

Prevalence of Substance Abuse among Students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran

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Original Article

Abstract

Background: The present study aimed to evaluate the prevalence of substance abuse among students of selected schools of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional study among students in five schools of Tehran University of Medical Sciences in 2014. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire which was designed by the researcher. Questionnaires were distributed among participants selected using stratified random sampling. A total of 422 questionnaires were filled and analyzed.

Findings: In total, 422 students aged 19 to 32 years participated in this study among which 233 were women (55.2%) and 187 were men (44.3%). The highest prevalence belonged to smoking (26.3%), alcohol (19.9%), and hookah (14.9%) use, respectively. The results showed that 311 participants (73.7%) had never smoked a cigarette, 111 (26.3%) had smoked at least once, and 84 students (19.9%) had consumed alcoholic drinks at least once in their lifetime. There was no meaningful difference in smoking and alcohol use in terms of students' gender. Mother's educational level ($P = 0.006$) and financial income ($P = 0.049$) had significant effect on alcohol consumption.

Conclusion: In this study, it was found that gender differences have reduced in cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption as seen in western countries, which should be taken into consideration. The prevalence of alcohol consumption was found to be higher compared to other similar studies conducted in Iran which is significant.

Keywords: Students; Substance abuse; Prevalence; Iran

Citation: Mozafarinia R, Assarian M, Ziaaddini A. **Prevalence of Substance Abuse among Students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran.** *Addict Health* 2017; 9(2): 103-9.

Received: 09.11.2016

Accepted: 22.01.2017

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Introduction

Substance abuse and addiction is one of the most important health, social, and political problems in the world.¹ The prevalence of substance abuse is at its highest among youth; thus, university students are more vulnerable to this issue.² Students' mental health is one of the most challenging concerns for Iranian decision makers. However, only a few researches have been conducted in this field.³

Substance abuse is a nonadoptive model of substance use, which causes many issues and has harmful outcomes. It has a chain of psychological and behavioral expressions, it is also an important social hazard, which not only places the health of the individual and population at risk, but also brings around ethical and mental problems.⁴ Substance abuse has an impact on increasing antisocial behavior, behavior and psychological disorders, as well as infectious diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis.² Iran has a large youth population, and thus, major problems in addiction.² There has been a high increase in cigarettes, alcohol, and opiate abuse especially in youths.² The exact prevalence of substance abuse among medical sciences students is unknown. Previous studies showed 20% to 40% prevalence of substance abuse.^{1,5}

The results of a study conducted by Kordmirza et al. in 2003 in the University of Tehran, Iran, showed that the prevalence of substance abuse was 16.3%, 8.8%, 6.0%, and 5.1% in art, humanities, engineering, and medical sciences students.⁶ In the study by Zarrabi et al. in the 2005-2006 academic year in Guilan University of Medical Sciences, Iran, 30.1% of students had a history of substance use at least once during their lives. Cigarette (26.36%), alcohol (17.04%), and opium (3.86%) were the most prevalently used substances.⁷ Another study conducted by Taremian et al. in the 2005-2006 academic year showed a relatively high prevalence of use of soft drugs [water pipe 34%, cigarette 24%, and alcohol 17%], and low prevalence of hard drugs [opium 2.3%, hashish 2.2%, and ecstasy 0.7%] use among students of six different universities in Tehran, Iran.³ They also found lower rates of drug use among female students in comparison to male students for all drugs.³ A study in 2013 among dormitory students of Shahid Beheshti University

of Medical Sciences, Iran, revealed that the prevalence of substance abuse among students was 15.4%, and the highest frequencies belonged to cigarette use (47.4%) followed by hookah use (42.9%).⁴ Parties and gatherings with friends were common excuses for substance abuse (47.5%).⁴

Recent studies in Iran showed that the prevalence of abuse of drugs such as tramadol, Ritalin, pethidine, and morphine is significant.³ Studies demonstrated that hookah and cigarette smoking are the most frequently used drugs.^{2-4,8-10} Moreover, the prevalence of alcohol consumption was one of the top three in various studies.^{2,3,7-9,11} Multiple studies conducted in Iran have shown a significantly higher prevalence of substance abuse in men in comparison to women.^{2-4,8-10,12-15}

Very few researches have directly studied substance abuse among students in Iran to this date. Increasing prevalence of substance use in student communities, availability of lab-made substances such as crystal meth and ecstasy, lack of reliable data related to substance abuse, and its consequences in students' lives are all indicative of the necessity of finding possible solutions and early preventive interventions.³ This study aimed to provide prime information on substance use and recent trends and study the relationship between demographic variables and cigarette smoking/alcohol consumption among students of Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Iran.

Methods

This was a cross-sectional study among students in five schools of Tehran University of Medical Sciences with an entrance academic year between September 2012 and 2014. The study population consisted of 2260 students and the sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table as a total of 330 students. A random sample from each school was engaged in a number proportionate to the stratum's size when compared to the population. These subsets of the strata were then pooled to form a random sample. Questionnaires were distributed among the participants who were selected using stratified random sampling. A total of 500 questionnaires were filled, 422 of which could be analyzed.

The research protocol was approved by the ethics committee and students were included if only they provided consent for participation in the study. They were assured of the