RAR MANUAL SUBSTANCE USE AND ADDICTION

Rapid Assessment and Response
substance use and addiction

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CVO Research & Consultancy
Trimbos Institute
To FRANZ TRAUTMANN (1953-2016)
one of the key designers of Dutch harm reduction drug policy
inspiring colleague
very close friend
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Preface
In recent years alternatives have been sought for traditional scientific research methods, which have proven expensive and time-consuming in terms of assessing and responding to public health problems. This has especially been the case in the field of illicit substance use health risks, where attempts were made to develop new assessment and response models. Financial resources necessary for traditional research are often hard to find. Many public health problems require a quicker response than traditional scientific research generally allows. This has led to the development of so-called Rapid Assessment and Response (RAR) approaches. CVO and the Trimbos Institute refined RAR and built a data management tool to make analysing and reporting easier and transparent to enable people who are not scientifically trained, to use RAR. This resulted in a manual to map problematic substance use quickly and accurately and generate priorities and ideas for interventions. RAR uses several indicators and data sources. It brings together different types of information, combining different research methods. By cross-checking the information from different sources and perspectives an adequately reliable picture on the nature and extent of a particular risk behaviour can be obtained. The focus of RAR is not on scientific excellence but on practical and policy relevance. RAR is more of a policy tool than a scientific research instrument.

Due to the overall positive experiences with RAR, and other similar approaches, Rapid Assessments have been applied in various problem areas in several European countries.

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Note to this manual
This manual is written for health professionals working with problematic substance users. These professionals can be both staff of drug services and prevention agencies or connected with other aid services and shelters. RAR can be used to collect relevant information for developing tailor-made health interventions and to assist in making decisions about appropriate interventions for health-related and social problems.

Although we did attempt to make RAR accessible to individuals without experience in research, former RAR projects showed that training and support by an experienced researcher is important. If the executing institution does not have this expertise it could be incorporated at a local university. If desired, authors can support training and supervision. We have divided the manual into two parts. Part 1 is an introductory chapter explaining the project’s background and the basics of RAR. Part 2 is an instruction on how to perform RAR, describing the process in detail. It contains the instruments for administering RAR’s, examples of questionnaires and focus groups for collecting and checking information, and models of grids to aid in processing the collected information. Examples illustrate instruments for data collection and data processing. The examples help you to adapt questionnaires and other research instruments to specific research groups.
Part 1 Rapid Assessment and Response: Theory

History
RAR is not a new method. In the twenties of the last century similar methods were used to explore new markets for commercial products. The Rapid outbreak of intravenous drug use and associated HIV/AIDS epidemic in Eastern Europe and Russia in the last decades was an important reason for developing a method to respond to acute and urgent public health problems in an adequate and pragmatic way.

Because conventional scientific research is often too expensive and mostly time consuming in terms of assessing and responding to public health problems, staff of the Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour at Imperial College London, commissioned by the WHO and UNAIDS, developed the Rapid Assessment and Response (RAR) method (Stimson et al 1998a/b/c and Rhodes, et al 2000). The method was tested extensively since 1997. Due to overall positive experiences the RAR method is now used in many different fields and various RAR manuals are developed for specific target groups (Braam et al 2004). RAR’s are used to collect relevant information for developing tailor-made health interventions and to assist in making decisions about appropriate interventions for health-related and social problems.

Triangulation and funnelling
RAPID ASSESSMENT AND RESPONSE is a fast and cost-effective way to generate a large amount of information with a relatively modest investment of time. It uses various methods of social research, including interviews with respondents and focus groups. This prevents and corrects potential biases that may arise from the use of only one source of information. RAR helps you to get a more complete picture, including context information facilitating a better understanding of a complex phenomenon.

RAR helps you to explore a certain phenomenon or problem rather than to establish quantifiable facts about it. This investigative orientation will provide you with information on the differences in background, perception and interests of the actors involved, making you understand the biases of the information you receive. This will facilitate a process of ‘weighing’ the reliability of the information you receive. Crosschecking, ‘triangulating’ information from different sources is a crucial element of RAR.

From the information you receive you are inducing hypotheses about the nature of the subject you are investigating. These hypotheses can then be crosschecked again. This illustrates the importance of consulting a wide range of people from different backgrounds.

Commitment in Response
By gathering information from all possible different stakeholders a network of personal contacts is built up. This network is not only valuable for gathering information during the assessment, but can also be used for the development and implementation of interventions. While various stakeholders have been involved in the assessment and took part thinking about the target problem and possible solutions, they will also be strongly involved to the Response phase: the implementation of interventions. The experience gained from previous projects underline this conclusion. In most cases, stakeholders think about opportunities for appropriate interventions even before the end of the assessment phase. The involvement of the target group contributes to more effective and tailor made interventions.
**Dynamics between Assessment and Response**

Its consultative character and mostly direct link to the development of interventions makes RAR a dynamic approach that does not have a fixed end in a research report, in which the compiled findings are presented. For adequate interventions it is vital to regularly check if these interventions are still adequate for the problems and needs they intend to address. This need to monitor/evaluate the development and implementation of interventions results in a cycle of Assessment and Response that includes the following steps:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rapid Assessment of the situation ↓</th>
<th>decisions about interventions to be implemented ↓</th>
<th>implementation of interventions ↓</th>
<th>evaluation of interventions ↓</th>
<th>further Assessment of the situation ↓</th>
<th>adapting interventions or development of new interventions</th>
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**Rapid Assessment and empirical research**

RAR is a mix of commonly used research methods such as interviews and focus groups. The big difference between empirical research and RAR is the pragmatic approach, focusing on adequacy rather than on scientific excellence.

RAR is not a substitute for conventional scientific research but is based on this knowledge (Rhodes et al 2000). The focus of RAR is on adequacy rather than on scientific perfection. For adequate interventions in the field of health promotion you do not need to know the absolute number of people involved in certain risk behaviour. It is sufficient to know that a substantial number of people are involved in this risk behaviour. Through crosschecking information from various data sources, RAR enables you to establish reliable information about the occurrence and the nature of certain forms of risk behaviour.

RAR is therefore used in cases where the focus is not on knowledge as such, but on knowledge that makes quick response possible. Relevance to interventions and pragmatism are key features of RAR.

**Methods**

As regards the field of substance use we limited the number of methods used in RAR. We omitted observation and estimation techniques, as we wanted to design a basic RAR approach for use by people without thorough research experience, who can only spend a limited amount of time on extra work. Although conducting a Rapid Assessment as outlined in this manual still requires a substantial amount of time, the experiences gained during several RAR projects confirmed that the format chosen allowed the project groups to complete a Rapid Assessment in a reasonable period of time. If sufficient human resources are available and the assessment is well planned from the beginning - meaning, among other things, that the staff involved has scheduled their RAR tasks well in advance - a RAR process, as presented in this manual, can be completed in three months.
We further developed a strictly ordered RAR process; again, to enable people who are not experienced researchers to employ this method. We start with a very open form of collecting information, trying to collect as much information as possible on the subject of substance use among the target group and about possible (preventive) interventions. As the initial phase consists of exploring the subject, we will use open questions. This first step will provide background information for formulating hypotheses for more directed, closed questions at later stages, in order to check the hypotheses about vulnerable groups, substances used, useful (preventive) interventions, et cetera. This means that the process of RAR is one of narrowing the scope from exploring to checking, thereby feeding the wide range of information to relevant findings. It is a process leading from unstructured to structured forms of collecting information.

This manual uses the following steps:
- Preparation
- Existing information
- Access and sampling
- Semi-structured interviews
- Structured interviews
- Focus groups
- Reporting

**Preparation**
To perform a RAR, it is necessary to properly prepare several issues. A team must be composed to carry out the RAR. Furthermore, time and resources should be made available by the organization to actually be able to do the job. Also, everyone has to agree on the key issues and these issues must be defined and formulated. Attention needs to be paid to communication and information management. Finally, the team members must be trained to work in the same way.

**Existing information**
The first step is to establish whether there already is some existing information on the subject and what aspects are covered. Possible sources to check include reports/information from health, justice and police authorities, reports/information from health, social and legal services, information from organisations representing the interests of drug users, et cetera. Information from the media can also be helpful; maybe not as far as actual facts are concerned, but in terms of the perception of substance use and the attitude of the public. It also can help you to identify key informants and lead you to further sources of information.

Though in this phase you will simply look for relevant information available on the issue, a set of key questions will help you to sort the information and limit the scope of your search, and to distinguish between information directly relevant to the issue and context information.

The available existing information will help you to identify what kind of further information is required, as well as assist you in defining the problem and specifying/prioritising the target group. It can give you an idea on how substance use and its perception have changed over time. Lastly, existing information can also be used in the process of triangulation, in order to assess the value or bias of different findings.

**Access and sampling**
The second step is to identify possible sources of information and to gain access to the target group. Here your focus lies on identifying key informants, establishing contact, collecting information from these informants, and through them, gaining access to the target group.
In this phase of RAR process, your focus will still lie on gathering all the information you can get on substance use among the target group, in order to allow you to understand the problem. As in the case of examining existing information the key questions will serve you as guidelines and help you to sort the information you obtain.

Through the information gathered in this phase you will be able to specify the problem and the target group. In addition to information directly related to the key issues of interest to you, you will also obtain a great deal of information not directly connected to these key issues, such as information about backgrounds of the target groups, and their way of life and living conditions, et cetera. This context information is far from irrelevant, and can be valuable in giving you a better understanding of the issue of substance use.

Based on the information collected you will be able to map the target group, outlining the locations where certain parts of the target group get together, who lives where, who is connected to whom, et cetera. This mapping will be helpful to select the respondents for the next stages of RAR.

Additionally, through making contacts with various people you are starting to develop a network that will serve as a fruitful basis for future prevention activities. Direct involvement with the issue and the people concerned facilitates and motivates a process of going beyond the role of researcher and getting engaged in interventions.

**Semi-structured interviews**

The information collected in the first two stages serves as the basis for the semi-structured interview. Whereas in the second phase you will generally use the format of unstructured interviews, using the key questions as basis for the unstructured collection of relevant information, you will now be using a questionnaire with a mix of open and closed questions in a set order to be able to formulate clearer hypotheses about substance use and possible preventive interventions. Which groups are especially vulnerable, what substances are used problematically, what can be done in the field of prevention, et cetera?

To accomplish this, based on the key questions - which also define the structure of the questionnaire - more detailed questions have been designed. These questions reflect the information you will have gathered in the first two phases. The interviewees will be key informants.

**Structured interviews**

Phase four consists of structured interviews, using a questionnaire with closed questions, again a more structured form of collecting information than in the previous phases. The information obtained from the semi-structured interviews is used to design the questionnaire for the structured interviews. This questionnaire has the same structure as the questionnaire for semi-structured interviews.

Its purpose is to test the hypotheses and conclusions about substance use and preventive measures drawn in the earlier phases and to obtain additional information. You are trying to establish, whether another sample of respondents does confirm the picture you have gained from the semi-structured interviews concerning especially vulnerable groups, substances used problematically, and suggestions for effective preventive measures, et cetera. Interviewees do not have to be key informants, but should represent different relevant groups, both health professionals and target groups.
Focus Groups
As a means of checking results in the concluding stage of the process, focus groups have two different aims. The first objective is to check diverging or contradicting information received in earlier phases and to validate and crosscheck findings from earlier RAR stages. The second is to assess the representativeness/validity of conclusions and to discuss the implications of the results for planning and undertaking preventive interventions.

This generally means that you will have to organise two focus groups. Viewing and discussing the information you have obtained in earlier phases may reveal some contradictions in the findings you can’t explain. You can solve this problem by conducting individual interviews with some key informants, but a focus group is usually the better option. Bringing together key informants can provide you with information about the reasons why people have different views. Maybe this is related to their social position, their political agenda, or - as a result of these factors - simply because people see different aspects of reality.

The next step after having solved these problems is to decide which preventive measures should be taken. Here too, a focus group has proved to be a valuable instrument. Of course you will be able to formulate a number of hypotheses about this issue in team discussions about the information collected in the earlier stages. However, bringing together a group of experts and target group representatives and discussing the results of your RAR concerning adequate preventive responses to the problems found, will help to make the plans more solid. To implement interventions successfully, it will further help you to obtain the necessary commitments from the relevant individuals.

Reporting and data management
Formulating preliminary conclusions will complete every phase of the RAR process. The conclusions of one phase will serve as a basis for specifying the steps to be taken in the subsequent phase. What information do you lack? What questions have arisen in the phase just completed? Which individuals could provide you with this information or answer these questions?

As stated earlier, one of the characteristics of RAR is to use multiple methods and to collect data from different sources. This means that in order to guarantee the validity of the collected data, you have to make sure that you obtain your information from a variety of independent sources, i.e., from people with different professional backgrounds and from different groups within the target population. Since all these different aspects were considered in collecting this information, you will be able to get a comprehensive picture about substance use and possible preventive measures. However, this picture may also contain diverging information on some issues. Triangulating this data, trying to identify biases and finding explanations for deviations and contradictions is an important element in processing the information.

As you will be confronted with a vast amount of information on various subjects during the RAR process, good and efficient data management is vital. You need to organise the information clearly to make it easily accessible. Once again, the key questions will serve as the basic structure for this data management, for sorting the information you have collected. In part two you will find formats, grids, in order to structure the process of data collection.
Part 2  Rapid Assessment and Response: Practice

In part 1 history, backgrounds and basics of RAR are described. Part 2 are instructions to conduct a RAR and a detailed description of the RAR process.

Preparation

Assembling a RAR team

One of the organisational prerequisites for conducting RAR successfully is a well-chosen and well-prepared team. To get the work done in a quick and efficient way the team should not be too big. However, in order to accomplish the work, identify and avoid possible biases in the information and discuss tasks and findings, exchanges with colleagues are essential. To carry out a Rapid Assessment quickly, the RAR team should be made up of a limited number of people, preferably three or four: one coordinator and two or three co-workers.

If a health care organisation wants to carry out a Rapid Assessment, it means that the RAR team leader and the team members have to be relieved from most of their daily routine jobs for the duration of the Rapid Assessment.

The composition of the RAR team should remain unchanged during the whole RAR process. This contributes to an efficient management of knowledge. All team members share the information collected, thus avoiding the need to transfer information collected during preceding stages to any new colleagues.

All RAR team members have to be acquainted with the entire RAR process. This means that they generally will require training in data collection methods. If the RAR team leader is an experienced social scientist, he or she can train the rest of the team. Special attention has to be paid to ensuring that every team member is trained in administering interviews.

We want to emphasise that all team members, i.e., not only the RAR team leader, have to have an overview of the Rapid Assessment during the entire process. This implies that the RAR team has to meet frequently. During these team meetings, the RAR team makes a planning for all activities to be carried out between then and the next meeting, divides all these activities between different team members and discusses all stages of the RAR process. Moreover, (preliminary) results can be discussed and (preliminary) conclusions drawn. Ideally, all activities and responsibilities of each RAR team member, all communications between RAR team members and all interview appointments with respondents are entered in a log. Both meetings and logs allow efficient sharing of information within the RAR team during the entire process.

To allow a fruitful discussion of the findings and identify possible biases, you should make sure that the team members represent a broad range of different - professional and personal - characteristics. Relevant criteria to take into account can be gender, ethnic, socio-cultural and religious background, age, profession and experience.

Most of the methods in the RAR process derive from empirical research in social sciences. Therefore, the RAR team should have some social scientific expertise. Ideally the coordinator is a social scientist. Another option would be a social scientist supporting the team. Other members of a RAR team could consist of health care staff, welfare workers, drug services staff
and drug prevention workers. If possible, (ex) substance users and (ex) addicts could be added to the team.

Especially in the Response phase when preventive measures are being developed, the RAR team needs a network of allies in order to implement these preventive measures successfully.

Potential allies are:

- Health care workers and organisations
- Welfare workers and organisations
- Accommodation services
- Law enforcement and human rights services
- Community members and groups

To strengthen this supportive network the RAR team can also consider involving:

- Representatives from local and regional political parties
- Local and regional policy makers

From former RAR projects we have learnt that the contacts established in the Assessment phase will be the first steps in developing this network. Ideally this network improves when the RAR process moves forward. Involving the above-mentioned people and groups in the assessment process has the additional advantage of creating commitment, so money and time within the organisations will be released for adequate implementation. Asking people to bring in their expertise and experience usually makes them feel involved. The awareness that they can influence the process contributes to feelings of shared ownership of and responsibility for the RAR project. All that will aid you to gradually create a network that will prove helpful when designing and implementing preventive measures in the Response stage. Sometimes, actually involving people from the network in the Response phase is recommendable.

**Phrasing the key questions**

To structure and organise the RAR process the RAR team collects during the assessment information based on a set of key questions. Key questions are designed to collect information about substance use of the group and possible adequate prevention measures. They form the basis and the framework for all these information collection steps. During the RAR process they will be subdivided into more detailed questions, which are designed based on the findings in the preceding information collection phases.

In the manual eight key questions serve as a guideline to collect information during the Rapid Assessment. Four key questions are about substance and are based in the theoretical construct in drug research: the relation between drug, set and setting:

1. Who is using substances problematically?
2. What substances are used problematically?
3. What are the main problems caused by substance use?
4. What factors are of influence in developing problematic substance use?

Another four questions concern knowledge level of the risks of substance use and existing and possible preventive measures:

5. What does the target group know about the risks of substance use?
6. What are existing effective preventive interventions/preventive conditions?
7. What preventive interventions/preventive conditions are needed by the community?
8. What are the priorities in prevention?
Based on the problem definition and the group to be researched, key questions can be adapted. Keep in mind that extending the number of key questions slows down the speed in the RAR process. It is important to limit the number of key questions.

**Choice of research methods**

In RAR some frequently used research methods are used to get answers on the key questions. Staff of the Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour describes research methods listed below:

- Examining existing information
- Access and sampling
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Observations
- Estimation techniques

(Stimson et al. 1998a)

For RAR on substance use a limited number of methods can be used. We omitted observation and estimation techniques, as we wanted to design a basic RAR approach for use by people without thorough research experience, who can only spend a limited amount of time on extra work.

Observation can be a useful tool to collect important information, especially when working in an open setting, like the streets for example. It can provide valuable information about the behaviour of the target group, locations, relationships between people, et cetera. However, we decided not to include observation, as it is a rather time-consuming tool. Observation generally demands patience and time. It will take you a considerable amount of additional time, if you opt for including observation in a RAR. However, for those who are interested, we have included a chapter about observation in Annex 1.

We also decided to omit estimation techniques. The use of these techniques requires relatively large samples to allow reliable estimates about the size of a population or the extent of a problem. In addition, very careful examination of the data is required to make sure that you are working with independent samples. Again, for people who are interested, a more detailed description of these methods is included in Annex 2.

We further decided to follow a strictly ordered RAR process; again, to allow people who are not experienced researchers to employ this method. We start with a very open form of collecting information, trying to collect as much information as possible on the subject of substance use among the target group and about possible preventive measures. As the initial phase consists of exploring the subject, we will use open questions. This first step will provide background information for formulating hypotheses for more directed, closed questions at later stages, in order to check the hypotheses about vulnerable groups, substances used, useful preventive interventions, et cetera. This means that the process of RAR is one of narrowing the scope from exploring to checking, thereby feeding the wide range of information to relevant findings. It is a process leading from unstructured to structured forms of collecting information.
**Existing information**
Existing information can include reports and information of health, justice and police authorities, reports and information from health, social and legal services, information from organisations representing the interests of drug users and addicts and information of the media. Consulting existing information is the first step in a RAR process. During this step you check in what respect existing information gives answers on the key questions. At the same time, this helps you to identify possible gaps in this information. Moreover, viewing existing information can help in monitoring changes in drug use and perceptions over time. It also can help you to identify key informants. Lastly, existing information, like all other steps in the RAR process, can also be used in the process of triangulation, in order to assess the value or bias of different findings.

**Access and sampling**
After consulting existing information, access and sampling is the second step in the RAR process. In this step information about drug use of the group is collected by administering very short and open interviews. Here also, key questions are guidelines to structure information. Informants can be substance users, staff of health and addiction care facilities, members of organized interest, policemen, drug dealers, people working in bars, shop keepers et cetera. Informants are people with knowledge that exceeds their personal experience and can give answers to the key questions. These people might be able to tell you more about the whereabouts of the target group in order to facilitate access. Besides, informants will nominate respondents for the next steps in the RAR process. Just like all other steps in the RAR process, information from informants can also be used in the process of triangulation. Lastly, some informants may play a role in the Response phase of the RAR process, when (preventive) interventions are implemented.

**Interviews**
After existing information and access and sampling, interviews are the next step in the RAR process. Interviews can be semi-structured and structured. After unstructured short interviews in the access and sampling phase, successively a number of semi-structured interviews and structured are administered. Semi-structured interviews structured by a questionnaire containing mainly open questions, are used to explore the phenomenon and to collect information to assess the phenomenon. Structured interviews have the same structure and sequence as semi-structured interviews. Structured interviews are made up of closed questions and a number of fixed answers. Information from structured interviews is used to verify information of former steps in the RAR process.

Interviews can be administered with both individuals and groups. Interviews with individuals are more suitable to collect detailed information about sensitive subjects.

**Focus groups**
The difference between a group interview and a focus group is that in the latter the aim is to generate group discussion about certain topics, whereas in a group interview, individuals are requested to limit themselves to answering specific questions. During this step in the RAR process two focus groups are organized. The first focus group is to check diverging or contradicting information received in earlier phases and to validate and crosscheck findings from earlier RAR stages. The second is to assess the representativeness/validity of conclusions and to discuss the implications of the results for planning and undertaking preventive interventions. The second focus group is the network to successfully implement an intervention during the Response phase of the RAR process.
Some concluding remarks about the preparation
We have chosen a RAR format that starts with a very open form of collecting information, and then gradually develops from unstructured to more structured methods of information collection, feeding the wide range of information collected in the starting phase to the relevant concluding findings. During every next step in the RAR process information is triangulated with information from former steps. Besides, as the RAR process progress information gets more ‘funnelled’.

This strict order of phases in the information collection process has the advantage of offering someone without research experience something to hold on to. On the other hand, it takes away one of the advantages of RAR, namely that of being a flexible instrument that can be adapted to changing needs.

Consequently, if you have experience in the field of research, or receive assistance from someone who has, you can, of course, decide to deviate from the proposed format, choose a different sequence of phases or include additional instruments, e.g. observation. There are various options you can consider. For example, you could backtrack one step from structured to semi-structured interviews, if the structured interviews do not confirm the picture you have gained from the earlier round of semi-structured interviews. The divergences between the results from the first round of semi-structured interviews and the results from the structured interviews can be used for designing a questionnaire for an additional round of semi-structured interviews to find explanations for these divergences.

You also can decide to have focus groups in the very beginning of the RAR process, as it can be useful and efficient to bring together key informants for discovering opinions and behaviours (that are not covered by existing information), for collecting information to formulate first hypotheses, for discussing how to gain access, and defining the details of questionnaires. A focus group can also be of value in the middle of a RAR to check findings, assess the accuracy of hypotheses, validate or crosscheck findings, and find explanations for divergent information. Once the semi-structured interviews are completed, you might consider a focus group for designing and fine-tuning the questionnaire for the structured interviews.

Observation can be a helpful technique in different stages of a RAR process. Unstructured observation in the starting phase might provide information about behaviour and social relationships in the target group. Structured observation might help you to check certain information in the later stages of the process.

Information selection and data management
The Rapid Assessment process includes five methods to collect relevant information:

- Collecting existing information
- Access and sampling
- Semi-structured interviews
- Structured interviews
- Focus group(s)
After each step of the RAR process preliminary conclusions are formulated. Preliminary conclusions after each step are starting points for activities to be taken in the next step. What information is lacking? Which questions you encountered in the last step? Which persons can give relevant information and answers to the questions?

All information collected with these five methods provides:

- Answers to key questions
- Context information, i.e., all other information relevant to gaining a better understanding of the problem.

For an efficient and rapid research we advise you to limit the scope of the assessment. Select one target group and one core problem. It is more efficient to examine one target group than to get lost in more target groups and core problems.

**Storing information**

During every phase of the RAR process the RAR team will collect a huge amount of data. All data will be analysed in grids. Grids are formats to simply analyse collected information. Down in this manual grids are discussed. Filled out grids are the base to write (preliminary) reports.

When collecting *existing* information the RAR team will compile written material: scientific research documents, policy papers, reports by addiction and health care organisations and articles in newspapers and magazines.

During the *access and sampling* phase relevant informants will be identified. Informants will answer key questions and provide context information. In addition they will give the RAR team members more existing information. The RAR team should store all information on relevant informants, such as:

- Addresses, telephone and fax numbers, email addresses
- Meeting places of informants who cannot, or prefer not to give addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, or email addresses
- Any information the informants can provide
- Networks to which informants belong, et cetera.

In addition, the RAR team should start a log of the assessment during the access and sampling phase, in order to manage and organise fieldwork activities and informal talks in the field.

The next stage of the RAR process, the *semi-structured interviews*, consists of filling in questionnaires, and processing and analysing the information from these questionnaires. In addition, team members will compile more context information and continue to update the log throughout this phase. The same activities are to be carried out in the *structured interview phase*. Lastly, in the *focus groups*, the information resulting from the discussions of the selected issues has to be processed and analysed.

In these three phases too, you should store the data of interview respondents and focus group(s) participants, i.e., where to locate them (addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, email addresses, or locations where they can be found), as well as what type of information they can provide, and any networks they are part of, et cetera.

Information collection is a process in which each phase is based on and/or adds to the information gathered in the previous phase.
Every member of the RAR team has to have an overview of the entire RAR process. Data management has to be the responsibility of one member of the RAR team, preferably the coordinator, but has to be well structured, transparent, and accessible to all RAR team members. To accomplish this, data management has to be discussed during team meetings and information should be stored in a structured way. For example, to make the information easily accessible, store questionnaires from semi-structured interviews in a separate directory, et cetera.

Furthermore, as confidentiality is guaranteed to each informant, respondent, and focus group participant during the various phases, all data collected must be managed discretely. All personal data, logs, interview recordings, interview transcriptions, grids and (preliminary) reports must be kept under lock and key and all digital documents secured with a password.

It is up to the coordinator and the RAR team how they want to manage the data. Here some assistance will be given to develop protocols for data management.

Most existing and context information will consist of written material, or of printouts of material downloaded from the Internet. All existing and context information is to be tagged or labelled. It is to contain the date of collection, name of the RAR team member who screened the information, and the date when the information was processed into grids.

If printed out, all records of collected information should be kept in separate folders, arranged according to the phase in which the particular information was collected, and in separate folders, if stored digitally on the computer. If printed out, the information should be dated.

Separate files can be kept for names, telephone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses of informants, respondents and focus group participants in the respective phases. The best way to keep this data up-to-date is to upload it into a computer, and secure access with a password. If printed out, the files of informants, respondents and participants have to be dated.

If semi-structured interviews are recorded, it must be kept under lock and key. All records are to be tagged or labelled, with a number assigned to the respondent and the interview date. The same applies to structured interviews, provided these are recorded, and to focus group(s). Minutes of focus groups can be stored in a separate folder on the computer.

**Processing and analysing information**
A Rapid Assessment generates a substantial amount of information. How to organise all this information, how to establish an overall view and how to draw conclusions from this information?

To structure and simplify the process of data analysis, we have developed grids according to the method of information collection. During the RAR all relevant data is processed into grids. Grids are tools to analyse relevant data easily. The grids are designed so that team members can enter and organise the data collected from interviews and other forms of information collection. All grids basically have the same layout.

In the text you will find several examples of possible grids. Use these examples to make your own grids. Feel free to adapt them for your own needs using any word processor or spreadsheet.
In one column there is space for entering all answers from respondents to a (key) question. At the bottom of the column a summary of the answers can be made.

In addition, there is a column for remarks to respondents’ answers. At the bottom of this column deviant answers and unresolved questions can be memorised for further investigation.

Standard grid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Answer from respondent n° 01</td>
<td>From what viewpoint did this respondent answer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Answer from respondent n° 02</td>
<td>and/or: Why did this respondent give a deviant answer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Answer from respondent n° 03</td>
<td>and/or: What is the background information on this respondent?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of the answers to the key question</th>
<th>Deviant answers, topics for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers mentioned by most respondents</td>
<td>Diverging or missing information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Former projects made clear that all grids have to be filled in directly after data collection, especially when interviews are carried out. Filling in the grids is a lot of work, but pays back during analysing and reporting.

Once all grids on key questions have been filled in, the summaries and unresolved questions can be transferred to a summary grid. Each Rapid Assessment phase ends with a summary grid on the key questions: one summary grid for existing information, one for the semi-structured interviews, et cetera. With the help of these summary grids the outcomes from the different RAR phases can be compared and conclusions can be drawn.
Existing information

During the RAR process, the RAR team will collect data from two main sources. The first source is existing information: scientific research, policy papers, reports by drug services and health care organisations and articles in newspapers and magazines. This might be superadded by the information received during access and sampling. The second source - and most likely the main source - will consist of data collected by the RAR team itself: through semi-structured interviews, structured interviews and focus group(s).

One of the pitfalls in collecting existing information is to screen all these data sources too thoroughly in the search to find answers to the key questions. Only examine written sources that offer information on both problematic substance use and the target groups. Answers to key questions encountered in existing information are processed into existing information grids. Eight existing information grids have to be created, one for each key question. Fill in all grids - including the existing information grids - directly after data collection. All existing information grids can have the same structure:

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Target Group:
Grid: Existing Information
Key Question:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary
Gaps

Start filling in the ‘Name’ of the RAR researcher who fills in or updates the grid followed by the ‘Date’.

Next fill in ‘Key question’ i.e.: Who is using substances problematically?

In the ‘Reference’ column, enter author(s), title, publisher, year of publication, newspaper or magazine in which the article was published, et cetera.

In the ‘Information’ column, relevant data, taken from the source, can be entered to answer the key question.

In the ‘Remarks’ column, the RAR team can comment on the quality of the information, taken from the source, and agreed on during team meeting. An article in a tabloid, for example, will contain more biased information than an extensive article in a magazine based on interviews.
with the target group. A social scientific study based on a large survey on, or in-depth interviews with the target group, will offer more reliable information than a policy paper based on immigration and/or police statistics.

Make a 'Summary' and fill in the 'Gaps'.

Feeding relevant data into grids will be discussed in more detail in the chapters on semi-structured and structured interview phases.

**Context information**
When collecting information the RAR team will not only obtain data to answer the key questions, but also retrieve context information. Context information can be as comprehensive as the RAR team chooses before data collection starts. During the assessment the RAR team will come across context information.

Dependent on the available time the next aspects of context information can be recorded:
- Drug using careers of the target group
- Careers in addiction care of the target group
- (Local) drug policy, availability of drugs, (in)formal control mechanisms and drug legislation
- (Local) drug prevention and drug care policy

During team meetings, the RAR team decides how extensively and exhaustively context information has to be collected. The amount of data collected on context information has implications on how to manage and analyse this data. The more data is collected, the more time it will take to record and sort the information. All relevant data on context information can be entered into grids.

If you decide to collect a lot of context information during the assessment, it may be necessary to split up some of the grids into sub-grids. You can also opt to limit the information recorded to the most relevant topics.

Since an assessment has to be executed in a short period of time we suggest to restrict context information to three topics mentioned above. This means that one grid will do when little context information is collected.

Fill in the grids directly after data collection.
Before context information is processed the RAR team has to decide how many context information grids will be used. Splitting up context grids during the RAR process means a lot of extra work.
All context grids have the same structure and are made up of three columns and a box for conclusions and gaps:

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Target Group:**
Grid: Context Information
**Topic:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Relevancy for RAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Start filling in the ‘Name’ et cetera like you did in the existing information grid.

Next, name the ‘Target group’, for example: ‘people injecting drugs’ or ‘adolescents smoking cocaine’.

Under ‘Topic’ you can fill in one of the context topics mentioned above.

In column ‘Source’, the RAR team can fill in where, respectively from whom the data was collected. Context information will be compiled during the whole Rapid Assessment process, but especially from:

- Existing information: scientific research, policy papers, reports by drug services and healthcare organisations and articles in newspapers and magazines.
- Semi-structured interviews.

If the source of the information consists of written material, enter author(s), title, publisher, year of publication, newspaper or magazine in which the article was published, et cetera. If context information was collected during an interview, enter the respondent in column ‘Source’.

In the ‘Information’ column, relevant data to describe and to understand the context can be summarised.

In column ‘Relevancy for RAR’ the RAR team can determine the exact implications of this specific context information for the next phase in the assessment or for the Response stage, when developing new prevention and intervention initiatives, or adjusting existing ones. These things are established in team meetings.
In the ‘Summary’ column the RAR team can summarise the context information on the particular topic. In the ‘Gaps’ column the RAR team can decide what aspects of the topic are still unanswered and require special attention during the remaining time of the assessment. As Rapid Assessment is an on-going process, information can be added to the context grids during all stages of the assessment.
Access and sampling

For data collection among the target group the RAR team has to gain access to the target group. Gaining access and getting into contact with the target group usually involve obstacles and can be difficult. RAR team members can use intermediaries to establish first contacts.

To gain access to a setting, members of the RAR team will have to pay frequent visits to key areas, where members of the target groups are known to congregate. By visiting key areas regularly, members of the RAR team will be able to identify key informants, both with information about the target communities and the infrastructure of the key areas. An infrastructure of a key area is made up of:

- an (informal) network of care facilities, such as (voluntary) outreach workers, facilities set up by different religious groups and the like;
- the normal infrastructure of an area and its social surroundings, such as bus and train stations, shops, cafes, restaurants and so on.

First, informants of the target group usually are not promptly accessible. By visiting an area frequently, members of the RAR team will ultimately get into contact with key informants, both in the target communities and in the infrastructure of an area.

As members of the RAR team are likely to be health or drug services workers themselves, establishing (informal) contacts with fellow workers won’t be the most difficult problem. Usually social and medical care facilities are available for the target group. Staff of care facilities can be an excellent starting point to identify informants. A pitfall in focusing exclusively on social workers and medical staff is that they sometimes consider themselves as gatekeepers for the target communities. The emphasis during the access phase of the assessment should therefore be on finding key informants from within the target communities and the normal infrastructure of a setting: bus and taxi drivers, shop keepers, cafe owners and so on.

During the access phase RAR team members have to get on good terms with informants and gain their trust. During the semi-structured and structured interview phases, good terms and trust has to be lasted. Most informants - especially if they are members of the target communities - might consider the issue of substance use a sensitive matter and giving information on this issue a possible threat.

When RAR team members visit the setting on a regular basis target communities will become accustomed to the presence of the RAR team. Again, it can be helpful if the introduction occurs through existing contacts, provided of course, that these contacts are trusted by the target group.

Another prerequisite for good terms and trust is that RAR team members are as open as possible about the aims and objectives of the assessment. Before entering the setting the RAR team should agree on some consistent one-liners that explain the aims and objectives to the target group. And of course you have to guarantee the interviewee total anonymity.
During the access phase the RAR team will identify key informants, who have knowledge of the target communities, or know people with such knowledge. Team members can establish the level of knowledge of each informant by administering a very short unstructured questionnaire. For example:

- What can you tell me about substance use among the target group?
- What can you tell me about the drug-related problems the target group encounters?
- What can you tell me about care facilities to relieve these drug-related problems?
- What persons you know who have extensive knowledge about the subject?

The questionnaire can be modified and/or expanded, but the RAR team should agree on a consistent, short questionnaire for screening informants. These details should be worked out in team meetings.

Information collected among informants during the access and sampling phase are processed in the grid below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Target Group:**
**Phase: Access and Sampling**
**Grid: Informants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Nominees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform 01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform 02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform 03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform 04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fill in 'Name', 'Date', and 'Target group'.

In the 'Informants' column fill in the id-number of the informant.

In the 'Knowledge' column the knowledge level of the informants are described. Does the respondent have first hand information, in what way is he/she involved with the target group, et cetera.

In the 'Nominees' column all nominees an informant mentions are registered.

When informants have extensive knowledge they can be selected as respondents during the semi-structured interview phase. Also, informants with less extensive knowledge about the subject can be useful, when they give a lead to other persons with extensive knowledge. These persons will be respondents for a semi-structured interview.

In all phases of data collection of the RAR process, except the focus groups, informants of the access and sampling stage and respondents of the interview phases will be asked to identify nominees with extensive knowledge about the subject. This research technique is called snowball sampling. In practice snowball sampling is the most important means to identify informants and respondents during the RAR process.
Other, less relevant, ways to select a sample are:

- **Purposive samples** are used if you want to select certain cases, which will quickly maximise your understanding of social processes and activities.
- **Opportunistic sampling** is not really a sampling method, as it actually is nothing more than simply collecting all the cases you can find. There may be occasions when cases have to be selected simply because they have become available.
- **Block sampling.** You may wish to select a series of sample ‘blocks’ from the total target community. These should be comprised of a number of communities and sites relatively close to one another, such as city blocks, groups of streets, or village tracts.
- **Quota samples** can be used to investigate a range of different, theoretically important categories. This includes defining the categories and then deciding on how many individuals from each category - or quota - should be contacted.

To collect information from different angles during the assessment, members of the RAR team should try to start snowball samples in different networks during the access stage. To avoid overlaps these networks should be independent from each other. Former RAR projects showed that it is relatively easy to start snowball samples in professional networks of RAR team members, but far more difficult in other networks. Do not only focus on volunteers and workers in social and medical facilities, but particularly on the target group and the social infrastructure. Start identifying informants from these networks right from the beginning.

Some target communities may be hidden to such an extent that RAR teams will have to resort to opportunistic sampling.
Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing means: ask questions systematically and listen carefully to the answers given by respondents. In explorative research, like Rapid Assessment, interviewing respondents is the most effective way to collect data. By using interview techniques the RAR team gathers data on facts, meaning and opinions, and starts to create a network to facilitate the implementation of preventive future interventions. Keep in mind that every respondent, like every informant during the sampling and access phase, can possibly help to implement interventions in the Response phase.

Respondents
During the assessment process two interview techniques will be used: semi-structured and structured interviews. Once the access and sampling phase has been completed, the RAR team will have an overview of potential respondents with substantial knowledge of the key questions. By snowball sampling the RAR team will identify additional respondents with such knowledge. These respondents will be questioned in semi-structured interviews.

Respondents of semi-structured interviews:
- Are closely connected to the target communities on a professional basis, or
- Have daily contacts with the target communities through their position in the ‘normal’ infrastructure, or
- Have central positions within the target communities

Moreover they:
- Have a good overview of the local situation
- Have a network of people with excellent knowledge of the key questions

Target of the RAR process is that the team can conduct the semi-structured interview phase in about one month. All teams were able to administer about ten to fifteen semi-structured interviews. We advise you to limit the number of respondents for semi-structured interviews to about fifteen. Make sure that these respondents are selected from different angles. Try to identify respondents beyond professional networks.

The semi-structured questionnaire
In semi-structured interviews the whole range of key questions, decided on the beginning of the RAR process, is covered. In this manual eight key questions are phrased:
1. Who is using substances problematically?
2. What substances are used problematically?
3. What are the main problems caused by substance use?
4. What factors are of influence in developing problematic substance use?
5. What does the target group know about the risks of substance use?
6. What are existing effective preventive interventions/preventive conditions?
7. What preventive interventions/preventive conditions does the community need?
8. What are the priorities in prevention?

The key questions must be elaborated in a questionnaire with open and closed questions. Restrict the questionnaire to the most essential questions, else processing will take long time. Discuss the questionnaire extensively within the RAR team to agree on and all members are
familiar with all questions. The questionnaire below serves as a blue print to design your own questionnaire.

0. **Background information of respondent:**
What is your age, gender, education? What are your activities? For how long are you part of the target group? For how long you have contact with the target group?

1. **Target group: Who is using substances problematically?**
According to informants (part of) the target group is using substance problematically. Do you agree? Can you tell why?

2. **Substances: What substances are used problematically?**
What substances does the target group use problematically?

3. **Problems: What is the main problems caused by problematical substance use?**
What are the three most important problems of the target group caused by substance use:
Physical health?
Psychological health?
Social problems?
Financial problems?
Problems with the police/the law?
Other relevant problems?

4. **Causes: What factors are of influence in developing problematic substance use?**
What are the target group’s three main causes for problematic substance use?
Physical health?
Psychological health?
Social causes?
Financial causes?
Causes by the police/the law?
Other relevant causes?

5. **Knowledge and information: What does the target group know about the risks of substance use?**
What does the target group know about the risks of the substance(s) they use?
From what sources did the target group obtain this information?

6. **Existing interventions: What are existing effective preventive interventions/preventive conditions?**
What are existing (preventive) interventions for the target group?

7. **Needed interventions: What preventive interventions/preventive conditions are needed by the community?**
What are needed (preventive) interventions for the target group?

8. **Priority interventions: What are the priorities in prevention?**
What (preventive) interventions have priority for the target group?
The interview

Before administering interviews, the semi-structured questionnaire has to be tested and practiced.

Test interviews should be conducted within the RAR team. When members of the RAR team interview each other and these interviews are then discussed and evaluated by the team, questions can be rephrased and their sequence changed.

Through these tests, RAR team members with no prior interview experience receive instant interview training. Besides, this is a way to find out if the questionnaire runs well and to adapt the questionnaire to types of respondents. Once the semi-structured questionnaire has been tested within the team, the RAR team should consider retesting and re-evaluating the questionnaire by interviewing one or two respondents. This might help you to detect and solve possible problems in the formulation and sequence of the questions.

We recommend involving outsiders in the test and practice process. Let ‘respondents’ adopt different roles while (parts of) the questionnaire are administered. Experienced interviewers can give critique and suggestions during the test interview process.

In a semi-structured interview the questionnaire is a guiding principle and checklist. The interview has an open nature, do not phrase the questions word by word. Learn the questionnaire by heart, ask questions in a natural way and adapt the formulation of the question to the respondent.

Respondents can also provide other relevant information that is not covered by the key questions, i.e., context information. Respondents are invited to answer all key questions and relevant issues freely and in detail. Answers are not limited to predefined categories.

Although semi-structured interviews yield an immense amount of information in a short amount of time, they require much preparation. Besides, a fair amount of time is needed for managing the information from the semi-structured interviews. Especially during the interviewing phase it is important to process information directly into grids.

Furthermore, the interviewer needs some experience to administer the interview properly. An unprejudiced and open attitude towards the respondent is also a must.

During the preparatory work for the semi-structured interviews, the RAR team members screen all the relevant existing data and context information thus far collected. This data can serve as the basis for adaptations of the enclosed questionnaires. Furthermore, the RAR team needs to consider carefully, which questions to ask. This is determined in meetings of the team. The RAR team also has to agree on the sequence of the questions. Finally, the RAR team has to decide how the questions have to be phrased. Both sequence and phrasing of questions depends on the individual respondent.
Be mindful to avoid:

- Complex and technical questions. Use clear and simple language, which is easy to understand and unlikely to being misinterpreted.
- Long and multiple questions. Long questions might confuse respondents; when asking multiple questions, there is a chance that respondents might only answer the part they remember.
- Leading questions. When asking suggestive questions, even if these are based on existing data or context information (for example, "Do you also agree that?"), respondents might come to conclusions they would not have considered otherwise.

Before you start an interview, both a semi structured and a structured one, a good introduction is essential.

An introduction to an interview must be tailored to every respondent. Both respondents working with the target communities and respondents from the target communities will be interviewed during the semi-structured and structured interview phase.

An introduction to an interview must contain the following topics:
- Start your introduction how you got in contact with the respondent. Most of the times the respondent is introduced/mentioned by a key informant or other respondent.
- Continue your introduction by introducing yourself and the organization you are working.
- Then introduce the causes of the research. The causes vary from target group to target group, but are most of the times based on (anecdotal) sources that show that substance users suffer from various health problems and problematic drug use seems to be one of their more prominent health problems.
- Subsequently explain the aims of the research. The main aims are to monitor the use of substances among the target group, to make inventory of existing preventive interventions, to develop new effective preventive interventions. Explain that substances not only comprise illicit ones, like heroin, cocaine and cannabis, but also the licit ones, like alcohol, tobacco, tranquilizers and sleeping pills.
- Further, when you interview members of the target communities, explain that you are not interested in the personal substance use of the respondent, but that you made an appointment with the respondent because he or she has an excellent overview on the problem among his or her fellow compatriots.
- Conclude your introduction by explaining that all respondents will stay anonymous and that all information given will be dealt with strictly confidential, which means that information never will be passed through to police, customs, city hall, the government et cetera.

Once the interview test is completed and the actual interviews are underway, the RAR team members will have to determine how detailed they want each key question answered, and whether further clarification of each key question is required. Two techniques with which to obtain more detail, clarification and additional information, are probes and prompts.

Probes are intended for encouraging respondents to provide more information, or to continue speaking. Probes may consist of making silent gestures (e.g. nodding your head), encouraging sounds, or asking questions (e.g. “is there anything more you can tell me about this subject?”).

Prompts encourage respondents to raise issues that have not arisen spontaneously (e.g. "Another respondent told me ..., what is your opinion on that?")
13 steps to administering a semi-structured interview

1. Arrive early at the location where the interview is to take place. Try to ensure that the location is as quiet and as free of interruptions as possible.

2. Interpreters - if needed - should be briefed on what is going to happen. If a recorder is used, it should have a good microphone and sufficient battery time. Naturally you will have to make sure that the respondent agrees to the interview being recorded.

3. Introduce everyone present to the respondent. Introduce people in a friendly way. State reasons and aims of the RAR. Promise respondents that everything discussed will remain confidential. Assure respondents that they are the experts, and that the RAR team wants to learn from their knowledge, experience and opinion.

4. Use clear and simple language when asking questions. Allow participants time to think and speak.

5. Sensitive subjects can be introduced by mentioning what ‘other’ people in the target group are said to be doing in terms of substance use or certain behaviour patterns, and then inviting critical comment.

6. Repeating respondents’ answers in their own words is a good method of checking that you understand what they are trying to say.

7. Be a good listener and ask ‘why’ and ‘how’.

8. Check with the respondent that it is acceptable to continue an interview, if it looks as if it may last longer than expected.

9. Always collect demographic data, such as background, function, ethnicity and status. This will be useful in considering the link between certain types of people and specific behaviours.

10. Summarise the key issues and opinions, once the interview has ended. Ask if respondents have any questions. It is important that RAR team members do not offer any advice or answers they are not in a position to give.

11. Ask respondents whether they have anything to add to the discussed topics.

12. Conclude the semi-structured interview by asking respondents, whether they know any other people who also have great/useful knowledge of the issue.

13. Thank the respondents for their contribution.

If you decide to record the semi-structured interviews realise that transcribing all information from the recording is very time-consuming. Be pragmatic and only transcribe the information you really need. Besides recording always take notes and write down the most important information on the key questions. This can help you to summarise the answers. Also note good quotes that can be used to illustrate the issue in your final report. If a respondent does not agree on recording, the interviewer will have to take written notes only. Ideally, an interviewer and a note-taker should administer these interviews. If this is not possible the interviewer will
have to take the notes himself. This will prolong the interview because respondents will sometimes have to repeat their answers. Occasionally a respondent may not even give the interviewer consent to take notes. In that case the notes should be made immediately after the interview, beginning with the answers to the key questions, followed by other relevant information.

Recording and notes must be labelled (interview date, respondent’s name or code, interviewer’s name) and processed as soon as possible. Ideally, all interviews, and especially the first few interviews should be discussed and evaluated in meetings of the RAR team. This can help you to be more specific in next interviews (clearing diverging answers) and, if necessary, add or adjust questions.

**Analysing data**

Semi-structured interviews always produce a huge bulk of information. To process and analyse all this data, you will have to feed it into a set of grids.

In a set of grids, each key question has its own grid, in which the answers given by each individual respondent to the specific key question can be entered. Besides, there is space for commenting on the answer of respondents. A grid ends with a summary of the answers provided by all respondents on each key question, and a column in which deviant answers and unsolved questions can be memorized. Once all the grids relating to key questions have been filled in, the summaries and unresolved questions can be transferred to a summary grid. This summary grid can help the RAR team to draw conclusions.

Keep in mind to fill the grids directly after an interview! When you wait too long it will be very time consuming and a tough job to reconstruct who said what. It is very important to keep an overview on the developments and results of the interviews and, when needed, to adjust or to collect additional information about diverging answers or unclear issues. When you wait filling in the grids after all interviews are administered, you probably do not have that possibility anymore.

In the next paragraphs we will explain all grids for the semi-structured interview (SSI). We have included example grids with some (fictive) information, to show how the grids might be filled in.

**Grid Respondents**

The next grid is designed to process information of respondents during the semi-structured interview phase. The same grid can be used for respondents during the structured interview phase. In the ‘Respondent’ grid, background information about the respondent can be entered, in order to better understand the answers and to explain possible deviant answers between respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Function and background/position</th>
<th>Sources of information</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resp 01</td>
<td>Female, social worker</td>
<td>First hand info, office service for clients. Professional literature</td>
<td>Long career in addiction care, knows many double diagnosis clients for years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp 02</td>
<td>Male, addiction physician</td>
<td>First hand info, holds office hours twice a week. Scientific literature</td>
<td>Has little contact with target group. Has an overview on medicine use and health related problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp 03</td>
<td>Male, outreach worker</td>
<td>First hand info, knows a lot of dd clients in the streets</td>
<td>Sees what is happening in the streets every day, but has the job for only three months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp 04</td>
<td>Female, mother of double diagnosis client</td>
<td>Only knows her child’s adventures</td>
<td>Pictures the problem maybe to dramatically. Wants care for her child that is hard to realize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp 05</td>
<td>Female, double diagnosis client</td>
<td>First hand info, lives in the streets</td>
<td>Pictures her problem too rashly. Tells a standard story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructions:**
Start filling in the 'Name' of the RAR researcher who fills in or updates the grid followed by the 'Date'.

Fill in the 'Target Group' concerned.

In the 'Respondents' column, you can enter the ID number of each respondent.

In column 'Function and background/position', you can enter background information on a respondent, such as profession, gender or any other demographic characteristics that might be of importance.

In column 'Sources of information', you can enter from where the respondents obtain their information (first or second hand information from target groups, community or professional workers), and what type of information it is (written material, such as scientific studies, policy papers or mass media).
In the ‘Remarks’ column, you can enter any relevant data that might help to interpret the answers given by the respondents: what is their experience/knowledge, what kind of (professional) relationship do they have with the community or target group, what is their position within the community or target group.

**Example grids for the semi structured interview phase.**
Most grids for the semi-structured interview phase have more or less the same structure as shown in the following example.

**Example: standard grid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Target Group:**
**Phase: Semi-Structured Interview**
**Key Question:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Answer from respondent n° 01</td>
<td>From what viewpoint did this respondent answer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Answer from respondent n° 02</td>
<td>and/or: Why did this respondent give a deviant answer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Answer from respondent n° 03</td>
<td>and/or: What is the background information on this respondent?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of the answers to the key question</th>
<th>Deviant answers, topics for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers mentioned by most respondents</td>
<td>Answers on which most respondents do not agree, items to be clarified in next interviews, or to be discussed in a focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructions:**
Fill in ‘Name’, ‘Date’, ‘Target Group’ and ‘Key Question’ concerned.

In the ‘Respondents’ column, an identifying number for a respondent can be entered. Every respondent receives a personal ‘ID’ number. By using these ID numbers, it is always clear which particular respondent gave what answer. Don’t forget to make a list of all respondents with their corresponding ID numbers. You can use the ‘respondents’ grid for that.

In column ‘Answers’, the answer from each individual respondent to the specific key question can be entered.

In column ‘Remarks’, remarks can be made about the respondents or their answer to get a better understanding why a particular respondent gave this specific answer.
Once answers are filled in, they can be compared. If several respondents give the same answer, it can be entered in the column ‘Summary of the answers to the key question’. It is possible that some respondents give two or more different answers. In that case, fill in all these answers. For example, the key question ‘substances’ might be answered with ‘alcohol and sleeping pills’.

Deviant answers that are not shared by several other respondents need to be examined more closely. A case study of the respondent might explain the deviant answer. In column ‘Remarks’, remarks can be entered as to why the respondent might have given a different answer. The deviant answer might be a complement to the shared answer. For example, a respondent from the community might describe a particular problem differently than a physician, while both, in fact, mean the same thing. Another explanation for a deviant answer could be that the respondent sees different aspects of reality, for example, a different section of the target population. Finally, differences in moral beliefs, certain preconceptions, and interest in the subject can also play a role in this.

Any remaining deviant answers that cannot be explained by the available information can be described in column ‘Deviant answers, topics for discussion’. The items in this column can be studied at a later time, after having gathered additional information (e.g. from next interviews, or an additional interview with the particular respondent, or with an expert on the subject). The divergence might be confirmed in the answers given in the structured interviews, or become a topic for discussion in a focus group.

To distinguish grids from each other in the document structure of your computer it is important to give each grid a unique code. You can use the information of the

- Target group
- Phase
- Key question

For example, grids can be saved as PID SSI 1 (target group: people injecting drugs (PID); phase: semi-structured interviews; key question: 1), or PID SSI 3 (target group: people injecting drugs (PID); phase: semi-structured interviews; key question: 3).

In former RAR projects coding grids in this way proved to be useful. You can design your own grid codes as long as the different grids can be distinguished in a transparent way.

**Adapt standard grids**

Answers to each key question are processed in separate grids. Usually you manage with a standard grid. Answers to some key questions cannot be processed in a standard grid. Then the grid can be adapted. You may need an extra column for example. The questionnaire designed above is the guideline. Both in this chapter and in the chapter on Structured Interviews adapted grids are illustrated by examples of former RAR projects.

**Example: agree/disagree**

During a semi-structured interview for example you can ask respondents whether they agree or disagree that there is problematic substance use in the target group and why they think so. In earlier phases this seemed to be the case and during semi-structured interviews you want to check this. To process the answers systematically you can adapt the standard grid.
**Target Group: people injecting drugs (PID)**
**Phase: Semi-Structured Interview**
**Key Question: 1 (target group)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Finds it hard to offer adequate care for double diagnosis clients. Prefers to focus on young users who can still be helped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Thinks that target group encounters little problems if they get enough methadone and medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Witnesses daily life of double diagnosis clients in the streets and conclude this group encounters heavy problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wants her child to get better and more intensive care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thinks she has heavy problems for years and wants more extensive care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary agreement on problematic use**
Most respondents agree that double diagnosis clients are a problematic group

**Deviant answers, topics for discussion**
Staff working for a long time in addiction care thinks that it is impossible to help target group/ received already enough care

In the two columns ‘**Agree**’ and ‘**Disagree**’, enter whether the respondent agrees or disagrees.

In column ‘**Remarks**’, enter the data that you consider important concerning the respondents who disagree. For background information you can use the completed ‘**Respondents**’ grid.

Adapting the standard grid this way, you can conclude after a number of interviews if respondents agree that double diagnosis client is a problematic group. It seems that the majority of respondents agree, although respondents view the problem from different angles.

**Summary grid**
The last grid of the semi-structured interview phase is the summary grid. Once the SSI grids for the key questions have been completed, the columns ‘**Summary**’ and ‘**Deviant answers, topics for discussion**’ can be transferred to the SSI summary grid, simply by copy and paste. In the summary grid you get an overview of the summarized answers to all key questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Deviant answers, topics for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The summary grid can be used to define and fine-tune steps to be taken in the next phase. Furthermore, it can be used to compare the results obtained from the key questions in the different phases of the Rapid Assessment, i.e. with the grid on existing information and the summary grid of the structured interview phase. By comparing these summary grids, the RAR team can draw conclusions and prepare a topic agenda for the focus groups.
Structured interviews

At the end of the semi-structured interview phase the RAR team will be able to formulate tentative answers to almost all key questions. These tentative answers to the key questions will be tested during the next phase of the Rapid Assessment: the structured interview phase.

Respondents
Respondents for the structured interviews basically do not differ from respondents for the semi-structured interviews; they:

- Are closely connected with the target communities on a professional basis, or
- Have daily contacts with the target communities through their position in the ‘normal’ infrastructure, or
- Have central positions within the target communities

Furthermore, they:

- Have a good overview of the local situation
- Have a network of people with substantial knowledge of the key questions

During the structured interview phase you might encounter respondents, who can add new elements to the information gathered so far. In that case, the interviewer can decide to collect additional answers in regard to certain key questions during that interview, or even administer a semi-structured interview to gather answers to certain key questions. Also, one or more key questions are not adequately answered during the semi-structured interview phase. Finally, certain key questions or parts of key questions are not answered univocally. In that case, some open questions have to be asked during the structured interview phase and the information processed in grids. Usually the grids for semi-structured interviews can be used to process the new data. Note down carefully additional information and answers to non-univocal answers during the semi-structured interview phase. Possibly new grids have to be designed to process additional and non-univocal information.

The structured questionnaire
Like for the semi-structured interview a questionnaire has to be designed for the structured interviews.

Structured interviews:

- Are used to check the results and conclusions from the semi-structured interview phase.
- As a rule, use a detailed questionnaire with clearly formulated and ordered questions, most of them consisting of closed questions that allow certain answers only.
- Use the same format for each interview, making it easier to code, analyse and compare data.
Again, we present an example of a structured questionnaire.

0. **Background information of the respondent**
What is your age, gender and education?
What are your activities?
For how long are you part of the target group? For how long you have contact with the target group?

1. **Target group: Who is using substances problematically?**
According to informants (part of) the target group is using substances problematically. Do you agree?
- yes
- no

Are problematic users mostly male or female?
- male
- female
- male and female
- do not know

In what age category will we find the majority of problematic users?
- under 18
- 19-30
- 31-45
- +45
- do not know

2. **Substances: What substances are used problematically?**
According to respondents the target group uses substance 1
Do you agree?
- yes
- no

According to respondents the target group uses substance 2
Do you agree?
- yes
- no

According to respondents the target group uses substance 3
Do you agree?
- yes
- no

Do you distinguish other substance use among the target group?
- yes, namely
- no
3. Problems: What are the main problems caused by problematical substance use?
Problematic substance use expresses itself in different ways. Can you estimate, on a scale from 1 - 5, to what extent these problems express themselves in the following areas?

Problem area 1: not serious □□□□□ very serious
Problem area 2: not serious □□□□□ very serious
Problem area 3: not serious □□□□□ very serious

4. Causes: What factors are of influence in developing problematic substance use?
There may be several causes for problematic substance use. Can you estimate, on a scale from 1 - 5, the significance of these causes for your community?

Cause 1: not important □□□□□ important
Cause 2: not important □□□□□ important
Cause 3: not important □□□□□ important

5. Knowledge and information: What does the target group know about the risks of substance use?
Can you estimate, on a scale from 1 - 5, the knowledge of the target group about the risks of the substance(s) used?

not informed □□□□□ well informed

6. Existing interventions: What are existing effective preventive interventions/preventive conditions?
Respondent of the semi-structured interview phase listed a number of existing interventions for the target group? Can you estimate, on a scale from 1 - 5, how useful you think these methods are?

Method 1........................................ not useful □□□□□ very useful
Method 2........................................ not useful □□□□□ very useful

7. Needed interventions: What preventive interventions/preventive conditions are needed by the community?
Respondent of the semi-structured interview phase listed a number of needed interventions for the target group? Can you estimate, on a scale from 1 - 5, how useful you think these methods are?

Method 1........................................ not useful □□□□□ very useful
Method 2........................................ not useful □□□□□ very useful

8. Priority interventions: What are the priorities in prevention?
Respondent of the semi-structured interview phase listed a number of priority interventions for the target group? Can you estimate, on a scale from 1 - 5, how useful you think these methods are?

Method 1........................................ not useful □□□□□ very useful
Method 2........................................ not useful □□□□□ very useful
Just like in semi-structured interviews: do not read the questions word for word. Learn the questions by heart and ask the questions in a natural way. Adapt the questions to the respondent. Especially questions about the target group and substances used can be asked in a semi-structured way, but take care you get answers to all questions in the structured questionnaire. Structured interviews are used to check the results and conclusions off the semi-structured interview phase. Keep in mind that before you start an interview a good introduction is essential.

Although a structured interview can be administered by less experienced interviewers than a semi-structured interview, its scope may be more limited. Due to the strict pre-set format, interviewers might fail to collect information that presents itself unexpectedly, but is relevant nevertheless. Besides, structured interviews generally will not facilitate the collection of additional answers to key questions, or zooming in on unresolved questions of the semi-structured interview phase.

Before starting the structured interview phase, the structured questionnaire must be tested. Test interviews should be conducted within the RAR team, and preferably include a couple of respondents. The results of these test interviews should be discussed and evaluated during meetings of the team. They may help you to detect and solve possible problems in the formulation and sequencing of questions.

Follow the same 13 steps to administer a structured interview as described in the semi-structured interview phase. Go through the 13 steps before you start administering a structured interview.

**Analysing data**

The grids you can use for managing the information from the structured interviews are very similar to the ones used for the semi-structured interviews. Answers by respondents, taken from the structured interviews (SI), can be entered, summarized and assessed in these grids. Once all grids have been filled in, the summaries on the key questions can be transferred to a summary grid. This summary grid can be compared with the summary grid of the semi-structured phase in order to evaluate and check the results. Both summary grids will be used for preparing the discussions of the Focus Groups. Process all information of a structured interview directly into a grid.

For some key questions you can use the standard grid but some grids to process information of the structured interviews can be more structured than semi-structured interview grids. Below you find some examples to process information of the structured questionnaire. You can use the examples to design grids to process information of your own semi-structured questionnaire.

For some grids in the structured interview phase you can use the same as in the semi-structured interview phase, e.g.:

- **Question 0**, background information of the respondents can be processed in the two respondent grids designed for the semi-structured phase.
- **Question 2**, what substances are used problematically, can be processed in the agree/disagree grid presented in the semi-structured phase.
For the structured interview phase two new grids can be used:

- A grid with an extra column
- A grid with a scale of five

For processing the answers in question 1 a grid with an extra column can be used:

**Example: extra column**

You can process multiple answers to a key question into one grid by adding an additional column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Target Group:**
**Phase:** Structured Interview
**Key Question:** 1B (demography)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Remarks/other possible target communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary agreement on demography**
**Deviant answers, topics for discussion**

**Instructions:**

Fill in ‘Name’, ‘Date’, ‘Target Group’ and ‘Key Question’ concerned.

In the grid above answers on **key questions 1 B** can be processed:

**Are problematic users mostly male or female?**
- male
- female
- male and female
- do not know

**In what age category will we find the majority of problematic users?**
- -18
- 19-30
- 31-45
- +45
- do not know

In the ‘Respondents’ column, you can enter the ID number of each respondent.

Describe demographic features named by the respondents in the columns ‘Gender’ and ‘Age’.

Column ‘Remarks/ other possible target communities’ is meant for relevant information of respondents and possible other target communities they have mentioned.
In the 'Summary agreement on demography' column you can describe the target group the respondents agree on.

Make note of unresolved questions in the 'Deviant answers, topics for discussion' box and indicate what information has to be collected in the next phases of the process.

The respondents answer key questions, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, on a five-points scale. To process these answers you can use a grid with a scale of five.

Example: scale of five
To verify findings of the semi-structured interview phase a five-point scale is used in the structured interview questionnaire. With the scale of five you can make an assessment of the gravity of the three most important problems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem 1:</th>
<th>Appraisal by respondents</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 not serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 very serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem 2:</th>
<th>Appraisal by respondents</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 not serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 very serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem 3:</th>
<th>Appraisal by respondents</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 not serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 very serious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary problems by substance use</th>
<th>Deviant answers, topics for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem 2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem 3:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructions:
In the grid above answers on key questions 3 can be processed:
Problematic substance use expresses itself in different ways. Can you estimate, on a scale
from 1 - 5, to what extent these problems express themselves in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem area 1:</th>
<th>not serious</th>
<th>very serious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem area 2:</td>
<td>not serious</td>
<td>very serious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem area 3:</td>
<td>not serious</td>
<td>very serious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fill out in column 'Problem' the three most important problems of substance use mentioned by the respondents during the semi-structured interview phase.

Fill out in column 'Appraisal by respondents' the judgement of the respondents.

In the column 'Remarks' you can fill in why some respondents gave deviant appraisal.

In the last part of the grid you fill in 'Summary problems by substance use' the average value of all appraisals of the problem. In other words: the total score of all appraisals divided by the total number of respondents. Most important problems can be discussed in focus group II and can be a starting point for the response to be developed.

**Summary grid**

When all questions are processed in grids a summary grid can be filled out. The summary grid is the same as the summary grid in the semi-structured interview phase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Target Group:**
**Phase: Structured Interview**

**Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Deviant answers, topics for discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The summary grid can be used to compare the results obtained from the key questions in the different phases of the Rapid Assessment, i.e. with the grid on existing information and the summary grid of the semi-structured interview phase. By comparing these summary grids, the RAR team can draw conclusions and prepare a topic agenda for the focus groups.
Focus groups

A focus group consists of a number of individuals who are presented with a list of unresolved issues. Some of these issues, relevant to the expertise and knowledge of the focus group, are then discussed collectively. Participants can be recruited based on their homogeneity (because they share common experience and similar backgrounds), or their heterogeneity (different social position and viewpoint). In both cases they are selected because of their specific skill, expertise or extensive knowledge. Often they are likely to be key informants, i.e., people with knowledge that exceeds their personal experience. Participants of focus groups are informants of the ‘Access and Sampling’ phase and respondents of the phases ‘Semi-Structured Interviews’ and ‘Structured Interviews’.

Focus groups are good for producing a lot of information quickly and identifying and exploring beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. It is a useful instrument to formulate hypotheses, check information and find explanations for diverging data. Their major disadvantage is that you have less control than in an interview, that data cannot tell you about the frequency of beliefs and behaviours and that the group may be dominated by one or two participants, who may influence the views of others.

However, you can decide to combine the advantages of a group interview with the advantages of a focus group. In doing so, you would start with a certain question and ask each participant to answer this question individually, not allowing any discussion. Once each participant has answered the question, you start discussing the various viewpoints with the aim to find explanations for differing views.

Focus groups are planned in the concluding stage of the process for two different aims. One objective is to check diverging or contradicting information received in earlier phases and to weigh the validity of (certain) information; the second is to assess the representativeness/validity of conclusions and discuss the implications of the results for planning and undertaking preventive interventions.

This generally means that you will have to organise two focus groups. Viewing and discussing the information you have obtained in earlier phases may reveal some contradictions in the findings, which you can’t explain. You can solve these problems by conducting individual interviews with some key informants, but a focus group is usually the better option. Bringing together key informants can provide you with information about the reasons why people hold different views. Maybe this is related to their social position, their political agenda, or - as a result of these factors - simply because people see different aspects of reality.

The next step is to decide which interventions/preventive measures should be taken. Here too, a focus group has proved to be a valuable instrument. The information collected in earlier stages helped you to formulate ideas and plans for interventions. Bringing together a group of experts and target group representatives to discuss these findings will help to make the plans more solid. Another advantage of this focus group is that it will help you to obtain the necessary commitments from the relevant individuals for successful implementation.

How to prepare a focus group
The focus group is a method for collecting data that is not as well defined in advance as the other methods discussed before. Like these, the focus group is also structured on the basis of
key questions, but the actual topics - such as diverging/contradicting information to be settled and prevention activities to be undertaken - depend on the results from the preceding phases. This means that you will have to define the aims and the scope of the focus group.

**Define the aims**
The first step is to define the aims of a focus group. Are there any conflicting findings or conclusions that need to be weighed or crosschecked? If so, you will have to organise two focus groups, using the first group to clarify divergences in your data. The summary grids from the earlier phases of information collection will provide you with this data.

If there are no major divergences you can bypass focus group I and limit yourself to a focus group for discussing the implications of your findings for future (preventive) interventions (focus group II).

**Define the scope**
It is essential for both focus groups to clearly define their scopes. In regard to focus group I, it means that you will have to identify relevant divergent information. This can be done easily, if you filled in the summary columns of the above grids, and especially the columns for registering deviant answers and topics for discussion. Here the summary grids might be particularly useful. Also to identify relevant propositions for preventive interventions in focus group II, the grids from the preceding stages will provide the necessary information. You can take this information from the grids in which you have filled in and summarised the information collected on prevention activities.

In defining the scope of a focus group you will have to keep in mind the amount of time available to you. This again will depend on the kind of people you are intending to invite. How much time can you ask of them? Are they used to participating in this sort of thing? How much time do you or does your team have? There are no clear guidelines on how long a focus group should last. In general, it is advisable to limit a session to four hours, including breaks. Should you need more time, you can choose different options, such as splitting up the focus group in separate sessions to be held on different days. You can also opt for a one-day meeting. In this case the agenda should not only have a clear structure, but also include a number of breaks (coffee or tea breaks in the morning and afternoon and a lunch break around noon, preferably with food included).

The maximum amount of time available will set the framework for limiting the aims of the focus group. This should be done after first having prioritised and organised the topics of discussion.

**Choose the format**
The next step is to choose the format. Do you merely want to discuss the selected topics, or do you want to start off with the participants stating their viewpoints. The latter might be an interesting option for focus group I when discussing diverging opinions. After having heard and noted down the different views, you can try to establish the underlying reasons for these views in a discussion. To avoid participants influencing the answers/statements of others, you might even opt for collecting the individual responses to the selected topics in advance (in writing or during a personal talk). You can inject these personal viewpoints into the focus group when introducing a topic.
Select the participants
For focus group I you should recruit those individuals who provided the diverging or contradicting information, thus representing different viewpoints. You could also select key informants with knowledge about the background of the different viewpoints.

As regards focus group II, you should select individuals already known to you from the RAR process as having relevant knowledge and ideas about (preventive) interventions.

Keep in mind that the number of participants in a focus group should be limited to allow an effective discussion, in which everybody has the opportunity to speak. From our experience, we would suggest to keep the size between 6 and 10 participants.

Draw up the agenda
After having selected the issues you would like to deal with in the focus group, you should draw up a clear topic agenda. There are different ways to structure topics. You can decide on a logical sequence, e.g. by following the order of the key questions. However, you can also proceed from very important to less important topics. The decisive criterion will usually be: what information is absolutely essential and what is important, though not vital. Sometimes it might be wise to choose a mix of complex and less complex questions to avoid participants having to face a series of difficult discussions. The person chairing the session will have to make sure that discussions are not getting too time-consuming and therefore tiring for the participants. You should keep in mind that reaching a consensus is not your primary aim.

Based on the list of topics you should also prepare a preliminary timetable to make sure that you will be able to deal with all the topics you have selected. The number of topics to be discussed and the amount of time available (see 'Define the scope') provide the framework for setting the time period you allow for each topic. The person chairing the session has to ensure that people stick to this timetable.

Naturally you should make sure that there is sufficient time available for discussing each topic. If you anticipate that there may be too many items to cover in a 4-hour or a 1-day session, you will have to cut down on the number of topics, or decide to hold more sessions.

Prepare the logistics
Preparing a focus group also includes preparing logistics, such as:

- The choice of location. It should be as neutral, comfortable and accessible to participants as possible. Moreover, you should be certain that you could have a meeting free of interruptions.
- A recorder can be a helpful tool; however, only if participants consent to being recorded.
- A blackboard, whiteboard, or paper and pens can be helpful for taking notes to remember points discussed earlier and structure the results of the discussion.
- A moderator to participate in the focus group and encourage participants to talk about interesting and relevant issues.
- A note-taker to observe and record significant verbal and non-verbal details.
- Lastly, you should ensure that participants are informed about the meeting and invited in good time.
How to run a focus group

When actually running a focus group you should proceed as follows:

- At the very start of the session warmly welcome the participants (thank them for coming) and introduce yourself, possible colleagues, and their functions (chair person, note-taker, et cetera).
- Inform participants about:
  - The purpose of the focus group, and what you would like to gain from it.
  - Agenda and timetable.
  - The procedure, if you have chosen a mix of group interview and focus group.
  - Rules of behaviour. These include that only one person should speak at a time, and that people should not interrupt each other. Emphasise that you are interested in everyone’s view, that each participant’s contribution is valued and that everyone will get a chance to speak.
  - How information will be treated and used. Naturally it is of vital importance to stress that all personal information will remain absolutely confidential.
- Allow participants to introduce themselves.
- Listen well and, if necessary, ask for clarification.
- Do not express your own opinion on a topic.
- Summarise the preceding discussion at appropriate points.
- Encourage passive participants to speak and curb the enthusiasm of overly dominant participants. Addressing passive participants directly, like asking them for their opinion can do this. You could also interrupt overly dominant participants by simply stating that you would like to hear the view of other people on a certain issue. Or you could ask all participants to speak, one after the other. However, structuring a focus group along those lines makes the whole thing somewhat schematic, thereby frustrating the discussion that might reveal additional - sometimes even non-verbal - information about the relationship (likes/dislikes) between participants.
- Allow sufficient breaks for refreshments.

How to manage the information

To ensure that you keep track of all the relevant data revealed during the discussion, the following points could be helpful:

- Record the discussion (including the introduction of participants). To prevent overlooking or losing important information, you preferably should work with one person chairing the session and another person taking notes.
- Make (additional) notes of especially relevant statements (when using a voice recorder include date and record number).
- Keep a list of participants.
- Fill in the focus group grids.
Focus group I
For the first focus group on unresolved contradictions in answers you can use the next grid.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RAR team members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>Unresolved topic in key question</th>
<th>Priority on agenda</th>
<th>Discussion, implications and suggestions for intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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Instructions:
After the structured interview phase, any unresolved topics concerning the key questions will be discussed in focus group I. Enter the key questions in the left column and important unresolved topics concerning the key question in column 'Unresolved topic in key question'.

If a lot of unresolved topics remain at the end of the structured interview phase, it will not be possible to discuss all of them in focus group I. An agenda will therefore have to be drawn up, listing the most important ones. Enter in column 'Priority on agenda' the unresolved topics you want to discuss first, second, and third, et cetera.
In column 'Discussion, implications and suggestion for prevention', enter the main conclusions drawn from the discussion of the unresolved item.
Focus group II
For the second focus group on the implementation of the intervention methods you can use the following grid.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
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RAR team members

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key question</th>
<th>Main conclusion</th>
<th>Priority on agenda</th>
<th>Discussion, implications and suggestions for prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

Instructions:
Once the structured interview phase is completed, the main conclusions drawn about key questions and the implications and suggestions for preventive interventions will be discussed in focus group II. List the key questions in the left column and the main conclusion drawn in column ‘Main conclusion’.

It will probably not be possible to discuss all conclusions in focus group II. An agenda will therefore have to be drawn up, listing the most important conclusions to be discussed. In column ‘Priority on agenda’ enter the conclusion you want to discuss first, second, and third, et cetera.

In column ‘Discussion, implications and suggestions for prevention’ enter the most important implications and suggestions for preventive initiatives.
How to analyse and weigh the results
The final step will consist of analysing and weighing the results of the focus group. This will be the subject of an extensive discussion within the RAR team. The following points are part of this exercise:

- Play back the recording and discuss its content with colleagues. If this is too time-consuming, you can base your discussion on the written summary notes taken during the focus group and consider selecting certain parts from the recording (using the notes of especially relevant statements as a guiding tool).
- Seek explanations for diverging answers:
  - Interests connected to profession or position of participants
  - Political or ideological viewpoints
  - Cultural differences
- Look for arguments or sources supporting the different answers
- Look for arguments or sources that moderate different answers
- Try to reach a consensus with your colleagues on:
  - A summary of key points
  - Possible weaknesses in the way the focus group was conducted
  - Possible issues missed in the discussions
  - Issues previously not considered
  - Decide if you need further information or discussion
Reporting

The concluding phase of the RAR process consists of compiling a report in which the findings and conclusions of the Rapid Assessment are outlined.

An important point to begin with is defining the report’s target audience. In most cases the report is likely to be written for: Health care workers, drug services staff, drug prevention workers and policy makers.

Reporting on a project is not an easy task, but we have tried to make things easier for you in three different ways, namely:

- The strictly ordered RAR process, consisting of different stages of data collection that are based on each other, can serve as a basic structure of your report.
- Key questions are determined in order to define the problem and structure the collection of data. You can use these key questions to structure reporting, possibly subdivided into phases of the assessment.
- Grids are designed to order all data collected.

Nearly all grids for processing and analysing data of the RAR process are designed in a similar way. At the bottom of all grids we have created two boxes, both for answers to key questions and context information:

- A box for summarising (preliminary) conclusions
- A box for listing gaps, unresolved problems, deviant answers and so forth.

After each consecutive phase of the RAR process, answers to key questions will become more reliable and clearer. Summary grids are designed for those phases of the RAR process in which most of the data will be collected, mainly in the semi-structured and structured interview phase. A summary grid provides an overview of the preliminary conclusions about all key questions and an overview of any deviant answers by respondents.

In the course of the assessment your compilation of results will become more complete and the boxes for ‘gaps’ in these grids will gradually become emptier.

Additional information from key informants and respondents will help you to fill these gaps, provide more clues to key questions, as well as explain unresolved problems and deviant answers. Last but not least, you have focus group I as a tool for tackling the rest. Summary grids compile the structure for the preliminary report of the Rapid Assessment.

When writing a first draft report you should not aim at perfection immediately. A first draft serves as a base for brainstorming and discussion in the team before preparing the second version. After the team has discussed the second draft of the report, it is recommended to let readers from outside, e.g. a number of key informants, comment on it.

We advise you to write a preliminary report after each phase of the RAR process, starting after the completion of the access and sampling phase. A final report was compiled once the focus groups had been organised.

Writing preliminary reports may seem like a great deal of extra work, but a lot of intensive discussions and brainstorming about preliminary reports in team meetings helped the teams to compose the final reports. Confining you to short draft reports and using the summary boxes and grids will help you to limit the time you invest in this task.
A RAR team may naturally decide to produce only the final report and do without preliminary reports. Depending on the amount of time available for conducting the Rapid Assessment, this could certainly be a valid option. If no preliminary reports are prepared, at least the summary boxes and summary grids with answers to key questions and the summaries of context information and gaps should be discussed intensively in team meetings at the end of every phase. This is necessary for defining the details of the next phase, but compiling reports of these discussions can also help to write a final report about the Rapid Assessment.

When writing the report, consider the following:

- It involves a lot of hard work. Do not wait for inspiration. Try to write every day.
- Take breaks during the writing process. Breaks are perfect for relaxing and organising your thoughts.
- Stop writing in the middle of a sentence, paragraph or chapter, or after having roughly formulated your next thoughts. When you continue writing the following day, it will be easier.
- When you have finished one chapter of the draft report, start writing the next chapter. You can add ideas and thoughts to the finished chapter directly, but you should modify chapters only after you had a chance to let them 'sink in' for a day or two.

The final report of the Rapid Assessment ultimately serves as a basis for the next and most important phase of the RAR process: developing prevention and intervention methods. It will, in fact, include the first step to intervention strategies by presenting the results of focus group II.

The aim of the RAR process is not to produce a thorough scientific study or a literary essay, but to react rapidly to an acute problem previously unmapped. The RAR team should therefore make an assessment of a problem that is understandable for the audience and involves and stimulates people, who can play a role in developing and realising intervention strategies.
References


Annex 1 Observation

To identify key informants and respondents in closed settings, but especially in open settings, members of the RAR team will have to visit the setting frequently. Observations made during these visits can provide data for answering or triangulating key questions and context information.

An observation is data collected by watching and listening to what is happening in the settings frequented by members of the RAR team. Observations can be structured or unstructured. Discoveries made while moving around in a setting to identify key informants, or while on the way to interview a respondent, are unstructured observations.

Observations can be useful in all phases of a Rapid Assessment. At the start, observations can provide valuable information for mapping. This can include identifying locations where the target group meets and where key informants ‘hang out’. Mapping can also help you to get a picture of the relationship between different members of the target group and between the target group and the community. Mapping will help you to distinguish between normal and unusual events. Observations might further help you to gain access to the target group and identify key informants. During the middle and final phases of the Rapid Assessment, observations can prove useful to validate, check and crosscheck findings.

One thing you will have to keep in mind is that there are settings and situations in which observations are not appropriate. One of the most important restrictions, of course, is that you have to respect people’s private space. This is not only limited to someone’s private home or room. Certain public spaces like a bar, or even a corner in a square or park, can be regarded as the private domain of a certain group. Entering these private domains, observing people in these areas is only possible, if these people - implicitly or explicitly - give their consent.

Partly in connection with this ethical limitation of observation you will also have to make sure not to endanger the safety and security, both of the people observed and the observers. Entering the territory of a group of illegal immigrants and collecting information on substance use by observing could, for instance, expose these people to the risk of arrest and expulsion. On the other hand, entering a private domain without approval of the ‘occupant’ could endanger the safety of the intruder.

Unstructured observations are useful in the early phases of a RAR process, when background data on the local area and behaviours is being collected. They should not exclude any prominent features, but should also avoid concentrating on any one aspect. These observations can then be classified and coded after the event according to relevant themes. Unstructured observations are useful for highlighting behaviours which neither the researcher, nor the participants were initially aware of.

Structured observations are undertaken when the team has decided what data is most relevant for the RAR process. Generally this type of observations needs observation guides that indicate what and what exactly needs to be observed. The guides include pages to report if and how frequently certain behaviour occurs. Structured observations are undertaken when the team has decided what data is most relevant for the RAR. There are three specific forms of structured observations: extended observations, time point observations and spot checks.
**Extended observations**
Sometimes you might want to make on-going observations of a particular event or site. For example, you might want to monitor the types, behaviours and interactions of members of a target group at a location where they regularly hang out. You could then decide to observe this location for a number of hours to check if and how the gathering at this certain place changes over time, who is related to whom, et cetera.

**Time point observations**
Another useful approach to monitor behaviour over a period of time consists of time point observations. These can be a good alternative for the rather time-consuming extended observation. Time point observations means monitoring behaviour for a certain period of time at predefined intervals. You can, for example, make observations for 60 seconds every 10 minutes, for 10 minutes every three hours, or twice a day for a week.

**Spot checks**
Doing a spot check means checking what is happening at a certain location at irregular times. These are generally one-off observations. Usually the researcher will arrive unannounced at a particular site, perform the check and leave.

**Demonstrations**
Some acts and events that take place in certain settings will be very hard to observe, but are essential for the Rapid Assessment. People preparing and injecting drugs in private rooms or settings that are inaccessible to outsiders. Youngsters smoking cannabis or using laughing gas at parties and hangout spots. The only way to collect data about these acts, events and behaviours, is to ask people for a real life demonstration.

Demonstrations have proven successful in identifying possible health risks involved in injecting drugs. In studies on the risks of Hepatitis C infection, researchers asked IDU’s to demonstrate the preparation of a ‘shot’ in order to identify what risk behaviours are involved that might cause infection with Hepatitis C.

Demonstrations are useful as the researcher can:
- Ask for certain stages of the act to be repeated or explained, thus allowing detailed note taking and the avoidance of misunderstandings.
- Have a good visual view of the process. If this is not the case during an observation, certain behaviours or activities are likely to be overlooked by the researcher.

However, demonstrations always hold a risk that the people observed might behave differently than they would otherwise under normal, unobserved circumstances. People might try to behave in a way which they think is expected of them. Using demonstrations successfully therefore requires a relationship of trust between the observer and the observed.

Observations - especially structured ones - are often carried out with the use of an observational guide to indicate what should and should not be observed, and/or a record sheet for recording the presence of certain behaviour and its frequency. For all observations - structured and unstructured - you should use field notes (the researchers’ written description of what they have observed). Finally, voice recordings, video recordings, and photographs can be useful records of observations, as long as they are acceptable to those being observed.
When recording observations, for example in the form of field notes, you should include the following information:

- **Settings** - Where does the observation take place? What is the physical layout? What kind of objects is present?
- **People** - Who is present? What type of people are they? Why are they there?
- **Activities** - What is going on? What kind of activities are the people involved in?
- **Signs** - Are there any ‘clues’ which provide evidence about meaning and behaviour?
- **Acts** - What are people doing?
- **Events** - Is this a regular occurrence? Or is it a special event, such as a meeting or a disagreement?
- **Time** - In what order do things happen? Is there a reason for this?
- **Goals** - What are people trying to accomplish?
- **Connections** - How do people know one another? Is their relationship social or business-related? Does the relationship change over time?

A field note should start with the date and time of the observation, the setting where the observation is carried out, and the name of the observer. All field notes should be kept in a log, either analogue or digital. This log should be accessible to every member of the RAR team.

One of the pitfalls of observations is that they can produce biased data. An observer in a setting always has a selective view or influences a setting simply by being there. Biases can be limited to a minimum by:

- Writing down field notes immediately after observations. The longer an observer waits with converting observations into field notes, the less likely it is that field notes are accurate and clear. During an on-going observation, members of the RAR team could jot down ‘memory joggers’ in little notebooks, on receipts, bus tickets, beer mats and the like. If no scrap of paper is available at all, realise that your body can serve as an excellent notebook alternative: the back of your hand, the inside of your arm, etcetera.
- Being as neutral as possible when translating observations into field notes. Avoid making colourful characterisations, interpretations and opinions in field notes.
- In team meetings the RAR team discusses the collected field notes and feeds them into grids, i.e., record sheets to aid you to systematically analyse and write down your observations. Field notes are fed into observation grids for key questions and into observation grids for context information.
All observation grids for key questions can have the same structure and are made up of two columns:

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>

**Target Group:**
**Observations**
**Key Question:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation code</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Summary and answer to key question**

Start filling **name** and **date**.

In the column **'Observation code'**, the RAR team fills in date, time, setting and name of observer.

Relevant information from the field notes is entered in column **'Information'** by the RAR staff in team meetings, in order to answer the key question. Keep in mind that a field note could provide answers to more than one key question. If the RAR team gathers a large amount of observations on more than one vulnerable group in more than one community, the team could decide to fill in different observation grids per key question for each vulnerable group or community. However, as the assessment has to be carried out quickly, we suggest sticking to one observation grid for each key question.

Column **'Summary of answer to key question'** is used for outlining preliminary answers to key questions. As Rapid Assessment is an on-going process, observation grids can be adjusted after every phase of the assessment. We suggest summarising observations after the access and sampling phase, the semi-structured interview phase, and the structured interview phase. If data on key questions in your field notes differ from data obtained in interviews, you can ask the respondents of the semi-structured - but also of the structured - interview phase to explain these discrepancies. If that check does not solve the discrepancy, you should consider putting the unresolved key question on the agenda of focus group I.
Annex 2 Estimation techniques

Estimation techniques are useful instruments to assess the size of a population or scale of a problem. This will be valuable information for planning and designing interventions, i.e., what types and what scale of interventions are needed. In making estimates over time, estimation techniques are also useful for monitoring the size of a population and the scale of a problem. This information can be used to set and adapt priorities for intervention strategies. But it also can help to identify changes and trends, such as new groups involved in substance use, or changing patterns of substance use.

The basic principle of estimation techniques is that a limited number of known cases is used to estimate the total number of cases. This can be done on the basis of existing data, such as client registration data of drug agencies, or based on data collected for undertaking the estimation, or on a mix of both.

In their manual on RAR, Stimson, Fitch and Rhodes (Stimson et al 1998a) include the following estimation techniques:

- Case finding
- Multiplier technique
- Nomination technique
- Capture-recapture technique

Except for case finding - which is, in fact, nothing more than case counting - estimation techniques make assumptions combining (existing) quantitative data on the extent of a certain phenomenon.

Estimation techniques have proven especially useful in gaining insight in the size and problems of so-called hidden populations, such as (illicit) substances users. In most cases it is not possible to select a representative sample from this population. In general access is only possible to reported or registered cases taken from police, social and health services. These figures tend to underestimate the real size of the target population.

Case finding
Case finding in fact, is not an estimation technique. It simply means counting the visible individual cases at a certain time in a certain region. You can improve the quality of the data through so-called multi-source enumeration, i.e., counting the cases of illicit substance use, drug treatment service files and police statistics.

When applying case finding, you should keep in mind, first and foremost, that you will not be able to cover 100 per cent of all cases. When using multi-source enumeration you will have to make sure that you are not double counting. Not counting cases twice is only possible if you have unique personal identifiers, e.g. unique personal codes, at your disposal. The latter naturally involves the risk of breaching confidentiality.

Multiplier technique
The multiplier technique entails making assumptions about the proportion of cases in a population that experiences an event in a particular period of time (such as an overdose, imprisonment, death). This is the so-called multiplier. In addition you are using a benchmark, i.e., the number of such events that are known to occur.
For example, a **benchmark** could be the total number of the population using illicit substances, who was in treatment at some point during the year in question, say 3,000 people. A **multiplier** could be an estimate from a sample survey of the proportion of the population using illicit substances, who was in treatment that year, say 20% (one fifth). If the benchmark-multiplier calculation were to be applied to these figures, the overall size of the population of illicit substance users would be estimated as: $3,000 \times 5 = 15,000$.

The benchmark is generally taken from existing data sources. Of course you should select data sources which have proven to be reliable. The multiplier can either be taken from existing research or from a study specifically undertaken for this estimation. You should be sure, of course, that this data is reliable.

Of course, using several benchmarks and multipliers will make the estimation more robust.

Finally, you can use the result from applying a multiplier technique as the basis for further calculation. For instance, if the finding from another study suggests that about 13% of illicit substance users are involved in drug-related crime at least once a year, you can estimate that 13% of the earlier estimated 15,000 are involved in drug-related crime, i.e., about 1,950 people.

**Nomination technique**

The nomination technique works along similar lines. It consists of estimation methods based on information given by individuals in a sample about their acquaintances. Sample members are, for instance, asked to enumerate drug-using acquaintances and to indicate whether these acquaintances have been in contact with drug treatment centres, health services or any other similar body within a certain period of time. The proportion of substance users in treatment, as nominated by the sample, is then used as a multiplier - as described above - in conjunction with the benchmark of known attendance figures at the drug treatment agencies in order to arrive at an estimate of the total number of substance users.

For example, if a substance user indicates in an interview that an average of three of his/her friends underwent treatment in the past 6 months and had 10 drug-using friends, then the proportion of drug users attending treatment would be 30%. If it were known that 3,000 people in the area attended treatment in the past 6 months, then the number of drug users in the area would be estimated at 10,000, as 30% of the total population is 3,000.

**Capture-recapture technique**

Capture-recapture technique is the most reliable estimation technique and therefore also widely used in empirical research, among other things to estimate the size of drug-using populations.

It involves ‘capturing’ a random sample that is “marked” in some way (let’s say $n_1$). Subsequently, a second random sample is ‘recaptured’ ($n_2$) and the number of marked people from the first sample ($m$) observed. The ratio of marked people $m$ to the recaptured sample size $n_2$ is assumed to be the same as the ratio of the first captured sample $n_1$ to the total population. This is expressed as $(n_1/m) \times n_2 = N$ (total population).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample 1</th>
<th>Sample 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>m</td>
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<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n1</td>
<td>N (estimated)</td>
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</table>
For example, in a certain city researchers estimated the total population of street-based sex workers. Key informants were recruited to distribute a set of cards to each sex worker they contacted during a 24 hour period; this was the first ‘capture’ (n1 = 100). These cards provided details about local services and safer sex practices. Seven days later the key informants returned to that location and distributed more of these cards to sex workers there; this was the second ‘capture’ (n2 = 70). They also asked the sex workers, whether they had previously received a card. Those who had received a card were recorded by the key informants; this was the 'recaptured' sample (m = 20).

From this, researchers calculated that the total number of sex workers in the area was:

\[
\frac{100}{20} \times 70 = 350
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample 2</th>
<th>Sample 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>present</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td>70</td>
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For effective two-sample capture-recapture studies it is important to:
- Cover different angles of substance use (health-related and legal aspects, et cetera.).
- Take two samples from different sources.
- Consider representativeness and homogeneity of the samples in relation to the population being estimated.
- Consider in which direction biases may occur, i.e., if samples are not independent then estimation will over-estimate the true population.
- Use a limited time period and geographical area.
- Use an equivalent definition of the target population in all samples (in relation to substance use, age range, geographical area and time period).
- Consider the adequacy of the identifier for individual matching.
- Calculate rates: the reference population should be taken consistently according to age range, geographical area and calendar year.
- Compare the resulting estimate with other prevalence information.

**Remarks**

Estimation techniques are useful instruments, but should be handled with care. There are stringent requirements that have to be complied with in order to obtain reliable outcomes. When you use a multiplier or capture-recapture technique you have to be/make sure:
- That you can avoid double-counting, meaning you have to find a controllable way to record personal data without violating the confidentiality of information collected and/or interfering with the privacy of the target group.
- That the two samples you are taking are independent of one another, e.g. by comparing information from community health services with data from interest groups.
- That there is an equal likelihood of each member of the population being sampled on each occasion. This is not easy to guarantee, but the least you can do is to reduce a possible bias by checking - in case you are taking one sample from a health service - whether this service is visited or avoided by a certain sub-population.
- That the population is stable while you are taking the sample. This can be done by limiting the period and the geographical area.
A critical review with colleagues, key informants and people with research experience of possible biases in the samples is therefore of vital importance.

Finally, you should never forget that what you get is an estimate, i.e., an indication about the size of a population. This is something people often tend to forget, and they show or read these figures as representing reality. Especially when working with politically sensitive issues where figures could be misused for dubious political purposes and as a result affect people in negative ways, one should either be very conscientious, carefully employing the estimation techniques and taking even more care when presenting the results, or leaving quantitative estimates aside. The extent of substance use is one of the subjects where an extremely careful approach is a must. If you have the slightest doubt about the quality of your estimates and if you cannot guarantee that the information you provide will not be misused, then you should refrain estimating the target population.