

Factors Related to Substance Abuse among Students in Rajarata University of Sri Lanka

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The gradual increase of substance abuse among educated youth has become a critical issue in Sri Lanka. Due to absence of systematic efforts, reasons as to why educated youth tend to use such illicit drugs remain unexplored. The present study explores the factors underlying the substance abuse of educated youth by taking a risk sample of young undergraduates from a Sri Lankan State University. This qualitative study employed in-depth interviews to gather data. Sample selection was conducted utilizing the snowball method, to include the undergraduate students who engage in substance abuse. Data was gathered from 10 key informants and the analysis began with coding. Coding was done in two rounds; first to identify the broad categories and then to identify the themes in each category. Accordingly, the first round of coding divided the responses into five categories as usage stage, usage pattern of drug varieties and the consequences experienced, in addition to the factors affecting the usage of drugs. The responses reveal that many of the young students use varieties of drugs, namely, cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis, hash, heroin, crystal meth, tablets, pills, stamps and LSD. Factors that lead to substance abuse appear in three main themes: personal factors, social factors, and economic factors. It is curiosity, relaxation and happiness-expectations, biological factors, and psychological factors that appear as personal reasons. Peer influence, freedom of the environment, and undisturbed access to the drug network were found at the social level. Having a personal source of income and adequate external financial support appeared to be the economic factors for students' engagement in drug usage. Accordingly, the findings of this study offer a basis to take necessary measures to avoid the potential threats and negative consequences created by this hidden problem, while establishing the vital importance of engaging in serious discussion on the matter.

Keywords: University students, Substance abuse, Variety of drugs, Living environment