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*Intoxicant use by school children.
Danger scale and prevention possibilities*

Since the end of the 90s there has been observed a more frequent use of psychoactive substances among teenagers. From 1992 to 2003 the number of students taking drugs increased nearly by five times (from 5 to 24%). This phenomenon has been recorded both by European as well as Polish researchers. Every year the police statistics note an increase in the number of committed offences which violate the regulations of "The Act on Drug Addiction Prevention". It reflects the scale of the phenomenon. In 2002, 36,178 drug offences were noted (increase by 23.8%) including offences committed by juvenile delinquents – 7,358 (an increase by 10.1%). Among juvenile delinquents 93.1 % were school children (10). What is alarming is the fact that the most frequent drug offences committed by teenagers is providing intoxicants and encouraging to use them in order to obtain financial benefit, as well as possessing intoxicants. A considerable number of secured drugs is also the proof of the danger scale. This phenomenon is still dynamically rising. Among teenage circles using drugs as the way of spending free time, is fashionable and is still gaining in popularity. The authors of the report "Neuroscience of Psychoactive Substance Use and Dependence" stress the fact that dependence on psychoactive substances is connected with many factors: psychological and social, environmental, biological and genetic. The factors are very complex and that is why comprehensive approach to prevention and treatment is required. C e k i e r a (3) presents social factors of drug use such as broken home, improper family relations, lack of religious practices, systematic use of tranquillizers by parents, parents cigarette smoking, alcohol abuse by parents, lack of ambitions connected with life purposes and curiosity, boredom, influence of peer groups, escape from outside problems, escape from inner problems, regular cigarette smoking. Dysfunctional family is a particularly important factor. D i m o f f and C a r p e r (4) and B r o o k (2) think that conflicts at home are the main cause of adolescent drug taking. The family situation is still considered to be one of the principal reasons for taking psychoactive substances by children and the youth (7). Other factors which might create the will to daze are failures at school. A child with school failures has a small possibility of compensation of suffered failures in a socially approved way. The endangered self-esteem is, therefore, frequently defended by socially unacceptable means (5).

An easier access to intoxicants is being observed (the development of dealer network) as well as greater variety and the "appeal" of the assortment (11, 12). In the face of a considerable danger of drug abuse, prevention and therapy matters are of current and profound importance. EU Strategy of Drug Abuse Prevention focuses on currently most dangerous problems such as: continuously high level of drug abuse especially among school children, drug dealing, damage to the society caused by drug-related crime, health problems as well as social expulsion of addicts (1, 6).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The purpose of the study is to identify the scale of danger, taking intoxicants by young people in the specific area. Research was carried out in 2004 among 1,780 post-gymnasium second form students in the Świętokrzyski region. 610 students of grammar schools, 580 students of secondary

vocational schools and 590 students of other lower-level vocational schools. The study covers only some of the drug-related problems in the above mentioned schools, such as: the possibility of obtaining psychoactive substances, places where they can be acquired, reasons for taking drugs by young people, kinds of intoxicants chosen by the youth. Drug prevention has been discussed against the background of the above mentioned matters.

RESULTS

As it was previously said, the analysis of only some of the addiction problems has been carried out. The results are presented in the form of tables and figures. The analysis began with the accessibility of drugs. In the research young people were asked about drugs availability. The biggest chance of obtaining them is from their friends at school (Fig.1). This way of getting drugs is indicated by over 40% of respondents – more boys than girls. The next sources are drug dealers and friends from outside the school (over 24%). This way of obtaining drugs is chosen more frequently by boys than girls. Over 30% of the students questioned in vocational schools point friends from outside the schools, and those attending lower-level vocational schools indicate dealers.

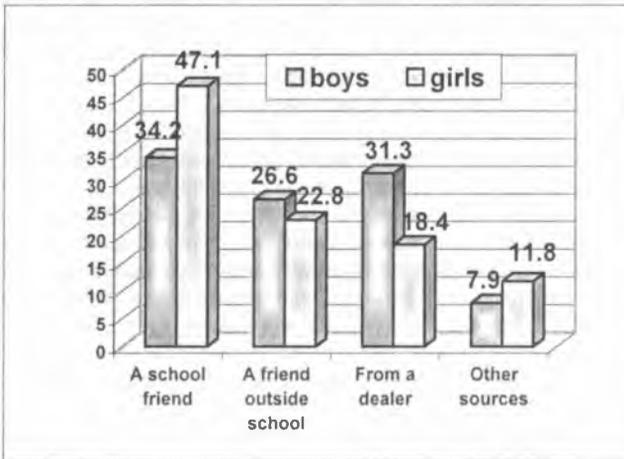


Fig. 1. Possibilities of drug access by boys and girls

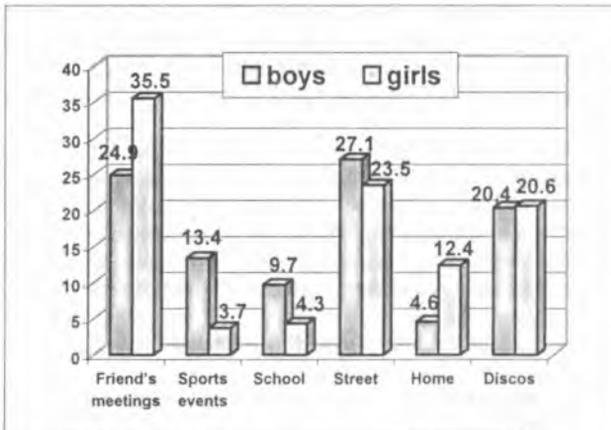


Fig. 2. Places of using intoxicants

Intoxicants are most often taken during social meetings. This place is most often chosen by students of grammar schools and technical colleges. Students of vocational schools indicate "street". These are usually squares where they meet. The place where drugs can be obtained is a disco. Some percentage of students indicate also sports events, school and home (Fig. 2). Young people, irrespective of a school type, choose marijuana – 31.5%, amphetamine – 27.7%, cocaine – 9.6%. At similar percentage level are other substances (LSD and other hallucinogens, opiates, ecstasy and medicines) (Fig. 3).

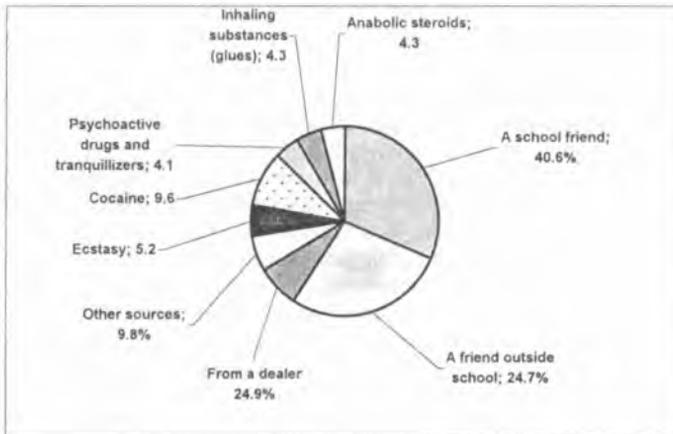


Fig. 3. Types of substances used by the youths questioned

The main reason for taking drugs, according to young people are: family conflicts (this is most often indicated by vocational schools students), trend (students of grammar schools), stress release. Over 30% of students from vocational schools indicate "peer pressure" (Fig. 4).

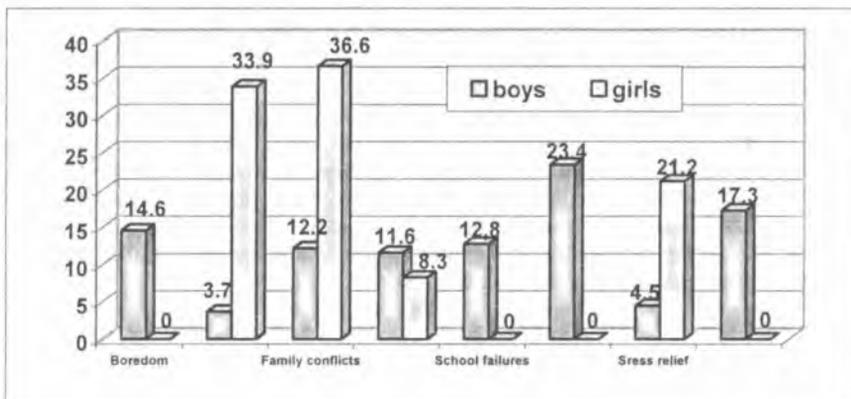


Fig. 4. The main reasons for using intoxicants

DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of widespread drug abuse has been reported in both European and Polish research. The study "Neuroscience of Psychoactive Substance Use and Dependence" analyses the problem of addiction to psychoactive substances from the point of view of the latest scientific

developments in the brain functions as well as nervous system. The report is the result of a three-year research project co-ordinated by WHO. It was initiated at the Neuroscience Conference held in 2000 in New Orleans. The authors of the report emphasise that addiction to psychoactive substances is determined by many factors: psychologically-social, environmental, biological and genetic ones, which requires a comprehensive attitude to the behavioural and pharmacological treatment. Latest discoveries in the research into the nervous system describe such phenomena as compulsive behaviour, tolerance, craving and withdrawal as well as the notion of addiction itself.

One of the ways of preventing children and teenagers from expanding drug addiction is broad prophylaxis. The European Union countries have introduced various forms of prophylaxis and information programmes, which inform children and youths about the results of indulging too freely in drugs. It is a fact that 15–16-year-olds declare that they have come into contact with so-called “hard” drugs at least once (9). Effectiveness of drug delinquency prevention depends on finances, efficient law instruments and the sense of commitment of all departments, and above all on the information flow. Specificity of common drug delinquency, resulting from the absence of typical “perpetrators” and “victims”, makes it necessary to tighten the cooperation of all state organs and institutions involved. It can be presently observed that the police are winning more and more allies both among local authorities and non-governmental organizations in the struggle against drug trafficking and addiction. It can be seen in mutual organization of regional programs or strategies of drug prevention. Every subject realizing difficult tasks of drug prevention in its specialistic range and having support of its partners can count on positive effects.

The authors of the International Report of International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) for the year 2003, which was published on 3rd March 2004 in Vienna, declare for employing means of prevention such as interventionist actions on a level of primary school and properly directed interventions of the police, concentrated on definite problems. Prevention means should include trainings for education institutions personnel, law court employees, parents, inhabitants and people who work with youths. A complex list of recommendations advised by INCB has been created in order to help local communities to deal with the problem. The list includes: creation of a local community which will not be in favour of drug dealers and traffickers; support for local actions aiming at creating work opportunities and providing with legal income sources; support for educational programs directed at the social margin groups; integrated and properly directed interventionist actions in risk groups; information exchange between various agencies; interventionist actions in the area of restorative justice based on local communities, undertaken by people representing different social environments and finally interventionist actions taking a question of sex, young age or minority affiliation into consideration. INCB also notices that all programs should be of long term character so they could bring the desired result. If we want to solve problems arising from drug addiction we need to deal with the reasons for excluding and rejecting young people into the groups for drugs social margin. It is worth then to invest in their life quality, frame of mind, in particular via sport and training programs. A very important task is to support the struggle against the demand for drugs with the preventive education. “Education can acquaint youths with real effects of using intoxicants, it can also help them avoid or cure “soul diseases”, it can make their way in society, it can inculcate them with ethical knowledge and attitude, which will strengthen their characters and let control their fate” (8).

CONCLUSIONS

1. Accessibility of psychoactive substances and their popularity among children and youths are increasing.
2. The students who have been questioned most often obtain their supplies of psychoactive substances from their school fellows at school they attend. These are girls rather than boys who more frequently get their supplies this way, in particular in grammar schools. Boys who attend technical schools obtain drugs from dealers.

3. As the main reason for taking drugs the youths who have been questioned have indicated in the same order: fashion, family conflicts and a way to relieve stresses. The girls from technical schools also imply that "group pressure" is one of the reasons for taking drugs.

4. Psychoactive substances which are most frequently used by youths, regardless of the school type, are: marijuana (31.5%) and amphetamine (27.7%). 9.6% of the questioned claim it is cocaine. Girls more often take tranquillizers, boys marijuana.

5. Places where youths most often obtain their drug supplies are in the order: social contacts, street and discotheque. It is the same order of places as for taking psychoactive substances.

6. There is an urgent need to introduce prophylactic programs aimed at premature educational intervention (before initiation appears) typical of the drug problem and also non-specific prophylaxis referring to every problem behaviour. It seems fundamental to elaborate local prevention strategies aimed at addiction problems incorporating, except for school, many local institutions into it. The influence will be thus of integral character.

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SUMMARY

The purpose of the study is to identify the danger scale of intoxicants use among teenagers in the specified area. The research was conducted in 2004 among 1,780 secondary school children (students of the 2nd year) from the Świętokrzyskie region. 610 secondary school students, 580 technical college students and 590 vocational school students were tested. Due to limited space the study focuses only on some problems connected with drug addiction among teenagers from tested schools such as possibilities to obtain access to psychoactive drugs, places where drugs are available, the causes of adolescent drug use, types of psychoactive drugs used by teenagers. Taking this into account the issues of prevention were discussed. There is a necessity to undertake actions

which aim at prevention of drug addiction among children and teenagers by introducing more efficient preventive programmes at schools and in the local environment because availability and popularity of psychoactive substances among children and teenagers increases systematically.

Używanie substancji odurzających przez młodzież szkolną. Skala zagrożenia i możliwości przeciwdziałania

Celem pracy jest analiza funkcjonującego systemu profilaktyki uzależnień w szkole i środowisku lokalnym i rozpoznanie skali zagrożenia używaniem substancji odurzających przez młodzież. Opracowanie przygotowano na podstawie badań 400 uczniów szkół ponadgimnazjalnych z Regionu Świętokrzyskiego. Omówiono społeczne skutki uzależnień narkotykowych dzieci i młodzieży oraz działania profilaktyczne podejmowane w tym zakresie. Na przykładzie rozmiarów uzależnień w Polsce poszczególnych województwach w latach 2001–2002 omówiono zostały skutki społeczne. W końcowej części poruszone zostały zagadnienia profilaktyki uzależnień narkotykowych. Wnioski sprowadzają się do konieczności podjęcia oddziaływań, zmierzających do przeciwdziałania uzależnieniom dzieci i młodzieży poprzez wprowadzanie w szkołach i w środowiskach lokalnych bardziej skutecznych programów profilaktycznych. Zarówno pedagodzy, jak i uczniowie krytycznie oceniają działalność profilaktyczną szkoły, postulując konieczność licznych zmian. Budowanie programu wychowawczego szkoły, w którego ramach planuje się działania profilaktyczne, wymaga rozwijania wiedzy uczniów, ich umiejętności społecznych, postaw, systemu wartości oraz zdolności dokonywania wyborów w sytuacjach realnych i pozaszkolnych sytuacjach społecznych. Realizatorami szkolnych programów profilaktycznych powinni być pedagodzy, nauczyciele–wychowawcy klas, we współpracy ze specjalistami z poradni psychologiczno-pedagogicznych, poradni specjalistycznych, resortu zdrowia, sprawiedliwości, opieki socjalnej, stowarzyszeń i fundacji. Profilaktyka w środowisku lokalnym wymaga koordynacji działań i środków na jej realizację.