

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Cocaine use by older populations, sleep quality, and associated risks

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Reports of cocaine use by older populations have risen in recent years. The abuse of illicit substances by older adults was once considered unlikely, and aging was commonly seen as a protective factor against use of these substances. However, new cases of drug abuse by aging individuals are being reported through admissions for inpatient treatment.¹ In some cases, onset of cocaine consumption might occur after 50 years of age, contradicting previous assumptions. Yarnell² reported on this trend and highlighted that it is a growing health concern that has been underestimated and under-analyzed to date. Projections warn that approximately 5.7 million people over the age of 60 years will have substance-use disorder by 2020.³

Several demographic aspects should be considered when assessing this population. A great number of these older cocaine users are male and unmarried. The profile for these substance abusers seems to be developing into one of predominantly white people with a secondary or higher education. Possible factors involved in the seeking of illicit psychoactive substances by older adults include emotional problems related to loneliness and stressful situations in later life, loss of productivity or a social role, and chronic pain. A high frequency of depression is also observed in these individuals. It is noteworthy that alcohol consumption may be an associated factor.² Regarding age, higher rates of cocaine use were reported in adults aged 50 to 64 than in those over 65 years old.³

Elderly people frequently experience neurologic, cognitive, and behavioral impairments that can be worsened by cocaine use. Attention and working and visual memory are the cognitive functions most prominently impaired in cocaine users.⁴ Andersen et al.⁵ reported a decrease in birth of new cells in the hippocampal dentate gyrus in experiments involving acute administration of cocaine in adult rats.

Cocaine is also known to disrupt the sleep pattern of its users severely, affecting sleep maintenance, causing sleep fragmentation, and altering sleep architecture,^{6,7} all effects that warrant special attention in the elderly.

It is safe to assume that cocaine use can have an amplifying impact on several health problems associated with advanced age. Illicit drug use is on the rise, while life expectancy has increased. Substance abuse by older adults is an observed and ongoing trend that may represent a social and health concern of considerable proportions in the future. Specifically, we highlight the relevance of

qualitative and quantitative evaluations of this trend and its possible implications.

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Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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Coronary calcium score as an expression of multisystemic progression of bipolar disorder

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We read with interest the study by Wageck et al.¹ recently published in *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria*. In their