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Application of new methods of estimating drug abuse prevalence

Summary

The research conducted in two regions (Wrocław and Kielce) focused on the assessment of the number of drug users. It constituted a pilot study of research and estimating methods, so far not employed in our country. The snow-ball sample of drug addicts and several unrelated registers based on medical documentation and police operation data were archived. The data obtained were used to estimate the number of drug dependents via the capture-recapture method.

Our analysis focused on opiate users, as they constituted the only adequately represented and precisely defined category.

The comparison of registers of various type health institutions focusing on drug users, allowed for several statements of significance with regard to the interpretation of routine statistic.

It was found that:

- numbers provided by specialized drug treatment clinics and mental health clinics can be aggregated for validating the number of individuals treated in outpatient sectors,
- ignoring clients of Monar counseling centers results in underestimation of the number of individuals treated in outpatient clinics by several percent only,
- in order to calculate the number of drug dependents in inpatient and outpatient sectors jointly, one should add 60% to the number reported by outpatient clinics.

The encounter of police registers with health registers indicates relatively low criminalization standing of the drug users. Approximately 30% up to 40% of healthcare clients are present in the police operational databases.

The capture-recapture method provided us with the following results. In the Wrocław region the number of opiate dependent individuals may be estimated as approximately 1,200 (+/-25%), in the Kielce region as 258 (+/-50%). It was proved in both regions that our estimates exceed police statistics by 2.4 times and inpatient clinics statistics by 4.5 times. After transferring these ratios on the entire country, the number of drug dependents in Poland may be estimated as settled within the span of 20,000 up to 40,000 individuals.

Key words: estimation, prevalence, drug addicts, snowball, capture-recapture