

Empowering Youth: A Case Study Research on Role of Family and Peers in Substance Abuse Recovery



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ABSTRACT

“Empowerment” has multiple facets when it comes to youth. As India emerges on the geo-political frame of the world as a young country, filled with energy and activity, it becomes important to identify and recalibrate the roles and responsibilities of the youth. Being the drivers of change, the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, thus, ensuring their health and wellbeing remains the top-priority on any country’s agenda. It is a matter of concern that India’s youth is facing a heavy exposure to illicit and psychotropic drugs/ substances, which if left unchecked, can seriously alter the country’s growth trajectory. The objectives of this study are: To Investigate the underlying factors that contribute to drug experimentation and addiction among youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds; To Examine the motivations and experiences associated with drug use as a means of coping with emotional distress and psychological challenges among different age groups; To Explore the role of family dynamics in substance abuse recovery among youth, and; To Identify effective strategies for empowering youth in overcoming substance abuse through family and peer support. The study uses case study as its prime data source, borrowing from the first-hand-experiences of the people, understanding their concerns, fears and outlook. The study reveals a deep

connection between lifestyle choices and role of family/peer group. The nature of drug abuse amongst youth has been judiciously interpreted in the study with reference to economic stability, education and a sense of “belongingness”. Youth empowerment and their wellbeing is the principle guiding force of this study.

Keyword: Youth, Substance abuse, Peer support, Family.

Introduction

Drug abuse is a global challenge, causing millions of deaths annually and harming the economy and human resources. Regardless of age, anyone can fall victim to drug addiction. To understand drugs and their effects, it's important to clarify concepts like drug abuse, drug dependence, drug addiction, and abstinence syndrome.

A drug is a substance that has physical and/or psychological effects, altering normal bodily processes. In medical terms, drugs are prescribed or manufactured to treat and prevent diseases. In psychological and sociological contexts, drugs are habit-forming substances that directly affect the brain or nervous system, potentially harming individuals and society.

Addiction generally refers to physical dependence, where the body requires continued drug use to function properly. Withdrawal symptoms specific to the drug appear if it is stopped, known as abstinence syndrome. Tolerance occurs when a chronic drug user needs higher doses for the same effect. Psychological dependence occurs when an individual relies on a drug for well-being. Habituation, a term used for psychological dependence, lacks compulsion compared to addiction.

Drug addiction is characterized by an overpowering desire to continue drug use, increased doses, psychological and physical dependence, and adverse effects on individuals and society. It is a global issue with rising numbers of addicts, including in India.

Family and peer group associations play significant roles in drug abuse. The quality of family relationships influences drug usage, involving parents' interest in their children's careers, harmonious relations, parental control, manageable family size, adherence to social and moral norms, and trust and security in parent-child relationships.

Literature Review

Tracy et al. (2016) revealed the findings of research conducted to analyse the effectiveness of peer support groups, one part of peer support services, in the treatment of addiction in their study. The following

studies found linked benefits: (1) treatment engagement, (2) human immunodeficiency virus/hepatitis C virus risk behaviours, and (3) secondary substance-related behaviours such as desire and self-efficacy.

Moore et al. (2018) reported a cross-sectional study of the 2013 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey, which was completed by 9055 young people between the ages of 11 and 16. Multilevel logistic regression analyses used to test associations between family communication, family support, relationships with school staff, school peer connectedness, have revealed deeper psychological relationships between the immediate environment and drug dependents.

Sharma et al. (2023) looked closely at students' perspectives and levels of comprehension surrounding substance usage as well as the effect of popular culture and media. The study included 641 participants, including males, females, and transgenders, and used a well-structured Questionnaire that was randomly given to students in grades 9 through 12. According to the results, 57% of respondents said that drug abuse in their community contributed to domestic violence against women. Neglect (23% of respondents) and sexual assault (20% of respondents) came in second and third, respectively.

Nasir et al. (2015) attempted to establish a relationship between anti-social conduct, criminality, and drug misuse in their study work. According to the findings of this survey, the majority of respondents (31.1%) are illiterate and come from a nuclear family structure; the majority of delinquents are between the ages of 15 and 18. The majority (42.2%) belonged to a low-income profile and were prone to negative associations with friends (75.6%), which enhanced the likelihood of adolescent delinquency.

Objectives

1. To Investigate the underlying factors that contribute to drug experimentation and addiction among youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.
2. To Examine the motivations and experiences associated with drug use as a means of coping with emotional distress and psychological challenges among different age groups.
3. To Explore the role of family dynamics in substance abuse recovery among youth.
4. To Identify effective strategies for empowering youth in overcoming substance abuse through family and peer support.

Methodology

This research utilized a case study approach to examine the role of family and peers in substance abuse recovery among youth. Qualitative methods were employed, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observations of family and peer interactions. The study involved a diverse group of youth who had undergone substance abuse recovery programs, along with their family members and close peers. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly followed. The findings aim to enhance understanding of the supportive role of family and peers in empowering youth during substance abuse recovery.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study-1

In the first case study, the respondent is a 30-year-old single child. He holds a B.TECH. degree and comes from a Sikh family. Currently, he is unemployed. His father received primary level education, and his monthly income is less than 20,000 rupees. His mother is a housewife, and he is married with one child. He completed his schooling in an English medium institution and aspired to pursue an M.TECH. after graduation. Initially, he wanted to become an engineer, but due to negative influences and bad company, he failed to achieve his goal, leading to extreme frustration and stress. Under peer pressure, he turned to drugs. He believes that young people primarily experiment with drugs for the experience, although curiosity, pleasure, and escapism from financial and domestic problems may be initial motivators. He administered heroin through injections. He preferred not to take drugs alone, as he relied on the security and support of his friends. He claims to have never had a negative drug experience. Physically, drugs help alleviate his tension and self-consciousness, allowing him to forget himself and become part of a group. He has observed that drugs always improve his mood, which motivates him to continue the habit. His parents are elderly and unaware of his drug addiction. However, with the assistance of friends and detoxification centres, he has managed to break free from drugs. He started the process slowly, gradually reducing his drug use, and currently resides in a hostel for his studies.

Case Study-2

The respondent in the second case study comes from a family where both parents are college graduates. Both parents work outside the home for regular hours. He has a younger sister who is currently studying. He is 22 years old and belongs to a Sikh family. Recently, he

obtained a B.A. degree from a reputable college in Bathinda. However, he is currently unemployed. He acknowledges being aware of the effects of drugs on the mind and body. Nevertheless, he denies that the loss of his father was the primary reason for his involvement with drugs. He admits that his father's death weakened the family's control over their children. He perceived his mother as a weak person, and with the absence of a strong figure after his father's passing, there was no one to monitor his behaviour. He started with smack and later progressed to brown sugar, heroin, and other substances. He preferred using drugs alone, usually in his own bedroom or bathroom. Initially, he felt nervous when he tried smack for the first time, but he concealed his feelings. After a few minutes, he experienced a sense of exhilaration with trembling legs and a light-headed sensation. Suddenly, he felt as though he was dying. He sourced drugs from peddlers near the college premises and funded his addiction with pocket money provided by his mother. He feared that his relationship with his parents would worsen, but they turned out to be quite liberal and modern. They advised him to quit drugs, and initially, he started using them approximately once a week, gradually escalating to every other day. His neglect of studies led to examination failure, and his parents eventually discovered his drug use. Concerned about the detrimental effects, they warned him and took him to a recovery centre for psychological treatment. After undergoing psychological and physical treatment, he realized that he was becoming disconnected from society, which frightened him. He took the difficult step of distancing himself from friends who used drugs, and he successfully managed to completely give up drugs.

Case Study-3

The third case study involves an individual who is the youngest among three siblings. He is 25 years old, with one employed brother and a sister currently studying in college. His father is a businessman, and the family's monthly income is approximately 10,000 rupees. His mother is a housewife, and they belong to a Hindu family. He completed his matriculation education but did not pursue further studies. Presently, he is unemployed. After the death of a close friend, he experienced deep unhappiness and depression. Some of his friends suggested that drugs could provide relief from sorrows and tensions, prompting him to start using drugs regularly in the hope of finding happiness. He exclusively used smack as his drug of choice. His initial experience with drugs was extremely confusing, leaving him disoriented and unable to comprehend his surroundings or actions. To verify his feelings, he tried drugs again and found the second experience to be more encouraging. He felt refreshed and happy. However, he gradually

realized that relying on drugs alone would not permanently overcome his depression. The drugs merely provided temporary mood changes. When he used drugs alone, he purchased them himself and funded his addiction with his own money. He developed a tendency to steal household goods and sell them to obtain money. Hence, acquiring funds was never a problem for him. He kept his drug use a secret from his parents and relatives. Although he was not afraid of his parents, he believed that they would be deeply hurt and shocked if they discovered his involvement with drugs. He also feared the negative reactions and criticism from his relatives, anticipating attacks on his character. All these factors contributed to his decision to distance himself from drugs.

Case Study-4

In this case, the respondent is an 18-year-old from a Sikh family. He has only completed studies up to the 5th grade. He faces pressure from his father to earn money, coming from a very poor family. Both of his parents are illiterate, and his father is currently unemployed after working as a labourer in a factory that has shut down. His mother works as a maid servant. He desires to continue his education but faces obstacles due to his father's alcoholism and drug addiction. As a result, his father pressures him into drug addiction as a means to earn money for drugs and alcohol. His father shares money with him to purchase drugs. He started with hashish and gradually moved on to heroin and brown sugar. He prefers brown sugar because it gives him a more pleasing experience. He usually consumes drugs outside his home and prefers to do so alone. He was shocked by the intensity of his experiences with drugs. He appreciates drugs because they provide a temporary escape from the harsh reality of being forced into drug addiction by his father. He buys drugs using his own income, supplemented by funds provided by his father. In this case, the respondent has never received care from his mother throughout his life. Additionally, his father actively engages in drug use and drug dealing, making it impossible for him to seek parental guidance regarding drug addiction. Although he has attempted to quit drugs due to negative experiences, he has been unsuccessful and is now attempting to reduce his intake. While he acknowledges some level of dependency on tobacco, he believes he is not as dependent on drugs and is willing to give them up with the help of others. However, his father's influence poses a significant obstacle to achieving this goal.

Case Study- 5

The respondent is a 19-year-old boy pursuing a B.A. degree. He actively plays hockey and comes from a Sikh family. His father holds a

responsible and prestigious position and has a B.A. degree. His mother is a housewife and a graduate. He has an elder brother and a younger sister who are still studying. The respondent has passed the CBSE exam and initially desired to pursue a sports-related degree in college. According to him, curiosity is a common reason for young people to try drugs. Having read extensively about drugs during their time in Chandigarh, he became tempted to try them when he had the opportunity. He experimented with charas, ganja, and heroin, but he preferred charas due to the better experience it provided compared to other drugs. Heroin tended to dull his senses, making him feel numb and prone to mistakes while playing. He generally consumed charas outside of college or occasionally at home. However, he has consumed drugs on college premises, even during lectures. His first experience with drugs happened when his brother and friends were having a charas session at his house, and they offered some to him out of curiosity. Since then, he has taken drugs both alone and with friends, although he prefers taking them in a group. He believes that his overall appreciation of sports significantly increases when he consumes charas, leading to improved performance. He admits that charas slightly affects his physical abilities but enhances his mental state, enabling better game appreciation and coping with various situations. Initially, he didn't know how to obtain drugs or prepare them, relying on his friends for supply. However, he eventually started buying his own drugs as they were easily available. He didn't have any formal arrangement with his friends and only paid for the drugs if he specifically asked someone to buy them for him. Financially, collecting drugs wasn't burdensome as they were cheap, and his parents held a liberal and modern view. When he informed his parents about his drug use, there were no dramatic scenes at home, but they were shocked. However, the atmosphere at home was not disturbed. Initially, he consumed drugs about once a week, but gradually increased the frequency as his peers believed it improved their performance. However, he noticed negative effects on his health, such as weight loss and headaches, leading him to decrease his usage. Once he made up his mind, quitting drugs became easier for him, but he started smoking cigarettes instead of taking charas.

Case Study- 6

The respondent is a 27-year-old individual who has suffered from polio, resulting in permanent damage to one of his hands. His father passed away when he was young, and he currently lives with his mother and grandfather. He is the only child. His father had studied up to intermediate commerce and was a businessman, leaving them a substantial amount of money. His mother completed education up to

the 8th class but doesn't have any earning source. Currently, the respondent is unemployed and comes from a Hindu family. He completed education up to the 10th class but was unable to continue due to economic reasons and his physical condition. He resorted to drugs to combat boredom and tensions at home. He primarily turned to drugs to avoid the difficult situation within his household. He started with ganja and gradually progressed to regularly using heroin, sugar, hashish, bhang, morphine, cocaine, and other drugs. He prefers taking drugs alone, occasionally stopping for a few days when he begins to cough and spit blood due to continuous drug use. Occasionally, he reduces his drug usage to test his willpower. He insists that he is not addicted and remains confident about receiving proper treatment. He enjoys the experience of using drugs and believes they enable him to think deeply. The investigator observed that he appears nervous and restless. Notably, he first tried drugs at the age of sixteen. Under the influence of drugs, he feels more emotionally sensitive. He describes himself as a highly moody and unhappy person who is restricted from developing relationships with others, including close friends. He admits that frequent drug use leads to coughing, spitting, or vomiting blood, but he doesn't consider it a serious issue. He confesses to stealing money from his mother's and grandfather's purses to fund his drug collection. He purchases drugs from peddlers. His mother strongly disapproves of drug use and was greatly shocked upon learning about his habit. She forcefully brought him to a recovery center for treatment, but he sees no need to give up drugs despite being under pressure from his family members.

Case Study-7

In this case, the respondent's father used to work as a lower division clerk in a government office but is now retired. The respondent, the elder son, is currently involved in a small business while his siblings continue their education in school and college. He is 27 years old and follows the Sikh religion. He obtained a B.A. degree from college, but his unfavourable economic condition prevented him from pursuing further studies. The main reason for his engagement with drugs, according to him, was a failed love affair. To forget the memories associated with his girlfriend, he sought to change his mood by exploring articles about drugs that promised happiness. He started using drugs while studying in 10th class and found ganja to provide a satisfying experience. He believes his thought processes are stimulated under the influence of these substances. Although he has tried brown sugar, he considers it less effective than other options. He prefers to use drugs alone but has no objections to using them with others. He consumes

drugs at friends' houses or elsewhere, but not at college. His initial experience with drugs was unsatisfactory, requiring multiple attempts, but eventually, he found pleasure in the experience. He believes drugs can alter one's mood. He purchases his own drugs near his business location and occasionally obtains them from friends. His parents are aware of his drug use as one of his friends informed them. They tried to convince him of the negative health effects of drugs and pressured him to quit. Eventually, with the help of medical and psychological therapy, he managed to give up drugs. He used drugs as frequently as four times a week but also had periods of abstaining for weeks at a time. Currently, he hasn't considered giving up drugs as he finds enjoyment in using them.

Discussion

Drug Misuse has assumed a dangerous form in the context of present day youth. While there can be several factors attributed to this problem like lack of awareness and influence of popular culture, one must never forget that indulging in such activities is not only self-harming but also puts the immediate community at risk. Drug misuse can lead to serious health altercations in the form of diseases and handicap, also threatening societal peace and harmony through crimes and contamination.

The case studies provide deep insights into the mind of the people, touching their conscious. Throughout all the case studies included in this research, the role of peer group and family has been highlighted several times. It is the company of the people that made them abstain or indulge in such acts, altering their lives severely. The families where the parents are more educated and have a stronghold over the child's decision making are much less likely to use drugs. Rampant unemployment, uncertainties of the present/future and relieving stress are the top reasons why youngsters between the ages of 20-23 years of age are doing such things. While most of them see to initiate drug use out of curiosity, some had reasons which are far more troublesome, like depression or losing a loved one. For such people, drugs often become a way to dissociate from the reality, being resentful and elevate a sense of loneliness.

Recovery for such youngsters begins from the family and brethren itself. Any step towards helping the drug dependent population in any form starts with acceptance and understanding, not isolation and prejudice. With constant companionship, counselling and treatment practices the youth can be brought back on tract. At the same, there is an ardent need to generate awareness about the risk of drug misuse and appropriation against youth on a higher level.

Conclusion

Parental support and cohesion with peer group plays an important role in the grooming of an individual. Consumption of any kind of psychotropic substances leads to far-reaching consequences for a person, even endangering life. Constant supervision and guidance from parents, role of a strong father/mother figure and good company can potentially save a person. Apart from this, it becomes the duty of the government and educational institutions, as well as NGOs and safety nets to generate awareness. Economic stability and employment acts as an important influencer of choices and lifestyle.

Future Scope

1. Establish an all-encompassing drug awareness program that caters to all segments of society, utilizing simple language and appealing strategies.
2. Offer specialized educational initiatives for parents to enhance their qualifications and strengthen their role in their children's social development.
3. Implement psychological treatment programs within social work frameworks to address the emotional requirements and social influences impacting adolescents.
4. Foster stronger family bonds, encourage cooperation within society, and promote the growth of resilient individuals to prevent drug abuse.
5. Concentrate government efforts on enhancing healthcare and mental services, supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs), enforcing drug laws, and providing rehabilitation for addicts.
6. Foster community engagement and eradicate societal stigma to ensure the successful reintegration of former addicts.
7. Tailor prevention measures to tackle specific drug problems, taking into account socio-political, economic, and cultural factors.
8. Address the societal origins of drug problems, targeting issues such as deprivation, social exclusion, and early school dropout prevention.
9. Place emphasis on personal and social growth, effective decision-making, and active participation in prevention programs, avoiding fear-based messaging.

10. Evaluate and cater to the needs of adolescents and children through education, training in essential life skills, and the promotion of constructive activities.

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