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Polydrug Use in a Population of Young Italian Adults

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Introduction: Polydrug use is mostly common among adolescents and young adults, often with the intention of enhancing or counteracting the effects of another drug. It significantly increases the risks, due to drug synergy and increased side effects.

Objectives: We investigated the prevalence of polydrug users in a population of Italian young adults using a specifically designed questionnaire.

Aims: We aimed to assess the prevalence of polydrug abusers in a large sample of general population, and also to identify possible associations between alcohol misuse (e.g., binge drinking behaviours) and polydrug use.

Methods: We administered the questionnaire to a sample of 3000 subjects, aged 18 to 26, investigating socio-economic characteristics, alcohol abuse (with a specific focus on binge drinking) and use of psychoactive substances (cannabis, cocaine and Novel Psychoactive Substances-NPS). Collected data underwent statistical analyses.

Results: 80.5% of the sample habitually consumed alcoholic beverages. Among alcohol consumers, 34.2% used cannabis, 5.4% cocaine, 3.7% NPS, and 79,2% had binge drinking behaviours. Among those who did not consume alcohol, 4% used cannabis, 0.4% used cocaine, and 0% used NPS. Polydrug use was more common among binge drinkers. 35.6% of cocaine abusers also used NPS, in comparison to 1.4% of non-abusers.

Conclusions: According to scientific literature, alcohol and cocaine are the substances most commonly involved in risky polydrug use. Binge drinking and NPS appear to be involved in polydrug use too. The combined effects of the different drugs need to be considered in identifying an appropriate and timely intervention strategy