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SMOKING CIGARETTES AND DRINKING ALCOHOL AS A MANIFESTATION OF RISKY BEHAVIORS OF YOUNG PEOPLE - A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

SUMMARY

WORKING ASSUMPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the presented work was (the main objective of the study) to analyze the health, social and mental behaviors of youth from the Wielkopolska province, in particular those related to smoking cigarettes, alcohol consumption, the influence of the family and peer environment, and to assess the physical and mental condition of young people. The specific objectives of the study were set as follows: to determine the age of initiation of youth in smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol; to assess the availability of cigarettes and alcohol from the perspective of youth and to analyze the patterns of their consumption and the scale of potential addiction problems; to examine the beliefs of youth regarding smoking, especially in the context of body weight control and social acceptance; to analyze the influence of the peer environment on behaviors related to smoking and drinking alcohol; to compare attitudes and behaviors towards stimulants between girls and boys; to assess the awareness and attitudes of parents towards their children's use of psychoactive substances, including the role of the family in alcohol initiation and the level of acceptance for alcohol consumption at home; to determine the scale of youth's exposure to passive smoking at home; to examine the quality of relationships with parents, including the availability of their support in difficult situations and their knowledge about the use of free time by children; estimation of the percentage of youth with reduced mental and physical condition, including the frequency of suicidal thoughts.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study was conducted on a group of 1,292 adolescents (737 girls, 555 boys) aged 13-19 using a survey questionnaire consisting of 51 thematic questions and personal details. The study was conducted in secondary schools (general secondary school, basic vocational school, technical school) in selected counties of the Wielkopolska province in April-June 2023. The survey was in electronic form and was conducted online via the Microsoft Forms online platform. The surveys were completed by students independently, the study was voluntary and anonymous. Data from the electronic surveys were transferred to a database, on the basis of which statistical analyses were carried out.

RESULTS

The results of our own research were presented with a division into several thematic threads, i.e. smoking cigarettes by young people, drinking alcohol by young people, taking psychoactive substances by young people (other research threads) and self-assessment of the health of young people and assessment of relationships with parents or guardians.

Almost 1/3 of young people (27.2%) admit that they smoke cigarettes. The percentage of young people who smoke cigarettes is almost the same in the countryside and in the city (26.7% vs. 27.6%). On average, every 4th smoking teenager (25.6%) admits that they smoke cigarettes every day, and another 10.0% more than 20 days a month. On average, every 20th smoking teenager (5.3%) admits that they smoke more than 20 cigarettes a day. The parents of almost every second teenager (45.6%) know that their child smokes cigarettes.

The majority of teenagers admit (62.5%) that they have already consumed alcohol. Youth admit that they drink alcohol in various forms 1-2 times a month (39.1%), 3-9 times (25.5%), 10-19 times (3.8%) or as many as over 20 times (1.1%). Almost 1 in 50 teenagers (1.8%) drinks alcohol every day. Only 1/3 of young people (28.9%) do not drink alcohol at all. On average, every third teenager (33.8%) drinks alcohol in the amount of "1 mug of beer, one glass of wine, 1 shot of vodka, one drink" on a single occasion, however, a further 20.3% of teenagers admit that they usually drink "5 or more mugs of beer, 5 glasses of wine, 5 shots of vodka, 5 drinks" on a single occasion. Young people most often drink beer (78.1%), vodka (72.2%), less often wine (54.3%) or other types of alcohol (9.5%), e.g. drinks, gin, rum, tequila, whiskey, brandy or liqueur. Parents of 2/3 of teenagers (72.7%) know that their child drinks alcohol. Young people take stimulants for many reasons, but the most common are: out of curiosity (9.6%), admitting that they cope better with life after using them (8.2%) and to kill time (5.8%). Young people drink energy drinks in various amounts on a monthly basis, i.e. almost every third teenager (31.3%) drinks them 1-2 times, another 25.0% 3-9 times, and 18.4% as many as 10 or more times. Youth drink energy drinks in a single day in varying amounts, i.e. 71.5% of teenagers drink up to 0.25 liters (1 can), 18.7% up to 0.5 liters (2 cans), 4.5% 0.75 liters (3 cans), while 5.3% of teenagers drink more than 1 liter (i.e. 4 cans or more). On average, 1 in 5 teenagers (21.7%) admit to having health problems. Almost half of the youth (45.9%) assess their health as "good", another 26.6% as "very good", and 20.4% as "average". Most young people, but to varying degrees, feel lonely, i.e. always (8.0%), most of the time (21.0%), sometimes (36.1%), rarely (22.9%). On average, every 8th teenager (12.0%) wrote that they never feel lonely. Almost every fourth teenager (22.4%) admits that they are so stressed most of the year that they cannot sleep, and another 7.4% of teenagers say that they always feel this way. On average, every 13th teenager (7.7%) admits that they feel suicidal most of the year, while on average, every 22nd teenager (4.5%) says that they always have such thoughts during the year. Almost one third of young people (31.7%) say that they are not satisfied with their lives.

Statistically significant relationships were shown: Teenagers who smoke cigarettes are much more likely to drink alcohol ($\chi^2 = 152.25$; $p < 0.001$). Teenagers who drink alcohol ($\chi^2 = 127.66$; $p < 0.001$) and those who smoke cigarettes ($\chi^2 = 57.22$; $p < 0.001$) reach for energy drinks much more often. Health problems are more frequently reported by teenagers who smoke cigarettes ($\chi^2 = 18.76$; $p < 0.001$), who have ever drunk alcohol ($\chi^2 = 8.00$; $p = 0.005$) and those who consume energy drinks ($\chi^2 = 5.27$; $p = 0.022$). Teenagers who assess their health as worse are more likely to feel lonely ($\chi^2 = 281.12$; $p < 0.001$). The more often teenagers feel stressed to the point that they cannot sleep, the worse they assess their health ($\chi^2 = 211.70$; $p < 0.001$). A worse subjective assessment of teenagers' health is associated with a higher frequency of suicidal thoughts ($\chi^2 = 309.98$; $p < 0.001$). Teenagers are more likely to be more satisfied with life if they do not smoke cigarettes ($\chi^2 = 24.21$;

$p < 0.001$) and have never drank alcohol ($\chi^2 = 9.99$; $p = 0.002$). Teenagers who are less likely to receive support from parents/guardians in difficult situations are more likely to smoke cigarettes ($\chi^2 = 27.32$; $p < 0.001$) and/or drink alcohol ($\chi^2 = 40.51$; $p < 0.001$).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Main conclusion: Analysis of youth behaviors showed early initiation of smoking and drinking alcohol, easy access to these substances, high influence of peer environment and different attitudes of parents towards alcohol consumption by teenagers. Studies also showed exposure of teenagers to passive smoking at home, problems in relationships with parents, lack of support in difficult times and high level of stress and suicidal thoughts in some teenagers. Detailed conclusions: 1. Teenagers who have ever smoked cigarettes smoke their first cigarette mainly in the age group of 12-17 years, although a small percentage of youth try to smoke at the age of 10-11 years (10.9%) or even earlier. In turn, youth also start drinking alcohol mainly in the age group of 12-17 years (83.4%), although a small percentage of youth try to drink alcohol at the age of 10-11 years (4.7%) or even earlier. Therefore, the age of initiation of youth in the topic of smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol is very early, which increases the risk of tobacco-related diseases and alcohol problems in these people in the future; 2. More than half of young people buy cigarettes (54.7%) without any major difficulties, and some of them also buy alcohol (13.7%), which indicates insufficient control of sales and the need for educational activities among sellers. Young people consume various types of alcohol (most often beer - 78.1% and vodka - 72.2%; less often wine - 54.3% or other types of alcohol - 9.5%, e.g. drinks), often in an intensive manner, which suggests the existence of alcohol problems and a lack of awareness of the harmfulness of alcohol regardless of its type; 3. On average, every 4th teenager believes that smoking helps in losing weight (23.6%) and that a boy/man (24.8%) or a girl/woman (22.1%) who smokes cigarettes has more friends/colleagues, which indicates that it is justified to conduct educational programs for young people that will debunk myths about the benefits of smoking cigarettes and make young people aware of its harmfulness and promote physical activity and healthy eating as factors that truly affect health; 4. Most young people admit that in their environment there are many people of a similar age who smoke cigarettes (some friends smoke – 55.0%; most friends smoke – 27.3%; all friends smoke – 3.1%) and very often drink alcohol with their peers (73.7%), which suggests that peer pressure may be a strong factor influencing teenagers' decisions to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol. This indicates the need to strengthen social competences and assertive refusal skills; 5. Girls more often than boys declare smoking cigarettes (30.0% vs 23.4%), more often drink alcohol for the first time in the family home (37.9% vs 30.8%) and more often indicate, as the reason for taking stimulants, "better coping with life after taking them" (10.4% vs 5.4%), which justifies the need to take into account the gender perspective in designing prevention programs concerning stimulants; 6. Some parents of teenagers are aware that their children smoke cigarettes (45.6%) and/or drink alcohol (72.7%), which makes parents informed about the existing problem and co-responsible for not preventing addictions in their children and not taking early treatment steps. The family home plays an important role in the initiation of alcohol among young people and is also the place where they most often consume alcohol, which, combined with the frequent drinking of alcohol by people close to them, indicates the need for preventive and educational activities aimed

at families. Frequent drinking of alcohol by adults and varying levels of parental consent for its consumption by children (from 12.1% to 29.0%) encourage further experimentation and the consolidation of harmful behaviors, which indicates the need for preventive and educational activities aimed at families; 7. On average, every third teenager (31.7%) admits that the parents/guardians living with them smoke cigarettes, which indicates that some teenagers are exposed to passive smoking at home and which in turn indicates the need to implement preventive and educational activities on the harmfulness of smoking aimed at parents of teenagers; 8. On average, every 4th teenager (26.9%) admits that support and help in difficult situations from their parents are not always guaranteed (young people can count on such help only sometimes), which may indicate that parents of teenagers are overloaded with work, weakened family ties and a lack of conversations between parents and their children on important topics of adolescence. On average, every 6th teenager (15.9% in total) admits that their parents rarely (10.9%) or never (5.0%) know what they are doing in their free time, which indicates little interest of some parents of teenagers in their children's affairs, but also indicates a smaller opportunity for parents to get to know the interests and needs of teenagers, which in turn makes it difficult to build a strong bond and a relationship based on trust and creates a potentially greater risk of young people undertaking inappropriate or harmful activities without the knowledge and supervision of adults; 9. On average, 1 in 4-5 teenagers admits that they have health problems (21.7%), assesses their health as "average" (20.4%), feels lonely most of the time (21.0%), lacks satisfaction with life (31.7%) or admits that life has no meaning (26.2%) and that most of the time during the year they are so stressed that they cannot sleep (22.4%), which indicates a high level of stress and anxiety in some young people. Therefore, if such symptoms persist, it may be advisable to deliberately visit a psychologist or mental health specialist. Nearly every 8th teenager (12.2% in total) admits that they often feel suicidal (most of the time during the year - 7.7%, always - 4.5%), which indicates a feeling of great stress, overwhelm, hopelessness or helplessness among some young people and a desire to escape from negative experiences and emotions and may indicate mental health problems. Persistent suicidal thoughts in some adolescents require psychological assessment and support from a psychologist, and in justified situations, referral of the teenager to a psychiatrist.