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**SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADOLESCENCE - STUDY OF NEW REFERRALS TO A PORTUGUESE SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT SERVICE DURING A YEAR**

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**Objectives:** Study of a patient population with drug problems. Analyses of demographics and drug abuse data.

**Methods:** We examined medical files of all new patients who attended the outpatient clinic of the Drug and Drug Abuse Institute in Coimbra, Portugal, during a period of a year, in order to characterize this population.

**Results:** A sample of 171 patients, predominantly male, age ranging from 15 to 54 years-old, was evaluated. Within our sample, low education predominates, with early school drop-out. The predominant initial drug (excluding alcohol and tobacco) was hashish. The age of onset of consumption varied between 7 and 38 years-old. The main drug of most patients is heroine (n=100), and most started their consumption between ages 15 and 18 years-old.

**Conclusions:** The best treatment of substance abuse is prevention. While there are well-controlled studies available for the treatment of substance use disorders in adults, no such studies are available for children or adolescents. Psychological, although not physical, dependence has been reported with cannabis use. Regular users may withdraw from the challenges of the external world into a state of chronic low motivation. Such individuals then become at risk for entering into more dangerous drug-taking activities. Earlier adolescent substance use and heavier adolescent substance use are associated with greater risk of later drug problems. In addition to providing a service to people with drug problems, it is necessary to focus on prevention and discourage the consumption of the so called mild drugs.