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## PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH

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### Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs Related To Drugs among Pahang Matriculation Students in Malaysia

*Balsam Mahdi Nasir Al-Zurfi, Maher D. Fuad Fuad, Hasanain Faisal Ghazi, Mohammed A. AbdalQader, Maged Elnajeh and Mohammed Faez Baobaid*

*Community Medicine Unit, International Medical School, Management and Science University, Malaysia.*

*\*For reprint and all correspondence: Dr. Hasanain Faisal Ghazi, Community Medicine Unit, International Medical School, Management and Science University, Malaysia.*

*Email : [dr.hasanainhabasha@gmail.com](mailto:dr.hasanainhabasha@gmail.com)*

#### ABSTRACT

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<b>Received</b>	23 May 2016
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<b>Introduction</b>	Drug abuse has been a global threat not only in Malaysia but worldwide, especially among adolescents. This is alarming issue had been a serious public health problem worldwide. The aim of the study is to access the knowledge and attitude on drug abuse among Pahang Matriculation students in 2016.
<b>Methods</b>	A cross-sectional study was conducted involving 217 matriculation students. A self-determined questionnaire was distributed among the students regarding knowledge and attitude about drugs.
<b>Results</b>	The prevalence of good knowledge on drug abuse was (82.03%). The prevalence of students' attitude on drug abuse has higher number of good attitude with the sum of 182 (83.9 %). Only gender showed a significant association with students' knowledge (P= 0.046).
<b>Conclusion</b>	The knowledge, attitude, and practice of drug abuse among Pahang Matriculation students are good.
<b>Keywords</b>	Knowledge and Practice - Attitude - Drug Abuse - Students - Malaysia.

## INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse has been a global threat not only in Malaysia but worldwide. In Malaysia, this issue only escalated with arrival of Europeans during the British rule though drug abuse dated back to 8th century among Arab traders, facilitated via meeting of various distant cultures by means of exploration, trade or even war. Nowadays, substance and drug use, misuse and abuse among adolescents and youths have been categorized to be on the increasing trend.<sup>1</sup>

According to Norliza<sup>2</sup> the most commonly used drugs in Malaysia were opiates, followed by methamphetamine, ganja and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) such as Adderall which is a drug prescribed to patients diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD). A study was then conducted at 16 public higher learning institutions as well as two private higher learning institutions. A total number of 3,558 first-year students were randomly picked from these institutions; it stated that students in higher institution were actually having low knowledge regarding the effects of drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Drug abuse among the younger generation in Malaysia is becoming a grave concern with children as young as seven years old are hooked on it. Increasing trend of drug abuse recorded every year involves all students from primary to undergraduate level. Apart from peer pressure and exposure, the prevention director of Agensi Anti Dadah Kebangsaan AADK Malaysia also attributed neglect and lack of parental guidance as factor for the increasing abuse among teens. According to a research conducted by the AADK, the culprits are the small-time drug dealers.<sup>4</sup>

Based on a research conducted by Tam,<sup>5</sup> the major contributing factors of drug abuse among students were peer influence and curiosity in trying out drugs. The research showed that social pressure to belong, to be accepted, and to be part of social group among teenagers provoked them to indulge themselves in these sinful activities. Apart from that, study shows that the tendency of using these drugs is to achieve a compensatory mechanism against stress was on the rise among professional groups in Malaysia.

The aim of the study is to access the knowledge and attitude on drug abuse among Pahang Matriculation students in 2016.

## METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted involving students from Pahang Matriculation College in 2016. Non-probability convenience sampling was used in this research. Out of 248 Pahang Matriculation College students of semester 2, there were 217 respondents, giving a response rate of 87.5%.

The data for this study was collected using a questionnaire derived from a survey of Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs (KAB) conducted in Ireland (Bryan et al. 2000). Questionnaire was divided into 4 sections which are part A, part B, part C.

Part A of the questionnaire consist of questions regarding socio-demographic factors of the students of Pahang Matriculation College mainly on gender, age, race, residential area, highest level of parents' education and the average monthly income of the family.

Part B of the questionnaire was comprised of the knowledge part which consists of 19 questions. These questions were given to assess the students of Pahang Matriculation College knowledge about drug abuse. The results obtained will be scored using three part Likert People Scale ranging from Don't Know, No and Yes.

Part C of the questionnaire was composed of 15 questions regarding attitude of the students towards drug abuse.

- Scoring for knowledge was, one point was given for the correct answer and zero point was given for the wrong one and also don't know answer. Any score more than 17 was considered as good knowledge.
- Scoring for attitude was, one point was given for the correct answer and zero point was given for the wrong one and also don't know answer. Any score more than 7.49 was considered as good attitude.

Ethical approval was obtained from International Medical School, Management and Science University. Questionnaires were back-to-back translated and also pre-tested among 30 students prior to data collection. The Knowledge scale had a good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.687. While attitude scale has Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.681.

## RESULTS

A total of 74.2% of the respondents were female and 25.8% were male. Among the respondents, the percentage of Malay respondents was the highest which is 99.0% while Chinese and others were 0.5% respectively. 60.4% of the respondents came from rural area whereas 39.6% of the respondents came from urban area. Fathers and mothers with secondary level of education have the highest percentages which are 58.1 % and 65.9% respectively. 48.9 % of the respondents came from families with average monthly income of less than RM 2300. Other factors are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	56	25.8
Female	161	74.2
Race		
Malay	215	99.0
Chinese	1	0.5
Others	1	0.5
Residential area		
Rural	131	60.4
Urban	86	39.6
Father's education		
Primary	15	6.9
Secondary	126	58.1
Tertiary	76	35.0
Mother's education		
Primary	18	8.3
Secondary	143	65.9
Tertiary	56	25.8
Average monthly income		
Less than RM2300	105	48.4
RM2300-RM5599	82	37.8
More than RM5600	30	13.8

**Table 2** Knowledge regarding drug abuse among respondents

Variables	Don't know N (%)	No N (%)	Yes N (%)
Illegal Drugs			
Cannabis	117 (53.9%)	30 (13.8%)	70 (32.3%)
Ecstasy	8 (3.7%)	18 (8.3%)	191 (88%)
Cocaine	15 (6.9%)	22 (10.1%)	180 (82.9%)
Heroin	7 (3.2%)	17 (7.8%)	193 (88.9%)
Methamphetamine	94 (43.3%)	37 (17.1%)	86 (39.6%)
Ganja	5 (2.3%)	20 (9.2%)	192 (88.5%)
Glue	16 (7.4%)	77 (35.5%)	124 (57.1%)
Amphetamine	109 (50.2%)	44 (20.3%)	64 (29.5%)
Signs and symptoms			
Constriction of pupils	94 (43.3%)	29 (13.4%)	94 (43.3%)
Dry mouth	62 (28.6%)	31 (14.3%)	124 (57.1%)
Constipation	74 (34.1%)	101 (46.5%)	42 (19.4%)
Kidney damage	29	17	171

	(13.4%)	(7.8%)	(78.8%)
Dilation of pupils	120 (55.3%)	63 (29%)	34 (15.7%)
Diarrhea	75 (34.6%)	121 (55.8%)	21 (9.7%)
Brain damage	20 (9.2%)	8 (3.7%)	189 (87.1%)
Seeing unreal images that others can't see	7 (3.2%)	6 (2.8%)	204 (94%)
Hearing unreal sounds that others can't hear	10 (4.6%)	11 (5.1%)	196 (90.3%)
All illegal drugs are equally harmful to your health?	8 (3.7%)	150 (69.1%)	59 (27.2%)
Most young people today try out heroine and morphine.	55 (25.3%)	84 (38.7%)	78 (35.9%)
Alcohol abuse causes more problems in society than drugs abuse	49 (22.6%)	91 (41.9%)	77 (35.5%)
Treatment should be only given to drug addicts who intend to give up drugs for good	22 (10.1%)	85 (39.2%)	110 (50.7%)
Money spent on the prevention of drug use, is money well spent	16 (7.4%)	18 (8.3%)	183 (84.3%)
The use of cannabis should not be against the law	142 (65.4%)	23 (10.6%)	52 (24%)
Occasional use of cannabis is not really dangerous	150 (69.1%)	23 (10.6%)	44 (20.3%)
Most people are concerned about the drug problem in Malaysia	10 (4.6%)	20 (9.2%)	187 (86.2%)
Occasional use of heroin is not really dangerous	73 (33.6%)	20 (9.2%)	124 (57.1%)
Medically prescribed heroin substitutes should be available to drug addicts	66 (30.4%)	38 (17.5%)	113 (52.1%)
Almost all drug addicts are dangerous	11 (5.1%)	38 (17.5%)	168 (77.4%)
Drugs education in school should start at primary level	5 (2.3%)	3 (1.4%)	209 (96.3%)
Drug related crime is a major problem in Malaysia today	13 (6%)	24 (11.1%)	180 (82.9%)
Reports about the extent of drug usage amongst young people are exaggerated by the media	45 (20.7%)	29 (13.4%)	143 (65.9%)
Drug addicts charged with petty offences should be given a choice between treatment and prison service	33 (15.2%)	63 (29%)	121 (55.8%)
The availability to illegal drugs poses a great threat to young people nowadays	13 (6%)	10 (4.6%)	194 (89.4%)
Regular use of cannabis is just as dangerous to your health as regular use of heroin	110 (50.7%)	6 (2.8%)	100 (46.3%)

### Knowledge

It is found that 70 (32.3%) students have heard of cannabis, 191 (88%) students have heard of ecstasy, and 180 (82.9%) students have heard of cocaine as shown in table 2. 59 (27.2%) students agreed that all illegal drugs are equally harmful to health. 78 (35.9%) students say most young people today try out heroine and morphine. 77 (35.5%) students agreed that alcohol abuse causes more

problems in society than drugs abuse. 110 (50.7%) students agreed that treatment should be only given to drug addicts who intend to give up drugs for good.

### Attitude

It was found that 79 (36.4%) think that our society is too tolerant toward drug users. They also would see drug addict more as criminal than victim

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142(65.4%). 182 (83.9%) would tend to avoid someone who is drug addict as shown in table 3.

The good and poor prevalence for knowledge attitude shown in table 4. There was a

significant association between gender and knowledge level ( $p=0.04$ ), while other socio-demographic factors were not significant as shown in table 5.

**Table 3** Attitude towards drugs abuse

VARIABLE	YES n (%)	NO n (%)	DON'T KNOW n (%)
Our society is too tolerant toward drug user	79 (36.4%)	107 (49.3%)	31 (14.3%)
I would see drug addict more as criminal than victim	142 (65.4%)	50 (23 %)	25 (11.5%)
I would tend to avoid someone who is drug addict	182 (83.9%)	24 (11.1%)	11 (5.1%)
I would be nervous of someone who uses illegal drug	191 (88%)	18 (8.3 %)	8 (3.7%)
Drug addicts are not given a fair chance to get along in society	84 (38.7%)	96 (44.2%)	37 (17.1%)
People who end up with drug problem have only themselves to blame	65 (30%)	105 (48.4%)	47 (21.7%)
Drug are not really a problem to us here in Malaysia	29 (13.4%)	178 (82%)	10 (4.6%)
Treatment should be available to all drug addict according to their needs	193 (88.9%)	15 (6.9%)	9 (4.1%)
Drug addict really scare me	174 (80.2 %)	32 (14.7%)	11 (5.1%)
Tougher sentence for drug misusers the best answer to the drug problem	114 (52.5%)	75 (34.6%)	28 (12.9%)
Most people are concerned about the drug problem in Malaysia	94 (43.3%)	90 (41.5%)	33 (15.2%)
Many drug addicts exaggerate their troubles to get sympathy	103 (47.5%)	48 (22.1%)	66 (30.4%)
The drug problem in Malaysia is out of control	122 (56.2%)	59 (27.2%)	36 (16.6%)
Society should provide syringes and needle free of charge	38 (17.5%)	146 (67.3%)	33 (15.2%)
It would bother me to live near drug addict	178 (82%)	22 (10.1%)	17 (7.8%)

**Table 4** Prevalence for knowledge and attitude

Variable	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
<b>Knowledge</b>		
Poor	39	17.97%
Good	178	82.03%
<b>Attitude</b>		
Poor	35	16.1%
Good	182	83.9%

**Table 5** Relationship between knowledge level and socio-demographic factors

Variable	Poor Knowledge N (%)	Good Knowledge N (%)	X2	P value
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	15 (26.8)	41 (73.2)	3.98	<b>0.046<sup>a</sup></b>
Female	24 (14.9)	137 (85.1)		
<b>Residential</b>				
Rural	16 (18.6)	108 (82.4)	0.039	0.844 <sup>a</sup>
Urban	23 (17.6)	70 (81.4)		
<b>Mother's education</b>				
Primary	5 (27.8)	13 (72.2)	2.27	0.340 <sup>b</sup>
Secondary	22 (15.4)	121 (84.6)		

Tertiary	12 (21.4)	14 (78.6)		
<b>Father's Education</b>				
Primary	2 (13.3)	13 (86.7)	0.320	0.848 <sup>b</sup>
Secondary	22 (17.5)	104 (82.5)		
Tertiary	15 (19.7)	61 (80.3)		
<b>Monthly Income</b>				
< RM 2300	20 (19.0)	85 (81.0)	2.777	0.261 <sup>a</sup>
RM 2300-5599	11 (13.4)	71 (86.6)		
>RM 5600	8 (26.7)	22 (73.3)		

<sup>a</sup> Chi square test was performed, <sup>b</sup> Fisher exact test was performed, Level of significant at  $P < 0.05$ .

## DISCUSSION

Based on the final data analysis, the prevalence of students' knowledge on drug abuse before the health talk was quite high. Accounting about more than half of the Pahang Matriculation students have good knowledge on drug abuse with a sum of 82.03% whereas only 17.97% have poor knowledge on drug abuse.

A high response rate achieved from this study had similarly been reported in Ireland (Nation-wide survey of drug-related knowledge, attitude and beliefs), stating that younger respondents (aged 18-29) possessed greater knowledge when compared to general population.<sup>6</sup>

This could be due to awareness that had been created through prevention education since young through programs such as Pintar Anti-drug program, TUNAS Anti-drug program, Project SUCCESS (Schools Using Coordinated Community Efforts to Strengthen Students), Project Toward No Drug Abuse (TND) and so on and so forth.

Despite that, a study on drug abuse, relapse and prevention education in Malaysia done with collaboration of Ministry of Malaysia states that drug education and preventive programs will be more effectual when initiated between the ages of 11 and 12 years which are slightly older than the common age of first exposure and suggested improvement can be done on existing prevention program.<sup>7</sup>

As for practice towards drug abuse, our study discovered that most of the students of Pahang Matriculation College is having a good practice towards drug abuse by 99.1% whereas only 0.9% with poor practice. Most of them agreed that they never try neither any illicit drugs (97.7%) nor alcohol (99.1%) so far. Similar to this research, a survey conducted by Czech Republic High School showed that 37% of new drug users were teenagers between 15 to 19 years old<sup>8</sup> which is obviously higher when compared with our study. Our study showed that only 2.3% of the students have taken any type of drugs.

In contrast to our research, a study was conducted in India to review about knowledge, attitude and opinion on substance use among adolescent high school students. Their result shows

that out of 416 students, 12.5% used or abused drugs in rural area suggesting that the students live in urban area has greater knowledge on harmfulness substance abuse. This was proven when the level of knowledge was higher in urban with percentage of 84.6% than rural with 61.5%.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

To summarize, based on the cross-sectional study that was done, it has been proven that the knowledge, attitude, and practice of drug abuse among Pahang Matriculation students is mostly good. The study also showed that there is high prevalence of good knowledge among the students after health talk was given. It is preferable to implement more strategies such as collaboration between policy maker, health workers and religious leaders in order to build a structured education programs and readily accessible to the community.

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