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PATTERNS AND TRANSITIONS IN SUBSTANCE USE AMONG YOUNG SWISS MEN

S. Baggio[1], J. Studer[2] and G. Gmel[2,3,4,5]
[1]Life Course and Social Inequality Research Centre, University of Lausanne, Switzerland, [2]Alcohol Treatment Center, Lausanne University Hospital, [3]Addiction Switzerland, [4]Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and [5]University of the West of England

Introduction. The stages of involvement in illicit drugs other than cannabis remain vague and few studies focused on the last steps of drug-use trajectories. This study investigated this topic.

Methods. We used data from the Swiss Longitudinal Cohort Study on Substance Use Risk Factors (C-SURF) to assess exposure to drug use (alcohol, tobacco, 16 illicit drugs including heroin, and five prescription drugs including opioids) at two times point (N = 5,041). Patterns and trajectories of drug use were studied using latent transition analysis (LTA) and cross-lagged panel models.

Results. The LTA identified five classes of drug users showing a pattern involving adding alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, middle-stage drugs (uppers, hallucinogens, inhaled drugs), and final-stage drugs (e.g. heroin, ketamine, crystal meth). The most common transition was to remain in the same latent class. Heroin use predicted later opioid use (b = .071, p = .003) but not the reverse (b = -.005, p = .950).

Conclusion. The pattern of drug use displayed the well-known sequence of drug involvement (licit drugs/cannabis/other illicit drugs), but added a distinction between "middle-stage" and "final-stage" drugs. Progression along the whole drug course remained rare among participants in their twenties. For the final stage, heroin appeared as to be a step for opioid use.