


Trajectories of Drug Abuse and Addiction Development Among FSU Immigrant Drug Users in Israel

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the trajectories of drug abuse and addiction development among former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrant users. It is based on in-depth interviews with 19 Russian-speaking recovering addict counselors employed in Israeli addiction treatment centers. The interview analysis yielded two main trajectories: one of abuse deterioration and the other of abuse initiation in the context of coping with immigration. The core issue that characterizes both trajectories is the immigrant users' sense of loneliness. Participation in treatment appears as a path for regaining their sense of belonging. Implications for prevention and treatment based on the interviewees' reflections, as well as on extant literature, are discussed.

Keywords

acculturation, immigration/migration, intergroup relations/prejudice, drug abuse

Introduction

Similar to many Western countries, Israel tackles the issue of illicit drug abuse that is known to be closely associated with health-related problems, family dysfunction, psychosocial maladjustment, and crime (Ammernan, Ott, Tarter, & Blackson, 1999; D'Amico, Edelen, Miles, & Morral, 2008; Schwabe, Dickinson, & Wolf, 2011). Although the exact number of drug users in Israel is unknown, the official estimate is that 14,000 to 15,000 persons are addicted to hard drugs (Natan, 2011; Roshka, Mehl, & Florentin, 2011), and of them some 25% are immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU; Isralowitz, Reznik, Spear, Brecht, & Rawson, 2007). FSU immigrants account for approximately 13% of the Israeli population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016); yet according to information gathered in treatment services, FSU-origin users constitute 25% to 30% of their patients, and in therapeutic communities this percentage increases to nearly 50% (Ranz, Dekel, & Izhaky, 2012). The high incidence of drug dependence among FSU immigrants may be mainly attributed to high rates of substance abuse in their countries of origin (Isralowitz et al., 2007; Peles, Schreiber, & Adelson, 2014) as well as to the stress associated with immigration

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