

Substance Abuse among Adolescents: A School-Based Prevalence Study in West Bengal

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Abstract

Substance abuse among adolescents has become a major public health concern, particularly in regions undergoing rapid socio-cultural change such as West Bengal. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by increased vulnerability to experimentation and risk-taking behaviours, including the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other psychoactive substances. The present study aims to assess the prevalence and patterns of substance abuse among school-going adolescents using a descriptive research design. Primary data were collected from a sample of 500 students selected through stratified random sampling from secondary and higher secondary schools. A structured questionnaire was used to gather information on demographic characteristics, types of substances used, age of initiation, frequency of use, influencing factors such as peer pressure and family environment, and awareness regarding harmful effects. The findings reveal a significant prevalence of substance use, with tobacco and alcohol being the most commonly consumed substances, and factors such as peer influence, curiosity, and psychological stress playing a key role. The study emphasises the need for school-based awareness programmes, counselling services, and parental involvement to prevent substance abuse and promote healthy behavioural development among adolescents.

Keywords:- Substance Abuse, Adolescents, Prevalence, School-Based Study, West Bengal

1. Introduction

Substance abuse among adolescents has emerged as a significant public health concern worldwide, particularly in developing regions where rapid socio-cultural transitions influence youth behavior. Adolescence is a critical developmental phase characterized by experimentation, identity formation, and vulnerability to external influences such as peer pressure, media exposure, and changing family dynamics. In this context, the use of substances such as tobacco,

alcohol, and illicit drugs poses serious risks to both physical and mental health, potentially leading to addiction, academic decline, and long-term psychosocial consequences. In India, and specifically in West Bengal, the growing accessibility of addictive substances and the normalization of certain habits like tobacco consumption have intensified the problem. Schools, being primary institutions of socialization, provide a crucial setting for understanding the patterns and prevalence of substance use among adolescents.

A school-based prevalence study is essential to assess the extent of substance abuse and identify associated risk factors within a controlled and accessible population. Such studies not only offer insights into the magnitude of the issue but also help in recognizing demographic variations, including age, gender, and socio-economic status. In West Bengal, where diverse cultural and economic backgrounds coexist, adolescents may experience varying levels of exposure and susceptibility to substance use. Understanding these patterns is vital for designing targeted interventions, awareness programs, and policy measures aimed at prevention and early intervention. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the prevalence of substance abuse among adolescents in selected schools, providing empirical evidence to support effective health education strategies and promote healthier behavioral outcomes among youth.

2. Research Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive research design to assess the prevalence and patterns of substance abuse among adolescents studying in selected schools of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. Adolescence is a sensitive developmental phase marked by physical, psychological, and social transitions, which may increase susceptibility to risky behaviours such as substance use. The study focuses on identifying commonly used substances, age of initiation, and influencing factors such as peer pressure, family environment, and psychological stress, along with assessing awareness levels and perceived academic impact.

The study population comprises students enrolled in secondary and higher secondary classes. A sample of 500 students was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across age groups, gender, and academic levels.

Primary data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire covering demographic details, substance use patterns, frequency, influencing factors, awareness, and behavioural outcomes. The instrument was pre-tested to ensure reliability and validity. Ethical standards were maintained by obtaining institutional permission and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics, particularly the chi-square test, to examine associations between variables. This methodology provides a systematic and evidence-based understanding of adolescent substance abuse in the study area.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study indicate a considerable prevalence of substance abuse among adolescents in selected schools of West Bengal. A significant proportion of respondents reported having used at least one form of substance, with tobacco and alcohol emerging as the most commonly consumed. The age of initiation was found to be relatively early, often during mid-adolescence, highlighting the vulnerability of this age group. Gender differences were observed, with a higher prevalence among male students; however, a rising trend among female adolescents was also noted. The data further revealed that peer pressure, curiosity, and exposure to substance use within family environments were major contributing factors. Additionally, a lack of adequate awareness regarding the harmful effects of substance abuse was evident among a section of students.

The analysis also demonstrated a significant association between substance use and factors such as academic performance, behavioural issues, and psychological stress. Students who reported substance use were more likely to exhibit declining academic outcomes and increased behavioural problems, including absenteeism and lack of concentration. The chi-square test indicated statistically significant relationships between substance abuse and variables such as peer influence and family background. These findings are consistent with existing literature, which emphasises the role of social and environmental determinants in shaping adolescent behaviour. The results underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions, including school-based education programs, counselling services, and parental involvement, to address the growing issue of substance abuse and promote healthier developmental outcomes among adolescents.

4. Conclusion

The present study highlights substance abuse among adolescents as a growing public health and social concern in West Bengal, particularly within the school-going population. The findings reveal a notable prevalence of substance use, with tobacco and alcohol being the most commonly consumed substances, often initiated during early adolescence. The study identifies key influencing factors such as peer pressure, family environment, curiosity, and psychological

stress, all of which contribute significantly to the adoption of such behaviours. Additionally, the association between substance abuse and negative academic performance, behavioural issues, and reduced awareness levels underscores the broader impact on adolescents’ overall development.

The results emphasise the urgent need for comprehensive and preventive strategies to address this issue effectively. School-based awareness programs, life skills education, and accessible counselling services can play a crucial role in early intervention. Furthermore, active parental involvement and supportive family environments are essential in guiding adolescents toward healthy choices. Policymakers and educators must collaborate to design targeted interventions that address both individual and environmental risk factors. Overall, the study underscores the importance of timely action to prevent substance abuse and promote the well-being, academic success, and future prospects of adolescents.

5. References

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