



**A STUDY TO ASSESS THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, PRACTICE, AND PATTERN OF
SUBSTANCE USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS FROM SELECTED
SCHOOLS OF RAJASTHAN, INDIA**

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Background of the study:

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines “substance use” as “The use of a substance for a purpose not consistent with legal or medical guidelines which causes sufferers to experience physical and psychological dependency.” It is a major global concern today with nearly 284 million people aged 15 to 64 using illicit drugs annually.² In India, this problem is increasing at an alarming rate, with nearly 2.8% of Indians having used cannabis products in the past year. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in collaboration with NDDTC at AIIMS in New Delhi, reported that cannabis and opioids rank as the second most commonly abused substances in India, following alcohol. Studies have shown that the highest proportion of substance abuse is prevalent among youth who contribute to one-fifth of the population.³ College life is a period of transition from the cocoon of parental vigilance and strictures of school life towards freedom. During this period, students may indulge in substance use, often to explore the boundaries and cope with new pressures of life. The stress resulting from societal changes, intense academic competition, increased financial burden on families, a decline in familial bonds, adolescent isolation, peer pressure, and curiosity collectively drive them to experiment with various drugs.^{4, 5} Addiction gives rise to aggravation of violent crimes, reduced job productivity, and a surge in health care costs. Substance abuse and dependence are qualitatively ranked on a continuum of substance use disorders in the recently released Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders-5 (DSM-5), based on a number of symptoms. Substance use disorders are a psycho-medico- social problem requiring both medical and socio-psychological management. It is prevalent across all ages, but adolescence provides the greatest window of vulnerability for such high risk behavior. The stress of pubertal transition and identity formation, desire to take risks and exhibit autonomy and independence, defiance and disagreement with parental and societal authorities, as well as peer and academic pressures accentuate drug experimentation behaviour in adolescence have been reported reasons for initiation. Given the wide challenges of adolescence, contextual differences in substance use are noted among adolescents. Notwithstanding the risks of adolescents for substance abuse, this phase of life also offers opportunities for the reduction of substance abuse. The substance use drugs affect the brain's "reward" circuit, which is part of the limbic system that responds to feelings of pleasure by releasing the neurotransmitter dopamine. Significant psychological problems and difficulties including emotional, conduct, peer and poor prosocial behaviour has been noted among adolescents in similar settings in the past.

Objective

- The study is done to observe knowledge, attitude, and practice of substance use among school and college going adolescents and young adults.

Materials and method:

Study type, population and duration: This was a cross sectional study among the school and college going adolescents and youth from Rajasthan, India. The study duration was from January to April 2022. A total of 7 schools, 2 colleges and one polytechnic institute was selected to get representative data of substance use among adolescent and youth of Rajasthan. The school students enrolled in class 9th to 12th were selected for adolescents, while students enrolled in medical college and at the National Service Scheme (NSS) were selected for young adult population. The polytechnic institute was selected as it comprises adolescents who opt for technical studies instead of the secondary school system and could have differential responses. Sample size and Sampling: The sample size of the study was calculated by using the formula, $n = z^2p(1-p)/d^2$. Taking the prevalence of substance use from a previous study from Aligarh (10)

and error (d) as 2%, resulting in the required sample size of 1142. Accounting for a non response rate of 25%, the final sample size was calculated as 1428. For the selection of the study participants, we first approached the school authorities of all the schools of Rajasthan board for proper permission. The sampling frame comprising of all the eligible school students (Class 9th to 12th) and college students (medical, polytechnic, and NSS) was prepared and applying Probability Proportionate to Size, we estimated the number of students to be selected from one particular school/college. The selection of study participants from the particular school/college was done by randomly selecting one or more section/semester on the day of data collection in that school/college, and all the students present in that section/semester were approached for the study. Study instruments: We used a self-administered questionnaire with four sections that included demographic, knowledge, attitude and practice of substance use information. The questionnaire was developed based on the protocol of Global Assessment Programme on Drug Abuse (GAP) of the United Nation. The questionnaire was piloted among 50 school students and after which it was revised and validated. It was provided to the participants in small groups to improve response rates, accuracy, and reliability of the responses. Personal information was coded for privacy and unbiased response.

Results:

We observed that most of the students (89%) had some knowledge about substance use. The risk-taking attitude was common even against drugs like cocaine and charas (30.6% and 29.1% respectively). A high prevalence of ever user and current user was observed (33.3% and 12.9% respectively). The mean age of starting the drug in students and their friends was 15.5 ± 2.7 and 16.2 ± 2.8 years respectively. Among the ever users, tobacco smoking (56.6) and alcohol (47.6%) were most common. Stress (57.9%) was most common reason to use drugs. Males and college students (40.6% and 41.2% respectively) were using it more. Among the ever users, tobacco smoking (56.6) and alcohol (47.6%) were most common, followed by codeine syrup (27.5%), cannabis and its derivatives including charas (13.6%), bhang (12.8%) and ganja (8.8%), sleeping pill (11.5%), opium (8.6%), cocaine (7.3%), LSD (5.0%), morphine (5.0%), shisha (4.8%), inhalant (3.4%), amphetamine (3.14%) and ecstasy (1.5%). The current use of smoking and alcohol was reported in 6.7% and 5.7% respectively. Among those who

used drugs, the most common reason for using it was to relieve stress (57.9%). Less than half of the students perceived curiosity (46.6%) and stress (41.4%) to be reasons behind friends' use of substances. The history of ever as well as current use of drugs were given more by male (39.1% and 15.9%), and college (39.8% and 15.9%) students. A similar pattern was reported in their friends too. About one fourth (26.1%) female students reported ever substance used, while 9.2% were still using it. The mean age of initiation was similar in males and females. Conclusion: This study found half-baked knowledge, propensity towards a risk-taking attitude, and a substantial prevalence of substance use practices. Proper action and further researches are required to explore variables associated for reducing the prevalence.

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