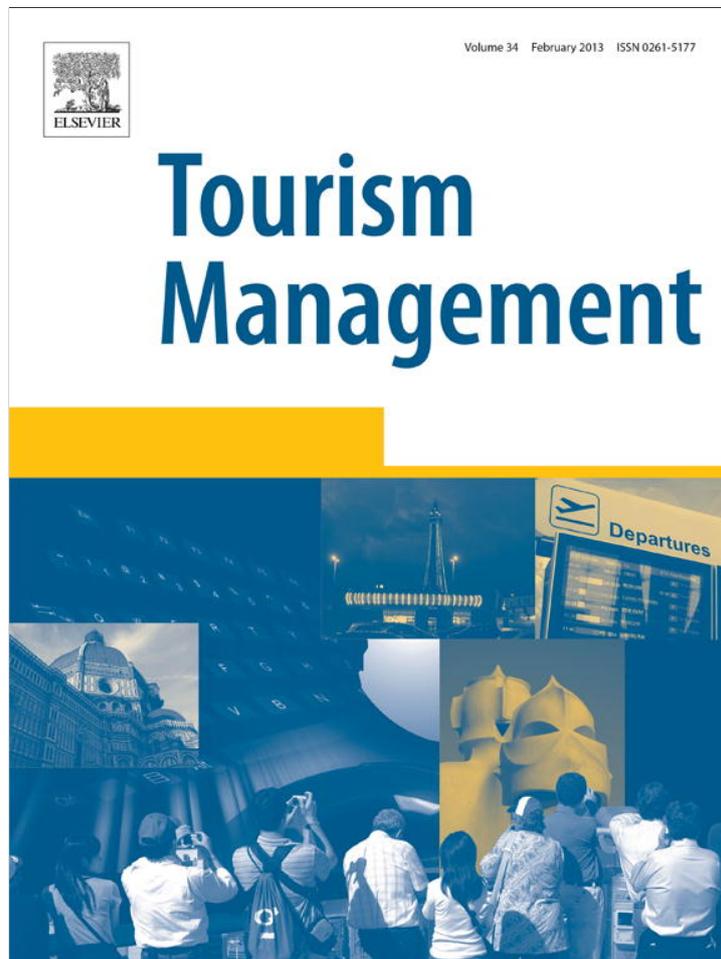


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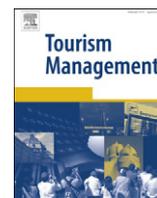


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Substance abuse and job attitude among hotel workers: Social labeling perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Results from a survey ($n = 458$) held in Eilat indicate that hospitality workers use substances much more than average rate in the general Israeli population. Based on a series of independent t -test samples utilized to examine the relationship between respondents' attitude toward their job and their recent substance use habits, we suggest that the correlation between these two variables should be examined in light of the social legitimacy associated with the substances in the environment surrounding the workers.

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1. Introduction

It has been determined that substance use among employees is a function of five factors: organizational culture, social control, work alienation, work-related stress, and the availability of drugs (Sonnenstuhl & Trice, 1987). The study reported here looked at the interactions between some of these factors and their influence on the use of psychoactive substances by workers in the hospitality industry in the Israeli resort town of Eilat. It was hypothesized that workers' general attitudes toward their jobs were negatively correlated with their substance abuse habits, defined as heavy smoking (more than 10 cigarettes a day), binge drinking (more than 5 drinks on one occasion), cannabis consumption, and the consumption of other illicit drugs. Based on the results of the survey conducted in Eilat, we suggest that the usage of substances should be examined in light of the social meaning ascribed to the substances in the environment surrounding the workers.

While all psychoactive substances may be said to temporarily change our cognition and behavior, the social meaning ascribed to their usage differs from one substance to another. According to labeling theory, in any particular social setting, usage of a substance acquires its connotation (i.e., is labeled as deviant or legitimate) depending on the reaction of the majority toward its consumption. For example, the behavior of heavy coffee drinkers is not labeled as

deviant even when they consume their caffeine during working hours, because caffeine consumption is an accepted practice.

2. Research process and sampling

This research project originated in a series of 15 interviews conducted with hotel workers in Eilat during which the latter were asked about their substance use habits during and after working hours. Subsequently a theoretical framework regarding possible links between job attitudes and substance use was developed and operationalized in the form of a questionnaire incorporating measures of work attitudes. Two scales were used to measure the independent variables of work alienation and job satisfaction: the Job Satisfaction Scale (Macdonald & Macintyre, 1997) and the Work Alienation Scale (Hirschfield & Feild, 2000; Maddi, Kobasa, & Hoover, 1979). In each measure, the respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with regard to 10 statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The statements in the Job Satisfaction scale were positively worded (e.g., "I receive recognition for a job well done", "I feel good about my job"), whereas those in the Work Alienation scale were negatively worded (e.g., "I wonder why I work at all", "I don't enjoy work; I just put in my time to get paid"). Both measures were tested for construct validity and reliability, which were found to be satisfactory (Cronbach alpha scores for Job satisfaction and Work Alienation scales were 0.85 and 0.86, respectively). Also included in the questionnaire were three sections relating to the socio-demographic background of the participants, their work-related characteristics and their substance use habits. The questionnaire

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was administered to employees in the three main hotel chains in Eilat between June 2010 and March 2011. The voluntary nature of the study was made clear to the participants and their anonymity was carefully preserved, in compliance with the ethical guidelines of the participating university.

3. Results

Of the 473 participants in the study (response rate of 70%), 48.9% were male ($n = 224$) and 51.1% female ($n = 234$), averaging 27.8 years of age ($SD = 8.0$). The vast majority of the sample were single (73.3%, $n = 346$), with no professional or academic diploma (64.6%, $n = 303$). Regarding work-related characteristics, 74.2% ($n = 348$) were part-time workers, slightly more than half (52.1%, $n = 246$) had worked less than one year in their current position, and 61.8% ($n = 292$) had worked less than three years in the hotel industry. The majority of the sample earned less than 24 NIS per hour – equivalent to \$US 6.90 (the statutory minimum wage at the time of data collection was NIS 20.75 per hour). By and large, the study sample reflected the general employment picture in the hotel industry in Israel (Reichel & Amit, 2000) and abroad (Pizam & Shani, 2009), i.e., consisting predominantly of young workers with a low level of education receiving low wages with little employment security; consistent with this picture, the industry has a high labor turnover rate.

Consumption of substances by the hotel employees was considerable: 45.7% ($n = 216$) were involved in binge drinking (more than five drinks on one occasion), 13.8% had used cannabis (marijuana or hashish), and 5.9% ($n = 28$) had used some other illicit substances (e.g., ecstasy, LSD, cocaine, etc.) during the month prior to the interview. Additionally, 51.5% ($n = 236$) of the participants in the survey reported that they smoked on a daily basis and 30.7% ($n = 140$) were classified as heavy smokers. These are striking figures when weighed against assessments of substance use among the general Israeli population (20% smokers and fewer than 15% heavy smokers), as well as among other occupational groups (CBS, 2011; IADA, 2009).

A series of independent t -test samples was utilized to investigate the link between job satisfaction and work alienation scores, on the one hand, and substance abuse habits, on the other (see Table 1, Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). Somewhat unexpectedly, no statistically significant difference in work alienation and job satisfaction scores was found between respondents who had been involved in binge drinking in the previous month and those who had not, nor between heavy and non-heavy smokers. However,

work alienation was more prevalent among those who had used cannabis in the previous month than among non-users, while the latter also reported a higher degree of job satisfaction. Similarly, respondents who had used other illicit substances in the previous month were characterized by a higher degree of work alienation and a lower degree of job satisfaction than those who did not use such substances.

4. Conclusions

Statistically, the striking popularity of tobacco and alcohol among participants of this survey makes it difficult to differentiate between these groups of users in terms of their attitudes toward their jobs. Nevertheless, in line with the labeling perspective, we would like to suggest that it is the legal status of these substances and their social connotations that play a mediating role in the relationship between their usage and job attitudes. To be more specific, if we accept the conventional wisdom that alcohol and cigarettes are regarded as legitimate recreational substances, especially in the context of the resort town of Eilat, it is not surprising to find that their usage is not linked to work alienation or job satisfaction. On the other hand, cannabis and other drugs are still illicit and carry negative connotations; their users are regarded as persons who have deliberately positioned themselves on the fringes of society, knowing that their behavior could lead to their being labeled as outsiders.

The status of binge drinking must be viewed in the context of Eilat's hospitality industry. Due to the developed drinking culture among hotel workers, who are exposed to a lively night life in bars, restaurants, and night clubs, binge drinking is an accepted practice. Noteworthy in this context is that during the interviews conducted with these hotel workers, all of the respondents reported occasionally drinking after working hours with their colleagues and even with their direct and indirect supervisors. Our data show that binge drinking is not linked to negative attitudes toward the user's job, a finding we believe can be interpreted in the context of this drinking culture. Similarly, our data also indicate an organizational culture that tolerates cigarette smoking. More than half of our participants reported that they were regular smokers, with almost a third classified as heavy smokers. Hence it can be argued that the prevalence of cigarette smoking promotes a culture in which cigarette smoking, even during working hours, does not necessarily manifest in a negative attitude toward one's job.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found online at doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2012.03.008.

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Table 1
Job satisfaction and work alienation scores versus substance use habits.

		Job satisfaction		Work alienation	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Binge drinking (past month)	Yes	35.81	7.76	22.43	8.75
	No	35.43	8.22	21.49	8.09
		$t(468) = .521, NS$		$t(468) = 1.207, NS$	
Heavy tobacco use (daily)	Yes	35.40	8.44	22.59	9.10
	No	35.71	7.83	21.32	7.96
		$t(451) = .379, NS$		$t(451) = -1.42, NS$	
Cannabis use (past month)	Yes	33.31	7.31	25.68	9.41
	No	35.97	8.07	21.31	8.09
		$t(467) = -2.495, p < .05$		$t(467) = 3.942, p < .001$	
Other substances (past month)	Yes	32.70	7.82	27.68	8.13
	No	35.78	7.99	21.55	8.29
		$t(468) = -1.983, p < .10$		$t(468) = 3.794, p < .001$	

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