

Developing a universal pleasure and pain scale for psychoactive substances

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Who is conducting this research?

This is an independent study conducted by Professor Raimondo Bruno, Dr Stephen Bright and Shahni Watts. This project is part of Shahni's master's degree in psychology. Raimondo and Shahni are from the School of Psychological Sciences at the University of Tasmania; Stephen is from Edith Cowan University.

What is this study about?

We're trying to make a scale (a questionnaire) for rating new drugs.

New drugs come on to the market pretty rapidly. When they first come out, they typically haven't had any testing, and sometimes they're just plain awful (the synthetic cannabinoid that left people too heavily stoned for 72 hours comes to mind). We are hoping to come up with a quick but thorough way for people to record their experiences with a new substance. One of the ways this might be applied is in early warning systems where people who use drugs post reports on their experience with drug batches and new drugs. While this isn't as good as drug checking (or having a safe supply) it is a good way for the community to help each other.

Getting a questionnaire that is *quick* but still *thorough* is really tricky, though – because drugs have different types of effects, and people choose substances for different reasons. Also, we want to record the negative and the positive effects of the substance. Because all of this is important to people!

We've put our heads together, coming from a wide range of scientific and lived experience, and have looked at all of the existing scales in the scientific literature, as well as on community enthusiast websites. We've tried to boil things down to the smallest number of questions.

Now it is over to the community of people who use drugs for your advice. We want to make sure that we haven't missed anything that is really important to you when thinking about substances, and also try to work out where we can make the questionnaire shorter and easier.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You are invited to participate because you are **18 or older**, and you have used **at least three different illicit ('illegal') substances in the past six months**.

If I participate, what do I have to do?

We start with some general questions asking you to rate how important different parts of the peak experience of a drug are to you (like their intensity, how long they last, feelings of connection). Then we ask about the important parts of the after-effects of a drug are to you (e.g. how big the effects on your feelings are the next day, how long they last etc). Then we

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ask you to pick the most important things you want to know about a new drug before you take it (we have a list, but you can add to it if you like).

We've also developed a series of questions that we think might work for rating a drug. It has 19 questions about the positives and negatives of an experience. To see if it works, and where we can cut it back, we would like to invite you to think about the best/most positive experience you've had when you've used just one substance, and rate that experience using the scale. Then we would like you to think about the worst/most negative experience you've had when you've used just one substance, and use the scale to rate that experience. **We acknowledge that sometimes there are really bad experiences that occur, and if you think reflecting on this might cause distress for you, then you should not take part in this study.**

At the end, we ask just a few questions about you – your gender, your age group in 2 or 5 year categories (e.g. 35-39), the country you live in, and how you would rate your level of expertise on drugs (in comparison to the general population). We are keeping the number of questions about you as brief and broad as possible to protect your anonymity.

All together we think it should take about 10 to 15 minutes to finish.

How do I benefit from participating in this study?

The main benefit of participating in this study is contributing to science and making sure that the scale being developed reflects the things that people who use drugs feel are important. Our aim is to eventually build these questions into open early warning systems so that there is a systematic way of recording and communicating the positive and negatives of new drugs or new batches.

While we aren't able to provide reimbursement for your time, as a small means of 'giving back' we will be donating all the funds we have for this study (AUD \$500) to one of the following charities by means of a prize draw on December 1, 2025. When you complete your survey you can choose your preferred charity and we will make a random selection from these preferences. The charities on the list include: Doctors Without Borders (MSF); Red Umbrella Fund; Bluelight.org; The Loop; Erowid; Global Action for Trans Equality; Four Paws; Save the Children; Trees for the Future; Ocean Conservancy; Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere. The receipt for the donation will be published on the web page for this study (<https://osf.io/6hdjc>) by December 21, 2025.

Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?

The study asks about your positive and negative experiences with substances. It is possible that thinking about negative experiences may be distressing for you. If you think this is likely to be the case for you then we would recommend that you do not take part in the study. There are contact details for services for help with distress, substance use or a range of other important issues available here <https://findahelpline.com/>.

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We also acknowledge that we are talking about use of drugs that is currently illegal. There are some circumstances in which researchers are legally compelled to provide information or evidence about the use of illicit drugs. However, we do not expect that any information in this study would be able to be used against you. We have taken a number of steps to protect you. Most importantly we are not asking questions that would be useful in identifying you – we just ask age category, gender, and country. You are able to decline to answer any of these questions you wish. Either way, there is nothing identifiable that could connect you personally as taking part in this study. We do not record IP addresses or timestamps. To maintain your confidentiality, the survey is hosted on a University of Tasmania server, and data are stored on University of Tasmania servers. Bank-grade encryption is used for survey submission.

There are some things that you should do in order to maximise your own online safety in completing this study at your end. Please make sure you are using a private device and a secure internet connection. If you are in a workplace, school, public network or a country with restrictive internet laws, consider switching to a personal device, a home or mobile network. There are many free VPNs that you could use as well (ProtonVPN is a good one). If you are unsure of your safety, we would encourage you not to take part in this study.

What if I change my mind about participating during or after the study?

This study is voluntary. That means that you can decide not to participate. If you do wish to participate, you can stop participating at any point in time without giving any explanation. You are able to decline any demographic questions that you so wish, and if you get part way through the survey and decide not to continue, you can close the survey on your computer. We will treat any incomplete survey responses as a withdrawal of consent to participate and this data will be securely deleted before data analysis. Stopping your participation in the study part way through will not impact on your relationship with the University of Tasmania or the people involved in this study (especially as there is no way we know who you are!).

If you have submitted a response to the study, and change your mind, we cannot remove your submission because we can't work out which survey response belongs to you. We will give you a reminder at the end of the survey to confirm that you consent to the use of your responses.

What happens with the information I give during the study?

All information will be kept confidential and is non-identifiable. We don't ask any questions that can specifically identify you as taking part in the study. It is possible that if *you* looked at the records of the study and there was only one person that matched your specific age bracket gender and country, then you would be able to make a solid guess about which is your own record in the data, but if a person did not know that you took part, there is no way that you could be identified by the questions that we ask.

Information collected from this study will only be accessible to, and viewed by, the research team named at the start of this document. All data collected will be stored on a secure

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password protected database which will be kept secure for a period of five years, after which all information will be securely destroyed.

Our research group supports the principles of Open Science. Some of these principles involve making sure that research results are available to others, so they can be used in other studies to speed up new discoveries. Another benefit of Open Science is that other people can audit our data (and make sure that we haven't made any mistakes in the way it is reported). We feel that this is an important part of science. We would like to make the non-identifiable data from your responses available to other researchers on the Open Science Framework website for this study (<https://osf.io/6hdjc/>). To further protect any identifiability, we will remove any responses you make to 'free text' or 'open' questions, and only include the numerical ratings you make to each question (e.g. 4, 6, 9 etc). The data and all the materials from the study (the questionnaire and results) will be stored on this website, and other researchers may request access to the non-identified data from this study. As a reminder, 'non-identifiable' means that it is not possible to identify any specific data an individual person has contributed to the research (or a specific person on the basis of their responses). Access is audited and under password protection. All of our studies will be available under the Drug Use at UTAS (DRUGLAB) page on the Open Science Framework website (<https://osf.io/nps6y/>). You will be given the opportunity to opt-in to or out of this use of your data in the questionnaire.

Once we finish the study, we will publish and/or present the overall results in scientific papers, research theses and/or conferences. Only group level analyses will be reported in any publication, so as a participant you will not be individually identifiable.

Will I be told the results of the study?

A summary of the results will be made publicly available on the Drug Use at UTAS (DRUGLAB) page on the Open Science Framework website (<https://osf.io/6hdjc/>). You can also contact Raimondo Bruno directly here for copies of results: Raimondo.Bruno@utas.edu.au after 1 January 2026.

What if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact Raimondo Bruno at Raimondo.Bruno@utas.edu.au

This study has been approved by the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, you can contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 6254 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. You will need to quote H31686.

Thank you for considering participation in this study and for your time to read this information sheet. If you wish to participate in this study, please continue to the next page. Continuing to the next page implies your consent to taking part, but you have another chance to confirm your

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consent at the end of the survey. Please download a copy of this information sheet for your records.