

# Substance Use among Adolescents: A Perspective on Glorification and Harm

Sonali Katoch<sup>1</sup>, Keerat Kaundal<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Nursing, CSHS, Chitkara University, Rajpura, Punjab, India

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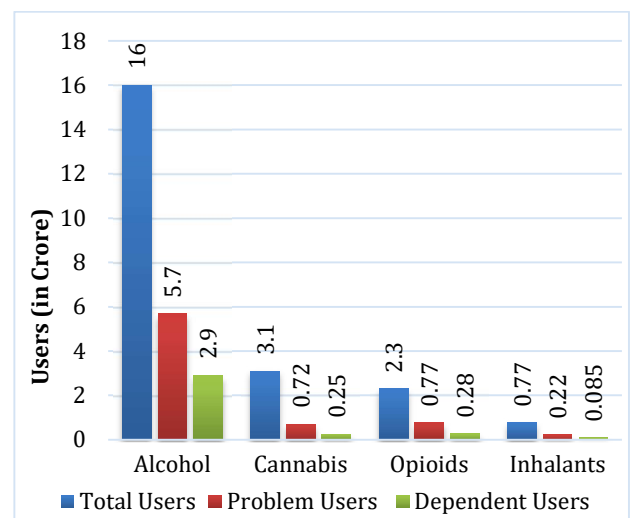
**\*Correspondence:** Keerat Kaundal (Email: keeratofficial@yahoo.com)

Sir,

The use of substance in our society is deeply rooted in many cultural practices such as social gatherings, weddings, festivals, etc. Substances such as alcohol has become an integral part of every celebration. The idea of substance is commonly sold to the teens and young adults as relaxation techniques irrespective of the adverse effects it poses of the physical as well as mental health. A national survey on the extent and pattern of substance use in India was conducted by the ministry of social justice and empowerment in collaboration with National drug dependence treatment center, AIIMS, New Delhi. The results from the survey revealed that approximately 16cr people use alcohol among which 5.6cr. has developed alcohol dependence. Approximately 3.1cr individuals use cannabis products among which 72L developed dependence, and out of 2.3cr individuals using opioids, 77L developed dependence. The survey has also revealed a wide treatment gap<sup>1</sup>. The aim of this article is to justifying the dire need of expanding the preventing and curative modalities, along with highlighting the role of media in promoting awareness related to harmful impact of substance use on health.<sup>1</sup>

**Media Influence:** Social media has higher influence on the adolescents. 85% of adolescents between the age group 13-17 use YouTube, 72% use Instagram, 69% use snapchat, and 51% use Facebook as a part

of their daily web surfing. The benefits of social media may include entertainment, education, social awareness, keeping abreast of trends, and Innovation through art. Although the use social media has its benefits, the problems associated with excess use could lead to anxiety and depression.<sup>2</sup>



**Fig 1: Substance Use in India (Survey Report, 2019)**

The media nowadays has a significant influence on the norms and attitudes of our society, including

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those pertaining to substance use. A review of substance-related content on famous social media frequently promotes substance usage by associating it with enjoyment and fame. People may unconsciously start to see alcohol and drugs more favourably as a result.

Numerous films, television series, and musical compositions depict characters using substances while remaining trouble-free. It has been established that the adolescents and young adults who have viewed alcohol related content in their favourite movies are 5 times more exposed to alcohol use.<sup>3</sup> Although the written warning is displayed on screen whenever any character is using substance, but, as it is evident that the visual cues over-seeds the written warnings, youngsters still follow their media idols.

Considering the greater outreach that social media has, few of the initiatives are highly appreciable such as running advertisements in the theatres to create awareness regarding cancer associated with the use of tobacco.

**Impact on Youth:** The students who spend more time on social media are tend to have higher levels of psychological distress. This may also have a negative impact on their academic performance as the students who spend more than 2 hours on social media has been found to have poor coping mechanism leading to maladaptive behavior. Especially the use of cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana are linked to poor academic achievement and deteriorated health.<sup>4,5</sup>

**The need to strengthen the Education and Prevention Programs:** Irrespective of all the law enforcement, the use of substance is getting popular amongst the teens and young adults because of their highly influential mind. Beyond the individuals directly involved, substance use has far-reaching effects on their families, communities, and society at large. In order to solve this, it is essential to put emphasis on the school and college-based awareness programs. The preventive modules should be developed and made a part of the academic curriculum. Family and community, being the primary influence,

should be involved in creating awareness among the youth. Social media can play a key role and be in the forefront of spreading awareness by advertising national programs such as *Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan*. The misleading advertisement of tobacco and alcohol should be banned from all media platforms.

## CONCLUSION

It is imperative to oppose actions that normalize substance use and give youngsters the wrong impression. Thus, we must endeavour to establish a culture in which substance misuse is viewed as a severe problem and is not accepted. More responsible media representations, educational activities, and supporting and preventive measures can all help achieve this. The counselling services directed towards the substance use should be integrated with primary health care.

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