

Addictive behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic: results from a nationwide study in Portugal

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Background:

Evidence shows that individuals can engage in maladaptive behaviours as a response to a pandemic context, which can compromise their health and wellbeing. This project aims to characterize self-reported changes in addiction-related behaviours and associated factors in the adult population during the first COVID-19 lockdown, in Portugal.

Methods:

Cross-sectional study, with an online survey conducted between May 22 and July 20, 2020, targeting a non-probabilistic sample of adults (18 years of age or more) dwelling in Portugal (mainland and autonomous regions). The following data were collected: alcohol drinking, smoking, use of cannabis and other substances, gambling, and sugar-sweetened food intake, work-related variables, and socio-demographics. After data cleaning and weighting (by sex, age group, NUTS II and educational level), logistic regression

models were conducted to assess potential determinants of addiction-related behaviours.

Results:

Overall, 3,982 individuals participated in the study (79.1% women; mean age of 45.15 years). Women, young adults (18-34 years) and individuals with difficulties in work-life balance had higher odds for self-reported increase of sweets intake. Men, young adults (18-34 years) and those with work-life balance difficulties presented higher odds for alcohol drinking increase. Those unemployed (or with suspended activity or in layoff) and those with lower income had higher odds for gambling behaviour increase.

Conclusions:

Some segments of the Portuguese population reported to have increased their engagement in addictive-related behaviours, during the COVID-19 lockdown, which can have negative consequences for mental health. The study of the correlates of maladaptive responses under this scenario is pivotal to inform public health interventions and alleviate the potential deleterious impacts of this pandemic.

Key messages:

- COVID-19 pandemic can increase maladaptive coping behaviours in some segments of the population.
- Public health interventions are needed to mitigate the negative consequences of this pandemic.