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Research Article

Epidemiological Data on the Drugs Use from Youngsters in Shkoder City

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Abstract: Drugs use is a phenomenon already present in our schools, constituting a problem which is related not only to health but economic and social aspects as well. The aim of this study is to provide epidemiological data on the drugs use in schools and determine factors influencing the spread of drugs use in this part of the population. The study was conducted in Shkodra District and included 1,500 youngsters aged 13-18 and 19-22 that were given an anonymous questionnaire. The Fisher test, *t*- student test and ANOVA test were used to analyze the data. Out of 1,500 subjects, 1,302 of them were declared non-users (86.8%), while 198 used drugs (13.2%). The number of users was comprised of 63,6% male and 36,4% female respondents. By analyzing the data as regarding to age groups, 57.4% of drugs users belonged to the 19-22 age group, while 42.6% belonged to the 13-18 age group. In conclusion, drugs use is a concerning phenomenon among youngsters. The majority of users are male and mainly those at an advanced age. The most successful method to fight the increase of this problem is action through education.
Keywords: Epidemiological data, Age group, Drugs use.

INTRODUCTION

Drugs abuse poses a serious threat to health as well as social and economic development of nations, communities, families and youths. The number of the drugs users in the world reaches 185 million users [1]. From year to year the number of drugs users there is a growing trend, but the concern is that they are teenagers [2]. 6-7 % of the youth use drugs ranging from light hashish to cocaine and heroin by injection. Besides health problems, drug use reflected the acute social problems too. Violence associated with drugs use includes murder, assault with sexual background and numerous kinds of domestic violence [3, 4]. Crimes committed to provide or distribute illegal substances pose a serious threat to the community. Substance abuse is a social problem that appears differently in different people. This is due to a series of factors such as gender, family background, social status, intellectual level, economic level, etc. A series of injuries are related to illegal drugs use. Overdose occupies the leading place in mortality associated with the drugs. The majority are accidental overdose [5]. Negative health consequences vary according to the type of drug used and its route of administration ranging from cardiac and pulmonary problems to mental health disorders [6]. Unsafe injection practices, unsafe sex, multiple daily injections increase the risk of getting sick from infectious diseases such as Hepatitis B, C and HIV [7, 8].

Several factors make the necessary deepening and intensification of educational work on the reduction of the number of users to abusive substances:

- Low socio-economic level, unemployment, infertility of teenage social life.
- Lack of health educational work and inability to cope with the difficulties of life.
- Low motivation in teenagers to ignore social problems and to engage in other activities with educational character.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

With this study we aimed: to extract epidemiological data on the drugs use in 13-18 and 19-22 age groups, to evaluate the prevalence of drugs use according to gender M/F and to determine how the educational, cultural and economic level of the family influences drugs use.

The target group of the study was pupils and students of elementary schools (7^{th}, 8^{th}, and 9^{th} classes) and high schools (representing the 13-18 age groups). The 19-22 age groups were represented by university students. During January 2011-January 2014, a transversal study was conducted in the Shkoder District, engaging 1,500 young people of the 13-22 age groups. These age groups were divided into two categories, representing the start of adolescence and the challenge of physical and emotional changes – 13-18 age group; and years

when important decisions in life and career are taken – 19-22 age groups. The technique used for selecting the sample was "cluster selection", cluster representing one class of a school. Classes were chosen at random. The participants in the study were 300 pupils of elementary schools (20%), 422 high school pupils (26.7%), and 778 university students (53.3%). The questionnaire was anonymous and was comprised of two parts:

General demographic data of the interviewees (gender, year of birth, place of birth, residence, parent's educational level, parents employment status, family income level). Attitude of the individual toward drugs use (how often they are used, age when drugs use started). To analyze the data were used: Fisher test to compare the distribution of socio-demographic characteristics, lifestyles and dangerous behavior. *T*-Student test, ANOVA test, Mann-Whitney test were used to compare average values of numerical variables between male and female respondents.

RESULTS

The respondents were divided into 45.5% male and 54.5% female. 46.7% of them were in the 13-18 year old age group while 53.3% belonged to the 19-22 age groups. Regarding the place of birth, 55.5% were born in the city, while 44,5% of them were born in the countryside. 56.4% of the interviewees resided in the city, 43.6% of them lived in the countryside. The educational level of respondents' fathers varied from middle (50.4%) to high education (37.3%) and elementary (12.3%). The educational level of respondents' mothers varied from middle school (47%) to high education (38.2%) and elementary (14.8%). As regards the employment status of the parents, 74% of respondents had their fathers employed; employed mothers were represented with 69%. The greater part of the respondents came from families with average income (60.4%).

Table 1 shows in detail the socio-demographic characteristics of interviewees.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees

Variable	Interviewees (%)
Gender	
Male	45.5(%)
Female	54.5(%)
Age group	
13-18	46.7(%)
19-22	53.3(%)
Place of birth	
City	55.5(%)
Countryside	44.5(%)
Residence	
City	56.4(%)
Countryside	43.6(%)
Type of school	
Elementary	20(%)
High	26.7(%)
University	53.3(%)
Father's education	
Elementary (0-8 yr)	12.3(%)
High (9-12 yr)	50.4(%)
University (>12 yr)	37.3(%)
Mother's education	
Elementary (0-8 yr)	14.8(%)
High (9-12 yr)	47(%)
University (>12 yr)	38.2(%)
Father's employment status	
Employed	74(%)
Unemployed	26(%)
Mother's employment status	
Employed	69(%)
Unemployed	31(%)
Income level	
Low	18.2(%)
Average	60.4(%)
High	21.4(%)

Out of 1,500 subjects, 198 of them were declared drugs user (13.2%), while 1302 were non-users (86.8%). The drugs users' contingent was comprised by 63.6% male and 36.4% female respondents. By analyzing the data in accordance to the age groups, 57.4% of users belonged to the 19-22 age group, while 42.6% belonged to the 13-18 age group. Regarding the residence, 81.6% of users lived in rural areas and 18.4% in urban areas. On the parents' educational level, fathers of 49.1% of drugs users had high school education, while mothers represented 43% in this category, whereas on the parents' employment status, 63.5% of users had employed fathers and 55.9% unemployed mothers. The majority of drugs users came from average income families (62.3%). 19.2% belonged to families with high income, and 18.5% belonged to low-income families.

Table 2 shows the relationship between drug users and socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. In this table, there are presented the percentage, OR, Interval of Confidence, the value of *P* based in logistic binary regression and the Free Degrees.

Table 2: Relationship between actual drugs users and socio-demographic characteristics of youngsters and their parents

Variable	Non-users (N=1014)*	Users (N=486)*	OR†	95%CI†	P†
Gender					
Male	31.5(%)	63.6(%)	1.49	1.36-2.32	<0.001
Female	68.5(%)	36.4(%)	1.00	Reference	
Age group					0.776‡
13-18	55.2 (%)	42.6(%)	1.34	0.66-1.43	0.979
19-22	44.8 (%)	57.4(%)	1.00	Reference	-
Place of birth					
City	15.8(%)	19.8(%)	1.01	0.70-1.24	0.873
Countryside	84.2(%)	80.2(%)	1.00	Reference	
Residence					
City	11.2(%)	18.4(%)	1.26	0.77-1.63	0.637
Countryside	88.8(%)	81.6(%)	1.00	Reference	
Father's education					0.857
Elementary (0-8 yr)	17.1(%)	35.9(%)	0.88	0.69-1.58	0.885
High (9-12 yr)	44.6(%)	49.1(%)	0.93	0.73-1.16	0.868
University (>12 yr)	38.3(%)	15.0(%)	1.00	Reference	-
Mother's education					0.069
Elementary (0-8 yr)	16.1(%)	37.1(%)	1.33	0.99-2.14	0.116
High (9-12 yr)	46.5(%)	43.0(%)	1.13	0.78-1.25	0.749
University (>12 yr)	37.4(%)	19.9(%)	1.00	Reference	-
Father's employment status					
Employed	75.0(%)	63.5(%)	1.29	0.90-1.58	0.307
Unemployed	25.0(%)	36.5(%)	1.00	Reference	
Mother's employment status					
Employed	56.2(%)	44.1(%)	0.87	0.55-0.89	0.003
Unemployed	43.8(%)	55.9(%)	1.00	Reference	
Income level					
Low	16.4(%)	18.5(%	1.76	1.02-2.34	0.099
Average	60.6(%)	62.3(%)	1.25	0.94-1.79	0.049
High	23.0(%)	19.2(%)	1.00	Reference	0.158

Number and percentage of respondents according to columns.

† ratio OR: drugs users vs non-users, 95% interval of confidence and the value of P based on logistic binary regression.

‡ general value of P and the free degree.

DISCUSSION

The study on the drugs use from youngsters produced data pertaining the situation and the degree of drugs use, thus making possible the evaluation of dynamics and trends regarding its prevalence and relevant risk factors.

In the study, substantial changes have been statistically identified related to the models of drugs use according to variables under examination. The factors at risk from drugs use resulted to be the male sex gender, greater age, rural area residents, belonging to an average income family, and high school parents' education level. Males, and mainly those in greater age, tend to agree more on different, dangerous, behavior

related to drugs use, compared to females and younger persons, suggesting that these two groups engage more easily on dangerous behavior pertaining drugs use. This is also true for people belonging to high school education level families. On the other hand, females, younger persons, and those living in urban areas, substantially perceive as dangerous the behavior related with the drugs use.

Although not in such high levels, dangerous behaviors were present also on the youngsters interviewed. As expected in this case, there were also sharp differences regarding age and gender. So, males reported more dangerous behavior related to drugs use. The intensity of this kind of behavior is increased with age.

Comparison of the study findings with other national and international studies

ESPAD study (European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs), conducted in 2011 and targeting pupils of the 15-16 age groups, with a representative sample of more than 6,000, showed a drugs use prevalence of 8%. Meanwhile, our own study has shown a prevalence of 13.2% for the 13-22 age groups. This figures show the growing trend of this phenomenon. In both studies it is being reported that drugs use prevalence is higher in males and in higher age groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study provides data on drugs use in the schools of Shkoder District. It clearly shows the concerning trend of drugs use since young age, as well as present risk factors influencing this phenomenon. This study will help health care professionals and educational specialist to improve their activity in specific issues with impact on the health of children. By reducing drug use among young people and encouraging users to interrupt them, they would stimulate: involvement of youth in social and educational activities; exposure of them to healthy models of their peers; support to understand their health and material damages arising from the drugs use; organization of preventive activities which include young people and their parents and social services in support of drugs users.

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