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PATTERNS OF SUBSTANCE USE IN AN IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN SPAIN

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Aims: The relationship between immigration and drug abuse and its treatment is complex and poorly understood. The objective of this study is to gain insight into patterns of drug use and service access and how they are influenced by social factors and the migratory process in a population of foreign born drug users in Barcelona, Spain.

Methods: An interview protocol was developed for the study which examined drug use patterns, social and health factors, and treatment, and was administered to 118 foreign born users in harm reduction centers. 92% were male and 8% were female. 42% were from Eastern Europe, 35% were from the Magreb, 14% from the European Community, 6% from Subsaharan Africa and 3% from Latin America.

Results: With migration opium use decreased whereas cocaine, heroin, and speedball increased, which also constitute the primary drug used by this sample. Social support was correlated with greater consumption of heroin, cocaine, and alcohol, whereas lower social stress was predictive of higher cannabis use. Hard drug use was predicted by illegal status and a lack of stable housing. Acculturation and acculturative stress were not found to be related to substance use. Treatment was positively evaluated, with no perception of lower quality of care.

Discussion: Drug use patterns shift with the migratory process, and, it would appear, adapt to the dominant local ones. The unexpected findings regarding social factors and acculturation and acculturative stress may indicate differences in the Spanish drug use context, and as such warrant further research.