

Abstract

Starting point: The use or overuse of cannabis is still considered among the general public to be highly risky mainly for the reason that (apparently) it only precedes the use or it is a form of an entrance gate to the world of use of so called “hard drugs”, which are especially stimulants and opiates, injected, therefore again by a very risky way. Regardless the interaction and impact of a wide range of other socioeconomic, personal and other factors, which indisputably also have a determined impact on the fact that a specific person will sometimes in the future tend to (mis-)use addictive substances or not, in this case the existence of much more frequent, accessible and generally tolerated drugs such as tobacco and alcohol including the role they might play is often neglected. This work deals with the investigation of patterns of use of legal and illegal addictive substances during the adolescence of current problem users, the outcoming data is compared with the study conclusions of ESPAD and states possible deductions.

Objectives: By means of retrospective investigative method the work should map out the patterns of the use and prevalence of experiencing the selected legal or illegal substances by a current problem 16 year-old user and compare them with the conclusions of the ESPAD study. At the same time it should verify the possibility of using the modified ESPAD questionnaire retrospectively and consider the results in relation to the gateway theory. It attempts to give an answer to investigative questions (Is the future PDU characterized by a higher frequency/intensity of cannabis use at adolescent age in comparison with the general population of sixteen year-olds? Are we going to notice a lower age of the first use of addictive substances with the PDU group compared to a general population of 16 year-olds or not? Which of the observed areas could serve as predictors of future problem drug use? Could the retrospective method of questioning be considered as relevant? Why yes, why not?)

Applied methods: A modified version of ESPAD questionnaire has been used to collect the data, it has always been filled in by the respondent in the presence of a contact worker. At the beginning each respondent was fully instructed on how to work with the questionnaire including the basic information that the specific respondent should answer “as if he was just 16”, i.e. with maximum authenticity possible, regarding the circumstances and the situation in which he was when he was 16. Afterwards the collected data were processed and assessed statistically.

Results: 93,9% of the selected sample of respondents, who are now problem drug users, have tried to smoke at least once in a lifetime (till the age of 16). More than 25% of the questioned (approximately a quarter) stated they smoked for the first time when they were 10 or younger. Then more than 79% of the questioned claim they started to smoke at the age of 14 or less. The beginning of smoking with a daily frequency was the most common at the age of 16 or more. The most frequent abused drug from the group of illegal substances was cannabis whose at least one use in a lifetime (meaning till the age of 16) was

stated by 68% of the respondents. The second on the list of abused illegal drugs was methamphetamine, 60% of the respondents stated to use it at least once in a lifetime. With reference to the extent of illegal addictive substances use among respondents' friends and siblings, the least spread was the use of ecstasy and volatile substance sniffing, on the contrary when these respondents were 16, the majority of their friends drank alcohol and smoked cigarettes. The most respondents (68%) named their family in which they grew up as economically average, 15% of respondents claimed their family to be rather poorer and then 12% to be rather rich in comparison with the economic situation of other families.

Conclusion: We might say that the beginnings of legal drugs use (cigarettes and alcohol) by the generation of current problem users is not much different from the beginnings of drug use by the population of 16 year-olds who participated in ESPAD study. Lifelong prevalence of the drug use by the selected group of problem drug users during adolescence is basically the same as the original ESPAD study without major discrepancies. The biggest differences between both investigations have been noted in terms of observation of lifelong prevalence use of metamphetamine and volatile substances when the group of the questioned PDU claimed metamphetamine (after cannabis) to be the second most frequently abused illegal drug. It has also been discovered that the same group used volatile substances widely at the age of 16, 42% of them. In future it would certainly be useful to extend the questions to analyse the specific respondent's personality features which might be from the point of view of the prospective addictive substances use considered more risky (higher vulnerability, tendency to search for new / unusual experiences more often etc.), as well as the questions analysing the family background in detail or the respondent's background considering the possible evaluation of his function or stability.

Key words:

ESPAD - patterns of use - prevalence - problem drug use - gateway theory - (risky) drug use predictors