The use of the Amazonian psychoactive beverage ayahuasca for treating drug and alcohol abuse and addiction.

Ayahuasca is a psychoactive drink used by many Indigenous groups throughout Amazonia, as well as by mestizo shamans (known as "vegetalistas"), religions and independent groups in Brazil. Since the 1990's the drink has been used to treat dependency. At present, there are a few centres in South America that carry out this type of treatment. I carried out fieldwork in four of them, one in Peru and three in Brazil. In this presentation I intend to explore what I call as the "ayahuasca treatment model", which works at the neuro-chemical, social, and behavioral levels of addiction. The core idea is that an ayahuasca ceremony would bring out a series of emotions that triggers drug use, allowing the patient to work on these emotions during the tea effect. I will present a short ethnographic description of these treatment centres and offer some considerations about the role of experience during the effects of the tea in the process of recovery from dependency. Fifty people (patients and healers – psychologists, shamans, care givers) were interviewed during research fieldwork. I also consider the possibility that this type of treatment is not merely a substitution therapy.
Key words Dependency, Drugs, Ayahuasca, Imagination, Experience.

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