

PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG THE CHILDREN IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract: India comprises the largest numbers of children among the whole population. Children are in the growing stages of development where they inculcate good habits, behaviour, morals and education. But if there is any gap in their developing ages, they can grow with the dreadful habits of substance abuse. This group is more vulnerable and more prone to substance abuse. Recently the number of substance abuse in children is increasing day by day which is slowly paralysing the backbone of our society. Most of the children start using substances during school days, but the treatment is given after a long period of time because the symptoms of adverse physical and psychological complications is not visible the very time of initiation of use of substances. These children usually found using substances like inhalants, tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis. Some children from poor families and broken families are engaged in child labour due to poverty and less paid too. They are also highly susceptible to substance abuse because there is a very close connection between drug abuse and child labour. Children from lower socio-economic background have more numbers of drop-out cases because of substance abuse and hardly given treatment for rehabilitation.

Key words: Children, substance abuse, vulnerable, child labour, poverty.

Introduction:

Substance abuse is a rising problem in world. Substance use among children and adolescents is now become a serious health concern almost every parts of India. Substance abuse during the shaping years can hamper academic results, social development. Previously it was limited to children living on streets, child labour and trafficked children, but now days it is affecting almost every segments of the society such as school-going students, drop-out students and children living out of home. Substance abuse among adolescents is now an issue of worry all over world. Adolescence is a transition period of development where the brain is very much susceptible to the disturbing properties of using alcohol. Drinking alcohol may have several short-term and long-term bad outcomes. The severe effects of alcohol drinking by adolescents like motor vehicle accidents, suicides and different types of violence are very much common (pillai et al., 2014). The history behind substance or drug abuse is age-old. Human beings from long before had craved for eating or drinking substances which helps them to feel ecstatic. Since 6000BC people are using drugs for feeling relaxed. The first abusive drug (alcohol wine) was homemade and used for religious purpose, Moreover children were also given it in their holly gatherings. Except that other drugs were used for medical purposes (Bah, 2010).

Objective:

The objective of the study is to acquire and assess the knowledge about the substance abuse and its prevalence among the children and to get probable idea about its identification, prevention and treatment approaches.

Terminology:

A **child** is a person 19 years or younger unless national law defines a person to be an adult at an earlier age. However, in these guidelines when a person falls into the 10 to 19 age category they are referred to as an adolescent (WHO, 2013).

Substance: the substances included in the study were tobacco chewing, beedi, cigarette, supari, gutkha, pan, pan masala, solvents, alcohol, cannabis, opium, heroin, cocaine, LSD etc.

Substance abuser: in this study any participant who has accepted having used one or more mentioned substances during past 1 year and has been taking it at least once in a week or several times in the previous month was considered to be a substance abuser.

Prevalence and Patterns of Using Substance among Children:

According to Saxena et al. (2010) in India approximately 5500 children and adolescent start using tobacco products daily, some as young as 10 years old. Particularly alarming is the fact that the age of initiation in substance abuse is progressively falling. He also stated that "girl substance users have only a limited generalizability as they are likely to represent more severe users. On the other hand, it may be deduced that girls using substances continue to remain a largely hidden population, which is difficult to reach".

Belcher and Shinitzky (1998) found that illicit drug used by men has twice than the rate of women's drug use and is alcohol consuming is 3 times additional repeated in men. The reason may be the patterns of drug use may be found in childhood, where drug use is generally higher in boys than in girls. If a child uses alcohol and other drug at younger age, there are more health problems than other substance abusers. Addiction results through the cycle of the individual, the agent (substance), and the environment.

According to Dhawan, (2017) there is lack of data which leads to rejection of the hitch among Indian policy-makers, but the study found that drug use exists in children in all regions, cities and smaller towns across all states. "That the problem of substance use among children is not confined to metropolitan areas as is often perceived" (Dhawan, 2017). He also stated that age of the youngest child was 5 years in the sample which is long before adolescent age. Substance abuse by the girls was only 4.3% of the total sample.

Noticeably, it has seen that substance abuse in adolescents having a good relationship with family members is higher. The reasons may be availability of substances and lack of supervision. On the other hand unavailability of money creates tensed relationship among these adolescents (Saxena, 2010).

Bah, (2010) found “Poverty is critical factor for adolescent abuse of drug. Drug abuse is more prevalent among middle and lower socioeconomic sectors of the youth and increasingly common in poorer parts of the world”.

A range of psychoactive substances, like alcohol, cannabis and opioids are being used for hundreds of years in India. Children get the drugs through various way, such as offering from peers, sharing price with friends, offering from adults abusers, stealing, rewards of done for services to sellers and peddlers, buying them individually with pocket-money etc. In case of homeless children begging, stealing and prostitution is the easiest option for getting those substances.

A report by “Save the Children” (2016) many beggar children or child labour are abuses drug to escape the cruelties of their daily life.

The report by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2019) establishes that the people who use psychoactive substances in India are in huge figure. It is found in all sections of people but adult men are having more disorder related to those substances

Methodology:

The study is done based on secondary data. Journal, books, and some e-resources have been studied for getting the idea about issues related to substance abuse.

Causes of Abusing Substances by Children:

Children are engaged in drugs or substance abuse for numerous reasons including

- out of Curiosity
- influence by peer group and for group recognition,
- poor school performance (academic, sports, cultural etc.),
- parental rejection,
- dysfunction in family or broken family,
- lack of stable home environment,
- to imitate the actors of different media,
- abuse(physical, psychological, social),
- under-or over-controlling (excessive) by parents,
- lack of supervision parent or family members,
- residing with adult abusers
- to work hard and for long hours in case of child labour,
- to relieve stress, depression,
- ignorance by family, friends, society,
- easy accessibility and affordability,
- for seeking pleasure and relaxation,
- coping and fitting into street life circumstances,
- boldness to withstand violence,
- to curb hunger(drugs abuse helps to abstain from intake of food for a long time),
- to induce sleep and
- entertainment etc.

Effects of Abusing Substances:

There are several effects of substance abuse. It may be short term or long term. Some visible and immediate effects are like

- neglect towards regular work and duties,
- frequent stealing and lying,
- aggressive conduct and hostile behaviour,
- truancy, escape from school and formal education,
- mental illness,
- beating others,
- adjustment problems with peers, family and society,
- family problems,
- poor health and nutrition,
- diseases (e.g. HIV/AIDS, TB, STIs, etc.),
- road accidents etc.

Prevention and Treatment:

It is very sad to say that it is seen that although the children have prior knowledge and also aware of the harmful effects of substance use but still they initiate the use of substances. (Tsering, 2010). Most of the people start using substances during adolescence period, but the treatment is not given right from then. It is sought after a few years when physical or psychosocial difficulties start to come into view. The study shows only 5% are adolescents among all the treatment-seekers. Reasons behind that low motivation among them along with stigma for treatment process or lack of specialized adolescent treatment programmes, or even mere lack of awareness of facilities for them (Dhawan, 2017). Perceiving the risk factors, the early identification and prevention of substance abuse in children will help to reduce the spreading the problem. School based and community based intervention programmes like counselling, remedial classes, life skill development programmes may be very much useful for the prevention of substance abuse among the children and for mainstreaming them towards their development. Partnership between

school, health care professionals, drug de-addiction centres and social workers are needed to be integrated for effective prevention of substance abuse. The policy must, in our view, address the need for setting up de-addiction centres in every district and address specific vulnerabilities particularly in the context of high-risk populations, including children. We direct that this exercise be completed and that a national policy be formulated within six months"(Nair, 2018). Steps followed by the children to fight against drug abuse are such as avoidance of bad peer groups, attending school and campaign regularly, building proximity to family and responsible adults, involvement in life skill development programmes and self-esteem building activities etc.

Role of stakeholders (parents, community and government) to combat the issue of substance abuse:

Children are the product of society and future of our nation. So, it is our duty to help them to have better environment during their developing ages. If any child is in trap of any menace like substance abuse, the several stakeholders had vital role to play to help the child to come out from that problem. Proper identification and prevention method is required right from the beginning. For that the parents should build the smooth and strong parent-child relationship and increase the supervision and monitoring of the activities regularly. Enhancement in child monitoring helps to decrease threat of using alcohol and other drugs. A healthy shared bond and affection with parents can decrease the consumption of drug among children. They should involve their children in open discussion to have the better knowledge about positive and negative consequences of different issues related to our society. The community needs to generate different awareness programmes, help to avail the resources for the community people, and provide support against stigma attached to them. Government and other development partners should raise funds for campaign and awareness generation. They should create the pathways to mainstream them to combat the risk factors of substance abuse.

Summary and conclusion:

Understanding substance abuse among children needs more attention to deal with the issue. The first and foremost step is to become proactive and identifying the risk factors, generate awareness through providing knowledge regarding the menace of substance abuse. It is very much important to restrict the availability of drugs out of reach of children. Regular supervision by elder members of family and monitoring the activities of them are to be increased along with building open communication with those children. Strong bond between child, school and family will help to develop good habits, inculcate controlled and modified behaviour; and thus to avoid the use of substances. The enforcement agencies have the crucial role to play to prevent such activities. It is also important to include family, friends, schools and other stakeholders of the society to deal with the problem through prevention and treatment programmes for proper development of children who are future and builders of our nation.

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