

Studies on the relationship between alcohol or nicotine use and panic

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Studies on the relationship between alcohol or nicotine use and panic

Dissertation to obtain the degree of Doctor at the Maastricht University

Fiammetta Cosci

The present thesis is focused on the relationship between panic disorder (PD) and alcohol or nicotine use disorders. The co-occurrence of alcohol or nicotine use and panic have been differently explained. One hypothesis refers to self-medication as the two substances may reduce panic. The other hypothesis is that alcohol or nicotine may trigger panic. A third relevant factor is the familial transmission which might promote both conditions.

According to the review of the literature, alcohol seems to lessen anxious apprehension in panic subjects, thereby decreasing the likelihood of panic. In alcoholics, alcohol increases CO₂ sensitivity, thereby promoting panic. In both cases, a significant familial transmission contributes to the co-occurrence of the two disorders.

According to the experimental studies, alcohol has a specific anti panic effect in healthy volunteers and panic disorder patients, while nicotine aspecifically induces anxiety in healthy subjects and has a specific panicogenic effect in PD patients.

Cigarette smoking also contributes in increasing the level of negative affectivity in smokers applying for smoking cessation clinics, thus complicating cigarette smoking dependence and limiting the possibility to quit.

Moreover, quitting seems influenced by the level of nicotine dependence and specific traits of personality. Thus, the role of pharmacological effects of alcohol and nicotine in the causal relationship with panic as well as the role of clinical and psychological factors in such a co-occurrence seem strongly relevant.

Key words: panic, alcohol, nicotine.

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