

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE AMONG INTERNEES

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SUMMARY

The study was designed to assess the various factors pertaining to alcohol and drug abuse among internees with the help of the youth survey questionnaire developed by the WHO. 22.67% of the males indulged in alcohol abuse atleast once a month. Correspondingly cannabis was abused by 9.33% of the boys which is the most commonly abused drug of addiction, followed by sedatives and tranquilizers.

The commonest explanation offered for the non medical drug abuse were, to be sociable, for enjoyment, curiosity and relief of psychological stress. Friends have been the main source of introduction. Most of them reported that it was easy to obtain the drugs like marijuana and amphetamines.

Though India has traditionally been described as an abstinent culture, in the recent past we find that it is by no means so. On the contrary, the excessive abusers pose difficult problems for themselves, for quite a number of families, for industrial and other establishments and the society. The increasing magnitude of this problem in our society has led the public and scientific attention to be focussed on it, though it can not be equated to the studies conducted in the West. The present study was aimed at to assess the prevalence, frequency and allied factors pertaining to alcohol and drug abuse among a batch of internees attached to a teaching hospital in the city of Madras. Also, it was directed towards assessment of the operational aspect of the "Youth survey questionnaire".

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A batch of internees (Feb. 1982 batch) numbering 116, working in the Madras Medical College and Govt. General Hospital, Madras were selected for the study. The youth survey ques-

tionnaire developed by the W. H. O. in co-operation with the United Nations fund for drug abuse control (Smart *et al.*, 1980) was used for his purpose. The questions elicit informations on, a few demographic characteristics, age of first intake, frequency of drug abuse, reasons for non medical drug use, source of introduction and allied informations pertaining to 13 types of drugs including alcohol and tobacco.

Each internee was supplied with a printed questionnaire by two of their colleagues who were also included in the study team. They were specifically instructed to desist from writing their names in order to ensure strict anonymity and confidentiality. The questionnaires were collected either on the spot or a little later by the same team for transmission to the file maintained for the purpose. The study was conducted from September to November 1982. The subjective responses thus obtained from 116 internees were analysed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 116 (M—75, F—41),

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58(73.33%) males have tasted alcohol atleast once and it is equally so for tobacco (72.00%). On the other hand 21.95% of the females have resorted to liquor atleast once and 14.63% for tobacco. Further our findings point out that 20 (26.67%) boys had resorted to cannabis at some time or the other whereas 28 (37.33%) boys had taken tranquilizers and sedatives. So did one girl with cannabis and 4(9.76%) girls with tranquilizers and sedatives (Table I). However 13.33% of the men and

TABLE I *Drugs used atleast once*

Drugs	N=75	N=41
	Male	Female
Tobacco	54 (72.00)	6 (14.63)
Alcohol	58 (77.33)	9 (21.95)
Cannabis	20 (26.67)	1 (2.44)
Cocaine	1 (1.33)	..
Amphetamine	8 (10.67)	1 (2.44)
Hallucinogen	9 (12.00)	..
Glue, Aerosol spray Gases	2 (2.67)	..
Tranquilizers	16 (21.33)	1 (2.44)
Sedatives	12 (16.00)	3 (7.32)
Opium	3 (4.00)	..
Heroin	2 (2.67)	..
Other opiates (Methadone, Morphine etc.)	2 (2.67)	..

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

73.17% of the ladies had taken neither alcohol nor any of the drugs even once (Table II). The first indulgence in vast majority of them had been at or above the age of 19 Yrs. Tobacco-28 (46.66%), Alcohol-45 (60.16%), Cannabis-18 (85.71%), Sedatives-12 (80%).

Two boys (3.45%) had reported that they had been taking alcohol on

TABLE II *Non-abusers*

	Male N=75	Female N=41
Never abused any of the drugs	16 (21.33)	32 (78.05)
Neither abused alcohol nor any of the drugs	10 (13.33)	30 (73.17)

Figures in Parenthesis indicate percentage.

more than 20 days during the month prior to the study and so was one boy (5%) on cannabis. It is possible that this group could turn out to be addicts. Alcoholic consumption for 6-19 days was resorted to by 5 (8.62%) boys and also by one (11.11%) girl. So was with 2 (10%) boys on cannabis. For the consumption of alcohol for 1-5 days during the month prior to the study was seen in 10 (17.24%) males and 2 (22.22%) girls. Likewise cannabis was chosen by 4 (20%) males and sedatives and tranquilizers by 5.

Other drugs taken by the boys on not more than a few days are hallucinogens, glue/gases, heroin, opium and its derivatives.

Sethi and Manchanda (1977) have adopted the criteria for abuse as indulgence with a frequency of atleast once a month without medical prescription. When this criteria was applied on the whole 17 (22.67%) boys could be labelled as alcohol abusers. Correspondingly cannabis was abused by 7 (9.33%) boys which is the most abused among the drugs and the next most abused drugs were sedatives and tranquilizers. In a survey conducted by Dube and Handa (1971) in and around Agra, 2% of the population studied was found to have problems of drug abuse and out of them 60% abused alcohol.

When an attempt was made to

compare the parental status of the monthly abusers of alcohol and drugs and others the authors could not draw any significant conclusion (Table III).

TABLE III Comparison of monthly abusers with others in relation to their parental education

	Drugs		Alcohol	
	Monthly Abusers (N=35)	Others (N=81)	Monthly Abusers (N=20)	Others (N=96)
<i>Father</i>				
No formal schooling	1	—	1	—
Primary	1	5	—	6
Secondary or High School	6	5	3	8
University or other postgraduate	26	70	15	81
Not known	1	1	1	1
	X ² =6.28, N. S.		X ² =8.63, N. S.	
<i>Mother</i>				
No formal schooling	1	—	1	—
Primary	2	7	—	9
Secondary or High School	18	38	8	48
University or other post-graduation	13	35	10	38
Not Known	1	1	1	1
	X ² =4.11, N. S.		X ² =9.18, N. S.	

The commonest explanations for the non medical drug use, offered by the

males were enjoyment (25.33%), to be sociable (20%), and curiosity (18.67%). To be sociable, enjoyment, curiosity and relief of psychological stress were some of the explanations offered by the girls. Curiosity was also the usual offered reasons according to Varma *et al.* (1977) (Table IV).

TABLE IV Reasons for nonmedical drug use

Reasons	Male (N=75)	Female (N=41)
Religious Custom	—	—
To be accepted by others	—	—
To be sociable	15 (20.00)	2 (4.88)
Enjoyment	19 (25.33)	1 (2.44)
Enhancement of Sex	1 (1.33)	—
Curiosity	14 (18.67)	1 (2.44)
Treatment of Health Disorder	(1.33)	—
Relief of Psychological Stress	3 (4.00)	1 (2.44)
Relief of Cold Hunger or Fatigue	1 (1.33)	—
Not Known	29 (38.67)	36 (87.80)

Figures in Parenthesis indicate percentage.

Most of the boys and girls had expressed that they would have confessed if they had abused drugs (M—85.33%, F—36.59%) (Table VI).

TABLE VII. Perceived

Drug	Probably impossible		Very difficult	
	M	F	M	F
Marijuana	2(2.66)	3(7.32)	4(5.33)	6(14.63)
Amphetamines and other stimulants	4(5.33)	3(7.32)	2(2.66)	6(14.63)

Figures in Parenthesis indicate percentage.

Though marijuana use has been disapproved by most of the girls and boys, quite a number of boys do not disapprove of the occasional use of marijuana (18.67%).

It has been revealed by most of the males that it is rather easy to get the drugs like marijuana and amphetamine (Table VII). Personality of the drug abusers is equally ambitious and antisocial (Table VIII). And friends have been the main source of introduction both for the males (56%) and females (7.32%) (Table V).

TABLE V *Source of introduction*

Sources	Male (N=75)	Female (N=41)
Family	—	1 (2.44)
Casual Acquaintance	2 (2.67)	—
Friends	42 (56.00)	3 (7.32)
Drug Pusher	1 (1.33)	—
Doctor	1 (1.33)	—
Other Health Workers	—	—
Pharmacist or Druggist	—	—
Others	1 (1.33)	—
Not known	28 (37.33)	37 (90.24)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

availability of the drug

Fairly difficult		Fairly easy		Very easy		Not known	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
5(6.66)	2(4.88)	27(36.00)	3(7.32)	12(16.00)	1(2.44)	25(33.30)	26(63.41)
6(8.00)	3(7.32)	25(33.33)	—	16(21.33)	2(4.88)	22(29.26)	27(65.88)

TABLE VI *Confession if they had used
(cannabis, opium or heroin)*

(Cannabis, opium or Heroin)

Confession	Male (N=75)	Female (N=41)
No	7 (9.33)	6 (14.63)
Not sure	4(5.33)	1 (2.44)
Yes	64 (85.33)	15 (36.59)
Not known	—	19 (46.34)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

The results of the data generated, indicate the overwhelming usefulness of this W. H. O. questionnaire, though incorporation of the local commercial names of the drugs and a few more details like the frequency of tobacco intake, motivating factors for the current usage etc., may yield additional information. Further, to assess the availability, apart from Marijuana, amphetamine and other stimulants, other drugs of addition could also have been included. In addition incorporation of the operational definitions for the Personality types of the drug abusers would enlighten the respondents.

TABLE VIII *Opinion about personality of drug users*

	Ambitious	Antisocial
a) Much less than average	14 (12.07)	11 (9.48)
b) Less than average	11 (9.48)	8(8.90)
c) About average	18 (15.52)	15 (12.93)
d) More than average	15 (12.93)	14 (12.07)
e) Much more than average	1 (0.86)	9 (7.76)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

CONCLUSION

About one fourth of the males had been on liquor more than once a month. Cannabis is the choicest of all the drugs for our drug abusing internees, followed by sedatives and tranquilizers. In view of the easy availability of the drugs like marijuana and amphetamine eliminating the source of supply will be one of the fruitful

methods to prevent the growing menace of alcohol and drug abuse.

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