

A quiet epidemic: The increasing danger of drug abuse in India

Shubham Shubhashish¹, Dr. Gurshaminder Singh², Kartikay Sharma¹

¹ Department of Agricultural Sciences, University Institute of Agricultural Sciences (UIAS), Chandigarh University, Mohali, Punjab, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Sciences, University Institute of Agricultural Sciences (UIAS), Chandigarh University, Mohali, Punjab, India

Abstract

"Drug addiction is a brain disease that causes individuals to lose control over their substance use, leading to a variety of negative outcomes ^[1]. Drug addiction is a grave problem due to its role in causing millions of deaths annually across the globe. Substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine are also classified as drugs. Drug addiction can begin with casual or experimental drug use after which some people start using it frequently. For some people, drug addiction may begin when they are prescribed certain drug by doctors and later they start misuse of prescribed medication (also known as drug abuse) The susceptibility to addiction varies among substances. Opioid analgesics, in comparison to others exhibit a heightened propensity to induce addiction. As a person continues to use the drug, he/she may develop tolerance, meaning they will need larger doses to get the same effect. This can lead to dependence, where person feels like they need the drug to function normally. Quitting can be difficult and may result in unpleasant withdrawal symptoms.

Keywords: Drug addiction, withdrawal symptoms, socio-economic issues, mental health, drug trafficking

Introduction

Drug addiction is a serious retrogressing disease related to brain which compels a person for continuous use of drugs in a reckless manner ^[1]. Drug addiction has become a very serious issue in India and in the world. Drug addiction leads to various socio-economic issues like damaging of body organs, relationship issues, behavioral changes, financial issues, chronic health issues and even death of the individual. The objective of this review paper is to investigate the scope of the issue, identify the factors that contribute to drug abuse, and discuss the social, health, and economic implications.

Drug addiction in India-present situation and patterns

Substance abuse, or drug abuse, has become a global threat.

Drug addiction is a worldwide problem that affects every region of the globe. Drug misuse has become a major issue that is negatively impacting the nation's physical and socio-economic well-being. It has a significant impact on public health in many spheres of society. In India, the drug addiction epidemic among the younger population has taken concerning forms. The pressure and stress caused due to modern lifestyle has increased a person's susceptibility to drug abuse issues. Alcohol and drug addiction impacts not just the addict but also their family and the society.

According to the Ministry's 2018 National Survey on the Amount and Pattern of Substance Use in India by NDDTC, AIIMS ^[2], the prevalence (in percentage terms) of adults and children who now use different psychoactive substances is shown through pie charts below:-

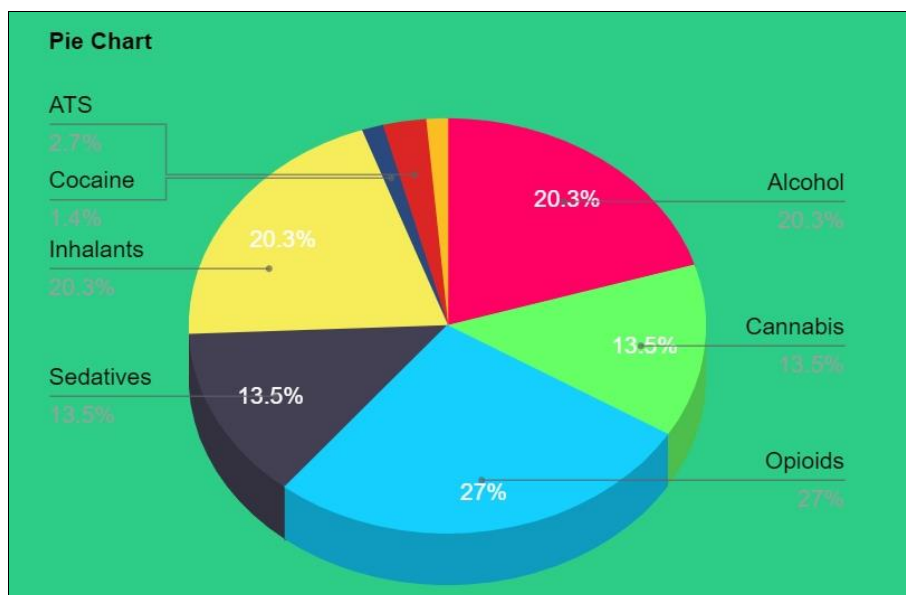


Fig 1: Children & adolescents (10-17 years) involved in drug abuse

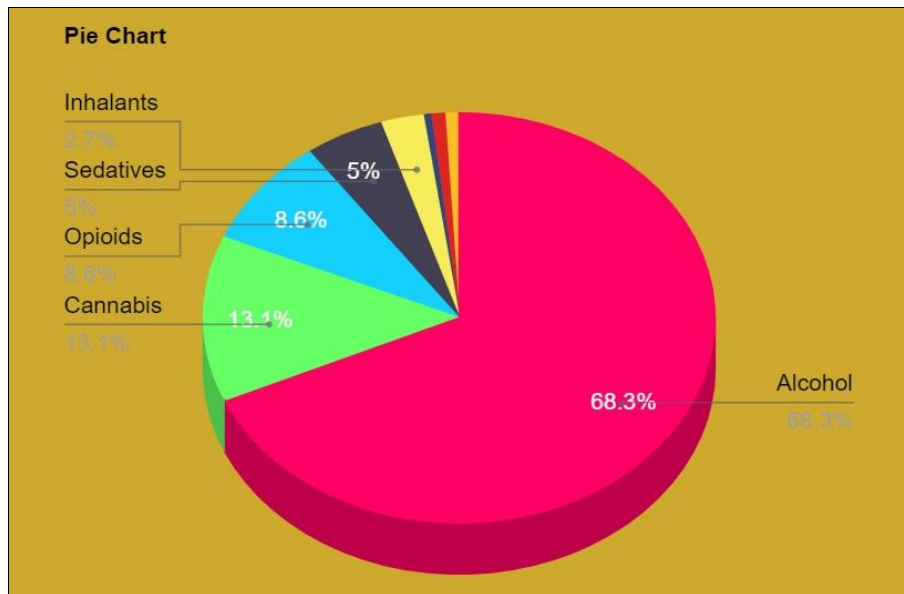


Fig 2: Adults (18-75 years) involved in drug abuse

Symptoms and causes of drug abuse

Drug addiction and dependence symptoms are caused by drug abuse. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders states that drug and substance abuse is often recurrent and can have serious short- and long-term effects on the body. In addition to the physical harm, there can also be social harm if the person struggles to maintain family ties and doesn't fulfill their obligations in life. Addiction to drugs can also result in unsafe and risky behaviors.

Symptoms of drug addiction [3]

1. A continuous urge to take drugs several times in a day
2. Increase in the amount of drugs consumed over time to get the same desired effect.
3. Getting involved in improper and illegal activities like stealing money to maintain a continuous supply of drugs when a person is not able to afford it.
4. Not able to shoulder the responsibilities
5. Person starts cutting off from the society.

Causes of drug addiction [4]

1. Socio-economic factors

- Poor financial issues
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Lack of education and unawareness regarding ill effects of drug abuse

2. Physiological factors

- Stressful situations in life
- Poor mental health

3. Cultural factors

- Influence from peers
- Ancestral background

4. Ease of availability

One of the factors that has contributed to the rise in drug abuse in recent decades is the availability of drugs or the ease of access to them. When drugs are easily accessible, the likelihood of individuals experimenting with them and developing an addiction is higher. Therefore, the availability of medications is a concern that needs urgent focus in order

to take steps to reduce or remove potential adverse outcomes.

Effects and Influence of drug abuse [4]

1. Ill impact on health

- Increased chances of getting infected with chronic diseases like AIDS, Cancer etc.
- Deterioration of physical and mental health

2. Social impact

- Discord at home
- Increase in crime rates
- Increase in cases of domestic violence
- Loss of values and morale in society

3. Economic impact

- Higher expenses for medical care
- Negative effect on work ultimately leading to poor financial condition

Government actions and interventions for controlling drug abuse [5]

Various schemes and programs have been initiated by the government of India to control drug abuse in India. Few of the schemes are:-

1. National action plan for drug demand reduction

- The Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has started the execution of a National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR) for the years 2018-2025.
- The Plan focuses on reducing the negative impacts of drug abuse by using a comprehensive approach that includes educating, treating addiction, and rehabilitating both individuals and their families.
- It centers on education for prevention, raising awareness, identifying, counseling, treating, and rehabilitating drug-dependent individuals, as well as training service providers through partnerships between Central and State Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations.

2. **Nasha mukt bharat abhiyan**

The Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, initiated by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment in 2020, is a leading effort to address the widespread problem of substance abuse in India. This ground-breaking initiative led by the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment serves as a guiding light in the effort to build a society liberated from the grip of addiction. The Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan aims to empower individuals to escape drug dependency through a holistic approach including awareness programs, counseling services, and capacity building.

3. **A drug abuse helpline number, 1800-11-0031, is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to assist those struggling with addiction**^[6]

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has established a 24x7 toll-free helpline (1800-11-0031) to offer assistance, therapy, and advice to those facing drug addiction issues, both individuals and families.

Difficulties in dealing with drug Abuse^[7]

1. Pharmaceutical drugs that are approved for use according to the law

Tobacco is often viewed as a gateway drug that children use to experiment with, making it a significant issue.

2. Drug trafficking

Drug trafficking occurs in states such as Punjab, Assam, and West Bengal, which have borders with neighboring countries which is a very big threat and challenge in controlling the drug abuse.

3. Absence of rehabilitation facilities

Rehabilitation centers are in short supply. Additionally, non-governmental organizations running rehabilitation facilities in the nation have not been successful in delivering the necessary type of care and counseling.

Conclusion

Drug addiction is a multifaceted and widespread problem that greatly affects individuals, families, and society in its entirety. It poses a dual threat to society, both in terms of public health and socio-economic impacts, causing significant health issues, family breakdowns, criminal activity, and financial insecurity. Elements like socio-economic status, mental strain, cultural impacts, and accessible drugs are all playing a role in the increasing epidemic. Even with initiatives such as NAPDDR and Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, the government still faces challenges in addressing underlying causes and offering sufficient rehabilitation services. It is essential to have comprehensive strategies that encompass awareness, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation in order to effectively address drug addiction. It is crucial for the government, healthcare providers, schools, and communities to work together in order to establish a drug-free society and protect future generations from the negative impacts of substance abuse.

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