

CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE ILLICIT DRUG USERS IN REHABILITATION CENTRES IN SRI LANKA

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Illicit drug users are people who use psychoactive substances that the production, sale or use is prohibited by law and for long term on regular basis for non-medical purposes. Illicit drug use has become a significant problem in Sri Lanka during recent years. This study was conducted to describe characteristics of male illicit drug users in rehabilitation centres. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 431 male drug users in five selected rehabilitation centres. Data were collected using an interviewer-administered questionnaire and were analysed using SPSS statistical software. The majority of the sample were Sinhala (82.4%), Buddhists (70.5%) and early school dropouts (32.2%) with a mean age (SD) of 32(10.3) years. Nearly 40% were readmissions. The highest percentage of the drug users were from the Western province (75.6%), followed by Kurunegala (5.1%), Pollonnaruwa and Galle (both 3.0%). In 87%, drugs were introduced by friends. The majority (90%) had initiated substance use

with smoking and had started drug use as an experiment (67.5%) or due to peer pressure (25.5%). Nearly 3/4th of drug users were unaware about harmful outcomes of drug use and were able to conceal their behaviour from family for more than one year. A considerable proportion (84.7%) had easy accessibility to illicit drugs and the majority (93.0%) was able to easily purchase drugs. The age of the first drug use was positively correlated with the age of the first alcohol use ($r= 0.687$; $p<0.01$) and first smoking ($r= 0.732$; $p< 0.01$). Level of education, area of residence, experimental usage, peer influence, availability and accessibility and previous use of other substances were identified as the main characteristics of drug users and drug use behaviour. These findings will be useful in designing and targeting interventions for prevention of drug addiction in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Characteristics, Male illicit drug users, Rehabilitation centres