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## Research Article

### INFLUENCING ATTITUDES IN THE TRANSITION OF LICIT TO ILLICIT DRUG ABUSE

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** It was proposed to identify the influence that attitudes have surrounding the transition of licit and illicit drugs consumption in young people. **Method:** An study of cases and controls was performed. The sample was made up by 280 participants who formed two groups, the first one, young people who haven't had the transition of licit and illicit drug abuse (210) and the second one, young people who have already had transition of illicit drugs (70). **Results:** Significant differences were found in the attitudes ( $U=4877.5, p<.001$ ) among young people who have experienced illicit drugs ( $\bar{X}=38.02, SD=19.78$ ) and the ones who haven't ( $\bar{X}=27.32, SD=19.78$ ) highlighting more positive attitudes in the consumption of illicit drugs in the young people who have experienced them, the lineal regression model showed a positive effect of the attitudes towards the transition of the consumption of illicit drugs ( $\beta=.029, p<.001$ ). **Conclusions:** The results of this study showed that the positive attitudes towards the consumption of illicit drugs work as predicting factors to the transition of licit and illicit drugs consumption, whereby the development of interventions can be improved, focused towards the prevention of this phenomenon.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse is a social health issue worldwide due to its increase and its start in early ages. It is estimated that 243 million people (5.2%) of world population have consumed one kind of illicit drug (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018; United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2018). In Mexico according to the national survey regarding drugs reports that the prevalence of people who admitted to consume drugs at least one time in their life was of 9.9% another fact that calls our attention is this increase of consumption in adolescents (National Institute of Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2018; National Institute of Psychiatry Ramon de la Fuente Muñiz [INPRF], National Public Health Institute [INSP], National Commission Against Addictions [CONADIC], & Secretary of Health [SS], 2017).

Currently, a global interest exists in considering the abuse of illicit drugs as a result of the interaction of varied personal, community and social factors with each other, in this sense some authors have reported that illicit drug abuse such as tobacco and alcohol act like a gateway towards illicit drug abuse, naming this phenomenon from transition of licit drugs to illicit drugs (Castaldelli-Maia *et al*, 2014; kandel & kandel, 2015).

Studies have identified diverse personal factors which work like facilitators in the start of drug abuse, one of them is attitudes. We have observed that attitudes towards drug abuse are related to different variables which are the tendency of the adolescent in wishing to belong or to be accepted in a group, in the same way the environments facilitating the consumption, besides they are related to a behavior in search of attention and behaviors of conflict such as academic disobedience (Guzmán-Facundo *et al.*, 2014; Varela, Marsillas, Isoma, & Rial, 2013; Young & Havens, 2012).

Attitudes are beliefs and social actions of the individual which are lasting systems of positive and negative evaluations, feelings, emotions and tendencies of actions or positive and unfavorable behaviors in relation to social objects (Soares, Vargas, & De Oliveira, 2011). The attitude of the individual towards determined behavior which is in this case drug abuse might be conditioned by a group of relevant beliefs concerning the consequences that drug abuse provokes and the emotional value that the individual attributes to such consequences, it means the evaluation either positive or negative that the person does to illicit drug abuse (Ajzen, 2005).

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Due to the necessity that a scientific knowledge exists in the field of prevention and the reduction of the transition in the abuse of licit and illicit drugs, essentially in the future nursing interventions, we have marked that exists a knowledge gap about the factors that facilitate the transition of illicit drugs and this suggests the necessity to keep researching (Soares, Vargas, & De Oliveira, 2011).

Therefore the objective of this study was to know the influence of the attitudes about the transition of the abuse from licit drugs to illicit drugs in a sample of young people in the north of Mexico. Under the hypothesis that the favorable attitudes in drug abuse increase the probability of transition of the consumption of illegal drugs.

## METHODOLOGY

This study presents a design of cases and controls of the observational kind. The case group was formed by 70 young people who have experienced the abuse of illicit drugs, the search and selection of the participants were through the "snowball" method, people over the age of 18 that accepted to participate in the study.

For the purposes of this study the control group got together from the search of young people who were not consumers of illicit drugs but consumers of any licit drug (tobacco and alcohol) in homes, taking the address of each case as a reference. Through the "clock hands" method: Once the address of each case is located we traveled clockwise, we investigated in each home the existence of eligible subjects for the control group, with a final sample of 280 participants.

In the present study a personal data card and a history of drug abuse were used (CDPHCD) and the attitude scale of the use of drugs taken from the measuring scale of intentions for the use of drugs (EMIUD [Rodriguez-Kuri, et. al, 2007]). The EMIUD test measures the attitudes, subjective standard, behavioral control and the intention of consumption of illicit drugs, this questionnaire was designed by Rodriguez-Kuri, et. al (2007). In this study only the paragraph of attitudes was used for drug abuse, which consists of two sub scales, 1) it focuses in the beliefs about the consequences of drug abuse, these sub scales are formed by 13 reagents and they present five options of answer in likert scale kind (it is not probable, it is little probable, most likely probable, it is probable and it is very probable) 2) it's about the evaluation of the consequences of drug abuse, it is formed by 13 items with a scale of answers of likert kind with five options of answer.

This study was submitted to both Research and Ethics Committee for the research of the Autonomous University of Nuevo León. If the subject wished to participate a filter interview proceeded to conduct where it was questioned if his first drug was legal, to verify that it was eligible for the study, if it met the criteria, we started the interview reading the consent informed of cases requesting in another sheet of paper and without the possibility of relating the participant, his address and subsequently we delivered the instruments to be answered. This procedure was done until the sample of the group of cases was done. Subsequently we proceeded with the data collection of the participants who formed the control group, it is worth mentioning that this group was formed from the reference of the addresses of the participants of the case

group. The address was located using the "clock hands" method permanent households were visited for the search of participants who complied with the criteria of the control group, visits to permanent households were performed, asking for young men and women between the ages from 18 to 29, until locating three controls of each case.

The data obtained were processed through the statistic program Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for Mac OSX. Descriptive Statistic was used to obtain frequencies, proportions, measures of central tendency and variability, this is to describe the population of the study and variables used within the model. The internal consistency of the instruments was used through the reliability coefficient Alpha of Cronbach. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine goodness of fit with Lilliefors correction to determine the normality in the distribution of continuing and numeric variables, the use of nonparametric statistic was used based on these results.

## RESULTS

The average age between the participants was 21.4 (DE=3.3) in relation with the sex, the 77.1% of the young people were men and 22.9% were women in both groups. In respect of academic level, it was found that the young people with degree were the ones who showed higher percentage in both groups (52.4% group without transition 52.9% group with transition) followed by high school level (36.2% and 30.0% respectively). 70% of young people of the control group said that they lived with both parents and only the 44.3% of the case group.

Table 1 shows the prevalence of tobacco and alcohol consumption in both groups. We observe higher prevalence of alcohol and tobacco consumption in the young people who have experienced the abuse of illicit drugs.

**Table 1** Prevalence of tobacco and alcohol consumption

Prevalences	Case (n=70)		Control (n=210)		$\chi^2$	p
	f	%	f	%		
Alcohol						
One time in their life	70	100	209	99.5	3.35	.563
Last year	70	100	197	93.8	4.54	.033
Last month	54	77.1	96	45.7	20.8	.001
Tobacco						
One time in their life	54	77.1	59	28.1	52.4	.001
Last year	39	55.7	38	18.1	37.2	.001
Last month	28	40.0	30	14.3	21.1	.001

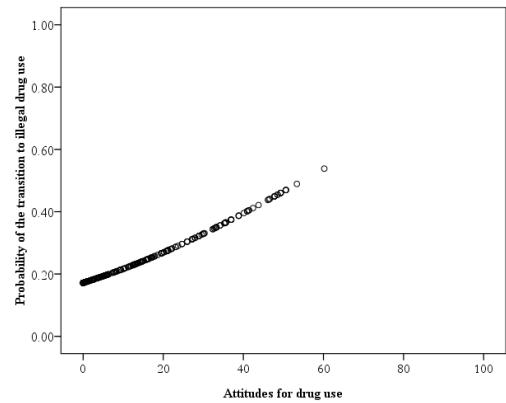
Note: f= frequency, n= total of observations, CI= Confidence Interval,  $\chi^2$ = Chi Squaretest, p= significance

Table 2 reports the prevalence of the abuse of illicit drugs. The 78% of the participants who have experienced the abuse of illicit drugs reported that they have consumed marijuana at least one time in their lives, 65.7% in the last year and 32.9% in the last month, being this substance the one with higher consumption, followed by the use of sedatives and the use of amphetamine.

**Table 2** Prevalence of illicit drug consumption

	Prevalencias	Case (n=70)	
		f	%
Marijuana	One time in their life	55	78.6
	Last year	46	65.7
	Last month	23	32.9
Cocaine	One time in their life	6	8.6
	Last year	5	7.1
	Last month	5	7.1
Amphetamine	One time in their life	8	11.4
	Last year	4	5.7
	Last month	0	0.0
Inhalants	One time in their life	2	2.9
	Last year	2	2.9
	Last month	0	0.0
Sedatives	One time in their life	14	20.0
	Last year	10	14.3
	Last month	5	7.1
Hallucinogen	One time in their life	6	8.6
	Last year	5	7.1
	Last month	2	2.9

Note: f= frequency, n=70



**Figure 1** The effect of the attitudes about the probability of the transition of drug abuse

**Table 3** Comparison of the attitudes towards the abuse of drugs by case and control

Variable	Transition	n	$\bar{X}$	Mdn	SD	U	p value
Creencias de drogas	Control	210	27.32	21.11	23.77	5216.5	.001
	Caso	70	38.02	38.46	19.78		
Evaluación de las creencias	Control	210	43.65	46.15	20.74	6149.5	.041
	Caso	70	49.45	50.96	20.21		
Actitudes	Control	210	13.35	7.63	14.78	4877.5	.001
	Caso	70	20.07	16.56	14.17		

Note:  $\bar{X}$ =means, Mdn=median, SE=standard deviation, U=Mann Whitney U, p=significance

In table 3 the comparison of the attitudes between the case group and control group is shown, the results show significant differences, highlighting the highest medias and means in the group of young people who have experienced the abuse of illicit drugs.

According to the hypothesis which raised that the positive attitudes to the abuse of drugs increase the risk of transition of the abuse of illegal drugs, the results of the binary logistic regression model showed the significant effect ( $x^2=10.22$ ,  $p<001$ ) with a variance explained of 5.3%. We observed that the attitudes had a significant effect ( $b=.029$ ,  $p=.001$ ) in the transition of drug abuse, it means that that the higher positive attitudes about the drug abuse the higher the probability is to the transition of illegal drug abuse (see figure 1) with these results the hypothesis is approved.

## DISCUSSION

There is evidence that the attitudes develop an important role with the substance use, due to the prior evidence, the interest has increased about these researches. The objective of the study was to know the influence of the attitudes in the transition from licit drug abuse to illicit drug abuse. The results showed that the illicit drug with more transition is marijuana, this agrees with the data of national and international surveys (INPRF, INSP, CONADIC, & SS, 2017; UNODC, 2014) where they indicate that the illicit drug with higher consumption is marijuana.

In respect of the attitudes, the results report that the young people who have experienced the abuse of illicit drugs show more positive attitudes to drug abuse than the ones who haven't. The results agree with previous studies concerning drug abuse (Arango-Tobón, *et al.*, 2013; Guzmán, *et al.* 2014) which reported the relation of the attitudes in the abuse of drugs in a way that explains when the more the positive attitude towards drugs is the higher is the frequency of consumption. In this sense the participants of the study who have experienced this attitude refer higher positive beliefs to drug abuse, such as providing pleasant experiences, releasing pressures, allowing to do different things and feel adrenaline.

It is worth mentioning that a significant effect in the attitudes was observed concerning the transition of drug abuse. It means that the more attitudes to drug abuse the higher is the probability that a young person experiences from tobacco or alcohol consumption to the abuse of any illicit drug. In the same way these results are confirmed when observing the contrast of the total index score of attitudes between the consumers and non consumers. The young people who showed no abuse of drugs showed less scores of attitudes than the ones who indicated consuming drugs. These findings agree with the literature (Gutierrez & Romero, 2014; Janssen *et al.*, 2014; Mallou *et al.*, 2013) and it is explained that it's possible that in the life stage of these young men they make the decision of consuming drugs in the pursuit of feeling good, forget about their problems, have fun, and even feel grown men and show their independence (White *et al.*, 2018). In this sense these beliefs must be considered, since the attitudes for the abuse of drugs are determined by the group of beliefs about the consequences which provoke such substances (Ajzen, 1991); however, these beliefs can be reinforced in the young people

who have already have experience in previous abuse, or through the experience of abuse by peers. With these results previously discussed, we confirm that if a young man shows positive attitudes he will incline to a higher answer to the transition of the abuse of illicit drugs (Ajzen, 1991)

## CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that the young men who have experienced the abuse of illicit drugs showed higher scores in the positive attitudes towards abuse of illicit drugs. Additionally, the positive attitudes to drug abuse are predictors to the transition of abuse of illicit drugs.

The previous paragraph shows that the findings must be considered like a guide for the substantiation of future interventions of drug abuse in young university students.

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