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**EVALUATION OF PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF
STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY CITY IN SIBERIA**

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Abstract

Many university students smoke, drink alcohol, and use various psychoactive substances. Among them there are people who have problems with addiction to these substances. Some can not cope with it and they need help from psychologists or health professionals. Increased psycho-emotional loads become a frequent reason for using psychoactive substances. The purpose of the study was to identify the facts of non-medical use of narcotic drugs and other psychotropic substances by students of a university city, and to establish reasons for it. The study was conducted in March–June 2015 among students of a university city in Western Siberia. 22 199 students aged 18 to 25 were examined by the method of a continuous survey. The average age of the respondents at the time of the study was 20.9. The authors found that the main problems of students are related to their status and social role: household difficulties, high study loads, the need to make their own money (work and study). Great pressure in these spheres can provoke a desire to relieve tension by smoking, drinking alcohol, using narcotic or other psychotropic substances. The result of the study proves that the problem of the emotional security of the educational environment is broader than the prevention of smoking, alcoholism and drug addiction. Today high loads of the university study provoke stress and endogenous diseases that in their symptoms, without clinical studies, coincide with addiction and withdrawal symptoms.

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Keywords: Youth, psycho-emotional health, mental health, risk group, psychoactive substances, social adaptation.



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1. Introduction

The psycho-emotional aspect of health is an integral component of a successful person oriented towards a prosperous future. Researchers note that factors of well-being include specific sets of values that one holds and one's personality; they move an individual to self-development, motivation, healthy mental development, self-determination, etc. (Schutte, Tichelaar, Dekker, Thijs, de Vries, Richir, & van Agtmael, 2017; Ryan, & Deci, 2000; Konyukhova, Konyuhhova, Kashpur & Lokotosh, 2017). Many young people see the path to success through higher education "which should be secured in their employability and financial future" (Fell, Fell, & Lukianova, 2017). However, almost none of the students think about whether they will have enough strength to cope with the psycho-emotional stresses associated with studying at university, communicating in the new environment, dealing with circumstances, with the need to combine work and study, etc.

High psycho-emotional loads quite often push young people to find ways to relieve tension. Some find them in sports, creative activities; others - in the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs and other psychoactive substances. The use of such substances "can impair students' academic, emotional, and physical success and can lead to chronic diseases" (Blavos, Glassman, Sheu, Thompson, DeNardo, & Diehr, 2017, p. 1). Studies show that the number of young people who are one-time or constant (addicted) users of psychoactive substances is growing all over the world. They do it both to relieve stress after a traumatic event and to reduce the psycho-emotional stress caused by various factors, including studies, the need to work, maturing, etc. (Johnston, O'Malley, Miech, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2015; Ham, Wiersma-Mosley, Feldner, Melkonian, Milner, & Lewis, 2016; Avant, Davis, & Cranston, 2011; Behrendt, Wittchen, Höfler, Lieb, & Beesdo, 2009). "Fifty percent of adolescents have tried an illicit drug and 70 % have tried alcohol by the end of high school, with even higher rates among multiracial youth" (Fisher, Zapolski, Sheehan, & Barnes-Najor, 2017, p. 27).

In this context, the problem of preserving and maintaining the normal psycho-emotional and physical state of the student, an adequate solution to which will help prevent the use of any psychoactive substances, including alcohol, tobacco, drugs, is actualised.

In the scientific literature, the links proposed with drugs, marijuana or alcohol abuse are "mostly biological, psychological and environmental. Some authors proposed to analyse these consumptions in connection with the parents-children's relationships as well as the way individuals cope with problems and regulate emotions" (Sinnasse, & Tereno, 2017, p. 370). In this study, we tried to identify the facts of and reasons for the consumption of narcotic drugs and other psychotropic substances by students.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) sets universal goals, tasks and measures necessary to maintain an adequate socio-psychological state of an individual. The WHO Action Plan sets out the main criteria for mental health; their observance provides for individual's vitality, energy and working capacity. The criteria include:

- comprehension of one's physical and psychological "I", the preservation of one's permanence and identity;
- moderation in the experience of certain similar situations;
- adequate psychological response to current events, situations, changes in the social environment;
- planning one's own life and implementing all plans, etc.

In neuro-emotional activity, psychosocial factors greatly contribute to stress generation during adaptation and significantly affect the compensatory-adaptive and communicative functions of emotions in learning activities.

Psycho-emotional health includes emotional and psychic properties and qualities of an individual which, as is known, do not exist outside social relations. Consequently, the distinction between psycho-emotional and social health can be considered conditional. Emotionality implies more or less stable responses to certain vital facts referred to as mood (anxious, cheerful, sad). Mental health means an equilibrium between an individual and the outside world, the balance of various psychic properties and processes.

There are specific biological, psychological and social levels of mental health. At the biological level, health implies a dynamic balance of the functions of all internal organs and an adequate response to environmental influences. At the psychological level, health issues are related to the personal aspect of treating a person as a psychic whole. The more harmoniously united all the essential properties that make up a personality are, the more stable, balanced and holistic an individual is. Inclusion of an individual in social relations determines the social level of mental health. The psychological aspect of mental health presupposes attention to the inner world of an individual: one's confidence or insecurity, understanding one's abilities and interests; one's attitude to people, to the surrounding world, to the ongoing social events, to life as such and its meaning, etc. Their combination is a defence mechanism for health, for reducing risk behaviours and psychoactive substances consumption, for overcoming social anxiety, etc. (Brassai, Piko, & Steger, 2011; Clerkin, Werntz, Magee, Lindgren, & Teachman, 2014). Psychological health is considered as mental well-being that regulates behaviour and activities adequately to the conditions of the surrounding reality. Thus, the psychological aspect of health is a part of mental health.

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify the facts and establish the reasons for non-medical consumption of narcotic drugs and other psychotropic substances by students of a university city.

The research aimed to solve the following tasks:

- 1) to establish students' comprehension of personally important problems of modern society;
- 2) to establish the facts of the use (one-time, multiple, regular) / non-use of tobacco, alcohol, psychoactive substances for non-medical purpose;
- 3) to establish the correlation between personal problems (relationships with parents, peers, beloved, etc., financial problems, high study and work loads) and the use of tobacco, alcohol, psychotropic substances and / or drugs for non-medical purpose;
- 4) to establish students' need for qualified care of mental health professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists or narcologists) and develop proposals for resolving this issue.

3. Research Methods

The study was conducted in March–June 2015 among students of a university city in Western Siberia. By the method of a continuous survey, 22 199 students aged 18 to 25 were examined. The average age of the respondents at the time of the study was 20.9. 14.75 % of the respondents were foreign

students. 60.42 % of the respondents lived independently (in dormitories, rented flats, etc.) during the period of study.

The authors analysed official documents and statistics on the problem to examine the general situation of students' mental and emotional health. The authors used psychological testing to study students' psycho-emotional states. The authors applied data cluster analysis to process and organise the data.

4. Findings and Discussions

This research has confirmed that respondents are concerned with problems related to household difficulties, feeling of loneliness as a result of separation from the family, financial problems, etc., which are traditionally indicated by young people not only in Russia but also in other parts of the world (Grunbaum, Tortolero, Weller, & Gingiss, 2000).

The top three problems that concern students of a university city are as follows:

- household difficulties, financial problems (33.74 %);
- high study loads (28.53 %);
- the need to make their own money (work and study) (26.07 %).

Obviously, the most important urgent problems of full-time students are directly related to their current status and activities. The high proportion of students living independently determines financial and household problems, which, together with study loads and the need to earn money, creates additional difficulties. The "problem of computer and Internet addiction, preference of the virtual world to the real one", a separate question in the survey, was the fourth serious problem (25.09 %) for the respondents.

The least disturbing problems for students were "problems of offenses; anti-social behaviour" (4.77 %), "problems of sexual promiscuity" (5.73 %) and "gambling, computer games, slot machines" (7.34 %). The first two "anti-leaders" of the students' problems rating, problems for some other age and status groups, are not perceived as problems by students themselves; they are rather a part of their role-playing complex. Gambling and slot machines may have ceased to be an urgent issue after the administration and law enforcement agencies have taken measures to eradicate their structure in the region.

Respondents are also concerned with the "problem of lack of culture (non-observance of moral standards, swearing, spiritual poverty, etc.)" (23.43 %) and "lack of employment prospects in the field" (19.4 %). The different topics are united by the fact that university students are not inclined to live for the day, they broadly look at the social context they live in.

Responses to direct questions about the use of tobacco, alcohol and, in the first place, psychotropic substances must be analysed extremely cautiously, even in case of anonymous ones. The distortion of the results may be due to the desire of some respondents to give a "socially approved answer" because smoking, drinking and drug abuse are condemned by society. The second reason for the distortion of the data may be related to the respondents' underestimation of their addiction to smoking, psychotropic substances. In this respect, responses about the frequency of their use may be distorted.

In the survey, 68.7 % of the respondents say they never smoke. The trend of the recent years is a less tolerant attitude to smoking than to drinking alcohol. This may be due to the massive anti-tobacco

propaganda conducted at various levels, primarily by the media. At the same time, moderate consumption of alcohol is not condemned by society. The responses reflect these trends to a certain extent. 37.36 % of respondents say they never drink, 50.18 % say they drink once a month or less frequently, which is quite acceptable in terms of social morality.

Respondents are particularly cautious when answering questions about non-medical use of psychoactive substances / drugs. 90 % say they have never used them.

Respondents are just as cautious when answering questions about the reasons for non-medical use of psychotropic substances / drugs. The most frequent response to such questions was "no". Two reasons are mentioned: hedonistic (24.08 %) and ataractic (14.49 %), i.e. desires to have fun and relieve tension.

In summing up the results of the study, it seemed important to consider the reasons for using tobacco, alcohol, psychotropic substances among those who can provisionally be called "addicted". These are respondents who gave the "20 or more cigarettes a day" answer (1.18 %) to the question about the use of tobacco; "weekly or more often, to severe intoxication in some cases" (1.05 %) about alcohol; "regularly" (0.57 %) about non-medical use of psychotropic substances / drugs.

Among the "addicted" to smoking, 68.22 % are males and 31.78 % are females. The hierarchy of the main personal and social problems that concern them is slightly different than for all respondents in general. While "household difficulties and financial problems" is the most common problem, the second problem for this group was "relationship with loved ones" (25.83 %), the problem that ranked 12 out of 18 for all respondents. Difficulties in relationships can be both a cause and a consequence of abuses of any kind. In any case, young people with these difficulties become a risk group for the development of addictions. The problem of loss of goals, values, interest in life ranks third (24.72 %), which can also be a cause and a consequence of individual's general ill-being.

Among the "addicted" to alcohol, 60.26 % are males and 39.74 % are females. In terms of their problems, household and financial difficulties rank first (30.34 %), study loads second (29.91 %), loss of goals, values, interest in life third (27.79 %). Problems in relationships with loved ones rank seventh. Foreign studies have shown that students addicted to alcohol explain reasons for its abuse by the desire to overcome negative psycho-emotional experiences (including because of everyday problems) and the desire to have fun (Ham, Zamboanga, Bacon, & Garcia, 2009).

Among the "addicted" to psychotropic substances, 55.56 % are males, 43.65 % are females, one respondent did not specify sex. There is a clearer gender balance in the "addiction" of this kind. In terms of problems in this group of respondents, study loads rank first (35.71 %), lack of culture (non-observance of moral norms, swearing, spiritual poverty, etc.) ranks second (29.91 %), while financial and household difficulties rank only third (27.79 %). Particular concern about the overall level of culture in this group of respondents requires an additional study.

Reasons for smoking tobacco indicated by "addicted" respondents include the desire to have fun (66.05 %), the desire to relieve nervous tension (53.87 %), "to cure boredom" (50.18 %). Reasons for drinking alcohol indicated by "addicted" respondents include the desire to get rid of stress (55.72 %), hedonism (48.71 %) and hyperactivation (40.59 %). Respondents that regularly use psychotropic substances are extremely reluctant to even talk about their reasons, preferring to choose the answer "no"

for all the six options. Nevertheless, the dominant reasons for using psychoactive substances based on the survey results are hedonic (25.09 %) and ataractic (15.5 %).

Internal tension, trembling, panic can be signs of alcohol, nicotine or drug withdrawal syndrome, but they can also be signs of a stressful condition or even endogenous diseases (depression, schizophrenia). In any of these cases, expert assistance is required. 2.19 % of respondents constantly feel an internal shiver, 2.7 % feel panic, 5.3 % feel tension. Based on the total number of respondents, at least 500 people need the assistance of mental health professionals.

The approximate assessment of the respondents' psycho-emotional state at the time of the survey indicates that at least 5 % of respondents need qualified assistance from mental health specialists (more than a thousand people), another 11 % would benefit from consultations on methods for relieving mental stress, from learning to control undesirable manifestations of emotions, etc.

Most respondents (73.44 %) say they do not need qualified assistance from mental health professionals. Some of them (9.05 %) admit having such problems, but do not think that such professionals could help them. An encouraging trend is that the share of answers that indicate fear of or shame before such professionals, which could become a serious obstacle to obtaining the necessary assistance, is low (5.11 %). 11.34 % of respondents realise they need help and are ready to accept it.

5. Conclusion

By its main characteristics of age and social status, the object of research is very homogeneous. The authors surveyed full-time students; respectively, roles that determine their behaviour, their leisure, and conditions of socialisation are rather uniform. Respondents were young people aged 18 to 25, a university youth with a high level of mobility, intellectual activity and health.

At the same time, stricter requirements for the professional competencies of modern university graduates, higher study loads, the need for many to combine full-time study with work, the acceleration and complication of social dynamics in modern society in general put great pressure on the psycho-emotional sphere of students, and can contribute to the generation of stress, the development of endogenous diseases (depression, schizophrenia). These factors can also push students to search for ways to relieve stress and gain energy in tobacco, alcohol, psychotropic substances. Thus, university administrations, regional health authorities, the city administration face the issue of organising assistance of mental health professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists or narcologists) adequate to students' needs.

The results of the study indicate the need to educate students on the issue, and to monitor the mental health situation in the region. It is necessary to organise qualified assistance of mental health professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists or narcologists) for university students. Firstly, it is targeted assistance to specific students who are addicted to psychoactive substances and are in borderline mental states or have signs of endogenous diseases. The study says there are up to 5 % of the respondents. Such assistance should be organised; it should be available to students; every university student must be informed on where and how to get it. Modern youth are not inclined to be ashamed or distrustful of specialists and, if possible, will ask for help. A student city must have the infrastructure for students to get qualified help of mental health professionals.

Secondly, it is measures to ensure the emotional security of the educational environment. Since the leading factors in consuming tobacco, alcohol, psychotropic substances are the desire to relieve psycho-emotional tension, to cheer up, students must be taught how to relieve tension and activate intellectual and physical activities via healthier methods: supporting positive self-esteem, improving communication skills, overcoming social isolation, learning to refuse from offers to drink and to try narcotic substances. Specialists with theoretical and practical experience in conducting trainings and individual consultations should do such work.

The anti-tobacco campaign of the recent years in the media proves the effective influence of such educational methods on the public opinion on important issues.

The problem of the emotional security of the educational environment is broader than the prevention of smoking, alcoholism and drug addiction. High study loads of university students today provoke stressful conditions and the development of endogenous diseases, which in their symptoms, without clinical studies, coincide with addiction and withdrawal symptoms. It is emotional overloads that often push students to abuse. Therefore, university administrations, regional and municipal health authorities should permanently focus on creating an emotionally safe learning environment.

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