

Knowledge and attitudes towards addiction to psychoactive substances in professional groups of health care workers, teachers and the police in the Lubuskie Voivodeship

Wiedza i postawy wobec uzależnienia od substancji psychoaktywnych w grupach zawodowych pracowników służby zdrowia, nauczycieli i policji w województwie lubuskim

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Abstract

Drug addiction is a common phenomenon that increases with the progress of the European integration process. Professional help to people addicted and under the influence of drugs or other psychoactive substances should be provided primarily by health care institutions. An important and interesting issue seems to be the assessment of how people who have the most frequent contact with addicts are prepared to provide help, what is their knowledge and attitude to the phenomenon of drug addiction and to people addicted to psychoactive substances. The material for the research was a questionnaire for people who have contact and / or work professionally with people addicted to psychoactive substances. A total number of 253 people who had professional contact with people addicted to psychoactive substances were examined, including 102 men and 151 women. The respondents most often acquired knowledge in the field of drug addiction through the mass media. The exception is the professional group of doctors, which was the only one to refer to professional literature. Contact with drug addicts was not worried by 68.6% of doctors, 68.4% of policemen, 45.9% of nurses and only 39.0% of teachers. Fear may be caused mainly by possible aggressive behavior, which is feared by 49.8% of the respondents, including 58.3% of women and 37.2% of men. When it comes to 90.1% of respondents, they believe that the cause of aggression is the lack of control over their emotions. The results of the work can be helpful in creating new, satisfying solutions to difficult situations and developing cooperation characterized by empathy and acceptance.

Keywords: medical staff, policemen, teachers, knowledge, attitudes, addiction to psychoactive substances.

Streszczenie

Uzależnienie od substancji psychoaktywnych jest zjawiskiem powszechnym, narastającym wraz z postępowaniem procesu integracji europejskiej. Profesjonalną pomoc osobom uzależnionym i będącym pod wpływem substancji psychoaktywnych powinny nieść przede wszystkim instytucje ochrony zdrowia. Ważnym i ciekawym zagadnieniem wydaje się ocena jak osoby, które

mają najczęstszy kontakt z uzależnionymi są przygotowani do udzielania pomocy, jaka jest ich wiedza i nastawienie do osób uzależnionych od substancji psychoaktywnych. Materiał do badań stanowił kwestionariusz ankiety dla osób mających kontakt i / lub zajmujących się zawodowo osobami uzależnionymi od substancji psychoaktywnych. Zbadano 253 osoby mające kontakt zawodowy z osobami uzależnionymi od substancji psychoaktywnych, w tym 102 mężczyzn i 151 kobiet. Wiedzę w zakresie substancji psychoaktywnych najczęściej respondenci zdobywali za pośrednictwem środków masowego przekazu. Wyjątek stanowi grupa zawodowa lekarzy, która jako jedyna sięgała do fachowego piśmiennictwa. Kontakt z osobami uzależnionymi od substancji psychoaktywnych nie obawiało się 68,6% lekarzy, 68,4% policjantów, 45,9% pielęgniarzek i tylko 39,0% nauczycieli. Lęk mogą wzbudzać głównie ewentualne zachowania agresywne, których obawia się 49,8% respondentów, w tym 58,3% kobiet i 37,2% mężczyzn. 90,1% respondentów za przyczynę agresji uważa brak panowania nad swoimi emocjami. Wyniki pracy mogą być pomocne w kreowaniu nowych, satysfakcjonujących rozwiązań trudnych sytuacji i rozwijania współpracy nacechowanej empatią i akceptacją.

Słowa kluczowe: personel medyczny, policjanci, nauczyciele, wiedza, postawy, uzależnienie od środków psychoaktywnych.

Introduction

Drug addiction is a common phenomenon, growing along with the progress of the European integration process [1]. Professional help for addicts and under the influence of drugs or other psychoactive substances should be provided primarily by health care institutions. However, in everyday life, the first contact with a person under the influence of these substances is the preventive service, and often even teachers. What kind of help will be provided to an addicted person depends on many factors, including the preparation and professionalism of people who should be involved in providing help. The quality of the support provided depends on the attitudes of professionals and their assessment of the drug addiction phenomenon [2].

The problems of addicted people have an impact on those who remain in professional and social relationships with them [2]. Due to their profession, educators, health care workers and preventive services should be partners in activities preventing addictions. The integration of these services in preventing drug addiction seems to be insufficient. The cases of violations of the law by addicts are underestimated, and intervention appears only when problems become serious and addiction has already destroyed many areas of human life.

Therefore, an important and interesting issue seems to be the assessment of how people who have the most frequent contact with addicts are prepared to provide help, what is their knowledge and attitude to the phenomenon of drug addiction and to people addicted to psychoactive substances. The results of the work can be helpful in creating new, satisfying solutions to difficult situations and developing cooperation characterized by empathy and acceptance.

Material and methods

The research material was a questionnaire for

people who have contact and / or work professionally with people addicted to psychoactive substances. The research material and the method of obtaining it have been positively assessed and approved by the Bioethics Committee of the Medical University of Karol Marcinkowski in Poznań - Resolution no. 1016/10. Data were collected in 2007 and 2008 in the Lubuskie Voivodeship in the Zielona Góra, Nowosolski, Krośnieński, Żagań and Świebodziński poviats.

The questionnaire took into account the basic demographic and socioeconomic parameters. A total of

Table 1. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of people who come into contact with addicted to psychoactive substances.

| Characteristic | | N | % of the total |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|----------------|
| Sex | men | 102 | 40.3 |
| | women | 151 | 59.7 |
| Age [years] | 20-30 | 47 | 18.6 |
| | 31-40 | 116 | 45.8 |
| | 41-50 | 71 | 28.1 |
| | over 50 | 19 | 7.5 |
| Profession | nurses | 61 | 24.1 |
| | doctors | 35 | 13.8 |
| | policemen | 79 | 31.3 |
| | teachers | 78 | 30.8 |
| Place of residence | city | 162 | 64.0 |
| | village | 91 | 36.0 |
| Education | higher | 151 | 59.7 |
| | medium | 102 | 40.3 |
| Work experience [years] | 0-9 | 76 | 30.0 |
| | 10-14 | 43 | 17.0 |
| | 15-18 | 50 | 19.8 |
| | 19-24 | 43 | 17.0 |
| | 25-40 | 41 | 16.2 |

253 people who had professional contact with people addicted to psychoactive substances were examined, including 102 men and 151 women (Table 1).

The STATISTICA 12.0 package was used for statistical calculations. The relationships between the studied variables (all of a nominal nature) were assessed on the basis of the Pearson chi-square test (χ^2), and in the case of a small number in the "box" the Yates correction was applied. All the described relationships and differences are statistically significant. Values of the test function meeting the condition were considered significant $p \leq 0.05$.

Results

Knowledge about drug addiction among teachers (92.3%), nurses (60.7%) and policemen (67.0%) came mainly from generally available magazines and / or radio or TV broadcasts, while doctors more often (60.0%) used professional literature. In the opinion of 73.1% of all the respondents, training in the field of drug addiction is insufficient, 20.2% of respondents considered that it provides basic care and 6.7% considered it sufficient. When it comes to 42.3% of respondents, they believed that the number of places in detoxification departments was too small and that they had to wait in a queue, and 7.9% considered that their number was sufficient. Almost half of the respondents (49.8%) had no opinion on this subject, and it is significant that as many as 36.1% of nurses and 28.6% of doctors had such an opinion.

Most of the respondents had no knowledge of the ongoing risk reduction programs (94.9%) and were convinced that local authorities were not sufficiently involved in solving problems resulting from the drug addiction phenomenon (92.9%).

When it comes to 39.1% of respondents, they believed that there was cooperation between the police, school and health service in preventing drug addiction, 31.6% took a different position, and 29.2% did not have any opinion on this subject. The police officers were most often convinced about good cooperation (49.4%).

The attitude to the problem of drug addiction is emotionally marked and, in part, results from knowledge of the law. It is surprising that as many as 53.7% of respondents denied the existence of a demoralizing influence of drug addicts on the society and do not see the need to isolate them from society, 28.1% had a different opinion, while 18.2% did not have any opinion on this subject. It is interesting that women (57.6%) were significantly more often ($\chi^2 = 7.32$, $p = 0.026$) more liberal in these opinions than men (48.1%). What is particularly surprising is the opinion of doctors, the majority of whom (77.1%) did not notice the negative impact of drug addicts on society and the need for their isolation.

The majority of respondents (54.1%) stated that a person addicted to psychoactive substances leads a "parasitic lifestyle", 27.3% had a different opinion, and 18.6% did not take any position on this issue. Here again, women turned out to be significantly more liberal ($\chi^2 = 8.66$, $p = 0.013$), because only 47.0% considered drug addicts to be social parasites, while 64.7% of men think so. The social parasitism of drug addicts was most often recognized by policemen (64.6%), doctors (60.0%) and nurses (55.7%), and only 39.7% of teachers. When it comes to 36.8% of the respondents, they agreed with the opinion that treatment and rehabilitation of people addicted to psychoactive substances is too expensive, including 54.1% of nurses, 34.3% doctors, 34.2% policemen and 26.9% teachers.

Considering the problem of discrimination against former drug abusers who are now under treatment, i.e. the so-called "sober drug addicts", 43.1% of respondents believed that they were discriminated against, and 20.9% said that such a person must hide this fact.

Most of the respondents (87.7%) found that even only occasional drug use was reprehensible, especially people aged 41-50 (94.4%) and living in the countryside (94.5%). This position was also shared by the majority of nurses (93.4%), teachers (92.3%), policemen (84.8%), and interestingly only 74.3% of doctors.

People addicted to psychoactive substances generally (54.0%) did not arouse fear (66.7% of men, 45.3% of women). Contact with drug addicts was not worried by 68.6% of doctors, 68.4% of policemen, 45.9% of nurses and only 39.0% of teachers. Fear may be caused mainly by possible aggressive behavior, which is feared by 49.8% of the respondents, including 58.3% of women and 37.2% of men. When it comes to 90.1% of respondents, they believe that the cause of aggression is the lack of control over their emotions. Aggression is feared by 67.2% of nurses, 51.4% of doctors, 48.7% of teachers and 36.7% of policemen.

More than half of the respondents (61.7%) expressed the view that people addicted to drugs should be treated under duress, 34.8% considered the possibility of treatment only with the consent of the addict, and only 3.5% believed that drug addicts should be punished instead of treated.

When it comes to 57.7% of respondents, they expressed the view that criminogenic behavior related to drug use should be punished, and 42.3% believed that drug use should be punished. The number of 74.3% of doctors, 65.6% of nurses, 51.3% of teachers and 50.6% of policemen admitted the possibility of punishing criminal behavior related to the use of psychoactive substances.

According to 64.4% of the respondents, drug addiction should be combated by the method of prohibitions. Men (73.5%) think so more often ($\chi^2 = 6.18$ p

= 0.0123) than women (58.3%).

The vast majority of respondents (90.5%) believe that the law should be more restrictive in relation to drug addicts. This is the opinion of 96.7% of nurses, 96.2% of policemen, 89.7% of teachers and 68.6% of doctors.

The attitude to threats and methods of treatment is an important aspect of this study, as it proves the quality of work of the surveyed professional groups. When it comes to 61.6% of the respondents, they stated that care

for addicted persons is carried out poorly, 34.8% thought it was good, and in the opinion of 3.6% it should not be provided at all. Significantly different ($p < 0.001$) opinions on this issue are expressed by the representatives of the analyzed professions (Table 2). The number of 74.7% of policemen, 59.0% of teachers, 54.1% of nurses and 51.4% of doctors had a negative opinion on the care of drug addicts, and mainly doctors (45.7%), nurses (44.3%) and also teachers (41.0%).

Table 2. The quality of the care provided over addicted persons.

| Profession | | Caring for addicts | | | Marginal sum |
|------------|-------|--------------------|---------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| | | Realized badly | Realized well | It should not be implemented | |
| nurses | Lo | 33 | 27 | 1 | 61 |
| | Lo-Le | -4.61 | +5.78 | -1.17 | |
| doctors | Lo | 18 | 16 | 1 | 35 |
| | Lo-Le | -3.58 | +3.83 | -0.25 | |
| policemen | Lo | 59 | 13 | 7 | 79 |
| | Lo-Le | +10.29 | -14.48 | +4.19 | |
| teachers | Lo | 46 | 32 | 0 | 78 |
| | Lo-Le | -2.09 | +4.87 | -2.78 | |
| Σ | | 156 | 88 | 9 | 253 |

$\chi^2=24.41, df=6, p<0.001, (Lo-$ values observed, $Le-$ expected values)

The profession is related to the concerns about the risk of hepatotropic virus infections (mainly type C) and HIV in contact with drug addicts (Table 3). Policemen (68.3%), doctors (68.6%) and nurses (62.3%) have them

significantly more often ($p < 0.001$). People with secondary (67.6%) and higher (49.0%) education are of particular concern.

In the opinion of 18.6% of the respondents,

Table 3. Fear in contact with a drug addict of HIV and viral hepatitis (explanations as in Table 2).

| Profession | | Fear of viral hepatitis and HIV infection when in contact with a drug addict | | | Marginal sum |
|------------|-------|--|-------------------|------------------|--------------|
| | | I'm afraid | I have no opinion | There is no risk | |
| nurses | Lo | 38 | 14 | 9 | 61 |
| | Lo-Le | +3.52 | -1.67 | -1.85 | |
| doctors | Lo | 24 | 3 | 8 | 35 |
| | Lo-Le | +4.22 | -5.99 | +1.77 | |
| policemen | Lo | 54 | 12 | 13 | 79 |
| | Lo-Le | +9.35 | -8.30 | -1.05 | |
| teachers | Lo | 27 | 36 | 15 | 78 |
| | Lo-Le | -17.09 | +15.96 | +1.13 | |
| Σ | | 143 | 65 | 45 | 253 |

$\chi^2 = 31.10, df=6, p<0.001, (Lo-$ values observed, $Le-$ expected values)

treating drug addicts should be dealt with by the inpatient treatment division, and according to 2% by the outpatient treatment division. The majority (79.4%) of the respondents believe that both divisions should complement each other. This is significantly more common among doctors and teachers, while teachers are

more likely to have a different opinion (closed treatment) (Table 4).

Only 26.5% of the respondents expressed their readiness to provide any help, and 64.8% would not provide financial support to an addicted person in a state of abstinence. Half (49.0%) of respondents would not like

Table 4. The healthcare division, which should deal with the treatment of drug addicts (explanations as in Table 2).

| Profession | | Fear of viral hepatitis and HIV infection when in contact with a drug addict | | | |
|------------|-------|--|-------------------|------------------|--------------|
| | | I'm afraid | I have no opinion | There is no risk | Marginal sum |
| nurses | Lo | 12 | 49 | 0 | 61 |
| | Lo-Le | +0.67 | +0.54 | -1.21 | |
| doctors | Lo | 0 | 35 | 0 | 35 |
| | Lo-Le | -6.50 | +7.19 | -0.69 | |
| policemen | Lo | 25 | 51 | 3 | 79 |
| | Lo-Le | +10.32 | -11.76 | +1.44 | |
| teachers | Lo | 10 | 66 | 2 | 78 |
| | Lo-Le | -4.49 | +4.03 | +0.46 | |
| Σ | | 47 | 201 | 5 | 253 |

$\chi^2 = 22.89$, $df=6$, $p<0.001$, (Lo- values observed, Le- expected values)

to have a drug addiction and HIV-infected center in the vicinity. Such opinions were expressed significantly more often by policemen (Table 5).

Table 5. Accepting the vicinity of the center for drug addicts and HIV-infected (explanations as in Table 2).

| Profession | | Proximity to the center for addicted and HIV-infected people | | |
|------------|-------|--|------------|--------------|
| | | No approval | Acceptance | Marginal sum |
| nurses | Lo | 23 | 38 | 61 |
| | Lo-Le | -6.90 | +6.90 | |
| doctors | Lo | 10 | 25 | 35 |
| | Lo-Le | -7.15 | +7.15 | |
| policemen | Lo | 53 | 26 | 79 |
| | Lo-Le | +14.28 | -14.28 | |
| teachers | Lo | 38 | 40 | 78 |
| | Lo-Le | -0.23 | +0.23 | |
| Σ | | 124 | 129 | 253 |

$\chi^2 = 19.32$, $df=6$, $p<0.001$, (Lo- values observed, Le- expected values)

Results

Drug addiction is considered a serious social, legal and medical problem all over the world, which is a challenge for practitioners and theorists in social and professional relationships with addicts [3].

Own research of three professional groups that deal with the problem of drug addiction on a daily basis stated that they know what this phenomenon is. Over 54.5% of respondents considered it an incurable disease, and 29.6% as a picture of modern society. According to Andrejew-Frączek [4], 77.8% of Polish society treated drug addiction as a disease, and according to Godwod-Sikorska and Sierosławski [5], 81.3% of respondents perceived drug addiction as a disease. Drug addiction, however, was not always considered a disease. Research conducted among health care professionals indicated that it was treated as a social phenomenon of medium importance (44% of

respondents), or as a phenomenon of great importance (39% of respondents) [6]. Regardless of whether drug addiction is perceived as a medical or social problem, it is a serious phenomenon that requires action to reduce its negative effects.

The knowledge of people professionally dealing with addiction to psychoactive substances should not be fundamentally different. In the authors' own research, 60% of physicians used professional literature, while over 79% of teachers and over 57% of nurses used generally available articles. The co-workers were not the source of knowledge for doctors and teachers. Due to the diversity of the sources of knowledge, it is not the same in the professional groups we studied. One can speak of a certain slogan. According to Demetrovics et al. [7], even the knowledge gained from professional sources does not necessarily translate into the quality of work

with addicts. Research conducted among Hungarian psychiatrists concerning, inter alia, knowledge about psychoactive substances and treatment methods, led to quite unexpected conclusions. Many respondents to these studies gave incorrect answers to the questions that, if applied in medical practice, could cause serious health damage to patients [7]. The authors of the above-cited studies stated that in practice, a doctor can always turn to his friend who has more experience for help. However, psychiatrists experienced in treating drug addicts did not achieve better test results than doctors without such experience [7]. Similar opinions are presented by Jacek et al. [8], namely that Australian doctors know a lot about alcohol, benzodiazepines or nicotine, and little about illegal substances. According to Polish research, the knowledge of primary care physicians on drug addiction was obtained primarily from non-medical sources, and to a small extent from scientific studies. More than half of the respondents have met an addicted patient in their medical practice. Doctors declared knowledge of the routes of administering psychoactive substances and recognizing the symptoms that occur after taking the drug (younger people recognized the symptoms better) [9].

Teachers are willing to learn and improve their knowledge about drugs. The areas of their interest are the types, availability and effects of drugs, 'warning signals' of changes in behavior and external appearance that appear in people abusing psychoactive substances. There is a reported need to have information about the stages of addiction, the possibilities of influencing its individual stages, and the mechanism of 'entering drug addiction'. The issue of directing a young person to an appropriate specialist is raised [10].

Earlier studies conducted among the professional group of teachers indicated that school principals did not deny the seriousness of the drug addiction problem, but emphasized its marginality and absence in their own school, while allowing the possibility of drug addiction in other schools. The difficulty of detecting the addiction phenomenon in the initial phase in the educational institution was emphasized [11].

According to Latelski et al. [12], about 85% of the surveyed primary care physicians were unfamiliar with modern methods of treating drug addiction. Their education also did not influence the greater knowledge of the subject. It seems very important to have information about ongoing projects, as they directly inhibit the adverse health effects of drug addiction. It is worth mentioning here about low-threshold programs, that is, the exchange of needles and syringes and the running of day rooms for active drug addicts. Since 2002, the number of needle and syringe exchange programs in Poland has decreased compared to 2008 from 21 to 13. The number of cities

where these programs are available has also decreased [13]. When it comes to harm reduction programs, of course, they cannot be limited to the exchange of needles and syringes, although they are one of the most effective methods of HIV or HCV prevention. Harm reduction programs are also information about drugs, on the one hand, actual knowledge about drugs and their impact on the human body, and on the other hand, knowledge about what kind of 'commodity' is sold and what health consequences will be after taking it.

The respondents most often acquired knowledge in the field of drug addiction through the mass media. The exception is the professional group of doctors, which was the only one to refer to professional literature. One can speak of a certain slogan and lack of systematization of knowledge of other professional groups.

When it comes to 56.5% of the participants of own research in contact with drug addicts, they were afraid of HIV / HCV infection, about 18% had no fear, and about 26% did not think about it. The greatest concern about the possibility of contracting the above-mentioned viruses is caused by addicts to psychoactive substances among doctors (68.6%), then policemen (68.3%), nurses (62.3%) and teachers (34.6%). HIV infection was spreading rapidly among injecting drug users.

Medical personnel presents negative attitudes towards HIV-infected and AIDS patients, and is less willing to maintain social contacts than towards patients with other diseases [14]. Nursing doctors and medical students were often afraid of contact with HIV-infected or AIDS patients. They were unable to show compassion or simple cordiality in working with the sick [15]. There remains the issue of the flow of internal information among health care professionals, namely informing about the serological status of the patient - drug addict. According to Janiszewska [14], studies conducted in many countries show that obtaining information about a positive test result did not reduce the risk of infection of a doctor or nurse.

According to Marcinkowski and Jabłoński [16], the emergence of HIV, hepatotropic viruses and AIDS infections changed the society's attitude towards drug addicts and resulted in the search for solutions to a new problem. The existing centers were unprepared to receive HIV-infected people, therefore, on the initiative of various people, centers were established to accept only HIV-positive patients. An example is the MONAR house in Zbicko near Opole. However, creating a homogeneous community, and therefore in this case infected with the virus, nullified the effort and the therapeutic effect.

Conclusions

Analyzing the presented research results, the authors

suggest that the research should be repeated and extended to other regions of the country, and the training system in the field of drug addiction should be reorganized and intensified, especially for professional groups that have frequent contact with addicts. Also, emphasis should be placed on greater participation of primary care workers in the process of recognizing early symptoms of addiction and referring to specialist institutions.

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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