DRUG ABUSE AMONG NON-STUDENT YOUTH LABOUR

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SUMMARY

257 non-student youth (age range 15-24 years) have been studied on socio-demographic variables, extent and frequency of drug abuse. Results of the study have been discussed.

In the last two decades a number of studies have been published about drug abuse among school, college and university students. Such studies are relatively easy to do since they deal with "captive" cooperative population. Students represent a large proportion of the youth in many countries. A variety of sophisticated methodologies have been developed for student studies and many have been reviewed (Smart et al 1980). However, non-students are an important segment of the youth population of developing countries and they have been rarely studied. Since the non-student youth population is large and growing rapidly in many developing countries, some information about their problems is clearly needed.

In the present study an attempt has been made to study drug abuse among non-student labour youth population.

Material and Method

Three different samples were used: factory workers (121), rickshawpullers (102) and railway coolies (34). For the factory workers three factories in Ludhiana were randomly selected. In the factories also selection was made by simple random technique and all workers aged 15-24 years were included. Rickshawpullers were randomly selected from six rickshaw stands of civil lines, Ludhiana and those with range of 15-24 years of age were interviewed. All railway coolies at Ludhiana railway station with age 15-24 years have been included for study.

Each respondent was administered a standard WHO questionnaire for study of drug abuse among non-student youth (Smart et al 1981). Interviews were conducted by trained investigators. These

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investigators received two weeks training including familiarization with drugs, drug literature, and interviewing techniques. Each respondent was enquired about use of tobacco, alcohol, opium, cannabis, tranquillizers, barbiturates, smack, heroin, cocaine, pethidine and morphine. Respondents were enquired about socio-demographic variables i.e. age, number of years of education completed, religion, domestic (rural/urban), whether staying alone or with family, full/part time job and pattern of drug use (ever in lifetime, during the last 12 months, in the last 30 days and the frequency) of drugs. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of the responses.

Out of 265 respondents contacted 257 cooperated for the study. As done earlier by Chandigarh centre in a multicentred WHO study on drug abuse (Smart et al 1981), each one was assigned to one of the groups:

a) Ever use; who used any of the drugs even once in lifetime.
b) Recent use; who used drugs in the past 12 months.
c) Current users; who had not used drugs either daily or weekly in the past month.
d) Moderate users; who used drugs weekly but not daily in the past month.
e) Heavy users; who used one or more drugs in past month on a daily basis.

Results

Sociodemographic variables of the sample are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Variables of non-student labour youth

| Years of Schooling | N = 257 | %  |
|-------------------|---------|----|
| Illiterate        | 51      | 19.8|
| Below Primary     | 45      | 17.5|
| Primary           | 65      | 25.3|
| Middle            | 57      | 22.1|
| Matric            | 35      | 13.6|
| Graduate          | 4       | 0.2|

Married outnumbered the single. Majority of the population did not study beyond matric. Majority were day time workers, most of them were staying in rural area in growing up period but the larger number stayed in urban areas in the past one year. Migrants outnumbered Punjabis. Migrants were predominantly from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Bihar. Sikhs and Muslims constituted a very small number of the sample. Details of drug use are presented in table 2. The analysis of data shows that tobacco (60.31%) and alcohol (51.36%) in the order; followed by cannabis (8.52%), opium (1.16%) and minor tranquillisers (0.77%) were the drugs most commonly used at sometime or other by these workers. Recent use of drugs was also reported in the same order. No one reported use of cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, smack or heroin. Current use was reported in this order: tobacco (50.58%), alcohol (27.62%), cannabis (1.94%), opium (0.38%) and minor tranquillizer (0.38%).
Table 2

| Drug              | Ever used | Recent use | Current use | Light use | Moderate use | Heavy use |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
|                   | N         | %          | N           | %         | N            | %         |
| Tobacco           | 155 (60.3) | 145 (56.4) | 130 (50.6)  | 3 (1.2)   | 7 (2.7)      | 120 (46.6) |
| Alcohol           | 132 (51.3) | 125 (48.6) | 71 (27.6)   | 25 (9.7)  | 36 (14.0)    | 10 (3.8)  |
| Cannabis          | 22 (8.52)  | 8 (3.1)    | 5 (1.9)     | 2 (0.8)   | 1 (0.48)     | 2 (0.8)   |
| Opium             | 2 (1.26)   | 1 (0.48)   | 1 (0.4)     | 1 (0.4)   | 0            | 0         |
| Minor Tranquilizers | 2 (0.87) | 1 (0.4)    | 1 (0.48)    | 1 (0.4)   | 0            | 0         |

The frequency of abuse of 71 current users of alcohol was further categorised, 25 (9.72%) were light users, 36 (14.00%) were moderate users, and 10 (3.89%) were heavy users. Out of 130 current users of tobacco, 3 (1.16%) were light users, 7 (2.72%) were moderate users and 120 (46.69%) were heavy users. There was no heavy user of cannabis. There was no heavy user of opium and minor tranquilizers too.

Table 3 shows reasons for taking drugs: common causes were out of curiosity, to keep awake or alert, to overcome boredom & to celebrate special occasions.

Table 3

| Reasons                        | Number | %    |
|--------------------------------|--------|------|
| Out of curiosity               | 82     | 31.9 |
| To keep awake or alert         | 60     | 23.3 |
| To overcome boredom            | 40     | 15.6 |
| To celebrate special occasions  | 40     | 15.6 |
| For the sake of company        | 35     | 13.6 |
| To induce sleep                | 32     | 13.6 |
| To kill time                   | 30     | 11.7 |
| To increase physical strength   | 30     | 11.7 |
| To get pleasure or kick        | 22     | 8.6  |
| For relief of tension          | 8      | 8.1  |

Discussion

In this report we have presented our findings with regards to the prevalence and pattern of drug abuse in non-student labour youth in Ludhiana. Results showed that tobacco was number one drug ever used by this group. Tobacco users were mostly heavy users, while alcohol users were mostly light and moderate users. In an earlier WHO sponsored multicentred study on drug abuse among non-student youth there were five study centres: Toronto, Mexico city, Islamabad, Penang and Chandigarh (Smart et al 1981). In Chandigarh centre six different samples were used: (a) a general population from urban area, (b) a general population from rural area (c) factory workers (d) rickshawpulleers (e) workers in labour colonies and (f) shop assistants. Only four drugs (cannabis, amphetamines, tranquilizers, and opium) were studied by Chandigarh centre. Among the ever users opium (3.6%) was most commonly used followed by cannabis (3.1%), tranquilizers (1.3%), and amphetamines (1.0%). Insignificant number of users of all drugs (4% or less had ever used them) were found in the general urban population and among shop assistants, and no users were discovered amongst labour colony workers. Opium was used by 4.3% of the rural population and 5.8% of the factory workers. However, rickshaw pullers were by the most frequent drug users. 15% had used cannabis, 7.5% amphetamines and 12.5% opium, but none had used tranquilizers. In general drug use was not reported to be recent or frequent among any of the sample studied. Contrary to the report from Chandigarh in our sample use of cannabis has been
more than that of opium. Similar have been findings in earlier studies (Sethi et al 1979 & Ponnudurai et al 1984).

In India a number of good studies have been done on drug abuse among school, college and university students. In student population Mohan et al (1978) reported that tobacco was most commonly reported substance followed by alcohol. Varma et al (1979) reported that next to alcohol, tobacco was the drug ever experienced by students. Surveys of drug abuse in rural area of North India revealed that opium being abused next to alcohol (Mohan et al 1977 & 1979).

In the present study we have taken the employed population. Does pattern of drug abuse differ in employed and unemployed non-student youth can be found out by an interesting study. Because of the size of the non-student youth population in developing countries it is important to know about their problems. Youth is an age at which many social, economic and family problems occur as young people seek to become established and achieve independence from their parents. Such problems are likely to be greater among non-students, who do not have support of schools and teachers or their parents, since they frequently move away from home. A United Nations Interregional seminar on "The Problems of Early School Leavers" (United Nations 1974), found that young people in developing countries may leave to enter the job market to help with the family business or farm. However, many leave because parents can no longer afford the education, other students leave because of cultural factors. With varied reasons for leaving school it is not surprising that non-students are exposed to variety of social and personal problems. In fact, the precise problems faced by all types of non-student youth are not well understood. Clearly there is a need for studies of these problems and to find solutions to them.

Acknowledgement

We are thankful to Dr. L.S. Chawla, Principal, Dayanand Medical College for his permission to publish this paper.

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