Primary Prevention of Addictions in Education

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents and summarizes the research on students to identify features and tendencies of drug abuse and alcoholism among the youth. It is important in order to organize some primary prevention of addictions. The urgency of the problem is due to the growth of drug and alcohol use. And this problem concerns the whole population. The authors enumerate some causes of drug addiction and alcoholism such as infantile consciousness, weakness of volitional processes, lack of sustainable interests and hobbies. The authors conclude that there is an existing problem of addictions among students and it has a devastating impact on psychological health in general. Namely, a large percentage of students feel a need to use tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

INTRODUCTION

Drug and alcohol use has reached a critical level of epidemic in modern Russian society. If it goes on then it can turn into a real threat to the national security of the country. Growth of the volume and variety of drugs and alcohol products make all levels of the population addicted, especially young people.

The psychological characteristics of adolescence make the research rather complicated. It is because this is the period of self-consciousness developing. And while the period of transition to adulthood the problem of achieving harmony with the inner world becomes strained. Young people begin to realize that they acquire their life experience on their own. Consequently, their desire to understand themselves, their own uniqueness and originality, their social status worsen. [1].

However, many young people have rather infantile consciousness, weak volitional processes and lack of clear objectives. The sense of “I” is uncertain, vague and is often experienced as a kind of inner emptiness. In particular, N.V. Tarasova (a lecturer of South-West State University, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Russia) has studied students for several years and defined that the students lack the necessity of relationship between the target-values and values-means. Target values mean that the ultimate goal of any individual is worth to aim at. Values-means mean that a certain action or character of the person is preferable in any situation.

The result is a situation of some disadaptation, which is accompanied by feelings of loneliness, isolation, lack of psychological comfort and being in a deep conflict. It complicates the development of new and effective strategies of behaviour and establishing authority in a group. Young people try to eliminate these problems by any means, including alcohol and drugs [2].

The lack of sustainable interests and hobbies is an equally important cause of alcoholism and drug addiction of today’s youth. Unfortunately, the 1st year students prefer visiting discos and going out with friends (65%) to have a rest both in 2005 and 2009. Only 35% of students prefer other forms to spend time (5% of the students are involved in sports; 3% tend to learn foreign languages; 17% are into computers; 10% have their other kinds of hobbies). The 3rd year students still choose discos and going out with friends (63%).
Going to discos and going out with friends as the main forms of entertainment seem dangerous because they define some risk factors of drug addiction among students. First, a large percentage of students (the 1st year - 23%, the 2nd year - 32%, the 3rd year - 33%) have drug addicted friends and acquaintances. It increases the risk of new addicts under the influence of negative social environment. As a result, 3% of the 1st year students, 13% of the 2nd year students and 17% of the 3rd year students used drugs occasionally for nonmedical purposes, which means that they might become drug addicted. Second, about 35% of all students who took part in the research confirm that it is easy to buy drugs in clubs, discos or just outdoors at night [3].

Thus, lack of sustainable interests and hobbies, having fun with friends at discos can create unfavorable environment to start using drug.

Professional self-determination and the difficulty of finding a job after the university are among the reasons of becoming addicted. T. Yu Kopylov E.A. Nikitina, O.V. Chernishova (the lecturers of South-West State University, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, Russia) give individual consultations and diagnosis to students. The lecturers identify a number of major problems. First, when students combine studying and work they have a negative attitude to this work, because of lack of professional experience and skills, so they usually can find work which is uninteresting, monotonous and poorly paid. Secondly, students complain of lack of self-expression in such work, still not realizing that first they should master their future profession well. Third, students cannot imagine what psychological characteristics are important for their chosen profession and if they are fit for it or not. Fourth, the socio-economic situation in the country makes students believe that finding a prestigious job is not connected with a high level of professionalism, but with luck, profitable families or high social status of parents. When young people face with the reality they are greatly disappointed and their professional goal seems to be inaccessible and blurred. As a result, a young man has a feeling of despair and hopelessness. Immaturity emotional and volitional characteristic of today's youth makes the situation worse. All this can also be a trigger mechanism to form propensity of young people to use drugs and alcohol [4].

Our research was focused on the problem identification of addicting among students of South-West State University (Russia) to determine the main directions of intervention programme to prevent drug, alcohol and tobacco addiction; and to determine further educational work in general. The research involved 210 students of 1st, 3rd year in the age of 17 - 20.

Analysis of the results showed that most students tried alcohol for the first time at the age of 13 - 16. About 30% of boys and girls among the 1st and 2nd year students drink alcohol several times a month and this figure rises to 50% among the students of the 3rd year. The most popular types of alcohol among these young people are beer, champagne and dry wine. Although there are those who prefer vodka and cognac, and the number of such students increases with age (1st year - 3%, 2nd year - 13%, 3rd year - 17%). The dose of alcohol consumed at one time increases with age: the 1st year students use up to 500 g, but the 2nd and 3rd year students prefer more at a time [5].

In connection with an existing problem, the staff of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology (South-West State University, Russia) systematically rates the main tendencies aimed at identifying different aspects of students’ health. We consider appropriate to compare the results of this research with the results got in April 2005. That research was to identify tendencies of various forms of addiction.

In 2005 about 69% of students (3rd year) used alcohol, which is 19% more than in 2009. Most of boys and girls in 2005 and 2009 (about 65%) answered that the most popular alcoholic drink is beer. They start using alcohol quite early (in the age of 13-16). Unfortunately, the dose of alcohol use is not reduced; it is more than 500 g at a time.

As for smoking it is defined that the quantity of non-smoking students decreases (1st year - 53%; 2nd year - 48%; 3rd year - 32%) and the number of those who smoke systematically increases (1st year - 11%; 2nd year - 19%; 3rd year - 25%). In 2005, students who smoke regularly (3rd year) accounted for 39%, which is 14% more than in 2009.

We compared our results with those got by the Regional State Health Institution “Center for Medical Prevention”. The center also studied how much young people aged 17-18 use alcohol and tobacco. About 58% of the total number of respondents drink alcohol. 39% respondents use alcohol once a month, 19% respondents use it once a week. The percentage of young people who use alcohol is 20%, which might lead to alcoholism. 21.5% of the total number of respondents smoke systematically and about 6% smoke up to 20 cigarettes per day. In general, we had the same results as “Center for Medical Prevention” [6].

The composition of harmful substances that have a destructive effect on people’s psyche and health in general is being changed. The number of students who use alcohol decreased by 19%, and the number of those smoke regularly decreased by 14% in 2009 compared to 2005. However, by 2009, the number of 3rd year students who use drugs occasionally for non-medical purposes increased by 5%, which pushes the risk of drug addiction spreading among students (in 2005 - 12%; in 2009 - 17%). The worst thing here is that new drugs can be prepared at home; smoking blends and tonic tablets with different narcotic effects are easily available.

Since one of the main causes of such addictions among young people is a lack of sustainable interests and hobbies, we decided to check the students of South-West State University (Russia) who are also the members of...
the students’ association there. [7]. Therefore, the next stage of our research was to find out if there is a problem of addiction of any kind among these students. Students’ government association is a special kind of activity closely connected with the development of creative abilities through solving various problematic situations in the following areas: adaptation of foreign students, university students’ leisure and charitable assistance to orphanages and boarding schools, and so on. Consequently, formation of boys’ and girls’ active life position, independence, the ability to predict their activities, the desire for self-education, ability to organize time efficiently is encouraged among members of the association. We can assume that these students do not have visible socio-psychological causes for drug and alcohol addiction [8].

Let us compare the students who are members of the students’ association (19 people), and other students of the university for addictions.

Up to 15% of the members of the association smoke systematically, but a lot more of other students of the university (up to 25%) do it regularly.

The students of both groups start drinking alcohol at the age of 13-16. The members of the students’ association drink 300 g of alcohol at a time, but the other students drink 500 g at a time. The percentage of students who drink alcohol regularly (30%) is decreasing. At the same time 50% of the other students do it regularly [9].

We note that risk factors among members of the students’ association are minimum: these students never use drugs (0%) as well as 17% of the other students use drugs occasionally; 10% of the members of the students’ association friends are drug users as well as 28% of the other student’s friends are addicted. Moreover, the members of the association are usually interested in sport and like going out with friends, but the other students prefer discos and clubs.

While comparing the results of our research on the problem of addiction among young people who are the members of the students’ association and the other students we confirmed the assumption that socially mature young people who have sustained hobbies and interests, a wide range of social roles, who are more or less independent and responsible are less affected [10].

Conclusion:

Thus, summarizing the data of this research, we can conclude that there is a problem of addictions among students, and it has a destructive effect on people’s psyche and health in general. Namely, a large percentage of students feel the need for tobacco, alcohol and drugs. Besides, on the one hand, changing of the composition of harmful substances leads to reducing the number of smokers among students and students who use alcohol, but on the other hand, it increase the number of students who use drugs occasionally for non-medical purposes, and that last increases the risk of drug spreading in general. Social and psychological causes of drug addiction and alcoholism among the youth today are specific and can be summarized as follows: withdrawing from the problems, unmet needs in communication, achieving psychological and physical comfort, lack of sustainable interests and hobbies, infantile consciousness. Moreover, socio-economic features of modern society, such as social stratification, a lack of guarantee in further employment, difficulties caused by the crisis can also become trigger mechanisms for young people to use drugs and alcohol.

The main task is to include arrangements for primary prevention of addictions in educational work with students. This the fact confirms that 3rd year students need to participate in a variety of preventive activities more than 1st year ones. About 23% of 1st year students, 38% of 2nd year students and 41% of the 3rd year students would like to increase the number of such activities. Primary prevention activities mean working with organized groups and social conscience in order to make them follow a healthy way of living. [11]. Primary prevention aims to prevent negative outcomes of addictions, to spread information on drug effects on the body and the human psyche, to enhance motivation for positive changes in life and to form protective factors of healthy socio-active behavior. To realize these aims it is necessary to organize lectures by experts of the regional drug abuse clinic systematically; to attract students to participate in anti-drug motivational activities and round-table discussions on addictions; to involve young people in organizing charity activities and to increase the number of mass sport events in order to attract more participants [12].

That is why, lecturers of the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology (South-West State University, Russia) organize systematically the following: conducting surveys to study students’ attitude to smoking, alcoholism and drug addiction as well as to identify students’ attitude towards a healthy lifestyle; clarification of drugs and alcohol effects on people; discussion on addiction prevention; psychological trainings for personal growth; urgent, current and temporal advice for students and their parents. Different researches to identify important qualities professionally are systematically made. It is done in order to develop students’ professional consciousness that promotes professional growth and development of professional responsibility. In October 2012, a column “Ask the Psychologist” was organized together with the editorial board of the University newspaper “Impulse” to promote the values of a healthy lifestyle and to overcome stereotypes about drug addictions.
Members of the students’ association should also take part in organizing such events. While communicating with their peers they could help them to realize importance of participation in society and at the same time highlight the "boundaries" of responsibility in relation to new areas of activity and relationships.

REFERENCES