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**STUDENTS AND DRUG USE:
 A STUDY OF PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS
 AND EXTENT OF DRUG USING BEHAVIOR***

ABSTRACT: This research was designed to determine the existence of differences on selected personality and attitudinal variables, among groups of adolescents, categorized according to the extent of drug usage characteristic of their respective memberships. The sample population consisted of 60 subjects, selected from the grade-twelve student body of a large Edmonton composite high school. The subjects comprised three groups of 20 (10 male and 10 female) individuals, categorized as: habitual drug users, occasional drug users, and non drug users. Individuals inclusive of the three groups were matched carefully to control for age, sex, and educational level.

Measures employed included the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule and A Survey of the Opinions of Youth, a scale developed by the writer for purposes of examining the direction and intensity of attitude toward drug usage.

Groups were found to differ significantly on four of the personality variables measured, and on attitude toward drug usage.

Implications for further research exploration, education, and preventive and therapeutic services were drawn from the findings.

INTRODUCTION

This research was designed to examine the relationship, if any, between selected personality and attitudinal variables, and comparative extent of drug using behavior among a sample of grade twelve students in Edmonton, Alberta. Current professional and popular opinions are that differences do exist between habitual drug users, non-users, and those who "dabble" in usage of psychedelic substances, and that such differences vary widely, from behavioral indices such as a drop in school marks, to the extremes of psychopathology. The present study, limited in nature, was an examination of differences on selected

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personality variables among three groups — habitual users, occasional users, and non-users of psychedelic drugs. "Psychedelic drugs" included organic substances (e.g. marijuana), chemicals and compounds (e.g. LSD, "speed," and glue, and prescribed drugs (e.g. amphetamines and barbiturates).

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study was prompted not only by extensive (and continually expanding) counseling experience with drug users, but also by concurrent review and observation of the dearth of conclusive research, specific to identification of personal-social factors relevant to the drug using phenomenon among youth. More than a decade ago, Huxley (1954) noted that the desire to "transcend" oneself seems to have existed with man from earliest times. De Ropp (1957), following this thesis, demonstrated repeatedly that the effort to escape one's own "creating self" and to experience even temporary states of euphoria as relief, regardless of the cost, had followed man throughout the course of history. The current "drug problem" within our North American youth society has since been debated, discussed, described and defined by such professionals as Campbell (1969), Dewhurst (1970), Holmes (1969), Keeler (1968), King (1969), Levy (1968), and Unwin (1968, 1969), to name but a few, most of whom relate its existence to the various states of alienation, rebellion, and neurotic contempt for traditional society presently characteristic of individual or collective youth. Cameron (1969) supplements the thinking of many such exponents with the proposal that the two most significant factors relating to experimentation with psychedelic drugs include (1) escape — from pain, anxiety, fatigue and excessive passivity or boredom" and (2) thrill-seeking — or the pursuit of "new or novel intellectual and emotional experiences." Keeler (1968) suggests further that drug users distinguish themselves from non-users in that they are significantly more strongly motivated to conform to peer-group values and to satisfy curiosity. Apart from professional opinion and theoretical assumption, many studies have been conducted among Canadian youth (such as those completed in British Columbia (Russell, 1970) and Toronto (Narcotic Addiction Foundation, 1970) in attempts to determine the extent of and motivations for usage among youth. The need for continued research exploration in this area was evidenced from review of the literature. Further, evaluation of such observations as those of Smart (1969), who noted the dramatic increase in usage since the inception of the drug phenomenon, and Unwin (1969), who noted a similarly dramatic decrease in the age level of those experimenting, prompted the present research exploration.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Three groups of adolescent high-school students, characterized according to extent of drug usage were compared on two indices of personality constructs, including 15 personality traits and one attitudinal dimension.

The Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 60 subjects, selected from certain groups in the grade-twelve student body of a large Edmonton composite high school. The groups included:

1. Habitual Users — individuals who used substances regularly and more than twice per week. These were 48 clients undergoing intensive psychological counseling related to their drug using concerns.
2. Occasional Users — individuals who used substances intermittently but regularly (at least twice per month). These were 50 clients undergoing assistance from school counselors, and self-admitted users.
3. Non-Users — individuals who had never (nor had any intention thereof) used such substances. These were 50 students selected by teachers to be likely non-users, and further, self-admitted to be non-users.

Ten male and ten female Ss were randomly selected from the aforementioned three groups. All were 19 years old. Rigorous control of variables other than age and grade level, such as socioeconomic status, family dynamics, ability levels, and so on, was not attempted; however, no glaring differences were found to exist on cursory examination of such variables.

The Instruments

The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Edwards, 1959), which provides measures on 15 personality variables, was used to measure a number of relevant personality traits. It was chosen for the several reasons following:

1. It provides a comparison of strengths of needs within the individual.
2. Satisfactory reliability and validity have been reported in many studies.
3. It is based not only on a sophisticated theoretical formulation, but also, and more particularly, one which concerns motives in psychologically *normal* individuals.
4. It is useful as a counseling tool.
5. It is highly sensitive to group differences, a major concern of this study.

A Survey of the Opinions of Youth, an attitude scale developed by the present writer, was designed for purposes of examining the direction and intensity of attitude towards drug usage and was employed with the intention of measuring a limited number of important potential correlates of the attitudinal dimension of personality. Content validity was established, and format evaluated and agreed upon by submission to a group of five professional colleagues who, as independent judges, agreed upon details (presently excluded) regarding its development.

Procedure

All subjects were interviewed by the writer prior to testing, and

informed of the nature of the study. They were also assured anonymity with respect to their involvement in the study. Both instruments were administered by the writer in standardized testing situations to the total number of 60 students involved.

Hypotheses

Data were treated by using the trial or null hypothesis to determine the existence of differences on possible sources of variation.

For each of the 16 variables, it was hypothesized that no significant differences would be found to exist among groups of habitual drug users, occasional drug users, and non-drug-users, or between males and females within each group, nor would there be a significant interaction found to exist between extent of drug usage and sex.

Respective of each variable assessed, a 2 x 3 analysis of variance was calculated for, and thereby served to test each of the hypotheses.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

With one exception, of all the major hypotheses (regarding non-significant differences extant among the groups involved, respective of the 15 personality variables assessed) were confirmed. The single exception was found with regard to the variable Endurance which distinguished between the group of habitual drug users and the others. Thus, habitual, occasional, and non-users were found to be, on the average, similar to one another in respect to 14 EPPS personality variables. On all 15 personality variables, occasional users and non-users were not significantly different.

It is not surprising that the group of habitual drug users differentiated themselves according to scores on this variable, since authoritative opinion substantiates the trend apparent among this group toward "dropping out" — of school, employment, and, indeed, society as a whole. Characteristically, the antithesis of all representatives of "Endurance," habitual users typically exhibit:

1. inability to concentrate
2. academic failure
3. lack of motivation
4. growing apathy toward present tasks and future plans.

As a group, therefore, habitual drug using students display a significant lack of qualities pertaining to the characteristic, Endurance — qualities which, by comparison, are not apparent by their absence among groups of occasional drug users or non-dug-users.

Based upon group comparisons, apart from this finding, extent of drug usage was found not to be associated significantly with distinctive or characteristic personality constructs as measured by the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule.

Significant differences between males and females were found to exist within certain of the three groups considered, respective of a limited few of the total number of variables assessed, and in each case, Scheffé's *a posteriori* contrasts were applied to determine the direction of significant differences thus observed. Sex differences were

found to exist within the group of occasional drug users on the variable Exhibition, and within the groups of habitual drug users and non-drug-users on the variable Abasement. It would be conjecture to attempt to explain these results other than to suggest that sex differences on selected personality variables within groups so characterized may be anticipated, and should receive consideration in further research efforts of this nature.

Of the total variables of personality assessed, the single outstanding variable found to exhibit differences among the groups studied, and hence to refute the major hypothesis, was that of attitude toward drug usage. The group of habitual drug users was found to differ both from the group of non-drug-users, and the group of occasional drug users — exceeding chance expectation beyond the .01 level. Members of this group distinguished themselves as having significantly more positive or favorable attitudes toward drug usage than those of either the group of occasional drug users or the group of non-drug-users. This observation may be considered self-evident, or at the least, not surprising; however, the comparative coexistence of a non-significant difference in attitude toward drug usage between the groups of occasional drug users and non-drug-users leads one to speculate upon the existence, thus demonstrated, of characteristics exclusive to the population of habitual drug users. Unwin (1969) and other contemporary authorities in the field, are in agreement with this conclusion; however they submit that such distinguishing characteristics approximate the nature of pathological states of personality. The present study lacked both intention and design to attempt assessment of the comparative existence of pathology among groups of youth respective of the extent of drug using behavior characteristic of each. It was able to determine, however, within the range of normal traits of personality studied, one which served to distinguish the group of habitual drug users from groups of occasional drug using and non-drug-using peers. The writer believes that the attitudinal dimension thus identified as relevant, in differential respect, to the habitual use of drugs, warrants further research exploration. Further, it deserves consideration as a distinguishing characteristic, at least proportionate to that granted the various states of pathology presumed exclusive to the habitual drug-using populace of youth.

Finally, it must be emphasized that no difference was established regarding this, or any other characteristic presently under consideration, between groups of occasional drug users and non-drug-users. Proportionate as well, therefore, to the consideration given distinguishing characteristics relative to drug usage, must be granted the *lack* of differences, or, perhaps, similarities apparent.

Implications

Although the results of this research should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive, they imply a global or public need for diminished focus upon the existence of various states of deviance, or otherwise abnormal constructs of personality, presumed to characterize the sector of habitual drug users within our youth population. Further

need for public awareness is apparent with regard to the lack of differences between the occasional or casual drug user and his non-drug-using contemporary, differences which, to date, have been granted disproportionate and perhaps unfair consideration.

Social agencies, including education systems, presently involved in the provision of therapeutic, educative, and preventive services to youth, regarding drug usage, may well involve themselves with efforts to facilitate attitude formation and change, if, in fact, further research substantiates the relevance of the attitudinal dimension in this regard, particularly if attitudes are found to influence individual and group decisions with respect to involvement in usage.

The need for further research in this area is self-evident. The present study re-emphasizes this need, particularly for research directed toward more precise, and comparatively more all encompassing findings with regard to evaluation of constructs of personality relevant to the phenomenon of drug usage. Further exploration of the attitudinal dimension is strongly recommended from the present findings.

In conclusion, results of the present study suggest that exploration of relevant dimensions of personality, particularly that of the attitudinal dimension, may prove a viable approach to the study of characteristics of youth as they relate to extent of involvement with drug usage.

RESUME: Existe-t-il des différences de personnalité et d'attitudes chez les adolescents qui consomment de la drogue?

L'échantillon de l'étude, composé de 60 sujets, fut choisi parmi les étudiants de douzième année d'une école secondaire d'Edmonton. Les sujets furent classifiés en trois groupes de 20 (10 étudiants et 10 étudiantes): Consommateurs habituels, consommateurs occasionnels et abstinents. Les sujets furent appariés sur les variables suivantes: âge, sexe et niveau scolaire.

On a utilisé deux instruments de mesure: le *Edwards Personal Preference Schedule* et le *Survey of the Opinions of Youth*. Cette dernière échelle, mise au point par l'A. permet de dégager la direction et l'intensité des attitudes face à la consommation de la drogue. Les groupes se différencient significativement sur quatre des variables de personnalité et sur l'échelle d'attitudes. En se basant sur les résultats, on a dégagé les implications concernant la recherche, l'éducation et les services préventifs et thérapeutiques.

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RESOLUTIONS

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