

ARAŞTIRMA | RESEARCH

Expectations of Youth and Parents from Drug Addiction Awareness Efforts in Turkey

Türkiye'de Madde Bağımlılığını Farkındalık Çalışmalarından Gençlerin ve Ebeveynlerin Beklentileri

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This work was driven by the sense of responsibility and by the aim of providing/raising awareness for the youth regarding drug addiction. In order to raise the awareness of youth within the framework of drug addiction, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health General Directorate of Health Promotion made 2 spot films which were intended for the youth and 1 spot film related to the "191 Line"; "The Counseling and Support Line for the Fight Against Drugs which addressed a larger target population.

Method: The aforementioned 3 spot films were analyzed with the method of focus group analysis, containing the opinions of the intended population regarding the films and the subject at hand.

Results: It was seen that negative elements such as fear and death which were used in the public service announcements that are intended to raise awareness in terms of "drug addiction" were not considered as dissuasive from the perspective of teenagers. Moreover, parents do not want studies to be conducted which induces fear and anxiety among themselves and their children. Teenagers and their parents think that the processes which lead the individual towards drug addiction should be clarified and elaborated in a clear manner within the future studies.

Conclusion: These individuals expect the related films and studies to contain positive messages regarding the subject and they also expect these works to touch people's lives, to make contact with the society itself.

Keywords: Drug addiction, youth, family, awareness

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışmada madde bağımlılığı konusunda gençlerin farkındalığını sağlama amacından ve sorumluluğundan hareket edilmiştir. Türkiye Sağlık Bakanlığı Sağlık Geliştirilmesi Genel Müdürlüğü tarafından gençlerin farkındalığının artırılması amacıyla genç hedef kitleye yönelik, yeni medyada yayınlanmak üzere 2 spot film ve daha geniş bir hedef kitleye hitap etmek üzere Uyuşturucu ile Mücadele Danışma ve Destek Hattı ALO 191 ile ilgili 1 spot film yapılmıştır.

Yöntem: Hazırlanan 3 spot film yayınlanmadan önce hedef kitlelerin filmlerle ve konu ile ilgili öngörüşleri odak grup görüşmesi metoduyla analiz edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Gençler uyuşturucu madde bağımlılığı ile ilgili farkındalık için hazırlanan kamu spotlarında korku ve ölüm gibi olumsuz öğelerin caydırıcı olmadığını düşünmektedir. Ebeveynler de kendileri ve çocukları için kaygıya ve korkuya neden olacak çalışmalar yapılmamasını istemektedir.

Sonuç: Gençler ve ebeveynler yapılacak çalışmalarda madde bağımlılığına sürükleyen sürecin neler olduğunun net bir şekilde anlatılması gerektiğini düşünmektedir. Aynı zamanda topluma temas edebilecek, olumlu mesaj veren filmlerin ve çalışmaların yapılmasını beklemektedirler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Madde bağımlılığı, gençler, aile, farkındalık

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of drug addiction has been increasing in the recent years globally as well as in Turkey (1). According to the 2018 World Drug Report (2), it has been found that by the year of 2016, 275 million people worldwide (approx. 5.6% of the total world population) used drugs at least once in their life. With regards to this information, 1 in every 18 individuals have had an experience of drug use (3-5). With reference to the data of World Health Organization (WHO), it can be said that 450.000 individuals have lost their lives because of problems induced by drug use. 167.000 of these deaths were directly attributed to drug use and abuse (usage at high doses etc.).

The term “drug”, not only refers to substances which have the quality to narcotize, but it also refers to substances which give pleasure, agitate, sooth the user and which are psychedelic while providing a state of alertness again to its user. Drug is defined as “substances which, when taken/used in certain doses, effect the individuals' nervous system, disrupting the equilibrium of the mental, physical and the psychological states, which cause economical and social collapse in terms of both the individual and the society as a whole, which induce addiction, and which its use, possession and trade is forbidden by law” in the Turkey National Drug Policy and Strategic Paper (2013–2018) (3, 6). The prevention activities aimed at drug crimes are based upon the Constitution of The Republic of Turkey, Article 58: “The State takes the necessary precautions to protect its youth from a fondness/addiction to alcohol, from narcotic drugs, crime, gambling and alike bad habits and illiteracy/ignorance” (7).

The work for the tackling of addiction in Turkey, is maintained under the coordination of The High Council of Tackling Addiction (BMYK) which was formed within the scope of the 9/12/2017 dated and 2017/23 numbered Prime Ministry Circular by the extension of the subsisted High Council of Tackling Drugs. The “2018–2023 National Strategy Paper and Action Plan for Tackling Drugs which contains the national strategies and activities in terms of tackling drug addiction for the forthcoming six years went into effect by the 11/05/2018 dated resolution of the BMYK(8). The purpose and aim of the aforementioned strategy paper and action plan is to determine a road map for tackling the use of drugs and drug addiction, to execute studies and activities throughout Turkey simultaneously in a coordinated fashion at the same time enabling the support and increasing the effect of each other and therefore, to monitor these effects of the relevant studies and activities via the predetermined indicators in a systematic way, ensuring success.

Prevention activities form up the most important component of the struggle oriented at drug use and drug addiction. The prevention studies conducted in Turkey concentrates on the population which is in the age range of 15-24 (9-14). Within the scope of these prevention activities, the biggest responsibility – which is protecting children and teenagers from harmful habits – falls over to the shoulders of families and parents. Raising the awareness levels of families and parents regarding the matter is crucial in terms of prevention studies. Apart from families and parents, institutions of education and therefore, teachers also have an important role to play (15). All segments of the society has a role to accomplish in tackling addiction and raising awareness within prevention studies and activities (14, 16-21).

In this paper, making a definition of target populations in an accurate way, building effective communication strategies, implementing the procured strategies in a consistent fashion and the information of what expression and content that media content should have are included in order to maintain and pursue a healthy communication regarding drug addiction, which is a derivative of the term “addiction”. For the purpose of supporting drug addiction studies in Turkey, health communication studies are in progress within both micro and macro scales. This work was driven by the sense of responsibility and the aim of providing/raising awareness for the youth regarding drug addiction. In order to raise the awareness of youth within the framework of drug addiction, Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health General Directorate of Health Promotion made 2 spot films which were intended for the youth and 1 spot film related to the “ALO 191” line; “The Counseling and Support Line for the Fight Against Drugs which addressed a larger target population. The aforementioned 3 spot films have been analyzed with the method of “focus group discussion”, containing the opinions of the intended population regarding the films and the subject at hand.

METHOD

In this research, a qualitative research method, focus group discussions method was used. Focus group discussions can be defined as a qualitative data collection technique, which is carried out within the framework of predetermined directives, and, in accordance with the logic of this method, prioritizes the subjectivity of the interviewees, and takes into consideration the discourse of the participants and the social context of this discourse.

Sample

Focus group discussions were conducted to receive data about the pre-opinions of individuals regarding spot films which has the purpose of raising awareness among teenagers in terms of struggling with drugs and to introduce the “Counseling and Support Line for the Fight Against Drugs (ALO 191)”. The aforementioned focus group discussions were carried out with 3 different groups on the 22th December 2017 between 11:00 – 18:00 o'clock, and at auditoriums which were assigned by Ankara University. Undergraduate students, highschool students and parents attended these focus group discussions. Since they are under the age of 18, approval was taken from the parents of highschool students to include them in the discussions. These discussions were conducted under the supervision of 1 moderator and 4 researchers helped the moderator by taking notes and offering support whenever needed by functioning as facilitators. Questions were designed for the focus group discussions and these questions were asked to the groups verbally.

The discussions lasted for 7 hours and 33 minutes. The discussion durations for the groups are as follows; 2 hours and 26 minutes for the group of undergraduate students, 1 hour and 35 minutes for the group of highschool students and finally, 1 hour and 52 minutes for the group of parents. In total, 28 individuals participated in the discussions. 10 people were invited to participate in the discussions per group. 2 students from the highschool group could not participate in the group discussions because of class and exam programs conflicting with the date and time of the discussions. Therefore, the discussion group of highschool students had 8 participants. Equal gender distribution among groups were observed.

The first group consisted of 5 female and 5 male undergraduate students. 5 of these students were on their 2nd year whereas the other 5 were continuing on their 4th. The youngest participant of this group was 19 years old, while the oldest was 23. The second group consisted of 3 female and 5 male highschool students. The participants were 17 years old and 7 of them were attending 11th grade whereas 1 of them was attending 12th grade. The third and last group consisted of parents. The determined requirement for selecting participants for this group was the condition that individuals should have a child who was attending secondary school or highschool. The participants who fell between the age range of 39-54 were counted as 5 female and 5 male. 9 of the participants had 2 children each. The eldest child of the parents aged 30 and the youngest aged 9. Most of the participants had a bachelors' or an associates' (two – year college education) degree.

In the focus group discussions, participants had a chance to watch 3 spot films which were made by the General Directorate of Health Promotion; Starting a life anew is in your hands (Hayata Yeniden Başlamak Senin Elinde) (Film no. 1), 191 Awareness Film (191 Farkındalık Filmi) (Film no. 2) and 191 Line Promotion Film (191 Tanıtım Filmi) (Film no. 3). After watching these 3 films, participants were given questions to answer regarding the films.

Statistical Analysis

In accordance with the general characteristics of qualitative research, the knowledge, experiences, emotions, perceptions, thoughts and attitudes of the participants are important in focus group discussions. In this method, what is important is not to reach statistical information, but to describe the views and perspectives of the participants.

RESULTS

Short Information Concerning the Scenerios of the Spot Films

The first film watched at the focus group discussion sessions - Starting a life anew is in your hands (film no. 1) – is lengthed 45 seconds. The film starts with the image of a male actor who goes out from a door and in the second scene who is sitting in a chair, hands tied up, face beaten. The film contains an ambulance, an emergency door of a hospital, a doctor, and parents – a mother and a father – of the aforementioned male actor. It is seen at the film that the parents receive ill news and start crying. In the end of the film and as an alternative scenario, the male teenager is shown as calling 191 and getting free from the ropes that binded him.

The duration of the 191 Awareness Film (film no. 2) is 2 minutes and 19 seconds. It is known by the notification of the social sharing site that it is the birthday of the male actor on the film. In the first scene, the actor is called by one of his friends but the actor does not answer the call. The young male actor scrolls through the social media site and goes to the past, looking at previous appearance – 1 year ago – and the difference between his previous appearance and current appearance is shown on screen as sequences. It is seen that the male had started drugs when he started to have problems in his relationship with his girlfriend. But it is not clear in the film that which event triggered the other one. The teenagers' social life seems over, he does not see his friends but they still struggle for him. His friends direct him to the support line and he calls 191. In the end of the film, the teenager presses the “delete” button on his social media account to delete his social media history. He has a luggage in his hand and he shares a

photograph on social media that reflects his days spent on AMATEM (Alcohol and Substance Addiction Treatment Center). Finally, his friends post comments on his photograph.

“ALO 191”; “Counseling and Support Line for the Fight against Drugs” which started its activities on the 8th of July 2015, is a platform where counselling and supportive services regarding drugs are directly given, and where the individual receives the necessary guidance/redirection in terms of his or her problem associated with drugs and addiction. The support line is open 24/7. The “191 Line Promotion Film” (Film no. 3) is the film for the presentation of the line which has a duration of 2 minutes and 9 seconds. The film starts with the interactive display of the line’s logo and then the first scene appears on screen with a 191 Line specialist just like at an original encounter when someone calls the line. 191 workers are shown, then, a father calls and requests for counselling service, changing the screen. Information about the line and its year of foundation is elucidated by an external voice. In the next scene, a 191 worker states that the line is open 24/7. The following scenes contain actors who are seemingly workers of the 191 Line while the privacy and protection of the information disclosed and trusted to the line by clients is emphasized, encouraging families and the social circle of the individual who is effected by drug addiction in any way to call the line. In another scene, a man calls the line in behalf of his little brother. Then, another 191 Line worker appears on screen and states that the line is operated by specialists and that they will give the appropriate services upon request. The aforementioned external voice speaks once more and talks about the technical characteristics/qualities of the line, adding information about stages such as prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. It is indicated that the applicant individual will be redirected to the most appropriate option, and if he/she would like to, an appointment would be made in behalf of them at the relevant institution/organization. In the film where “support” is highly emphasized, the last scene contains workers of the 191 Line calling out to addicted individuals saying that “change” is in their own hands. In the epilogue, the logo is displayed in an interactive fashion once more and then the film ends with the same logo side by side with the logo of the Ministry of Health.

The Opinions of the Groups Regarding the Films and Drug Addiction

The Opinions of Undergraduate Students

When the opinions of the undergraduate students regarding the movies that they have seen have been evaluated, it was found that they thought films using negative emotional elements (such as fear, death etc.) were repellent and it was stated that they wanted to see the facts and phenomenon that lead individuals toward the path of addiction, rather than the facts that are related to the consequences of the problem. It was expressed that emphasizing the feeling of being late was a poor choice, and perhaps another scenerio should be written expressing the importance of forewarning and taking the necessary precautions early on. While the participants gave negative feedback with regards to Film no: 1, they also expressed that the scenario which they watched was one of many possible and real life scenarios which addicts face in real life. Therefore, it was asserted by the participants that they have found the film “normal” and they have received a message about the possibility of a clear solution.

It was observed that the images and scenes were found “dark”, with insufficient lighting and the effects being “exaggerated” by the students and this situation had a negative effect over participants.

The participants expressed that the target population should be determined more clearly. Based on the information that drug usage age had fallen drastically, they stated that the age of the actors should have been considered accordingly. At the same time, participants thought that it was not enough only to reach out to the current users, also precautions should be taken in terms of protecting individuals who have not yet started to use drugs. The participants stated that the written scenarios and scenes should be simplified since complex films are meaningless for teenagers and parents who are illiterate and who are poorly educated.

Students criticized Film no. 2 which uses the social media as “impossible to understand for individuals who do not use the internet, who are in their old ages and who are illiterate” since even the students themselves had difficulties following the film and its “complex” scenes. To sum up, students thought that unrealistic scenarios stand pretty far away from being impressive and effectual. While they found the scenario of the Film no. 2 more realistic than the other, they suggested it to have it simplified for better understanding.

The participants expressed that only giving the message “call us” was not enough. They said that the message “call us” did not carry a “triggering” or “encouraging” quality and they made criticisms about the presentation of the 191 Line, comparing it to a “sponsorship” for the presentation was considered pretty short.

The students stated that even written simpler, a scenario which contained a structure of introduction – body – conclusion could be more understandable and more impressive for society. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of using women and child actors in these types of films. The films which were appraised as “superficial” by the students were seen on the standard of an “ordinary public service announcement (PSA)”.

In term of visuals, the participants generally expressed that using the dark and illumination at the same time gave the intended message to the audience more clearly. With regards to vocalization and music, choosing music which do not have the quality of “labelling” individuals was especially emphasized, asserting that certain music types which are listened by particular population segments should not be used. Moreover, since PSA's have the quality of short films, it was voiced that using music which changes according to the story would increase the effectiveness of the film.

Participants, who dwelled upon the insufficiency of information in the Film no. 3, expressed that the absence of a website which could provide detailed information about the matter, was an important shortfall.

At the end of the group discussion, participants were asked that if there was any contribution that they wanted to make with regards to drugs and tackling addiction. Participants, who shared the belief that the states' counselling services were inadequate, also thought that the act of societal awareness-raising should be carried out by the state itself. They stated that drug addicts were marginalized in daily life, that they were seen as dangerous people, people to stay away from and therefore, a society reluctant to offer help was a natural outcome. For this reason, students advocated the idea that the awareness raising activities should primarily address the society as a whole.

When asked their opinions regarding what the state should do, say and how to approach the matter of drug addiction, participants expressed that the televised PSA's could be longer. Furthermore, they stated that the element of fear was not dissuasive, and it could even create an adverse/negative effect over the audience, emphasizing that the forbidden could be more alluring and tempting. Therefore, the focal point was suggested to be the reasons that lead to this situation, rather than the elements of death and fear. It was commented by the participants that the films only concentrated on individuals who have already started to use drugs and who something bad has befallen upon. This situation was criticized.

The participants' expectations were towards making films which makes contact with the society and stems/originates from the daily life itself.

The Opinions of High School Students

When the opinions of the highschool students were analyzed, it was found out that they wanted to see more realistic scenarios on screen. It is understood that there was a pre-determined/definitive "drug addict" figure on the minds of the participants. This figure maintained its life away from television and social media. While the the contribution and support of the family and the individual's social circle were seen important from the viewpoint of the participants, they also stated that in the end, the ultimate choice and power to make a change rested in the hands of the user. The students thought that in case the individual did not desire change, neither his or her family, neither the social circle nor the PSA could be effective to induce change.

Participants, who were sensitive to the aspect of reality, also showed a sensibility towards subjects such as visuals, lighting and audio. They asserted that putting real-life, lived scenes to the films which they found unrealistic, would be quite impressive and effective. Participants, who thought that drug use was a behavior more prevalent among men rather than women; expressed that this situation was not to be reflected as "women are not using drugs". At the same time, participants referred to a suggestion regarding a categorization not only about gender, but about age as well. They stated that a film which used experienced/old users and young aged drug addicts could be effective. They used terms which indicated that they were pleased regarding films which they though were realistic.

With respect to the Film no.3, while half of the students stated that they have not heard of such a line and service, the other half expressed that they have known such a line and this group was divided in itself as the half who knew the number of the line and the half who knew the existence of such a line and service but did not know the number of the line. The majority of the participants who were comprised of highschool students, stated that especially Film no. 1 was ineffective, and failed to evoke the addict to act. When the question of "what would you have done if you were them?" was directed to the participants, different responses were received. A portion of the participants stated that they would have struggled with addiction for their families but would not bother to do so for their social circle and friends while another portion would call for help. Moreover, they stated that Film no. 2 and Film no. 3 carried more encouraging elements than the Film no. 1. Film no. 2 was found more realistic but again, a desire within the drug user to quit was seen necessary. The students said that they watched the Film no. 3 without high expectations, and for the sole purpose of acquiring technical information but they also stated that the target population with regards to this film should be everyone. The

students emphasized that it should not be expected of the addict to always call the 191 Line but this was to be expected from his or her loved ones or friends.

Speaking generally, the participants believed that the user/addict should take action since no one could do anything if the individual did not want to, including the 191 support line. The highschool students specified that the support of parents was necessary in this situation. On the one hand, participants think that the processes which lead individuals to drug use problems should be explained clearly and on the other hand, they suggest that the movies should have a hopeful end for a better future.

The Opinions of Parents

In the group discussion made with the participation of parents, it was stated that drug addiction was a problem which concerned all of society. Participants who thought it was appropriate to implement the relevant applications from the moment that students start their primary education, designed in the form of visual materials since parents thought that the new generation children were affected by them. At the same time, it was emphasized that following different methods and routes for conveying the prepared visuals and materials to children and adults was a necessity.

Within this context, parents added that these visuals could be integrated to films and TV series since watching these are prevalent among the Turkish population. It is thought that the relevant messages could be placed in cartoons which are watched by children frequently. The participants have narrated their own daily experiences and expressed that they especially made their children watch scenes in TV series which they deemed important.

It was observed that parents have evaluated the films in a more emotional and empathetic manner since they had children of their own. with the ending of Film no. 1, parents seemed concerned for their childs. Whereas having a positive conclusion and ending, Film no. 2 and Film no. 3 had a relieving effect over parents. One of the important subjects which parents overstressed was that they did not know from what age onwards and how should they communicate with their children in terms of drugs. It was stated that it was important for them for the state to provide an individual or an institution which they can consult to. The general of the participants expressed that they did not know how to approach especially little children regarding the matter. They suggested that children can be informed also at class, alongside by the television or the internet. The participants stressed that especially little children attending primary school can be steered and guided more easily since adolescents would regard the information given to them as "stories", "fables". Parents emphasized that children encountered scenarios on films, TV series and on TV news which promote and encourage individuals to use drugs, which contain information about where to obtain them and that the protective measures where insufficient. They underlined that the awareness raising activities should be held in a sustained fashion.

Throughout the discussion, participants talked about the necessity of raising the awareness levels of the family and society therefore, to tackle the problem of drug use and addiction in a holistic – a "full scale war on drugs" – way. They had a consensus regarding that the PSA's should be made with a quality of "impressiveness". However, they also did not want a concern or fear created for themselves by that impressiveness. Another subject which

parents found significant was the need to inform individuals and families about the processes and reasons which lead to drug addiction when conducting and implementing relevant studies and work.

DISCUSSION

According to the 2018 World Drug Report (UNODC 2018), it has been found that by the year of 2016, 275 million people worldwide (approx. 5.6% of the total world population) used drugs at least once in their life (2). With regards to this information, 1 in every 18 individuals have had an experience of drug use. The ratio of experiencing any illegal drugs at least once, among the individuals who are aged between 15-64 in Turkey is 2.7% (1, 11). Since there is a possibility for the percentages to increase, it is clear that countries should make policies which will protect especially children and teens whose health are being threatened and policies which will ensure that they are raised safe and free from these substances (5, 22, 23). Emphasis must be laid upon that countywide policies should be made, data should be gathered and analyzed in a systematic fashion. In addition, using the media effectively to inform the society and raise awareness, determining the medium according to the target population, creating a budget for the protective/preventive services large as much as the budget for treatment service are also important in terms of disseminating the studies and work to all of the segments of society (16, 17, 24, 25).

Numerous work are conducted in Turkey with regards to the drug addiction policies of the country. A significant portion of these studies and activities are carried out by the Ministry of Health. 3 PSA films were prepared for one of the communication studies to reach a target population narrowed by the General Directorate of Health Promotion Ministry of Health and before broadcasting these films, focus group discussions were conducted as a pre-test in order to learn the opinions of the targeted population and to use these data to shape the ongoing studies and work regarding drug use and drug addiction.

As a result, young people think that negative elements such as fear and death – used in PSA's which are made to raise awareness in terms of drug addiction – are not dissuasive with regards to positive behavior change (14, 18-21). Also parents do not want studies which may induce anxiety and fear among both themselves and their children. Young people and parents think that the progresses which lead individuals to drug addiction must be explained clearly in the future studies. Moreover, they expect films and studies to be made and conducted which give positive messages to the audience.

The decision to broadcast the films related to drug addiction awareness which were made by the Ministry of Health was given accordingly to the outcome of the focus group discussions and these outcomes were assessed as instructive for future studies aimed at young people. While The Ministry of Health General Directorate of Health Promotion decided not to broadcast Film no. 1 because of the negative feedback of all participants, The General Directorate decided to broadcast Film no. 2 and Film no. 3 since it received positive feedback from participants.

The study is limited in scope since the nature of focus group discussions allowed the inclusion of limited individuals within the study and because of this situation, the sample may

not represent the general population. On the other hand, this study can be regarded as significant since it paves the way for similar and new awareness studies and researches in terms of teens and children in Turkey.

As a conclusion, Drug addiction is one of the most important problems in the world in general and also in Turkey. This problem has been increasing especially among the young population in Turkey in recent years and this increase shows that struggle with substance abuse is likely to hold a larger place on Turkey's agenda in the near future. It is known that one of the remedies for substance use is prevention and early intervention programs. For this purpose, detection of children and adolescents at risk and determining individual and environmental risk factors is important in terms of establishing prevention programs. Obviously, an individual struggle on substance addiction is not sufficient, and family, school and social environment have great importance. Health professionals, non-governmental organizations, teachers, families and especially governments have important responsibilities in the establishment of social awareness. In order to develop social awareness, it is of utmost importance that specialized health communication and health promotion programs are established, implemented and maintained for various different target audiences. In particular, communication activities that will be prepared by taking into consideration the ways in which the children and young people communicate and take action will provide long-term positive results. Instead of presenting one sort of a "packaged" communication message, preparing programs that are formed and developed for children and young people with the help their opinions and thoughts will enable the messages to reach the target audience as well as to spread the positive opinions.

Finally, it should be noted that, besides the health dimension, the public, social, legal and administrative dimensions of substance addiction issue must be taken into consideration and all action plans for combating substance addiction should be addressed in an integrated, holistic manner.

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