RESEARCH ARTICLE

CONSUMO DE SUSTANCIAS PSICOACTIVAS ILEGALES EN PACIENTES DEL HOSPITAL UNIVERSITARIO ERASMO MEOZ EN EL AÑO 2019 A 2022: UNA CARACTERIZACIÓN CLÍNICA Y SOCIODEMOGRÁFICA.

USE OF ILLEGAL PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES IN PATIENTS OF THE ERASMO MEOZ UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL IN THE YEAR 2019 TO 2022: A CLINICAL AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERIZATION.

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RESUMEN

Introducción: El consumo de sustancias psicoactivas ilegales es un problema de salud pública que afecta la calidad de vida y el área psicosocial de los pacientes, además de generar un alto costo en recursos públicos. **Objetivo:** El presente estudio realizado en el Hospital Universitario Erasmo Meoz de la ciudad de Cúcuta buscó caracterizar a los pacientes que consumen estas sustancias, analizando variables sociodemográficas, sustancias detectadas, manejo médico y abordaje interdisciplinar. **Método:** Es un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo, de tipo no experimental, retrospectivo con corte transversal. Se identificaron un total de 426 historias clínicas, posterior a aplicar los criterios de inclusión se contó con un total de 369 historias clínicas para el análisis **Resultados:** La mediana de edad de los pacientes fue de 26 años, con un 82% de hombres. El 21% eran habitantes de calle y el 53% solteros. El 52% asistió al servicio de urgencias por intoxicación aguda, y el 24% por síndrome de abstinencia. La estancia hospitalaria promedio fue de 2,3 días. Un 49,6% negó experimentar craving, mientras que el 38,5% lo experimentó. El manejo interdisciplinario involucró principalmente a trabajo social, psicología, psiquiatría y toxicología, con tratamiento farmacológico basado en benzodiacepinas y moduladores del estado de ánimo. Hubo dos muertes asociadas al consumo. **Discusión:** El estudio refleja la tendencia nacional en el consumo de

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marihuana y cocaína, con inicio en edades entre 10 y 20 años. Se identificó una baja adherencia al tratamiento y un subregistro en la detección de patologías duales. Estos hallazgos destacan la importancia de contar con datos epidemiológicos locales para desarrollar políticas de salud pública efectivas.

Palabras clave: Sustancias psicoactivas; Trastornos relacionados con sustancias; Factores socioeconómicos; Toxicología.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The use of illegal psychoactive substances is a public health issue that impacts patients' quality of life and psychosocial well-being, in addition to generating high public resource costs. **Objective**: This study, conducted at the Erasmo Meoz University Hospital in Cúcuta, aimed to characterize patients who consume these substances by analyzing sociodemographic variables, detected substances, medical management, and interdisciplinary approaches. **Method:** This is a quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental, retrospective, cross-sectional study. A total of 426 medical records were identified, and after applying inclusion criteria, 369 records were analyzed. **Results:** The median age of the patients was 26 years, with 82% being men. Twenty-one percent were homeless, and 53% were single. Fifty-two percent visited the emergency department due to acute intoxication, and 24% for withdrawal syndrome. The average hospital stay was 2.3 days. 49.6% denied experiencing cravings, while 38.5% did. Interdisciplinary management primarily involved social work, psychology, psychiatry, and toxicology, with pharmacological treatment based on benzodiazepines and mood stabilizers. There were two deaths associated with substance use. **Discussion**: The study reflects the national trend in marijuana and cocaine use, with initiation ages between 10 and 20 years. Low adherence to treatment and underreporting in the detection of dual pathologies were identified. These findings highlight the importance of having local epidemiological data to develop effective public health policies.

Keywords: Psychotropic Drugs; Substance-Related Disorders; Socioeconomic Factors; Toxicology.

Introduction

Psychoactive substance abuse is the harmful, compulsive, and dangerous use of drugs whose outcome is related to significant deterioration in the health and/or psychosocial sphere of the user (PAHO, 2022). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023), estimates that by 2021, approximately 275 million people worldwide used drugs, and more than 36 million suffered from related disorders due to their use. In relation to this, between 2010 and 2019, the number of drug users increased by 22%.

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In Colombia, the 2019 National Study on Psychoactive Substance Use revealed that 10.3% of the population had tried illegal drugs at least once, and 3.4% used them in the last year (Ministry of Justice and Law, 2019). According to data from the National Study on Psychoactive Substance Use in the Norte de Santander region, approximately 8% of those surveyed admitted to having consumed some illegal drug at some point in their lives (UNODC, 2021).

Given its complexity, a three-stage model has been proposed that supports the neurobiological basis associated with addictive behavior, which intensifies over time, generating significant changes in the reward, stress, and executive function systems in the brain. This cycle progresses through three main brain regions: the basal ganglia, the amygdala, and the prefrontal cortex (Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

Cocaine addiction generates a chronic brain condition, with a predominance of compulsive drug-seeking and cognitive and emotional changes due to neurobiological adaptations (Castilla et al. 2016). The supply and demand for cocaine have been increasing, with an estimated total of 315,500 hectares cultivated and 22 million users worldwide in 2021 (PAHO, 2022). In Colombia, 136,000 people reported having consumed cocaine in 2019 (Ministry of Justice and Law, 2019).

Recreational cannabis contains tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC is the main psychoactive compound, responsible for increasing dopamine levels in the prefrontal cortex and providing the euphoric effect (Bostwick, 2019; Simone et al. 2023). THC activates the CB1 and CB2 receptors of the endocannabinoid system, which gives it its psychoactive properties affecting functions such as eating, learning, memory, sensory perception, and propensity to develop psychopathology such as psychosis and anxiety (Lachenmeier et al. 2019). Globally and in Colombia, cannabis remains the most consumed drug (Téllez, 2015).

Opioids produce a continuous release of dopamine in the ventral tegmental area (VTA) and the nucleus accumbens (NAc), generating pleasurable sensations and sedation in a short period, a sensation that generates a high degree of addiction (Kosten et al. 2002; Beltrán et al, 2015).

It is estimated that more than 11 million people worldwide inject opioids; of these, half will contract infections such as hepatitis C and HIV. Additionally, due to their depressant effects, opioids are responsible for the majority of overdose deaths, with 60 million non-medical users in 2021 and nearly 70% of the 128,000

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drug use disorder-related deaths in 2019 (PAHO, 2022).

Globally, 70% of psychoactive substance users are men, which means more men die from drug overdoses (PAHO, 2022). Specifically in the Colombian context, men have a higher consumption of marijuana, cocaine, basuco, and ecstasy compared to women; approximately three out of four marijuana users are men (75%) and one is a woman (25%) (Ministry of Justice and Law, 2019).

The age of onset of substance use usually occurs during adolescence and is associated with long-term social and health complications. It has been shown that most addicts admitted to treatment centers began using drugs at age of 17 or earlier (Subodh et al. 2019). In 2021, 5.3% of adolescents aged 15 to 16 worldwide had used psychoactive drugs in the last year (PAHO, 2022). In Colombia, the average age of onset of illegal psychoactive substance use is 18.4 years for men and 19.6 years for women, and for some particular substances such as marijuana it was 18.1 years, cocaine 19.2 years, basuco 20.3 years, and heroin 20.0 years (Ministry of Justice and Law, 2019). In our country, the age of onset of marijuana use has remained stable between 17.6 and 17.9 years (Téllez, 2015).

Civil status influences behavior and health; research shows that being married is linked to lower rates of substance use and associated disorders compared to single or divorced individuals. This is attributed both to the selection of healthier individuals for marriage and to the protective effect of marriage on health (Salvatore et al, 2020).

Regarding the education variable, according to the 2016 national study on psychoactive substance use in the Colombian school population, there was a statistically significant increase in use prevalence from almost 42% among seventh graders to 77% among eleventh graders, becoming a significant risk for academic failure (Observatory of Drugs of Colombia, 2016).

The relationship between academic success and substance use has been described: some students who have abstained from substance use throughout their lives achieve better academic results than their peers who use substances, often experiencing academic failure and dropping out of school (Bugbee et al., 2019). Thus, years of schooling are inversely related to substance use, as greater academic achievement is associated with lower rates of illegal substance use. Furthermore, academic success is linked to the timely start of a professional career

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after completing high school (Agrawal et al., 2005; Fothergill et al., 2006; 2008).

Regarding the reason for admission, it has been described that consumers access emergency services seven times more for mental health problems and complications associated with addiction (Kendall et al, 2019). In emergency rooms, the most common reasons are chest pain, induced psychosis, depression, overdose, car accidents, and withdrawal (Cederbaum et al, 2014).

Self-harm is significantly associated with a history of injectable drug use and cannabis use disorders. Twenty percent of patients admitted to emergency services for self-harm have a history of substance use disorder (Gupta et al, 2019). Substance use also plays an important role in traffic accidents, with positive opioid screenings found in male drivers (Divsalar et al, 2021; Goli et al, 2022). Severe sexual abuse is also associated with the use of illegal drugs (Schäfer et al, 2000; Liebschutz et al. 2002).

Regarding hospital discharge, it has been shown that patients often leave voluntarily due to experiences of stigma, perceived negligence, inadequate management of pain and withdrawal symptoms, and ultimately refuse to participate in follow-up care (Kendal et al., 2017). (Horton et al., 2017) found that patients with opioid use disorders are at high risk of leaving the hospital against medical advice due to fear and insufficient treatment of opioid withdrawal. According to Simón et al. (2020), the lack of withdrawal management, a strong craving for drug use, and uncontrolled acute and chronic pain are key factors contributing to patient elopement or voluntary discharge.

Regarding dual pathology, understood as the coexistence of a substance use disorder and a psychiatric condition, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Colombia (2018) reported an increase in the number of cases. These rose from 9,419 individuals in 2009 to 28,000 in 2017. Most of the individuals affected were men, representing 64.6% of the total, and were between 15 and 34 years old. The same report showed that the highest number of people treated were between 15 and 19 years old, followed by the 20 to 24 age group. In the department of Norte de Santander, a total of 333 patients with dual pathology received care.

Engelgardt et al. (2023) found that young people with mental illnesses were substantially more likely to use illicit drugs, and a relationship was found with ADHD, personality disorder, conduct disorder, and affective disorders.

It was found that individuals who use multiple drugs are generally young, male,

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live in urban areas, and have a history of early substance use initiation (Grabovac et al., 2018). The American Addiction Centers indicate that factors such as homelessness, mental and physical illnesses, traumatic experiences, lack of social support, social acceptance of drug use, early initiation of substance use, running away from home, maladaptive coping mechanisms, and easy access to substances are key determinants of multiple drug use (American Addiction Centers, 2024).

Regarding age, in Colombia, marijuana use is more frequent among young people aged 18 to 24 (6.5%), followed by the 25 to 34 age group (4.2%). The highest rates of cocaine use are also observed in young people aged 18 to 24 (1.1%) and in the 25 to 34 age group (0.9%). The basuco and ecstasy use is concentrated mainly in young people aged 18 to 24 (DANE, 2019).

The objective of the present study was to describe the sociodemographic and clinical variables related to illicit substance use in patients at the Erasmo Meoz University Hospital between the years 2020 and 2022.

Method: This is a quantitative, descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional, retrospective study.

Participantes: Patients between 14 and 65 years old who were treated at the Erasmo Meoz University Hospital in the city of Cúcuta, with diagnoses related to illegal substance use detected by toxicological screening and confirmed by a specialist or treating physician.

Medical records of patients with diagnoses related to psychoactive substance use described in the ICD-10 were collected, and a data collection instrument was designed based on the review of variables contained in the medical record. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS® version 25.

A total of 426 medical records were identified. However, 6 were duplicates, 12 did not meet the age criteria, 24 had diagnoses related to intoxication with legal substances, and 15 had neither used illegal psychoactive substances nor had related diagnoses. After these exclusions, the final sample consisted of 369 patients.

Results

Male sex predominated in substance use, with a total of 306 males compared to 63 female users. The median age was 26 years old, and the age range distribution had a higher proportion between 15 and 44 years old with a total of 337. In the 45 to 60 years old range, there were 18 patients, only 5 were over 60 years old, and 9 participants were 14 years old.

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The most prevalent health insurance scheme was the subsidized regime, accounting for 52.3% of cases, with a total of 193 participants. The majority of individuals were single, representing 53.7%, equivalent to 198 participants. The second most common category, with 35.8% and also 198 participants, included those whose marital status was not reported in their medical records.

Significant underreporting was identified in the occupation (96 participants) and education (166 participants) variables. In total, 80 participants were found to be living on the street, with illiteracy or incomplete primary education.

Of the total sample, 19% were unemployed, 10% worked independently, and 9.8% were formally employed.

In the study, 15 patients were incarcerated individuals, and only 2 participants were sex workers. The highest academic levels were undergraduate and postgraduate, with percentages of 3.3% and 0.5% respectively. 1.9% were illiterate.

It was recorded that 52% of the participants (192 people) were admitted due to acute intoxication associated with an illicit substance. The second most common reason for admission was withdrawal, with a total of 24.1%. There were 18 traffic accidents (4.9%), 13 people admitted due to self-harm, 41 cases due to altercations, 11 patients due to firearm injuries, and only 4 patients admitted through the obstetrics area for labor. There was 1 case of sexual abuse.

The most common mix of 3 illegal substances was cannabis, cocaine, and opioids, at 5.1%. The most consumed substance was cannabis, with a total of 22.2%, followed by cannabis and cocaine with 22%, cocaine alone 21.4%, opioids in 6.5% of patients, and cannabis plus opioids 6.2%.

Regarding days of hospitalization, it was found that short stays (1 to 5 days) predominated at 88.9%. Patients with hospitalizations between 6 and 10 days accounted for 7.3%, and between 11 and 15 days, 1.6%. 2.2% required more than 15 days. The average hospital stay was 2.3 days, with a minimum of 1 day and a maximum of 29 days.

There was an underreporting rate of 65% regarding the age of onset of substance use. However, among the available data, the most prevalent age range for initiation was between 15 and 20 years old, followed by the 11 to 14 age range, which accounted for a total of 11.4%.

Regarding the number of substances reported, the use of two substances was the most common, with a total of 133 individuals (36%), followed by single-

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substance use with 118 individuals (32%), and three substances with 71 individuals (19.2%). Only 3 people reported using up to three substances.

For the discharge condition variable, only 2 patients died, 7 (1.9%) patients left the hospital, 38 (10.3%) requested voluntary discharge, and 35 (9.5%) were discharged with referral to a mental institution. Two patients were referred to another institution, and only 6 (1.6%) were referred to a drug addiction treatment center.

In terms of follow-up compliance through outpatient consultations, there was an underreporting rate of 20.6%, corresponding to 76 patients. It was found that for 90 patients no follow-up was requested, 52 patients (14.1%) attended their outpatient follow-up, and 151 patients (40.9%) were asked to attend but did not comply.

Regarding dual pathology, it was found that 228 (61.8%) patients were questioned, and an associated mental disorder was ruled out. In 57 patients (15.4%), it was not explored. The most common associated mental disorder was anxiety (33, or 8.9%), followed by schizophrenia (22, or 6%), then depression (16, or 4.3%), followed by psychosis (8, or 2.2%), and finally bipolar affective disorder (5, or 1.4%). Regarding craving, 183 denied experiencing it, and 142 acknowledged it, with a sub-registration of 44 patients (11.9%).

The most common multidisciplinary management involved social work and toxicology for 50 patients, followed by social work, psychology, psychiatry, and toxicology for 48 (13%) of the patients. The most common treating specialty in this population was toxicology (134, or 36.3%). Only 22 patients received management by general medicine without requiring another discipline or specialty.

Regarding the final diagnosis, it was found that 60 people presented with mental and behavioral disorders due to cocaine use: acute intoxication, and the second most frequent diagnosis was mental and behavioral disorders due to opioid use: withdrawal state. These data were reported by professionals in the medical record.

Discussion

A total of 369 medical records were analyzed, of which 83.2% corresponded to Colombian patients and 16.53% to Venezuelan patients. This can be attributed to the border area between Cúcuta, Colombia, and Venezuela, which has experienced significant migratory movement, especially in recent years. It was found that 82.93% of the patients were men and 17.07% were women, highlighting that the male

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population has a higher prevalence of illegal psychoactive substance use. This finding is supported by global statistics presented in the 2023 World Drug Report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) and the National Survey of Psychoactive Substance Use (ENCSPA) conducted by DANE (2019). A previous study at the same hospital found that 76.8% of substance users were men compared to 23.3% women, showing an approximate 6% increase in the male proportion in our current research (Hermida et al., 2021).

The median age was 26 years old, indicating that the patients were within the productive age range. Substance use can negatively affect their ability to maintain stable employment, resulting in an impact on overall labor productivity. This highlights the need for early interventions and effective prevention programs targeting younger populations. The largest age group associated with substance use was between 15 and 44 years old, totaling 337 participants. This finding aligns with data from DANE, which indicates that drug use is highest among individuals aged 18 to 25 (39%), followed by those aged 26 to 29 (34%) (DANE, 2019). Similar results are supported by the Alcohol and Drug Use Survey in Spain (EDADES, 2022), which estimates that the highest prevalence of substance use in the past 12 months occurs among those aged 15 to 34. It is also important to note that the Study on Psychoactive Substance Use in Bogotá D.C. (2022) concluded that young people between 18 and 24 years old show the highest rates of use for both legal and illegal substances. These findings further support the higher prevalence of substance use among young adults, consistent with the findings of the present study.

In the present study, there was underreporting in the medical records regarding the age of onset of psychoactive substance use, despite this being a key factor and indicator for therapeutic approach and patient prognosis. It has been documented that most individuals seeking treatment for addiction began using drugs at an early age, with a significant percentage starting even before the age of 17, and 10.2% initiating use before the age of 11 (Poudel et al., 2017).

A national study carried out in the department of Norte de Santander estimates that the age of onset for substances such as alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana is 18 years, while for cocaine it is 20 years (UNODC, 2016).

In Spain, Arias and collaborators (2013) described some of the related pathologies in relation to dual disorder, finding that the most frequent sociodemographic characteristics were: men (80%), single (54%), with primary

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education (44%), economically inactive (48%), whose most frequently associated pathology was hepatitis (21%).

The lack of emotional and social support, especially in those who live alone, can increase the likelihood of treatment abandonment and relapse into substance use compared to those who have a partner or supportive family members (Salvatore et al. 2020).

The most commonly used substance was cannabis, reported by 82 patients, followed by the combination of cannabis and cocaine with 81 patients, and cocaine alone with 79 patients. Regarding opioids, 24 patients tested positive in toxicology screenings, while 23 patients showed the presence of both cannabinoids and opioids. According to 2019 estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023), marijuana remains the most widely used illicit substance. Similarly, a National Drug Use Study (2016) found that in Norte de Santander, 7% of individuals reported having used marijuana at some point in their lives, 2.4% had used cocaine, and 1.1% had used basuco. These findings are consistent with the results observed in our research.

Regarding management by specialties, the most frequent was social work and toxicology, implemented in 50 patients, as most of them had conditions of social abandonment. The most requested specialty is toxicology, with a total of 134 patients. In this regard, the American College of Medical Toxicology (ACTM, 2023) supports the vital role of toxicologists in treating patients with substance use disorders. According to a clinical practice guideline published in an Indian journal, Sarkar and collaborators (2023) conclude that psychiatrists play a significant role in the care of patients with substance intoxication, and working closely with emergency physicians can improve patient outcomes.

It was found that the main reason for admission was acute intoxication, accounting for 52% of the population, followed by withdrawal symptoms at 24.1%. This finding is consistent with evidence collected in studies by Zhang et al. (2021) and Horton et al. (2022), who reported that 49% of emergency visits related to drug use were due to abuse, overdose, and opioid withdrawal.

The most prevalent diagnosis was F14.0 (mental and behavioral disorders due to cocaine use: acute intoxication), found in 16.3% of participants. This aligns with the most frequent reason for admission, which was acute intoxication. These findings are supported and contrasted by previous studies, such as that of Suen et al. (2022), which showed that emergency department admissions have significantly increased in recent years

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due to overdose and intoxication from psychoactive substances, including stimulants, cocaine, and opioids.

75.6% of patients had a satisfactory discharge after the proposed treatment. However, 10.3% of patients requested voluntary discharge. The literature reports that these patients leave the hospital before completing the proposed treatment due to experiences of stigma, perceived neglect, and insufficient pain and withdrawal management (Zhang et al. 2021; Horton et al. 2022).

Expectant management was maintained in approximately 31.9% of participants because the patient's medical conditions did not warrant the use of medications, so paraclinical tests were taken, and vital signs were monitored to rule out a fatal event. The most used class of medication was benzodiazepines in a total of 20.5% of patients. In this regard, Richards and collaborators (2016) demonstrated their efficacy in reducing cardiovascular toxicity and agitation caused by psychoactive substances due to increased GABA action, producing a sedative and hypnotic effect.

The present study analyzed the compliance with follow-up requested by the toxicology specialty. It was found that only 14.1% complied, 40.9% did not comply, and no record was found in the clinical history for 20.6%. These results are consistent with those reported by Giacinti and collaborators (2019) and Roncero (2012), who found that in these populations, regardless of accessibility to health services, people rarely comply with what is proposed.

In the present study, it is considered that low adherence to treatment may be related to acute intoxication and its resolution in a few hours. Detoxification is temporary and improves the patient's symptoms, in addition to what was stated by Sotomonte et al. (2018) who explain that beliefs and expectations of substance use and the way the user believes they have control are determining variables for treatment adherence.

In the present study, the onset use was found to be on average between 15-20 years, followed by 10 to 14 years. In this regard, Muñóz Muñóz (2017) states that those who consume from early ages tend to be dependent on several substances, suffer from childhood disorders, and are less adherent. However, having a partner and higher self-esteem levels are considered protective factors.

Regarding dual pathology, data were collected during the anamnesis through questions about psychiatric history. Most patients denied having experienced a related disorder; however, this highlights a high likelihood of underreporting and underdiagnosis.

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The most common disorder found was anxiety, followed by schizophrenia, depression, psychosis, and bipolar disorder. In this regard, the literature has found that more than 50% of people suffering from severe mental illnesses experience a substance use disorder throughout their lives. Furthermore, it was found that in this population group, there are higher risk factors associated with repetitive hospitalization (Heslin et al. 2015).

The Ministry of Health (2018) reported an increase in cases of dual pathology, rising from 9,419 in 2009 to 28,000 in 2017, with a prevalence of 64.6% in men, particularly those over the age of 55. In Norte de Santander, 333 patients were recorded, suggesting a possible underreporting. Disorders related to childhood, such as ADHD, as well as personality, conduct, and affective disorders, are common in these cases (Engelgardt et al., 2023). Additionally, dual pathology is associated with unemployment, being male and single, personality disorders, suicidal risk, hypomanic episodes, and anxiety. Approximately 55% of affected individuals use two or more substances, including cocaine, alcohol, or marijuana (Arias et al., 2013)

A total of 38.5% of patients reported experiencing craving, while 49.6% reported anxiety and urges to use substances, which negatively impacts treatment success and adherence. Cless et al. (2023) found that single men and those who had used substances in the previous 30 days reported higher levels of craving. Craving was also associated with specific environmental triggers in the users' immediate context, such as people, familiar places of use, and physical objects like syringes, packets, and pipes, which intensified the sensation of craving and supported the hypothesis of the reward circuit (Vafaie et al., 2022). In clinical management, it is crucial to assess impulsive behaviors, anxiety symptoms, and sleep quality, as these have been linked to a greater likelihood of developing craving (Ruan et al., 2024).

Our study found that 56% of patients consume two or more substances, which is associated with early initiation of use and mental disorders such as depression and stress during adolescence (Grabovac, 2018; Jongenelis, 2019). Polysubstance use is more common among people experiencing homelessness (American Addiction Centers, 2024); in our study, they represented 21% of the cases. School dropout, which is linked to a higher risk of drug use, affects 50% of those who discontinue their education (Bugbee, 2019; Fothergill, 2008).

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Regarding hospital stay, we found that the average length of hospitalization was 2.3 days with a standard deviation of 3.8 days, with a minimum of 1 day and a maximum of 29 days. In the study by Ndanga and Srinivasa (2019), they found an average hospitalization of between 4.5 and 5.5 days, also finding that those with greater comorbidities tend to stay longer in hospitalization. Another study found that cocaine users had a hospital stay of between 3 and 5 days. In addition, studies such as that by De Los Cobos-Callejas (2003) found that on average a patient is hospitalized for up to 8 days.

We consider that care at HUEM is primarily focused on observation and symptomatic treatment of acute intoxication. Patients often experience discomfort during prolonged hospitalization, and once their symptoms are resolved, they are discharged, usually with a follow-up by a specialist, which, as mentioned earlier, is often not carried out.

Conclusions:

It was determined that the Erasmo Meoz Hospital follows a pattern with national and international figures regarding sociodemographic variables associated with the use of illegal substances, especially in age, sex, occupation, education, age of onset of use, marital status, length of hospital stay, adherence to treatment, craving, among others.

Regarding medical treatment approaches, an adequate approach was observed, as benzodiazepines were indicated to reduce agitation and anxiety in acute intoxication, and anticonvulsants were also correctly and individually indicated as mood stabilizers. In addition, the use of methadone was found in patients with opioid dependence.

There are factors that exacerbate the problem of problematic illegal substance use, such as high relapse rates, a growing number of users worldwide, and early exposure to substances. This results in significant human, social, health, and economic costs. Both prevention and treatment are essential to address this issue, and both strategies must consider a full range of factors, including biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects.

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