

Prediction of Drug Abuse in Servicemen—Phase I

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OBJECTIVE: To develop an instrument which will aid in the prediction of chronic drug abuse among American soldiers in Thailand.

DESCRIPTION: Although the extent and prevalence of illicit drug use in Thailand remains essentially indeterminate, actions of armed forces command indicate its considerable concern with the problem of drug abuse. One important aspect of any complete drug abuse program for the military should be the isolation of high risk individuals prior to their assignment to areas where drugs of abuse are easily obtained. To differentiate individuals into "high risk" or "low risk" categories requires the knowledge of the etiology of and the predisposition to drug abuse, and a description of how the chronic drug user differs from the non-user. Knowledge of the influencing and etiological factors could provide the information necessary for categorizing individuals as indicated.

The available literature concerning drug abuse indicates that there has been no attempt to empirically differentiate the chronic or heavy user from the non-user of amphetamine, barbiturate, marijuana, hallucinogens, and heroin, for prediction of chronic drug use. Many studies have, however, suggested that there may be important ways in which these individuals differ. Only two available studies have presented statistically derived "profiles" of the drug user. Both studies utilized factor analysis and suggested that there might be a "general orientation toward drug use" or a "general drug-taking predisposition." The isolation of a series of factors which differentiate the chronic or heavy drug user from the non-user could aid in the prediction of the likelihood of becoming a chronic drug abuser. A finding of such a differentiation must, however, include a follow-up study of labeled individuals to assess accuracy of prediction.

The present study is a structured interview study of a population of soldiers, made up of chronic drug users and non-drug users. Those questions whose answers correlate with chronic or heavy drug use (e.g., are answered differently by the chronic user and non-user) will be isolated. These questions will be combined into a final questionnaire which, in a future study (Phase II), will be administered, along with urinalyses, to an incoming population of troops. In the follow-up study, a prediction will be made for each soldier of the probability that he will chronically abuse certain drugs during his tour in Thailand. He will be followed for one year during his stay in Thailand to assess the accuracy of the predictions. All questions will be selected via statistical procedures, based on the present study.

If no statistically valid differentiation between chronic drug user and non-user is found, then Phase II will consist of a prospective long-term cohort study of incoming troops, with the emphasis on monitoring their behavior vis-a-vis drug usage, with the same psychological test battery administered early in their Thailand tour, at critical periods during their tour, and at the end of their one-year tour.

PROGRESS: Starting 1 January 1972, interviewing was begun. It is expected that the data collection phase will terminate by the end of August 1972, and the final questionnaire will be completely formulated in September. At this time, incoming troops will be surveyed, predictions made, and the follow-up begun.

SUMMARY: A method to predict drug use in a soldier population is described. This involves developing a series of questions which are answered differently by the drug user and non-user, and assuming that anyone who responds like a drug user has high probability of using drugs during his tour.

Data collection has begun; this study will be completed in September, 1972. The success of this study will determine whether such a method of prediction can be utilized in a planned future study of prediction of chronic drug abuse.