

CHARACTERISTICS OF DRUG ABUSE: A qualitative multicenter study in Turkey

Ass. Prof. Kültegin Ögel, MD

"Characteristics of drug abuse" study is planned to assess the characteristics of drug abusers who live in Turkey.

Method

- ◆ The first phase of the study is a qualitative research and key informant interviews are conducted in 10 different cities (Adana, Ankara, Denizli, Diyarbakir, Eskişehir, İstanbul, İzmir, Kocaeli, Trabzon and Van) in Turkey and Turkish part of the Cyprus. These cities are represents different geographical regions of Turkey. These cities are also known as high drug use.
- ◆ 149 male and 37 female, totally 186 informant were interviewed. 72 of them were a drug abuser. Key informants selected from four different categories. Law enforcement and judicial system, people who frequently contact with drug users (friend of drug user, health care provider, barmen, journalist, etc.), parents of drug users and drug users. Drug users are selected from heroin, cannabis, inhalant and pill users.
- ◆ Snowball technique is used in the selection of key informant. Ten different interviewers conduct the study and each of them trained by experienced trainers. All these reports are analysed by the research co-ordinator.

Findings

- ◆ Drug abusers were described as persons who have problems with their families and society. Society is afraid of drug users and sees them as a criminal person. On the other hand they pity them, too. Informants defined drug abusers generally in two dimensions as sick and criminal.
- ◆ Cannabis stated as most frequent used drug. Pills and solvent use was also high. On the other hand, solvent users were not mentioned in Van. Cocaine and use of other drugs were very low.
- ◆ It is found that heroin is frequently used by sniffing and inhalation, intravenous use is rare. Solvents are common in small children who have no families and live in streets. However, an increase of solvent use was shown among late adolescent and young people who live with their parents, too. Benzodiazepines especially clonazepam and flunitrazepam which is not legal in Turkey, are most frequently used pills.
- ◆ Abusers who use pills were described as more aggressive, criminal, self-mutilating and psychopathic. Heroin users described as a calm people who commit crime when they can not buy or find drugs.
- ◆ In every region, specific districts were found for drug use and sell. Older parts of the city and low socio-economic status are the common characteristics of these districts. Production and dealing of drugs in a region is found as an important predicting factor for drug use in a region.

- ◆ Generally, a relationship was found between drug use and immigration. It is found that drug use is frequent among Turkish people who lived in Europe and return to Turkey. In cities other than eastern part of Turkey, it is mentioned that university students frequently used drugs and it is more frequent among students who came from İstanbul. In northern part of Turkey, drug use was found more frequent among people who came from Commonwealth of Independent States.
- ◆ It is stated that most of the heroin users are older than 25, pill users are younger than 25 years. Inhalant users are very young, up to 10 years old.
- ◆ Most of the drug users are male and a small proportion of them is female. Use of pills is frequent among prostitutes. Women from high socio-economic status and students seem to use drugs more frequently than other female groups.
- ◆ Abusers, who use pills and cannabis, have low education level in contrast educational level of heroin and cocaine users are higher. Most of the users do not work. Work impairment could not be found among cannabis user, they continue to work despite of long term cannabis use.
- ◆ Families do not communicate with them well, make pressure on users, and do not know how to contact with them. Many abusers use drugs in their home with the permission of their families.
- ◆ Users and their families are not optimistic about treatment. Seeking for treatment is very low. It is mentioned that some of the drug users seek treatment just to get tolerance from police. They expect from treatment only to relief the withdrawal symptoms. Most of them quit by themselves and secondly they tend to prefer private clinics.

Conclusion

- ◆ There is an increase in drug use, especially among inhalant use.
- ◆ Criminal activity shows differences according to type of drugs use.
- ◆ We noticed three different groups among drug users when the report of eleven cities analysed. The first group is the drug users who live in rural areas. These areas are also a center for production and use of drugs can be evaluated as a traditional use. Relations between society and this group of drug users are well preserved than other groups.
- ◆ Second group include drug users who live in lower socio-economic regions of the cities and their income are mostly from illegal jobs.
- ◆ Young people who rebel to the society and have a tradition of rockers or punks form the last group and they seem to be influenced by western culture.

Address: Ruh ve Sinir Hastaliklari Hastanesi, AMATEM,
Bakirköy, İstanbul, Turkey
e-mail: kultegin@sim.net.tr

