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UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

LICIT AND ILLICIT DRUG USE IN AMSTERDAM II

Report of a household survey in 1994 on the prevalence of drug use among the population of 12 years and over

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Non-response revisited

12.1 Introduction

Where the response results in general give cause for concern, it is extremely important to investigate the specificity of the response group relative to the non-response category. As was shown in Chapter 10, almost 90 per cent of the non-response group belongs to either the category of those who refused to cooperate or those who were not at home. Already in the 1990 project we were able to carry out research among the not-at-home category. Most important, however, is the category of those who refused (60 per cent of the non-response group). For that reason we were very happy to obtain permission from the Registration Commission to re-visit those who refused to cooperate in the main survey. A strategy was developed in an effort to get the most relevant information out of these respondents. That relevant information included the reasons why they not wanted to cooperate in the main survey, and some information about the use of drugs, with which we would be able to estimate the specificity of the response group. In Sections 12.3 and 12.4 we will deal with both of these items. But first we will in Section 12.2 elaborate upon the strategy we followed in order to reach a satisfactory result.

12.2 Strategy applied

The objective of the special non-response project was to obtain 150 responses from those who were initially not at home, as well as 150 responses from those who refused in the main survey. Two relatively large samples from the not-at-home category and the refusal category were taken. We carefully prepared a standard text to be used when contacting the selected persons (Appendix 2). In that text we stressed the right of every person to decide not to participate in whatever research project. We also stressed that at the same time we would like to know whether we had made any mistakes and/or people's reasons for non-cooperation. We also decided to offer an incentive of f 20,- to those who formerly had refused and were now being asked whether they would cooperate this time (as an alternative, we offered to transfer the incentive to an ideological institution, such as Amnesty International or the World Wildlife Fund).

Those who could be contacted by telephone were interviewed that way. Other persons received a letter and a reply card, so they could let us know when and how

Table 12.1 *Frame errors, unused addresses, responses and non-responses for refusers and absentees*

refusers							
by telephone				face to face			
<i>gross sample</i>	abs.	perc.		<i>gross sample</i>	abs.	perc.	
frame errors	21	8.2		frame errors	22	13.3	
non-used addresses	8	3.1		non-used addresses	5	3.0	
response	100	39.1		response	58	34.9	
non-response	127	49.6		non-response	81	48.8	
total gross sample	256	100.0		total gross sample	166	100.0	
	abs.	perc.	perc. of valid adr.		abs.	perc.	perc. of valid adr.
total refusal	30	23.6	13.2	total refusal	43	53.1	30.9
partial refusal	41	32.3	18.1	partial refusal	12	14.8	8.6
not-at-home	37	29.1	16.3	not-at-home	24	29.6	17.3
illness	10	7.9	4.4	language problems	1	1.2	0.7
other	9	7.1	4.0	other	1	1.2	0.7
total non-response	127	100.0	55.9	total non-response	81	100.0	58.3
total response	100		44.1	total response	58		41.7
total valid addresses	227		100.0	total valid addresses	139		100.0

absentees (not-at-home)							
by telephone				face to face			
<i>gross sample</i>	abs.	perc.		<i>gross sample</i>	abs.	perc.	
frame errors	15	7.4		frame errors	36	20.1	
non-used addresses	8	3.9		non-used addresses	4	2.2	
response	100	49.0		response	56	31.3	
non-response	81	39.7		non-response	83	46.4	
total gross sample	204	79.7		total gross sample	179	107.8	
	abs.	perc.	perc. of valid adr.		abs.	perc.	perc. of valid adr.
refusal	25	30.9	11.0	refusal	33	39.8	23.7
not-at-home	37	45.7	16.3	not-at-home	50	60.2	36.0
illness	10	12.3	4.4	illness	0	0.0	0.0
other	9	11.1	4.0	other	0	0.0	0.0
total non-response	81	100.0	35.7	total non-response	83	100.0	59.7
total response	100		44.1	total response	56		40.3
total valid addresses	181		79.7	total valid addresses	139		100.0

(telephone or face-to-face) they wanted to be interviewed, if they wished to take part. If no reaction was received after a couple of days, then selected, well-trained interviewers were sent to these addresses.

The result of this combination of approach strategies was good. The response rate even appeared to be almost as high as in the main survey. The reduction of the questionnaire to a two-page list will no doubt have been an important factor, too (Appendix 2). The sample frames totalled 383 not-at-home persons and 422 refusing persons. Corrections for frame-errors (such as moved away, address not existent, etc.) resulted in sample frames of 339 not-at-home persons and 370 refusing persons, respectively. The 156 responses from the not-at-home category therefore constitute a 46 per cent response. Only 68 (20%) refused cooperation, whereas 26 per cent could not be contacted. The 158 responses from the refusal category constitute a 43 per cent response. Here, 22 per cent refused to cooperate (Table 12.1).

As in the main survey, the representativeness of the responses from both categories can be estimated by comparing the characteristics of the response group with the samples from which they were drawn (Table 12.2). In general, no significant differences between the samples (that is, the 'normal' (main) response in the main survey, and the responses in the second runs) could be shown. The only significant and relatively large differences were related to marital status. People who were initially not at home often appeared to be unmarried, while those who refused to cooperate initially often were married.

12.3 Reasons for refusal in the main survey

The first question posed to the 'new' response, who had refused the first time around, was the reasons for their refusal. It may be interesting to distinguish between those who answered this question but refused to answer further questions (see Appendix 2) and those who answered this question and then continued to answer further questions. The reasons given are summarized for both situations in Table 12.3.

Contrary to what is often expected, most reasons have nothing to do with either the complexity or the specificity of the topic. No less than 37 per cent gave a reply coming under the category 'do not remember why'. Most of these were willing to cooperate the second time around. Another 22 per cent replied that they 'had no time', although this did not imply a principal refusal. Of those 62 persons (28 per cent) who answered 'never cooperate', 'no interest', '(objective of) survey makes no sense', or 'do not want to answer personal questions', as many as 35 persons (56 per cent) decided to cooperate the second time around!

The conclusion is that in general there are only few principal reasons to refuse cooperation. Most of the 'refusals-in-the-main survey' were willing to cooperate the second time. The high percentage of people who were unaware that they had refused the first time around suggests that some interviewers may have tended

Table 12.3 Response from main survey, sample and response groups from non-response survey, by age group, gender, residential district, marital status, household status, country of birth, nationality, ethnicity and year of settlement

age group	(N=4 364) norm. resp.	total		absentees		refusals	
		(N=805) sample	(N=314) response	(N=383) sample	(N=156) response	(N=422) sample	(N=158) response
12 - 14 years	2.4	1.7	1.9	1.3	1.9	2.1	1.9
15 - 19 years	5.7	4.8	4.2	5.2	3.8	4.5	4.5
20 - 24 years	8.1	7.8	6.7	8.4	5.8	7.3	7.6
25 - 29 years	13.1	11.6	12.5	12.5	13.5	10.7	11.5
30 - 34 years	13.0	16.3	15.3	18.5	16.7	14.2	14.0
35 - 39 years	10.6	10.2	10.9	11.2	12.8	9.2	8.9
40 - 49 years	16.8	15.2	13.4	14.9	14.7	15.4	12.1
50 - 59 years	9.6	13.2	12.8	11.2	9.6	14.9	15.9
60 - 69 years	8.8	8.8	11.9	8.1	12.3	9.5	11.5
70 years a.o.	11.9	10.4	10.5	8.6	9.0	12.1	12.1
chi square		5.3		6.6		2.0	
gender	norm. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
male	46.4	49.9	48.2	50.9	44.9	49.1	51.6
female	53.6	50.1	51.8	49.1	55.1	50.9	48.4
chi square		0.4		2.3		0.4	
resid. distr.	norm. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
A binnenstad	11.5	11.8	10.2	14.4	12.2	9.5	8.3
B west.haven	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
C spaarnd.b.	4.5	4.3	4.5	4.7	7.1	4.0	1.9
D oud west	4.8	6.0	7.3	5.5	7.7	6.4	7.0
E pijp	6.0	7.3	8.0	10.7	9.0	4.3	7.0
F oost	4.1	5.3	5.4	3.9	2.6	6.6	8.3
G indische b.	4.0	3.5	3.2	3.7	5.1	3.3	1.3
H bos & lommer	3.5	6.1	6.4	6.3	4.5	5.9	8.3
J admiral.b.	4.7	6.5	4.5	5.5	5.1	7.3	3.8
K zuid	8.1	7.1	6.7	7.3	5.8	6.9	7.6
L rivierenbuurt	4.7	4.1	3.5	3.4	2.6	4.7	4.5
M watergr.meer	3.4	3.4	4.8	3.1	5.1	3.6	4.5
N noord	11.8	8.1	8.9	5.7	5.8	10.2	12.1
P slotermeer	4.8	3.9	3.8	4.4	5.8	3.3	1.9
Q osdorp	4.2	5.6	6.7	6.3	6.4	5.0	7.0
R slotervaart	5.1	6.3	7.0	6.5	7.1	6.2	7.0
S buitenveldert	2.7	2.7	3.5	1.3	3.2	4.0	3.8
T zuidoost	12.1	8.1	5.4	7.3	5.1	8.8	5.7
chi square		10.8		15.5		16.8	
marital status	norm. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
unmarried	46.6	44.7	41.2	49.9	45.5	40.0	36.9
married	36.6	40.0	45.7	35.2	41.7	44.3	49.7
divorced	10.1	8.6	4.8	9.1	4.5	8.1	5.1
widowed	6.7	6.7	8.3	5.7	8.3	7.6	8.3
chi square		9.8		7.9		3.2	

Table 12.3 Response from main survey, sample and response groups from non-response survey, by age group, gender, residential district, marital status, household status, country of birth, nationality, ethnicity and year of settlement (continued)

household status	(N=4 364) norm. resp.	total		absentees		refusals	
		(N=805) sample	(N=314) response	(N=383) sample	(N=156) response	(N=422) sample	(N=158) response
head of family	23.9	24.3	27.5	21.1	26.3	27.3	28.7
partner	17.0	17.5	21.1	15.4	19.2	19.4	22.9
child	11.1	10.6	12.1	9.1	10.3	11.8	14.0
single/other	48.0	47.6	39.3	54.3	44.2	41.5	34.4
chi square		8.8 •		6.6		3.6	
country of birth	n. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
Netherlands	78.1	73.9	82.4	70.2	78.8	77.3	86.0
Surinam/Antillean	7.2	6.6	3.2	5.5	3.2	7.6	3.2
Morocco	2.9	5.1	4.8	7.0	6.4	3.3	3.2
Turkey	2.0	4.8	3.5	5.2	3.2	4.5	3.8
other	9.8	9.6	6.1	12.0	8.3	7.3	3.8
chi square		13.7 **		6.2		8.4	
nationality	norm. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
Dutch	86.0	79.5	85.0	75.7	82.1	82.9	87.9
Surinamese	0.5	0.7	0.3	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.0
Moroccan	2.6	4.6	3.5	5.7	4.5	3.6	2.5
Turkish	1.7	4.3	2.9	5.0	3.2	3.8	2.5
other	9.2	10.8	8.3	12.8	9.6	9.0	7.0
chi square		6.1		3.5		3.4	
ethnicity	norm. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
Dutch	79.6	73.8	82.1	71.3	79.5	76.1	84.7
Surinamese	6.9	6.5	3.2	5.2	3.2	7.6	3.2
Moroccan	2.6	4.6	3.5	5.7	4.5	3.6	2.5
Turkish	1.8	4.3	2.9	5.0	3.2	3.8	2.5
other	9.2	10.8	8.3	12.8	9.6	9.0	7.0
chi square		12.3 •		5.3		7.3	
settlm. date	norm. resp.	sample	response	sample	response	sample	response
before 1969	42.2	44.1	53.0	37.3	46.8	50.2	59.2
1969 - 1978	15.0	13.9	10.2	13.6	8.3	14.2	12.1
1979 - 1988	22.6	22.6	24.0	25.1	26.9	20.4	21.0
1989 - 1994	20.1	19.4	12.8	24.0	17.9	15.2	7.6
chi square		16.0 **		9.5 •		8.9 •	

Significance test used: Chi square (with sample frequencies as expected frequencies)

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

Table 12.3 *Reasons for non-participation in main survey*

total cooperation				total and partial cooperation			
reason	abs.	perc. resp.	perc. cases	reason	abs.	perc. resp.	perc. cases
can't remember refusal	45	26.8	28.7	can't remember refusal	53	23.7	25.1
no time / not convenient	39	23.2	24.8	no time / not convenient	50	22.3	23.7
can't remember reason	14	8.3	8.9	I never participate in studies	24	10.7	11.4
I never participate in studies	12	7.1	7.6	not interested	23	10.3	10.9
not interested	12	7.1	7.6	can't remember reason	15	6.7	7.1
I did not refuse	7	4.2	4.5	language problems	9	4.0	4.3
disliked interviewer	7	4.2	4.5	don't know	8	3.6	3.8
language problems	5	3.0	3.2	I did not refuse	7	3.1	3.3
don't know	4	2.4	2.5	goal of research is useless	7	3.1	3.3
reasons of privacy	4	2.4	2.5	disliked interviewer	7	3.1	3.3
goal of research is useless	4	2.4	2.5	reasons of privacy	5	2.2	2.4
illness, handicap	3	1.8	1.9	illness, handicap	4	1.8	1.9
don't want strangers in house	3	1.8	1.9	don't want strangers in house	3	1.3	1.4
questionnaire too long	2	1.2	1.3	questionnaire too long	2	0.9	0.9
poor research	2	1.2	1.3	poor research	2	0.9	0.9
I don't use any drugs	1	0.6	0.6	I don't use any drugs	1	0.4	0.5
research is waste of money	1	0.6	0.6	research is waste of money	1	0.4	0.5
cooperation was not paid	1	0.6	0.6	cooperation was not paid	1	0.4	0.5
no answer	2	1.2	1.3	no answer	2	0.9	0.9
total	168	100.0	107.0	total	224	100.0	106.2

to register people as 'refusers' too quickly.

The overview presented does not indicate a clear deviancy of the main survey-refusal category. We will pay more attention to this issue in Section 12.4. But first attention will be given to another aspect that may have influenced the refusal rate in the main survey. That is the circumstances under which the respondent would agree to cooperate in a survey. Table 12.4 provides further information on this matter.

Only 15.5 per cent of former refusals stated that they never take part in surveys. However, 61 per cent of them appeared to be willing to cooperate in this questionnaire, and answered sixteen questions!

Some fifty per cent answered indifferently ('don't know', 'not applicable') or gave no answer at all. Another almost ten per cent answered 'if it were a more convenient time'. All other reasons reflect various circumstances that may be improved (privacy guarantee, 5%; shorter questionnaire, 3%; prefer telephone interview, 3%; better interviewer, 2%; better information, 2%).

In conclusion, only very few people referred to the topic of the survey itself as a reason to refuse cooperation. Indifference seems to be the most obvious factor that we need to deal with. Only carefully developed procedures and approach strategies, as well as the input from motivated, well-trained interviewers, may help reduce the refusal percentage. In the meantime, the refusal category does not seem to be automatically a category that has 'escaped' from the topic dealt

Table 12.4 Circumstances under which respondents will take part in survey

total cooperation				total and partial cooperation			
circumstance	abs.	perc. resp.	perc. cases	circumstance	abs.	perc. resp.	perc. cases
don't know	30	29.4	30.0	don't know	36	24.3	24.8
I never participate in studies	14	13.7	14.0	I never participate in studies	23	15.5	15.9
more convenient time	10	9.8	10.0	more convenient time	13	8.8	9.0
privacy insured	7	6.9	7.0	privacy insured	7	4.7	4.8
less time investment	4	3.9	4.0	interesting subject	7	4.7	4.8
interesting subject	3	2.9	3.0	less time investment	4	2.7	2.8
more information	3	2.9	3.0	no visit at home	4	2.7	2.8
no visit at home	3	2.9	3.0	better interviewer	3	2.0	2.1
better interviewer	2	2.0	2.0	more information	3	2.0	2.1
personal interest	2	2.0	2.0	personal interest	3	2.0	2.1
other	2	2.0	2.0	other	2	1.4	1.4
interview during daylight	1	1.0	1.0	interview during daylight	1	0.7	0.7
payment for cooperation	1	1.0	1.0	payment for cooperation	1	0.7	0.7
not applicable	11	10.8	11.0	not applicable	23	15.5	15.9
no answer	9	8.8	9.0	no answer	18	12.2	12.4
total	102	100.0	102.0	total	148	100.0	102.1

with in the survey. More details of the refusal- and not-at-home categories can be found in the next section.

12.4 Non-response characteristics and drug-use prevalence

The not-at-home responses and the refusal responses are compared with the normal responses received in the main survey. The comparison has been performed in two ways, unweighted, and weighted on marital status. The results did not differ very much, and therefore only the weighted version is shown. Table 12.5 includes the comparison for several lifestyle-, household- and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

One of the hypotheses was that those who were (frequently) not at home during the main survey or who refused to cooperate would be persons with outdoor lifestyles and outdoor behaviour, often single-person households, who were not tied to their house by a partner and/or children, but instead would often go out to discos, cafes, etcetera. Some differences between those who refused and those who were not at home could exist.

Such a profile of both categories would automatically result in relatively high prevalence scores in the spheres of alcohol and cannabis.

The results show us that such a hypothesis (and its sub-hypotheses) must be rejected almost entirely. The profiles of both the not-at-home category and the refusal category are contrary to what was expected, although some differences between the two can easily be demonstrated. Both categories indeed appeared to be frequently not at home, and therefore showed some form of outdoor

Table 12.5 *Response from main survey, from absentees and from refusers, by lifestyle-, household- and socio-economic characteristics*

evenings per week at home	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
5 - 7 evenings	2468	56.8	38	24.7	42	26.9	80	25.8
3 - 4 evenings	1276	29.4	43	27.9	46	29.5	89	28.7
less	602	13.9	73	47.4	68	43.6	141	45.5
total	4346	100.0	154	100.0	156	100.0	310	100.0
leisure behaviour: going out	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
rarely	2100	48.1	76	48.7	81	51.3	157	50.0
occasionally	1177	27.0	43	27.6	41	25.9	84	26.8
regularly	1087	24.9	37	23.7	36	22.8	73	23.2
total	4364	100.0	156	100.0	158	100.0	314	100.0
lifestyle	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
home oriented	1925	44.2	53	34.2	64	41.0	117	37.6
medium	1171	26.9	45	29.0	35	22.4	80	25.7
outdoors oriented	1255	28.8	57	36.8	57	36.5	114	36.7
total	4351	100.0	155	100.0	156	100.0	311	100.0
type of household	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
single parent	199	4.8	4	2.6	9	5.7	13	4.2
couple	961	23.2	48	30.8	47	29.9	95	30.4
couple with kids	861	20.8	40	25.6	47	29.9	87	27.8
single	1710	41.3	48	30.8	36	22.9	84	26.8
other	412	9.9	16	10.3	18	11.5	34	10.9
total	4143	100.0	156	100.0	157	100.0	313	100.0
kids living at home	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
no	3025	73.5	107	69.5	95	60.1	202	64.7
yes	1093	26.5	47	30.5	63	39.9	110	35.3
total	4118	100.0	154	100.0	158	100.0	312	100.0
level of education	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
elementary	778	18.0	29	18.8	35	22.2	64	20.5
vocational (low)	566	13.1	18	11.7	32	20.3	50	16.0
secondary (low)	412	9.5	18	11.7	20	12.7	38	12.2
vocational (middle)	602	13.9	14	9.1	21	13.3	35	11.2
secondary (middle/high)	662	15.3	27	17.5	16	10.1	43	13.8
vocational (high) / university	1181	27.3	47	30.5	32	20.3	79	25.3
other	127	2.9	1	0.6	2	1.3	3	1.0
total	4328	100.0	154	100.0	158	100.0	312	100.0

Table 12.5 Response from main survey, from absentees and from refusers, by lifestyle-, household- and socio-economic characteristics (continued)

studying	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
no	3342	77.2	119	76.3	131	82.9	250	79.6
yes, full time	754	17.4	23	14.7	20	12.7	43	13.7
yes, part time	234	5.4	14	9.0	7	4.4	21	6.7
total	4330	100.0	156	100.0	158	100.0	314	100.0

labour market position	norm. response		absentees		refusals		total	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
wage-worker	1745	42.0	56	35.9	64	40.5	120	38.2
entrepreneur	218	5.2	14	9.0	8	5.1	22	7.0
free lancer	133	3.2	2	1.3	3	1.9	5	1.6
working for temp. agency	74	1.8	3	1.9	0	0.0	3	1.0
unemployed/in search of job	273	6.6	9	5.8	8	5.1	17	5.4
on benefits/not in search	103	2.5	1	0.6	3	1.9	4	1.3
work disability	203	4.9	6	3.8	10	6.3	16	5.1
retired	551	13.3	23	14.7	28	17.7	51	16.2
housewife /houseman	477	11.5	23	14.7	21	13.3	44	14.0
other	380	9.1	19	12.2	13	8.2	32	10.2
total	4157	100.0	156	100.0	158	100.0	314	100.0

behaviour. But clearly that behaviour is linked to neither consumptive (outgoing) outdoor behaviour or to single person households. The share of couples and couples with children (very often children were still living at home) appeared to be much higher in both categories as compared to the normal response. From the information regarding age structure and labour-market position it can be concluded that in general the former refusal category is somewhat older, retired, and often not highly educated. The former not-at-home category is often of the type of independent entrepreneur, relatively active in terms of achieving a higher education by studying at night. Both categories seem to be 'traditional' household types that find themselves in different phases in the household cycle, but who are trying to achieve a 'good' socio-economic position and/or a family-oriented life. Not surprisingly, the figures regarding the prevalence of alcohol and cannabis (the only two substances we asked about in the second run) were lower (alcohol) or even much lower (cannabis) as compared to the response group in the main survey (Table 12.6).

12.5 Recalculated response

The analysis of the non-response group shows clearly and, because of the high response rate, convincingly that our initial opinion about the characteristics of this category must be revised. There appear to be only a few people who fundamentally do not want to cooperate in a research project such as the one we confronted them with. Often the most important reason for refusing to cooperate was simply,

Table 12.6 Prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use for response group in normal survey, absentees and refusals (standardised)

	norm. resp. (N=4 352)		absentees (N=156)		refusals (N=158)		total (N=314)	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
alcohol								
lifetime prevalence	3746	86.1	126	80.8	129	81.6	255	81.2
last year prevalence	3358	77.2	116	74.4	114	72.2	230	73.2
last month prevalence	3015	69.3	106	67.9	102	64.6	208	66.2
cannabis								
lifetime prevalence	1272	29.2	33	21.2	32	20.3	65	20.7
last year prevalence	459	10.6	7	4.5	13	8.2	20	6.4
last month prevalence	293	6.7	6	3.8	5	3.2	11	3.5

and particularly, lack of time at the moment they were asked to cooperate. Reasons of frequently not being at home were often linked to outdoor activities, but not specifically to those activities linked to consumptive behaviour. The impression was gained that quite a number of persons initially did not want to cooperate because of a wide variety of vague but unimportant reasons.

Clearly the non-response category appears to consist of persons who generally have lower drug-prevalence scores as compared to those who answered in the main survey. Table 12.7 gives the results of a comparison of the prevalence figures for alcohol- and cannabis use without and with recalculation on the basis of what we now know of the non-response group. Two variant recalculation exercises were carried out. In the first we assumed all persons who refused cooperation or were not at home, to have the same score pattern as those who refused or were not at home in the main survey but could be counted with the response group in the second run. If all non-response would be treated as if they have the same character as the non-response of whom we know the characteristics, the prevalence figures clearly drop to substantial lower levels. The effect is stronger in case of the use of cannabis compared to that of alcohol, but significant in both situations. The absolute drop in the percentage of persons who 'ever used' cannabis is as much as four percent, which is a relative drop of fourteen percent. The relative drop is even higher for 'last month' prevalence figures. There the drop (1.5%) is over twenty percent in relative terms.

But, of course, this type of recalculation may be criticized for its assumption that all of the non-response group behave the same way as the response group in the second run, that was non-response in the main survey. However, what may be more realistic is to recalculate figures so as to raise the response rate to the level it was in our former research project (1990), when we reached the level of 55.4 per cent. Recalculation to that level reveals only small and almost negligible reductions in the percentage scores. We therefore think it correct to state that the somewhat lower response rate in the 1994 survey has no significant effect on the prevalence figures.

Table 12.7 Prevalence of alcohol and cannabis use for response group in normal survey, recalculated numbers of absentees and refusals, and recalculated total (standardised)
A) recalculation towards total response, and B) recalculation towards 55% response

A	norm. resp. (N=4 352)		absentees (N=1 233)		refusals (N=2 627)		total (N=8 212)	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
alcohol								
lifetime prevalence	3746	86.1	996	80.8	2145	81.7	6887	83.9
last year prevalence	3358	77.2	917	74.4	1895	72.1	6170	75.1
last month prevalence	3015	69.3	838	68.0	1696	64.6	5549	67.6
cannabis								
lifetime prevalence	1272	29.2	261	21.2	532	20.3	2065	25.2
last year prevalence	459	10.6	55	4.5	216	8.2	730	8.9
last month prevalence	293	6.7	47	3.8	83	3.2	423	5.2
B								
alcohol	norm. resp. (N=4 352)		absentees (N=144)		refusals (N=307)		total (N=4 803)	
	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.	abs.	perc.
lifetime prevalence	3746	86.1	116	80.6	251	81.8	4113	85.6
last year prevalence	3358	77.2	107	74.3	222	72.3	3687	76.8
last month prevalence	3015	69.3	98	68.1	198	64.5	3311	68.9
cannabis								
lifetime prevalence	1272	29.2	30	20.8	62	20.2	1364	28.4
last year prevalence	459	10.6	6	4.2	25	8.1	490	10.2
last month prevalence	293	6.7	6	4.2	10	3.3	309	6.4

At this point, one remarkable feature remains to be clarified. In the survey we carried out four years ago, we also investigated part of the non-response group. We then focused our attention on the not-at-home (the absentees) category. At that time we succeeded in getting a response from only 142 persons out of a sample of 500 (28%). A special team of interviewers tried to reach those persons to interview them face-to-face. One of the conclusions regarding the use of drugs was that the non-response category tended to consist of persons with *higher* drug-use prevalence scores.

So, there are two important differences with the actual survey, carried out in 1994. The first refers to the response rate of those who were formerly classified as 'not-at-home'. In the most recent non-response survey, we achieved a 46% response rate. The second refers to the level of drug-use. In the most recent survey, the drug

prevalence scores of those who were not-at-home during the main survey but were contacted later, tended to be slightly *lower* as compared to the response group in the main survey.

The interpretation of these differences is quite complicated. We suppose the way people were approached may have played a major role in causing these differences. In 1990 the non-response persons were revisited in order to try to conduct a face-to-face interview. In 1994 we applied several strategies and approached people by telephone (if possible) and face-to-face (otherwise). The response percentage of those who were approached by telephone amounted to 55 per cent, as opposed to approximately 40 per cent in the face-to-face category. Additionally, we offered financial incentives to those who would cooperate and to the interviewers who succeeded in completing a non-response interview. The new strategy may have resulted in a distinctive (new) category of not-at-home responses being reached as compared to four years ago. That distinction in turn is reflected in the lower drug-prevalence scores.

12.6 Data-quality analysis: conclusions

In Chapters 10, 11 and 12 we investigated three different methodological aspects that are of major importance with regard to the quality of the data obtained. We discussed the representativeness and effects of different approach strategies, and analyzed the non-response group in some detail and calculated its effects on the response group.

Again, our primary objective was to apply a consistent instrument, one with which we could measure real changes in the use of drugs. Changes should only be ascribed to changing population compositions (for which effects too we would be able to standardise the scores), or to real increases or declines in the use of drugs. To achieve that objective, we tried (as we did in 1987 and 1990) to use the same instrument. The experiments with other approaches were left out of the comparisons with former measurements; these were intended for learning purposes, to improve comparisons with other research carried out elsewhere, and/or to help us to change the approach in the future.

Despite the application of the same instrument, the response turned out to be significantly lower (approximately 5 %) than in 1990. Only half of the number of people approached decided to cooperate. We tend to explain this different response rate by the fact that we made use of a different bureau (compared to the one we hired in 1987 and 1990) to manage the survey as far as the fieldwork was concerned.

However, the lower response rate did not result in other differences between the response and non-response group in 1994, compared to the differences in 1990. The bias appeared to be much the same as four years ago. Our first important conclusion is that the representativeness of the 1994 data set is comparable to that of 1990.

However, due to the high non-response rate it was even more important to investigate the characteristics of the non-response group. We were able to reach a substantial number of the former refusals (43% response in the second run) and those who were not at home in the main survey (46% response in the second run). The somewhat surprising conclusion of the non-response analysis is that there were only a very few people who fundamentally refused to cooperate. Various simple and 'innocent' reasons were given by people who did not cooperate in the main survey. The outdoor lifestyle of those not at home in the main survey explained this type of non-response in the main survey. However, that outdoor behaviour was not specifically linked to consumptive behaviour.

Recalculation of the response weighted on the basis of the knowledge of the non-response group to the level of the response of 1990, did not, however, result in significantly different drug-prevalence scores. Our second important conclusion is that the differences between the response and the non-response category does not significantly affect the prevalence figures.

Remarkably, the response from those in the not-at-home category who we were able to reach in the second run, appeared to have lower drug-prevalence scores compared to the former not-at-home category we succeeded in reaching in the 1990 non-response investigations. We explain the difference by reference to the higher intensity of the 1994 re-approach strategy. And although the response / non-response differences did not result in significant changes in drugs-prevalence figures after weighting, our third important conclusion is that a higher response figure and an intensified approach strategy will, at least in the Amsterdam context, result in lower drug-prevalence scores than is shown by the low-response data sets acquired.

