

OP19

Drug dependency and drug use behaviour among male illicit drug users in selected rehabilitation centres in Sri Lanka

Darshana ILAN¹, Wijesinghe CJ¹, De Silva PV¹

¹*Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka*

Background: Illicit drug use has become a growing public health phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Many illicit drug users end up with drug dependency, becoming a burden to the country.

Objectives: To describe drug dependency and drug use behaviour among male illicit drug users in selected rehabilitation centres in Sri Lanka.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 431 male illicit drug users in five selected rehabilitation centres in Galle, Colombo, Gampaha and Kandy districts, Sri Lanka. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. Drug dependency was identified using ICD symptom checklist for substance use disorder.

Results: Majority of the sample were Sinhala (82.4%) and Buddhists (70.5%). Mean age (SD) was 32 (10.3) years. The highest percentage of the drug users were from Western province (75.6%). Of all illicit drug users, 97% were drug dependents according to ICD 10 symptom checklist. Heroin was most commonly addicted illicit drug (86.5%). Cannabis addiction was identified among 4.3% and all of them were from rural areas. Approximately 4% were addicted to multiple drugs. Injecting drug practices were reported among 23.4%. Mobile transfer of funds (eZ cash) was a popular method used to purchase drugs by drug users (21.8%) outside the

Western province. In a shortage of the regular drug, 32.9% of drug users used alternative illicit drug, 3.2% used alcohol and 16.9% had a period of abstinence. Interestingly, 46.9% never experienced a shortage of drugs. Drug overdose was experienced by 25.1% of drug users.

Conclusions: Drug dependency is a significant problem among illicit drug users. A proper system for early identification of drug dependents at community level is required to deliver better preventive care.