

Current consumption behavior, burden and need of support among Austrian MSM practicing chemsex

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Background

The intentional use of illicit substances (chems) among men who have sex with men (MSM) in a sexual context (chemsex), has been reported a substantial public health issue.¹⁻³ To pool expertise and offer professional support, a nation-wide network of experts from different professions related to all aspects of chemsex has been founded.⁴

This study aimed to assess consumption behavior, possible changes over time, burden, and need of support among Austrian MSM taking chems.

Methods

Austrian MSM were asked to participate in an online survey with closed-ended questions from May to October 2024. Four major drugs associated with chemsex, i.e. crystal methamphetamine, GHB/GBL, ketamine, and mephedrone, were included in the survey.¹⁻³ Volunteers were randomly recruited and excluded if chemsex experience was denied.

Results

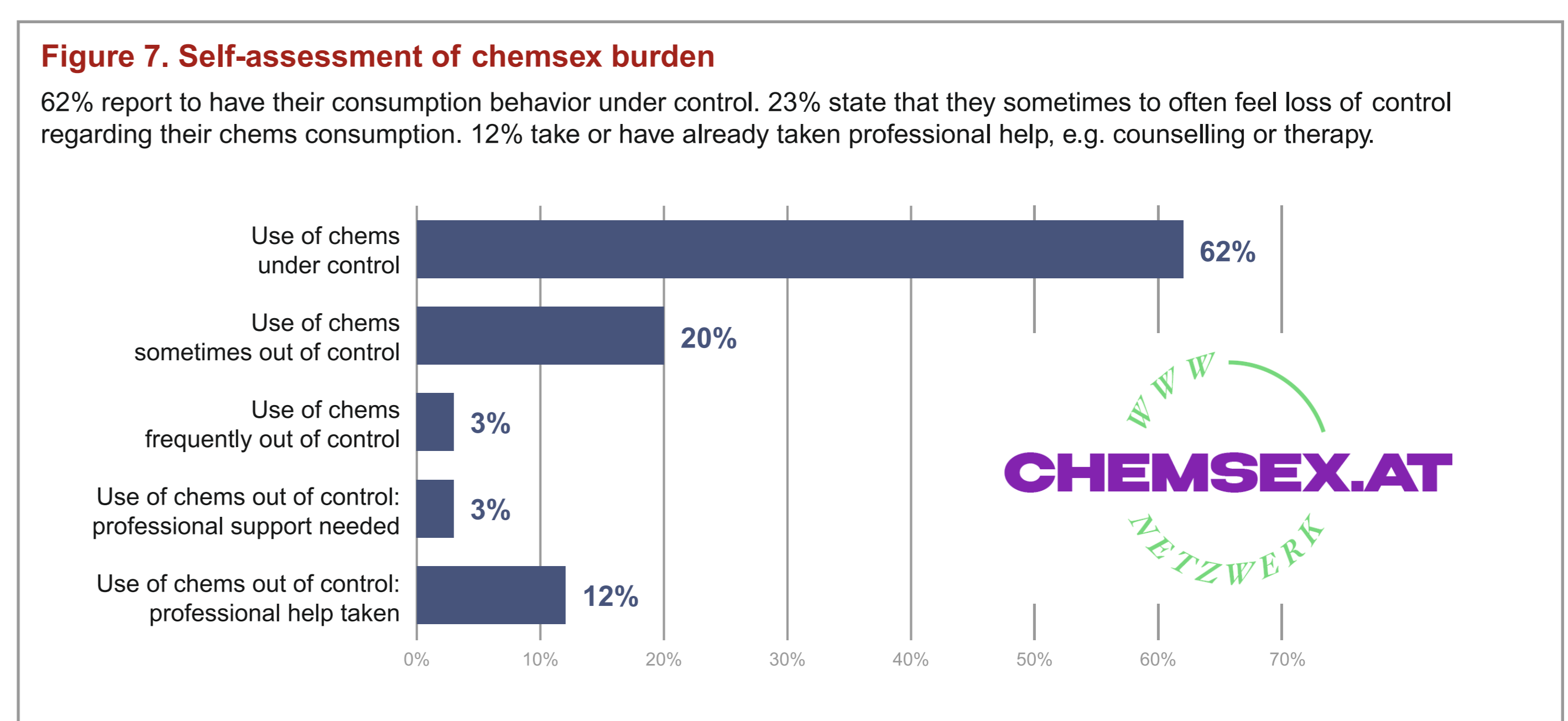
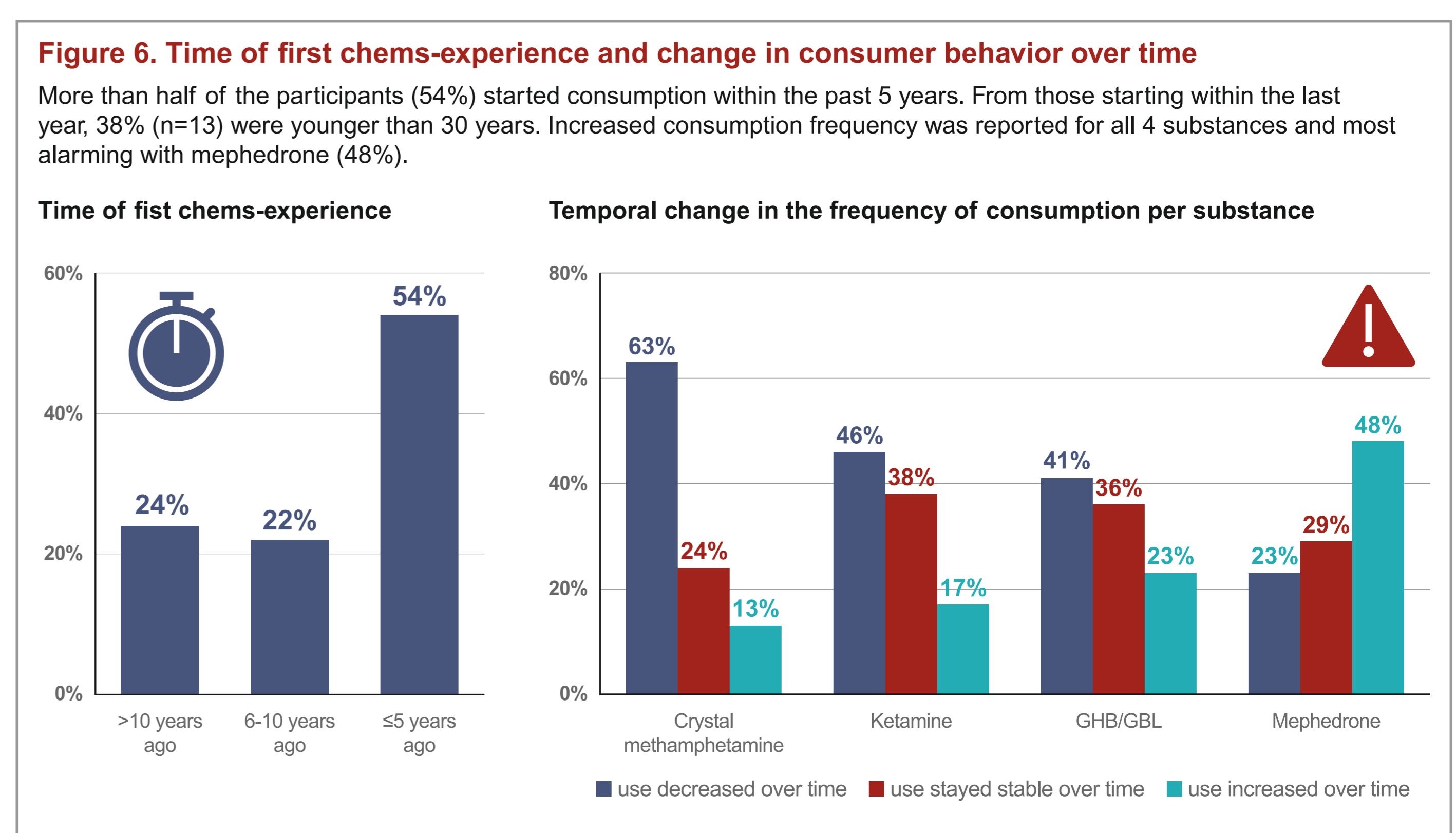
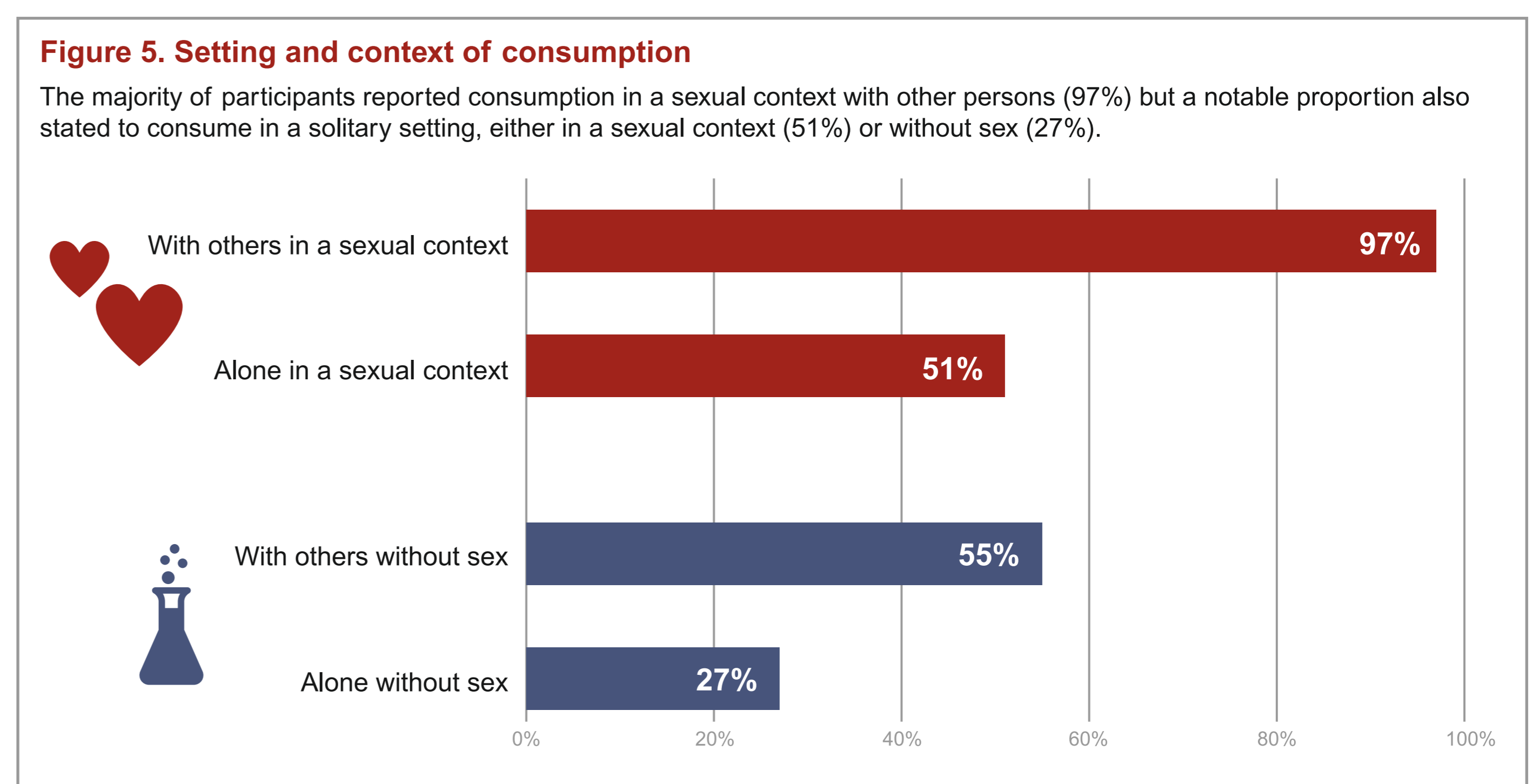
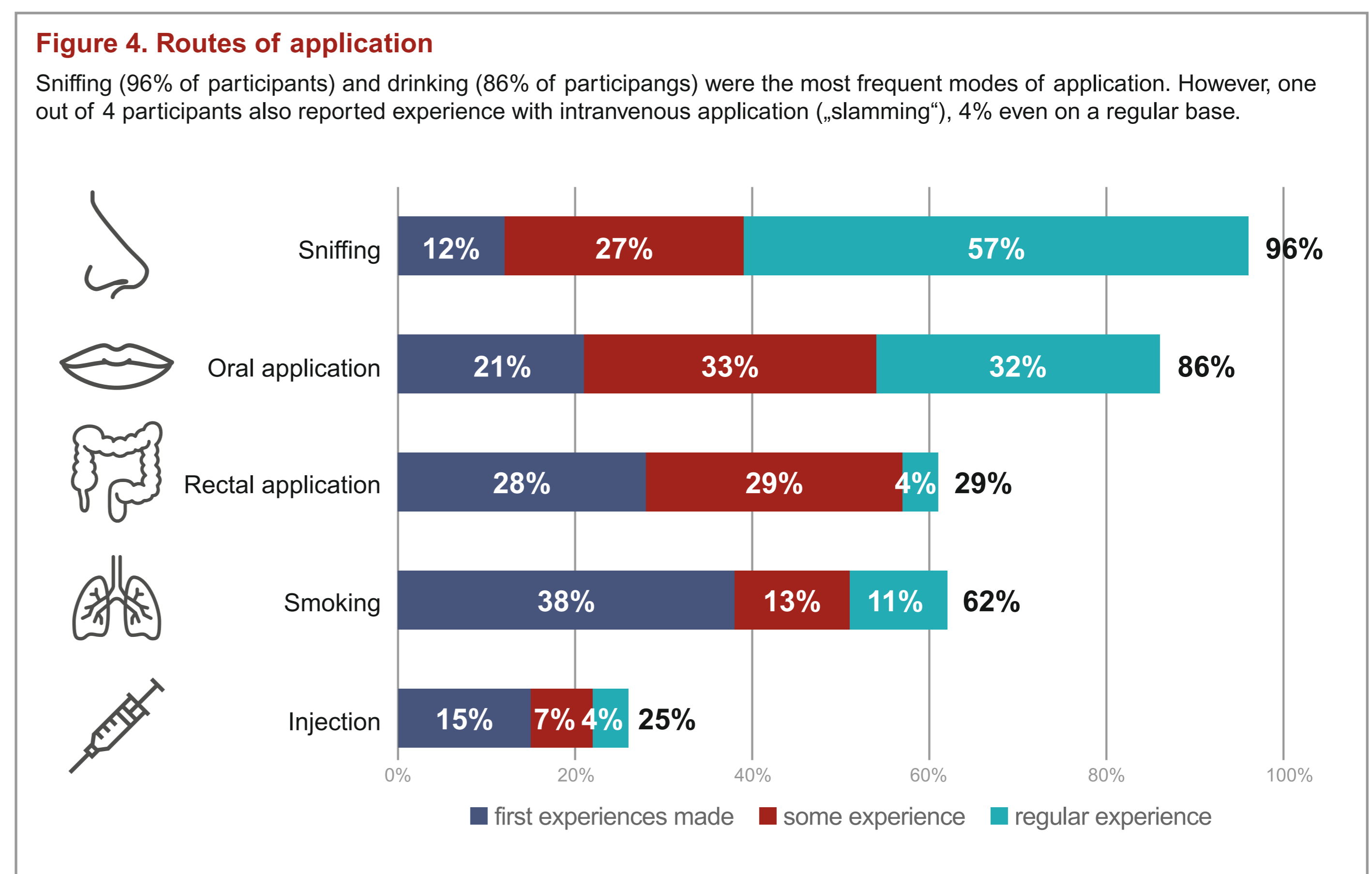
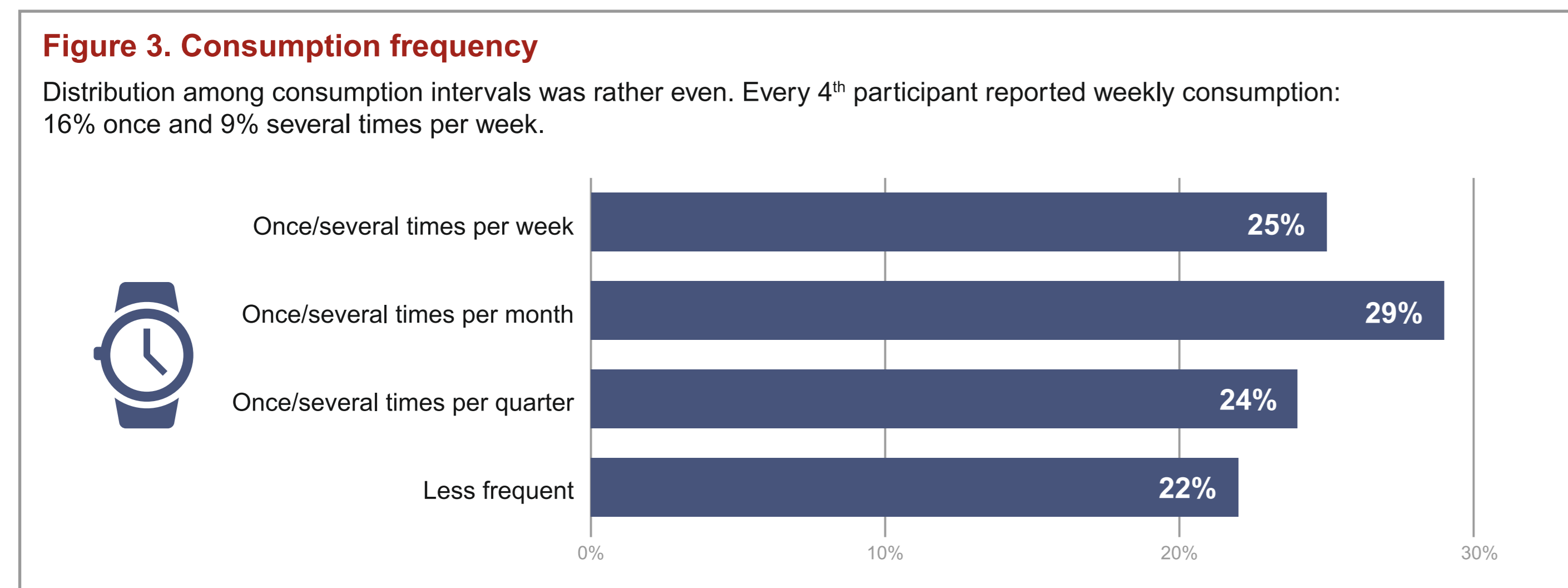
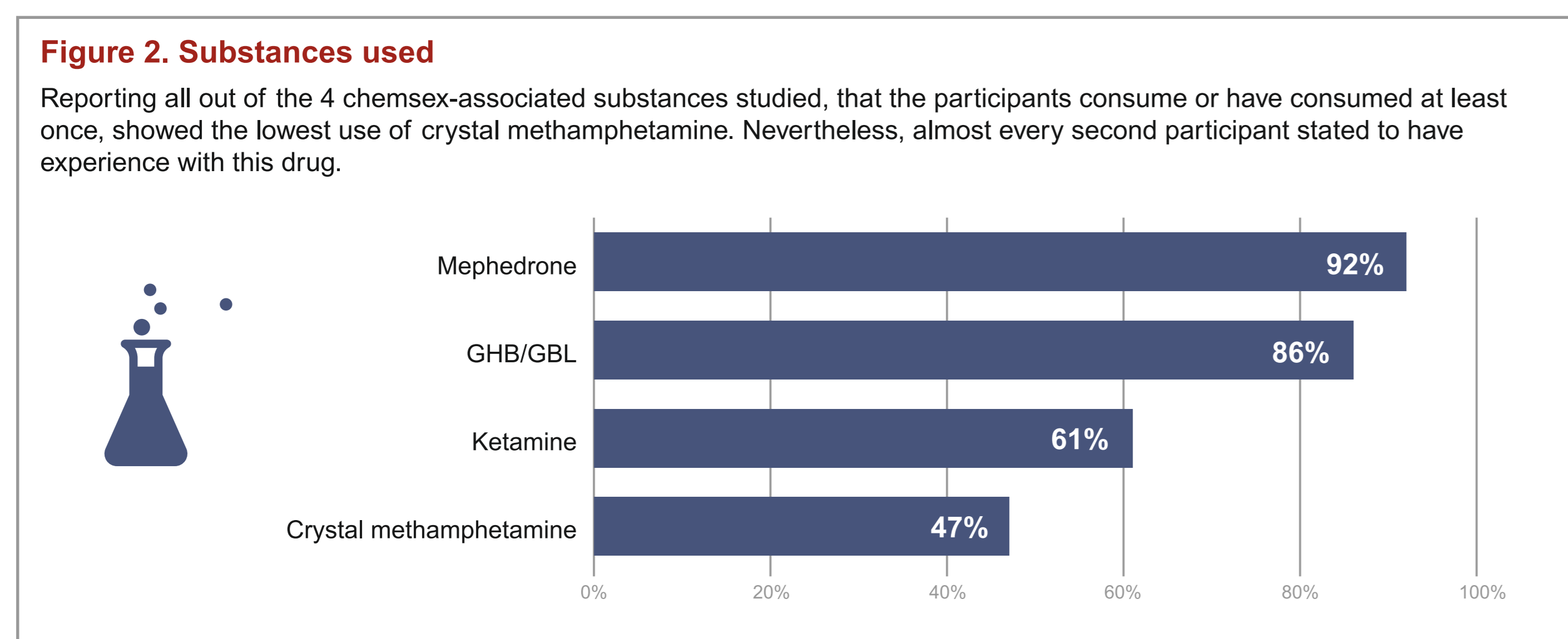
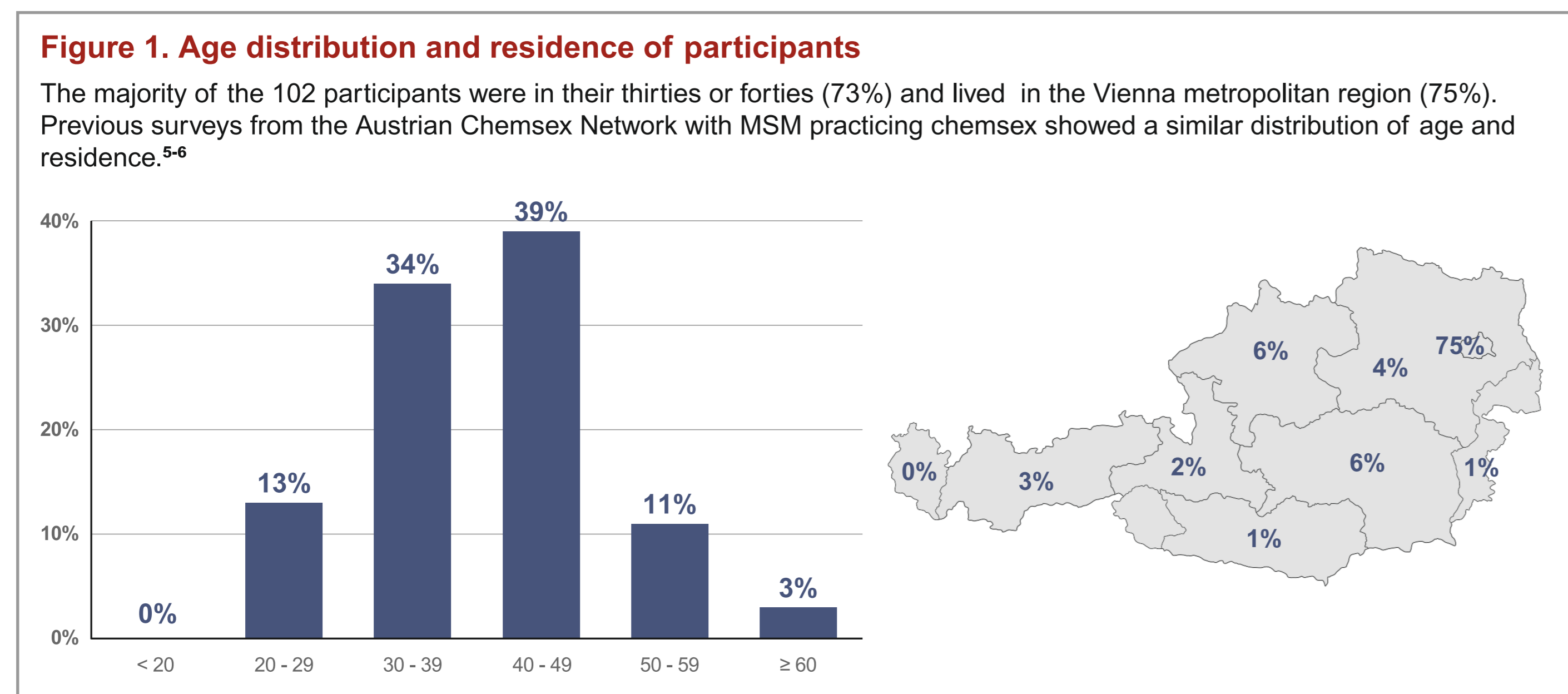
A total of 102 users participated in the survey (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 2, the most frequently used substances are mephedrone and GHB/GBL followed by ketamine and crystal methamphetamine (92%, 86%, 61% and 47% of users). 25% consume at least weekly (Figure 3), 25% report experience with intravenous application (Figure 4), and 27% use chems also alone without sex (Figure 5).

54% started consumption within the last 5 years and increased use over time was reported for all 4 substances and greatest among mephedrone users (48%) (Figure 6).

62% estimate to have their use under control, 12% take or have already taken professional help (Figure 7). 61% know the website www.chemsex.at listing professional support services offered by the Austrian Chemsex Network.

Interpretation

Chemsex risks seem to be highly underestimated among Austrian users. The COVID-19 pandemic might have aggravated the problem over the past years. These findings strongly suggest an increasing need for education- and prevention measures as well as support services for users.



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Abbreviations: GHB/GBL: gamma-hydroxybutyric acid/gamma-butyrolactone; MSM: men who have sex with men

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