

Title

Substance abuse in Students with disabilities in tertiary education in the Netherlands

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People with disabilities belong to a group with an elevated risk for substance abuse problems (roughly 5 times as much as the normal population, (West, 2005). Not many studies have captured substance use in students in tertiary education with disabilities. In this study we examine the prevalence and severity of smoking, alcohol use and drugs use in students with disabilities and student without disabilities in The Netherlands, and the effect of the nature of the handicap (physical and/or mental). Furthermore we took into account the substance abuse profiles of specific handicaps. Additionally, the amount of hinder that students experience from their handicap and the relationship with substance abuse was studied.

Methods

The study was undertaken as part of the project Stoplights: The Student Health Check, a self-regulation instrument for the promotion of student health, including a personalized feedback tool. Significant differences between students with and without disabilities for the prevalence of smoking, alcohol use and drugs use were tested using Cramers'V; Significant differences between students with and without disabilities for the smoking, alcohol and drugs dependence for users were tested with ANOVA's. The relationship of experienced hinder from the disability with dependence was tested for with regression analyses (controlled for age, gender and study phase).

Results

The first round of the project Stoplights (januari-july 2011) yielded 3982 respondents from various study programs and phases., The male –female proportion was 30%-70%, the average age was 22.8 (SD=4.28) and 17% reported no disabilities.

The results of this first assessment indicate significant differences in the prevalence of smoking and alcohol use between students without and with reported disabilities. Students with disabilities reported more nonsmokers (73 % against 68 %) and less frequent alcohol use (14% of students without disabilities report to use alcohol often to very often against 9 % in students with disabilities). When looking for significant effects for smoking, and alcohol or drugs dependence we found a trend towards drug dependence [$F(1, 668)=3.46$; $p=.063$] and a significant effect towards smoking dependence [$F(1, 1034)=7.43$; $p=.007$] for students with disabilities. Furthermore, we found a significant relationship between the amount of hinder experienced and smoking dependence for students with disabilities [$F(1, 1034)=7.43$; $p=.000$].

Conclusions

Students with disabilities overall report less use of substances than students without disabilities, although if students with disabilities use, the risk for dependence seems to be higher. (smoking, drugs). Experienced hinder from disabilities might relate to more severe dependence (regarding smoking in this sample). For students with disabilities it is important to pay extra attention to the danger of dependence for the relatively small group that uses. West & Graham (2005) already pointed out the need of targeted efforts as regards students with disabilities.

References

West, S. L., & Graham, C. W. (2005). A survey of substance abuse prevention efforts at Virginia's colleges and universities. *Journal of American College Health, 54*(3), 185-191.