

SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN INDIA

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Abstract

The epidemic of substance abuse in young generation has assumed alarming dimensions in India. Changing cultural values, increasing economic stress and dwindling supportive bonds are leading to initiation into substance use. Cannabis, heroin, and Indian-produced pharmaceutical drugs are the most frequently abused drugs in India. Drug use, misuse or abuse is also primarily due to the nature of the drug abused, the personality of the individual and the addict's immediate environment. The processes of industrialization, urbanization and migration have led to loosening of the traditional methods of social control rendering an individual vulnerable to the stresses and strains of modern life.

Introduction

The epidemic of substance abuse in young generation has assumed alarming dimensions in India. Changing cultural values, increasing economic stress and dwindling supportive bonds are leading to initiation into substance use. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) substance abuse is persistent or sporadic drug use inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practice^[1].

The picture is grim if the world statistics on the drugs scenario is taken into account. With a turnover of around \$500 billions, it is the third largest business in the world, next to petroleum and arms trade. About 190 million people all over the world consume one drug or the other^[2]. Drug addiction causes immense human distress and the illegal production and distribution of drugs have spawned crime and violence worldwide. June 26 is celebrated as International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking every year. It is an exercise undertaken by the world community to sensitize the people in general and the youth in particular, to the menace of drugs.

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Today, there is no part of the world that is free from the curse of drug trafficking and drug addiction. Millions of drug addicts, all over the world, are leading miserable lives, between life and death. India too is caught in this vicious circle of drug abuse, and the numbers of drug addicts are increasing day by day.

According to a UN report, One million heroin addicts are registered in India, and unofficially there are as many as five million. What started off as casual use among a minuscule population of high-income group youth in the metro has permeated to all sections of society. Inhalation of heroin alone has given way to intravenous drug use, that too in combination with other sedatives and painkillers. This has increased the intensity of the effect, hastened the process of addiction and complicated the process of recovery.

Cannabis, heroin, and Indian-produced pharmaceutical drugs are the most frequently abused drugs in India. Cannabis products, often called charas, bhang, or ganja, are abused throughout the country because it has attained some amount of religious sanctity because of its association with some Hindu deities^[3]. The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2002 report released in Vienna pointed out that in India persons addicted to opiates are shifting their drug of choice from opium to heroin.

The pharmaceutical products containing narcotic drugs are also increasingly being abused. The intravenous injections of analgesics like dextropropoxphene etc are also reported from many states, as it is easily available at 1/10th the cost of heroin. The codeine-based cough syrups continue to be diverted from the domestic market for abuse.

Drug abuse is a complex phenomenon, which has various social, cultural, biological, geographical, historical and economic aspects. The disintegration of the old joint family system, absence of parental love and care in modern families where both parents are working, decline of old religious and moral values etc lead to a rise in the number of drug addicts who take drugs to escape hard realities of life.

Drug use, misuse or abuse is also primarily due to the nature of the drug abused, the personality of the individual and the addict's immediate environment. The processes of industrialization, urbanization and migration have led to loosening of the traditional methods of social control rendering an individual vulnerable to the stresses and strains of modern life. The introduction of synthetic drugs and intravenous drug use leading to HIV/AIDS has added a new dimension to the problem, especially in the Northeast states of the country.

Drug abuse has led to a detrimental impact on the society. It has led to increase in the crime rate. Addicts resort to crime to pay for their drugs. Drugs remove inhibition and impair judgment egging one on to commit offences. Incidences of teasing, group clashes, assault and impulsive murders increase with drug abuse. Apart from affecting the financial stability, addiction increases conflicts and causes untold emotional pain for every member of the family. With most drug users being in the productive age group of 18-35 years, the loss in terms of human potential is incalculable. The damage to the physical, psychological, moral and intellectual growth of the youth is very high.

Adolescent drug abuse is one of the major areas of concern in adolescent and young people's behavior. It

is estimated that, in India, by the time most boys reach the ninth grade, about 50 percent of them have tried at least one of the substance of abuse nature^[4]. In last three decades, many epidemiological surveys have been carried out in India to assess the prevalence of substance abuse.

In Uttar Pradesh, Dube and Handa^[5] reported that 22.8 per 1000 were dependent on alcohol and drugs while Thacore^[6] from Lucknow gave a figure of 18.55 per 1000.

The Important finding of these studies is that alcohol was the commonest substance used (60-98%) followed by cannabis use (4-20%). Epidemiological surveys^[7,8] also revealed that 20-40% of subjects above 15 years are current users of alcohol and 10% of them are regular or excessive users. In a rural population of Uttar Pradesh alcohol was found to be the commonest substance abused (82.5%) followed by cannabis (16.1%). Varma et al^[9] found that rates of current use of alcohol in Punjab were 45.9% in Jalandhar and 27.7% in Chandigarh whereas it was 28.1% in rural areas of Punjab^[10].

Shukla^[11] reported that 38.3% of the rural population in Uttar Pradesh was habitual substance users. In a study conducted in rural community in Bihar prevalence of alcohol/drug use was found to be 28.8% of the study population^[12].

Increase in incidences of HIV, hepatitis B and C and tuberculosis due to addiction adds the reservoir of infection in the community burdening the health care system further. Women in India face greater problems from drug abuse. The consequences include domestic violence and infection with HIV, as well as the financial burden.

India has braced itself to face the menace of drug trafficking both at the national and international levels. Several measures involving innovative changes in enforcement, legal and judicial systems have been brought into effect. The introduction of death penalty for drug-related offences has been a major deterrent.

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, were enacted with stringent provisions to curb this menace. The Act envisages a minimum term of 10 years imprisonment extendable to 20 years and fine of Rs. 1 lakh extendable up to Rs. 2 lakhs for the offenders. Comprehensive strategy involving specific programmes to bring about an overall reduction in use of drugs has been evolved by the various government agencies and NGOs and is further supplemented by measures like education, counseling, treatment and rehabilitation programmes. Substance abuse can be addressed at the individual level, at the local level (society, national, etc.) and at the cross-national level. At the individual level, there has to be a synthesis of biological understanding with the exploration of background sociocultural factors. At the national and cross-national level, there has to be a concerted effort of all the countries in managing the issue of substance abuse, taking into account the local socio-cultural and political scenarios.

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