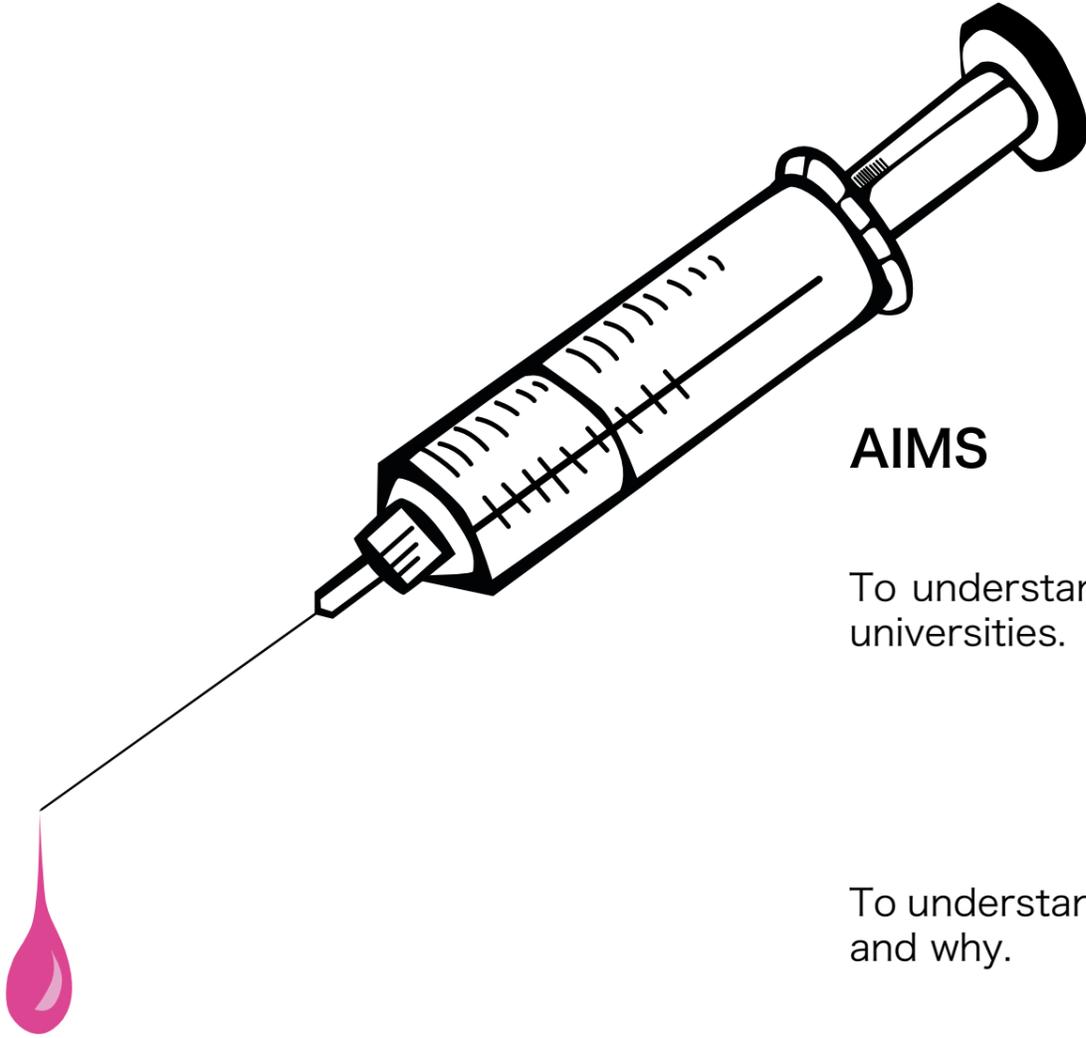


Understanding issues within
DRUG culture in Universities.

EammaChandler





AIMS

To understand problems within the drug culture of universities.

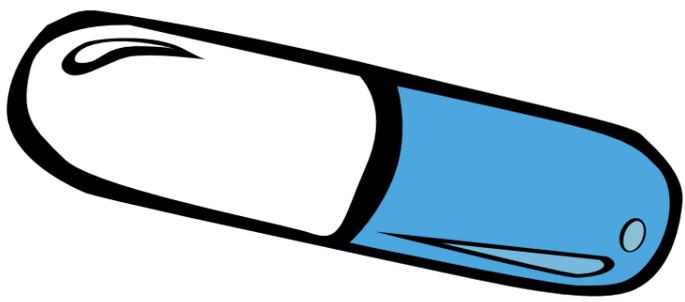
To understand what drugs most are frequently used and why.

To understand the positive compared to negative views there are about the experience.

To identify a design solution that may help the problems of drug use in Universities.

The aim of this research is to help create a wider more open awareness of what is or could be going on within Universities in the UK, what are the most prominent issues that students are facing because of drug culture, and how design could be used to bring more understanding and awareness to the key issues.





This insights report explores the different issues that have been identified and raised when exploring the drug culture with young adults in university, and the negative and positive experiences and views.

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A range of different methods of research is used to ensure that a wide range of views are obtained and also to access views of experts who have studied the area of illegal drugs. This is to ensure that there is an understanding of the real issues and take an open-minded approach.

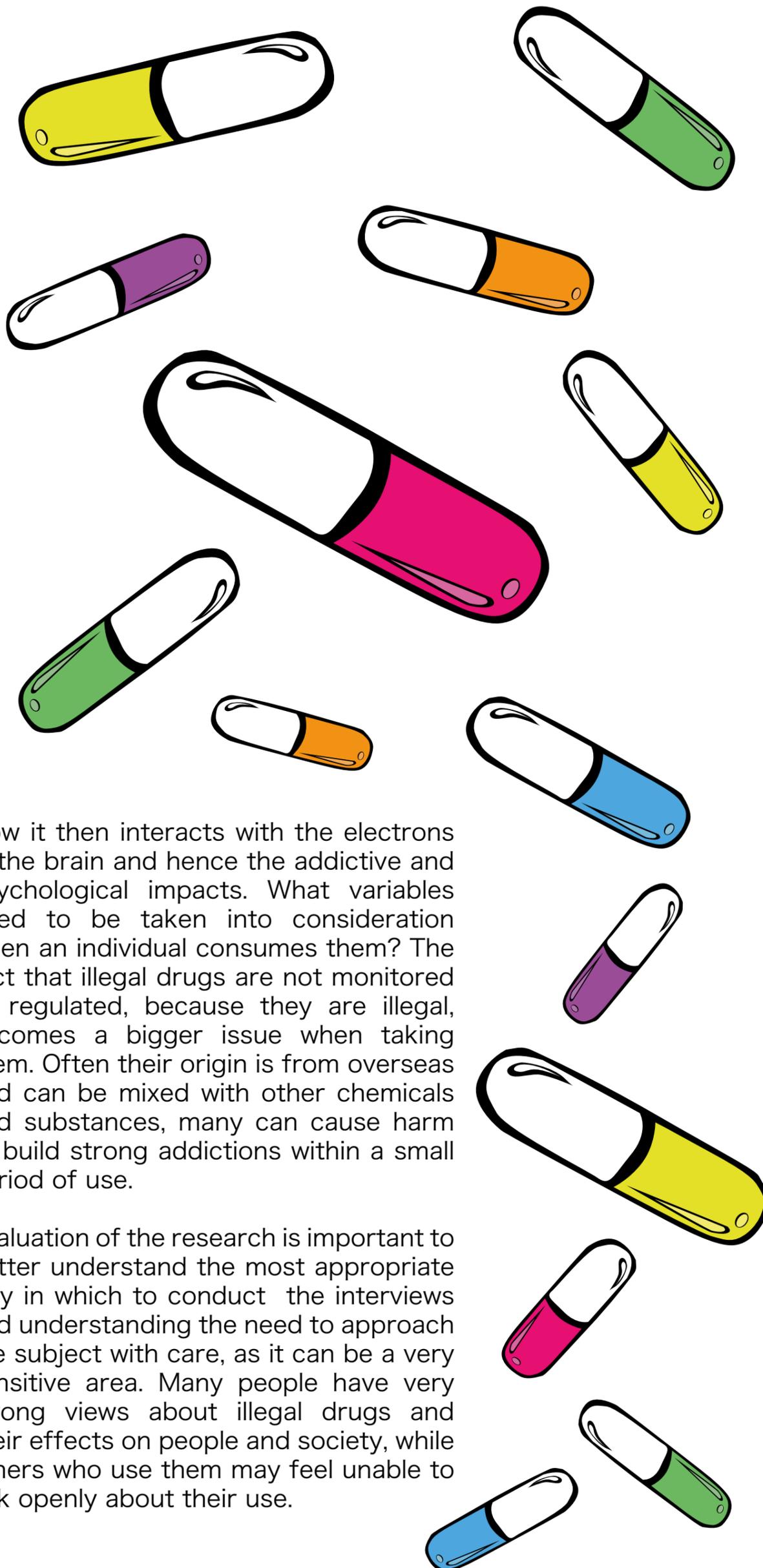
By exploring different articles on the internet as well as contacting and experts that have day to day interaction with the issue involved, a better understanding of my aims for the project can be determined. Comparing my primary and secondary research a small intermate array of interviews with friends and family were conducted, in a relaxed and safe environment, hoping this will make it easier to gather reliable and honest information.

Using online tools such SurveyMonkey, to get reliable information due to it being all anonymous. Students from various universities, and post graduates to get views from relevant people both currently at University and those who have long since left.

Everyone has their own personal experience or expectation of what the terms "drugs" or "addictive substances" actually stand for. These views range from legal substances such as alcohol and tobacco smoking to illegal drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, crack cocaine and heroin. There are very obvious differences between them and also the views people have of them. The world of illegal drugs is more concerning and requires a more detailed understanding of the way the key elements and compounds make up each drug.

How it then interacts with the electrons in the brain and hence the addictive and psychological impacts. What variables need to be taken into consideration when an individual consumes them? The fact that illegal drugs are not monitored or regulated, because they are illegal, becomes a bigger issue when taking them. Often their origin is from overseas and can be mixed with other chemicals and substances, many can cause harm or build strong addictions within a small period of use.

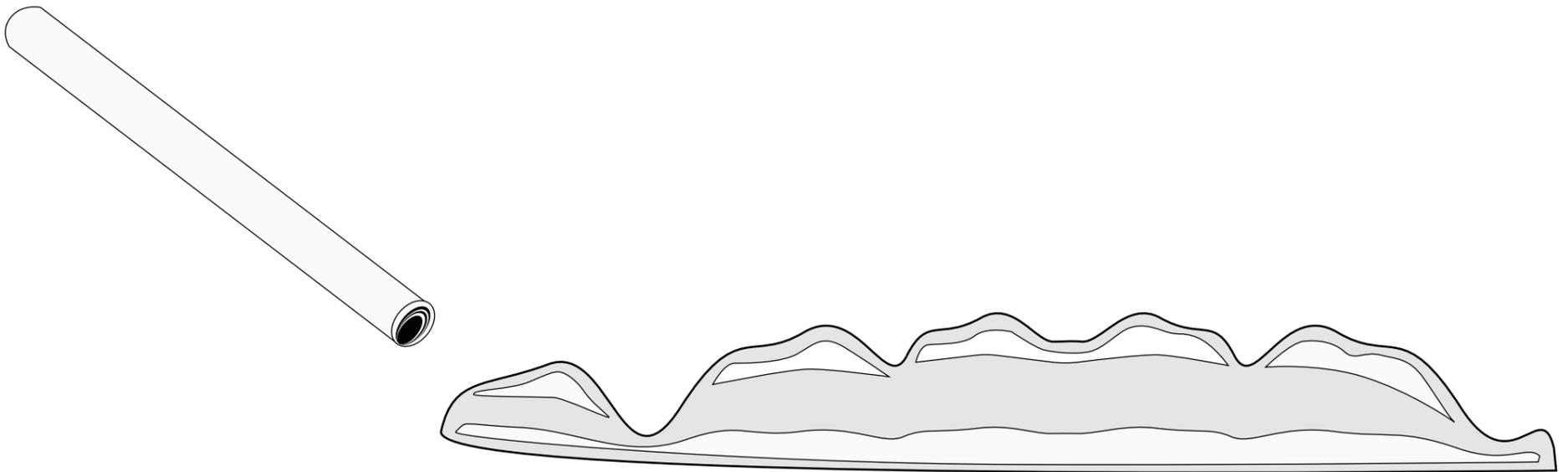
Evaluation of the research is important to better understand the most appropriate way in which to conduct the interviews and understanding the need to approach the subject with care, as it can be a very sensitive area. Many people have very strong views about illegal drugs and their effects on people and society, while others who use them may feel unable to talk openly about their use.



Dean Acreman

Public health Wales NHS

A first point of research was an interview with Dean Acreman, who works with the NHS helping to understand the issues with, not only students, but all age groups relating to alcohol and drug issues in Wales. Exploring findings from the latest study Philtre, Snapshot issued 18th October – December 2019, 830 samples have been analysed, with 99 substances identified within the drugs. The population tested was 82% males and 18% females. The most common drug to be brought into the test centre was cocaine, and then ketamine. These are also known to be very popular within the student drug culture community as they can be used to keep you awake and alert, while on a night out, at raves or just to get students through University work such as projects and assignments.



Dean Acreman's analysis matches the findings from my survey with cocaine and ketamine being the two most commonly used drugs within student culture, along with cannabis and MDMA.

Through the research it's found that not only are these drugs used to intensify your night out, but the other top reason is to escape into the 'bigger picture'. Through talking with Dean Acreman, the understanding is that this is the main reason for any use of drugs, especially with young adults that have been through some trauma in their lives or struggle with mental health issues. So, understanding the issues within mental health and stress that students put themselves through not only due to their course work but the social side too is a key element to potentially escaping into drugs. For some students moving into a flat with people they have never met before miles away from home puts pressure on them to fit in, which has been shown to be another factor in the research. Statistics also show that before university they may never have thought of getting involved with the drug culture but as it's all around them constantly, it's become normalised to the point where, the side effects that come along with the drugs are not seen or realised. As so many people are relaying positive experiences on the drugs, the positive experiences are the only ones that are showing through. More awareness and less shame need to be brought out on the facts that people do have bad trips



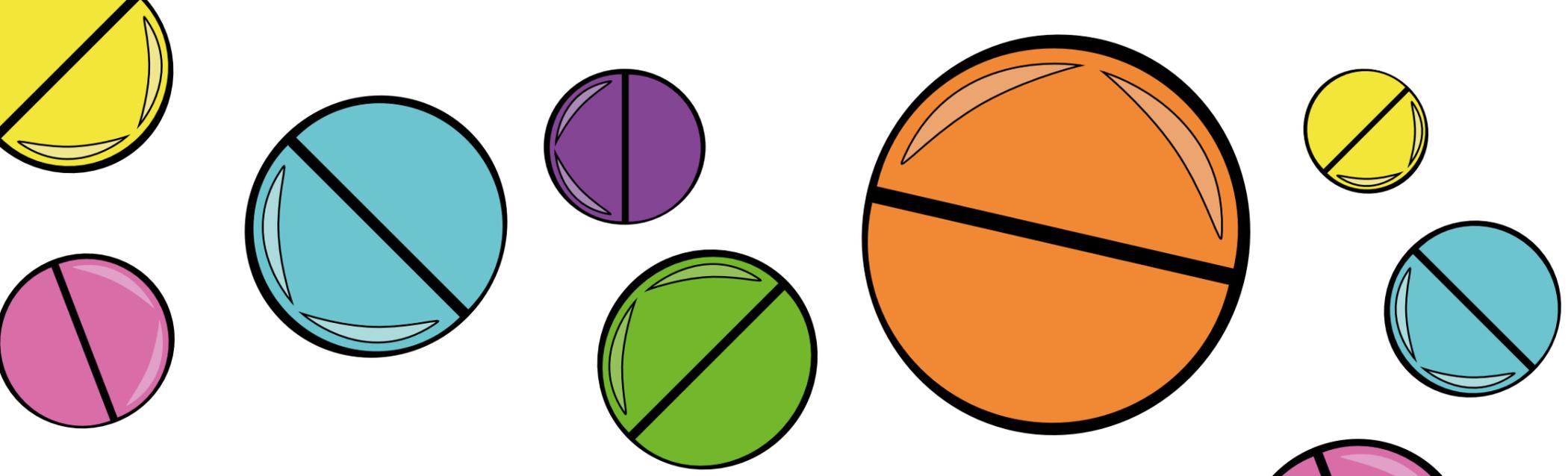


and that because you have a bad trip it doesn't mean you can't "handle" the drugs or can't talk about the experience. Talking about the bad experiences will help to educate people to know that there are a lot of more side effects to using drugs other than the typical stereotype of heavy user 'druggies'.

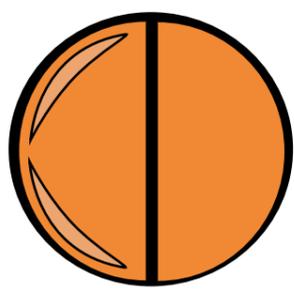
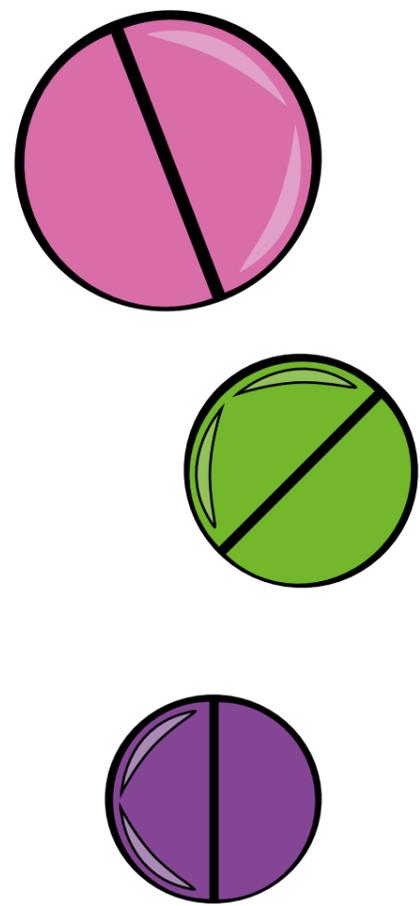
It was also highlighted that many "normal" everyday people are using drugs and this needs to be understood within the community so that it's easier for these people to come forward and get the help they need.

He went on to explain in the interview that through the years of him being in his perdition he focuses on education and understanding of the drugs and the safest way for young adults to take them. He identifies that there has been a huge increase in drug taking over the past 20 years, primarily due to the fact it's a lot easier to get drugs, however a major concern is the growing amounts of "bulking" used in cocaine and pills. Ranging from bicarbonate soda, concrete, bleach and other substances, he explained that using assorted "white powders" are extremely common bulking agents because people link them to the idea of them "being pure and clean", it gives them a false sense of safety but the bulking agents can be harmful. Depending on the amount of bulk that has been used in the substance you will never know how it will affect your body and what the long-lasting effects could and will be. If taken regularly without an understanding of how it moves through your body and what it is the effects can be extremely harmful.





An additional issue with some drugs is that the overall strengths have increased, or can vary from one pill to another. Studies have shown that since the '1990s and 2000s the average MDMA content of pills was somewhere between 50-80mg²' but comparing the results from studies in 2016 the 'averages were closer to 125mg² MDMA per pill' and there were reports of the 'super pills found on the market in some countries with a reported range of 270-340mg²'. With all these pills having different dosages it can have dangerous consequences as typically they look the same and cannot be told apart. This could create a deadly scenario as one night you could take a pill that only contains 50mg² of MDMA and have good experience, however another night you may have one or two but as it's impossible to tell how much MDMA it contains, unless you get it tested, you may be taking a pill or two with over 3x the amount in. This could cause a long list of side-effects including; uncontrollable body movements, restlessness, anxiety, changes in mental status, headaches, blurred vision, clenched jaw, elevated body temperature, chill, and excessive sweating, abdominal cramping, vomiting, nausea, irregular heart rate, increased blood pressure, urinary retention.





By overdosing the main five key indications to this happening are the following; very high blood sugar, a dangerously high body temperature, seizures, panic attacks and fainting spells. The main issue with taking MDMA (molly) in its pure form is the body craves water, by drinking too much water you can effectively drown, without you knowing. So, it's not always the pills that could kill you or damage your body it's the effects of the chemical reaction in your body. The period of time it takes to pass through a person's body may take from '3 to 6 hours' but again due to different people's body types it can vary. This all comes down to variables such as how high your metabolism is, how much bulking the pill has had put into it, as well as any other drugs or alcohol a person may have consumed in addition.

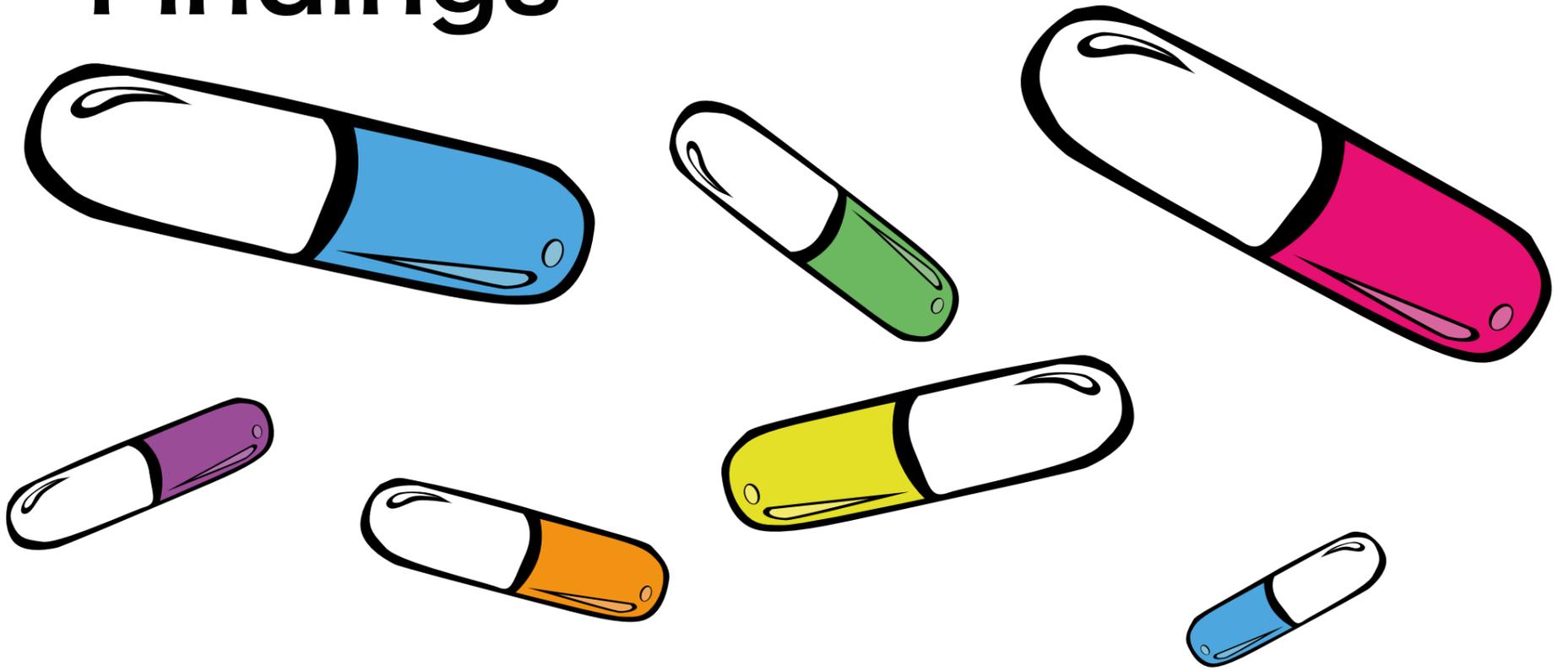
One To One Interviews

There were a number of considerations needed when carrying out one to one interviews. The main concern I experienced was not wanting to come across as overpowering or intense making the interviewee nervous, as this could then taint the information provided from them. If they felt uncomfortable telling personal information or intimidated talking about an already taboo subject that comes with a lot of negative stereotypes this could impact the research. “Open” questions needed to be asked as the interviewee answers could have been led, but also to gain as much information as possible so did not use “yes or no” answers that would come from “closed” questions.

Understanding the potential issues of a one to one interview, and the limited number of people I could talk to I also designed and circulated an anonymous online survey in which people could share their thoughts and experiences with drugs on FaceBook. Through these two methods a sample of 54 students and non students. 15% of responses were no longer students but had attended University at some time in the past and 85% were currently studying at a University in the UK.

Again, the questions were very open to avoid the guidance of any answers. Having an understanding of how the audience interpreted these questions would then help achieve a greater understanding of drug culture in universities by reaching a wider audience and also obtain views outside of the University of South Wales. This approach worked well and was demonstrated clearly in the findings. Due to the survey being anonymous the questions appeared to be answered in a more genuine way, leading me to explore the idea that; just because drugs are illegal it would be naive and irresponsible to think that they are not being used, they are being used throughout not only universities but to a lesser extent schools too, across all social groups and classes.

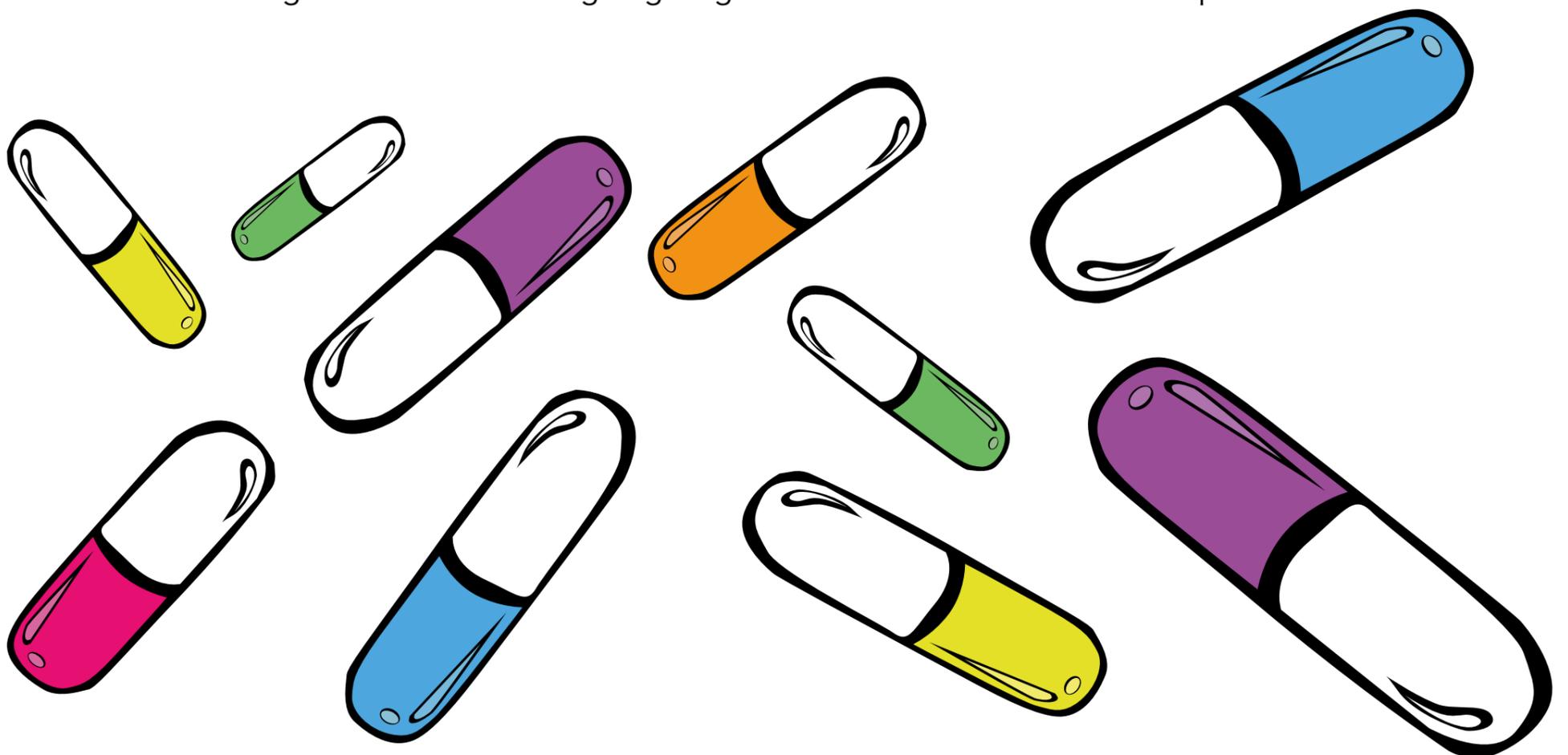
Findings



The following part of the report details responses and issues raised in the interviews:

Within my interview one key story stood out; a young female new to university, wanted to fit in with everyone else around her. There was no actual peer pressure from her peers to join in and smoke cannabis with them, but yet she felt the need to fit in and “impress” her new friends. She openly pushed the point that it was “self-peer” pressure that made her do the next thing. ‘The boys who I lived with wanted to hot box the bathroom and asked if me and my best friend wanted to join? A hot box is when you cut out any fresh air entering the room so your removing the ability for the smoke to leave the room. Even though you may not be smoking the joint at the time you’re still inhaling the smoke that’s in the room constantly. For someone who doesn’t smoke a lot it’s a very intense experience as you cannot leave the room at any time, as the smoke will escape if you do.

Knowingly this the boys doubled checked to make sure that she understood this, and she was sure she could handle it. About an hour had gone by, her friend got a text from one of the boys inside the bathroom asking to come and get the her. She had smoked too much as well as inhaling the smoke in the room and was having a bad trip. She went on to explain that the experience she had was intense and she didn’t have control of what she was thinking or feeling. ‘I genuinely thought I was in a game if sims, and that we were all being controlled by something much bigger. I know some people say it helps you see the bigger picture, but I didn’t expect that experience on just weed. It gave me the worst paranoia I’ve ever experienced, and I didn’t know when it was going to stop. That’s what scared me the most and what I needed reassuring was that it wasn’t going to go on for ever and that it would pass.’



A question I then asked was, what helped you clam down and did your friends know how to react to make it easier for you or did they panic?

'My friend and the boys that I smoked with knew what to do to keep me calm and thinking of positive places in my mind and kept me distracted so I did not think too deeply about things. Whereas one house mate didn't, she was making it worse by trying to make me laugh. To do this she would make comments about how I was looking a funny colour and how funny I looked, but obviously this just made the whole situation so much worse. It did get to the point where people told her to leave me alone and give me space as she was elevating the situation to a dangerous level.'

What did she think the reason was for her to act the way she did in that situation compared to the others?

She said a lack of knowledge and experience of people that have used drugs, the people that knew how to act and who knew what to say had all had a bad experience with smoking cannabis, so they knew what it was like and how scary it could be. They treated me as though they would hope someone would do to them if they had a bad trip.

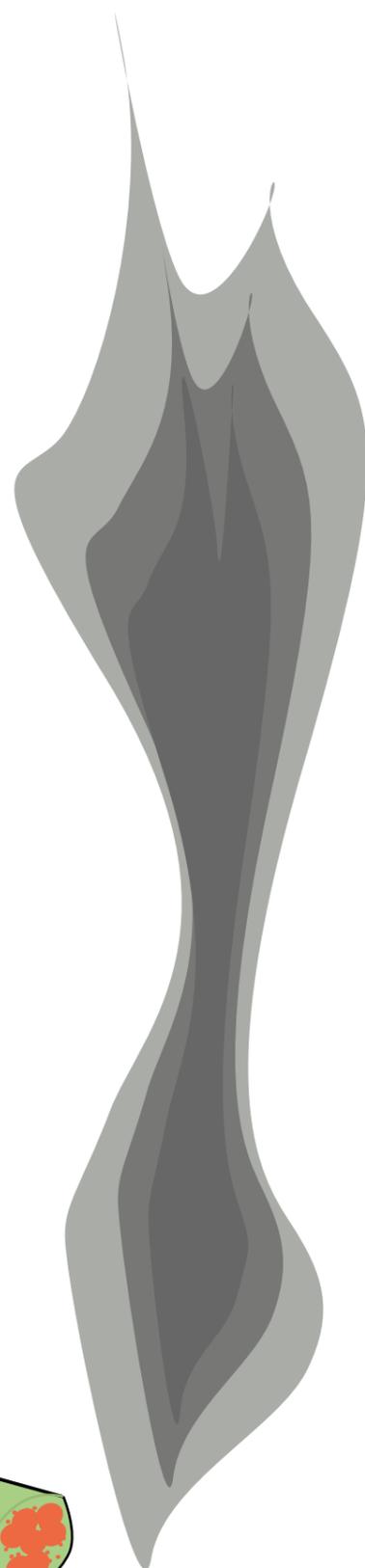
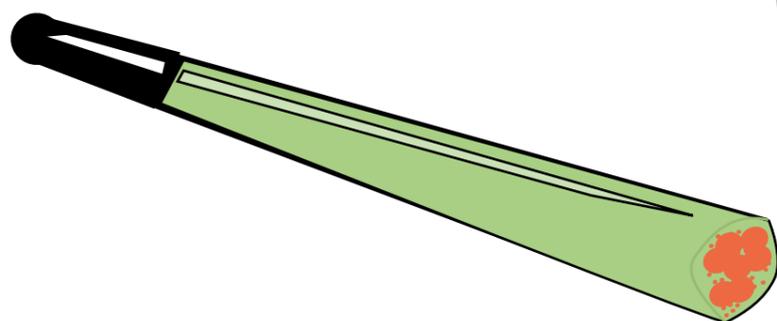
Another key question was - why is it that students get caught up in drug use when they come to University?

'You always get that one crowd that has done it for years while they were at college and they just bring it to university with them', but 'you also have that group of people that have had a very sheltered lives and so when they move away from home they go crazy and do what they want to do as there's no repercussions in their eyes.' These are also the sort of people that get into the deeper issues with drug use as they go to extremes with how often and much they consume combined with little knowledge.'

Another key question was - Do you think that having that bad experience has made you understand drugs better and have more respect when using? 'Having a bad experience definitely opens your eyes to the way in which drugs are used. I still smoke regularly but I know when to stop and know what to do if something happens. I'm also a lot more aware of the different types of cannabis.' The understanding of the chemicals in weed that gives you the high and how its measured and the different strength, as well as the different experiences you can have with each different type.'

Do the people you're around effect your experience with drugs and if so how?

"Depending on the type of drug you are using obviously the effects will be different, smoking a joint will most likely calm the body and relax you depending on the strain but if you with a group of people you don't feel confident and comfortable with, it can create paranoia, as well as anxiety. Whereas if you're with close friends or family that you feel safe around there will be a much different effect to your body".



This is an important issue when consuming any type of drug, and is even relevant to alcohol, as whatever your emotions may be before taking something like cannabis, there is a high chance that it will actually exaggerate your current emotional state further. If you then add in the fact the atmosphere in the room may not make you feel safe and secure, this could set off a bad experience, or as some call it a 'trip'. If the drug which is being consumed is MDMA (molly) the overall feelings and emotions that come over the body can sometimes be very intense, so being in a room with people that are comforting, and reassuring will only make the experience better. As the strongest emotion is love, this will be the most overpowering and won't only benefit you but the people around you. Knowing that your experience will not affect theirs is another key thing that shouldn't be on your mind. As at that point you start to evaluate yourself and sometimes doubt yourself about your actions and feelings, this behaviour is associated with any drug including alcohol.

Research Findings

Online survey

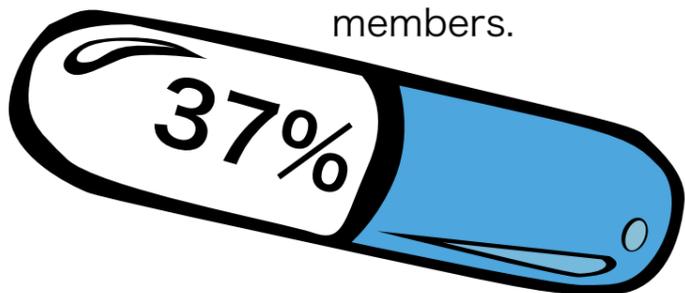
These answers were deemed the most informative when looking through the results from my anonymous surveys that were conducted via 54 students and ex-students. The overall responses made it very clear that the effect of 'student living' had a significant impact on their views and use of drugs as the majority didn't associate with the idea of drugs prior to going to University.

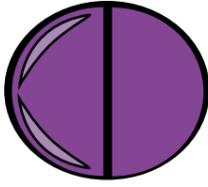
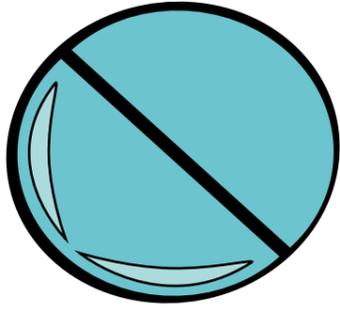
Through the survey that was conducted the results showed that 37% were not interested in drug culture before attending university, 25% haven't been to university and still haven't touched drugs. 14% haven't gone to university but still have explored or regularly experiment with drugs. Finally, 22%, explored drugs before attending university and then carried on while there.

It was also clear to see from the results that there was a significant increase in the use of drugs within Universities but there was also a lot more understanding and some appreciation of the side effects of drugs and how they must be treated with 'respect'. But alongside this there was a small percentage that didn't really pay attention to the side effects and what they were putting into their body, this was due to the fact that they had never had a bad experience and it was a case of 'it will never have happened to me, I've always had a good experience so I doubt I will have a bad one.' This was the opinion of 17% of the people in the survey that openly said they've had a good experience with drugs and use them regularly.

In contrast 20% said that they feel like they are careful when taking drugs and feel that they take all the correct precautions when experimenting. There was an 89% response from 18-22-year-old students with confident and open responses, compared to the ages of 23+, 11% of people responded showing that the idea of recreational drug use within universities are high and that they knew it was an issue that needed to be tackled but also showed their strong views with stereotypes and the idea of the users being 'crack heads, druggies'. This showed that their view and opinions were naive and sheltered.

Due to this being an anonymous survey, to get the best and most honest results, the results show the younger generation has been a lot more open when explaining their experiences, thoughts and ideas behind recreational drug use. They do however have both positive and negative stories to tell about themselves or friends and family members.





Anyone who is going to experiment with drugs should have a stronger understanding of what to expect, what could happen and what they could be putting into their body each time. The key factors of what their properties are and what makes up each of the different types of drugs. Key questions that were answered through this research were; what makes a class A drug different to a class C drug scientifically? What are the different effects of a class A drug compared to a class C drug? What is the basic information I need to know to be aware of the different types of drug use in generation Z?

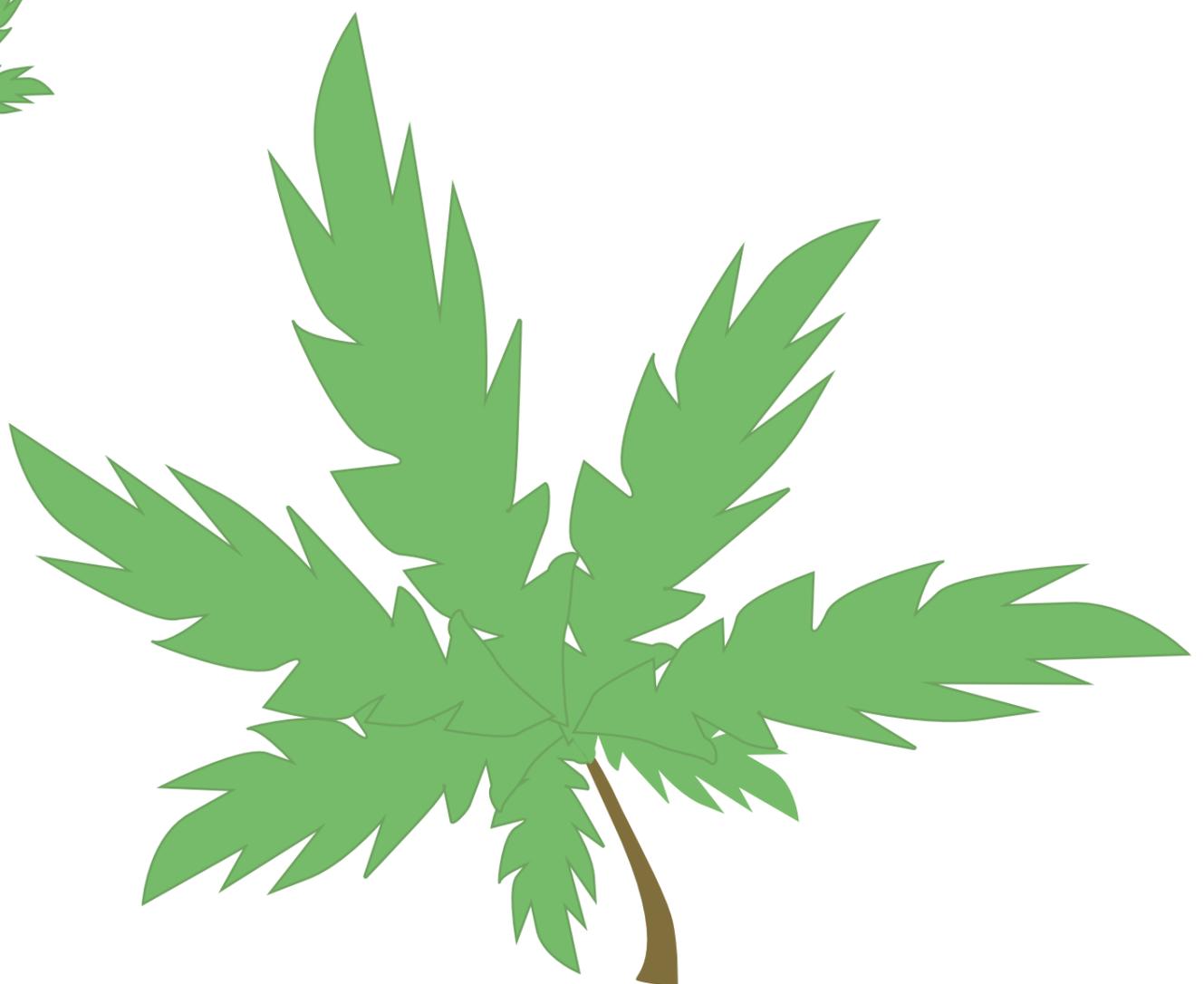
Exploring the results from my research I found class A narcotics consist of; heroin, crack, ecstasy, LSD, methadone, methamphetamine (mostly known as crystal meth), magic mushrooms containing a strong hallucinogenic chemicals such as psilocin, and any of the following class B drug that is consumed by injection.



Surly it would be better to have a safe space or environment where students or anyone could come and openly test their drugs but also have reliable information about different types of drugs and the affects it can have on your body. Within a non-judgemental and open-minded environment. Not only will the students feel safe enough to ask questions, but their identities would be protected so that there would be no legal repercussions of the conversation. This could have saved many lives throughout the past five years, when young adults have taken something not knowing exactly what it is? Information such as how long it takes to have an effect on the body, what would happen if you were to mix it with other drugs, as well as the long-lasting effect it could have on your mental and physical health. Through exploring the realisation that by knowing these three answers to the three key questions, it could genuinely determine three things; you will be safer, you would have a better understanding of what to expect, and the people taking them may take a second look and realise how bad it could get before it's too late.

For example, in 2008, Mattha Busby wrote an article for The Guardian, about the shocking death of 18-year-old Georgia Jones. She died at mutiny festival after taking 2 pills which 'may have been contaminated... which could include as much as 600mg of pure MDMA'. When a local charity got involved and examined the pills which where; 'silver Audi' these pills "contained up to triple the average adult dosage'

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/may/27/mutiny-festival-deaths-ill-portsmouth>



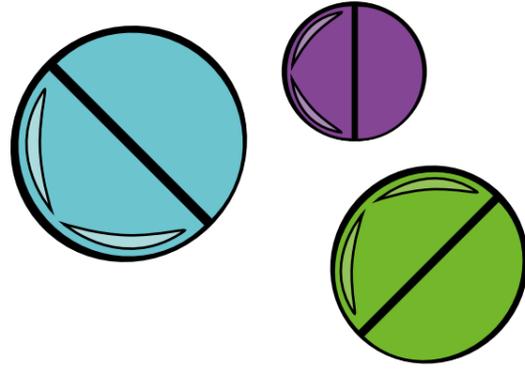


Further information gathered through secondary research provided technical details that were also raised within the interviews. The following are key elements of research that added further information that backed up the interviewee's comments. Through this information, understanding that there are drug types within drug types shows that by doing research before taking or smoking something is so important. There are over 102 different types of strains that all have small changes, for example; different 'flavours' blueberry, mango, sour apple each one has its own potency, which is low, with a small added taste of the fruit it's named after. As you move up the cannabis periodic table the potency increases, looking at <https://www.leafly.com/strains> website shows the different types of strains and their properties in a visual manner so it's quick and easy to understand with over 785 reviews on one product showing what to be expected when taking it. 'Mr. nice this strain is very dense but with a sweet aroma to it will creep up on you and provide you with a strong, mellow high.' To give different effects to the brain and body. Some will give you a relaxed and clam feel through the whole of your body, another can calm your body so you can concentrate. Whereas some will make you extremely paranoid and stress about everything, but this won't be the same for everyone.

This research showed that the number of variables that should be taken into consideration when thinking about taking a drug are huge. This suggests that there should be a much greater availability of detailed information on the possible consequences of taking drugs as well as the repercussions of what may or may not happen. This is relevant not only for the person taking the drugs but also their friends, so if something were to go wrong they have an understanding of what is necessary to assist their friend.



Conclusion

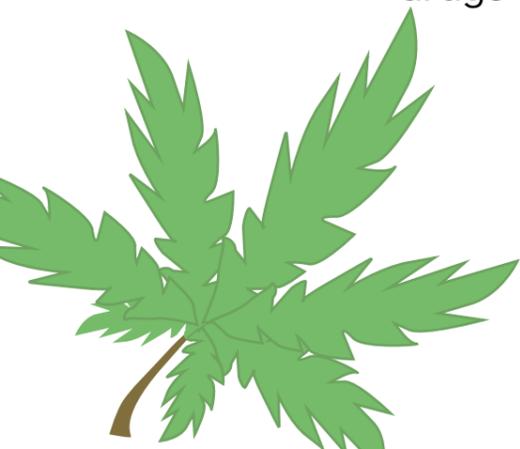


The research shows education is a very important element in controlling the issues of drug taking in Universities. Testing facilities may also be a good idea, but it is also extremely expensive. Cardiff University has testing equipment that costs £30,000 a year to run and so, it's not a realistic solution whereas creating enough awareness and being more open about the negative and positive effects on the mental health when using drugs as well as the physical health element is important. Both sides of the argument need to be shown, just because it's illegal it would be naive to think that no one does it and to pretend it isn't happening. So, a campaign in which it shows the "dirty truth" surrounding drug use and abuse would show everyone that drug use may be seen as fun, but consideration must be taken as to the safest way in which it could be done and what to do if it goes wrong. The student life at Universities is a testing ground for drugs and students must be equipped with the necessary information to stay as safe as possible.

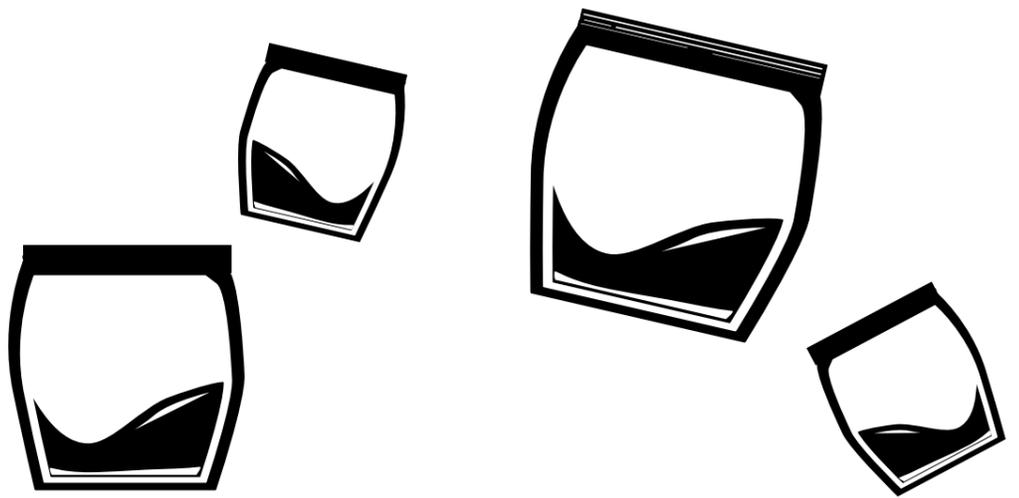
The wide range of different help tools that are currently available are good, but there still needs to be more information that's easily accessible and more impactful.

So, bringing together all the information that has been gathered and understanding the need to create a solution that not only educates consumers but helps document their experiences when with different people and environments with different types of drugs is key. By doing this I could create something where you can document the types of drugs you've had and so if there was any bad experiences there would be patterns that start occurring and so you could combat this as well as having information that is accessible for people so they know the safest way to take drugs.

As the research shows it would be naive to try and ignore the issue, we know it's an illegal practice, but it is happening now and at a large scale. It may not be talked about openly, but it exists and ignoring it does not solve the issues that drug taking links to mental health issues, including paranoia, schizophrenia depression. These conditions can later lead on to gross misuse of drugs and ultimately overdoses, whether this triggers these issues or develops them further as people try and self-medicate. This is detailed in the report from National Institute on drug abuse, Drugs Brains, and Behaviours: The Science of Addiction (July 2018) <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/addiction-health>.

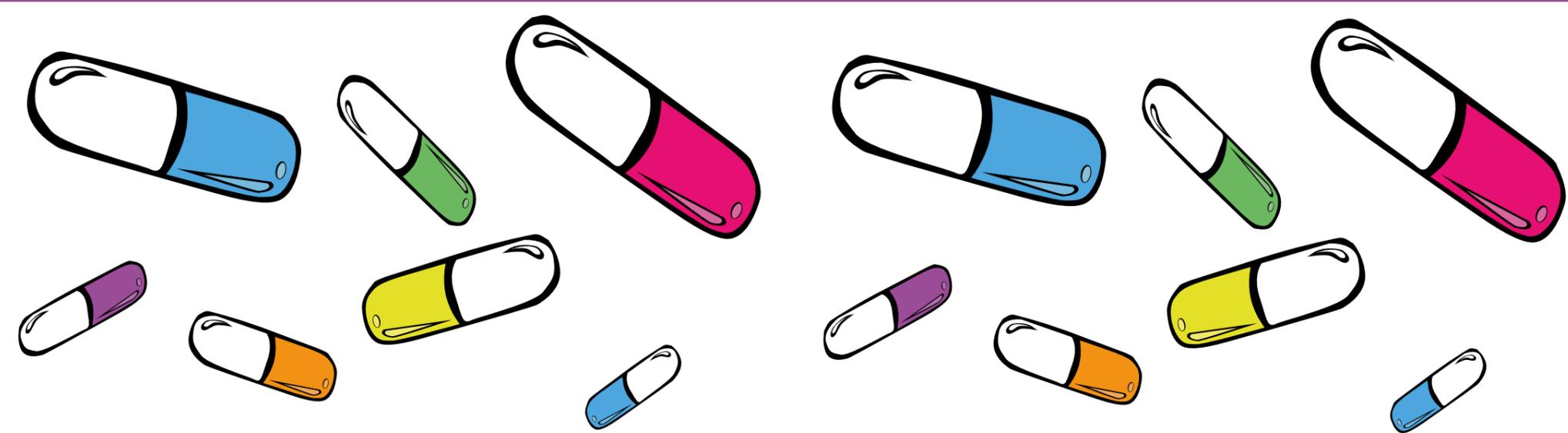


Design Solution



We can use design to explore the different ways in which people can share their stories, while also raising awareness for the truths both positive and negative within the drug culture. Giving a clear visual indication into what to expect, so if people were to experiment, they could do it in the safest way possible. As well as educating non-users, so that the stigma and stereotype doesn't hold people back from getting help and not feeling closed off, it is also important to communicate with long term or experienced users as they are at risk from other aspects of potential drug miss-use.

Using something that connects the drug use with mental health awareness is key in slowly combating the issue. By making it less of an embarrassment of the subjects, combatting the issues will become easier and the focus on educated drug use, and drug abuse will hopefully have an effect on the lowering the statistics of drug use in Universities.



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