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Does Family Influence the Development of Substance Use Disorder? Residential Rehabilitees' Perceptions

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Background: Substance use disorder (SUD) is influenced by several biopsychosocial factors. Family factors are perceived to contribute to an individual's vulnerability in developing SUD.

Objectives: To identify the characteristics of individuals with SUD and family factors perceived to influence the development of SUD in residential rehabilitees in selected centres in Sri Lanka.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in conveniently selected 205 rehabilitees in six selected residential drug rehabilitation/treatment centres in Sri Lanka. Individuals over 18 years of age who gave voluntary informed consent were recruited to the study. Those who were experiencing acute disturbances in the withdrawal period were excluded. Data were collected using interviewer-administered pre-tested questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results: The majority of the participants were males (98.5%, n=202) between the ages of 18-48 years. All were poly-drug users with a mean (SD) duration of substance use of 7 (± 5) years. Most of the participants had initiated substance use at 15-18 years of age or earlier (71.7%, n=147). Only a few participants responded that their mother (4.7%, n=9) or father (2.1%, n=4) had never received a formal education. Parents of 37.7% (n=77) of the participants had been employed. More than half (67.2%, n=137) perceived that family factors had contributed to the development of SUD. Family negligence (27%, n=55), strict parenting (20.6%, n=42), loss of a family member (12.3%, n=25), presence of an addicted family member (4.9%, n=10), presence of an addicted relative at home (5.9%, n=12) and divorce or separation of parents (5.9%, n=12) were perceived as the most important family factors in developing SUD.

Conclusions: The study contributes to the notion that family factors may contribute to an individual's vulnerability in developing SUD. Drug prevention or rehabilitation programme should emphasize and address family factors which can contribute to instigating and upholding substance use behaviour to get the best outcome of the rehabilitation programme.

Keywords: Family factors, Residential treatment, Substance use disorder

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