Doing a GPS during COVID–19

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GPS meeting, 19.05.2020
background/starting point

» last GPS survey in 2015
» not only drugs, but also alcohol, tobacco and gambling
» struggling to get a extra budget for GPS for at least two years
» financial commitment by MOH received by the end of 2019
» just before we were ready to start the corona pandemic emerged in Austria

Three options:
1. wait until autumn to do the GPS just like it was planned
   → face-to-face interviews still might not be possible in autumn
2. skip GPS to next year
   → funding for GPS on drug use might not be number 1 priority
3. do it now and adopt it to the actual situation
   → no experience on how to do a survey during a pandemic
necessary adoption due to COVID–19

original plan
» Mixed design
  (Face-to-Face and Online)

» One wave of data collection in April/May

» Very similar questionnaire like in 2015

» Questions on attitudes, risk assessment, drug and alcohol policy

» Focus on time lines

adopted plan
» Only online-interviews (offline-recruited, representative for adult population)

» Panel design with data collection in April/May and September/October

» Only key questions remained the same

» no questions on attitudes, risk assessment, drug and alcohol policy

» Focus on recent changes in consumption and motives for change
goals for our adopted survey

» First wave (April/May, n = 6,000)
  » exceptional situation
  » snapshot on substance use during the (initial) peak of pandemic
  » Assess short time changes in substance due to lock-down measures
  » Assess motives for change in consumption patterns
  » Subgroup analyses (based on consumption levels, levels of being effected by corona pandemic)

» Second wave (October, n = 4,000)
  » Still exceptional or a step back to normal?
  » Assess long term effects and/or provide prevalence estimates used for trend analyses 6 months after the initial peak (T2)
  » Subgroup analyses (based on consumption levels, levels of being effected by corona pandemic)
Challenge 1: timing is crucial!

» 29.01.2020: final questionnaire
» 31.01.2020: start of tender period
» 10.03.2020: end of tender period
» 13.03.2020: physical distancing and other measures announced in Austria
» 03.04.2020: Ministry of Health agrees to changed plan of doing an Online-survey
» 14.04.2020: market research company is commissioned
» 21.04.2020: field test of draft online-questionnaire
» 27.04.2020: start of field work
» 01.05.2020: lifting of some measures is announced in Austria

» No time for serious pretesting of corona-specific items

» Budget for the survey had to be reduced in order to avoid second tender period (lower legal requirements)

» With the start of field work some measures were already lifted

» Short term effects (e.g. physical distancing) are in steady transition vs. long term effects (e.g. job loss) are not yet visible
Challenge 2: what exactly is the novel effect that we try to measure?

» we rather measure a society’s reaction to a disease than a actual disease

» are GPS a suitable tool to measure effects by COVID-19: very few people are infected (with the virus), almost everyone is affected (by societal responses)

» how can we distinguish people who are effected on different levels?

» no standardized item blocks for measuring effect by COVID–19
Challenge 2: what exactly is the novel effect that we try to measure?

- four dimensions of **subjective effects**
  - psychological wellbeing/fear
  - job situation/income
  - social wellbeing/isolation/caretaking
  - general assessment of quality of life

- **objective effects**
  - reduction of income
  - job loss
  - pre-existing conditions

Does substance use change in relation to different levels of being effected by corona pandemic?
Challenge 3: how to measure change in consumption?

» Ask for $\Delta$ directly (Did your consumption of substance X change since Y) vs. indirectly (difference between „How much did you consume at time A“ and „how much did you consume at time B“)

» Usability vs. accuracy

» Not all change can be attributed to the actual pandemic (e.g. end of fasting period)
Challenge 3: how to measure change in consumption?

Q1: actual substance use (last 30 days)
Q2: did it change since the start of corona pandemic in Austria (no change, less, stopped, more, started)
Q3: what are the reason for that change in consumption?

» Decrease: less availability, affordability, fear of infection, fewer opportunities outside home, home isolation, …

» Increase: psychological distress, more free time, fewer obligations, more opportunities at home, no time to get up in the morning ...

» Reasons unrelated to corona!
Challenge 4: validity of the data

» Effects of the mode of data collection (experiences from our latest survey)

» „Survey-fatigue“: A lot of online-surveys are conducted at the moment on COVID-19 (e.g. on mental health in general, acceptance of political measures,…)

» How do we deal with limitation in terms of trend consistency with former data collections?
ANY EXPERIENCE ELSEWHERE?

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