

Experiences and Attitudes towards Dependence among Students in Vukovar, Croatia

Gordana Bujišić

Polytechnics »Lavoslav Ružička«, Vukovar, Croatia

ABSTRACT

The sample consisted of 104 students (male and female) from Croatian town of Vukovar, which was heavily destroyed during the Homeland war in 1991. Through self-report, author researches their experiences and attitudes towards different dependences, from so-called light to so-called heavy dependences. The conclusions of the survey are as following: a) experiences of Vukovar' students differ a lot depending on potential danger of particular dependence, so students prefer so-called light dependences than so-called heavy dependences b) Vukovar' students attitudes towards noxiousness/usefulness also differ according the potential danger of particular dependence and, again, so-called light dependences are more acceptable for students. c) Students have the same attitudes and experiences towards dependences, apart from gender or educational program. Suggesting the practical preventive usefulness, author stresses that basic conclusion of the survey is that students have positive attitude towards so-called light dependences, which should be changed by better information and education of students.

Key words: addiction, noxiousness, usefulness, students, Vukovar

Introduction

Vukovar-Sirmium County has very high risk for intensive increase of number of drug abusers, caused by poor socio-economic situation, recent war experience and geographic position. Vukovar-Sirmium County is part of so-called Balkan' route of the drugs since it has borders to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, such position makes drugs cheaper and more available. Adolescents are the population' group with the highest risk for development of drug addiction and it is necessary to say more about its characteristics in the particular region.

Vukovar' children and adolescents differ from their mates from other parts of Croatia because most of them survived the war in Vukovar as small children, then they have the experience of exile. Very often only partial family left to exile, which was additional problem aside from differences in the culture, society and language. Most of them were not accepted heart fully from the colleagues in the school and were marked by the position of refugee. After some time they adapted to the new environment and than they returned to Vukovar, which was new stress for them because they were reminded to the war. Also, high incidence of people with PTSD symptoms in their surrounding means higher incidence of family violence.

In the same time, in elementary and secondary schools we have very high rate of change of teachers, professors, who have not any additional knowledge and skills to help them in the recognition and prevention of drug abuse. To make conclusion, the life experiences of Vukovarž students are not very pleasant and theyand we are obliged to help them in all possible ways.

Vukovar' students are population who was exposed to numerous bad experiences, typical for the town which was almost completely destroyed during the war, and, on the other hand, they are in many senses very potential population – future of the town. The foundation of the polytechnics in Vukovar gave them additional support to improve their position and their future by further education. All above mentioned, gave us the idea to research experiences and attitudes of Vukovar' students towards dependence.

Surveys done before in the Vukovar' surrounding is very precious for the comparison of the results of research. In survey done by M. Valek (2004)¹ daily caffeine intake was researched among students in nearby town of Osijek. The results of this particular survey indicate that

only 10% of participants did not take any food containing caffeine. Soft drinks containing caffeine were the major source of caffeine intake in high school students. Bezinović (2004)² researched use of different dependence means in high school students in Istria and concluded that they use wide spectrum of means which are in accordance with so-called »Istrian culture of consummation«. Team of researches from »Andrija Štampar«³ researched epidemiology of smoking in the South-Eastern Europe and the conclusion is that rate of students who smoke are really high. Center for journalism from Sarajevo in 2008⁴ published very interesting data about smoking in the South-Eastern Europe and 50–60% of students are smokers.

In methodological sense, this research is comparable to the previous researches conducted in Zagreb^{5,6} and Split⁷.

The aim

The aim of the survey was to recognize specific characteristics of experiences and attitudes of Vukovar' students towards different dependencies, from very benign to the very dangerous.

Hypothesis

The survey starts from two basic hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 – Vukovar' students experiences on dependence differ according the potential danger of particular dependence, in the sense that subjects consumed more often so-called light than heavy dependence means.

Hypothesis 2 – Vukovar' students attitudes on noxiousness/usefulness differ according the potential danger of particular dependence, in the sense that for subjects more acceptable so-called light than heavy dependence means.

There are also two additional hypotheses:

Additional hypothesis 1 – experiences and attitudes of subjects differ according to gender

Additional hypothesis 2 – experiences and attitudes of subjects differ according to the study program they are attending: social curricula – administrative law and commerce, medical – physiotherapy or curricula of PRONI Institute for social education, as relatively alternative way of education for the work in society especially with youth.

Methods

The sample

The sample was made of randomly included participants, students of Polytechnics »Lavoslav Ružička« and PRONI Institute who were willing to participate in the survey.

The sample had 104 participants, 63 female and 41 male students, 58 of them were students of physiotherapy, 24 one of social studies and 22 social education.

Sample of variables

The basic variable, which describes means of dependence, has following categories: coffee, alcohol, games of chance, gambling, hashish/marijuana, ecstasy and heroin/cocaine.

The experience of subjects are measured by self-report about the intensity of consumption of each dependence means.

Attitudes are estimated by classical Likert' model (1932)⁸ with question/variable »What do you think about noxiousness/usefulness of consuming ... for consumer?« with offered answers:

- It is very noxious.
- It is noxious to some extent.
- It is neither noxious nor useful.
- It is useful to some extent.
- It is very useful.

Testing of hypotheses

The survey was conducted in March, 2008 (10th–21st).

The basic hypotheses are tested by comparison of relative values in contingency tables, while two additional hypotheses were compared by Chi-square test, ($p=0.05$).

Results

Consumption frequency

As it is shown in the Table 1 and Figure 1, different dependency means have been consumed in a different scale, upon their severity.

Clearly, coffee was consumed the most while those heaviest, heroin and cocaine were consumed the least. It

TABLE 1
EXPERIENCES WITH DIFFERENT DEPENDENCY MEANS

	None		Tried		Consume rarely		Consume often/regularly		Total	
Coffee	9	8.7	9	8.7	22	21.9	62	60.2	103	100
Games of chance	33	31.7	32	30.8	31	29.8	8	7.3	104	100
Gambling	77	74.0	20	19.2	5	4.8	2	1.9	104	100
Marijuana	66	63.5	33	31.7	5	4.8			104	100
Ecstasy	97	93.3	7	6.7					104	100
Heroin/cocaine	102	98.1	2	1.9					104	100

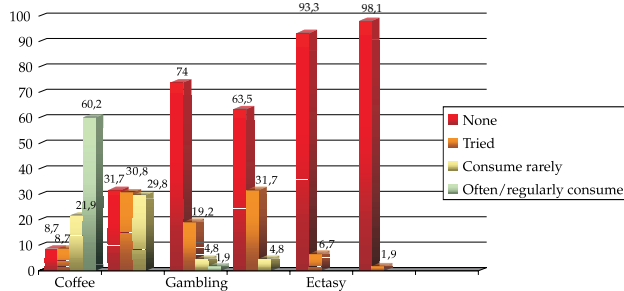


Fig. 1. Experiences with different dependency means.

has been noticed that were more students who used hashish and marijuana than those who gambled.

The first basic hypothesis (H1), which stated that students more often use or consume light then heavy dependency means, has been confirmed by this.

It seems that conclusion, which indicates that student population in Vukovar is not a risky one, is correct. However, the small number of those who have tried heavy drugs indicates that we have to be alert in conclusions. Even bigger contentment is caused by the poor experience in gambling and games on chance.

Let see in more details distribution of experience regarding nicotine and alcohol.

It seems justified to conclude that fact that almost half of sample group are smokers is a warning signal, despite the fact that most of them are beginners.

Keeping in mind that drinking of alcohol in Vukovar' area is widely spread, obtained results are expected, in the sense that Vukovar' students are good representatives of general population. Anyway, it is important to remember one simple data: 9 out of 10 Vukovar' students are consuming alcohol!

TABLE 2
HOW MANY CIGARETTES DO YOU SMOKE PER DAY?

	N	%
I am non – smoker	56	53.8
Less than 10 cigarettes a day	14	13.5
10 to 20 cigarettes	31	29.8
More then 20 cigarettes	3	2.9
Total	104	100

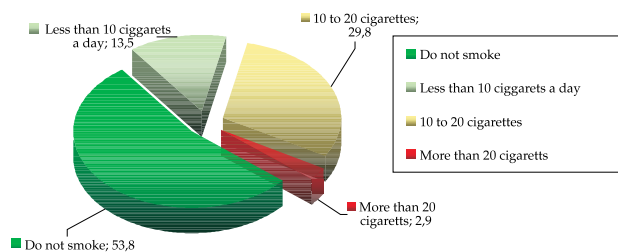


Fig. 2. How many cigarettes do you smoke per day?

TABLE 3
DO YOU CONSUME ALCOHOL?

	N	%
Not at all	11	10,6
Rarely	55	52,9
Same as most of my peers	31	29,8
Often	7	6,7
Total	104	100

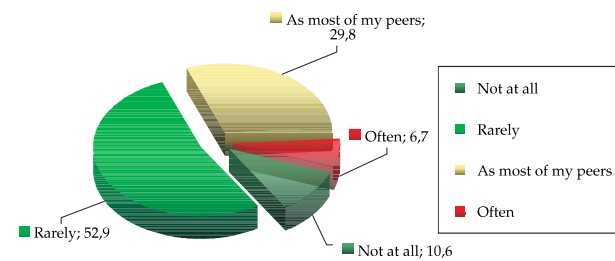


Fig. 3. Do you drink alcohol?

Attitudes towards noxiousness/usefulness ...

In the exploration of the attitudes, survey began from the assumption attitude towards particular dependency mean are not equal, despite the fact that some authors state that attitudes could have equal positive as negative rate⁹.

It is obvious, that only two dependences are marked as useful to some extent and in the same time, not very noxious – coffee and games on chance.

Data related to alcohol use are interesting, as well as for marijuana and hashish. Namely, while some benefits could be expected related to games of chance and gambling, those for mentioned means need further explanations. It can be presumed that use of coffee is related to the need of keeping our organism awake (ex. while learn-

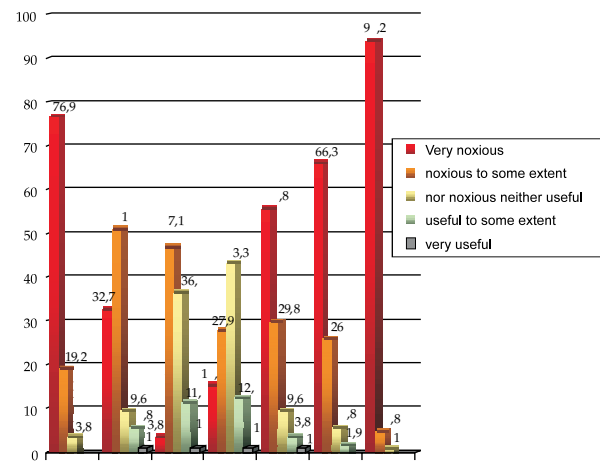


Fig. 4. What is your opinion about noxiousness/usefulness.

TABLE 4
WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ABOUT NOXIOUSNESS/USEFULNESS

	Very noxious		Noxious to some extent		Neither noxious nor useful		Useful to some extent		Very useful		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Smoking	80	76.9	20	19.2	4	3.8					104	100
Alcohol	34	32.7	53	51.0	10	9.6	6	5.8	1	1	104	100
Coffee	4	3.8	49	47.1	38	36.5	12	11.5	1	1	104	100
Games on chance	16	15.4	29	27.9	45	43.3	13	12.5	1	1	104	100
Gambling	58	55.8	31	29.8	10	9.6	4	3.8	1	1	104	100
Marijuana	69	66.3	27	26.0	6	5.8	2	1.9			104	100
Ecstasy	98	94.2	5	4.8	1	1					104	100

ing) while the usefulness of alcohol is related to often media articles on advantages of small amount of alcohol (mostly red wine) for coronary system.

However, for heroin and cocaine we did not even ask this question.

Distribution of the experience according to the gender and study program

Results of Chi-square test show that gender and type of study program of participants are not statistically significant for experiences and attitudes towards dependences. The chi-square test' analyses of the relations of the pairs of variables showed that there are no value lower than $p > 0.005$ for statement that students of opposite gender have different experiences and attitudes in analysed dependency' means. The same situation is for study programs participants are coming from.

So, female and male students as well as participants from four different study programs do not differ towards experiences and attitudes in analysed dependency' means. It makes conclusion that additional hypotheses should be rejected.

Discussion and Conclusions

Concerning the first hypothesis which implies that experiences of Vukovar' students differ towards potential danger of dependence' means in the sense that participants more often use less danger, so-called light dependency' means. So, the first hypothesis should be approved.

Coffee and alcohol are means which are consumed the most. Subsequently, there are games of chance and smoking, both in relatively significant extent. Consuming of so-called light drugs (hashish and marijuana) is more often than gambling, but it is not more often than games of chance. The least consuming is those of so-called heavy drugs, such as cocaine and heroin. Whole in one, results are in favor of the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis, which recons that attitudes of Vukovar' students on noxiousness/usefulness differ according to the potential danger of particular dependence, in

the sense that for subjects more acceptable so-called light than heavy dependence means, should be approved also.

Additional hypotheses about different experiences and attitudes towards dependences are result different of gender or study program, are not approved.

Results could be compared with similar surveys done in the neighboring countries with similar cultural models. Basically, the same conclusion got also Božičević et al. (2004)³ who researched epidemiology of smoking habit in South-Eastern Europe.

Sarajevo' Center for investigating journalism has published in 2008⁴ very interesting data about smoking habit in South-Eastern Europe. The center of interest for survey was health workers and it was found that 50–60% of them are smokers, while 40% students in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are smokers, as well. In the USA, approximately 50% of 5.4 million college students abuse drugs or drink at least once a month. Alcohol remains the favored substance of abuse on college campuses by far, but the abuse of prescription drugs and marijuana has increased dramatically since the mid-1990s, according to the study released in 2005 by National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse CASA at Columbia University. Nearly half the students surveyed by CASA said they drank or used drugs to relax, reduce stress or forget about problems. It is important to stress that in comparison with the similar research in 1993 reported more than double smoking marijuana. The percentage of students who reported drinking alcohol at least occasionally was about the same 68% in 2005 compared with 70% in 1993. The prevalence of heavy episodic drinking among Malawian female students (27.4%) was lesser than among their female counterparts in developed countries. The difference in alcohol consumption between Malawian female students and their male counterparts could be explained at least in part by the traditional African attitude towards women and their role in family and society. Al-Issa (1997)¹¹ has emphasized the role of stressors related to social adjustment to the American culture, such as accumulative stress, socioeconomic stress and minority stress in determining the drinking patterns of various ethnic minorities in the USA.

Results of our survey gave us the direction for presumably preventive activities. That is especially important for basic cognition of the survey that so-called light dependences are not harmful, so, consequently, society shouldn't worry about the rate of youth who are affected because it is typical for local tradition. Actually, it seems that that is the essence of the problem. Namely, typical local tradition is the key problem and the change of the public opinion is the key direction for possible preventive activities¹².

Also, pretty high availability of relatively cheap alcohol and narcotics (marijuana, ecstasy mostly) and lack of effective restrictive measures on alcohol consumption might contribute to the alcohol misuse among students. Therefore, measures that restrict and channels sales and consumption of alcohol could be effective in reducing rates of the alcohol-related problems in this population. Evaluation studies have demonstrated that such measures are the most effective in preventing hazardous drinking.

REFERENCES

1. VALEK M, LASLAVIĆ B, LASLAVIĆ Z, CMJ, 45 (2004). — 2. BEZINOVIĆ P, Korištenje sredstava ovisnosti kod srednjoškolaca u Istarskoj županiji, (In Croat) (Institute for Social Research, Zagreb, 2004). — 3. BOŽIČEVIĆ I, GILMORE A, OREŠKOVIĆ S, The Tobacco Epidemic in South-East Europe. Consequences and Policy Responses. (Health, Nutrition and Population Discussion Paper. World Bank, Washington, 2004). — 4. Anonymous, Zemlja okorjelih pušača (In Croatian) (Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo, Sarajevo, 2008). — 5. UZELAC S, BAMBURAC J, Soc Psih, 26 (1998) 3. — 6. UZELAC S, Napredak, 139 (1998) 24. — 7. UZELAC S, Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Splitu, 40 (3–4) (2003) 247. — 8. LIKERT R, Arch Psych, 140 (1932) 1. — 9. BEN-YEHUDA N, Deviant Behaviour, 3 (1990) 221. — 10. ZVEREV Y, Coll Anthropol, 32 (2008) 27. — 11. AL-ISSA I, Ethnicity, immigration and psychopathology (Plenum Press, New York, 1997). — 12. BAŠIĆ J, JANKOVIĆ J, Rizični i zaštitni čimbenici u razvoju poremećaja u ponašanju djece i mladeži (in Croatian) (Povjerenstvo Vlade Republike Hrvatske za prevenciju poremećaja u ponašanju djece i mladeži i zaštitu djece s poremećajima u ponašanju, Zagreb, 2001).

G. Bujišić

*Polytechnics »Lavoslav Ružička«, Županijska 50, 32000 Vukovar, Croatia
e-mail: gordana.bujisic1@vk.t-com.hr*

ISKUSTVA I STAVOVI O OVISNOSTIMA VUKOVARSKIH STUDENATA

S A Ž E T A K

Uzorak je činilo 104 studenta (muškog i ženskog spola) iz hrvatskog grada Vukovara, koji je bio gotovo u cijelosti razoren tijekom Domovinskog rata 1991. Autor je istraživao iskustva i stavove studenata o različitim ovisnostima, od tzv. lakih do tzv. teških i to kroz njihov samoiskaz. Zaključci istraživanja su sljedeći: a) iskustva vukovarskih studenata razlikuju se uvelike ovisno o potencijalnoj opasnosti određene ovisnosti, te studenti preferiraju tzv. lake ovisnosti; b) Stavovi vukovarskih studenata prema štetnosti/korisnosti također se razlikuju ovisno o potencijalnoj opasnosti određene ovisnosti i, ponovo, tzv. lake ovisnosti su prihvatljivije studentima; c) Studenti imaju iste stavove i iskustva prema ovisnostima, neovisno o njihovom spolu ili programu koji pohađaju. Ukazujući na praktičnu preventivnu korisnost, autor naglašava kako je osnovni zaključak istraživanja da studenti imaju pozitivan stav prema tzv. lakim ovisnostima, što bi trebalo biti promijenjeno boljom informiranosti i edukacijom studenata.