

ADOLESCENT DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION FROM A PSYCHO-SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Strategies of drug abuse prevention in general and in schools in particular should be based on a comprehensive understanding of psycho-social factors among these factors the understanding of the social background of the teenagers such as their parents socio-economic status, their parents marital status, the relationship with their parents and attitudes about the relationship with their parents. Accordingly, the researchers have conducted a pilot study in 3 high schools in Algiers city (Algeria) (N=272) in order to determine the main psychosocial factors of drug abuse.

The researchers believe that this basic work is essential in any strategy or plan for drug abuse prevention in schools.

The two researchers stress the importance of religious and spiritual education as well as the importance of physical education (Sports) adolescent training and learning to avoid drug abuse. beside understanding the rapid physiological and psychological changes the teenagers undergo in the beginning of the adolescence.

Introduction

The Algerian population in 1962; the year of the country's independence, was not more than ten million. Actually, the population is about 25 million. More than 70% of this population are under 30 years old.

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Drug abuse is usually associated with youth, mainly between the age of 18-30. However, the age of experience with and drug abuse is much earlier than this stated age in many countries. In Algeria, for example, we found that some children had started taking certain types of drug (e.g. glue sniffing) as early as 13 years old either inside or outside the educational institutions (generally, students in high schools experience glue sniffing, mix psychotropic drugs (e.g., tranquilizers, hallucinogens) with alcohol, and smoke cigarettes of hashish.

Certain factors that are related to drug abuse by teenagers in Algeria are associated with rapid social change in the country. This phenomenon is reflected in dramatic rural-urban exodus, rapid process of industrialization, democratic education, partial-employment of women in industrial and services' organizations.

The trend of rapid growth and development in the country had continued to be the dominant trend until the mid 1980. The decline of growth and development is reflected in inflation, unemployment, low school achievement. This last factor-low school achievement-might be demonstrated by the following factors which are related to the actual study:

- About 20% of children who are in the age of "schooling" are out of the educational system.
- No more than 20% succeed in the "baccalaureate" exam (high school diploma).
- Decline of the values that are related to school achievement.

In short, this environment is not a healthy one for a spiritual, rational and even physical growth and development. Consequently, teenagers try to find other ways to satisfy certain needs that are frustrated, and seek pleasure in drugs and smoking.

The present study is a pilot study which addresses certain issues that are related to drug abuse in Algerian high schools. These issues are:

- The structure of student's families and harmony.
- Parents-children relationship.
- Students' family-housing.
- Do students in high schools have colleagues who take drugs inside the educational institution?
- Do students have friends outside the educational institution who take drugs?
- Did students themselves experience any kind of drug?

- What is the School achievement of students in high schools?
- When students start experiencing with drugs?

Subjects

A sample of students in 3 high schools in Algiers was randomly selected. The size of the sample is 372 students. The sample is distributed among the high schools as follows:

- a) 114 students
- b) 188 students
- c) 070 students

The subjects represent 3 levels in high school: level 1, level 2, and level 3.

Method

Questionnaire: A questionnaire was distributed among the students in the selected high schools in Algiers, and they have been asked to answer the questions of the questionnaire.

Results

The analysis of data showed the following results:

- 1) 50 students out of 372 had admitted taking drugs. This number represents (13,44%).
- 2) 70% said that they have friends who take drugs inside the high school.
- 3) 30% said that they have friends who take drugs outside the high school.

Consequently, we might observe from these preliminary result that drug abuse is something that is obvious in Algerian high schools in the capital, Algiers.

Furthermore, we might note that the influence of peers and "deviant models" inside the educational system is much greater than the influence of peers and "deviant models" outside the educational institutions.

- 4) When students have been asked about the age of starting experience with drugs, they replied that the age ranges between 13-18 years old. One might note that this age is the beginning of the adolescence.

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5) Students parents relationship: 12% of the respondents said that their relationship with their parents - in general - is bad. 21% are not satisfied with their father's relationship while 17% are not satisfied with their mother's relationship.

6) Among the sample. 4% of the students' parents are divorced while 6% of the students had lost either father or mother (death of a parent).

7) Parent's employment: The results show that 27% of the fathers are unemployed while 89% of the mothers are unemployed. The tradition in Algeria does not encourage women to be employed especially if they are illiterate. The study showed that about 70% of the mothers do not exceed the elementary level of education, and only 8% reached the high school level, but only 2% had reached the university level. However, the level of fathers' education is better since 8% had reached the university level, and 16% reached the high school but still about 45% of them did not go farther than the elementary education level.

8) Housing: most students live in crowded apartments since about 80% live with their families in apartments that are consisted of 3 rooms or less. This is a terrible condition especially if we know that Algerian family is consisted in average of 7 persons.

9) School achievement: Only 10% of students have reported that their performance in high schools is either good (9%) or excellent (1%). While 81% said that their performance is fair or moderate, and 9% admitted that their performance is bad.

Discussion

It is important to note that the age in which children start drug abuse is declining since the actual study has revealed that the children start experiencing certain drugs at the age of 13. Moreover, 70% of the respondents asserted that they have friends inside high schools who take drug. This result shows the influence of the peers in drug abuse. This finding supports the same trend in the USA where a study of national Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) reported that "the percentage of America's 8th, 10th, 12th, graders who use marijuana continued to increase last year, according to NIDA's 1994 monitoring the future study" (Swan, 1995, p. 8).

The same study showed that while student's consumption of several other drugs had increased, the antidrug attitudes among teenagers deteriorated.

This age is psychologically significant since it is the beginning of the adolescence. The teenagers in this period take certain models as examples for learning. Consequently, they want to prove to their peers and to others that they are mature and they can experience what certain adults and youth experience such as smoking cigarettes and marijuana and toxic drugs.

The present study has addressed another important issue that is the relationship between adolescents and their parents. 21% of the respondents are not happy with their relationship with their fathers, while 17% of them are not happy with their mothers. This result is congruent with several previous studies about this issue.

Fong, Ismail, Navaratnam and Konk (1984), for example, have reviewed several studies, that are related to this relationship, and concluded that "disturbed family relationship and adolescent drug abuse appear to be significantly related" (p. 4).

The dissatisfaction of the teens with their parent's relationship and the disturbed families because of divorce or death of either or both parents have severe consequences on teenagers' behavior as various studies have shown.

The psychosocial factors (e.g. dissatisfaction, divorce, unemployment) are very important factors to be considered in any drug abuse prevention programme or plan. This study, for example, shows that the unhealthy familial environment and drug abuse prevention programme in school should not neglect the importance of the following psychosocial factors.

- 1 - the family structure and its harmony.
- 2 - the relationship between parents and siblings.
- 3 - the attitude of siblings towards their parents.
- 4 - the influence of the peers inside and outside the educational institution.
- 5 - the attitude of the teenagers towards education in general.

Regarding these important factors, several studies and conferences about drug abuse prevention stress the following:

1 - The role of religious beliefs: Abou-Al-Azaim (1992), for example, had concluded as a result of an experimental study in Egypt, that religious belief is an effective factor in drug abuse treatment and prevention. The same conclusion was reported by Fong et al. (1985) who stated that: "there is a general trend that participation in religion activities is related to less tendency involvement in alcohol and drug abuse" (p. 6).

2 - School achievement: it was found that children's attitude towards education and their low performance in school are significant factors associated with drug abuse (Fong et al., 1984).

3 - The role of training and learning to avoid drug abuse: Robert Mathias (1997), for example, has concluded as a result of an experimental study about steroid prevention program scores with high school athletes, that such a prevention program has given stu-

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dent athletes the knowledge and skills to resist (steriod) drug use and achieve their athletic goals in more effective, healthier ways.

In general, any drug abuse prevention program in school should be based on the understanding of the psychosocial background of students, their level of understanding, the content of the message, the agent(s) of prevention.

Conclusion

This pilot study shows how fragile is the structure of some teenagers psychosocial background because of divorce, death of parents, illiteracy of parents, unemployment of parents and unsatisfactory parents-siblings relationship.

This study is limited in its scope and findings because it's just an exploratory study. More research in this area is needed in order to relate the actual and other factors statistically with drug abuse, and drug abuse prevention programmes.

However, this study shows very clearly that drug abuse is a fact in high schools in Algiers because this study has covered 3 high schools in different regions the city. Furthermore, this study has shown that percentage of drug abuse among teenagers is alarming. Interestingly this percentage is almost equivalent to the percentage of the teenagers who have the following characteristics:

- 1 - The relationship with their parents is a bad relationship.
- 2 - Their school achievement is low.
- 3 - Unstable family because of divorce or death of one or both parents.
- 4 - Crowded housing (3 rooms or less in an apartment).
- 5 - High percentage of parents' unemployment.
- 6 - High percentage of parents' illiteracy.

References

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