

Why can't some people give up cocaine?

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Drug dependency is a recurrent but treatable kind of addiction. However, not all people who are drug dependent progress in the same way once they stop taking drugs. A new study shows that, in the case of cocaine, a high score on the so-called 'scale of craving', an antisocial personality type and previous heroin abuse are the factors most commonly involved in people falling back into the habit.

Ana López, lead author of the study and a researcher at the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), tells SINC that the objectives of the new study were: "To understand the factors linked to treatment outcomes, in order to help people get the right kind of treatment, reduce their chances of abandoning the treatment, ensure they stop using drugs and don't fall back into the habit".

The study, published in the Spanish journal *Psicología Conductual*, analyses the significant factors (sociodemographic, psychopathological and patterns of drug and other substance abuse) involved in patients continuing to use cocaine two years after having requested treatment.

A high score on the 'scale of craving' (which measures the level of anxiety or desire to take drugs) at the start of the treatment, an [antisocial personality](#) type, and having previously taken heroin at some point previously in life are the main factors involved in falling back into cocaine abuse. For this reason, "it is crucial to first evaluate the person's consumption history and personality type", explains the researcher.

The researchers analysed a sample of 38 people (35 men and 3 women,

with an average age of 31), who sought treatment for problems related to abuse of this substance in drug treatment centres in Galicia, in northern Spain, studying them at the start of their therapy and then two years later.

The study shows that impulsiveness and the desire for new sensations are also factors involved with substance abuse. "It's no surprise that people who have tried substances such as heroin, which is broadly rejected by society, score highly for impulsiveness and sensation-seeking, and these are also features that are characteristic of an antisocial [personality type](#)", adds the researcher.

The authors also highlight that, contrary to what had been believed up until now, a patient being depressed or anxious at the start of the treatment does not necessarily mean they will have worse long-term results. "These symptoms are often actually a consequence of cocaine use, and once they stop using the drug their symptoms start to improve", says López.

Although demand for treatment because of problems related to [cocaine](#) abuse has risen in drug dependency centres in Spain, there are as yet only a few studies analysing how the users progress throughout the course of the treatment, which is why this kind of research is so important.

More information: Ana López, Elisardo Becoña, Lorena Casete, M^a Teresa Lage, José M^a García-Janeiro, Avelina Senra, Isabel Vieitez, Juan Sobradelo y Jesús Cancelo. "Variables significativas para explicar el consumo de cocaína a los dos años de demanda de tratamiento". *Psicología Conductual*, 17(2):203-216; Sept 2009.

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