

THE HARMFULNESS OF DRUG USE AND SUPPORT MEASURES

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Abstract: *Drug use is considered a problem in today's society. Most people come to use drugs out of a desire to try something new, others out of curiosity, but the most common causes of drug use are family problems and the desire to belong to a particular group. The integrated programme of assistance for substance users is expressed through a varied system of therapeutic, social and psychological programmes, which materialize in an individualized plan of assistance for their reintegration. The methods used to carry out the research were a sociological survey based on an interview guide and an opinion survey which were administered to drug users. The aim of this research is to identify the perception of drug users regarding the causes that led them to consume illicit substances and the importance of family support, as well as the way in which specialists get involved and act for the social reintegration of drug users. Drug use is a growing phenomenon, which without the intervention and support of specialists will have negative repercussions both on the population, but especially on the people who use drugs.*

Keywords: drugs, user, addiction, social reintegration, social worker.

1. Introduction

Prohibited substances have been, and still are, the focus of particular attention both of people in general and of scientists, who have tried in various ways to understand the attraction that drugs exert on humans, the causes that determine their use, and not least, to identify effective recovery approaches. The majority of young people today who end up taking drugs believe that these represent a way to escape everyday life problems, that they represent the path to happiness, but all this is an illusion, because drug use has more negative than positive aspects.

Romania has confronted drug use since 1990, due to the fact that the country became a regular route for the transportation of banned substances, being even named the "Balkan Route". With the passage of time, and as a consequence of the manifestation of numerous causes, such as the lack of information about the dangers and effects of prohibited substances, the lack of the necessary budget to implement measures to reduce the phenomenon of drug use is more than evident. Due to the factors listed above, Romania has become an open road for drug use and drug trafficking (Gheorghe, 2018: 5).

According to the authors Cojocaru and Cernomoreț (2022: 10) drugs are those substances that can be of animal, vegetable or mineral origin, which are used in the preparation of certain medicines or narcotics. From other points of view such as pharmacological, drugs are substances used in the medical industry and the excessive consumption of which leads to both physical and psychological dependence, causing various serious disorders in the brain, cognition and behaviour.

2. Theories on drug use and dependence

There are many descriptive theories and models of substance misuse in specialty literature. The latest theories, developed in the contemporary period, verify that only certain people become users or addicts of illegal substances. Thus, depending on the aspect dealt with, the models and theories that explain the use of illicit substances are categorized into two broad classes (Rădulescu & Dâmboeanu, 2006: 182):

- person-centred - these refer to the intrinsic characteristics of the person;
- socially centred - these refer to issues that have an external influence on the person, emphasizing the environment.

Biological theories focus on two categories of views namely (Paraschiv, et al., 2014: 38-40):

- The people's tendency to come into contact with drugs is determined by the influence of genetic factors, as they emphasize that an association of genes is found, thus leading to a propensity to abuse drugs. An example of this is the tolerance the body shows to either low or high doses.

- The people's tendency to continue with consumption once contact with the banned substances has been made has an influence on the person's metabolism, thus drug abuse is described as the result of a metabolism imbalance. In this case, people addicted to heroin are considered to suffer from certain metabolic diseases or metabolic imbalances.

In the case of psychological theories, the focus is on certain tendencies, on the individual as a person, on certain mechanisms that help to "reinforce" the behaviour of those who overindulge in substance use, on the individuality of the user, and on the tendency to adopt appropriate behaviours.

Reinforcement theory refers to people who tend to place very high value on rewards. Lefter (2013: 262-263) presents the existence of two types of reinforcers: positive ones that occur when, a person notices a pleasant sensation as a result of consuming a banned substance, motivating the person to consume once again and negative ones that refer to the appropriation of a consumer behaviour of a banned substance, they are born from people's need to feel relaxation, avoiding pain, thus causing the person to resort to consumption.

The theory of reaction to low self-esteem/self-rejection attitudes emerges as a way of satisfying the attitude of self-rejection or rejection, caused by parental neglect, exclusion from the peer group, the occurrence of school failure, physical or social condemnation (Cojocaru & Cernomoret, 2022: 51).

Sociological theories aim to classify an individual behaviour in certain situations, social relations or as an integrated piece within social systems (Dascălu 2019: 85). Social learning theory refers to all categories of deviant behaviour, behaviour learned as a result of the process of interaction with different individuals or certain social groups, structures that the person in question consider valuable for them and that cause noncompliance with social normativity. Non-respect of social normativity refers both to the various behaviours that choose to comply with the law in force and to behaviours that violate the law being socially learned as a result of inappropriate mechanisms (Gheorghe, 2018: 62-63).

3. Causes, effects and prevention of drug use

There are no novelties as far as drug use is concerned, because the phenomenon among young people is becoming more and more widespread, in their view drugs are usually the only solution to get rid of some problems. Some of the external causes that determine the emergence of drug use in the category of young people are: the influence of the circle of friends, low education, non-existence of necessary information about drugs (Stanciu & Cotruş, 2014: 24).

Another cause of drug use is depression. The low chances of adaptation and integration, the impossibility for young people to get in contact with socio-professional structures, thus arising frequent failures, various disappointments coming from those close to them, certain inappropriate behaviours that may be determined by certain anxieties (Dascălu, 2019: 56).

Among the undesirable effects of drug use the following have been underlined (Ursan, 2010: 515): addiction; toxic effects on the nervous system, lungs, heart, and other internal organs; behavioural and social problems, the most common of which are: various accidents, school absenteeism, delinquency and even suicide.

Measures to reduce the demand for prohibited substances must take into account the myriad of social and medical problems caused by substance use and abuse, as well as by people who use several substances at the same time (poly-drug use), accompanied by psychoactive substances considered "legal".

The prevention of substance misuse, can be divided into different strategies, ranging from those that focus primarily on society as a whole, to strategies that focus on individual people prone to risk (Paraschiv et al., 2014: 122).

Abraham (2007: 11-12) prioritized prevention programs as follows:

- a) *Individual-focused programs* - the most widely used prevention method. These aim to develop knowledge, behaviours and attitudes towards tobacco, alcohol and substance use.
- b) *Peer group programs* - these programs are mostly targeted at young people, members of groups, with the group usually having a major influence on the individual.
- c) *Family-focused programs* - these programs are based on the family's active role in preventing substance use. They provide parents with useful information about substance use and its effects, enhance active listening, develop boundary-setting activities and recognize substance use.
- d) *Media campaigns* to prevent substance use do not have a direct effect on the formation of behaviour, but these campaigns have an important role in providing information, raising awareness and encouraging interpersonal communication.

5. Socio-professional rehabilitation and reintegration of drug abusers

The integrated programme of assistance for substance abusers is expressed through a system of different therapeutic, social and psychological programmes, subsidiary, simultaneous or sequential, which materialize in an individualized plan of assistance and comprises all the therapeutic, social and psychological interventions and measures adjusted to the needs of each individual abuser. Assistance and treatment must take into account a set of services, starting from services of minimum complexity, oriented towards cases in which the problems caused by substance use are minimal, to cases of maximum complexity (Lefter, 2013: 147).

According to the American Psychiatric Association, substance use disorder care has the following goals: cessation or reduction of substance use, decreasing the frequency and rigidity of relapse, and enhancing the psychological and emotional skills essential to recovery and maintenance of personal, social, and occupational functions of substance abusers (Blume, 2011: 270).

Interventions that combine treatment with social and health protection actions can be implemented at any stage of substance misuse and are recognized by experts as the best way to achieve rehabilitation for substance misusers. The various social reintegration measures are aimed at providing solid housing, finding gainful employment, capacity-building and improving social skills. The results of these measures take into account the efficiency of cooperation between social and health care institutions (Tomita, 2013: 165).

In our country, according to the legislation in force, the strategies against the illegal use of prohibited substances are (Tomita, 2013: 176):

- *rehabilitative treatment* - involves abrupt discontinuation of the banned substance, the use of non-substitutive symptomatic modalities, substitution treatment with methadone or other products and psychotherapy;

- *medical monitoring* - is decided when rehabilitation treatment is not required and involves: various assessment and continuing medical care services, psychotherapy and psychological counselling services, psychosocial or after-care rehabilitation services and decisions aimed at reducing the consequences of substance use.

Social reintegration of substance misusers is part of a set of systems aimed at understanding the biological, social and psychological aspects of intervention in relation to the individual, the environment or the community. This must be based on the social and personal means already present or likely to be present. Reintegration and rehabilitation constitute an action to normalize the personal and social circumstances of substance users, with an emphasis on the following areas (Blume, 2011: 271):

- social and personal area - it refers to obtaining criteria for living together, developing individual freedom and social value, increasing responsibility, recovering social skills, strengthening positive behaviours towards non-consumers, and encouraging the use of community means;

- professional training area - the development of professional knowledge, practices and skills, and the development of job search practices;

- employment area - getting a rewarded job;

- cultural and educational area - the acquisition of a satisfactory educational, relational and cultural level to understand and participate in social life.

- the area of stabilization of the civil and criminal legal situation;

- community intervention area - synchronization and cooperation with social and public entities.

The reintegration of substance misusers into society is a time-consuming process that requires multiple interventions by specialized individuals (Cosma, 2022: 72).

6. Quantitative research

The investigative approach consisted in carrying out an opinion survey among drug users. The aim of the opinion survey was to find out the opinion of drug abusers on the causes that led them to use drugs, the support they received from their family and the importance of professional intervention. A total of 10 questions were asked and the sample size was 55 people, aged between 18 and 55.

The formulated objectives are:

- to identify the causes and problems that lead consumers to abuse banned substances;

- to identify how to prevent and combat the phenomenon that leads users to abuse banned substances and the importance of specialist intervention;

- to uncover the importance of income support from the family for the social reintegration of the consumer.

Research hypotheses:

- if users sought help from specialists, they would identify the causes of the problems that lead them to use banned substances.
- the more informed users are about the harmfulness of drug use, the more likely they are to seek specialized help for intervention.
- if people who use drugs had family support, it would make it easier for them to reintegrate into society.

Following the application of the opinion survey, one can observe the respondents awareness of the causes and effects of drug use, their opinion about the importance of specialist intervention, as well as the support given by family members.

Thus, based on the first hypothesis, 62.5% of the people surveyed believe that the desire to join a group of friends is the main reason that leads them to use prohibited substances. In terms of the use effects, 85% of respondents consider euphoria to be the most common effect of drugs. As for the importance of intervention from specialists, 65% of those surveyed see intervention as important and consider it useful.

With regard to the second hypothesis, 80% of the interviewees perceive drug use as an addictive substance, one of the most known substances being heroin (85%) according to the answers given by the subjects. Also, 87.5% of the subjects are of the opinion that an important support comes from the social worker and that his/her intervention can lead to the social reintegration of the users.

The last hypothesis of the research emphasizes the support received from the family, thus, 77.5% of the total number of respondents stated that they receive the necessary support from their family, 75% of them considering that the relationship they have with family members is “very close” and “close”, helping their rehabilitation.

7. Qualitative research

In order support the results obtained from the opinion survey, an interview guide composed of 9 support questions was also applied, 20 drug users were interviewed out of the 55 previously interviewed, who were already registered in the records of the Centre for Prevention, Evaluation and Antidrug Counselling in Caras-Severin (CPECA Caras-Severin).

The aim of the sociological survey based on an interview guide was to discover the causes that led the beneficiaries to use illicit substances, what was the degree of the family support received and which were the methods used by the specialist during the intervention.

The questions from which the qualitative research started are: *“How does the drug user evaluate the situation in which s/he finds oneself?”*; *“What does family support mean for the drug user, if this exists?”*; and *“How does the drug user appreciate the importance of the social worker’s intervention, from CPECA Caras-Severin?”*

The objectives of qualitative research are:

- discover the causes of clients' substance misuse and describe the main problems encountered during an intervention
 - description of the main methods used by the specialist during an intervention
 - the importance of income support from the family for the social reintegration of the consumer.
- Analysis and interpretation of the data obtained after applying the interview guide to drug users:

Thematic Unit 1 - Main causes of drug use and the effects experienced

Buzducea (2005) presents a category of indicators associated with drug use such as: a state of irritability, the appearance of instability at both psychological and behavioural level, eye irritation, paranoid ideas, aggressiveness that cannot be explained and is not appropriate, depression, apathy, lapses and difficulty in speaking, decreased school efficiency, decreased motivation, nervousness, the appearance of interpersonal relationship problems.

The causes of drug use can be multiple. Thus, some of the external causes that determine the emergence of drug use among young people are: the influence of the circle of friends, a low education, the inexistence of the necessary information about drugs. (Stanciu and Cotrus, 2014)

The interviewees stated that the main reasons for drug use were:

- problems in the family such as the parents' divorce: *“I can't get over their separation, everything has changed and drugs have become my only comfort, my only chance to feel happiness again.”*
- going to work abroad: *“I was always a rebellious child who never listened to what I was told, because for most of my life my parents were abroad”.*
- as well as the desire to be part of a certain group of friends, the desire to be part of a group pushed them towards drug use: *“in elementary school I faced exclusion from groups, I was always lonely... Once in*

high school, I met a group of students, but in order to be part of that group, I was asked to use drugs. I knew they were dangerous, but the desire to be part of a group was much stronger, so I accepted".

In terms of the effects felt after drug use, the interviewees stated that euphoria, calmness and relaxation were among the most common drug-induced states: *"the first effect that I felt was euphoria, a state of happiness for no reason, but this state diminished quite quickly".*

Thematic unit 2 - Family support and the importance of specialist intervention.

The social worker is the specialist whose role is to promote non-discriminatory, non-accepting and compassionate behaviour at the social level, and at the individual level, to protect the rights and interests of people who are confronted with substance abuse. In addition to these aspects, the social worker will participate in and develop the interdepartmental networks responsible for the implementation and effectiveness of informational, multilateral, preventive, therapeutic and anti-drug programs.

The social worker's intervention in the case of drug addiction in comparison to his/her intervention in other cases is incomparable, because users of prohibited substances come from diverse social backgrounds, regardless of religion, gender, age or race. The rehabilitation of the person addicted to banned substances, is carried out with the support and help coming from the social worker following an assessment, following which the specialist carries out a rehabilitation plan and realizes cooperative links with various specialists. (Cosma, 2022)

The second thematic unit dealt with issues related to family support and the importance of professional intervention.

The interviewees stated that family support was very important, but from what some of the respondents said, there were families who knew absolutely nothing about their substance use (*my family did not know about it, I did not want to tell them because they would try to alienate me from my friends*), while others chose to be honest with their family and tell them what they were going through (*I chose to be honest with them because they were the only people who were always there for me and I felt they deserved to know the truth*). In terms of the importance of the specialists intervention, a good proportion of the interviewees claimed that their intervention is very important and they consider it necessary (*the help from the specialists was a relief because I was no longer alone in this struggle with addiction.*), in contrast to four people who believe that they have the situation under control but continue to come to the meetings with the social worker of the CPECA Caraş-Severin (*I believe that I have the situation under control and that I manage on my own, that is why the intervention of the specialists is not so important for me*).

The tools that the specialists use in working with the beneficiary are the initial assessment, the introduction into an integrated program for drug users by providing specialized social, medical and psychological counselling, and case management sessions in which the beneficiary's progress during the program is noted and the next steps in the program are determined. Thus, the file of a client benefiting from the services of CPECA contains the following: the beneficiary's registration form (European), a questionnaire containing questions related to the client's passions and desires, an assessment report, an individualized treatment plan, medical, psychological and social assistance agreement, the beneficiary's objectives, review of the objectives proposed in the ITP (individualized treatment plan), minutes, individual monitoring report, final interview with the beneficiaries, a satisfaction questionnaire.

Thematic Unit 3 - Changes brought about by drug use and the desire for change and social reintegration

The changes produced by drug use are among the most serious, because they produce negative effects on health, but especially on the central nervous system, causing behavioural problems such as aggression, paranoia, hallucinations, impulsivity, loss of control, and ultimately addiction. Substance use can even cause death, nowadays one in four deaths is caused by substance abuse. (Tomita, 2013)

The last thematic unit refers to the changes brought about by drug use, their desire to change. Thus, the interviewees stated that they very much want to change and go back to their former life, they want to lead a normal life without drug use. In terms of changes brought about by substances, most of them said that drugs affected their health, causing excessive weight loss, stomach and heart problems (*from a healthy person I ended up with weight problems because I lost a lot of weight and some heart problems but not serious*).

A good proportion of the interviewees want to give up drug use (*Yes, I very much want to get well and be the same as before, but it is a very hard process. I want to get well in order to be able to fulfil my desires, only now I realized that drugs only destroy a person, the intervention is working, I am on the right track*), they want a normal life.

The intervention of specialists is very important because the person facing drug addiction needs all the support and specialized help offered.

8. General conclusions of the paper

Drug use has become one of the most dangerous phenomena affecting young people in general. Nowadays 1 in 10 young people use drugs for various reasons, some young people use out of curiosity, others out of a desire to be part of a group or because of family problems. While all banned substances can cause complications, psychoactive substances have the greatest potential to cause abuse. These substances cause various damage to the brain structure, resulting in control of mood, behaviour and consciousness.

Efforts to identify the social or behavioural risk factors that lead to substance use have begun to be explored, and it is clear that there is no characteristic trigger system or incident that predicts a person's substance abuse.

The results of the opinion survey and the interview guide indicate that the causes that lead a person to use drugs can be social, educational, individual and, last but not least, family.

Specialist help is very important. The social worker is the specialist whose role it is to promote non-discriminatory, non-accepting and compassionate behaviour at the social level, and at the individual level, to protect the rights and interests of people who are confronted with substance abuse. In addition to these aspects, the social worker participates in and develops interdepartmental networks responsible for implementation and effectiveness of informational, multilateral, preventive, therapeutic and substance abuse programs.

The dynamics and diversity of the situations in which the beneficiaries may find themselves, require a broad training and a multi-field approach of the specialist in order to be able to realize an effective intervention. The CPECA Caras-Severin specialist is open to offer support and help to people who are confronted with drug use, considering that it is very important for a drug user to receive specialized help to get rid of addiction and for social reintegration.

The rehabilitation of the person addicted to substances is carried out with the support and help of the social worker following an assessment, after which the specialist will carry out a rehabilitation plan and establish cooperation with various specialists.

The role of the social worker is not only limited to intervention, in particular the rehabilitation of people who have used drugs, but also drug prevention. Together with other drug specialists, social workers have a duty to inform the public about the dangers of drug use.

Drug use can affect all ages and all social categories, it has a big social impact on the community as well as a strong medical impact.

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