

Stories of recovery – nonmedical use of tramadol among young people

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The illicit use of prescription drugs among young people has been observed as a growing problem in Sweden, where the synthetic opioid tramadol is the most common drug. In comparison with other opioids, tramadol often appears early in the drug career. This study aims to contribute to an understanding of young people's experiences of problematic use of tramadol, and more specific their attempts to quit the drug. The study has been conducted through repeated qualitative interviews with 11 young people in the age of 19-23 years. The informants have been recruited mainly from different drug treatment institutions and outpatient care in Sweden. A narrative approach is used to identify significant events and circumstances that have been encouraging or obstructive in their stories of recovery. The findings suggest that treatment interventions usually were initiated through external pressure from surrounding adults such as parents or social services, where the young people initially used different strategies in trying to keep them calm and still continue using. Eventually they experienced their tramadol use as more and more problematic and did attempts to quit or reduce the use, but withdrawal symptoms and mental state made it unbearable. Finally external- and internal "wake up calls" led to a changing mindset about their drug use, which was crucial for both their will and ability to quit drugs and seek help.