

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Humans consume a variety of licit and illicit substances since ancient times and also they will continue to do so. Tobacco, alcohol and hard drugs use is an emerging as significant problems globally where it may contribute the non-communicable disease burden. Drug misuse and abuse is a major health problem as well as a social problem in Sri Lanka. The economic costs of tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs use to society are staggering and deaths due to such behaviours often occur during the productive years of life, depleting a nation's workforce.

Illicit drugs are more widely used among males than females and among young people than older people. Therefore, adolescents must be a primary target group for intervention strategies in promoting healthy behaviours.

The number of research studies which has done on the use of hard drugs among school going children is less and further identified that no study is available for Kandy, being the second largest city in Sri Lanka, on use of tobacco, alcohol and hard drugs. Therefore this study was carried out to determine the prevalence of use of tobacco, alcohol and hard drugs and the associated factors among school going children of 15 to 19 years age in Kandy Municipal Council (KMC) area.

**Methods:** This was a population based cross-sectional study which was conducted in the Sinhala medium classes of type 1AB and 1C government schools of KMC area in September 2009. Sample was selected using probability proportionate multistage cluster sampling method.

Variables in the questionnaire were on socio-demographic data with family profile, data on the use of tobacco, alcohol and hard drugs, statements to acquire knowledge and attitudes. A structured, self administered questionnaire was used as the study instrument. Data analysis was done by using statistical software package SPSS version 13.0 to achieve the objectives.

**Results:** Total number studied was 1276 and the mean age of the study sample was 16.68 years ( $SD \pm 1.17$ ). The male to female ratio obtained in the study was 1:1.43. Majority, 97.8% comprised of Sinhalese students with 96.8% Buddhists. This study revealed that the prevalence of ever and current use of tobacco, alcohol and hard drugs use were, 11.3%,

17.3% and 2.1% respectively. There were no female students found as hard drug users. The mean ages of tobacco, alcohol and hard drugs use were 14.41(SD±2.97), 14.89 (SD±2.33) and 15.94 (SD±1.39) respectively. The prevalence of initiation of tobacco smoking before the age of 10 years was 18.6%.

The commonest places of substance use were stated as parties for tobacco and alcohol, 24.7% and 53.2% respectively. For hard drugs use, the commonest place (36.4%) was friends place where a 43.5% peer influence also observed. Many of the students have mentioned that they were not influenced by any means on use of tobacco (58.7%), alcohol (66.5%) and hard drugs (47.8%). The use of alcohol was statistically significant among the A/L students who were doing Commerce subjects (34%). Almost 38% of male students used tobacco smoke among tobacco smoking fathers compared to 18% used in non smoking father. Almost 27.5% of both male and female students consumed alcohol when the father is also an alcohol user. Nearly one third (34%) males and 7.4% females have smoked tobacco when they had a tobacco smoking family member. Nearly 40% of male students consumed hard drugs when there is a hard drug using family member in the family. Almost 37% of males and 11.5% of females used tobacco among tobacco using friends. Nearly half (50%) of the students (males and females) consumed alcohol among alcohol consuming friends compared to 4.8% in non alcohol using friends.

There were 18.8% of male smokers among the students who engage in sport activities which is statistically significant. Among the students whose class position was in 41 to 50 category had 35.0% tobacco smokers.

Sixty four (5.4%) of the students thought that they look smart when do smoke cigarettes.

**Conclusions:** Students substance use was associated with substance use by father, family member or close friends. Engage in sport activities has impact on substance use.

**Recommendations:** Implement programmes to improve life skills among students with intersectoral collaboration.

**Key words:** Tobacco- Alcohol- Hard drugs- School going Children