

Drug use in the Czech Republic University Students

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Summary: Attitudes to drug addiction and experience with drug abuse were investigated in 3387 undergraduates of the first and third years of 11 different university colleges. A standard questionnaire, used by the District Authority, Section of Public Health, in Hradec Králové, and commonly used in the whole Czech Republic, was employed for the survey. Most respondents were aged from 18 to 25 years and more than a half of them come from towns with more than ten thousand inhabitants. It follows from the obtained results that the drug most widely used by undergraduates is marihuana. Personal experience with taking this drug is stated, in dependence on the type of the faculty, by 13.5 to 50 % of respondents; the highest percentage is represented by the undergraduates of the Faculty of Pharmacy in Brno. A similar situation has been found in the case of hallucinogens abuse (LSD), where the highest percentage of abusers were again at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Brno (7.7 %). The age limit of the first experience with a drug ranges in most respondents between 14 to 23 years of age. In a small percentage of respondents, however, the first use of a drug is reported already below the age of 10. Drug abuse takes place usually at parties, discotheques and rock clubs. The study has also demonstrated that availability of drugs in schools is much lower than in places of residence; with increasing age of respondents their knowledge of existence of drugs in schools increases, and their knowledge of drug availability in places of residence decreases. An analysis of opinions concerning legalisation of drugs in the Czech Republic has revealed a generally tolerant attitude of undergraduates to permitting the use and distribution of drugs. The most negative viewpoint concerning this problem has been taken by the undergraduates of the Pedagogical Faculty in Hradec Králové; on the greatest benevolence has been found in the undergraduates of the Faculty of Pharmacy, Charles University, in Hradec Králové, and those of the University of Pardubice.

Keywords :: Drug abuse, marihuana, cocaine, LSD, hashish, alnagon, pervitin

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Çek Cumhuriyeti Üniversite Öğrencilerinde İlaç Suistimali
Özet : 11 Farklı Üniversitede 1. ve 3 ncü sınıf öğrencilerinden 3387'si üzerinde ilaç bağımlılığı ve ilaç suistimali araştırılmıştır. Çalışmada Hradec Kralove'de Halk Sağlığı Bölge Otoritesi tarafından Çek Cumhuriyeti'nde yaygın olarak kullanılan standart bir anket uygulanmıştır. Ankete katılanların çoğu 18 ila 25 yaş arasında olup, yarısından fazlası nüfusu 10.000'den fazla olan şehirlerden gelmektedir. Elde edilen sonuçlardan öğrencilerin en çok marihuana kullandığı ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu maddeyi kullananlar, ankete katılanların %13.5 ila %50 sini oluşturmaktadır. Marihuana kullanan öğrencilerin en yüksek oranı Brno Eczacılık Fakültesi öğrencilerinde görülmüştür. Aynı durum hallusinojen suistimali (LSD) için de söylenebilir. Yine en yüksek yüzde Brno'da Eczacılık Fakültesi öğrencilerinde bulunmuştur. Bu maddelerin ilk deneme yaşının 14 ile 23 yaşları arasında olduğu tesbit edilmiştir. Ancak bu ilk deneme yaşının düşük bir yüzde ile de olsa 10 yaşının altında olduğu da görülmüştür. İlaç suistimali genellikle eğlence partileri, diskotek ve gece kulüplerinde yapılmaktadır. Çalışmalarda ayrıca suistimal edilen maddelerin okullarda, evlerden daha az bulunabildiği ancak yaş ilerledikçe okulda bunları kullanabilme oranı artmaktadır. Çek Cumhuriyeti'nde suistimal edilen maddelerin yasallaştırılması üzerindeki görüşlere ilişkin analizler, öğrencilerde bu maddelerin kullanımı ve dağıtılmasına izin verilmesi konusunda hoşgörülü bir tutum sergilenmekten yana olduğunu göstermiştir. Buna ilişkin en negatif bakış açısı Hradec Kralove'de Pedagoji Fakültesi öğrencilerinden, en fazla toleranslı yaklaşım da Hradec Kralove'de, Charles Üniversitesi Eczacılık Fakültesi ve Pardubice Üniversitesi öğrencilerinden gelmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler :: İlaç suistimali, marihuana, kokain, LSD, hashş, alnagon, pervitin.

INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic became not only the transit country, thanks to its geographical situation and a

liberal society, but also directly the target country of the various illegal international groups dealing with drugs^{1,2}. The age, when teenagers try to self-examine their first psychotropic drug experience has been con-

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tinually dropping and drug abuse seems to be a certain kind of fashion. Illicit drug use increases have also been noted among university students and there is a need for a large survey across different universities and faculties. We report such a survey.

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

What university students look like from the point of view of drug abuse? To this important question we try, at least partially, answer on the basis of the elaboration and evaluation of a questionnaire search performed in the years of 1995 through 1999 at 11 selected faculties and universities. A total of 3387 students were included in our study from which an amount of 1093 respondents were the students of Charles University Prague, Faculty of Pharmacy in Hradec Králové (FaF HK), 389 respondents were students of Palacky University, Faculty of Medicine in Olomouc (LF UP), 105 respondents came from the Veterinary and Pharmacy University in Brno (FaF Brno), 109 from the Faculty of Body Culture of Palacky University, Olomouc (FTK UP), 338 respondents from the Faculty of Natural Sciences of Palacky University, Olomouc (PrF UP), 346 from the Faculty of Chemical Technology, University of Pardubice (FCHT), 19 respondents from the Pedagogical Faculty of Palacky University, Olomouc (PdF UP), 470 students from the Pedagogical College in Hradec Králové (PdF HK), 55 respondents from the Pedagogical Faculty in Liberec (PdF Lib), 215 respondents from the Textile Faculty of the Mechanical and Textile College, Liberec (TF Lib), and 248 respondents from the College of Economics in Cheb^{3,4} (VSE).

The questionnaire obtained from the Health Department of the Regional Office in Hradec Králové was used for the examination. The questionnaire consists of 51 questions out of which 14 have been devoted to the general social-demographic data of the respondents such as age, sex, residence, education of parents, family conditions, special interests of respondents, financial means, etc. Other 10 questions deal with smoking and alcohol and the remaining 27 questions are devoted to the knowledge of respondents concerning drugs, their own experiences with habit formers, availability and use of drugs in their vicinity, and any possible problems connected with drug abuse.

The questionnaire was personally administered during scheduled lecture hours and almost all the students participated. The number of respondents was dependent on total members of the students at each faculty.

Most of the results are presented as descriptive statistics. Associations between variables were analysed by χ^2 tests.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the group

In the given group students in the age from 17 to 30 years are included. The number of females is higher (70 %) than that of males (30 %). Most of the respondents come from towns with more than 10 000 inhabitants.

Legal drugs

Smoking

Non-smokers represent the majority of the group. Only 4.6 and 17.3 % of regular smokers and occasional smokers, respectively, were in the entire group. In the faculties with sport engagement, non-smokers prevail clearly over smokers.

Alcohol

11 % of both men and women did not drink Pedagogical College in Hradec Králové is proud of the highest amount of abstainers (15.5 %).

Illegal drugs

The situation in the sphere of abuse of illegal drugs is shown in Fig. 1.

Marihuana is the most preferred drug in university students (31.7 %), followed in a decreasing order by other drugs (7.6 %), hashish is in the third place (6.1 %), LSD is the fourth (4.4 %), and methylamphetamine, known as pervitin (2.4 %) is the fifth.

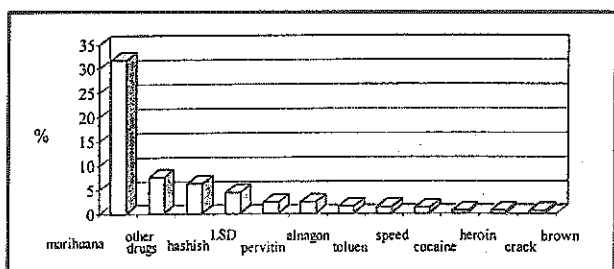


Fig. 1 Experiences of students with various drugs

Availability of drugs

Habit formers to be misused by their users must get into contact with them in some way. Therefore, offering the drugs in towns and villages where students have their residence and in the school, which they attend was examined. Surprisingly, to 56 % of students the situation in the school, where they study is not known. A higher offer was found outside the school.

Opinion and attitudes of student towards drug dependency

What is the opinion of students concerning the problem of full legalisation of psychotropic drugs? Only 6.4 % of students wanted to have a free market with drugs without any restriction and punishment, 33.8 % of students would legalise their use and only the distribution of drugs should be checked, 31 % would punish their distribution only. Unfortunately, only 27.9 % of students would punish both the distribution and usage of drugs. From the given facts it can be concluded that students are very liberal in the questions of drug abuse.

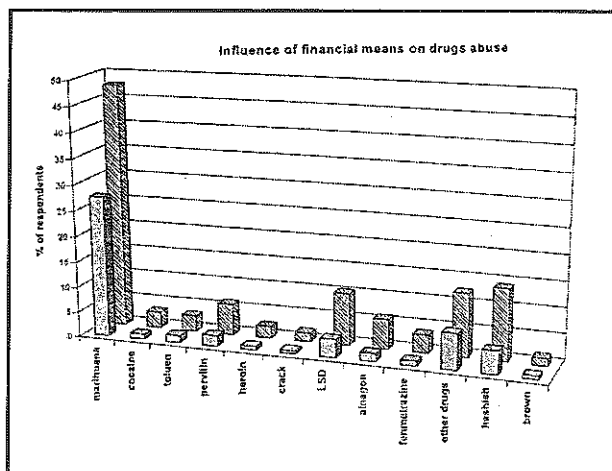
Attitudes of students to self-examination of drugs in the future

More than ten percent (11.7 %) of the students admitted willingness to self-examine drugs sometime in the future. Fortunately, the number of students, who will never want to self-examine drugs clearly prevails (74.9 %). Other 8 % have had probably rather bad experience wit drugs and therefore they do not want to re-examine it any more; however, 4.6 % examined it and will try to examine it again.

DISCUSSION

Influence of financial means

In the present study, our interest was also devoted to the question, whether financial situation may influence the attitudes of students to drugs. It was shown that those who received more money also smoked, drunk, and used habit formers more frequently. In the group of students with more financial means, marihuana is abused by three times more respondents. At the same time, there are twice as many smokers and respondents who misused other habit formers, and only a half of abstainers, compared with the poorer students.



Tested variable		"p" values	
Financial means	marihuana	0,00000	***
Financial means	cocain	0,00043	***
Financial mean	toluene	0,02269	*
Financial mean	pervitin	0,00004	***
Financial mean	heroin	0,00073	***
Financial mean	crack	0,06788	
Financial mean	LSD	0,00000	***
Financial mean	Alnagon	0,00000	***
Financial mean	fenmetrazine	0,01312	*
Financial mean	Other drugs	0,00139	**
Financial mean	hashish	0,00000	***
Financial mean	brown	0,96950	

Time-dependent dynamics of the development of the collection

Thanks to the long-lasting course of our study, the development of opinions and relation of students to habit formers can also be studied. In the academic year 1996 - 1997 a questionnaire search in students

of the first year of the Faculty of Pharmacy in Hradec Králové was carried out. Two years later (1998-1999) these students underwent the same questionnaire study as the students of the third year.

From the viewpoint of smoking, a good influence of the faculty was noticed, as the number of occasional smokers and regular smokers dropped from 21 % to 13 % and from 3 % to 2 %, respectively. The opposite trend was noticed, however, in relation of students to alcohol, because the number of alcohol abuse clearly increased.

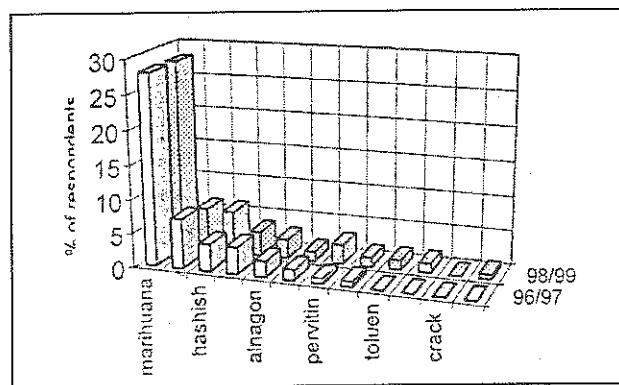


Fig. 2 Development of experience with drugs at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Hradec Králové.

Mutual comparison of drugs in 1996-1997 and now in 1998-1999 is shown in Fig. 2. As it is evident from the Figure, experiences of students with habit formers have not significantly changed during their study at the university.

Comparison with other studies

When the problems with drug addiction between teenagers in the entire Czech Republic with other neighbouring countries, namely Slovakia and Hungary were compared, one was able to recognize that the incidence of adverse and risky forms of alcohol abuse was higher in Czech young people than in Slovak and Hungarian coevals. Similarly, the spreading of experience with addictive drugs (such as marihuana, hallucinogens and amphetamines) was higher in Czech teenagers.

Among UK university students there are 11 % non-drinkers which is the same result as in our study. Experience with other illicit drugs was reported to be 33 % of the sample, most commonly LSD (lysergic acid die-

thylamide), amphetamines, Ecstasy (methylenedioxymethamphetamine), and amyl/butyl nitrate which had each been used by 13 - 18 % of the students. 34 % of these had used several drugs. Drug use had started at school in 46 % of the sample; 13 % began after entering university.⁵ We can see the difference in the spectrum of available drugs. While Ecstasy and amyl/butyl nitrate is commonly used in UK, for students in the Czech Republic, they are relatively new.

CONCLUSION

As it is evident from the present study, habit formers are not a problem of the majority of university students. However, a certain part of students have their own experience with soft drugs and only a minority of students have experience even with hard drugs, which is not, however, an alarming state. It can be concluded that university students are not the most threatened group in this sense⁶. But most students already come to the university with their own experience with drugs of abuse. The first contact with an addictive drug was between the ages 14 to 16 and sometimes even lower.

Abuse of addictive drugs causes social destruction and health damage as well as significant problems in the economical sphere. A simple recipe for solving this very complicated matter is unfortunately not available. We feel, however, the necessity to draw public attention to these alarming signals and to remind the public for the need of preventive measures directed at young people in risk.

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