Pattern and the cause circle of offence related to addictive substance use in juvenile observation and protection centers, Thailand

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study examines the pattern and cause circle of offence occurrences related to addictive substance use among 1002 juvenile participants (quantitative) and 52 participants (qualitative) in six juvenile observation and protection centers. The results indicated that males were more likely to use cannabis, kratom, Yaba, ecstasy, ketamine, and ice during their lifetime ($p < 0.05$). The causes of offence occurrences in female juveniles mainly derived from family, whereas in male juveniles, besides their family, they (themselves) and their friends were the causes.

Juveniles who had entered the justice system after such experiences will have high risk of drug relapse and re-offence. Finding the pattern and the cause circle of offence occurrences may be beneficial to delivering interventions to resolve the gap of the cause circle before returning them to the community.

Keywords: Pattern, Cause circle, Addictive substance use, Juvenile observation and protection centers, Thailand

Introduction

Illicit drug use has been one of the most widely contributing factors associated with juvenile delinquency.^{1,2,3} In the United States, it is estimated that 10% of youth were addicted to illicit drug use in the past year.⁴ Delinquent youths are three times more likely to use a psychoactive drug than youth in the general population⁵, with prevalence rates of drug use amounting to 38-85% in the past year among juvenile offenders.^{6, 7} A recent national report examining the prevalence of drug use among juvenile delinquents revealed a substantial increase over the past 25 years.⁸

In 1997 according to statistical data of the Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection in Thailand, about 30% of children and juveniles below 18 years old committed offences of property. Of this about 16% - 20% were related to drug abuse.⁹

Many studies of the College of Public Health Sciences, Chulalongkorn University (in 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008) indicated other charges concerned with substance use. Social context, family problems and others are risk factors to juveniles' substance use.¹⁰⁻¹⁵

Drug users were regarded as patients and all juveniles arrested were sent to treatment control systems. Substance abuse cases decreased from 16,723 in 2002 to 5,897 in 2003. Decrease of juveniles' drug cases was for methamphetamine (Yaba) use only, while other drug charges, especially volatile substance use has risen.

Many foreign studies indicated that deviant behaviour patterns of parents and close family members were correlated with behaviour patterns of youth. Thailand is no exception, but there is no comprehensive study. This report aims to provide data to support the pattern of substance use and the causes of offence occurrences related to addictive substance use in the Juvenile Observation and Protection Centers by quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Methods

This cross-sectional study used face to face interviews for quantitative and in-depth interviews for qualitative research in 2004. Inclusion criteria were 1) substance use experience, 2) juveniles aged 11-20 years with drug charges i.e. drug use/drug possession, drug dealers and others, 3) new cases, 4) willingness to be interviewed. Exclusion criteria were 1) having psychology symptoms, 2) having depression. We used purposive sampling to select samples who met inclusion criteria, both quantitative and qualitative.

The sample size (quantitative) was calculated by using G-power program (Effect size= 0.1, power=80%, alpha=0.05). We required at least 785 participants. Thus, 10% were added for the missing data. The sample size was 864 participants. We collected 1,002 participants from 6 juvenile centers (2 Remand Homes (n=250); Samutprakan and Baan Mettas (n=654); Baan Mutita, Baan Karuna and Baan Ubegka (n=98); Baan Pranee).

The sample size (qualitative) was selected from participants with drug charge/drug using experience. The qualitative selection derived from two sources: individual quantitative interview and the center authorities. The qualitative sample size was 52 participants from six juvenile centers. We requested permission from all participants and provided the consent form before interviewing them.

We explored differences in this sample's substance use by using χ^2 tests for categorical measures and 95% confidence interval.

Results

Quantitative results

Demographic and social characteristics

The average ages of male and female juveniles were 16-18 years. Over 60% males were single. About 35% males completed grade 6 (compulsory level), whereas females completed grade 9. About 50% of male juveniles had no employment. Sixty five percent of males and females were charged with drug peddling; Fifty percent and 60.0% males and females were charged as drug users respectively. About 30% males worked as labourers, while the employment details of females were not clearly recorded. Over half of them had no income (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of demographic characteristics between male (n=888) and female (n=114) juveniles

	Male		Female	
	n (%)		n (%)	
Education; incomplete high school	285	(32.1)	32	(28.1)
Unemployed	427	(48.1)	69	(60.5)
Minor occupation; sold drugs*	351	(39.5)	76	(66.7)
Ever treated*	137	(15.4)	14	(12.3)

*significant of demographic characteristics among non-injection and injection group at 0.05

Addictive substance use and risk behaviour

Nineteen male juveniles and two females had experience using heroin. About 12.2% male juveniles and 13.2% female juveniles used inhalants or volatile substances such as glue. Only 3% males used ecstasy, whereas 8.8% females ever used it. Moreover, 80% juveniles ever consumed alcohol (Table 2).

Table 2. Pattern of drug use among male (n=888) and female (n=114) juvenile drug users

Substance use	Male		Female		95%	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	Confidence	Interval
Cannabis; lifetime**	478	(53.8)	39	(34.2)	0.296	0.671
Cannabis; in 1 year	322	(36.3)	29	(25.4)	0.668	2.956
Cannabis; in 1 month	171	(19.3)	17	(14.9)	0.579	2.704
Kratom; lifetime*	76	(8.6)	3	(2.6)	0.09	0.931
Kratom; in 1 year	41	(4.6)	3	(2.6)	0.991	1.162
Kratom; in 1 month	17	(1.9)	1	(0.9)	0.062	8.765
Yaba (methamphetamine); lifetime*	648	(73.0)	71	(62.3)	0.407	0.918
Yaba; in 1 year	543	(61.1)	59	(51.8)	0.494	1.83
Yaba; in 1 month	391	(44.0)	46	(40.4)	0.723	2.618
Heroin; lifetime	19	(2.1)	2	(1.8)	0.188	3.553
Heroin; in 1 year	10	(1.1)	1	(0.9)	0.049	16.594
Heroin; in 1 month	6	(0.7)	0	(0.0)	0.516	1.24
Inhalant; lifetime	108	(12.2)	15	(13.2)	0.613	1.953
Inhalant; in 1 year	67	(7.5)	12	(10.5)	0.652	9.195
Inhalant; in 1 month	34	(3.8)	9	(7.9)	0.724	11.71
Ecstasy; lifetime*	29	(3.3)	10	(8.8)	1.349	6.011
Ecstasy; in 1 year	25	(2.8)	7	(6.1)	0.067	2.076
Ecstasy; in 1 month *	16	(1.8)	1	(0.9)	0.01	0.907
Ketamine; lifetime**	11	(1.2)	7	(6.1)	1.98	13.74
Ketamine; in 1 year	9	(1.0)	6	(5.3)	0.098	18.192
Ketamine; in 1 month	7	(0.8)	2	(1.8)	0.014	1.444
Cocaine; lifetime	9	(1.0)	1	(0.9)	0.108	6.886
Cocaine; in 1 year	5	(0.6)	0	(0.0)	0.516	1.24
Cocaine; in 1 month	3	(0.3)	-	-	-	-
Domicum(Midazolam); lifetime	4	(0.5)	2	(1.8)	0.715	21.792
Domicum; in 1 year	2	(0.2)	2	(1.8)	0.751	5.329
Domicum; in 1 month	1	(0.1)	2	(1.8)	0.606	14.864
Ice; lifetime*	146	(16.4)	27	(23.7)	0.989	2.516
Ice; in 1 year	111	(12.5)	24	(21.1)	0.716	8.883
Ice; in 1 month	74	(8.3)	15	(13.2)	0.334	2.082

*significant at 0.05

**significant at 0.01

Over 66% males and over 46% females have shown sexual behaviour (Table 3).

Table 3. Risk behaviour among male (n=888) and female (n=114) juvenile drug users

	Male		Female		95%	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	Confidence Interval	
Drug injection	32	(3.6)	4	(3.5)	0.338	2.803
Have sexual behaviour	591	(66.6)	53	(46.5)	0.295	0.647
No condom use	244	(27.5)	28	(24.6)	0.741	1.827
Roaming/Prostitutes	36	(4.1)	4	(3.5)	0.301	2.464
Ever consume alcohol	702	(79.1)	83	(72.8)	0.455	1.105

**significant at 0.01

Qualitative results

Results of the male juvenile group study

Causes of offence occurrences were mostly related to addictive substances derived from three central issues:

Personal problems: beginning from the juveniles' curiosity to substance use, their roaming in entertainment places (pubs/bars), their quarrelling and fighting, and robbery

Family problems: the juveniles' broken homes, their family members' imprisonment, gambling, drug peddling and drug use including consumption of alcohol

Friends' problems: beginning from their friends' persuasion to try addictive substance and to commit crimes such as robbing

Juveniles with family problems would escape their problem by using/selling drugs or running away from home to live with their friends or relatives who were drug peddlers. This is one of the major causes that pushed them into illegal offences (such as robbery or even murder) and drug trafficking with friends, in order to earn their living. These juveniles would easily be lured for drug trafficking because of their current environment and desire to have high earning. Some juveniles regarded drug peddling as a business with a high income.

There are chances that the juveniles who are not being arrested will commit offences repeatedly. When arrested, they will be sent to a correction center. After being released, they will have two alternatives, either to lead a new life

or to return to the same cycle of using addictive substances and committing offences (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Cause Circle of Offence related to addictive substance use in Juvenile Observation and Protection Center among male juveniles

Male juvenile examples

“M1”: A 20-year-old, Bangkok drug dealer. He was arrested with 3 charges: robbing, stealing, and an accomplice in stealing.

Family: Parents were separated and he lived with his friends. He reported selling Yaba when he was only seven years old because his family sold it. His older sister sniffed glue. “I’ve grown up with this kind of family, so what can I do? If I don’t sell drugs, I won’t have money to spend. If I have a bigger job such as being hired to kill someone, I’ll have to stop selling Yaba for a while because I need to spend quite a time following my victim.”

“M2”, 18 years old, is studying fine art design in a vocational school. His hometown is in a province in the Central region. He was charged with murdering. He sold Yaba when he was 17 years old. He lives with his father’s parents and parents who are quite well-off.

He used seven types of drugs starting with Yaba when he was 15 years old, followed by opium because he saw someone in his house smoke. Then he used cannabis, heroin then ecstasy, cocaine and Ice. He said, "Taking drugs is very normal for us – Art kids. It makes us have good imagination."

"M3", 17-year-old, has completed grade 12. His house is in Klongtoey (slum area), Bangkok. He is a messenger and a drug peddler. He was charged with drug use. His father has passed away when he was a child. At present, he lives with his mother, older brother and aunt. He used almost all drugs i.e. cannabis (when 10 years old), Ice, glue, Yaba, ecstasy, ketamine and cocaine. He has been in the Yaba treatment programme for 10 times. However, he used drugs immediately after he left the center. He admitted that he was not determined enough to quit. He said, "I sell drugs as my older brother knew a big drug peddler, so I tried to sell and it's a good business, so I got from him to sell almost everything, i.e. cannabis, Yaba, glue, ecstasy, ketamine, cocaine and Ice. I sell and use a lot. You wouldn't know how good it is, until you try it. I can't describe it."

"M4", 18 years old. He got married after completing grade 8. He was charged with selling 15 tablets of Yaba and he has been sentenced for three years. Two of his siblings were involved in Yaba charges. One in prison on Yaba use charge, and another one also used Yaba, but she was killed in a car accident. He began selling drugs when he ran away from home because he quarrelled with his father. His friends whom he stayed with, persuaded him to sell drugs. He also thought that it gives a good income. He said, "I quarrelled with my brother and I hit his arm with a knife. My father yelled at me and wouldn't listen to know why we're quarrelling. So I ran away from home to stay with my friend. My father went to fetch me so I went to stay with another friend who sold drugs. He persuaded me to sell drugs because it gives a good income. Then I didn't have money and I couldn't borrow money from him all the time. I stayed with him I had to help him sell". He said he started using cannabis (at 15 years old) then Yaba, Ice. He also mixed Yaba and Ice together as he believed it could prolong much longer.

Results of the female juvenile group study

Mostly the causes of offence occurrences began from family problems including undesirable patterns of behaviour of family members such as drug addiction/drug peddling. When family problems arise, they would decide to run away from home leading to an environment which lured them to drug peddling by two means: First, they met, lived or roamed about with their friends/boyfriends. Secondly, they knew their friends or the drug network through their friends/boyfriends who were drug peddlers. Both means led to either drug use. However, the principal point leading them to commit offences, such as drug peddling or sex services was their desire to have money for expenses after running away from home to stay with their friends, to buy

drugs to use or to sell at a high profit. They lived with their older brothers/sisters or friends who were drug peddlers, or who provided sex services, which facilitated them to join the drug trafficking cycle or the sex industry (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Cause circle of offence related to addictive substance use in Juvenile Observation and Protection Center among female juveniles

Female juvenile examples

"F1" – A 17-year-old, whose hometown is in a province in the Central region, completed grade 3, and was charged with drug possession for distribution (300 tablets). This is her sixth time of being arrested. Her father died and her mother has married again. One of her siblings was charged with drug use and drug dealing and was sent to Mutita Home. She ran away from home and lived with her friends since she was 9 years old because her step-father tried to seduce her. She said, "We quarreled because my step-father popped into my mosquito net at night. I was frightened so I hit him on his nose with a cooking knife. His nose bled and was broken, so my mother cursed me. I ran away from home to stay with my friend when I was 9 years old. I started sniffing glue. I've stayed with my friend until now and have never returned home. I had nothing when I left home. I got 20 baht for each tablet. I didn't mind; I only thought it's nice to have some money." She started sniffing glue,

Yaba when she was 10 years and started as a sex broker when she was 12 years, “My friend was sleeping because she smoked Yaba a lot. So, I received a phone call for her. Her friend said she wanted a girl for a customer. I tried to wake her up but she wouldn’t so I managed it for her. I made an appointment with the girl. She asked for 3,000 baht. I sent her a taxi and shared half with her.”

“F2”, 19 years old, already completed grade 9. Her hometown is in a province in the Central region.

Her parents were divorced. Her father visited her sometimes. Her mother is in Australia. She is staying with her father’s parents in the Eastern region. Her older brother sold and used Yaba and was sent to the correction center. She had a family problem due to her grandparents’ strict raising. When she was 13 years she ran away from home to live with her friends. She said “It’s like heaven when I first left home. I could do whatever I wanted. A year later, I started to sell drugs because I couldn’t live and eat with my friend all the time if I didn’t have money. If you were me, you’ll know there’re a lot of people using drugs. You live in the day world contrary to my night world. I see all the people from the same world. Just close your eyes and you’ll see the difference. It’s not good but I have no choice”. She started first smoking cigarettes and then stuffed it with cannabis. She used Yaba, ecstasy, ketamine and Ice.

“F3”- An 18-year-old, lived in Bangkok. She was dismissed from school when she was in grade 9. Her father died and she lived with her mother and relatives. Her first boyfriend threatened her not to break up with him or else he would tell her mother that they had an affair. When she was 15 years she started smoking cigarettes, followed by stuffing it with cannabis because her friends persuaded her. Her ex-boyfriend persuaded her to try Yaba. She stopped it when she broke up with him and started again when she was 16-17 years old. Her new boyfriend asked her to try Ice. “I was stressful then because I quarreled with my ex-boyfriend. I took Yaba followed by Ice and it made me nauseate because all Ice could be sucked but Yaba would leave some sediments mixed with Ice and it was very nauseating. Now I had Yaba and Ice”.

Conclusion

Male juvenile delinquency derived from three problems i.e. individual, family and friends. Initially, the juveniles in this study became involved in drug use through curiosity. They spent their night time existence in close proximity to the sex industry and in pubs. Many of them were engaged in violence between rival gangs and engaged in property crime, including robbery. Male and female groups reported similar family problems i.e. broken homes, imprisonment, gambling, drug use and drug peddling. Friends were strong influences for

drug use and gang membership contributed to criminal involvement. Many had run away from home to be with their friends – starting to enter into a drug trafficking cycle, resulting in being arrested and sent to the correction center. Juveniles, who had entered the correction center after experiences of drug use, will have high risk of drug relapse and re-offence. As mentioned earlier, family problems lead to female juveniles' entering to the circle of addictive substances. Some families were involved drug peddling.

Results of the study were coherent with the risk factors for recidivism in juvenile offenders. They highlighted various family background measures, such as parental anti-social behaviour, absence of the parents or low emotional attachments.¹⁶⁻¹⁹ Peer group factors are influential to the juveniles such as adolescent novelty-seeking, peer rejection or peer deviance.¹⁶ Another risk factor lies in an individual, including nature and extent of previous criminal behaviour¹⁶⁻²⁰ or personality characteristics, psychopathology, intelligence or substance abuse.²⁰⁻²⁸

According to the problems indicated in the qualitative analysis, male or female juveniles are in the drug circle because they have used at least one addictive substance. Evidence of high risk behaviour, such as alcohol and drug use, problems and delinquency tend to occur simultaneously.²⁹

The study among delinquents showed that over 70% juveniles used Yaba, 70% reported drug use, and 75% reported either alcohol or drug use.³⁰

Our study had both quantitative and qualitative methods. From a quantitative study alone, we may not comprehend the rationale for drug use problems while the qualitative study has enhanced understanding the root cause of the problems. We selected new cases representing the current substance use situation. However, there are some limitations. First, the study participants were in the correction centers only in Bangkok and the Central region. Thus, the results might not generalise issues of all juveniles in Thailand. Secondly, there was no scientific support to confirm their substance use. Lastly, a small sample size used to detect group differences between males and females. As such, these findings must be considered preliminary and required a larger sample for further research.

Placing the substance users in the correction center may not be the only solution. State sectors/concerned organizations and the community should also cooperate in resolving juveniles' problems, so that they will adjust their attitudes and ways of living before they return to the society.

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