



SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN YOUTH: CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND PREVENTION

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Abstract: Substance abuse among youth continues to rise as a complex and multidimensional issue that affects physical health, mental well-being, and also social stability. This article examines the key factors of substance use, including psychological vulnerability, Social influences and Environmental Conditions. It highlights the physical health effects, psychological effects and challenges faced by the affected individual. This article also give glance about risk factors such as stress, trauma, Low self-esteem, peer pressure and parental neglect which plays a crucial role in initiating and sustaining substance use behaviours. The study also considers the impact of academic pressure, Urbanization, and increased availability of drugs and alcohol. Furthermore, it emphasizes the crucial role of healthcare professionals in early identification, intervention, and health education. Addressing the root causes is essential to reduce the prevalence of substance abuse and support the healthy development of Young individuals. This also covers future challenges, including emerging drug trends and the need for integrated and multidisciplinary strategies to effectively prevent and manage substance abuse among youth.

Introduction

According to WHO, “Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs”, which often results in health consequences and financial burden on abusers and their dependents, to put it in another way **A transient sense of solace can progressively evolve into psychological reliance, ultimately leading to physiological failure.**

The youth would not fall right in to the use of substance mostly its starts with curiosity and then goes to weekends to weekdays to everyday.

The main reason to address this issue as it became common among young and youths who plays the crucial role in building a society. The use of substance diverts them towards a pathway that leads to nowhere but chaos and sufferings.

Substances Commonly Abused

Substances like Nicotine products, Alcohols, Inhalational substances, Prescription Drugs and illicit drugs.

Nicotine And Tobacco Products

- ✓ Cigarettes
- ✓ Vape
- ✓ Snuff
- ✓ Nicotine pouches

Alcohol

- ✓ Beer
- ✓ Whiskey
- ✓ Vodka
- ✓ Brandy



Figure 1: Alcohol abuse

Cannabis products

- ✓ Marijuana
- ✓ Hashish
- ✓ Weed

Prescription drugs

- ✓ Morphine
- ✓ Codeine
- ✓ Amphetamine

CAUSES

Psychological Factors

Often people feel stressed due to family problems, studies, exams, workload, etc., tends them to turn the side of substance to cope up with the stress.



Figure 2: Cigarettes, Vapes and hookah

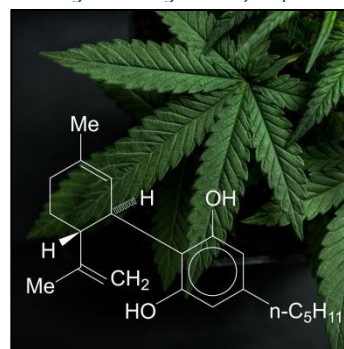


Figure 3: Cannabidiol (CBD)

Depression and Emotional instability: People who suffers from depression and low self-esteem inferior complex will take these substances to escape from the reality & criticism and people who takes prescribed drugs for depression abuses it by using it more than prescribed as it gives them a relief and they want to stay in that relief even if its temporary rather than waiting for the effect to be visible as prescribed ones take time to show effects and improves mood.

Curiosity: curiosity being the most common reason among youth to fell into this substance dependence.

This often starts by seeing other people use it and wanting to know how it feels to use it themselves and in other cases people starts to use it to fit in with the society or peers they are surrounded with.

Social Factors:

These factors include

- Peer pressure (to be approved/ to avoid being rejected)
- Family environment (lack of parental supervision, Family history of substance abuse)
- Media and Social Influence (As the world is moving towards science and technology, They are being the main reason for the good and bad things people learn or come across)

As smoking drinking and other substance abuse is shown and portrayed as superior habit and normalised in social media and films, children and youth who admires actors trying to imitate them and ended up being addicted without being able to differentiate between reality and Fiction.



Figure 4: a) Substance abuse by youth due to peer pressure

Biological Factors:

Genetic and neurological factors:

The substances when abused starts to rewire brain's reward pathways and mechanism which makes the individual feel only happy when they are on drugs. They stop noticing joy around them.



Figure 4: b) Social media influencing youth into illegal things

Environmental Factors:

Availability of substance:

Access to these substances like drugs, alcohol and tobacco products became very easy as there are lot of legal sellers and shops and also much more people selling it illegally even though it has severe consequences and other factors like their socio economic status plays it role too.

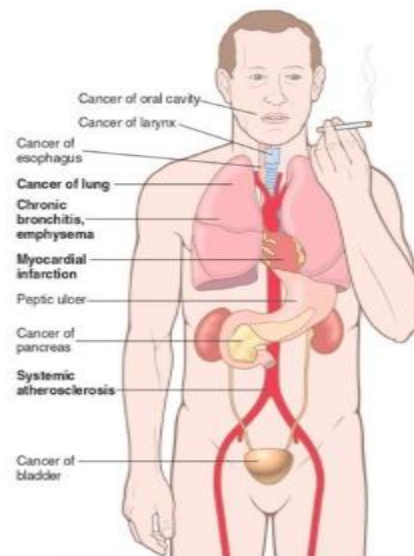


Figure 5: Adverse effect of smoking

Effects of substance Abuse

Being addicted to drugs and substances have a wide range of effects which includes Physical health effects, Psychological effects, Social effects

❖ Physical Health Effects

People who are addicted often have one or more associated health issues including lung disease, heart disease, stroke, cancer etc...

Based on the substance they overuse the effect it makes in body differs.

For example,

Tobacco - Cancers (mainly lung cancer and mouth cancer)

Methamphetamine - Dental problems (meth mouth)

Opioids - overdose and even death

Inhalants - damage or destroy nerve cells in CNS or in PNS.

By sharing the needles used for injection makes them prone to get infected by HIV and Hepatitis C.

They can have short term health consequences like increased heart rate, blood pressure, impaired coordination, reflex, anxiety, mood swings, confusion and also they can have Long term health complications like Liver, Heart, Lung damage and diseases, depression and anxiety

disorders, psychosis, hallucinations, physical and psychological dependence, withdrawal symptoms when they stop using it and also affects their usual performance in everything.



Figure 6: Meth mouth

❖ **Psychological effects**

Substance abuse leads to damage in brain function leading to poor memory, reduced attention span, which affects academic performance and day to day activities like decision making impairment.

Prolonged use of substance can make these reversible effects to chronic complications like anxiety, depression, mood disorders, psychosis with severe visual and auditory hallucinations and delusions.



❖ **Social effects**



*Figure 7: a) Depression and anxiety disorder
b) Hallucination*

Affects family relationship, academic progress, career and can cause legal issues. Sudden lack of availability or insufficiency of drugs can cause agitation and cause ignorance of responsibilities, loss of trust on people which leads to conflict between family members and friends.

Decreased concentration, fail to be present in productive events and poor performance leads to academic failure, joblessness and financial stress.

Individuals can take part in illegal activities like illegal possession of drugs and substances, stealing for buying drugs, drunk and drive which ends up getting them fined and also in imprisonment.

Risking factors and warning signs

🚩 Behavioural indicators like sudden change in routine, decline in academic performance, loss of interest in activities once they used to have interest on and social withdrawal.

🚩 Physical Symptoms like dilated pupils, bloodshot eyes, idiopathic weight changes, tremors, frequent fatigue.

🚩 Emotional changes includes mood swings, increased irritability, anxiety, agitation, aggression, personality changes.

Prevention:



Preventive measures can be taken from individual side, family or mentor side or even from schools, communities and society too.

Individual prevention includes awareness, self-control and having focus on important things.

Family based prevention is by monitoring their children constantly and guidance towards a better future with better health. Keeping a good communication level between their families plays a very crucial role in prevention.

Spreading awareness by doing programs or getting awareness by participating in them also helps.

Knowing the health consequences and penalties they face under law mostly help them prevent themselves from doing illegal activities like substance possession and abuse.

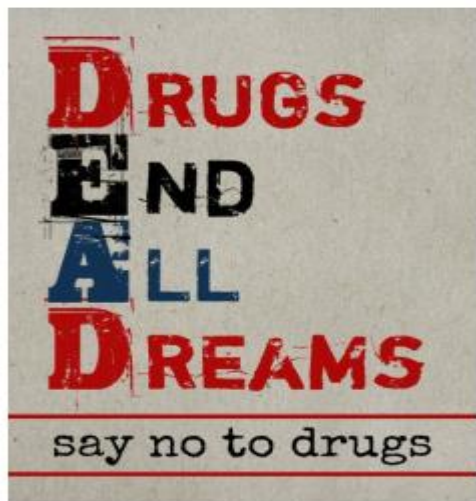


Figure 8: Picture Illustrates awareness about drugs

Treatment and rehabilitation

Treatment includes both psychological and physiological ways

Psychological treatment:

This way of treatment helps people to take a step against their addiction by their own will with the help of others

These kind of treatment often includes treatment like,

1. Cognitive behavioural therapy - helps them identify and ignore negative thoughts pattern and behaviours.



2. Motivation - By counselling or by showing real life examples of people who overcame addiction.

3. Contingency management: Changing their habits by giving them productive and useful rewards (to rewire their reward mechanism)

4. Family communication - improving communication and explaining their state of family due to this substance abuse can give them a reason to change.

5. Group therapy - Which includes peer support and sharing their experiences of how they started and how they got affected and how are they now in the treatment phase to the new ones in the rehabilitation centre.

Physiological treatment:

This treatments helps them reverse the effects of drugs on body by medical interventions like detoxification, medications associated therapy.

Detoxification process helps the individual to eliminate the substances from their body safely with the help of medical experts.

Medication associated therapy consists of treatment with drugs which reverses the effects of the drugs they abused (based on the drugs abused, drugs used for treatment changes)

Rehabilitation centres:

Helps the individuals by monitoring them 24/7 abstaining them from access to drugs and regular medical check-ups to notice changes of withdrawal and improved physiological health.

Role of Healthcare professionals

Early identification:

It plays a major role as it can help quick reversal and prevent from addiction or dependence.

Medical experts help people identify the signs or changes which often gets unnoticed by normal people.

They have role in spreading awareness by doing free counselling in person and through internet.

Prescribing appropriate drugs for management and treatment, Referring individuals to specialised rehabilitation services for better recovery, Multidisciplinary treatment helps in comprehensive care.



Figure 9: multidisciplinary treatment (psychiatry and other medical professionals)

Education:

Educating families, friends and society by explaining them the availability, effects, guidance, prevention, consequences and treatment.

Challenges:

These comprises of trends in substance abuse, behavioural addictions etc.

Trends

Among the current generation, people are getting introduced much more addictive substances than earlier days.

Like synthetic or lab made substances like fentanyl analogue, synthetic cannabinoids with uncertain effects.

People are getting involved in polysubstance abuse by mixing multiple drugs together (e.g. Alcohol with opioids or stimulants, Cough syrup mixed with Codeine etc.)

Influenced by social media and peer trends:

Abusing prescribed drugs like painkillers and sedatives.

Non substance abuse

Newer generations involving in non-substance addictions too like smartphones, social media scrolling, gaming and internet browsing.



Figure 13: Social Media Scrolling



Figure 11: Opioid misused among



b) Codeine-based cough syrup






Figure 10: Polysubstance abuse
a) Alcohol with opioid

Technological and Social challenges

Even though people try their maximum effort to protect themselves and their surroundings. Due to the technological development people still gets introduced to substances through online drug stores/markets, dark web, quacks prescribing medicines without considering its side effects. Poverty, unemployment also leading the youths towards vulnerability.

Need of integrated approaches

-  Combining medical, psychological and social factors for treatment.
-  Stronger policies and laws to make people fear of the consequences which will refrain them from illegal abuse.
-  Use of technology in treatment, by spreading awareness through social media and blocking the access of online websites or portals to online drug stores or illegal markets.

Conclusion:

Substance abuse is a complicated issue that requires careful consideration and needs a comprehensive response. The vulnerability growing among youths highlights the immediate and urgent actions towards eradicating the cause and prevention and also severe focus on treatment too. To do all this a single individual or just an organisation cannot do instead You me us as families as strangers as humans with good deeds should take action at least from what we can to help people with addiction and make a better society for us and for the future generations to continue their life on. Addressing this issue needs a comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation framework that integrates counselling,