

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

James R. Gooden^{1,2}, Catherine A. Cox¹, Vanessa Petersen¹, Ashlee Curtis³, Victoria Manning^{1,4}

¹Turning Point, Eastern Health, Richmond, Victoria, Australia; ²Monash Institute of Cognitive and Clinical Neurosciences, School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University Clayton, Victoria, Australia; ³Centre for Drug use, Addiction, and Anti-social Behaviour Research, School of Psychology, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria, Australia; ⁴Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University, Box Hill, Victoria, Australia. Oct 2018.
Corresponding author: Dr James Gooden, Turning Point, 110 Church St, Richmond, Victoria, Australia, 3121. jamesg@turningpoint.org.au

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

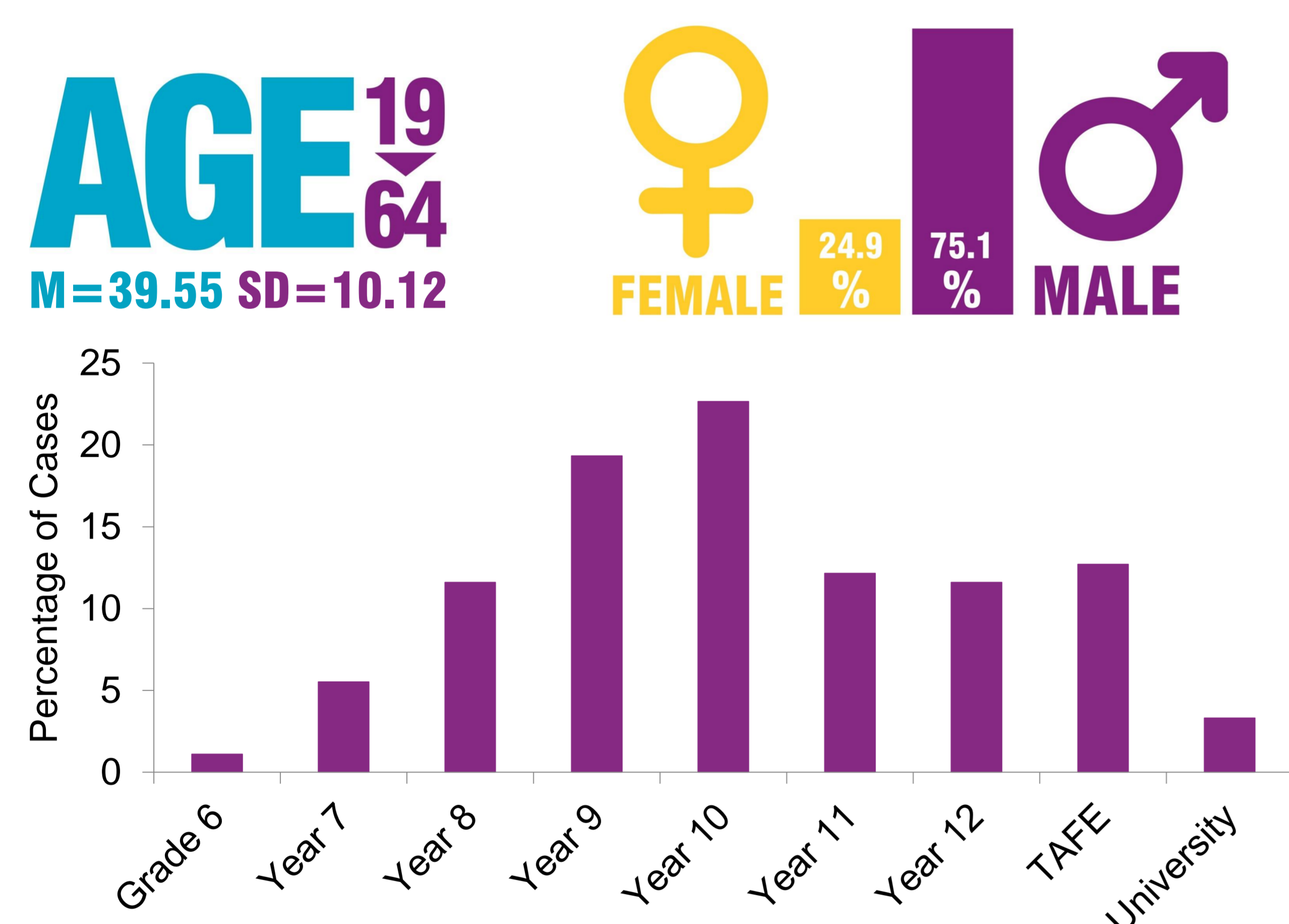


Figure 1: Education level reached by clients

AOD History

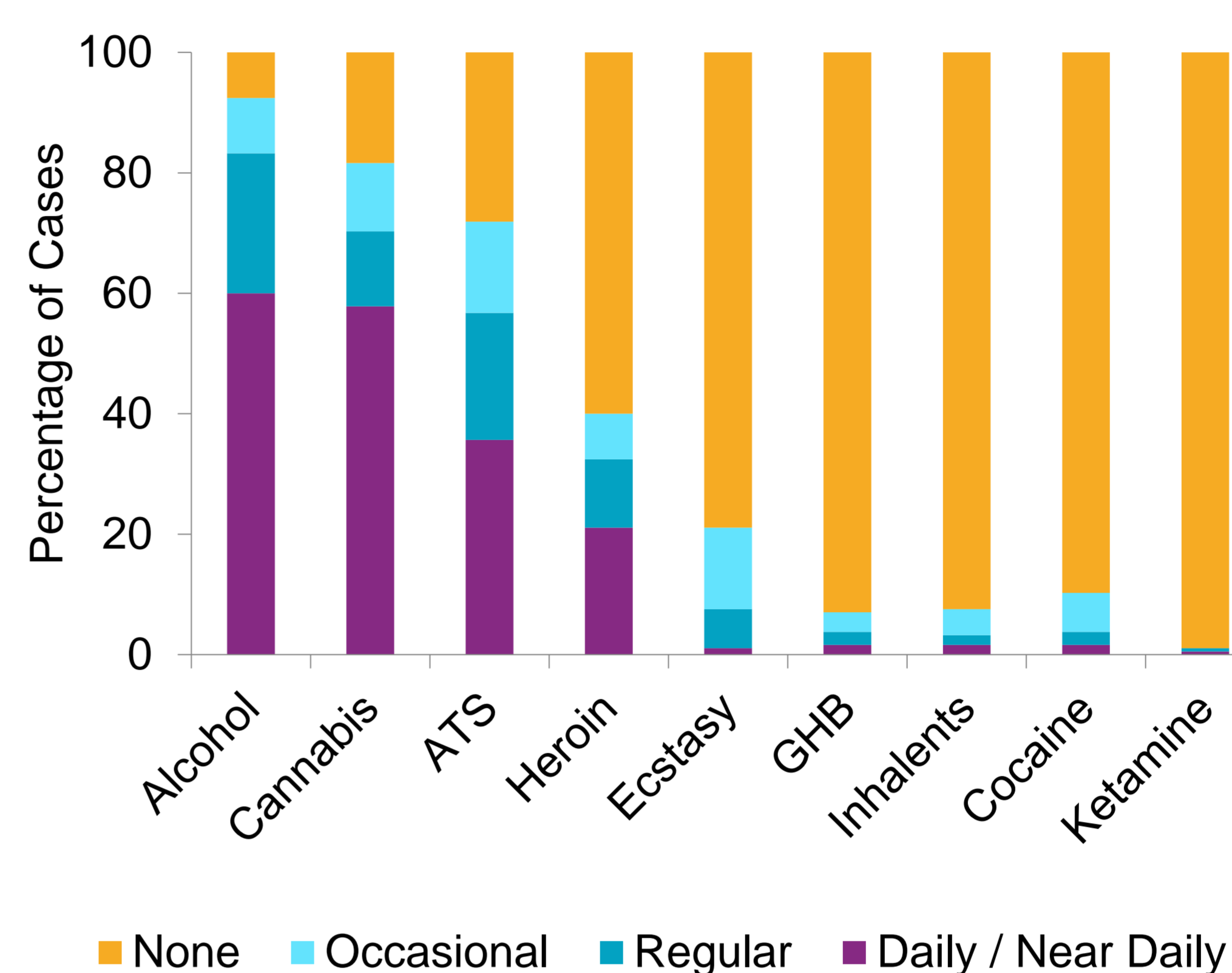


Figure 2: Lifetime frequency of use per substance

38% had used intravenously

20% had overdosed

11% of these had overdosed multiple times

30% were using daily at the time of assessment

19% had untreated Hepatitis C

7% had a past history of Hepatitis C

Age of first use:
M=14.96, SD=4.32
Range 8 to 48

No. of substances (Alcohol & illicit):
M=3.49, SD=1.56
Range 0 to 8



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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²Cadet, J. L., & Bisagno, V. (2016). Neuropsychological consequences of chronic drug use: relevance to treatment approaches. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 6, 189

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