**Characterisation of Presentations to a Community Based Specialist AOD Neuropsychology Assessment Service**

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**Introduction**

Cognitive impairment is commonly associated with sustained substance use,¹,² however, this clinical picture is often complicated by comorbid mental health and psychosocial factors.

The Turning Point Statewide Neuropsychology Service within Eastern Health provides specialist neuropsychological assessments to clients with alcohol or other drug (AOD) problems who may be presenting with cognitive, mental health or behavioural difficulties.

The aim of this study was to describe and characterise the presentations of clients with AOD histories referred to the service.

**Methods**

A retrospective case file audit was conducted for clients referred for assessment to the Turning Point Neuropsychology Service in Melbourne between August 2014 and May 2018. A total of 185 client files were de-identiﬁed and reviewed.

Information extracted included demographic details, medical, mental health, substance use and forensic histories.

**Results**

AOD History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Percentage of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannabis</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATS</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harin</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecstasy</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHB</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhalants</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketamine</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Lifetime frequency of use per substance

MENTAL HEALTH

71% had a history of mental health difficulty

TRAUMA HISTORY

40% had a history of complex trauma

SUICIDAL IDEATION

35% reported past ideation

7% reported active ideation

**Conclusion**

The results highlight that individuals referred for neuropsychological assessment at Turning Point are a complex group.

A high frequency of psychosocial difficulties and comorbid factors in addition to extensive substance use histories were found, with many of these being targetable and modifiable risk factors for cognitive impairment.

**Implications for Practice and Research**

Health professionals need to be aware of the complex histories of clients with extensive substance use to ensure their needs are appropriately met.

Psychosocial difficulties, comorbidities and cognitive impairment may have significant implications for treatment and therapy. In this context, neuropsychology has a role in adapting treatment to clients’ cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, studies exploring the effectiveness of substances use treatment need to account for the characteristics of real-world substance using populations as these groups are likely to be vulnerable to adverse outcomes.

**References & Acknowledgements**


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