

University Students' Views Regarding Reasons for Drug Abuse Among Youths

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Dear Editor,

In recent years, the prevalence of drug abuse has increased throughout the world. On an annual basis, drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and so on cause the deaths of 200,000 people worldwide; drug abuse also leads to the disintegration of families (1). Furthermore, it imposes heavy economic and social costs through its effects on human health and increased crime and death in community; thus, it has become a major threat to society (2). Although massive resources are dedicated to preventing the spread of drug abuse, it is common in the community regardless of people's age, economic status, education level, race or ethnicity, and location. Moreover, young people tend to be most at risk for drug abuse (3).

As a developing country, Iran is currently experiencing major changes at different economic and cultural levels. Along with all these changes, the population is growing, and the number of young people is increasing. Alarm bells are going off as new studies show the high prevalence of addiction and risky behaviors in the Iranian youth population (4). Drug abuse among youths increases the risk of problems related to their well-being and health, resulting in an increased risk of injury and death from interpersonal violence, road accidents, risky sexual behaviors, unintended pregnancy, diseases such as acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), and academic problems. Therefore, a survey to determine the causes of drug abuse among youths and how to prevent them is crucial (5). Preventive science suggests that negative health outcomes resulting from substance abuse can be prevented by reducing risk factors and enhancing protective factors (6). Prevention of substance abuse among adolescents requires awareness of characteristics that place youth at risk and targeting risk factors that are modifiable. Many studies have attempted to identify risk factors associated with adolescent drug and alcohol usage (7).

This investigation was a cross-sectional study with a sample of 362 university students who were selected using self-weighted stratified random sampling at the Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Northwest Iran. The aim of the research was to evaluate the causes of drug abuse among youth according to students' views. The information collection tool was a questionnaire. Research data were analyzed using the SPSS 19 software program, employing the descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results showed that the mean age of the participants for both sexes was 20.92 ± 1.8 , with a range of 18 - 33.

According to the subjects' views, individual and family factors were the most important factors of drug abuse compared to social, pharmacological, and physiological ones. Among effective individual factors, strategies for emotional stress, loneliness and anxiety, curiosity, and rapid irritability were emphasized by the students. Some studies have confirmed the relationship between individual factors like depressive mood and substance use (8). The students also perceived that parental misuse of drugs and parental disagreements, as family factors, had a major role in promoting drug abuse among youths. The results of one study by Velleman et al. confirmed this finding in the present research (9). In addition to some individual and family factors, participants emphasized the impact of peers (as a social factor) in increasing the likelihood of drug abuse among youths. The results of Brook et al.'s study also showed that peer influences plays an important role in illegal drug use among South African adolescents, which is in accordance with our study findings (10).

In sum, it is essential to consider the factors described above when designing educational and counseling interventions to prevent drug abuse in the population, particularly among adolescents and youths. It is recommended to focus on changing the knowledge and attitudes of

youths about the adverse effects of drug abuse on their health using appropriate educational and counseling programs.

Footnotes

Authors' Contribution:Alireza Didarloo had a major role in the following areas: study concept and design; acquisition of data; analysis and interpretation of data; drafting of the manuscript, critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content; statistical analysis; administrative, technical, and material support; study supervision. Reza Pourali has participated in the following parts of the research: study concept and design; acquisition of data.

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