017

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A large number of legal, semi-legal, synthetic, and organic drugs are sold online and through commercial vendors as novelties, often bearing the label "not for human consumption." This qualitative field study was based on extensive ethnographic interviews conducted over a five month period with 26 people who regularly used synthetic and organic drugs for recreational purposes. Some of the more popular and common legal and semi-legal drugs of choice among these users included, but were not limited to: "Spice" (typically sold as incense or potpourri containing marijuana-mimicking substances), Salvia (salvia divinorum, a South American brush that produces a deliriant effect when ingested or smoked), Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*, which has varying effects similar to opiate highs, stimulants, marijuana, and alcohol), Ayahuasca (a combination of herbs and plants that produces powerful psychedelic effects somewhat similar to LSD, "Magic Mushrooms" (spores that produce a variety of hallucinogenic effects), Hawaiian Baby Wood Rose and Morning Glory seeds (both of which when brewed as a "tea" produce hallucinogenic experiences) [1].

Utilizing a grounded theory approach the authors created a typology of users that fell into three general categories they labelled as: *Risk Reducers*, *Plan B Users* and *Novelty Seekers*. *Risk Reducers* were those users who wanted to avoid the common risks associated with the use of illegal and/or regulated substances. People in this category tended to have families, jobs and otherwise were considered to be non-drug users, and although they enjoyed getting high, they could not risk the stigma and other negative consequences associated with illegal drug usage. They contended that these drugs were undetectable in standard drug tests, did not give off the odours associated with marijuana or alcohol, and were highly unlikely to lead to arrest or other legal sanctions. Plan B Users was created as a category when one of the women interviewed, a long time heroin user who also abused prescription opiate drugs, when asked why

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**Citation:** Thompson WE (2017) In Summary: A High by Any Other Name: Exploring the Motivations for Consumption of 'Legal Highs'. J Drug Abuse. Vol. 3 No. 2:10

she used synthetic and organic drugs replied, "Well, it's not plan A." Typically, the users in this category were known drug users, many of whom were on probation or parole and were subject to routine and/or random drug tests. The synthetic and organic "substitutes" served as "plan B" to provide similar highs they would prefer to get from the harder illegal and regulated drugs to which many of them were addicted. The final category, Novelty Seekers, as the name suggests, consisted of people (often younger than the other two categories) who were curious about the synthetic and organic drugs and wanted to try some of them experimentally to see if they liked the effects, or they wanted to determine if they would experience some of the same "wild" and "crazy" experiences they had witnessed on social media and heard about through second-hand accounts.

In analyzing many of the motivations for seeking highs through the use of legal and semi-legal organic and synthetic drugs, it was not surprising to find that they were fairly similar to the reasons that people use illegal drugs or abuse prescription medications. A high by any other name, whether obtained legally or illegally, is still a high [1].

## Reference

- Wiecko FM, Thompson WE, Parham BP (2017) A high by any other name: Exploring the motivations for consumption of 'Legal Highs'. *Deviant Behav* 38: 549-560.