

# India's Rising Tide: Drug Abuse Among Youth

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## Introduction

Beneath the vibrant colours and bustling energy of India, a silent storm is brewing. This storm isn't one of nature's fury, but one born of despair and hopelessness. It is the rising tide of drug abuse sweeping across the nation, engulfing the very souls of its youth – India's future.

Imagine 356 million young minds, brimming with potential, not chasing dreams but falling prey to the suffocating darkness of addiction. This isn't a mere statistic; it's a human tragedy unfolding in every corner of the country, from the sprawling megacities to the remote villages nestled in the lap of the Himalayas. Children, once cherished as beacons of hope, are now experimenting with drugs at alarmingly young ages, lured by their siren song of escape from harsh realities.

The World Health Organization paints a grim picture: globally, 25-90% of street children are trapped in this vicious cycle, and India grapples with its own staggering burden. An estimated 40-70% of the nation's 18 million homeless children fight the relentless battle against addiction. The numbers stagger the mind, painting a chilling portrait of a generation teetering on the precipice.<sup>1</sup>

But addiction isn't a faceless monster; it's a story etched in the tears of mothers, the broken spirits of fathers, and the shattered dreams of families. It is the empty chairs at dinner tables, the stolen futures, and the lives lost before they even truly begin. The consequences of addiction reach far beyond the individual, poisoning the very fabric of society and jeopardizing the future of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> World Drug Report 2000, (2001), <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210040983/read> (last visited May 14, 2024).

Yet, within this darkness, glimmers of hope flicker. This paper delves into the heart of the crisis, dissecting the complex web of factors – genetic predispositions, crushing poverty, dysfunctional families, peer pressure, and the lack of adequate education and opportunities – that push children towards drugs. It analyzes the devastating consequences on their physical and mental health, their education, and ultimately, their ability to contribute to society.

But this isn't just a chronicle of despair; it's a call to action, a clarion cry to reclaim our future. We'll explore evidence-based strategies and interventions that can stem the tide of this epidemic. From prevention programs rooted in community engagement to robust rehabilitation centers with holistic care, we'll delve into solutions that offer lifelines to those drowning in addiction.

This is not just a research paper; it's a manifesto for change, a rallying cry for every citizen, every leader, every family to come together and fight for the future of our youth. It's a call to understand, to intervene, and to rewrite the narrative of a generation lost to drugs.

Let us break the chains of stigma, shatter the walls of apathy, and empower communities to become bastions of hope and support. Let us nurture dreams instead of despair, offer opportunities instead of oblivion, and build a tomorrow where every child can stand tall, free from the clutches of addiction, and paint their own vibrant portrait on the canvas of India's future.

The time for action is now. This is our fight, our responsibility, and ultimately, our shared victory. Let us answer the call, reclaim our future, and ensure that every young life thrives, not just survives, in the vibrant tapestry of India.

This revised intro elaborates on the emotional impact of the issue, delves deeper into the consequences of addiction, and adds a stronger call to action. It uses evocative language and imagery to connect with the reader and emphasizes the collective responsibility to address this crisis.

## **Literature Review**

Extensive research on child substance abuse has been conducted over the years; however, a notable gap exists in the Indian context, necessitating further exploration. Scholars and physicians emphasize the need to understand the parallels and discrepancies between drug use disorders in teenagers and other psychiatric conditions. While numerous findings highlight teenage substance use and associated risk factors, inconsistencies in these findings warrant a

closer examination. Although limited studies have been conducted in India, a comprehensive analysis of existing research can unveil causative factors and contribute to the development of relevant studies and strategies.

The multifaceted epidemic of drug abuse in Indian children has reached alarming proportions, influenced by shifting cultures, escalating economic pressures, poverty, ignorance, displacement, and child labour.<sup>2</sup> A global perspective reveals a bleak scenario, with the drug trade emerging as the third-largest industry globally, boasting a turnover of approximately \$500 billion—trailing only behind the petroleum and arms trade. An estimated 190 million people worldwide use some form of drugs.<sup>3</sup> The World Medicine Survey highlights the extensive scope of drug trade and narcotics trafficking, with figures reaching a staggering \$322 billion. The annual marketing value of Afghan Opium alone amounts to \$61 billion, and Western Africa registers a demand for cocaine totaling about \$85 million. The 2011 World Summit witnessed UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon declaring war on the illegal drug trade, emphasizing the need for awareness about the devastating impact of drugs on societies.<sup>4</sup>

The physical consequences of opioid addiction in youth are profound, encompassing physical discomfort, shivering, drowsiness, decreased breathing rates, and increased heart rates. The negative consequences of these effects manifest in a range of behavioural problems, such as frequent absences, dropping out of school, underachievement in academics, aggressive behaviour, bullying, repressed anger, disapproval, exclusion, isolation, dishonesty, theft, deceit, skipping classes, low self-worth, depression, shame, feelings of powerlessness, fear of being abandoned, and persistent manipulation. These defensive behaviours are displayed both at school and in the home environment.<sup>5</sup>

The interplay of family dynamics significantly influences the development of drug misuse issues in children. The "Drug Abuse and Addiction" report<sup>6</sup> underscores the significant impact of the family and home environment, particularly throughout childhood, as a pivotal determinant. Parents or older family members engaging in drug abuse or illegal activities

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<sup>2</sup> Syed Qadri et al., *Prevalence and Pattern of Substance Abuse among School Children in Northern India: A Rapid Assessment Study*, 2 INT. J. MED. SCI. PUBLIC HEALTH 273 (2013).

<sup>3</sup> OXFORD HANDBOOK OF CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS, (2023), <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/45764> (last visited May 14, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> N V Ramesh, *Awake! Keep Away from the Magnetic Clutches of Drug Addiction*, 3 (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Golden M Millar & Lana Stermac, *Substance Abuse and Childhood Maltreatment*, 19 J. SUBST. ABUSE TREAT. 175 (2000).

<sup>6</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Drug Misuse and Addiction* | National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), (--), <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drug-misuse-addiction> (last visited May 14, 2024).

significantly elevate the likelihood of children developing substance abuse issues. Comparable findings by Millar & Stermac<sup>7</sup> highlight the severe impact of family or parental substance abuse on children, with a staggering 66% of children raised by abusive parents experiencing physical assault or family violence, and 26% regularly subjected to sexual abuse. Disturbingly, physical or sexual assault occurs daily in one-third of households with substance abuse issues. The adverse effects on the offspring of drug-addicted parents begin in the womb, with pregnant women using alcohol contributing to the birth of children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).<sup>8</sup>

According to a research undertaken by the National Council on alcoholism and opioid use, around 5,000 newborns are born annually with significant damage resulting from fetal alcohol syndrome, while an additional 35,000 babies are born with less severe manifestations of the illness.<sup>9</sup> Cocaine worsens the situation by generating issues in the brain, DNA, and the passing down of traits from one generation to another, highlighting the need to urgently tackle drug addiction among children worldwide.

This literature review highlights the pressing need for extensive research, intervention programs, and awareness campaigns to combat the epidemic of substance abuse among children in India and globally. The interconnected factors influencing substance abuse necessitate a holistic approach to understanding and addressing this complex issue.

## **Adverse Consequences of Substance Abuse in Children**

The adverse effects of drug addiction in children have wide-ranging implications that go beyond acute health consequences, affecting several aspects of society, education, and family dynamics. The burgeoning prevalence of substance abuse in India necessitates a nuanced comprehension of the intricate challenges it imposes on the well-being and future prospects of children.

In the educational domain, the adverse effects manifest in academic decline, absenteeism, and an alarming rise in school dropouts. Cognitive impairments resulting from substance addiction cast a shadow on learning and academic performance, while the correlation between substance abuse and delinquent behavior compounds the challenges, potentially subjecting children to legal consequences, expulsion, or exclusion from educational institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> Millar and Stermac, *supra* note 5.

<sup>8</sup> Tetyana Parsons, *Alcoholism and Its Effect on the Family* (2003).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

The physical toll of substance abuse is marked by shivering, pain, altered respiratory and heart rates, contributing to absenteeism and compromised academic performance. Moreover, the susceptibility of youngsters who abuse substances to bloodborne and sexually transmitted illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis, highlights the significant public health consequences of this widespread problem.

Psychologically, substance abuse not only alters cognitive function but also significantly impacts mental health. Children in the throes of addiction grapple with loneliness, guilt, depression, and a sense of helplessness. The psychological symptoms, including anxiety and illusions, contribute to a self-destructive cycle, hindering healthy emotional development.

The familial repercussions are profound, extending beyond the individual child to impact the family unit. Children with parents or family members engaged in substance abuse face an elevated risk of abuse, neglect, and exposure to a dysfunctional family environment. The home environment plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's attitudes towards substance use, with parental modeling and attitudes significantly influencing the likelihood of the child developing similar behaviors.

Socially and environmentally, substance abuse among children is entwined with socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, and homelessness. Media influences, peer pressure, and evolving cultural norms further contribute to the vulnerability of children, necessitating interventions such as media literacy programs and community initiatives.

To address these multifaceted challenges, a comprehensive strategy is imperative. Educational institutions and communities must collaborate to implement prevention programs, emphasizing resilience, coping skills, and positive decision-making. Early intervention through counseling and mental health services is essential to identify and address substance abuse issues in their nascent stages. Strengthening family support systems and providing resources for parents grappling with substance abuse is crucial to break the cycle of intergenerational addiction.

Legal measures targeting drug trafficking and peddling, especially in areas frequented by children, are paramount. Advocacy for policies focusing on the protection of children, rehabilitation, and creating a supportive legal framework is imperative to address the systemic challenges contributing to substance abuse.

Nevertheless, the detrimental consequences of drug addiction among adolescents in India are complex and interrelated. A holistic approach that encompasses educational, physical,

psychological, familial, social, and environmental dimensions is indispensable to mitigate the impact and safeguard the well-being and future of the vulnerable youth ensnared in the web of substance abuse.

### **Antecedents of drug use initiation in childhood**

It is crucial to have a thorough grasp of the many variables that contribute to drug misuse among adolescents in India in order to effectively avoid it. This exploration delves into the multifaceted roles of peers, genetics, family, socioeconomic factors, and psycho-social dynamics, unraveling the intricate interconnections that shape vulnerability to substance abuse. Acknowledging the nuanced nature of this issue, it is evident that a singular approach is insufficient. Tailoring preventive strategies to address each facet is crucial. Collaborative efforts from education, healthcare, communities, and policy advocacy are needed to create a resilient support system, offering effective solutions for sustained impact on the well-being and future of vulnerable youth trapped in substance abuse.

#### **Peer Influence:**

Understanding the role of friends, peers, and associates in the context of substance abuse among children reveals a complex interplay of social dynamics. The report on Drug Abuse and Addiction<sup>10</sup> underscores the increasing strength of influence that friends and acquaintances exert during childhood, a crucial period in shaping behavioral patterns. Notably, even children without apparent risk factors can be swayed to try substance use for the first time under the influence of substance-abusing peers.

The correlation between academic failure, poor social skills, and the heightened risk of substance abuse further emphasizes the intricate relationship between a child's social and educational environments. Studies indicate that children with early behavioral problems not only face challenges in their academic pursuits but also experience rejection from their pre-social peers. This rejection, in turn, may lead them to form connections with deviant peers, setting the stage for engagement in maladjusted behaviors such as truancy, substance use, and, in extreme cases, violent behavior, as highlighted by research conducted by Bradshaw, Brennan, McNeely<sup>11</sup>, and Patterson, De Baryshe, Ramsey<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Abuse, *supra* note 6.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine P Bradshaw, Lindsey M O'Brennan & Clea A McNeely, *Core Competencies and the Prevention of School Failure and Early School Leaving*, 2008 NEW DIR. CHILD ADOLESC. DEV. 19 (2008).

<sup>12</sup> G R Patterson, Barbara D DeBaryshe & Elizabeth Ramsey, *A Developmental Perspective on Antisocial Behavior*, 44 AM. PSYCHOL. 329 (1989).

A noteworthy study involving a sample of 1023 children emphasizes the pivotal role of parental monitoring in mitigating the influence of peer pressure and subsequently reducing the risk of substance abuse. The findings suggest that a robust system of parental monitoring can strengthen a child's resistance to peer pressure, acting as a protective factor against the allure of substance use.<sup>13</sup> This underscores the importance of family involvement and guidance in shaping a child's ability to navigate peer influences and make informed decisions regarding substance use.

Moreover, the interconnected nature of these influences becomes apparent as academic difficulties, behavioral problems, and parental monitoring collectively contribute to the complex web of factors influencing a child's vulnerability to substance abuse. The need for comprehensive strategies that address both individual and environmental factors is evident, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts from educational institutions, families, and communities to create a supportive framework that steers children away from the risks associated with substance abuse.

#### Genetics and Environment:

The role of genetics in contributing to the complex issue of substance abuse among children unveils a multifaceted interplay between environmental exposures and genetic components. Prescott and Kendler<sup>14</sup> conducted a pivotal study involving 9000 twins, shedding light on the genetic underpinnings of addiction. The study emphasized the role of nuclear genes in shaping susceptibility to addiction, particularly in the context of early alcohol use. Their findings revealed that individuals with a genetic predisposition were more likely to become carriers of addiction, with a significant association between early alcohol use and the risk of alcoholism that was entirely mediated by genetic factors.

However, the intricate relationship between genetics and environmental factors complicates the understanding of substance abuse etiology. A separate research conducted on twins found that social interaction and the level of reliance between twins can impact the degree of resemblance between them. This study revealed that twins who are more co-dependent tend to have less genetic effects and more environmental influences.<sup>15</sup> In environments characterized

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<sup>13</sup> Natalie Guillén et al., *Youth Alcohol Drinking Behavior: Associated Risk and Protective Factors*, 6 REV. IBEROAM. PSICOL. SALUD 53 (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Carol A Prescott & Kenneth S Kendler, *Age at First Drink and Risk for Alcoholism*, 23 ALCOHOL. CLIN. EXP. RES. 101 (1999).

<sup>15</sup> R J Rose et al., *Social Contact and Sibling Similarity: Facts, Issues, and Red Herrings*, 20 BEHAV. GENET. 763 (1990).

by lower parental monitoring, genetic influences on child substance abuse are accentuated, creating a scenario where both genetic predisposition and environmental factors contribute to the problem.

Navigating the relative importance and contribution of genetic and environmental factors remains challenging, yet poor coping skills emerge as an additional facet in understanding child substance abuse. Multiple studies support the notion that, alongside genetic predisposition, the inability to cope effectively contributes to the development of substance abuse issues. An extensive inquiry, which included 861 pairs of identical twins and 653 pairs of fraternal twins, revealed the complex correlation between genetics and addiction. The study revealed a strong correlation between alcohol addiction in one identical twin and a considerably elevated probability of addiction in the other sibling. Conversely, in the case of fraternal twins, the addiction of one twin did not necessarily lead to addiction in the other.<sup>16</sup> The study ascribed 50-60 percent of addiction to hereditary variables, emphasizing the significant influence of heredity on the vulnerability to substance misuse.

Considering these factors, the involvement of genetics in drug misuse among children is an intricate interaction between hereditary inclination and environmental impacts. Studies point to the significant contribution of genetic factors, particularly in early alcohol use, but also acknowledge the moderating role of environmental conditions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in developing targeted interventions that consider both genetic vulnerabilities and the environmental context, offering a nuanced approach to addressing and preventing substance abuse in children.

#### Family Influences:

The influence of family plays a crucial part in developing the attitudes, values, and behaviors of children, which has a long-lasting impact on their learning and development. A secure and nurturing family environment fosters the development of positive habits and encourages a healthy lifestyle. Conversely, children raised in environments lacking appropriate care, nurturing, and family education may be susceptible to engaging in detrimental behaviours, with substance abuse becoming one of the potential consequences.

Research findings emphasize the substantial influence parents exert on their children. Rossow<sup>17</sup> highlights that families possess a powerful capacity to shape children's behaviour, emphasizing

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<sup>16</sup> Prescott and Kendler, *supra* note 14.

<sup>17</sup> Ingeborg Rossow, *Suicide, Violence and Child Abuse: A Review of the Impact of Alcohol Consumption on Social Problems*, 27 CONTEMP. DRUG PROBL. 397 (2000).



the role of parental influence in deterring or fostering substance abuse. Studies, such as those conducted by Conrad, Flay, and Hill<sup>18</sup>, reveal that children of smoking parents are twice as likely to become smokers themselves, underscoring the impact of parental behaviour on the choices of their offspring.

The absence of a stable home life, coupled with factors like separation, homelessness, or being a child of divorced parents, can contribute to an environment conducive to substance abuse. Boomsma, de Geus, van Baal, and Koopmans<sup>19</sup> suggest that the lack of structure in a home environment may contribute to children resorting to substance abuse as a coping mechanism.

To further underscore the role of family in substance abuse, researchers like Prescott and Kendler<sup>20</sup> delved into a comprehensive study involving individuals diagnosed with drug or alcohol addiction. Their research uncovered a strong correlation: if a parent had a drug abuse issue or addiction, the kid had an eightfold higher probability of developing substance misuse. Significantly, the existence of step-parents and mistreatment by family members have been identified as noteworthy risk factors and predictors of drug usage in youngsters.<sup>21&22</sup>

Analysing the available research outcomes suggests that children with family members, including parents and siblings, engaged in alcohol or substance abuse are particularly vulnerable. The influence of peers, however, does not easily diminish in the face of family dynamics. Peer groups tend to exert a strong influence during the formative years of children, sometimes surpassing that of parents. Friends, as Rossow<sup>23</sup> points out, often exhibit more similarity in substance abuse behaviours than in other activities or attitudes, potentially making peer influence more potent than that of parents.

The relationship between parental and peer influences is intricate, and certain research propose that parents who uphold conventional supervisory responsibilities can alleviate the influence of peer groups on children's views towards substance usage. The correlation between the

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<sup>18</sup> Karen M Conrad, Brian R Flay & David Hill, *Why Children Start Smoking Cigarettes: Predictors of Onset*, 87 ADDICTION 1711 (1992).

<sup>19</sup> D I Boomsma et al., *A Religious Upbringing Reduces the Influence of Genetic Factors on Disinhibition: Evidence for Interaction between Genotype and Environment on Personality*, 2 TWIN RES. 115 (1999).

<sup>20</sup> Prescott and Kendler, *supra* note 14.

<sup>21</sup> Karen A Randolph, *The Dynamic Nature of Risk Factors for Substance Use among Adolescents*, 13 J. CHILD ADOLESC. SUBST. ABUSE 33 (2004).

<sup>22</sup> F. Islam et al., *Substance Abuse amongst the Street Children in Guwahati City, Assam*, 4 ANNALS OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES RESEARCH 233 (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Rossow, *supra* note 17.

impact of peers and parental influences becomes evident, as the highest rates of substance misuse are reported in children whose parents and friends are themselves substance abusers.<sup>24</sup> In conclusion, the role of family influences on substance-abusing children is intricate and multifaceted. While parents wield significant power in shaping their children's behaviors, the interplay between family dynamics and peer influences cannot be understated. A comprehensive understanding of these factors is essential for designing effective prevention and intervention strategies to safeguard the well-being of children caught in the web of substance abuse.

#### Socioeconomic Factors:

The influence of socioeconomic circumstances on children's substance misuse is a complex issue that requires a detailed analysis from several viewpoints. A comprehensive review of the literature underscores the intricate connections between socioeconomic elements and the prevalence of substance abuse among children in India. Illiteracy emerges as a significant factor, hindering educational opportunities and potentially pushing children towards the harsh realities of street life. Living in joint families or broken families amplifies the vulnerability of children, creating an environment where they might find themselves on the streets, exposed to various risks.

The complex interplay of poverty, physical abuse, and substance abuse further exacerbates the predicament faced by children. Rapid industrialization and urbanization, coupled with changing lifestyles marked by both parents working long hours, contribute to an environment where children struggle for survival. The mounting pressures of poverty, coupled with a population explosion, amplify the challenges faced by vulnerable youth. Amidst the battle for survival, several youngsters are compelled to enter the grim realm of substance trafficking, trade, and misuse as a method of dealing with or ensuring their survival.

It is crucial to recognize that socioeconomic factors are not isolated contributors but interconnected elements that create a breeding ground for the complex issue of substance abuse among children. Addressing this problem requires a holistic approach that encompasses educational initiatives, family support, community interventions, and policies aimed at mitigating the root causes embedded in the socioeconomic fabric. Only through a

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<sup>24</sup> Vijay D Kautilya, K V Sathish & Shruti Prabhat Hegde, "*Study of Substance Abuse among Street Children near Bangalore Medical College, Bangalore*," 2 INDIAN J. FORENSIC COMMUNITY MED. 220 (2015).

comprehensive strategy can society hope to break the cycle that entangles the future of these children in the web of substance abuse.

#### Psycho-Social Factors and Related Risk Factors:

The interplay between gender and alcohol and substance misuse is a complex and intricate part of the larger issue. In India, societal norms historically dictated that the consumption of substances like tobacco and alcohol was socially acceptable for males but frowned upon for females.<sup>25</sup> Cultural practices, family rituals, festivals, and celebrations often involved the common use of these substances among male members, contributing to their increased exposure and acceptance. Consequently, males became more vulnerable to substance addiction. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been a significant shift, as studies have documented an increasing trend of 'women drug addiction' in India.<sup>26</sup>

The challenges faced by female children caught in the web of substance abuse are particularly daunting. A girl who has a close friend who smokes is far more likely to start smoking herself, highlighting the strong influence that peers have on moulding drug use behaviour.<sup>27</sup> Substance abuse, especially among females, leads to alienation from family, friends, and spouses, resulting in profound mental and physical trauma.<sup>28</sup> The societal stigma attached to female substance abuse further exacerbates the challenges faced by these individuals, highlighting the need for empathetic understanding and support from their families, which is often lacking.<sup>29</sup>

Among street children in India, psycho-social factors contributing to substance abuse are prevalent. Peer pressure and the need for experimentation and self-confidence boost are identified as common causes.<sup>30</sup> As children grow older, there is a significant association between increasing age and a higher prevalence of substance abuse, with developmental transitions like puberty and increased independence playing a role.<sup>31</sup> Peer groups, especially

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<sup>25</sup> Lisa Sarangi, Himanshu P Acharya & Om P Panigrahi, *Substance Abuse among Adolescents in Urban Slums of Sambalpur*, 33 INDIAN J. COMMUNITY MED. 265 (2008).

<sup>26</sup> Bhawani Singh Rathore Mr, Uma Joshi Dr & Aditya Pareek Ms, *Substance Abuse among Children: A Rising Problem in India*, 5 INT. J. IND. PSYCHOL. (2017).

<sup>27</sup> K S Hudmon et al., *Eating Orientation, Postcessation Weight Gain, and Continued Abstinence among Female Smokers Receiving an Unsolicited Smoking Cessation Intervention*, 18 HEALTH PSYCHOL. 29 (1999).

<sup>28</sup> Shelly F. Greenfield et al., *Substance Abuse in Women*, 33 PSYCHIATRIC CLINICS 339 (2010).

<sup>29</sup> Rathore, Joshi, and Pareek, *supra* note 26.

<sup>30</sup> Abhay M Gaidhane et al., *Substance Abuse among Street Children in Mumbai*, 3 VULNERABLE CHILD. YOUTH STUD. 42 (2008).

<sup>31</sup> Dechenla Tsering & Ranabir Pal, *Role of Family and Peers in Initiation and Continuation of Substance Use*, 31 INDIAN J. PSYCHOL. MED. 30 (2009).

throughout adolescence, have a significant impact, as tobacco use frequently begins when individuals are in the presence of peers who smoke.<sup>32</sup>

Preventive strategies for combating substance abuse in children must be multifaceted, considering the complex interplay of psycho-social factors, gender dynamics, and peer influence. Educational programs targeting different age groups, family interventions, and community support initiatives are essential components of a comprehensive approach. Additionally, fostering a supportive environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by female children in the context of substance abuse is crucial. Overall, recognizing the diverse factors contributing to substance abuse and tailoring preventive measures accordingly is vital for safeguarding the health and performance of children caught in this complex issue.

The problem of drug misuse among youngsters in India is a complex one with deep links. The exploration of the roles played by peers, genetics, family, socioeconomic factors, and psycho-social dynamics unravels the complexity inherent in the genesis and perpetuation of this problem. It is evident that a singular, isolated approach would be inadequate to address the diverse influences shaping children's susceptibility to substance abuse. Instead, preventive strategies must be meticulously crafted, considering the nuanced interplay of these factors. Tailoring interventions to each facet ensures a comprehensive and holistic approach, essential for safeguarding the well-being and securing the future of the vulnerable youth ensnared in the intricate web of substance abuse. This calls for collaborative efforts from various sectors, including education, healthcare, communities, and policy advocacy, to create a resilient support system that addresses the root causes and provides effective solutions for a sustainable impact.

### **Proactive interventions for children at risk of substance abuse**

When developing successful preventative methods to address substance misuse in children, it is essential to utilize a comprehensive and cooperative strategy that includes several stakeholders. One fundamental aspect of this approach is the implementation of a structured and constructive daily schedule for children. This schedule should incorporate diverse activities such as sports, co-curricular engagements, brain games, and group interactions. Engaging children in such meaningful pursuits not only aids in the development of positive habits but also keeps them actively occupied, reducing the likelihood of falling into the trap of substance abuse.

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<sup>32</sup> W J Millar & L Hunter, *The Relationship between Socioeconomic Status and Household Smoking Patterns in Canada*, 5 AM. J. HEALTH PROMOT. 36 (1990).

Schools emerge as central players in this collaborative effort. They can significantly contribute to prevention by actively monitoring students' academic performance, behavior, and attendance. The timely identification of any deviations or signs of substance abuse is vital. In cases of suspicion, schools should promptly inform parents and take appropriate actions to address the issue. This collaboration between educational institutions and parents forms a critical link in the chain of preventive measures, ensuring a unified front against substance abuse.

Parents and caretakers are at the forefront of this preventive initiative. Their active involvement is paramount, requiring a constant awareness of their children's interests, peer associations, and daily activities. Attending parents' meetings becomes a valuable opportunity to stay informed about the child's educational environment. Moreover, fostering open communication channels between parents and children is instrumental in creating an environment where concerns and issues can be discussed openly. By actively participating in their children's lives, parents contribute significantly to the early detection and prevention of substance abuse.

Continuing the collaborative effort, the next steps involve instilling positive self-esteem and confidence in children. Supportive relationships with teachers, friends, and family members play a vital role in shaping a child's mindset towards healthy habits. In instances where parents have faced substance abuse challenges, sharing these experiences can serve as a powerful deterrent, illustrating the adverse effects of such behavior. By being positive role models, parents can influence their children's attitudes towards safe practices, including their stance on alcohol, cigarettes, and medications.

To fortify these preventive strategies, communities need to actively participate in taking a stand against the availability and promotion of substances. By refraining from buying and requesting drugs and promptly reporting any suspicious activities to law enforcement, communities contribute to creating a safer environment for children. In addition, it is crucial for governments to have a central role in strategizing awareness campaigns, including substance addiction education into school curriculums, and enforcing stringent measures to regulate the availability and demand of substances.

In addition to creating a supportive environment, it is essential to recognize the significance of emotional well-being for children grappling with substance abuse. A nurturing atmosphere that focuses on bolstering self-esteem and instilling confidence is pivotal in guiding them towards healthier choices. The collaboration between parents, teachers, and friends becomes paramount

in providing the necessary emotional support. Open communication channels should be maintained, allowing these children to express themselves freely, while the adults involved should exercise patience, understanding that overcoming substance abuse is a gradual and time-consuming process. Parents, serving as primary role models, can significantly impact their children's mindset by exemplifying healthy practices and candidly sharing their experiences with substance abuse, underscoring the profound and adverse effects it can have on one's life.

The collective responsibility of communities and society at large plays a crucial role in combating substance abuse. A unified stance against the trading, trafficking, and manipulation of young minds by substances is imperative. Communities must remain vigilant and promptly report any suspicious or illegal activities related to substance abuse. Furthermore, a resolute rejection of substance demands ensures that the demand-side of the issue is actively addressed. This collective effort not only helps in curtailing the availability of substances but also creates an environment where the adverse effects of substance abuse are widely acknowledged and discouraged.

Government initiatives are instrumental in the comprehensive fight against substance abuse. Beyond individual efforts, the government should spearhead awareness campaigns and health advertisements aimed at educating the public about the detrimental consequences of substance abuse. Additionally, integrating substance abuse topics into school curriculums ensures that children are educated about the risks early on. Enforcing strict legal measures to curb misleading advertisements and exerting control over the supply and demand of substances are indispensable components of effective governance in this realm. The International Day against Drug misuse and Illicit Trafficking on June 26 is a significant global event that aims to raise awareness and demonstrate the world's dedication to fighting substance misuse, particularly among young people. These events serve as catalysts for change, fostering a sense of responsibility and encouraging proactive measures to address the issue at both individual and societal levels.

Suggestive measures for addressing child substance abuse require a comprehensive approach that integrates prevention programs into existing national initiatives. It is crucial to prioritize the availability of addiction facilities and eliminate barriers for teen opioid users. In doing so, the focus should extend beyond individual factors and encompass various environments where children may be at risk, including schools and neighborhoods. Considering the diverse risk

factors, such as working children and those out of school, is essential for crafting effective prevention strategies.

In the realm of education, a proactive system is needed to facilitate early detection and intervention. This entails granting school-going children who engage in substance abuse with access to therapeutic therapy, as well as guaranteeing the presence of at least one full-time certified psychologist in schools. The training of school counsellors is paramount, enabling them to recognize and treat children at risk. Vocational training centers emerge as key intervention points, offering life skills-based curricula and counselling programs to address the needs of at-risk children, especially those who may be part or full-time employees.

Advanced recovery facilities play a crucial role in providing necessary support for children using drugs. Sensitizing general practitioners and paediatricians to the challenges associated with child substance abuse is essential for early detection and intervention. Adequate budget allocations for prevention measures are imperative to sustain these initiatives on a large scale. The collaboration between various departments, such as the Excise Department, Narcotic Regulation Bureau, and Drug Controller General of India, is necessary to ensure effective action in curbing the availability of substances, particularly near schools and residential areas.

In the broader context, it is vital to raise awareness about child drug use in India among state governments and key stakeholders. Dispelling the misconception that substance abuse is solely a 'big-city phenomenon' is essential, as highlighted by national analyses. To address child substance abuse comprehensively, substantial budgetary appropriations must be made to support large-scale prevention measures and specialist programs. It is also crucial to integrate information, awareness, and preventive measures related to child/adolescent drug use with broader adolescent health initiatives, such as reproductive health and mental health. This holistic approach ensures a more effective and sustained effort in combatting child substance abuse in India.

## **Legislations and Policies**

The Government of India has entrusted two major ministries, namely the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoH&FW),<sup>33</sup> with the responsibility of providing treatment services. A notable concern arises

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<sup>33</sup> Kumar SM. Rapid Assessment Survey of Drug Abuse in India. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India and United Nations office on Drugs and Crime - Google Search, (2022), <https://www.google.com/search?q=Kumar+SM.+Rapid+Assessment+Survey+of+Drug+Abuse+in+India.+Mini>

from the fact that the flagship treatment programs initiated by these ministries exhibit limited reach and coverage. Only a small proportion of people suffering from alcohol or drug addiction report receiving treatment, either through a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) de-addiction center, such as the Integrated Rehabilitation Centre for Addicts (IRCA) supported by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE), or a Government de-addiction center supported by the Drug De-Addiction program of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOH&FW).

In the realm of substance use prevention in India, both Governmental and Non-Governmental Agencies have implemented various measures. A significant accomplishment includes the recent incorporation of substance use information as a mandatory component in the school curriculum. On the demand side, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has established numerous de-addiction centers, primarily located at the district hospital level, with approximately 130 such centers distributed across the country. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, enacted in 1985 and amended in 1989, is a pivotal legislative step in this regard.

Various efforts have been used to implement innovative reforms in enforcement, legal, and judicial systems. The implementation of capital punishment for drug-related crimes is a notable deterrent. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, has strict measures to address this problem, including a minimum jail sentence of 10 years, which can be increased to 20 years, and a fine ranging from Rs. one lakh to Rs. two lakhs for those found guilty. The amendments to the Act also contain provisions for the confiscation of properties obtained via illegal drug trafficking.

Children involved in drug use, trafficking, and those affected by substance use are recognized as children in need of care and protection under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. Section 77 of this Act outlines rigorous imprisonment for a term extending up to seven years, along with a fine of one lakh rupees, for providing intoxicating substances to any child. Furthermore, section 78 specifies severe penalties for using a child in activities related to intoxicating substances.

India, with a considerable population of children and adolescents (39% of the population aged <18 years), necessitates interventions addressing prevention and treatment in diverse settings.

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stry+of+Social+Justice+and+Empowerment%2C+Government+of+India+and+United+Nations+office+on+Drugs+and+Crime&oq=Kumar+SM.+Rapid+Assessment+Survey+of+Drug+Abuse+in+India.+Ministry+of+Social+Justice+and+Empowerment%2C+Government+of+India+and+United+Nations+office+on+Drugs+and+Crime&aqs=chrome..69i57.445j0j9&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8 (last visited Nov 28, 2022).



These settings include schools, communities, institutions, and healthcare facilities. Preventive efforts should be grounded in evidence-based findings, encompassing universal interventions targeting all children for optimal outcomes. Identifying key stakeholders and enhancing their capacity for appropriate interventions is paramount in addressing this complex issue.

Despite the presence of comprehensive legislative instruments such as the NDPS Act and the Juvenile Justice Act, the operational effectiveness of India's legal framework in addressing child substance abuse remains a significant concern. While the statutes are stringent in terms of penalties, they often fail to differentiate between adult criminal culpability and the rehabilitative needs of minors who are typically victims rather than perpetrators. Many children drawn into substance abuse are either coerced or circumstantially vulnerable due to poverty, homelessness, or lack of adult supervision. In such cases, punitive legal treatment can exacerbate trauma and alienate children from formal systems of care. What is lacking is a child-centric legal orientation—one that integrates restorative justice and therapeutic jurisprudence. A glaring gap exists in the absence of a unified national framework that mandates diversion programs, community-based treatment, and post-rehabilitation integration mechanisms. For instance, while Section 77 and 78 of the JJ Act provide for punishment of adults exploiting children, there is minimal follow-through in terms of prosecution or tracking such offenders. Moreover, frontline police and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) often lack adequate training to identify addiction as a health issue rather than solely a criminal one, resulting in delayed intervention or inappropriate custodial outcomes.

India's obligations under international human rights law further underscore the need for legal reform and capacity building. Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), to which India is a signatory, explicitly mandates states to take "all appropriate measures" to protect children from illicit drug use and prevent their involvement in drug production and trafficking. However, these obligations have not been fully translated into domestic legal mandates with accountability mechanisms. Judicial pronouncements too, while sparse, have emphasized the importance of the "best interest of the child" principle. For example, in *Sheela Barse v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court stressed the need for procedural safeguards and empathetic treatment of children in institutional settings. Yet, such progressive judicial language is seldom operationalized in day-to-day legal proceedings involving substance-affected children. What India urgently needs is a comprehensive National Juvenile

Substance Use Policy that integrates legal, psychological, and educational responses under a common umbrella. This policy should not only empower CWCs, Juvenile Justice Boards, and NGOs but also ensure periodic legal audits, coordinated enforcement across states, and consistent judicial oversight. Further, introducing a mandatory legal curriculum on child protection and addiction management for law enforcement, school counselors, and judicial officers could substantially improve outcomes. In the current scenario, the law exists on paper but fails in practice due to fragmented implementation, lack of inter-agency coordination, and limited awareness. Bridging this gap between legal theory and lived reality is not only a legal necessity but also a moral and constitutional imperative to protect India's most vulnerable citizens—its children.

## **Recommendations**

Tackling the intricate problem of drug use among adolescents necessitates a thorough and cooperative approach. In order to successfully address the issue, it is imperative for important ministries such as the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Home Affairs, Excise Department, Health & Family Welfare, Women and Child Development, Human Resource Development, and Youth Affairs and Sports to collaborate and work together.

Recommendations for Action:

1. Suggest to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare the implementation of consistent recommendations to state governments for creating a strong and effective system. This includes restricting children's access to public areas with liquor and tobacco outlets and displaying prominent boards, emphasizing the punishable nature of providing such substances to children.
2. Urgently enforce the 2012 notification by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, banning the sale of certain products with harmful compositions, to safeguard children.
3. Advocate for strict adherence to the Pharmacy Practice Regulations 2015 and the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, ensuring that pharmacists dispense prescription-based schedule 'X', 'H,' and 'H1' drugs and take strong action against those selling such drugs without prescriptions to children.
4. Issue an advisory to Directors General of Police (DGP) in all states to ensure proper implementation of Sections 77 and 78 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and establish a monitoring mechanism for relevant data.

5. I suggest that the Ministry of Social Justice update current programs to align with the recently passed or modified JJ Act of 2015. The primary objective should be to prioritize preventative and rehabilitative strategies by developing dedicated rehabilitation centers for children and adolescents struggling with substance abuse, in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
6. Advocate for an amendment to the Medical Council of India Act, 1956, directing the reservation of at least 10 beds in government and private hospitals and medical colleges for the treatment of children affected by substance use.
7. Advocate for the Ministry of Human Resource & Development to issue a directive to state education agencies about the enforcement of preventative strategies/programs for drugs and substance abuse in schools.
8. Conduct capacity-building training for Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members, emphasizing the handling of cases involving substance/drug use among children.
9. Conduct training and awareness programs for different stakeholders, such as government officials, community leaders, NGO personnel, teachers, medical professionals, and law enforcement officers, in order to facilitate their understanding and knowledge. It is crucial to collaborate with NISD, NCPCR, and SCPCRs.
10. Periodically monitor the implementation of Sections 77 and 78 of the JJ Act, 2015, through a proper mechanism led by SCPCR/NCPCR.
11. Support the implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure for Care, Protection, and Rehabilitation of children in street situations, emphasizing the need for care, detoxification, treatment, and rehabilitation for children with substance use issues.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the comprehensive exploration of proactive interventions for children at risk of substance abuse reveals the intricate web of factors influencing this societal challenge. The multifaceted approach discussed, involving schools, parents, communities, governments, and various ministries, underscores the collective responsibility required to address this pressing issue. The collaboration between educational institutions and parents, along with active community participation, forms a crucial front in preventing substance abuse among children.

Parents, as primary care givers and role models, play a pivotal role in creating an environment conducive to positive habits. Open communication channels and fostering positive relationships become key components in shaping a child's mindset towards healthy choices. Communities, governments, and society at large must unite against the availability and

promotion of substances, actively contributing to a safer environment for children. Government initiatives, awareness campaigns, and legislative measures serve as essential components in the comprehensive fight against substance abuse.

The discussion further delves into the importance of emotional well-being for children dealing with substance abuse. A nurturing atmosphere, coupled with supportive relationships, is identified as pivotal in guiding them towards healthier choices. The collaboration between parents, teachers, and friends becomes paramount in providing the necessary emotional support. The broader context emphasizes the significance of international events and global commitment to combating substance abuse, portraying it not only as a national but also a critical global issue.

The paper then transitions to specific recommendations for addressing child substance abuse in India. These recommendations span various ministries and departments, outlining actionable steps to strengthen preventive measures, enforce existing regulations, and enhance treatment facilities. The need for a collaborative approach involving key stakeholders is emphasized, underlining the importance of a unified front in combating substance abuse among children.

The legislative landscape is explored, highlighting the role of the government in providing treatment services and implementing measures to deter drug-related offenses. The paper acknowledges both governmental and non-governmental efforts in implementing preventive measures and treatment facilities. The Juvenile Justice Act is discussed as a crucial legal framework recognizing children affected by substance abuse as children in need of care and protection.

Finally, the conclusion underscores the urgency of the issue and the need for national attention and concerted efforts. The call for extensive research, understanding, and preventive action is highlighted, especially in the context of the dearth of studies on substance abuse among children in India. The collaborative efforts across ministries and key stakeholders are deemed essential in developing a unified approach to prevent and treat substance use among children.

To truly transform intent into impact, India must move beyond well-drafted laws and scattered interventions toward building a responsive legal ecosystem grounded in accountability and child protection. While statutes like the NDPS Act and the Juvenile Justice Act offer a foundation, their implementation is often fragmented, lacking both inter-departmental coordination and child-specific sensitivity. Legal mechanisms must be reframed not only to punish offenders but also to facilitate early identification, decriminalized responses, and

rehabilitative pathways for minors caught in the grip of substance abuse. Equally critical is the need for real-time data systems to monitor enforcement, evaluate the reach of de-addiction facilities, and track the reintegration outcomes of affected youth. These must be supported by a robust national policy that ties legal mandates with psychosocial support, inclusive education, and health services. In this context, the role of judiciary and civil society becomes pivotal—not just in adjudication or aid delivery, but in shaping a rights-based narrative around child substance abuse. Ultimately, the safeguarding of our children demands not just legal texts or policy blueprints but a societal commitment to translating these into lived realities. Such a shift would signal not only legal maturity but also our ethical resolve to uphold the dignity and future of every young citizen.

In essence, the paper advocates for a holistic, collaborative, and proactive approach that addresses the root causes of substance abuse among children. By emphasizing the collective responsibility of various stakeholders, the conclusion reinforces the imperative of immediate and coordinated action to safeguard the well-being of children and, by extension, the future of the nation.