

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Drug abuse in the armed forces

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ABSTRACT

Objectives

This article presents the subject matter embracing the issues of drug abuse in the Polish Armed Forces on the example of recruits serving in military units of the Warsaw garrison. The article draws attention to certain dangers connected with drug abuse in armed forces such as lowering discipline or combat effectiveness of a single soldier as well as whole units. The article also presents drug prevention procedures leading to diminishing the problem in armed forces and also within an inner circle of individual soldiers who cannot effectively cope with addiction to drugs or psychotropic substances.

Materials and Methods

The conducted analysis defining the phenomenon of drug abuse in the military environment was based on data gathered from 195 recruits serving in military units of the Warsaw garrison in January 2004. The data was collected by means of a diagnostic poll method conducted among the studied group of soldiers.

Results

Every third of the respondents admitted to taking drugs in the past, and 61 of the questioned soldiers (31.3%) admitted to taking drugs after being drafted into the army. The surveyed soldiers admitted to experimenting with drugs for the first time at the age of 14-16 (14.8%), the most common age of drug initiation was 17-18 years old (29.5%). The most frequently used intoxicant was cannabis (67.3%). 89.7% of the respondents were fully aware of harmful effects of drugs on a human body. The majority of the surveyed soldiers who acknowledged that they had taken drugs were of a working-class background (37.7%) or of a peasant background (32.8%); the greater part (62.3%) had primary education, merely every third of the soldiers had secondary school education.

Conclusions

A large number of soldiers serving in armed forces use drugs. The age of narcotic initiation is surprisingly early even though harmful effects of drugs on a human body are commonly understood. The fact of using drugs by young people is heavily influenced by environmental factors such as social background or education.

Keywords:

drug abuse, soldiers, armed forces

INTRODUCTION

Social interest in the phenomenon of drug abuse is not accidental. Among a great number of hazards occurring nowadays drug addiction remains the subject of particular interest of scientists, medical doctors, psychologists and sociologists. Tens of articles concerning health and social consequences of drug abuse can be easily found in numerous professional journals. Drug trafficking has been a serious problem in the military environment for many years. Narcotic or psychotropic substances can be easily distributed in the barracks - a concentration of a large number of people. Drugs typically reach military units via soldiers and their friends and are dealt by drug dealers. In January 2004 a research into drug abuse was conducted in the population of 195 recruits serving in military units of the Warsaw Garrison. The research confirmed the use of narcotic substances in the military environment. Until the late 1990s drugs were not mentioned in the analyses of health hazards in the Polish Armed Forces. They were regarded as an external problem concerning students of secondary schools and colleges. Such a stand mainly resulted from crime rates observed within the aforementioned environments. The position on the risks of drug abuse changed radically in 2000, when 28.000 doses of psychotropic substances were found among Polish soldiers. Next year as many as 55.000 doses of drugs and intoxicants were seized by the Military Police. However, this number does not fully reflect the scale of the problem. Taking into account the average statistics at the 'civil market' the number of doses which might have actually been introduced into the military environment could be estimated at more than 200.000.¹ In 2002 the amount of drugs in the military environment decreased considerably. This was largely due to effective actions of preventive services. 9.500 doses were seized in the vicinity of the barracks.² Nevertheless, the fact

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