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PATTERNS OF DRUG MISUSE AND THE SCHOOL DROP-OUT

ABSTRACT: In addition to studying the prevalence of drug abuse among transient youth this study attempted to relate certain drug-use patterns to the student drop-out rates. We tried to determine why students leave school and when. We investigated new drug use patterns.

Motivated by an interest in patterns of adolescent drug misuse and the relation of those patterns to dropping out of school, we set out on a study of transient youth in the summers of 1971 and 1972. Taking as a sample ($N = 260$), youth from fourteen to twenty years of age who visited overnight youth hostels in Eastern Canada, we found that school drop-outs constituted close to half the transient population. Surprisingly, only about one third of the drop-outs among the transients had been forced to leave school because of expulsion or low grades. Two-thirds of the drop-outs had left school voluntarily, especially for the reason that they had grown tired of the monotony of school and they wanted to try something else and have new experiences.

The transient sample was also found to include large numbers of drug users of various sorts. The findings indicated very clearly that drug use was related to time lost from school as well as to dropping out of school. It is interesting that about half the drug users, who dropped out of school, left during the tenth grade. The reasons for the disproportionate number of students that leave school at this particular time should probably be investigated. Perhaps some dropping out would be averted if the potential drop-out could be persuaded to remain in school throughout the tenth grade.

Student loss of time from school, while actually in attendance, was also highest in grade ten. Student absence during grade ten were significantly and positively correlated with their corresponding use of at least sixteen separate drugs which were investigated. At other grade levels only the use of four to six drugs was found to be related to non-attendance. These results show that grade ten is a crucial year in considering the drug and drop-out problems.

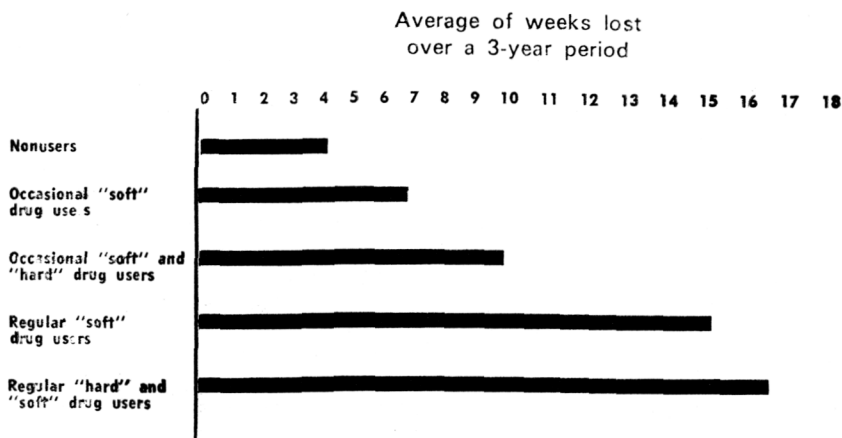
The relationship between the extent of involvement with drugs and the student's absence from school can be looked at in another way by contrasting the total loss of time from school of the drug users as opposed to the non-drug users. (Figure 1) It was found that occasional "soft" drug users lost an average of 6.7 weeks of school for every three years in high school, whereas the nonusers lost an average of only 4.7 weeks. Occasional "soft" and "hard" drug users lost 10.6 weeks per three years. Regular "soft" drug users lost 15.7 weeks and regular "hard" and "soft" drug users lost 16.3 weeks. It can be seen from these statistics that an escalation in total time lost was related to increasing involvement with drugs.

Some rough statistics can be given on the prevalence of drug use in the transient sample. Approximately ten percent of the sample were using narcotics such as opium, morphine, heroin, codeine, demerol, and methadone at the time we interviewed them. Another ten percent of the sample had tried these drugs but did not then use them. Opium was the most popular narcotic. Sixty-four of two-hundred-sixty subjects had at one time or another used opium.

The hallucinogens were quite another matter. Eighty to ninety percent of the transient sample were using marijuana and hashish at the time of investigation. Over fifty percent of the sample had used, or were using, other hallucinogens such as mescaline, LSD, DMT or STP.

Figure 1

Relationship Between the Extent of Involvement
with Drugs and Students' Absences from School



Stimulants such as cocaine and speed (benzedrine, dexedrine, and methedrine) were used by about twenty percent of the transient sample, dexedrine being the most popular drug among the "speeders." Only five to ten percent of the sample used barbiturates (nembutal, deconal, phenobarbital, or amytal) and other sedatives such as equinal, doriden, and librium. Of these "downers," deconal (also called seconal) was most frequently used. About five percent of the sample had tried glue or solvents in the course of their drug-use histories.

All the drop-outs in the sample were questioned about their reasons for leaving school. These reasons were categorized as: forced decisions, such as expulsion, low achievement, illness, and financial necessity; and voluntary decisions; such as general dissatisfaction with school or a desire to try something new. Expulsion, however, was the non-attendance factor most related to drug use. Among the forty youths who had been forced to leave school, only four were non-drug users and at least 20 were regular, and at least half of those were regular "soft" and "hard" drug users.

Educators sometimes assume that many drop-outs wish to return to school. Guidance counsellors often plan how to keep a student in school without giving much regard to the fact that the student himself does not want to stay. All the drop-outs in the study were asked to estimate their feelings of regret at having their formal educations interrupted. Those who had voluntarily dropped out showed very little regret regarding their decision to leave. Lack of regret was especially characteristic of drop-outs from higher income families, but it was true of many other drop-outs as well. For instance, the "soft" drug users seldom indicated any regret about losing time from school. It might be well for teachers, parents, and guidance counsellors to keep this lack of regret in mind when offering advice to the drop-out.

The regular "hard" drug users, on the whole, showed much more regret than did the non-users. Regret because of lost time was significantly and positively related to the frequency of use of at least a dozen "hard" drugs. Regret was especially related to the use of heroin ("smack"). Heroin was also the drug most associated with total time loss from school.

The transient drop-outs were asked if they felt the time they had lost from school was recoverable. People with feelings of regret seemed often to be optimistic about their recovery in that optimism and regret correlated quite highly. However, there may have been a tendency on the part of many users not to be realistic about their futures. It would be interesting to do a follow-up study to test the relationship between optimism and actual recovery.

A most interesting finding is that there were definite sex-related differences in many of the results. Surprisingly, the female transients had lost more time from school than their male peers. There was a consistent relationship between total time lost in each grade and being female. Although there was a positive correlation between being female and restricting drug use to "soft" drugs ($r = .20$),

and the length of time using "soft" drugs prior to using hard drugs ($r = .23$), being female was also related to the frequency of using "speeders" ($r = .16$) and certain "downers" such as librium ($r = .16$) and doriden ($r = .20$).

RESUME: En plus d'étudier le phénomène de l'abus des drogues chez les jeunes adultes, on a tenté de relier certains modes d'usage des drogues au taux d'étudiants qui abandonnent leurs études. L'auteur a également tenté de déterminer pourquoi et quand ces étudiants quittent l'école. Enfin, on a exploré les modes d'usage des drogues.

REVIEWS

THE ENCOUNTER GAME

By B. L. Maliver. New York: Stein & Day, 1973. Pp. 238.

Reviewed by Larry Eberlein,
Graduate Studies,
University of Alberta.

Encounter is many things to many people. It can be a new set of techniques in psychotherapy, or more emotional axle grease to make a business more profitable or a school system more "meaningful." For the individual it may mean a week-end adventure, a source of new sexual contacts, a substitute for psychotherapy, or a new religion. For the culture of the whole, encounter seems to offer instant psychological growth — like instant mashed potatoes, with all the flavor boiled out in the packaging (p. 215).

Writing from a somewhat negative standpoint, Bruce Maliver has carefully critiqued most of the major activities and movements in the encounter field today. The author has explored the negative side of groups to warn of the dangers and exploitations that commonly occur within the encounter movement, but also to salvage what real value does exist for potential participants in the group movement. This is a well-written, very readable book, liberally spiced with anecdotal material derived from the author's 12 years of encounters, personal interviews and experiences with participants and most of the major figures in the encounter movement today. Although documented with the little competent research currently available on encounter, the book is not written for a theoretically oriented, academic audience. It is a book that should be read by every person before he signs up for any type of encounter group experience. It should also be read by any person who purports to be a "trainer" in the encounter movement. It should be read by any agency considering the implementation of an encounter program for agency personnel.

Maliver describes in detail various workshops, micro labs, and group experiences run by well-known leaders, and discusses the oper-