



# Drug Abuse among Youth: Causes, Effects and Control

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## Abstract

Drug abuse and drug menace is the illicit, non-medical use of limited number of substances, most of drugs which have the properties of altering the mental state of a being in ways that are considered by social norms and defined by statute to be inappropriate, undesirable, harmful threatening to the life of the user and to the society at large. Alcohol, heroin, cocaine, opium, marijuana, are some of the drugs abused.

Generally, the youth seem to be the target of this drug menace and its abuse. Curiosity, peer pressure, and availability of drugs such as cigarettes and alcohol are the immediate causes of drug abuse amongst the youth. In the company of bad associates, friends are pressured to indulge in the use of drugs especially, in the senior high schools. On our television stations and on our radio stations, there is a "naked" advertisement of alcohol, cigarettes and other non-medicated drugs. These are harmful drugs that are being presented to be good enhancing performance. These drugs are even shown to the public as a laxative and the most annoying thing is that places where these could be bought in large quantities are announced to the public. This availability of drugs to the youth and the society proves a cause and a cancer to society.

"Curiosity," it is said, "kills the cat." The youth of today are very inquisitive and curious. They would like to test the efficacy of whatever they see and hear of. This curiosity at times becomes fatal even to the point of death. Some by their curiosity go into deal with drugs and become addicts. In this paper, the author wants to explore the causes, effects and control of this menace and also wants to highlight the social and cultural aspects of drug abuse.

**Keywords:** Drug menace, Peer pressure, Bad associates, Naked advertisements

## Introduction

The drugs that are beneficial to humanity may also be the same drugs that are detrimental to mankind. It is of no argument that drugs are created to cure diseases and to alleviate human condition; however, people may misuse over-the-counter drugs and this is called drug abuse. It has become a social problem because it has afflicted the family, the economy and the community. Drug and alcohol abuse in our nation's teenagers has become a major public health issue. The government collects facts on substance abuse and reports on the statistics and they are staggering. Below are some of the statistics that the United States government has reported on.<sup>1</sup>

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## Facts and Statistics on Drug Abuse in Teens

- Almost 50% of high school seniors have abused a drug of some kind.
- By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 15% of kids have used marijuana.
- 43% of high school seniors have used marijuana.
- 8.6% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders have used hallucinogens – 4% report on using LSD specifically.
- Over 60% of teens report that drugs of some kind are kept, sold, and used at their school.
- 1 in every 9 high school seniors has tried synthetic marijuana (also known as “Spice” or “K2”).
- 1.3% of high school seniors have tried bath salts.
- 64% of teens say they have used prescription pain killers that they got from a friend or family member.
- 28% of teens know at least one person who has tried ecstasy.
- 7.6% of teens use the prescription drug Aderall.
- Over 5% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders have used cocaine and over 2% have used crack.
- More teenagers die from taking prescription drugs than the use of cocaine and heroin combined.

## Facts and Statistics on Cigarette Use in Teens

- By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 15.5% of kids have smoked cigarettes.
- Almost 7% of high school seniors smoke cigarettes every day.
- Only 20% of high school seniors think smoking occasionally is dangerous.
- Over 18% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported that they have smoked a hookah in the past year.
- Almost 20% of high school seniors have smoked a cigar.
- Every day in the US, almost 3900 kids under the age of 18 try their first cigarette.
- After the first cigarette, 950 of the 3900 kids who try smoking will become daily smokers.
- Of the 950 daily new smokers, half will end up dying from their habit.

## Facts and Statistics on Alcohol Abuse in Teens

- By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, almost 30% of kids have tried drinking alcohol.
- 58% of sophomores have abused alcohol.
- 71% of high school seniors have used alcohol.
- 23% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported on binge drinking – with over five drinks in a row.
- 8% of high school students admit to driving after drinking.
- 24% of high school students rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.

- Teenagers who drink alcohol are 50% more likely to try cocaine (“coke”) than those who never use alcohol.
- 11% of all alcohol consumed in the United States is from underage drinkers.
- The average age of a boy who tries alcohol is 11, girls are on average 13.
- Teens that started drinking before the age of 15 are five times more likely to become addicted to alcohol later on, unlike those kids who waited until after they were 21.
- Teens that drink often are more than three times more likely to commit self-harm – such as cutting or suicide attempts – than teens that do not drink.
- Alcohol is the leading factor in the top three causes for death in 15–24 year olds, which are auto crashes, homicides and suicides.

## Parents... Did You Know?

When a parent talks to their teenager regularly about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, they lessen the chance of their child using drugs by 42%! However, only 25% of teens report on actually having these conversations.

## Drug Abuse in India

June 26 every year is celebrated as International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking every year. It is an exercise undertaken by the world community to sensitize the people in general and the youth in particular, to the menace of drugs. The picture is grim if the world statistics on the drugs scenario is taken into account. With a turnover of around \$500 billion, it is the third-largest business in the world, next to petroleum and arms trade. About 190 million people all over the world consume one drug or the other. Drug addiction causes immense human distress and the illegal production and distribution of drugs have spawned crime and violence worldwide. Today, there is no part of the world that is free from the curse of drug trafficking and drug addiction. Millions of drug addicts, all over the world, are leading miserable lives, between life and death.<sup>2</sup>

India too is caught in this vicious circle of drug abuse, and the numbers of drug addicts are increasing day by day. According to a UN report, One million heroin addicts are registered in India, and unofficially there are as many as five million. What started off as casual use among a minuscule population of high-income group youth in the metro has permeated to all sections of society. Inhalation of heroin alone has given way to intravenous drug use, that too in combination with

other sedatives and painkillers. This has increased the intensity of the effect, hastened the process of addiction and complicated the process of recovery. Cannabis, heroin, and Indian-produced pharmaceutical drugs are the most frequently abused drugs in India.

Cannabis products, often called charas, bhang, or ganja, are abused throughout the country because it has attained some amount of religious sanctity because of its association with some Hindu deities. The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2002 report released in Vienna pointed out that in India persons addicted to opiates are shifting their drug of choice from opium to heroin.

The pharmaceutical products containing narcotic drugs are also increasingly being abused. The intravenous injections of analgesics like Dextropropoxphene, etc., are also reported from many states, as it is easily available at 1/10th the cost of heroin. The codeine-based cough syrups continue to be diverted from the domestic market for abuse.<sup>3</sup>

Drug abuse is a complex phenomenon, which has various social, cultural, biological, geographical, historical and economic aspects. The disintegration of the old joint family system, absence of parental love and care in modern families where both parents are working, decline of old religious and moral values, etc., lead to a rise in the number of drug addicts who take drugs to escape hard realities of life. Drug use, misuse or abuse is also primarily due to the nature of the drug abused, the personality of the individual and the addict's immediate environment. The processes of industrialization, urbanization and migration have led to loosening of the traditional methods of social control, rendering an individual vulnerable to the stresses and strains of modern life. The fast-changing social milieu, among other factors, is mainly contributing to the proliferation of drug abuse, both of traditional and of new psychoactive substances. The introduction of synthetic drugs and intravenous drug use leading to HIV/AIDS has added a new dimension to the problem, especially in the Northeast states of the country.

Drug abuse has led to a detrimental impact on the society. It has led to increase in the crime rate. Addicts resort to crime to pay for their drugs. Drugs remove inhibition and impair judgment, egging one on to commit offences. Incidence of eve-teasing, group clashes, assault and impulsive murders increase with drug abuse. Apart from affecting financial stability, addiction increases conflicts and causes untold emotional pain for every member of the family. With most drug users being in the productive age group of

18–35 years, the loss in terms of human potential is incalculable. The damage to the physical, psychological, moral and intellectual growth of the youth is very high. Adolescent drug abuse is one of the major areas of concern in adolescent and young people's behavior. It is estimated that, in India, by the time most boys reach the ninth grade, about 50 percent of them have tried at least one of the getaway drugs.

However, there is a wide regional variation across states in terms of the incidence of substance abuse. For example, a larger proportion of teens in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh use getaway drugs (about 60 percent in both the states) than Uttar Pradesh or Haryana (around 35 percent). Increase in incidences of HIV, hepatitis B and C and tuberculosis due to addiction adds the reservoir of infection in the community burdening the healthcare system further. Women in India face greater problems from drug abuse. The consequences include domestic violence and infection with HIV, as well as the financial burden. Eighty-seven percent of addicts being treated in a de-addiction center run by the Delhi Police acknowledged being violent with family members. Most of the domestic violence is directed against women and occurs in the context of demands for money to buy drugs. At the national level, drug abuse is intrinsically linked with racketeering, conspiracy, corruption, illegal money transfers, terrorism and violence, threatening the very stability of governments.<sup>4</sup>

### Causes of Drug Abuse among Youth

There are two primary causes of drug abuse among the youths. These are (1) peer pressure and (2) depression.

#### Peer Pressure

Youth associates with different types of people otherwise known as friends, through the pressure from these friends, a child tends to have a taste of these drugs and once this is done, they continue to take it and get addicted to it in the long run.

#### Depression

Another primary cause of drug abuse is depression. When certain things happen to someone that are considered very sad and disheartening, the person starts thinking of the best way to become happy once more; hence the use of hard drugs comes in. This later on turns to a habit, hence drug abuse.

Another major cause of drug abuse is said to be the rate of unemployment among the youth. Furthermore, drugs

can be said to be abused when youth do not keep to the prescribed dosage and a continuous use of a particular drug for a long time without doctor's approval. This kind of abuse is associated with soft drugs.

### Effect of Drug Abuse

The effect of drug abuse on youth is going to be viewed from three aspects. These are: (1) Social aspect, (2) Financial aspect, and (3) Health aspect.

#### Social Aspect

The hard drug makes the taker hyperactive at the point of taking this drug. This makes the taker to behave abnormally, contribute to immoralities such as armed robbery, sexually transmitted diseases, e.g., HIV AIDS and many other societal vices.

#### Financial Effect

The person addicted to drugs tends to spend more money on the purchase of these drugs. This can make the taker to become bankrupt or start searching for money by all means. This will eventually increase the problem of the taker.

#### Health Effect

It makes the taker become unstable. The taker tends to go mad and starts behaving abnormally. It infiltrates a lot of diseases into the system of the taker and can eventually lead to his death.

### Remedies/Solutions to Drug Abuse

- 1) Aggressive extinction of all sources of these hard drugs including the farms where they are planted by a joint force of the UNO.
- 2) Parents should monitor the kind of friends of children and guide against bad company.
- 3) Rehabilitation of the affected persons.
- 4) Teaching the bad effects of drug abuse in schools.
- 5) Continuous campaign against the use of hard drugs at the federal, state and local levels.
- 6) Consent of a doctor should be sought before a prolong taking of a particular soft drug.
- 7) Stiff penalty should be meted out to anybody found dealing in hard drugs.

India has braced itself to face the menace of drug trafficking both at the national and international levels. Several measures involving innovative changes in enforcement, legal and judicial systems have been brought into effect. The introduction of death penalty for drug-related offences has been a major deterrent.

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, was enacted with stringent provisions to curb this menace. The Act envisages a minimum term of 10 years imprisonment extendable to 20 years and a fine of Rs. 1 lakh extendable up to Rs. 2 lakhs for the offenders.

The Act has been further amended by making provisions for the forfeiture of properties derived from illicit drug trafficking.

A comprehensive strategy involving specific programs to bring about an overall reduction in use of drugs has been evolved by various government agencies and NGOs and is further supplemented by measures like education and counseling. India has bilateral agreements on drug trafficking with 13 countries, including Pakistan and Burma. Prior to 1999, extradition between India and the United States occurred under the auspices of a 1931 treaty signed by the United States and the United Kingdom, which was made applicable to India in 1942. However, a new extradition treaty between India and the United States entered into force in July 1999. A Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty was signed by India and the United States in October 2001. India also is signatory to the following treaties and conventions:

- 1961 U.N. Convention on Narcotic Drugs
- 1971 U.N. Convention on Psychotropic Substances
- 1988 U.N. Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances
- 2000 Transnational Crime Convention

### Conclusion

The abuse of alcohol and drugs has resulted in significant morbidity and mortality among adolescents worldwide. Many of these youth will lose their lives to drugs and alcohol and significant numbers are likely to grow up to become problem drug users. Although the substance abuse problem is complex and large in magnitude, there is a substantial amount of evidence-based research available to physicians, community leaders and schools to implement interventions that can decrease adolescent substance abuse rates. Because this issue is not peculiar to any one community or culture, we recognize that individual interventions may not be universally effective. Therefore, we emphasize the NIDA strategy of targeting modifiable risk factors and enhancing protective factors through family, school and community prevention programs, as a generalized framework for healthcare and community activists to use when researching programs and strategies best suited for their own community.

**Conflict of Interest:** None

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