Substances Abuse Beliefs in Tehran University Students among Students of the University of Tehran

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Abstract

Introduction: Substances abuse is an important public health concern with social, economic and health consequences. This study aim was to investigate the self-reported beliefs about substance abuse among undergraduate students of the University of Tehran.

Methods: This is an analytical and cross-sectional study which performed in 300 students who entered into the University of Tehran on October 2011.

A self-made questionnaire which containing 14 demographic questions (age, gender, height, weight, level of education and the faculty, parents’ education, and employment status), 4 questions about the behavior of substance abuse(SA) experience, 2 essay questions about the benefits and harms, as well as complications and risks of SA.

Results: 56% of the 300 students (n=168) were female and 44% (n=132) were male; the mean of participants age was 23.2 ± 5.1 years old. Most of them (109 Ss- 36.33%) mentioned that the most important effect of Substances is causing various physical and mental disorders, as well as disorders in various organs of their body. The second most important effect was social harms. Several students had stressed the importance of education.

Conclusion: Despite the beliefs in accordance with the harms of substance abuse, the students pointed to the substances' calming effect and reducing stress. Therefore, further education must be provided for this group in order to reduce the reinforcing beliefs of substance abuse.

Keywords: Substance abuse, Students, Perception.

Introduction

Substance abuse or opium phrase meaning was the use (Eating, inhalation or injection) of one or more substances leading to important medical injury or distress. The DSM-V identified ten distinct groups of drugs that can lead to substance use disorders. These classes include: sedatives, hypnotics, anxiolytics, stimulants, alcohol, caffeine, cannabis, hallucinogens, inhalants, opioids, and other or uncertainty substances (1).

Substance abuse is an important public health concern with social, economic and health consequences. (2, 3). In many countries a significant increase in substance abuse has been observed (4, 5).

The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) in United States(USA reported that at least three out of four students (75.6 %) have consummated one or more addictive substances. Because of social, religious, cultural and economical reasons, consumption of addictive substances in Iran is unlike from other countries especially western countries and using opium is more frequent.(6) Mohammad poor Asl and et al, reported a high prevalence of addiction in the Iranian adult population, but a low prevalence among the adolescents. Prevalence of substance abuse was 1.4% (95% CI: 1.1–1.7) (7).

According to the report of Iran Drug Control Headquarter, that founded presence of 1.2-2 million opium abusers in Iran thus,2 and 11 million were engaged with the addiction complications of themselves or their family associates.(8)

In spite of this, Momtazi, Rawson R. study reported that substance abuse is a common problem among Iranian high school students (Life time rates of opiate use – mostly opium – was between 1.2 and 8.6% in different parts of the country(; thus, it is essential to design and implement plans to educate this highly-at-risk population. (9)

Studies have revealed that positive perceptions about substance abuse increases the risk of using it among students.

Methods

This is an analytical and cross-sectional study. The population consisted of all the students who entered the University of Tehran in October 2011. A stratified sampling method was used in terms of the level of education and major. Students at the University of Tehran are mainly divided into three majors: Engineering, Basic Sciences and
Humanities. As such, they have been categorized according to major, level of education and gender, and then the samples were selected proportional to the size of each category. Inclusion criteria included: 2011-2012 incoming students, ages of 18-39 years old, consent to be a part of the study, absence of disability and chronic illnesses. Exclusion criteria included students older than forty years and not consenting to participate in the study.

Tools:
A self-made questionnaire containing 14 demographic questions (age, gender, height, weight, level of education and the faculty, parents’ education, and employment status), 4 questions about the behavior of substance abuse experience, 2 essay questions about the benefits and harms, as well as complications and risks of substance abuse.

The assay questions were designed based on an exploratory study on planned behavior questionnaire which has been already used in the field of family planning in Iran(11). In order to check for reliability, the experts have been asked for their opinions.

Statistical analysis
Content analysis was used to analyze descriptive data. Every statement of the participants was reviewed and encoded, then categorized and summarized. Strategies that were used to validate the results included: listening to and reading the interviews repeatedly, long interviews and using colleagues’ opinions (review by supervisors). Attaining referrals and written consents were the ethical considerations of this study.

Results
The results show that 56% (n =168) of participants were female and 44% (n=132) were male; the mean of the participants age was 23.2 ± 5.1 years. 90.66% were single and 9.33% married. 19.33% were employed and 80.66% unemployed; 39.60% were Tehran natives and 60.33% were non-native. 98.8% had never used snus. 1.3% had been unemployed; 39.60% were Tehran natives and 60.33% were married. 19.33% were employed and 80.66% female and 44% (n=132) were male; the mean of the par-

anabolic steroids. 0.5% took psychoactive substance without a prescription. 4.9% of them were sometimes offered substance.

Among them, 23 Ss (7.66%) regarded tolerance of distress (1%), pain relief (4.66%) and Euphoria (0.33%) as benefits of substance use. 1.66% generally mentioned that it has some benefits. One student noted, "Opium can be a medicine if one does not take in extreme," and another stated, "Opium has been effective for very old patients with heart problems."

279 Ss (93%) reported that substance can do harm. Most of them (109 Ss- 36.33%) mentioned that the most important effect of substance is causing various physical and mental diseases, as well as disorders in various organs of the body. The second most important effect was social harms. Several students had stressed the importance of education. One of them in particular stated, “So far as they have taught us about the harms, we would be ok; otherwise we would be at a greater risk.” Some believed that substance abuse is harmful but “not as much as they are advertising against it.” The students’ responses about the harms of substance abuse are shown in table 1 in 4 categories of addiction, mental and physical disorders, social harms, and religious and cultural issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addiction</th>
<th>12Ss (4%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious and Cultural issues</td>
<td>4Ss (1.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social harms</td>
<td>32Ss (10.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption in Society</td>
<td>2Ss (0.66%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unethical behaviors</td>
<td>2Ss (0.66%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irresponsibility</td>
<td>1Ss (0.33%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin to get ruined</td>
<td>3Ss (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family dysfunctions</td>
<td>11Ss (3.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and mental disorders</td>
<td>81Ss (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical ailments</td>
<td>109Ss (36.33%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The loss of intellectual</td>
<td>12Ss (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Disorders</td>
<td>26Ss (8.66%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular Disorders</td>
<td>7Ss (3.33%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renal Disorders</td>
<td>2Ss (0.66%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distraction</td>
<td>1Ss (0.33%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eyesight</td>
<td>1Ss (0.33%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>1Ss (0.33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The black lips 1Ss (0.33%)

Table 1- Problems of substance abuse according to perceptions of students
Discussion
The study aimed to examine the students’ beliefs about the positive and negative effects of substance.

The most used substance was steroid drugs (2.1%), and then hashish (2%), opium (1.3%), snus (1.2%), ecstasy pills (0.05%), and psychoactive drugs (0.05%), respectively.

Overall, 4.6% of the students had experienced substance abuse. This statistics reports a lesser percentage than some other similar studies (12-14), which is probably due to selecting a different sample of study. They all were accepted at Tehran University and had higher IQ and spend most of their time studying and therefore less risky behavior were looking for.

Based on this statistics and other studies, there is a lesser rate of substance abuse in Iran, which can be accounted for certain legal, religious or cultural issues and the parents’ strict treatment of their children. (15)

Contrary to some other studies, age, gender, marital status and the area of residence had no significant difference between the users and non-users of substance (12, 13, 16) . According to the results of this study, the amount of substance abuse among men, older people, people living on their own as compared to living in a dorm or a parental house, as well as married people was reported as higher, yet there was no significant relation.

The results revealed that in students’ opinion, physical ailments, social problems, and mental disorders were the most harmful consequences of substance abuse.

As for the benefits of substance abuse, students emphasized tolerating stress, alleviating pains and causing a sense of euphoria. In Ahmad et al. study, seeking pleasure and tolerating stress were stated as the most common reasons for substance abuse. (17)

In Yekkehfallah et al. study, a misconception about the joyous effects of substance abuse, especially ecstasy, encouragement from friends especially of the opposite sex, and inability to refuse friends’ offers have been reported. (18)

In Dehghani et al. study, the most important motivations toward substance were listed as entertainment, pleasure seeking, endurance of difficulties of life, going with the flow, and curiosity. (19)

In addition to the individual beliefs various factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption or other substances, risky sexual behaviors, the strength of family, marital status, and being male have an effect on substance abuse. (12, 13, 16)

With regard to these factors, certain written plans must be implemented in order to educate society, and in particular the students, about different kinds of opioid and non-opioid substance, their harms, and problem-solving skills such as the skill to say no; furthermore, facilities for marriage, work, entertainment and healthy exercise must be provided.

Reinforcing religious beliefs is one of the most important effective factors in preventing substance abuse. Another interesting point is the availability of substances and legal prohibitions into which the relevant agencies should look. (12)

Also, since this was a qualitative study on the students’ beliefs, self-report of smoking behavior and the likelihood of a favorable response from the community were among the limitations of the study. A further study is suggested to be conducted in this field at the end of these students’ education.

Conclusion
Despite the beliefs in accordance with the harms of substance abuse, a number of students pointed to the substances’ calming effect and reducing stress. Therefore, further education must be provided for this group in order to reduce the reinforcing beliefs of substance abuse.

References