

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN THE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS OF PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

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Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges to society around the world, particularly affecting people in situations of social and health vulnerability, such as people who use drugs.

This study aims to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people who inject drugs (PWID), who attend the Mobile Drug Consumption Room (MDCR) in Lisbon.

Methods:

This work consists of two components. The quantitative component aimed to know the pattern of consumption of psychoactive substances of the 116 PWID of the MDCR. For this purpose, the analysis of a database was carried out, built from data from the admission records of MDCR users, analyzing them through descriptive statistical analysis. The qualitative component aimed to understand the difficulties, emotions, fears and experiences of the PWID during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to understand their needs, describing their experiences and perspectives of this moment. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed through thematic content analysis.

Results:

The quantitative component shows 90,5% were men, with a mean age of 46 years and 38.8% were homeless. The most consumed substances were heroin, crack and benzodiazepines. When it comes to health 38.8% diagnosed with HCV, 4.3% diagnosed with HIV and 16,4% co-infected. The qualitative component shows that, during the pandemic, there was an increase in substance consumption, polyconsumption and initiation of injection practices. Participants report greater difficulty in accessing social and health responses, with harm reduction services having a facilitating role in these aspects. During the pandemic, new housing responses emerged, and they were described as beneficial.

Conclusion:

Pandemic had a big impact on the PWID, having been minimized with the creation of new responses in different areas and greater flexibility in accessing them. This is a favorable condition for the PWID in multiple situations of vulnerability to be able to access easily to better conditions of life.

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