ISSUP | INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF SUBSTANCE USE PROFESSIONALS

ARGENTINA chapter

Impact of Disinformation and Misinformation about Drugs on Treatment for Psychoactive Substance Use in Children and Adolescents

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Items proposed for reflection

- ✓ **Misinformation and Disinformation in Belief Systems about Drugs**

- ✓ **ICTs and the Risk of Becoming Fertile Ground for Pseudoscience**

- ✓ **Intervention on Misinformation and Disinformation in Treatments**

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Substance Use Disorder as a Pediatric Problem To Be Treated

Age of initiation of drug use for individuals entering drug treatment globally (CURRICULUM CHILD Colombo Plan)
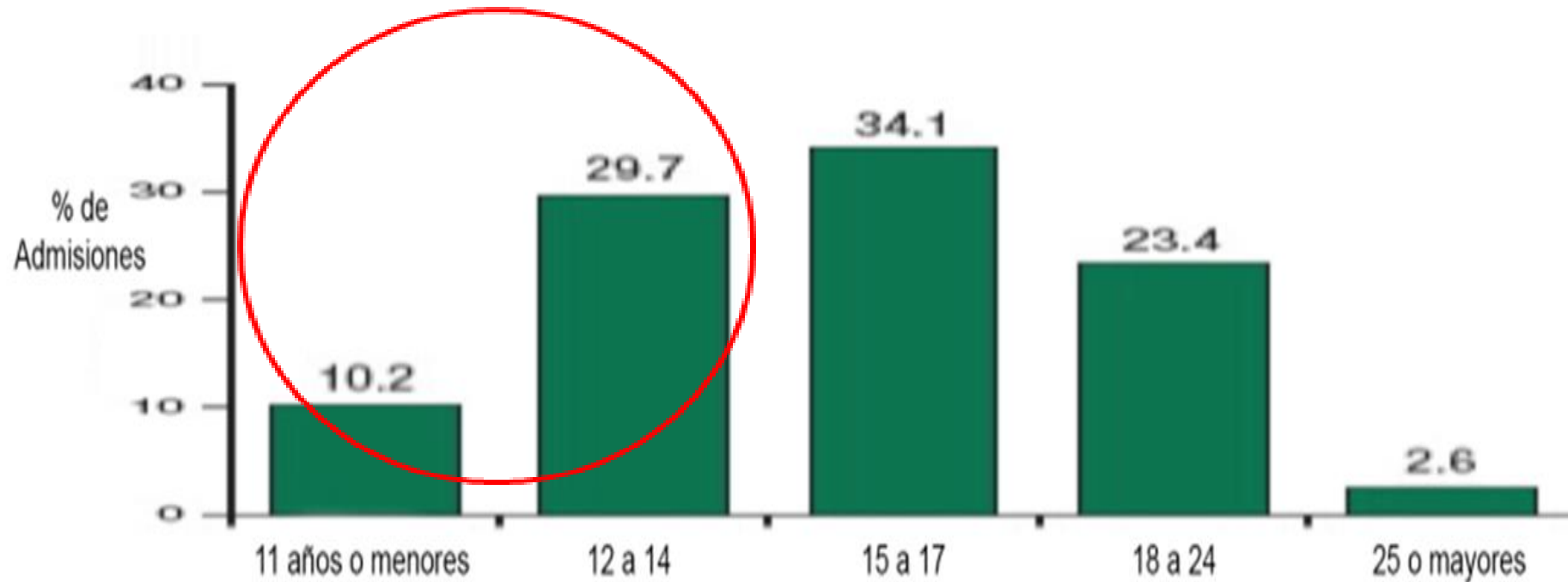
Hyperconnectivity

A new way of living and being in the world

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Childhood and Adolescence in the world of ICTs

➢ Currently, cyberspace is involved in almost every aspect of the existence of children and adolescents

➢ ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are sources for the appropriation of information, belief systems and behavioral patterns

➢ ICTs can generate both exciting possibilities and obstacles in the development of children and adolescents' belief systems about health risks.

➢ The child or adolescents' belief system about drug use will impact both the decision to stop using, to avoid relapses, and their interactions with the therapist

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Misinformation and Disinformation

➢ **Misinformation**: is false information that is spread without intent to mislead. Those who share misinformation may believe it to be true, useful, or interesting.

➢ **Disinformation:** is information that is created or disseminated with full knowledge of its falsehood (manipulated information), in an attempt to mislead and/or cause harm. The motivations may be economic (profit-making), ideological, religious or political, etc.

➢ **Both** can cause harm, be a threat to health, environmental or safety decision-making processes.

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Disinformation campaigns

➢ **Many disinformation campaigns are part of a broader plan to sow confusion about drugs and their effects, exacerbate political divisions, erode trust in health and scientific institutions and, directly or indirectly, negatively impact the trust of children and adolescents in the discourse of adults in general and therapists in particular.**

➢ **They can also be used for financial gains, to get followers on social media, or make a particular group appear superior to another based on how it evaluates substance use**

Knowing and understanding the impact of misinformation on the belief systems of children and adolescents is crucial for developing therapeutic strategies

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The principles of influence Cialdini (1984)

➢ **Commitment and Consistency** : People have a need to behave consistently with what they think, do and say: belief systems determine behavior

➢ **Social Proof**: People tend to imitate the behavior of others to avoid making mistakes: Who are the influencers?

➢ **Liking**: People are much more influenced by models who are likable and pleasant

➢ **Furthermore,** children and adolescents assess behaviors as threatening based on the perceived severity and vulnerability: If the threatening message is perceived as manageable, the desired motivational process (avoiding risk) will not occur.

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Social networks

➢ Misinformation is widespread across all major social media platforms

➢ For example, in TikTok's video format, people speak directly to the camera as if it were a video call with the user, creating a sense of intimacy and trust. Personal anecdotes, testimonial or powerful narrative combined with creative visual elements can compromise critical judgment in children and adolescents.

➢ Content creators use language that appears scientific to opine about drugs, selectively choose studies to support false claims, or cite research that may seem relevant but isn't.

➢ They present their conceptual opponents in a negative light

➢ The message can be repeated over and over again.

Impact of Fake News on behaviors and decisions

➢ **With just a few taps on a screen, users can be exposed to posts, images and videos that glorify or normalize drug consumption.**

➢ **Example 1- At the beginning of the pandemic, during strict lockdown, 'pseudoscientific' news began circulating on social media about the supposed benefits of consuming certain substances for COVID protection: smoking cannabis and vaping THC and CBD concentrates, despite the lack of scientific evidence that certain cannabinoids strengthen the immune system. The prevalence vaping among children and adolescents was high before the pandemic (Argentina, 2017)**


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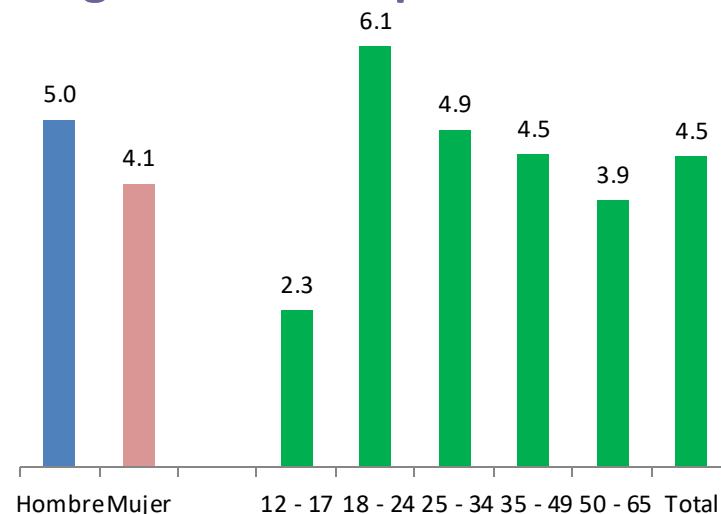
Example 2- Analysis of perceived value and misinformation applied to electronic cigarettes among young Spaniards (V.J.Villanueva-Blasco, M. Akardas, M. Isorna Folgar and J.M. ReyPi)

Several components of the perceived value of nicotine consumption experience through Electronic Cigarettes (EC) versus conventional cigarettes were identified, in line with the strategy of misinformation and dissemination of fake news by the industry. These components portray EC as products less harmful than conventional tobacco, cleaner, more attractive, and facilitators for quitting tobacco consumption. It demonstrates how brands are exploiting consumer's limited ability to process messages in their decision-making through marketing communication based on misinformation and fake news.

Example 3- The influence of online communities

Online communities focused on drug consumption can have a significant impact on attitudes and behaviors of children and adolescents. These communities provide a space to share experiences and seek advice, as well as to normalize and reinforce belief systems based on opinions and pseudoscience.

SUBSTANCES THAT AROUSE GREATER INTEREST TO BE TESTED IN USER FORUMS. OAD February 2017
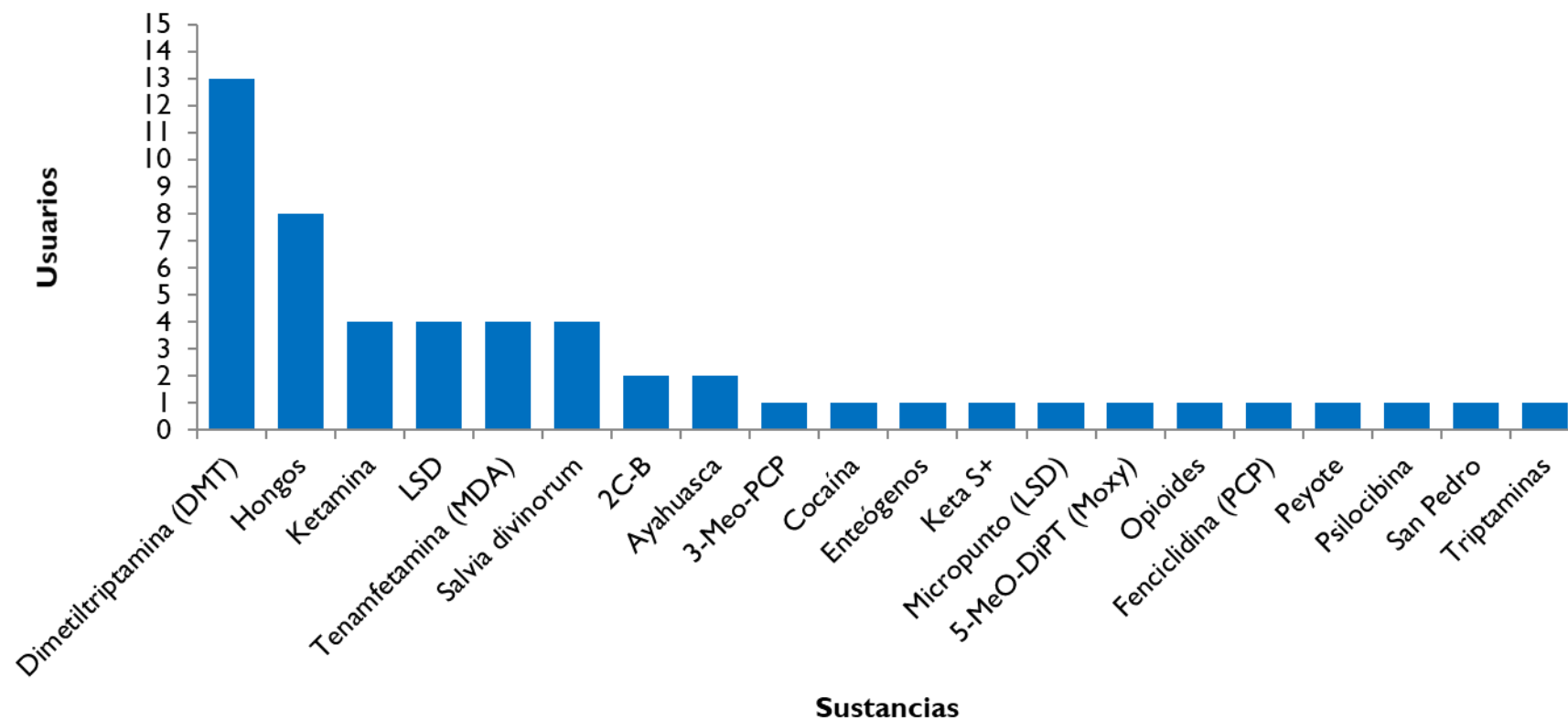
MOST REJECTED SUBSTANCES IN NSP OAD USER FORUM April 2018
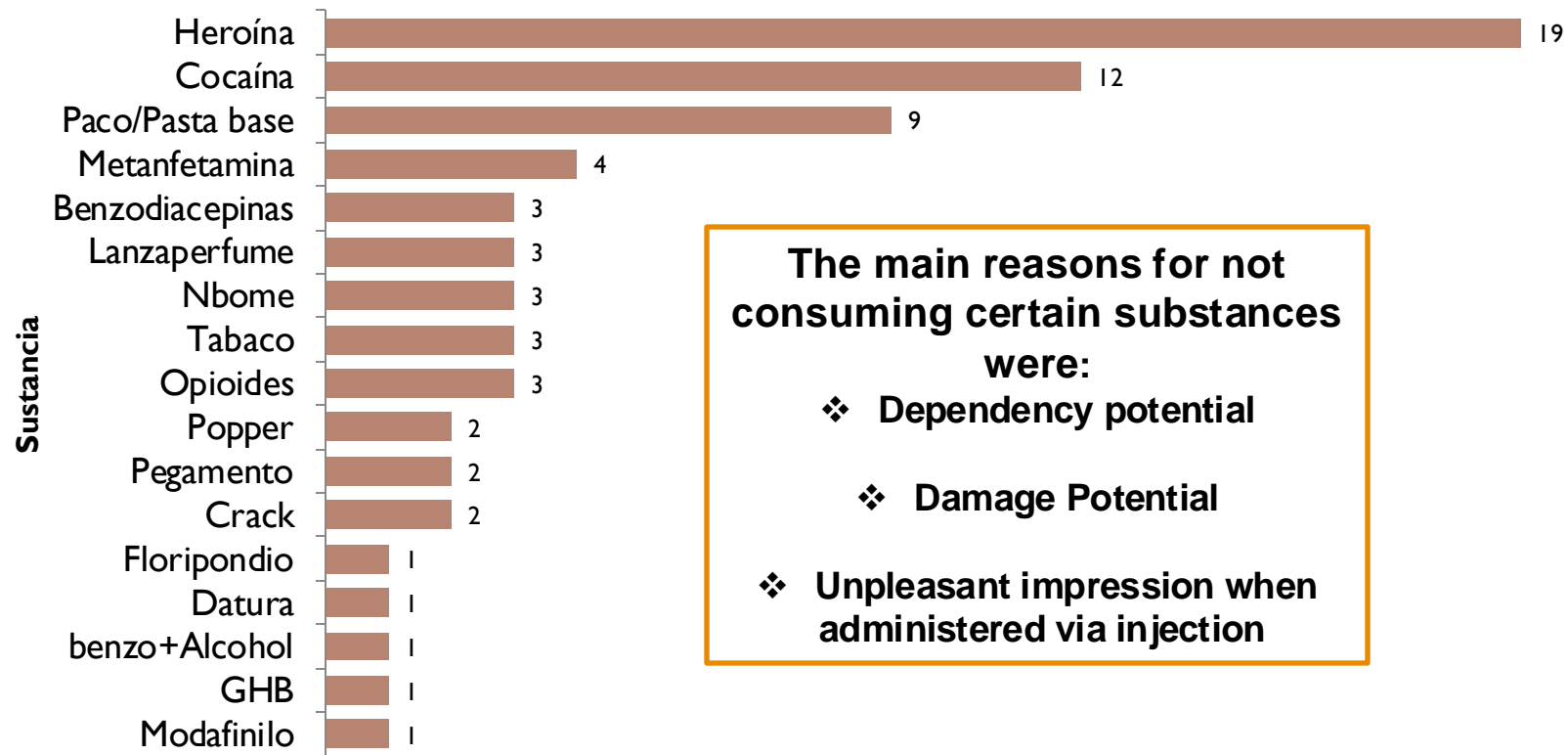
The main reasons for not consuming certain substances were:
- ❖ **Dependency potential**
- ❖ **Damage Potential**
- ❖ **Unpleasant impression when administered via injection**

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Misinformation and Disinformation as issues to address in treatment

➢ The varying levels exposure to misinformation on social media and the cyberspace in general reinforce the vulnerability of children and adolescents, normalize consumption and discourage attempts to quit.

➢ Belief systems about drugs consolidated on social media interfere with the credibility and rapport with therapists and treatment institutions and reinforce resistance to treatment at all stages:

❖ **Precontemplation**: Reduces the perception of risks and problems associated with current behavior among consuming children/adolescents and compromises self-assessment and environmental assessment.

❖ **Contemplation**: Compromises the identification of the reasons for change and the risks of not changing and decreases self-efficacy for changing current consumption behavior

❖ **Relapse prevention**: Reinforcement of consumption behaviors.

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Dismantling belief systems based on pseudoscience

Are health institutions and therapists prepared to address this issue in the treatment of children and adolescents with SUD?

Therefore, in the treatment of SUD in children and adolescents, it is necessary to:

➢ Promote proper drug education to facilitate recovery and improve quality of life.

➢ Address misinformation and fake news about drugs to ensure that patients have a correct understanding of the effects, risks and realities of substance use.

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Dismantling belief systems based on social networks

- ➢ **Provide clear and accurate information about the drugs they consume to help them make informed decisions about their treatment and increase the chances of successful recovery.**

- ➢ **Maintain a proactive approach in the therapist's role by guiding towards reliable sources of information and assisting in developing critical judgment and discernment skills, supporting recovery with precise and evidence-based knowledge.**

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Dismantling belief systems based on social networks

Useful Resources for Therapists and Treatment Institutions

❑ Reference institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) or equivalent local entities.

❑ Utilize and teach patients to use fact-checking platforms that can help debunk myths and misinformation.

❑ Distribute brochures, guides and educational resources that come from reliable sources such as public health institutions, universities or scientific publications.

❑ Facilitate discussion groups where children and adolescents can share and discuss the information they find, feeling safe to express their doubts and concerns.

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Strategies to address misinformation and fake news about drugs in treatment with children and adolescents

- ❑ Provide a space where children and adolescents can go at any time to verify information or address doubts about what they have heard or read.

- ❑ Work together with doctors, psychologists, nurses and other healthcare professionals to provide a comprehensive and scientific view on drug consumption.

VERY IMPORTANT

Stay Updated through ongoing training courses, conferences and scientific literature.

Remember that information about drugs and treatments is constantly evolving!

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Fake news that interferes with the risk assessment of substance use and in the treatments of children and adolescents with Substance Use Disorders

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muchas gracias

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