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A research on “craving” or the intense desire for tobacco establishes the bases for addiction control

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A research team from the University of Granada has carried out a study on the psychological process that triggers the “craving” or intense desire for tobacco, a study that could establish the bases to determine the brain mechanisms that activate this state and how to control them.

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Miguel Ángel Muñoz García, from the Department of Personality, Evaluation and Psychological Treatment of the University of Granada has carried out this study, under the direction of the Professors Jaime Vila Castelar and M^a Carmen Fernández Santaella.



“Craving” is an expression used to define an uncontrollable desire for the administration or consumption of an addictive substance. It is usually used in situations of alcohol or nicotine dependence and it is considered as a pathology that affects cognitive resources, as it has an obsessive component.

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180 cocaine users

The researchers of the University of Granada analysed, with the help of a device, 180 regular takers of an addictive substance (cocaine, in this case), to study the emotional mechanisms triggering the addiction for the substance. This study has helped to establish the behavioural mechanisms in cocaine addiction, and consists of the emotional control of different consumption situations.

These results have been the basis of a series of studies with smokers, in withdrawal for 8 hours, to measure the physiological and emotional variables present in withdrawal symptoms using a machine (a polygraph) to estimate the emotional mechanisms responsible for the addiction to that substance. The smokers were shown several images (48) connected with situations that produce desire (related with leisure, free time, coffee...), analysing the heart’s defensive cardiac response produced as well as the startle response.

Lastly, brain modifications associated with emotional responses of frustration and impulsiveness in smokers in withdrawal were studied. This system was also used for regular smokers.

Miguel Ángel Muñoz García states that this research has studied for the first time behavioural mechanisms involved in the tobacco craving process determining the brain areas and body responses connected with the compulsive behaviour provoked by tobacco.

Reference

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