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MEETING ABSTRACT

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Attitudes of patients with opioid use disorder towards synthetic cannabinoids

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Background: There is limited data on the awareness and use of synthetic cannabinoids (SCs) in high-risk populations in Serbia, despite SCs becoming more and more common at the illicit drug market. This pilot study aimed to examine the awareness and prevalence of use of SCs in patients with an opioid-use disorder and to identify patient characteristics and other factors associated with SC use.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted at the Clinic for Psychiatry, Clinical Center Vojvodina, Serbia, the largest tertiary health care institution in this region of the country. All patients hospitalized due to the treatment of opioid dependence during November and December 2017 were included, and filled out an anonymous questionnaire specifically developed for the purpose of this study.

Results: Out of 64 patients (median age 36.4 years), one third (32.8%) reported using SCs. Socio-demographic characteristics of the subjects were not associated with SC use. There were differences in the most common sources of information reported between the SC users and non-users. The majority of SC users (76.0%) were informed about SCs through friends, compared with just 26.0% of non-users ($p < 0.001$). Nearly all study participants (93.8%) were daily tobacco users. The share of respondents reporting alcohol and marijuana use was significantly higher among the SC users (52.0% vs. 20.9%, $p = 0.011$ and 15.6% vs. 12.5%, $p = 0.015$), respectively. A higher proportion of SC users used multiple psychoactive substances (38.1% vs. 16.3%), and this difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.047$). The most commonly reported adverse effect of SCs among users included dry mouth (81.0%), troubles to think clearly (52.4%) and panic attacks (52.4%).

Discussion: Understanding the awareness and use of SCs among high-risk drug users, as well as associated factors can help to improve substance-use disorder treatment in our setting. Educational activities targeting public are urgently needed to raise awareness on SCs, considering that social contacts are the main sources of information on SCs for this vulnerable population. Users of SCs have also reported using other psychoactive substances more often, and this calls for a holistic approach addressing multiple factors to improve substance-use treatment in our setting.

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