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## Link between emotion regulation and emotional competence and cocaine use

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## Background

Among illicit substance use, cocaine is frequently used, particularly among the younger populations. Indeed, 3.2% of 17-year-old adolescents report having used cocaine at least once (Jeanne et al., 2016). Cocaine use concerns approximately 5.6% of adults in France, including 1.6% of regular users (OFDT, 2019). This consumption generates different consequences for regular and occasional users: such as cognitive impairments, particularly in terms of working memory (Sponk et al., 2013), but also impairments of social life and interpersonal relations, particularly on an emotional level (Hulka et al., 2014). Specifically, cocaine users have more difficulty with empathy on both an emotional and cognitive level (Rameson & Lieberman, 2009). Additionally, there appears to be a deficit in negative emotion recognition skills (Kuypers, 2015).

The question of whether emotion regulation abilities as well as emotional skills (i.e., the ability to recognize the emotions of oneself and others) are linked to cocaine use or cocaine dependence seems thus relevant.

The first hypothesis assumes that emotion regulation skills will vary depending on cocaine use and cocaine dependence.

The second hypothesis states that emotional capacities will fluctuate with cocaine use and cocaine dependence.

## Results

Table 1  
*Mean comparison of emotion regulation scores according to cocaine use or not*

	Non-cocaine users		Cocaine users		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Lack of emotional awareness	15,1	4,8	15,0	4,34	0,28	0,77
Lack of emotional insight	11,3	4,20	11,5	4,42	-0,36	0,72
Lack of emotional acceptance	13,7	6,53	15,1	6,72	-1,67	0,09
Difficulty controlling impulsive behavior	13,1	6,01	13,2	5,98	-0,07	0,94
Difficulty engaging in goal-directed activities in the presence of negative emotions	16,0	5,37	15,9	5,67	0,02	0,98
Limited access to emotional regulation strategies	20,8	7,55	21,6	7,75	-0,81	0,42

Table 2  
*Mean comparison of emotion skills scores according to cocaine use or not*

	Non-cocaine users		Cocaine users		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
The identification of my emotions	17,4	4,52	17,3	4,16	0,11	0,91
The identification of other people's emotions	19,8	3,91	19,9	3,96	-0,23	0,82
Understanding my emotions	16,8	4,48	15,9	4,55	1,55	0,12
Understanding the emotions of others	18,8	4,28	19,1	3,61	-0,51	0,62
The expression of my emotions	15,5	4,58	15,4	4,52	0,20	0,84
Listening to the emotions of others	19,7	4,17	19,7	4,09	0,02	0,98
The regulation of my emotions	13,9	4,62	13,9	4,33	-0,02	0,98
Regulation of other people's emotions	16,9	4,28	16,9	3,83	-0,33	0,74
The use of my emotions	17,9	4,13	17,9	3,85	-0,26	0,79
The use of other people's emotions	15,4	4,99	15,4	4,60	-2,86	0,005

## Method

- **Participants:** Two hundred and eighty people participated in this study, of which N = 97 (34.39%) used cocaine at least occasionally and N = 185 (65.61%) never used it.

### Frequency of use:

Frequency of consumption	N	%
Less than once a year	15	15,2
Once or twice a year	22	22,2
Once or twice a month	37	37,4
More than twice a month	14	14,1
Several times a week	8	8,1
Every day	3	3

### Mesures:

- Anamnestic questionnaire for sociodemographic variables
- Cocaine dependence was assessed with a questionnaire based on DSM-5 criteria (APA, 2013)
- Emotion regulation was evaluated using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale - DERS (Gratz & Roemer, 2008) validated in French by Côté et al., (2013).
- Emotion skills was assessed with Brasseur et al., (2013) emotional competency profile.

### Procedure:

Data was collected online on a protected platform (Sphinx Campus®) while respecting confidentiality rules and ensuring that all participants gave their informed consent.

The study received a favorable approval from the ethics committee of the Federal University of Toulouse.

Table 3  
*Regression analyses regarding emotional regulation as well as emotional skills predicting cocaine dependence scores*

	β	p	Model Fit		
			F	p	R <sup>2</sup> adj
<b>Emotion regulation</b>					
Lack of emotional awareness	0,07	0,03	4,65	<0,001	0,18
Lack of emotional insight	0,09	0,19			
Lack of emotional acceptance	0,05	0,48			
Difficulty controlling impulsive behavior	0,06	0,04			
Difficulty engaging in goal-directed activities in the presence of negative emotions	0,07	0,25			
Limited access to emotional regulation strategies	0,07	0,41			
<b>Emotional skills</b>					
The identification of my emotions	0,08	0,47	3,17	0,002	0,18
The identification of other people's emotions	0,11	0,22			
Understanding my emotions	0,08	0,06			
Understanding the emotions of others	0,12	0,55			
The expression of my emotions	0,07	0,26			
Listening to the emotions of others	0,09	0,68			
The regulation of my emotions	0,07	0,07			
Regulation of other people's emotions	0,09	0,20			
The use of my emotions	0,08	0,26			
The use of other people's emotions	0,07	0,15			

## Discussion

The comparison of emotional regulation abilities between cocaine users and non-users indicates no significant differences, except for a slight tendency regarding the lack of emotional acceptance among cocaine users. When considering these same results concerning emotional skills, we see that only the skill of using others' emotions is significantly higher among cocaine users. This could be an indication of a tendency to use others' emotions for manipulative purposes to obtain something. Considering the impact of emotional regulation on cocaine dependence scores, lack of emotional awareness as well as difficulty in controlling impulsive behavior increases the likelihood of cocaine dependence. However, emotional skills seem to have rather little effect linked to cocaine dependence. Overall, contrary to our expectations, emotion skills seem to be relatively uncorrelated with cocaine use in this study, whereas emotion regulation seems to be slightly related. These results can be explained by the fact that in this study the population was composed of few daily users and that a future study should more focus on daily cocaine users. Nevertheless, interventions focusing on emotion awareness and impulsivity management could be interesting approaches in the treatment of cocaine-using patients and who desire to quit using cocaine.

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