

Substance use, mental health and sexual behaviour of college students in Bhutan

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Abstract:

Introduction: The Kingdom of Bhutan is often characterised as 'the last Shangrila', and has adopted 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH) as the foundation of wellbeing and development. Exposure to other lifestyles and values have been embraced by many young Bhutanese creating tensions with traditional culture and values; much of this associated with concerns about substance use, sexual behaviour and mental health.

Method: This study employed a self-administered survey in eight college campuses across Bhutan (N = 2471) of substance use, mental health and sexual behaviour among the college students, and is the first of its kind.

Findings: Substance use among the college students was relatively low, mental health concerns were identified by about 10%, and sexual risk behaviour by over 50% of sexually active students. Lifetime use of cannabis at 11.8% for male college students was far lower the 2016 WHO student survey which found 28.3%. Use of doma (betel nut) warrants attention, given know health risks, and despite cultural acceptance

Implications for policy and practice: Although the current findings for the surveyed college students in Bhutan is not alarming, there are enough reasons for educators, health workers and policy makers to be concerned. The problems associated with the use of substances such as doma and alcohol, risky sexual behaviour, have high potential to negatively impact quality of life, and thereby the national vision of Gross National Happiness. Education must remain a key policy area; for development of livelihood values, skills and attitudes.

Themes: Cross cultural and international, Adolescents and youth

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