

Core research areas on addiction: the need for a broader view

Núcleos y ámbitos de investigación sobre adicciones: necesidad de una visión más amplia

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Dear Editor,
It is becoming increasingly important to explore in more depth the diverse aspects related to scientific research in the field of health. Until quite recently, the focus was mainly on what was being studied, who was studying it, the impact factor of the journal, the researcher's institution, and his or her h-index. This is useful for obtaining knowledge about research activity in a given field, and can contribute to better decision-making in relation to the assignment of resources or university places. In particular, we have made a series of contributions in this field that have thrown light on the research situation in our respective areas of specialization (Burbano et al., 2013; Miró & Burillo-Putze, 2012; Miró, Montori, Ramos, Galicia, & Nogué, 2009).

Today, it is also of great interest to have access to more information about the links between researchers. Hence, our interest was drawn to a recent publication in ADICCIONES (González-Alcaide, Calafat, & Becoña, 2014), which for the first time identifies the core areas and networks of Spanish research on substance abuse and addictions over the last 14 years. But the snapshot these authors provide is, in our opinion, quite biased, on being confined – as the authors themselves indeed acknowledge – to a search for documents

published only in the *Substance Abuse* category of *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR) within the *Web of Science* (WoS), that is, a total of 18 journals.

The world of addictions is highly cross-sectional, and many specialists are involved in the care of addiction-related patients. If we think, for example, about psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists, emergency doctors, critical care specialists and toxicologists, to mention just 6 specialities clearly related to the care of those addicted to substances of abuse, one could have included the same number of JCR categories (*Psychology, Psychiatry, Neuroscience, Emergency medicine, Critical Care Medicine* and *Toxicology*), which altogether yield 599 journals, that is, 33 times more than those explored in the mentioned article. Therefore, we believe that the perspective emerging from their work is, despite its pioneering nature, somewhat incomplete. By way of example of the possible biases it contains, we might point out that while alcohol constitutes the target of 17 (57%) of the 30 core research areas identified, cocaine has a high presence in just 6 of the mentioned foci. Without wishing to deny the undoubted importance of alcohol addiction in the Spanish population, this methodological bias related to the group of journals selected reduces the true impact of cocaine addiction in our context, including all the visits to emergency

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departments generated by acute adverse reactions to a drug or its adulterants, the associated hospitalizations, and the mortality directly derived from drug use – all the object as well, of clinical and epidemiological research, particularly by specialists in emergency care (Galicía et al., 2012; Galicía, Nogué, & Burillo-Putze, 2014; Galicía, Nogué, & Miró, 2012; López-Rincón et al., 2013). And for the same reason, nor do we find references to research related to the use of gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB, liquid ecstasy), amphetamine derivatives or other drugs with emerging use in Spain (Caudevilla-Gálligo et al., 2013; Galicía, Nogué, & Miró, 2011).

What we propose is that an alternative search approach, based on key words rather than on journals, might perhaps give us a better picture of the true situation. Thus, following the methodology presented by the authors, we carried out a search in WoS, confining it to the period 2000-2013, using as key words “cocaine or ecstasy or GHB or heroine or methadone or ethanol or alcohol” (we limited the search to these few, but agreement could be reached on which to include), and indicating ourselves as authors. The results was 32 documents signed by one of the two (14 if one considers those documents signed by both at the same time). We do not know whether, following the methodology described by the authors to whom this letter refers, the activity would achieve the proposed definition of research cluster or core area, though we do think that this methodological alternative should be explored.

In any case, we acknowledge that the step forward, and in the right direction, made by the cited authors is a fundamental one, and constitutes another link in the chain that can provide a better understanding of the broad field of Spanish research on addictions. But perhaps what is needed is an extra effort so as not to exclude any relevant actor.

Conflicts of interests

None.

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