ABSTRACT

Background:

Sikkim—a hilly state in Northeast India reports high prevalence of alcohol use with emerging substance abuse problems. Sikkim is emerging as an important area for prescription opioid abuse with frequent news of seizures and arrests due to possession of prescription opioids. Although substance use disorder is in alarming stage in north eastern states of India, till date there is little information on descriptive epidemiology, comorbid illnesses and high risk behaviour of prescription opioid dependents from Sikkim.

Aim:

Published report on increased incidences of prescription opioid abuse from other north eastern states of India urges to study and understand various socio-demographic profile, drug use characteristics, peer’s role, pain pattern etc. of prescription opioid abusers from another north eastern states i.e. Sikkim. Aim of this study is to find out various socio-demographic variables such as age, sex, religion, marital status, community, occupation, income, education, role of migration etc., pain status, pattern of opioid analgesic use such as sources –for both initial and continued use, motives, and frequency of use as well as quality of life of prescription opioid abusers who reported for treatment at various treatment centres of Sikkim. It was also aimed to find out differences in pain interference, pain characteristics and correlations, among the pain severity groups.
Subjects and Methods:

Epidemiological data were collected by administering pre-devised questionnaires from n=224 prescription opioid abusers (main problem prescription opioids) reporting for treatment at five different drug abuse treatment centres across Sikkim. Several pre devised questionnaire on different domains were administered to 224 prescription opioid abusers after obtaining informed consent. The study protocol, instruments/questionnaire, informed consent was duly approved by Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC). For database development and analysis, SPSS-version 20 was adopted. For categorical variables chi-square test was used considering p value less than 0.05 as statistically significant.

Results:

Majority of subjects were male, of Nepalese ethnicity, urban resident, and never married, school dropout and/or illiterate, earning less than Rs. 5000 / month. The median age of prescription opioid abusers in Sikkim was 26 years. No role of migration on subject’s prescription opioid use behaviour was reported. Prescription opioid abuse observed both in rural and urban settings of Sikkim. It is more prevalent among school dropouts and unemployed respondents. Peers influence on subject’s prescription opioid use was observed. Commonly abused prescription opioids were dextropropoxyphene and codeine. Prescription opioid abusers also reported co-administration of alcohol, cannabis and benzodiazepines. Experimentation and euphoria were reported as major motives for initiation and continued use of its. Substance using friends and local dealers were noted as major source of prescription opioids in this study.
Injection sharing was more in urban whereas syringe exchange was observed equally among rural and urban prescription opioid abusers (p>0.05). Among urban injectors visits to commercial sex workers (CSWs), and multiple sex partners (MSPs) were also common in spite of knowledge about AIDS. Limited condom use was observed among rural respondents. Incidences of arrests, public intoxication, and violence under the influence of prescription opioids were also reported. Prescription opioid injection was found significantly associated with health problems, psychosocial problems and utilization of medical services.

Conclusions:

Existence of prescription opioid abuse problem was found both in urban and rural setting. It is more prevalent among school dropouts and unemployed youth. Alcohol problem was experienced by almost half of the prescription opioid abusers of Sikkim. First use of alcohol and prescription opioid started almost same time. Therefore poor education status, low literacy rate, more expenditure on substance use, peers substance use behaviour, more employment problems and moreover increased reporting of treatment admission at de-addiction centre indicates the need to study the socio-demographic profile, drug use characteristics and peer’s influence on substance use of prescription opioid abusers of Sikkim. Trends of injection drug use (IDU), unsafe injection, high risk behaviour have also been observed.

Key words:

Sikkim, prescription opioid, substance abuse, injection drug use.