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STRESS REACTIVITY IN PATIENTS WITH DRUG DEPENDENCE AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS

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Drug dependence is defined as a chronic relapsing brain disorder that is defined by a compulsion to seek and use drugs despite negative consequences. Drug-related cues and stress are known to be key factors for drug use. It has been argued that drug use could be seen as self-medication in patients with drug dependence and co-occurring personality disorders. However, the relevance of co-occurring personality disorders for stress reactivity after drug use is not clear.

Thirty drug-dependent patients on stable opioid maintenance treatment with and without personality disorders were examined in a randomized placebo-controlled crossover study to investigate the effects of diacetylmorphine (DAM= heroin) on stress reactivity. They were compared with 20 healthy volunteers receiving saline. The drug-dependent patients administered either their individual prescribed DAM dose or saline. Afterwards they completed four emotional tasks while brain responses were measured with functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Before and after the fMRI investigation, adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), cortisol, DAM blood levels, and psychological stress parameters, such as anxiety, anger, and craving were measured.

The findings of DAM effects on stress reactivity in patients with drug dependence and co-occurring personality disorders will be reported and clinical implications regarding specific psychosocial interventions will be discussed.