

A PSYCHODEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE PATIENTS OF A DEADDICTION CENTRE IN MADRAS.

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SUMMARY

Sixty patients who reported to a Deaddiction Centre were investigated with regard to their psychodemographic profile. 53.3% of them turned out to be exclusively alcohol abusers, 35% were abusers of alcohol concurrently with other substances and 11.7% were abusers of exclusively drugs. Those who consumed alcohol alone, commenced their intake at a mean age of 24.4 years and reported for treatment only at 39.2 years; this was in contrast to the mean age of 17.9 years at which alcohol use begin in those who took alcohol in combination with other substances. Further, abusers of drugs alone reported for treatment at an age of 24 years, which is quite similar to the age at which the abusers of alcohol concomitantly with other substances resorted for psychiatric help. Other than the withdrawal syndrome, the most frequently encountered psychotic condition was alcoholic hallucinosis.

Over the past decade there has been an upsurge in the abuse of certain drugs in India, which have not been previously encountered. Recent studies on heroin dependence (Adityanjee et al, 1984; Munjal & Jiloha, 1986; Gupta et al, 1987), on buprenorphine dependence (Lal, 1991), and phensedyl abuse (Nizamie & Ray, 1991) bear witness to this alarming trend. Regular ongoing research projects are warranted in de-addiction clinics in order to assess the changing types of substances abused, shift in the patterns of abuse, variations in the availability of these substances, and alteration in the profile of the substance abusers, so as to enable the formulation of management strategies. The present study was designed to assess the psychodemographic profile of the patients who reported to a de-addiction centre.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

All new cases who reported to the Research and Treatment Centre for alcohol and drug dependence at the Department of Psychiatry, Government Stanley Hospital, Madras, during the three months from November 1989 to January 1990 were selected for this study. Out of the 67 cases thus selected, seven had to be excluded for want of their co-operation and compliance, which left only 60 patients for this research project.

A detailed history was elicited and the particulars pertaining to the history of the substances abused and the required demographic data were recorded separately. On Psychiatric evaluation, wherever mental disorder was detected, ICD-9 (WHO, 1978) criteria were applied to classify them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The sample was entirely male (n=60) and 32 (53.3%) were exclusively alcohol abusers, 21 (35%) were abusers of alcohol concurrently with one or more substances such as cannabis, heroin, diazepam etc., and 7 (11.67%) were abusers of substances alone. The mean age at which patients with exclusively alcohol abuse reported for treatment was 39.2 years which was significantly at variance with the mean age (24.8 years) at which treatment was sought by those alcohol abusers who concomitantly

abused other substances. (Table 1). Furthermore, those who abused substances alone (n=7; heroin & cannabis, 4; heroin only 2; heroin, cannabis & nitrazepam, 1) reported for treatment at a mean age of 24 years which is quite

Table 1

	Exclusively alcohol abusers (n=32)	Abusers of alcohol concurrently with other substances (n=21)
Mean age at which alcohol abuse was started	24.433 yrs	17.947 yrs t = 3.004, p < 0.001
Mean age at which patient reported for treatment	39.219 yrs	24.762 yrs t = 5.758, p < 0.001

similar to the age at which the abusers of alcohol together with other substances resorted to psychiatric help.

Investigation of the initial phase of the intake of substances showed that consumption had begun in the users solely of alcohol at 24.4 years which was strikingly in contrast within the mean age of 17.9 years at which alcohol use was initiated in those who abused it in combination with other substances (Table 1). This suggests that the exclusively alcohol abusers are psychosocially or biologically different from those who consumed alcohol concurrently with other substances. Furthermore, the age at which solely alcohol abusers reported for treatment (39.2 years) suggests that, on an average, 15 years had elapsed before this group sought professional help.

The mean age at which heroin abuse started was 21.3 years, as compared to that of cannabis abuse (19.8 years), a difference which was not statistically significant. Noteworthy was our observation that both those who abused substances exclusively as well as those who abused alcohol concurrently with other substances had approached for treatment at about the same age (24 years). This finding leads us to speculate whether the abuse of substances such as heroin rather than alcohol could have led a person into complications necessitating treatment within a span of about 3 years.

Among the polysubstance abusers, i.e., those who con-

Table 2
Combinations of substances used

Combination of substances abused	n=26 (43.33)
Alcohol, heroin and cannabis	4 (23.33)
Alcohol and cannabis	4 (6.67)
Alcohol, heroin, cannabis and diazepam	1 (1.67)
Alcohol, heroin and methaqualone	1 (1.67)
Alcohol and native preparations	1 (1.67)
Heroin and cannabis	4 (6.67)
Heroin, cannabis and nitrazepam	1 (1.67)

Table 3
Socio Demographic Variables (n=60)

Marital Status	
Married	38 (63.33)
Unmarried	22 (36.67)
Educational Status	
Illiterate	11 (18.33)
1st-5th Standard	12 (21.67)
6th-10th Standard	27 (45)
11th-12th Standard	6 (10)
Degree/Diploma	3 (5)
Occupation	
Unemployed	19 (31.67)
Unskilled workers	24 (40)
Skilled workers	9 (15)
Clerk	2 (3.33)
Professional	2 (3.33)
Others	4 (6.67)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage.

sumed more than one substance (n=26, 43.3%), the most commonly encountered concurrent use of choice items were alcohol, heroin and cannabis (n=14, 23.3%). Among the rest, alcohol and cannabis abuse (n=4, 6.7%) were found to be more prevalent (Table 2). Twenty patients (35%) of our sample were found to be using heroin concomitantly with other substances of abuse while two had been on heroin only. All the cannabis abusers (n=24, 40%) had been concurrently using other substances of abuse also. Though cannabis was found by some to be a popular drug of abuse a decade ago (Sethi et al, 1979; Ponnudurai et al, 1984), at present, heroin also seems to have gained prominence in the drug abuse scenario in India.

Thirty eight (63.3%) patients were married (Table 3) of whom the vast majority were exclusively alcohol consumers (n=29, 76.3%). This observation is probably due to the higher mean age of the solely alcohol abusers (39.2 years). In our sample, eleven (18.3%) were illiterates and 13 (21.7%) had studied up to 5th standard. A sizeable proportion of them were either unemployed, (n=19, 31.67%) or unskilled workers (n=24, 40%). However, since the services of our Government hospital were free to those whose monthly income is less than Rs. 500/-, the socioeconomic status of the vast majority of our patients turned out to be on the lower side; this prohibits us from

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drawing inferences on the educational and occupational status of our patients.

Among the alcohol abusers (n=53) who sought our help, apart from the withdrawal syndrome, the most frequently encountered psychotic condition was alcoholic hallucinosis (n=6, 11.3%). Other psychiatric conditions seen were alcoholic jealousy (n=2, 3.8%), delirium tremens (n=1, 1.9%), alcoholic dementia (n=1, 1.9%) alcoholic withdrawal fits (n=1, 1.9%), and Neurotic depression (n=4, 7.6%). In one case, notwithstanding the abuse of alcohol for one year and cannabis and heroin for five years, a diagnosis of paranoid and hallucinatory state induced by drugs was made.

CONCLUSION

The notable prevalence of polysubstance abuse, particularly of heroin which produces dependence rapidly, and the prime age of 24 years at which patients sought psychiatric help should be an indicator for further intensive study of the youth and young adults at community level. It would be premature to speculate whether those abused alcohol exclusively were psychosocially or biologically different from those who consumed alcohol concurrently with other substances, but this is a pointer for further research in this direction.

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