Reviewer's report

Title: Factors that lead to the use of crack cocaine in combination with marijuana in Brazil: a qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 10 December 2014

Reviewer: Kora DeBeck

Reviewer's report:

General Comments:
This is a qualitative analysis examining the role that combining marijuana with crack cocaine smoking has in the lives of people who use crack cocaine in Brazil. To the extent that marijuana use may protect against some of the harms of crack smoking, studying this phenomenon is of potential relevance for public health and policy.

While the aims of the study are clearly stated, the apparent gap in knowledge that the study seeks to fill is not adequately apparent and it is unclear what unique contributions to the literature this study makes. The aim of the study as stated in the abstract is to “identify the reasons why users combine crack cocaine with marijuana and the health implications of doing so”. However, the introduction then outlines numerous prior studies that have established that combining marijuana with crack is common, and done purposely for a variety of specified reasons. In the introduction it is stated that few studies have addressed the phenomenon of combining crack and marijuana while taking into account the user’s opinions about this combination. However, the discussion references a qualitative study by Andrade et al., 2011 which reports on the perspectives and points of view of people who use crack and smoke marijuana, indicating that this is perhaps not a new approach for examining this phenomena. In the discussion section it becomes evident that the primary reasons reported in the analysis for combining crack cocaine with marijuana appear to have been identified in previous studies. For instance, Andrade et al., 2011 reported reduction of unpleasant effects, including physical effects (similar to improved quality of life), economical savings, more control over emotions/behaviour (similar to reduction of aggressiveness), and reduction in vulnerability and prejudice; Labigalini and Rodrigues, 1999 reported reduction of unpleasant effects and cravings; Riberiro et al., 2010, reported reduction of unpleasant effects and cravings (similar to reduction of crack cocaine-seeking behaviour) and prejudice. Given these prior studies, it is unclear what the unique contribution of the current analysis is. If there are aspects of the current study findings that have not been reported in prior studies it would be helpful to have these highlighted and the discussion should centre on these novel aspects of the study. Similarly, if the current study employs a methodology that is stronger than prior studies and therefore makes a unique contribution to the literature through this means, this should be emphasised in the manuscript.
The structure of the discussion section would also benefit from revision. The first paragraph should summarize the key novel contributions of the study (it is not necessary to restate the study context and study justification). The implications of the findings for policy and practice are really only touched on in the conclusion section of the discussion. These should be integrated into the main body of the discussion.

The discussion is missing a limitations section. Otherwise, the research methods are generally appropriate and adequately described.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Clearly state the gap in literature that this study is addressing (in light of comments above)
2. Explicitly state the novel contributions the study makes and structure the discussion of implications around these findings
3. Add a limitations section in the discussion
4. Revise the structure of the discussion as per suggestions above.

Minor revisions:
5. Line 137 –define ‘little education’
6. Line 152 –define ‘abandonment’

Discretionary revisions:
7. Line 10 –suggest replacing terminology of ‘intravenous drug users’ with ‘people who use injection drugs’
8. Paragraph line 143-148 does not seem relevant to analysis –suggest removing
9. There are a number of words that appear in italic which is somewhat distracting –suggest making text uniform formatting

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests