

## Are our Youngsters Safe in the Society Against Drugs?

Priyadhersini S\*

Department of Clinical Psychology, Srinivas University, India

**\*Corresponding author:** Priyadhersini S, Assistant Professor, Course Coordinator, Department of Clinical Psychology, Institute of Allied Health Sciences, Srinivas University, Mangalore, Karnataka, India, Tel: 9902529127; Email: priyadhersini071@gmail.com

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Anything that you make a habit, and a habit cannot be easily changed, to change, it demands a huge price, effort, and hard work. Our youngsters are willingly or unwillingly trapped in consuming the drugs and becoming victims of substance addiction, further contributing to behavioural addiction. The puzzle is they indulged in this pleasure-seeking activity knowing the effects or not. Numerous substances have the ability to produce strong feelings of pleasure and reward, which can result in addiction and encourage drug-seeking behaviour. The substances namely alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, opioids, marijuana, methamphetamine, benzodiazepines, and barbiturates are all adequately available in the society to reach the youngsters somehow at the cost of money, drug peddling, or by either consequence of low moral behaviour. The statistical data from the most recent studies has offered enough proof to guarantee the substantial risk of rising drug addiction. According to a survey from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, approximately 2.83% of Indians are drug users, with a higher prevalence among males than women. The most widely abused substances in India are also cannabis and opioids.

As per the National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment through the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC) of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) New Delhi, there are approximately 10 lakh drug addicts in Jammu and Kashmir. The growing number of Indian teenagers who are becoming drug addicts and drug selling has alarmed the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The Bench of Justice noted, while rejecting the anticipatory bail request of a drug dealer on December 23, that "this country has one of the largest numbers of youths, a factor to power economic growth, but an overwhelming

majority of addicts are among these youths", which has resulted in increase of crime and violence. In Bangalore, Karnataka Police arrests thirteen people for peddling drug worth 2.48 crores followed by the arrest of seven people, smuggling 168.6kg marijuana heading from Bidar, Karnataka to other cities. Mangalore Police in Karnataka detained nine persons, including doctors, on suspicion of participating in the consumption and sale of narcotics. Medical students from a private college in Mangalore were also detained including students and doctors from Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Telangana, and Karnataka. Drug dependence and abuse among Kerala school children were recently reported and raised as an alarming concern in the society. Every educational institute is facing a hard time with respect to maintain the discipline, safety and security of the young students as there is an increasing probability of drug consumption followed by the aftereffects and misbehaviours of the students.

As addiction has substantial negative effects on one's physical health, including dehydration, appetite loss, changes in neurotransmitters, and damage to brain cells, it can also cause severe mental health disorders, including neurotic disorders like sadness, anxiety, and psychosis. Memory loss, diminished attention, and poor decision-making skills would all be caused by a significant deterioration in cognitive capacities. Losing one's ability to reason and failing to solve difficulties could result in a negative personality developing, overall. The brain chemicals dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine, which control mood, behaviour, and enjoyment, can become unbalanced because of drug use. Chronic drug use can change the structure and circuitry of the brain, resulting in long-term modifications to behaviour and cognition.

Billy Batware, a programme officer for the UNODC, said during the international symposium on “Children Matter-Right to a Drug-Free Childhood” that 13% of drug addiction sufferers in India are under the age of 20. Additionally, it was asserted that children are more inclined to use drugs and alcohol as a result of their poor mental and physical health and the violence, exploitation, and sexual abuse that is directed at them. Nine out of ten drug addicts start abusing drugs before they become 18 years old. Substance addiction is gaining more popularity not only among the college goers but also among the high school children. A study conducted among multiple cities in India affirms over 10% of class 8 to 12 students have used drugs. National Institutes of Health (NCBI), through a meta-analysis, says, in India, it has been discovered that both street kids and enrolled students take a variety of drugs. Prevalence rates of up to 82.98% have been recorded in street youngsters. According to research, 18% of school-age adolescents use drugs regularly.

It is imperative that, we comprehend our young people and take action to identify the underlying factors contributing to their drug usage. What causes these young people to become entangled in drug use? From their perspective, there are many reasons, ranging from individual factors to cultural standards that influence peer pressure, academic stress, a lack of affection or attention from the family, and prestige drinking as part of socio-cultural expectations. Substance usage is also greatly influenced by a lack of awareness. Some kids get involved with drugs because of the academic pressure, parental or teacher’s discrimination, bullying interpersonal issues in the home, etc. Sometimes, using drugs or alcohol is seen to be a method to deal with these stresses, but this can soon develop into addiction. It’s possible that many young people in India are unaware of all the dangers and repercussions associated with substance usage, as well as the lack of access to harm reduction tools or addiction treatment. In certain situations, it’s also the fact that it may be relatively simple and inexpensive to access alcohol and

drugs in some parts of India, making it more challenging for young people to stay away from them.

In high schools, bullying is another significant, inescapable component. Children who experience bullying may resort to drugs as a poor coping mechanism, progressively taking drugs that inevitably lead to addiction.

Understanding the root causes of anything that has to be eliminated is essential, before developing a strategy for either prevention or treatment. The same holds good for addiction, however, rehabilitation frequently necessitates a combination of medical intervention, counselling, and continuing support. In general, prevention is the most preferable in treating addiction. An awareness is even more a top priority. Create educational programmes that address the dangers of drug use, how it affects the body and mind, and the long-term effects of addiction by providing the resources young people need to make their own health decisions. This is one of the most important ways to reduce the use of substances.

In the meantime, a good system of support and communication, parental encouragement, a supportive environment with educational institutions and friends, reduced level of stress, community involvement through the creation of positive activities as a part of the community, an interesting curriculum with goals for overall development, strict law enforcement to curb drug use in society, etc. In addition to all of this, it is crucial to act quickly when dangerous behaviour shows early warning signs in order to stop further drug use and abuse. Overall, combating the underlying causes of substance addiction among young people in India would necessitate a multifaceted strategy that includes prevention, education, and access to assistance and treatment. To end on a hopeful note, I’ll say that recovery from addiction is frequently aided by a combination of continued support, treatment, and medical intervention.