

Medicine Use and Sexual Function

Dear Colleagues,

Sexual health is one of the objectives in therapeutic work with medicine-addicted populations, although it is also one of the most neglected areas. The reasons for the latter are varied and both biological (effects of substances on human sexual function) and socio-cultural (being ashamed to talk about it, secrecy, difficulty in the evaluation, restrictive education, etc.).

From adolescence, there is a tendency to associate fun and sex with medicines. In the study of Teva, Bermúdez and Buéla-Casal (2009), among the surveyed adolescents who had had at least one sexual relation, 16.3% had used medicines in the last sexual intercourse, which reflects that people use medicines at an early age, and that such early start may affect sexuality. Helen S. Kaplan had already conducted a thorough study on how the use of medicines may affect sexual function (Kaplan, 1978); in said study, she reported that cocaine increases libido, heroin depresses the sexual centers of the brain, and alcohol depresses sexual function. More recent studies indicate that the risk of suffering erectile dysfunction is 10 times greater in people who consume substances compared to non-consumers (La Pera et al., 2003).

The literature on medicine use includes studies about its short-term effects at small doses (Degenhardt & Topp, 2003; Emanuele & Emanuele, 1998; Hyatt & Bensky, 1999; Peugh & Belenko, 2001), which indicate a brief improvement of sexual function, and studies about its long-term effects at greater doses, which show devastating effects on sexual function, at both the physiological level (Cocores et al., 1988; Johnson et al., 2004) and the psychological level (Ávila et al., 2004; La Pera et al., 2003; Peugh & Belenko, 2001; Rosen, 1991).

Despite the existing studies, it is difficult to specify more accurately the effect of the consumption of addictive substances on sexual function, as it involves pharmacological and non-pharmacological factors: dose, psychological predisposition, motivation, experience, the lifetime moment of the person who consumes, expectations of the encounter, sexual partner, personality traits, etc., and the specific substance is only one variable among all possible variables.

The aim of the present special issue is to compile articles that assess the influence of substance abuse on human sexual function in order to facilitate the work of professionals in this area.

Keywords: Medicine, Sexual dysfunction, Sexual health

Guest Editor



Dr. Francisco Javier Del Río Olvera, PhD

Professor, Psychology department, University of Cadiz, Cadiz, Spain; Biomedical Research and Innovation Institute of Cadiz, INIBICA, Cádiz, Spain

Interests: Personality, Psychological Assessment and Treatment, Sexology, Sexual Dysfunction, Drugs

Email: franciscojavier.delrio@uca.es

Website: <https://produccioncientifica.uca.es/investigadores/113293/detalle>

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