



EDITORIAL
COMMENT
EDİTÖRYEL
YORUM

Level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS of drug users: Media Should Take More Role

Uyuşturucu Madde Kullanıcıların HIV/AIDS Konusundaki Bilgi Düzeyleri: Medya Daha Fazla Rol Üstlenmeli

Mehmet Doğanay

Borekci and Uzel carried out a descriptive study to assess the level of knowledge in HIV/AIDS in 151 voluntary drug users in the Mersin province in Turkey, and the study is published in this issue of the Erciyes Medical Journal (1). A valuable questionnaire was prepared by the authors and made available to the voluntary drug users identified and supported for realisation of study by the Narcotic Police Department in Mersin. The aim of the study was to investigate the socio-demographic characteristics of drug users and determine the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS is an important health problem that is currently affecting all countries. As of December 2012, the total number of persons living with HIV/AIDS was estimated to be 34.0 million, including 2.5 million new cases that were diagnosed in 2011 (2). In Turkey, the total number of cases was 5224, according to the Turkish Ministry of Health. In the majority (52.7%) of people, transmission was through heterosexual relationships. About 3.1% of all cases were drug addicts. Although this rate may seem very low, it cannot be ignored for the prevention and control of the infection. When we consider the uncontrolled growth of some cities in Turkey, such as Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Antalya, Mersin, etc., the number of drug users may potentially increase in the future. For this reason, this study has given us very informative demographic data and might be a good example for some developing countries.

The Mersin province is a critical place for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV infection. The city is located on the Mediterranean coast, with a population of 1,682,848, of which 78.9% are living in urban areas and 21.0% are living in rural areas and villages (<http://www.nufusu.com/il/mersin-nufusu>). Almost all villagers earn their livelihood from farming, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Mersin is also a commercial city with a large harbour for commercial exportation. Many jobless and poor people from other parts of Turkey, particularly from the eastern and south eastern parts of Turkey, are migrating to Mersin, with the expectation of a new job and livelihood. The city is undergoing fast and uncontrolled growth, and is gaining many new social (prostitution, an increase in criminal offence, etc.), economic, and health problems. Common health problems include respiratory system diseases, particularly tuberculosis, childhood infections (measles, rubella, varicella, etc.), diarrhoeal diseases, parasitic diseases, vector-borne diseases, and STDs. In addition, social problems such as unemployment, poverty, etc. lead to high alcohol consumption, smoking, and drug use. When we consider the features of Mersin, this study gives us many important demographic data about drug users. In this study, the majority of drug users were male (92.1%), aged between 14-24 (56.3%), and were from low-income families. The majority (74.8%) of drug users were living with their family. Of these, 43% had multiple sexual partners (1).

Numerous studies have demonstrated an association between drug use and a high rate of STDs including HIV infection. Drug users are exposed to both parenteral blood-borne infections (HIV, hepatitis B or C, etc.) and sexual risks (2-7). Drug users generally have risky sexual behaviours that increase the risk of contacting STDs including HIV infection. Risky behaviours include having multiple sexual partners, sexual intercourse with HIV-positive persons, prostitutes, homosexuals or bisexuals, sex for money or drugs, using intravenous drugs or sharing needles, and sexual activity while using alcohol. In addition to these, drug users often have inadequate knowledge about how STDs including HIV infection are transmitted and prevented (4-7). This study showed that homosexual behaviour was very low (1.3%) but 43.0% had multiple sexual partners.

In this study, the majority of voluntary drug users had an awareness about illegal drugs and their bad effects. An impressive point in this paper is that 75.5% of drug users had learned some information about HIV/AIDS and its transmission from media. This point is very important for the prevention and control of STDs including HIV/AIDS. Verbal or written media may also be used as an effective way to fight against illegal drug use in the young generation.

Department of Clinical
Microbiology and Infectious
Diseases, Faculty of
Medicine, Erciyes University,
38039 Kayseri, Turkey

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Correspondance/Yazışma

Dr. Mehmet Doğanay,
Department of Clinical
Microbiology and
Infectious Diseases,
Faculty of Medicine,
Erciyes University,
Kayseri, Turkey
Phone: +90 352 207 66 66
e.mail:
mdoganay@erciyes.edu.tr

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