

## DRUG USE CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVICTS - IN THE LIGHT OF TRADITIONAL AND NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

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### Abstract

*The purpose of the study is to present the characteristics of drug use in Hungarian adult male convicted prisoner population, explaining the main differences between traditional and new psychoactive substance users. My goal is to uncover the potential differences between the two groups and to reveal their effects on the security of detention issues. The analyzed and presented data are based on the database of the Hungarian Risk Assessment system.*

Keywords: prison, drugs, substance use, new psychoactive substance, inmate, prison, risk assessment, risk management

### Introduction

Studies of drug use in prisons generally find that the lifetime prevalence of drug use among inmates and the proportion of regular users are higher than in the 'civil' population of the society in general. It is therefore essential to focus on drug use in prisons and the patterns of drug use among inmates to understand its nature, the sociological and criminological background of users, to assess the risks involved and to provide some treatment alternatives.

The increasing prevalence of new psychoactive substances (hereinafter NPS) has been a typical trend in inmate drug use in recent decades. Several studies, which will be briefly presented later, have found that prisoners involved in NPS use have different characteristics than those of prisoners using traditional substances, and typically pose a higher risk to prisons.

In the above context, the aim of the study is twofold. Firstly, to present the general characteristics of drug use by inmates and its criminological aspects, and secondly, to present the main statistics on drug use by inmates, based on prison databases, focusing on the types of variation observed between different users.

### Characteristics of drug use in prison, methodological approaches of research

The specific characteristics of drug use in prison can be categorized along two main lines. One set of features stems from the fact - due to the specific nature of the prison population in different countries-, that there are particular patterns of consumption, supply and demand and other characteristics. The other set of characteristics, however, are not country-specific but prison-specific, i.e. these characteristics can be found in some way in prisons in almost all countries. These are typically the factors that arise from the general 'nature' of prisons, which produces similar phenomena (e.g. nature and methods of smuggling, reasons for substance use, nature of trafficking) and similar institutional responses in terms of demand, supply and harm reduction.

Depending on the research objectives, the use of drugs by prisoners can be examined along three main lines. 1) The most popular approach is to study the main statistics and risks of substance use (classical socio-criminological approach), 2) the second is to examine the types and effectiveness of treatment tools and methods (group therapies or substitution approaches), and the third (3) is to examine the existence and efficacy of 'drug strategies' in prisons in a broader sense.

In the context of research on statistical data, it is also important to distinguish trends along the characteristics of the data under study. The range of data collected and analysed on substance use in each country is typically very broad, but there are also a number of clustering possibilities in these data collections that will determine the possibilities for later analysis and use.

One typical trend of analysis is, which distinguishes prisoners convicted of drug-related offenses (or typical offenses) on the basis of the offence committed (Ritter 2018). These studies focus primarily on the general phenomena of drug use and distribution and their criminal policy context, partly independently from the prison context. The other trend of research

is when data are collected during admission, thus gaining a picture of previous substance use patterns, which may also predict risks within prison. The third direction is based on prison security and discipline data and provides a picture of consumption within prisons, offering an opportunity to understand the phenomena within prisons and to explore differences with use on the streets.

In the present study, I rely on data held by the Prison Service and recorded at the time of the prisoner's admission, which represents a specific combination of the above lines of inquiry.

### NPS and prisons

The substance use preferences of inmates in different countries show a very diverse picture, with large variations between countries and significant changes within each country in a relatively short period of time (see later, for example, data from Hungary from 2018 to the present). In recent years, trends in some specific populations, especially in prisons, have shown an intense prevalence of NPS in several countries (Duke 2020; Vaccaro et al. 2022).

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (hereinafter UNODC) uses the following definition for NPS: *New psychoactive substances are substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled by the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but which may pose a public health threat. In this context, the term 'new' does not necessarily refer to new inventions but to substances that have been recently become available (UNODC, 2013:4).*

So NPSs are a wide range of substances, often similar to traditional drugs, but chemically different, so their effects on health may be different or unknown. This makes these substances a high hazard in themselves.

Their widespread use within prisons has also been helped by their ease of smuggling and concealment. The experience of smuggling in Hungary is also primarily that of vaporising the substance onto some sort of carrier material (typically paper) and attempting to smuggle it into prisons by some legal route (letters, official documents, possibly textiles, or anything that can be technically vaporised and later smoked or soaked). Because of their nature and the diversity of their chemical composition, they often cannot be detected by drug tests. Precisely because of the rapid variation in their composition, the security

solutions used to reduce their supply, so they are also of low appearance (Duke 2020; Vaccaro et al. 2022) and therefore presumably of high latency.

The substances are relatively cheap, so they can easily displace conventional drugs from prison, with the consequence of reshaping the internal market and the nature of the prisoner subculture. They have also generated new forms of victimisation of vulnerable inmates, often testing the potential effects of new drugs on low-status prisoners (Duke 2020). Various studies confirm that the rise of drugs in general, and NPS in particular, is also strongly associated with worsening trends in prison violence, suicide and recidivism risk (Wakeling – Lynch, 2020; Mason et al. 2022).

In addition to this, it is necessary to point out that whereas the 2018 report of European Monitoring Centre for Drug and Drug Addiction (EM-CDDA, 2018) indicated that NPS seemed to be more of a prison-specific drug, the 2023 data from Hungary show that NPS is already a preferred drug among prisoners entering prison. This phenomenon highlights an important social problem in general, and the high level of security and detention risks described in the literature cited above also gives relevance to the study presented below.

### Examination of drug use in prison

The next section of the paper presents national data on drug use in the prison population. The analysis focuses on the substance use patterns of adult male inmates admitted to prison.

The background to the analysis is provided by the database accessible from the Prison Service's risk assessment system, the data were available at different points of time. The "risk assessment", that started in practice in 2015 is a data collection system supported by a software background, which provides a complex analytic process based on standardized methods and involving different disciplines, which supports the decision-making mechanisms by providing information on the criminal history, family background, socio-economic situation, inmate behaviour, psychological and health status and other characteristics of the prisoners. The system allows for the recording of the professional judgement of the prison staff and the inmates, and based on this, the inmates are classified into low/medium/high risk categories (e.g. substance abuse, suicide, vulnerability, recidivism, etc.), which allows the prison

organization to offer various targeted risk management programs.

The present study based on 2023 March results, however, for some topics (due to previous, internal background analyses made by Prison Service) data for 2018 and 2021 are also available. These data also come from the database of the risk assessment system, only from previous data pool in time, reflecting the current state at the time, since the aforementioned system was under continuous development over the years, and is still being developed, so the element numbers were even lower earlier.<sup>1</sup> However, the different datasets—even if limited due to the short periods - also provide an opportunity to explore possible changes over time.

As far as the methodological background of the study is concerned, it is important to note that the risk assessment database is essentially a database of prisoners, and data is typically collected at the time of admission to the prison.<sup>2</sup> Most of the data that can be extracted from the risk assessment system are based on self-reporting by prisoners and in many cases cannot be checked up. Another limitation of the analysis and the interpretation of the results is that the data are not based on a questionnaire specifically designed for this study, but on a set of data generated in the course of the professional activities of the Prison Service and collected in a systematic, structured and professionally targeted manner. The database is basically a software supporting administrative functions, so the range of data and the scope of variables that could be used in the study remained unchanged which enabled no new variables to include.

### General characteristics of substance use at the time of admission

In the database of the risk assessment, data were available for 80.3% (N=10692) of the total convict population (N=13303) in March 2023 regarding the drug use of adult male convicts. A very large proportion of the sample, nearly half (48,5%, N=5185), was

involved in drug use (this percentage has remained almost constant in recent years). 36% of drug user inmates (N=1867) use several drugs at the same time, and 16,1% (N=879) use drugs intravenously.

Frequency of substance use		
	N	%
Daily or multiple drug use per week	3122	60,2
Occasional drug users	2063	39,8
Total	5185	100

Table 1.

In terms of the frequency of drug use, we can see that the values of multiple daily use and weekly use, based on the values of 2023, are 60,2% (Table 1, N=3122) so the substance-using convicts entering prisons are typically not occasional, but „problematic users” (24,1% of the total sample, see above N=10692). Based on the previous data, this value was 59,1% (N=3978) in 2021 and 52,13% (N=2164) in 2018, so the values of regular drug use display a constantly increasing trend (Somogyvári 2021). This implies that approximately a quarter of the admitted prisoners can be described as problematic substance users already at the time of their admission.

Table 2. contains the arrangement of manifold drug products trafficking among prisoners.

Drugs most commonly used in the 30 days before admission (%)			
	2018 N=5155	2021 N=786	2023 N=1141
New psychoactive substances	29,4	41,9	41,5
Stimulants	24,5	21,3	21,6
Cannabis derivatives	27,5	17,7	16,2
Hallucinogens	1,2	0,7	0,6
Cocaine, crack	8,6	6,4	5,9
Sedative and soporific medicines	1,4	1,9	1,6
Opiates	4,6	5,9	1,8
Organic solvents	0,5	0,52	0,3
Other	0,9	1,8	8,9
Don't know, no reply	1,4	2,0	1,5

Table 2. - Explanation of changing i.e.increasing numbers see text

<sup>1</sup> Due to the „novelty” of the system, the questionnaires were taken slowly, gradually increasing in number. When the system was introduced in 2015, only a little more than 500 convicts were included in the risk assessment questionnaire. Now it contains the data of more than 10,000 currently imprisoned convicts.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, the data presented does not include information about those who arrested or, for example, the cases, where the community service and financial penalty converted to imprisonment.

Regarding the trends and substance use preferences in recent years, it can be seen that the increase of NPS between 2018 and 2021 was very spectacular (from 29,4% to 41,9%) and the prevalence of cannabis derivatives decreased slightly, but apart from that, the substance use preference of prisoners remained relatively stable over the last 2 years. Among the substances used prior to admission, new types of psychoactive substances continued to be the most frequently used.

For the remainder of the study, I separated regular substance users (in the analysis, they mean daily or weekly substance users) from the rest of the sample, and then further subdivided this group into NPS users, and 'traditional drug' users based on their preference for the substances used, and then included non-drug users as contrast (see *Table 3*). Occasional drug users (N=2063) and cases without answer to the question to the preferred drugs, were excluded from the sample. They were not included in the reduced sample of 8,612 people because either they failed to inform the interviewers which drug they used (therefore they could not have been categorized in either groups of NPS consumers or „traditional” drug users). Moreover, they are only occasional users, not reaching the level of „problematic” drug users too. From the research point of view, regular, „problematic” drug users will be relevant due to the prison related risks they pose. Henceforth, 64,6% (N=8612) of the entire convict population (N=13303) remained in the sample (not on the Table).

Proportion of the sample		
	N	%
NPS users	667	7,7
Other drug users	2438	28,3
Non users	5507	63,9
Total	8612	100

*Table 3.*

The aim of the study was to visualize the characteristics, main risks and reintegration and/or security needs of prisoners using NPS according to different analytical aspects. Due to the nature of the database used, there are essentially categorical variables available, the data are explained in descriptive statistics.

### Sociodemographic attributes, education and labor market experience

In addition to patterns of substance use in general, it is important to know some of the demographic characteristics of the group under study, as they may have an impact on the risks of imprisonment and the protective factors against them. Looking at the risk assessment database, the average age of prisoners was 39 years (not on the Table), the drug preference shows different patterns per age columns of drug users.

Age (%) N= 8612					
	18-29 years	30-40 years	41-55 years	56+ years	Total
NPS users	55,6	32,4	11,5	0,4	100,0
Other drug users	32,1	41,7	24,2	1,9	100,0
Non users	16,5	27,3	41,8	14,5	100,0

*Table 4.*

*Table 4.* shows that regular drug use is more common among the younger prisoners than in the older generation columns, but even so, there is a sharp contrast in the data in favour of NPS users, with more than half (55,6%) of this group belonging to the young adult age group of 18-29 and has a decreasing tendency towards the elders.

Preference of drug per age distribution (%) N=8612				
	NPS users	Other drug users	Non users	Total
18-29 years	18,0	38,0	44,0	100,0
30-40 years	7,9	37,1	55,0	100,0
41-55 years	2,6	19,9	77,5	100,0
56+ years	0,4	5,6	94,1	100,0

*Table 5.*

Reversing the logic of the analysis it shows (*Table 5*) that the young generation, aged 18-29, has the highest prevalence of drug use (the total of NPS users and other drug users are 56%) and within that, the highest prevalence of NPS use (18%), when it is grouped by age.

After age specific characteristics, I looked at the family background, since the existence of a supportive environment (if it has a realistic, positive integrating power) is also relevant for the mental health of prisoners and also a major factor in reintegration chances.

In terms of family setting (Table 6.), the self-reported marital status of prisoners displays that single or divorced relationship status is the highest among NPS users (58,2%), so legally settled relationships are the least common. It is not the purpose of this study to establish a causal direction, but it can be seen that the protective factors of family in the classical sense are less likely to prevail among the target group.

In addition to the above, education and labour market experience are also very important factors for inmates since in addition to family support, they also largely determine the chances

Marital status (%) N=8468					
	Married	Living together but not married	Single, divorced	Other	Total
NPS users	5,6	35,8	58,2	0,3	100,0
Other drug users	6,7	40,6	51,9	0,8	100,0
Non users	17,6	35,3	45,2	1,9	100,0

Table 6.

of social integration after release and at the same time determine the direction of reintegration programmes provided during imprisonment

Education and employment (%)			
	No more than elementary educational level N=8514	Vocational education <sup>3</sup> N=7738	Ever been employed N=7429
NPS users	81,0	34,3	57,8
Other drug users	68,7	48,7	67,9
Non users	65,4	54,9	77,6

Table 7.

<sup>3</sup> Vocational training in this case does not only mean „high-prestige” training (e.g. carpentry), but it can also be a simple, certificate-giving training of a few months (e.g. park keeper), which the convict obtained in prison. The question refers to any qualification that helps him/her to find a job in the labor market.

On Table 7. can be seen the educational attainment of drug-using convicts being even lower than that of the average convict population (especially for NPS users, 81% of whom have only 8 grades). A very low proportion of them have some kind of vocational qualification, and their employment rate is similarly negative, with almost half of NPS users admitting not to supply any work along lifetime. All in all, their labour market integration was already relatively low at reception.

### Early deviances

The phenomenon that the younger a person commits crime - i.e. the earlier they start their criminal career, the longer and more intense it will be - has been identified in both Hungarian and international research (Farrington 1992; Solt 2012a; Koppen 2018), and that starting a criminal career early also means a higher risk of recidivism (Koppen 2018). Prisoners' juvenile deviance is therefore a significant determinant of their present situation and can be an important reference point for their treatment programs.

The risk assessment process includes several questions on juvenile criminality and juvenile deviance. The question on the start of a criminal career is also self-report based, so it is obviously subjective, who considers any action to be illegal one.

Start of the criminal career (%) N=7304					
	Before age 14	14-16 years	17-18 years	19-25 years	25y+
NPS users	13,1	28,7	20,3	28,4	9,5
Other drug users	10,6	27,1	18,3	27,8	16,2
Non users	3,4	11,6	12,6	29,9	42,5

Table 8.

The Table 8. displaying starting time of a criminal career shows that, basically, all age categories are dominated by NPS. However, when analyzing the results in terms of drug use preference, it can be seen that the highest proportion of NPS-user prisoners (41,8% overall) are those, who committed some offence (whether directly related to drug use or not) before the age of 16, while almost half of the non-users of drugs have their first encounters with the law at an adult age only (over 25). It

is important to underline that causality cannot be established from the data, so it cannot be said that drug use, including NPS, is the cause of criminality at a younger age or that NPS use is strikingly associated with other deviant behaviour in youth. However, the higher incidence rates and other associated risks are clear from the data. During the intake and risk assessment, the prison also tries to map the start of the criminal career, i.e. the nature of the offenses at the point of entry (i.e. what was the first offence committed). The data seen on *Table 9*, witness that offenses against property and violent ones appeared in the highest proportions and showed the strongest disparities.

Criminal career entry offence (% occurrence in answers) N=8612			
	Against property	Violence act	Drug offence
NPS users	65,5	36,1	10,0
Other drug users	52,8	32,7	17,7
Non users	39,5	28,4	2,3

*Table 9.*

The *Table 9*, shows the percentages of acts „against property”, „acts of violence” and „drug offence” mentioned by the group members (not all inmates answered the question at intake and some indicated more than one type). It is clear that both types of acts are highest among inmates using the NPS (65,5% and 36,1% respectively), but there is also a seemingly difference between inmates who use drugs in general and inmates who are not using drugs (39,5% and 28,4% respectively).

Interestingly, however, the proportion of drug-related offences committed on entry was higher among inmates who used traditional drugs.

In addition to the beginning of a criminal career and its predominant type of offence, the juvenile deviance rates, also based on self-report, also present an equally interesting picture. There was also a lot of subjectivity associated with the assessment of the initiation of a criminal career, but this is especially true for juvenile deviance, and there may be overlap in content between the two categories of questions.

Substance use and early deviant behaviour (%)					
The type of deviance		NPS users	Other drug users	Non users	N
Alcohol and drug abuse	before the age of 14	22,0	24,6	2,2	7737
	between the ages of 14 and 18	66,8	65,9	17,0	7745
Theft	before the age of 14	24,6	26,5	9,2	7654
	between the ages of 14 and 18	50,4	44,0	17,4	7655
Violence	before the age of 18	22,3	21,4	6,0	7697
Truancy	before the age of 14	58,1	49,3	24,3	7724

*Table 10.*

*Table 10*, data suggest that the results are similar in trend to those obtained in the criminal careers study (i.e., in principle, the prisoners most affected by each deviance are those using the NPS), but there are some interesting differences. The rate of alcohol and drug use before the age of 14 is a few percentage points higher among inmates who use classic drugs (24,6% compared to 22% for NPS users), and the same is observed for minor theft (26,5% compared to 24,6% for NPS users). Unfortunately, we cannot provide a validated answer to this discrepancy in the present study, but it may be worth conducting further sociological research to investigate what causes these discrepancies. One possible explanation could be that NPS are relatively recent drugs, so that they have been available on the streets only since the early to mid-2010s, and thus were less available when the currently admitted detainees were under 14 years old.

### Institutional background and the criminality of the social environment

Besides ,deviance and criminal career, I consider it essential to know the institutional background and the criminal involvement of friends and family, i.e. the juvenile history of the prisoners and the

criminality of their social relationships. This is an important issue because the existence of a family is basically considered in theory and practice as a protective factor, but if among the family and friends background criminals are found, the successful social reintegration chances are significantly reduced, although the state care and the background of the correctional institutions can offer also opportunities for integration.

However, it is important to clarify the distinctive legal distinction between state care and correctional institutions. In short, a person is placed in state care if there are anomalies in his or her family background or behaviour, whether it is a financial problem that prevents the child from being brought up in a non-deviant way, or specific abuse, endangerment or minor behavioral problems exist. However, only juveniles - who have committed an offence, but not below the level for which the court would impose on them a custodial sentence-, are sent to a Youth correctional facility.

Table 11. The percentages show that both the rate of prisoners in state care and those of the

Institutional background as youth (%)		
	State care N=7713	Youth correctional facility (reformatory) N=7667
NPS users	26,1	23,1
Other drug users	21,2	19,7
Non users	11,4	7,3

Table 11.

inmates sentenced to correctional institutions are significantly higher among drug users. However, the balance is again shifted towards NPS users among the two substance-using groups, with a higher proportion of both types of institutions (26,1% and 23,1%). Overall, it can be concluded that the proportion of NPS users in correctional institutions was three times higher than the proportion of non-drug-using prisoners. The background of state care (and the more difficult family circumstances it implies) and correctional upbringing examined here are likely to be reflected in the criminal involvement of friends and family.

Imprisonment of close relatives and friends (time frame: lifetime (%))		
	friend in prison N=6334	close relative in prison N= 6831
NPS users	64,4	61,4
Other drug users	62,7	47,6
Non users	37,4	30,1

Table 12.

The relevance of family and friends in prison is interesting in several ways, as it can increase the status in the prison hierarchy (Solt 2012b), the presence or absence of which (in different ways) poses security risks. In addition, as already mentioned, the law-abiding broader environment of prisoners may play a supportive role after release (Berg - Huebner 2011), but if the criminal background of the family and friends is high, this may be counterproductive. The data clearly show that inmates who use drugs differ negatively from the drug-free counterparts. This is also observed for family and friends with a criminal record, particularly for inmates using NPS, where more than 60% reported having had close relatives in prison for both friends and family.

### Suicidal behavior and mental health

In addition to general, demographic and socio-economic characteristics, early deviance, institutional background and criminal involvement, the last theme I would like to examine is the information available on the psychological characteristics of drug-using prisoners. In the following, I will focus on suicidal behaviour and psychiatric involvement of inmates.

Suicides are considered as a major risk factor for prisons, as the preservation of the health, life and physical integrity of prisoners is partly the responsibility of the prison service and thus a measure of the safety and professionalism of prisons. From a professional point of view, however, it is important to make difference in certain aspects: suicide is attempted with the actual intention of dying, while self-harm is usually motivated by tension reduction or an action triggered by the prisoners' own problems (completed, i.e. finished suicide with death is out of the scope of our study). However, it is also important to note that the underlying motivation for suicides within prisons often differs from the reasons for suicidal acts in the civil life, and in general, the majority of them can be considered manipulative,

an attempt to escape from detention (Dear et al. 2000; Smith et al. 2019; Haycock - 1989).

<b>Rates of attempted suicide and self-harm without the intention of dying (%) in lifetime perspective (N= 8003)</b>					
	<b>Self-harm</b>	<b>Suicide attempt</b>	<b>Both</b>	<b>None of them</b>	<b>Total</b>
NPS users	<b>23,1</b>	10,9	<b>11,0</b>	55,0	100,0
Other drug users	19,8	<b>12,2</b>	<b>11,6</b>	56,4	100,0
Non users	8,6	7,5	3,2	<b>80,7</b>	100,0

Table 13.

Table 13. shows substance-using prisoners having higher rates of self-harm and suicide attempts than non-drug-user prisoners (most notably in the „both” offence type, where the rate is almost 4 times higher among drug users). Of the various types of offence, self-harm with manipulative intent is most prevalent among NPS users (23,1% of cases), while suicide attempts with actual intent to die are highest among inmates using other drugs (12,2%).

In addition to suicidal behavior, the psychiatric involvement of prisoners may also have an impact on further risks, and some medical conditions have a strong influence on the prisoner’s ability to integrate himself into the general population, possibly requiring special accommodation, and may also be associated with suicidal urges and aggressive behaviour.

	<b>Treated in a civil psychiatric hospital (%) (total N=7997)</b>		<b>Treated in a Prison Psychiatric unit (%)</b>
	<b>Outpatient only</b>	<b>Psychiatric inpatient</b>	
NPS users	13,2	26,8	34,2
Other drug users	14,4	27,3	41,0
Non users	7,9	10,0	16,6

Table 14.

In the case of psychiatric care, the two groups of drug users are not sharply different, but there is a strong difference compared to the group of inmates not using drugs (over 40% of inmates with

psychiatric problems compared to 17,9% of inmates not using drugs). Also important, from a prison perspective, and summarizing the mental health of drug-using inmates, is the high proportion of substance-using inmates (34,2% and 41%) who have required psychiatric treatment in the Prison Service during their current or previous imprisonment.

## Summary

Partly on the basis of the presented literature and partly on that of our own analysis, it can be established that the drug use of prisoners is partly due to street drug consumption brought from earlier life, and in addition, the closed settlement and operating mechanism of prisons create a peculiar drug use inducing environment.

In order to understand the drug problem in prisons and to plan strategic objectives and interventions, it is necessary to understand this specific features. In addition to the general characteristics the substance use profile of inmates at the time of admission, which can be critical indicating intervention needs, data display more aspects of drug users with their problems, preferred substances, etc.

Within the drug issue the relevance of the NPS study is to confirm the fact that it has dominated prisoners’ drug use preferences very quickly and has maintained this status firmly. It is also important to note that this is a specific feature of the prison population, which in turn may indicate a change in the substance use habits of a particular social group.

In this study, I analyzed the data of 8612 adult, convicted men. The analysis of statistical data from Hungary also shows that NPS users typically come from a high criminality background. Closed institutional background is significantly more common, which appears as a serious negative factor in certain risks and reintegration chances. The 23,1% of NPS users, while 7,3% of non-drug users were in a correctional institution for minors in their youth. The existence of juvenile deviance also differs significantly, in the case of various deviances (e.g. alcohol and drug consumption, theft), a difference of up to 3-4 times more can be observed among NPS users. In addition, the criminality of family and friend relationships also show a more negative picture, the proportion of family members who have been in prison for NPS users takes 61,4% (contrary to 30,1% for non-drug users), and 64,4% of friends have been in prison (in the case of non-drug users



convicts this is only 37,4%). Furthermore, their socio-economic status can be considered the lowest in the sample. However, no important differences were found between the substance user groups in terms of suicides, psychiatric background or punishment, the contrast being much more between substance users and non-substance users. Conclusions to be drawn that the imprisonment and security/risk characteristics of traditional drug users and NPS users are very similar, however, NPS users have a worse criminal history and social background indicating unfavourable chances for social reintegration. In the perspective of the data, an additional and relevant question may be what needs, either for treatment or therapy, arise for the target group concerning the substance use habits of the incoming prisoners. Taking these needs and prison-specific characteristics into consideration, strategies for further intervention directions can be identified.

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