

5 **Virado: A New Method of Crack Consumption in Brazil**

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17 Crack emerged in the late 1980s in Brazil. This emer-
18 gence was a critical moment for public health; the growing
19 AIDS epidemic led intravenous cocaine users to migrate
20 toward crack use to avoid the use of injection drugs. At
21 the same time, young consumers of marijuana also began
22 using crack, largely due to market strategies in drug traf-
23 ficking that led to a shortage of marijuana and the avail-
24 ability of crack as a substitute.¹ Twenty years later, crack
25 use has spread throughout the country and among all so-
26 cial classes, creating a social burden on the State.^{2,3} This
27 situation has led crack users to develop survival strategies,
28 which, at times, increase the risks to users rather than pro-
29 tecting them.⁴

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31 In this context, the use of *virado* has recently been iden-
32 tified in the city of Recife (northeast of Brazil). This letter
33 is intended to comment on a new form of crack use, not
34 previously described or quantified in epidemiological stud-
35 ies, which was identified during a large ethnographic study
36 of crack cocaine use in Recife.

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38 In this study, several “cracklands” (places where crack
39 users gather to consume the drug) were observed, and in-
40 depth interviews were conducted with crack users. They de-
41 scribed the use of *virado*, which involves the transformation
42 of crack cocaine rocks into a powder through the addition
43 of an equal amount of boric acid, which is legally sold in
44 drugstores as an antiseptic.⁵ The solid mass that results
45 from heating this mixture is cut, and these slices are turned
46 into powder, which is snorted through a straw. *Virado* is a
47 salt form of cocaine (cocaine borate) that allows the drug
48 to be absorbed through the nasal mucosa. According to
49 users, this pathway of absorption provides a longer-lasting
50 effect and lower levels of craving and paranoia than smoked
51 crack.

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The consumption of *virado* generally occurs in groups, in
a ritual that combines the preparation of the drug and the
sharing of the straw. Users often harm their nasal mucosa
as a result of friction from the straw, abrasion from drug
particles that are not properly pulverized, and the vaso-
constrictive action of cocaine. Users report that the straw,
which carries the blood and secretions of multiple users, is
shared among the members of the group. This ritualistic
straw sharing is the most alarming aspect of *virado* use be-
cause it exposes users to the risks of blood-borne illnesses.

Moreover, according to the users of *virado*, cocaine hy-
drochloride consumers are forced to produce *virado* to
maintain their addiction in the absence of their drug of
choice. The need to buy crack to process into a snorted
powder introduces these users to crack culture and creates
the possibility that they will become crack users. This situ-
ation is alarming to public health authorities because crack
is more addictive than snorted cocaine and is associated
with more social problems.¹

The use of *virado* has been increasing in the city of Recife
and is reinforced by the actions of drug traffickers, who have
taken cocaine hydrochloride out of circulation. In light of
the evidence, we suggest the study of this behavior (turning
crack rocks into *virado* powder) in other Brazilian cities and
in other countries. A cross-sectional survey is recommended
to quantify its distribution and pattern of consumption.

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funded by FACEPE (Research Foundation of the State of
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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest. The authors
alone are responsible for the content and writing of this
paper.

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