

THE USE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES BY CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS FROM DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES AS WELL AS ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS TO PREVENT THIS PHENOMENON

UŻYWANIE SUBSTANCJI PSYCHOAKTYWNYCH PRZEZ DZIECI I MŁODZIEŻ Z RODZIN DYSFUNKCYJNYCH ORAZ DZIAŁANIA ZAPOBIEGAJĄCE TEMU ZJAWISKU PODEJMOWANE PRZEZ ORGANIZACJE POZARZĄDOWE

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SUMMARY

The aim of this research was to estimate the scale of the use of psychoactive substances by children and teenagers from dysfunctional families as well as the assessment of preventive functions of non-governmental organizations based on the example of a social therapeutic center.

The results show that dysfunctional families create favorable conditions for an early initiation into psychoactive substances by the adolescents. They come into contact with nicotine, alcohol and drugs. The social therapeutic center plays an important role in addiction prevention among children and teenagers from pathological families. It fulfills basic needs and supports family with its prophylactic and protecting functions.

Key words: prevention, non-governmental organizations.

STRESZCZENIE

Celem badań była ocena rozmiarów używania substancji psychoaktywnych przez dzieci i młodzież z rodzin dysfunkcyjnych oraz profilaktycznych funkcji organizacji pozarządowych na przykładzie świetlicy socjoterapeutycznej.

Wyniki wskazują, że dysfunkcje rodziny sprzyjają wczesnemu sięgnięciu po substancje psychoaktywne przez dzieci w okresie dojrzewania. Mają one kontakt z nikotyną, alkoholem, a także narkotykami. Świetlica socjoterapeutyczna odgrywa ważną rolę w profilaktyce uzależnień dzieci i młodzieży z rodzin patologicznych. Zaspokaja ona podstawowe potrzeby i wspiera rodzinę w jej profilaktyczno-opiekuńczej funkcji.

Słowa kluczowe: profilaktyka, organizacje pozarządowe.

INTRODUCTION

Modern young man is very often faced with choices that are too serious for his age. Contemporary world offers many ways of living, which are not always positive for a development. There are still not many safe and interesting places for the youth where they could spend their time in an attractive way [1].

The age of puberty is associated with searching for own solutions, manifestation of self autonomy, desire to fulfill the need for acceptance among peers

which often lead to making wrong decision. The increase of number of young people using psychoactive substances such as cigarettes, alcohol or drugs has become a significant problem over the recent years.

Entering the addiction path results both from the fact that one is threatened from the outside by the negative impact of environment as well as from the intrapersonal conflicts, weakness, naivety, ignorance, disregard for the moral norms and fundamental values [2]. "It is widely acknowledged that studies of prevention, i.e. prophylaxis, show that it is much more

effective and economical to prevent harmful events than to eliminate their negative consequences both for individuals and the whole society" [3].

It is difficult to estimate psychological and emotional losses caused by the psychoactive substances used by the young people. It is significant that the damages created by the use of these substances concern not only those who use them, but also people around them. The scale of such losses may be diminished by the effective policy on psychoactive substances. Multitude of reasons causing addictions entails the need of undertaking wide range of aid activities [4]. The intervention should lead to the reorganization of mental process as well as provide an individual with cognitive abilities helping with making decisions and solving problems [5], which in fact lead the young to addictions.

Taking into consideration this negative phenomenon, European countries take a number of actions aimed at reducing the use of psychoactive substances. It is understood that the meaning and the role of consumption of psychoactive substances differs due to the cultural factors. That is why every country has its own policy on solving problems with these substances. EU Alcohol Strategy as well as other documents, which chart the direction of policy on alcohol and psychoactive substances in the Commonwealth, emphasize that taking as many actions as possible should take place at the local level. It is in accordance with the EU Principle of Subsidiarity which states that the local authorities should be given as much competence and money as possible.

In Poland the Act of October 26th 1982 on Upbringing in Sobriety and Counteracting Alcoholism is the legal basis for actions in this area [6]. This legal instrument determines that taking actions connected with prophylaxis and solving alcohol problems as well as social integration of alcoholics are gmina's own tasks. The legislator also points to the responsibilities which must be realized in accordance with the local needs. In this aspect the Act is similar to the Act on Prevention of Drug Abuse. It is the gmina that is responsible for taking precautionary and remedial measures aimed at local society in order to prevent and minimize alcoholism and drug abuse. Nowadays, no one wonders if it is worth to help people with the problem of using psychoactive substances, but how to do this in the faster and more effective way [7].

Helping means minimizing consequences of alcoholism and drug abuse. To help better is to prevent in the first place, i.e. to educate, to raise awareness, to present alternative ways of spending leisure time, explaining how to cope with difficult situations effectively without any substances. Helping means also supporting young people in shaping their personali-

ties so that they do not have to turn to addicting substances and that they could learn to say "No" in situations when a young man feels under the pressure.

The most important legal basis for prevention actions on the local level is commune program on prevention and solving alcohol-related problems. This program is passed annually by the District Council. The tasks presented in this program are coordinated by the Mayor's Representative for Solving Addiction-Related Problems.

A term "non-governmental organization" (NGO) is more and more popular in Poland. It is very often used by the United Nations and other international organizations. It is also known as nonprofit organization. These terms describe organizations which do not make profits out of their activity but they concentrate on fulfilling the needs.

One of the characteristics of NGOs is the lack of connections with the state authorities and in consequence lack of government subsidy for its actions. The activities of NGOs are based on individual statutes.

Non-governmental organizations constitute a group of very important partners for local authorities when it comes to realization of objectives from the Act on Upbringing in Sobriety and Counteracting Alcoholism, the Act on Prevention of Drug Abuse and Tobacco Control and Health Protection Act [8].

Non-governmental organizations, foundations and associations emerged in Poland more or less at the same time as in Western Europe. The oldest dates back to the first decade of 20th century. Initially, they concentrated on charity and then they carried out corporate, cultural, educational and scientific actions. What is more, they propagated the ideas of social development and solidarity. Some of them were of religious nature whereas the other were completely secular. During the Second Polish Republic non-governmental organizations enjoyed rapid development. The Second World War and the period of Communist domination that followed caused an enormous drop in social activity and organization, and a part of the NGOs were abolished and their assets confiscated by the state, while others were assimilated by ideologically-oriented institutions. Since 1989 NGOs have enjoyed a renaissance thanks to the reinstatement of freedom of assembly and association. Some organizations (e.g. Caritas Poland, the YMCA), whose traditions date back to the pre-war period, have been reestablished and have begun their statutory activities. Numerous new foundations and associations have been created to solve the problems and meet the needs of modern society. Organizations have sprung up to counteract the effects of social problems, such as homelessness, alcoholism and drug abuse [9]. They include among others:

- the MONAR Association counteracting social pathologies within families, drug abuse, alcoholism, unemployment, juvenile crimes by creating healthcare centers, network of consulting points, hostels as well as carrying out preventing and educational actions,
- Nadzieja Rodzinie Foundation – working with teenagers addicted to psychoactive substances as well as prevention and assessment of pathological events,
- General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous – representing Alcoholics Anonymous Fellowship before natural and legal persons as well as operating a business (publishing and distribution of AA literature).

Local policy is crucial. For the last few years the emphasis has been put on the involvement of different units in drug abuse prevention both at the provincial and commune level. The local governments at these levels are obliged to work out and implement provincial and commune programs on drug abuse prevention. The best programs are included in the Bank of Recommended Programs on Prevention run by the Methodological Centre of Psychological-Pedagogical Counseling.

Due to the implementation of the Act of April 23rd 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work [10], the provincial self-government is allowed to cooperate, in the sphere of realization of own tasks concerning prevention and solving problems that are related to psychoactive substances abuse, with other units which operate as public benefit organizations as stipulated by the art. 3 sec. 3 of this Act, as well as with volunteers and organizational units subordinate to or supervised by the administration authorities. The cooperation should be based on commissioning the units mentioned above to carry out tasks concerning prevention and solving problems that are related to psychoactive substances abuse according to the following priorities:

- organization and realization of inventive programs on prevention and education designed for children and teenagers exposed to pathological behaviours;
- organization of holidays during summers and winter breaks with therapeutical programs for children and teenagers from pathological families (especially with drinking problems);
- organization and realization of programs on prevention and education designed especially for people at risk of psychoactive substances abuse e.g., for the homeless, inadequate and single mothers or fathers, parents of physically and mentally handicapped children, victims of violence, as well as for the people in crisis;
- organization and conducting of trainings, regional seminars, conferences and meetings concerning

abuse prevention and violence for the workers, institutions and organizations that support people with substance abuse problem and going through a crisis;

- organization of information and education campaigns on protection and promotion of health.

Non-governmental organizations more and more often take prevention actions using Internet through especially designed thematic web-pages, portals, services, on-line counseling. It is a readily available form for the young people which was assessed as friendly, professional and handy [11, 12].

Many researches confirm coexistence of different social, psychological and health problems resulting from the use of drugs and other psychoactive substances [12, 13]. The change in the way of thinking about consequences of using psychoactive substances caused looking at the problem from a different perspective and paying special attention to the harmful consequences, both medical and social, of different nature. It allowed to discover other problems connected with the use of psychoactive substances. Apart from the addiction they also include such health damages as mental disorders, infections, poisoning, aggression, conflicts, crimes, accidents, suicides, as well as many other harmful behaviours under the influence of alcohol and other psychoactive substances. Better understanding of different medical and social consequences results in the progress of treatment and creating new, more effective prevention programs [14, 15].

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research was to estimate the scale of the use of psychoactive substances by children and teenagers from dysfunctional families as well as the assessment of preventive functions of non-governmental organizations based on the example of a social therapeutic center.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Caritas of the Diocese of Radom was the object of this research as one of the non-governmental institutions. One of its initiatives is running the Social Therapeutic Center in Radom. Children from 6 to 17 who come from numerous families, single-parent families, at risk of social degradation, pathology, affected by the problem of alcoholism or drug abuse, morally or spiritually neglected can attend the center. These are students from elementary and lower-secondary schools. Most of them come from families that receive

a support from MOPS (Social Welfare Center). These families are characterized by such dysfunctions as alcoholism, unemployment, poverty, family violence.

The research was conducted at the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010. 105 pupils took part in the research. The method used was a diagnostic poll with the survey questionnaire directed to the pupils of the social therapeutic center. It concerned the problem of the use of psychoactive substances by the children and teenagers, family situation and the assessment of the center work.

RESULTS

During the preschool and early elementary period (up to 9 years) 11.76% of girls and 6.25% of boys, have smoked a cigarette. At the age of 10 girls smoked more often than boys. At the age of 11 12.5% of boys have had their first contact with cigarettes. The escalation of initiation into nicotine with boys took place at the age of 12 (18.75%), whereas with girls this percentage diminished significantly to 5.88%. After the age of 13 – 5.88% of girls and 6.25% of boys have started to smoke.

All respondents admitted that they have tried smoking at least a few times in their lives. 38.23% of girls and 18.75% of boys said that they are habitual smokers.

The research shows that during the preschool and early elementary school period (up to 9 years), 8.82% of girls and 12.50% of boys have come into contact with alcohol. At the age of 10, 11.76% of girls and 18.75% of boys have drunk alcohol. At the age of 11 – 20.58% of girls and 31.25% have come into their first contact with alcohol. The escalation of initiation into alcohol took place at the age of 12 – 44.11% of girls and 31.25% of boys polled. After the age of 13, 14.70% of girls and 6.25% of boys polled admitted to drink alcohol.

Just like with smoking, all respondents said that they have drunk alcohol at least a few times. 5.88% of girls and 25.0% of boys admitted to constant drinking and even to drinking themselves blind frequently.

In the case of drugs, all of the respondents up to 11 have not had any contact with drugs. At the age of 11 – 5.88% of girls and 12.0% of boys started using drugs. The same percentage remains with girls at the age of 12 and 13 whereas with boys it grows to 18.25%. 60% of all the respondents declare that they have come into contact with any addictive substance out of curiosity whereas 40% were persuaded by their friends.

When analyzing the influence of the family environment on the child's addiction, the following factors were taken into consideration: family struc-

ture and parents' addictions. The analysis of the data shows that the single-parent families constitute the highest percentage: 70.58% of all girls and 50% of all boys polled. 5.88% of girls and 18.75% of boys live in single-parent families. 5.88% of girls and 18.75% of boys live in reconstructed families whereas 16% of those polled have full families. The bad habits of parents are the most important factors which influence addictions of the young people. The research shows that fathers are those who are the most frequently addicted to alcohol (64.70% in the group of girls and 87.50% in the group of boys). The percentage of addicted mothers concerned only boys (6.25%). The problem of addiction of both parents concerned 5.88% of families of girls polled. The percentage of families in which parents do not use alcohol is 29.42% among girls and 6.25% among boys.

In case of the smoking habit, 11.76% of mothers in the group of girls and 43.75% of mothers in the group of boys were addicted to nicotine. The percentage of smoking fathers is 29.41% in the group of girls and 31.25% in the group of boys. The percentage of the families where both parents were addicted is 35.29% in the group of girls and 12.50% in the group of boys.

During the process of planning and realizing the prevention and educational principles and programs, the needs and interests of the children, for whom they are being designed, should be taken into consideration. When asked "Have you got any interests?", 82.35% of girls and 87.5% of boys polled said "Yes" and very often they listed interests connected with sport, art, music and dance. 17.65% of girls and 12.5% of boys said that they are not interested in anything.

The classes in the center do not take the whole time of the pupils. The poll shows that the most popular way of spending free time is watching TV, what makes 47.05% of all girls and 62.5 of all boys. The same percentage in the group of girls applies to spending time with peers whereas in the group of boys it is 37.5%. The group of children who spend their time outside is quite big – 11.76% of girls and 12.5% of boys. A group of children who declare to spend their leisure time using a computer is almost the same – 17.64% in the group of girls and 25% in the group of boys. Reading books in the free time is declared by 11.76% of girls and only 4% of boys. The less popular ways of spending free time are talking to parents and going for walks with them.

The assessment of work of the socio-therapeutic center is crucial. The preventive actions taken by this non-governmental organization influence the life of a child and its family. The pupils said that the center is organized very well – 76.47% of girls and 50% of boys. 23.52% of respondents in the group of girls and 50% of respondents in the group of boys assessed the

work of this center as satisfactory. None of the respondents assessed it as unsatisfactory.

Sport activities turned out to be the most popular among the pupils – 72% of those polled gave such an answer. The other activities that also won the recognition of the children were the following: art classes – 32% altogether, music classes – 16%, computer science – 12% of those polled. According to the index, other classes and activities were classified at the level of 4 per cent.

When asked “Are these classes interesting?”, 95% of the respondents said “Yes”. 50% of those polled expected care from this center, 32% expected help with homework whereas 18% of the pupils said that they expected “nothing”. Young people claim that they find the care, help with the difficult situations, support and solving of family-related problems in the center.

In general, the pupils would not like to introduce any changes in the way the social therapeutic center is operated (64%), however, 20% would like to have more music and dance classes and 16% more sport events.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the results of this survey the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. Children and teenagers, who took part in this research, started to use different kinds of psychoactive substances at the very young age. It is a group at the high risk of addictions due to the family situation. Family dysfunctions create favorable conditions for hazardous behaviours at the very young age. It has been revealed that smoking is the most popular among girls, whereas boys prefer drinking alcohol. Moreover, the most frequent motives for using psychoactive substances are curiosity and peers' encouragement.
2. The socio-therapeutic center plays an important role in prevention of addictions among children and teenagers who come from pathological families. It is a place that gives children a chance for an integral development. It fulfills the basic needs and supports family with its prophylactic and protecting functions.

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