

Use of Psychoactive Substances among Zagreb University Medical Students: Follow-up Study

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Aim. To estimate the exposure of Zagreb University medical students to psychoactive substances in 2000 and compare it with data collected in 1989.

Methods. Students were surveyed in 2000 (n=775) and 1989 (n=986) by means of a self-reporting questionnaire. The 2000 survey also included 136 non-medical students. General demographic data and data on experience with psychoactive substances were collected, analyzed, and presented as percentages with 95% CI.

Results. The lifetime prevalence of contact with illicit drugs (mostly marijuana) among medical students in 2000 was 35% vs 14% in 1989. Repeated use was reported by 3.9% students, and 6% confirmed the experience of simultaneous use of alcohol and drugs. The lifetime prevalence of contact with psychoactive medications (mostly benzodiazepines) was 33% in 2000 vs 15% in 1989. Medications were largely used without medical supervision, with 3.5% of the students explicitly stating non-medical reasons for consumption. The prevalence of smokers was 29% in 2000, compared with 31% in 1989, and prevalence of regular alcohol consumers (on monthly, weekly, or daily basis) was 50% vs 52% in 1989. Experience with all types of substances was more present among senior students, and less among medical students than their "non-medical" peers. Regular alcohol use was associated with the experience of illicit drugs use. In 2000, 40% of medical students and 53% of "non-medical" students voted for legalization of marijuana.

Conclusions. Experience with psychoactive substances is common among Zagreb medical students. Experiences with illicit drugs and psychoactive medications have substantially increased over the past decade.

Key words: alcohol drinking; marijuana smoking; psychotropic drugs; smoking; students; students, medical