

# Understanding recreational ecstasy use in the United States: A qualitative inquiry

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## **Abstract**

### Background

Ecstasy use has increasingly become popular among young adults, many of whom view it as a safe drug with no or limited negative social and health consequences. In this paper, we explore the perceptions of ecstasy users about its recreational use as well as regarding the normalization of use.

### Methods

The study participants were recruited using targeted and theoretical sampling. To be eligible, they had to be between 18 and 25 years and have used ecstasy at least four times within the past 90 days. In-depth interviews were conducted with 112 individuals. Data analysis included the constant comparison method commonly used in modified grounded theory.

### Results

The study participants associated their recreational ecstasy use with control, shaping both the timing and setting of their use. In addition, they supported that

easy access/availability and social accommodations of use contributed to their acceptance of ecstasy use as a normal part of life. Moreover, low risk perceptions of the social and health consequences of ecstasy used were identified as resulting in normalization.

### Conclusion

The study findings reveal the importance of considering recreational ecstasy use from the perspective of the users themselves for prevention efforts and when providing social and health services, including intervention strategies. In addition, the potential normalization of ecstasy use must be considered.

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