

INVESTMENT IN QUALIFICATION FOR RESEARCHING AND GENERATING SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCES RELATED TO THE DRUG PHENOMENON

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The Americas region has important ethnic, linguistic, economic and cultural diversity, reflected in a number of issues related to using psychoactive substances. Considering this complex and multifaceted context, the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (IADACC), invests in training programs to advance the understanding on the drug phenomenon and generate scientific evidence on the different realities experienced by the countries of the region. The *International Research Training Program for Health Professionals and Related Areas for studying the drug phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean* is one such initiative which, organized and offered in conjunction with the Center for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH), for ten consecutive editions (2006-2015) enabled the qualification of 100 professionals from the region.*

Combining theoretical and practical training with the idealization, development and implementation of a multicentric research project, each year, participants had the opportunity to build knowledge on the drug phenomenon and the development stages for scientific research through advanced and innovative methods, as well as to develop interpersonal skills and competences related to transcultural communication and knowledge transfer.

* It is important to note that the program was also offered by the Nursing School of the University of Alberta, Canada in the academic years of 2003/2004.

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This supplement of *Texto & Contexto Enfermagem* magazine submits the results of the multicentric researches developed by the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 classes. The 2014/2015 group was composed by health professionals and related areas from Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Trinidad and Tobago, who developed and implemented the research project named “Perception of risks and benefits on the use of marijuana by adolescents”. The articles resulting from the study display and discuss the data obtained in specific cities of the mentioned countries on the perception regarding risk and benefit of marijuana use among adolescents.

In this regard, the Report on Drug Use in the Americas, 2019 highlights, among the areas with specific relevance for the hemispheric drug policy, the increasingly early onset of drug use among adolescents, as well as the decrease in risk perception associated with its use. Thus, despite the decrease in tobacco consumption in all the countries of the region, marijuana use continues to grow in several countries, especially among younger population. The report’s data confirm, therefore, the actuality and innovation of the research performed and of the articles published on the subject in this supplement.¹

In this context, based on scientific evidences, the negative drug use consequences for adolescent health are reaffirmed, as well as the regional relevance of prevention programs and other interventions aimed at this public. It is also worth mentioning the current relevance of the topic, especially considering public discourse on drug decriminalization and legalization, focusing on marijuana in countries such as Canada, Uruguay and the USA.

Studies developed in Canada and the United States indicate that as the perception of marijuana-related risk changes, the greatest impact is not necessarily on increasing consumption prevalence in the total population, but on increasing the frequency marijuana is consumed among already existing users, as well as the higher THC concentration. Thus, understanding the relationship between the attitudes related to marijuana use and its potential long-term impact is essential for the countries of the region.²

Finally, the 2015/2016 group studies, derived from the project named “Perception of risk and driving motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol and marijuana in university students” developed by the professionals who took part in the program in cities of Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico, Trinidad & Tobago and Venezuela, are submitted in this study. In addition to the relevance of studies on marijuana use, as shown above, alcohol use is also extremely important, especially considering that among the countries of the globe, the prevalence of alcohol-related disorders (in population aged 15 years old or older) is generally higher than the prevalence of other drug-related disorders in the same population.³ In general, alcohol consumption contributes approximately to 3 million deaths worldwide and constitutes more than 5% of the global burden for diseases and injuries, representing an important risk factor for chronic diseases and transmittable diseases. Across the world, alcohol consumption is the seventh risk factor for premature death and disability.⁴

It is also worth noting that under the scope of the Sustainable Development Objective 3 (Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages) of the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030, targets for strengthening and preventing and treating substance abuse, are included. Programs aimed at prevention, treatment, care, rehabilitation and social reintegration play a key role and, if they are evidence-based, they may reduce the negative impacts on health and society related to the problematic use of alcohol and other drugs.

Abusive alcohol consumption is also related to work accidents, violence and traffic accidents, since it reduces attention, causing euphoria, difficulty in discerning visual signals and false speed perception.⁵ In this regard, the data submitted in the studies published in this supplement shows

significant evidence for the investment in the development and implementation of programs for preventing alcohol use, associated with motor vehicle driving.

Thus, the 14 articles representing the studies developed from 2014 to 2016 by the participants of the *International Research Training Program for Health Professionals and Related Areas on studying the drug phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean* show current results on topics with great importance for developing public policies and for the research agenda related to using psychoactive substances in the region of the Americas. We wish everyone an excellent reading.

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