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Young Adults and Psychoactive Substances and Their Consequences

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary social reality, there is an increasing popularity of psychoactive substances, which take various forms and affect the psyche and behavior of the people who use them. The consumption of these substances occurs in many social groups and accompanies diverse interactions, such as private gatherings or mass events. Contrary to stereotypes, the use of psychoactive substances is not limited solely to marginalized or criminal environments, but affects people regardless of their age, gender, origin, or social status.

Currently, we face an unprecedented popularity of increasingly potent and diverse psychoactive substances, which are gaining acceptance and spread also in various professional environments holding authority. It is particularly important to understand the attitudes and behaviors of young adults who, beginning their professional careers, simultaneously shape their habits and beliefs regarding the use of these substances. Their perspective is exceptionally important for predicting social trends and planning prevention strategies.

The chemical nature of these substances and their methods of distribution are constantly changing, often to circumvent legal regulations and provide users with new sensory experiences. New psychoactive substances, often synthetic, are gaining popularity, creating additional challenges for legal systems and healthcare services.

The use of psychoactive substances carries serious individual and social consequences, including risks of addiction, mental and physical health disorders, and social and material degradation of individuals. This problem also has implications for the safety of local communities, where drug consumption is often linked to increased crime and social problems.

The complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomenon of addiction to psychoactive substances make counteracting them a priority of social and health policy, requiring an interdisciplinary approach based on scientific research and integrated preventive and therapeutic actions.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was to analyze the phenomenon of psychoactive substance consumption among young adults, with particular emphasis on their behaviors, attitudes, and opinions in this regard.

The study aimed to determine the relationships between the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents and their attitudes toward psychoactive substances. Furthermore, it sought to reveal the socio-economic consequences of addiction and evaluate forms of anti-drug prevention.

The study also included an analysis of the frequency and nature of the use of various psychoactive substances, as well as the motivations and circumstances of their consumption.

An important aim was to examine the effectiveness and reach of preventive measures, as well as participants' attitudes toward the legalization of drugs.

Based on the statistical and qualitative data obtained, this paper attempts to identify directions for effective social and health policies aimed at reducing addiction and supporting people at risk and affected by addiction.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Characteristics of the Study Group: The study included 125 young adults, both women (44.8%) and men (55.2%), from diverse social and economic backgrounds. The age distribution was as follows: 4% were under 18 years old, 29.6% were between 18 and 21 years old, 56% were between 22 and 25, 7.2% were between 26 and 34, and smaller groups included those aged 35-40 years (3.2%). Participants had varied experiences with psychoactive substances.

Initiation and Frequency of Use: Men typically began using substances before the age of 15, while women started between 16 and 18 years old. Marijuana was the most popular substance, encountered by 87.2% of respondents, followed by ecstasy (48.8%), cocaine (42.4%), and hashish (40%). Substance use varied from occasional to daily use (about 10% of respondents).

Variation by Environment and Education: Individuals with higher education used psychoactive substances significantly less often than those with secondary or lower education. Residents of rural areas more frequently used marijuana and cocaine, while inhabitants of cities with populations over 200,000 more often used LSD, ecstasy, and hashish.

Motivations and Context of Use: Consumption mainly stemmed from the need to enhance sensory experiences, reduce stress, improve mood, increase work efficiency, and openness to social contacts. Young adults most often encountered drugs during social gatherings (72%).

Variation by Environment and Education: Individuals with higher education used psychoactive substances significantly less often than those with secondary or lower education. Residents of rural areas more frequently used marijuana and cocaine, while inhabitants of cities with populations over 200,000 more often used LSD, ecstasy, and hashish. Only 12.8% of respondents sought psychological or therapeutic support, indicating low awareness of such forms of help.

Qualitative Analysis of Motivations and Attitudes: Qualitative research revealed that attitudes toward psychoactive substances are strongly influenced by social environment, family experiences, and individual emotional regulation mechanisms. People with low self-esteem more often use psychoactive substances as a form of escape from problems and coping with pressures of daily life and work. This group also shows significant peer pressure influences and a need for belonging.

Social and Economic Consequences of Addiction: Addiction often leads to loss of financial stability, work problems, absenteeism, and decreased professional efficiency. It affects family relationships, degradation of social roles, and increases the risk of domestic violence and contact with criminal environments.

Attitudes Toward Legalization: 76.2% of respondents aged up to 21 and 60.2% of those over 21 supported legalization of psychoactive substances with additional restrictions and regulations analogous to those governing alcohol sales.

Effectiveness of Preventive Measures: A common phenomenon in the studied group was the lack of contact with addiction prevention forms (63% had no exposure to prevention). It is recommended to expand educational activities and support the social and emotional skills of young people, including through the presence of authorities and workshops.

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