Psychiatric comorbidity and gender difference among treatment-seeking heroin abusers in Taiwan

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to estimate the psychiatric comorbidity of Taiwanese heroin users seeking treatment and to identify the gender differences in psychiatric comorbidity and drug use behavior. Subjects were interviewed using a structured questionnaire on drug use behavior and the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview for psychiatric disorders. Of the subjects, 58.5% of the males and 62.5% of the females had at least one non-substance-use axis I psychiatric disorder or antisocial personality disorder. Compared to males, females were younger, were less educated, had higher rates of unemployment and had earlier onset of illicit drug use. Females were 11 times more commonly than males to exhibit suicidal behavior. Among heroin abusers in this study, females were more widely exposed to unfavorable social factors and had substantially higher incidence of suicidal behavior than males. Drug treatment centers should be aware of these gender differences and pay particular attention to comorbid depressive disorders and suicidal behaviors of female heroin abusers.

Keywords: Heroin; Substance abuse; Gender; Comorbidity.