



Substance abuse among high school students: A study with special reference to Elappara grama panchayat, Idukki district, Kerala

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Abstract

Times of India report shows that India has a large amount of student population – 315 million- in the world (Times of India, 2014). Students are strength, resource and backbone of our nation because a healthy student population can play vital role in the protection of freedom, justice, equality, ethics, social equilibrium of a nation and to eliminate injustice, inequality, oppression, exploitation, corruption etc. from a nation in the future. But there are different types of problems that will inflict massive harm to their life. One of such problems is substance abuse among school children. The present paper deals with the substance abuse among high school students in Elappara Panchayat which is in the district of Idukki, Kerala. The main objectives of the study is to know the awareness level of the high school students about the problem of the substance abuse, peer pressure, availability of the drugs, drinks, and smoke, mass media and family dynamics contribute to substance abuse among high school students in Elappara Panchayat.

Keywords: substance abuse, awareness, availability, mass media, family dynamics

Introduction

The incidence of substance abuse among children and adolescents is higher than the general population. This is notably because youth is a time for experimentation and identity forming. Alcohol and other drug use create a serious threat to the health and creativity of children and adolescents. In addition to the health risks inherent with alcohol and other substance use, it often linked with other risk behaviours such as early sexual activity, violence, academic failure, truancy, school dropout, delinquency etc.

World Health Organization observes that, harmful drinking among young people is an increasing concern in many countries. Alcohol use starts at a young age: 14% of adolescent girls and 18% of boys aged 13–15 years in low- and middle-income countries are reported to use alcohol. In some countries of the Western Pacific more than 50% girls aged 10-19 and more than 80% of boys aged 10-19 had ever consumed alcohol. (WHO, 2011) Globally, one in every 10 girls aged 13–15 years and one in every 5 boys aged 13-15 years use tobacco (WHO, 2014). Worldwide, 5% of all deaths of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 are attributable to alcohol use (WHO, 2016). The vast majority of tobacco users worldwide began when they were adolescents. Today an estimated 150 million young people use tobacco. This number is increasing globally, particularly among young women. Half of those users will die prematurely as a result of tobacco use. Banning tobacco and other substance advertising, raising the price and laws prohibiting smoking and using those substances in public places reduce the number of people who start using tobacco and other substances.

According to Child Line, in India, an NGO survey revealed that 63.6% of patients coming in for treatment were

introduced to drugs at a young age below 15 years. According to another report 13.1% of the people involved in drug and substance abuse in India, are below 20 years. Heroin, Opium, Alcohol, Cannabis and Propoxyphene are the five most common are the drugs being abused by the children. A survey shows that of all Alcohol, Cannabis and Opium users 21%, 3% and 0.1% are below the age of 18 (Childline India, 2018) [3].

It was found in a survey organised by Asianet, a leading channel in Kerala found that, in Kerala, students between the ages of 13 to 20 are more prone to substance abuse. Usually, they get the taste from senior students at the school. In no time they will become part of supply chain, which ensures free ganja for personal use along with extra income. They also entice other students and widen their network. In 2017, between March to May, over 100 students were arrested from Thrissur district alone (Lakshmi, 2016) [5].

Research Methodology

The study was conducted among the high school students at Elppara Panchayat age group of 14 to 17 years. Elappara panchayat is predominantly a plantation township with its abundant tea plantations, which is located on the Kottayam - Kattappana state highway. In this research quantitative approach and descriptive research design were followed. For the study, the researcher used probability sampling and simple random sampling technique. Both the interview schedule and the rating scale are used for collecting data for the research. First of all the researcher found out the students who are under substance abuse or have some relationship with substance abuse by using a self-made questionnaire and selected 50 samples through lottery method. The Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5) Level 1 rating scale is used which assesses mental health domains that are important across psychiatric diagnoses. It is a child-rated version of the measure consists of 25 questions that assess 12 psychiatric domains, including depression, anger, irritability, mania, anxiety, somatic symptoms, inattention, suicidal ideation/attempt, psychosis, sleep disturbance, repetitive thoughts and behaviours, and substance use. Each item asks the child, age 11–17. It was useful to find out what are psychiatric problems among students who are using dangerous substances.

Socio – Demographic Details of the Respondents

Table 1

No	Subject	Frequencies and Percentage (N= 50)
1.	Age of the Respondent	14 Years Old: 5 (10%)
		15 Years Old: 25 (50%)
		16 Years Old: 12 (24%)
		17 Years Old: 8 (16%)
2.	Domicile	Estate Quarters: 5 (10%)
		Rented House: 15 (30%)
		Own House: 30 (60%)
3.	Father’s Occupation	Cooli : 45 (90%)
		Others: 5 (10%)
4.	Mother’s Occupation	Kooli: 46 (92%)
		Government Job: 1 (2%)
		Others: 3 (6%)
5.	Religion	Hindu: 20 (40%)
		Christians: 20 (40%)
		Muslims: 10 (20%)
6.	Category	General – 10 (20%)
		SC: 12 (24%)
		ST: 10 (20%)
		OBC: 13 (26%)
		Others: 5 (10%)
7.	Economic Condition	Antiodaya: 5 (10%)
		BPL: 45 (90%)
8.	Education of Father	Below 10: 46 (92%)
		Plus Two: 4 (8%)
9.	Education of Mother	Below 10:43 86%
		Plus Two: 5 (10%)
		Degree: 2 (4%)

The age of the respondents was between fourteen and seventeen. There were 5 respondents are from the age of 14, 25 students from the age of 15, 12 students from the age of 16 and 8 respondents were from the age of 18. Since it is an area of tea plantation most of the respondents were from the poor family. It is very shocking that, 40% of the respondents do not have their own house. 90% of the parents are engaged in the area of cooli and most of the parent’s education qualification is less than SSLC.

Significant causes of substance abuse among high school students

One of the worst aspects of the drug problem is that, it affects primarily those who are most vulnerable, especially youth. The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is a crucial period in which experimentation with illicit drugs in many cases begins. Drugs may have strong appeal to young people who are beginning their struggle for independence as

they search for identity. Because of their innate curiosity and thirst for new experiences, peer pressures, celebrity worship, poor family dynamics, availability and faulty motivation leads many of the youth population to substance abuse (WHO, 1999).

Celebrity Worship

Celebrity worship has an entertainment-social dimension in which individuals are attracted to a celebrity because of their perceived ability to entertain and to become a social focus. But when it transforms to an extreme level, it may become a syndrome where an individual becomes overly involved, obsessed and interested to a celebrity and blindly imitate and believe their words, deeds and life. When it is related to a liquor or cigarettes advertisement presented with a celebrity’s image, the above mentioned individuals can be overtly influenced to that advertisement or film scene. Many of the youth are prone to imitate certain movie or advertisement scenes related to liquor or cigarette consumption of the celebrities (Griffiths, 2013) [4].

Table 2: Celebrity Worship of the Respondent

		Celebrity Worship of the Respondent		Total
		Yes	No	
Substance Abuse of the Respondent	Yes	35 (70%)	0	35(70%)
	No	5 (10%)	10 (20%)	15(30%)
Total		40(80%)	10(20%)	50(100%)

It was found that, celebrity worships is very much prevalent among the respondents. When they see the hero in a film using or working with the dangerous substances and when they wear or act in the drug contented advertisement, students are prone to it. In the study 80% of the respondents have severe celebrity worship. Only 20% are not engaged in the same. 70% of the respondents are regular to imitate the dress and style of their admirable celebrities. 70% of the respondents who are using substances expressed that even if the celebrities are the ambassadors of certain drug substances, they will not unfollow them. Above all, Those 35 students who are using substances are having strong tendency to imitate the style and dress of their admirable celebrities and those who are not using substances are not having any strong tendency to imitate the celebrities.

Peer Pressure

The influence of the peer group becomes particularly pervasive for the youth from a weak family setting, such as from permissive parents. In such a situation, peer influence could play a big role in students’ substance abuse (Abikoye, 2014).

Table 2: Friends' Influence in the Decision Making of the Respondent

		Friends' Influence in the Decision Making of the Respondent			Total
		Yes	No	Sometimes	
Substance Abuse of the Respondent	Yes	30(60%)	5(10%)	0	35(70%)
	No	5(10%)	10(20%)	0	15(30%)
Total		35(70%)	15(30%)	0	50(100%)

$\chi^2 - 20.00, df-2, P \text{ value}-.001$

The above table discloses the association between substance abuse and friends influence in the decision making of the respondent. The Chi-Square value is 20.00 and the P-value is .001 and which indicates a strong significance between the above two variables. Here 35 respondents are using substances and 15 of the respondents are not under the danger substance abuse. Those 30 students who are using substances are having strong friends' influence. Those who are not using substances are not having any strong influence of friends in the decision making of their life. It can be inferred that there is a strong association between substance abuse and friends influence

The study revealed that 95% of the respondents have intimate friendships. Among them 60% of the respondents are spending more time and 30% of them are spending sometimes with their friends. 60% of them are directly influenced and 30% of them are moderately influenced by their friends. 85% of the respondents are known about the substance abuse of their friends. So there is the chance of being influenced by their friends and lead to the substance abuse.

Poor Family Dynamics

Family dynamics are the patterns of relating, or interactions, between family members. Each family system and its dynamics are unique, although there are some common patterns. One or both parents have addictions or compulsions, One or both parents use the threat or application of physical violence as the primary means of control, One or both parents exploit the children and treat them as possessions, One or both parents are unable to provide, or threaten to withdraw, financial or basic physical care for their children, One or both parents exhibit a strong authoritarian control over the children will lead to a family with poor dynamics (Brown University, 2018).

Table 3: Substance Abuse of the Respondent and the Respondents' Preference to Accept Advice and Suggestions from - Cross tabulation

		The Respondent Prefer to Accept Advice and Suggestions from		Total
		Friends	Parents	
Substance Abuse of the Respondent	Yes	30(60%)	5(10%)	35(70%)
	No	5(10%)	10(20%)	15(30%)
Total		35(70%)	15(30%)	50(100%)

$\chi^2 - 8.889, df-1, P \text{ value}-.003$

The above table discloses the association between substance abuse and Respondents' Preference to Accept Advice and Suggestions from Friends or Parents. The Chi-Square value is 8.889 and the P-value is .003 and which indicates a strong significance between the above two variables. Here among those 35 students, who are using substances, 30 students are accepting advice and suggestions from the friends and the remaining 5 of them are wishing to accept advice and suggestions from their parents. Among those 15 respondents who are not using substances, 10 are ready to accept the advice and suggestions from their parents. It can be inferred that there is a strong association between substance abuse and family dynamics.

It is very amazing factor that 80% of the respondents in this study, prefer to talk their personal matters with their friends

rather than with their parents even during the school days. The family bond becomes more superficial. Respondents' parents do not know regarding the substance abuse of their children. That means there is a lack of personal sharing between parents and the respondents. It can be inferred that there is a strong association between substance abuse and family dynamics.

Availability

Though there are different laws implemented for the prevention of the substance abuse among school students, most of those laws are violating widely. That is why students are provided with harmful substances near the premises of the schools and houses. The table explained below discloses the intensity of those substances' prevalence.

Table 4: Availability of the Substances in the Locality of the Respondent

		Availability of the Substances in the Locality of the Respondent		Total
		Yes	No	
Substance Abuse of the Respondent	Yes	35(70%)	0	35(70%)
	No	10(20%)	5(10%)	15(30%)
Total		45(90%)	5(10%)	50(100%)

$\chi^2 - 9.474, df-1, P \text{ value}-.002$

The above table discloses the association between substance abuse and Availability of the Substances in the Locality of the Respondent. The Chi-Square value is 9.474 and the P-value is .002 and which indicates a strong significance between the above two variables. 70% of the respondents who are under substance abuse and 20% of the respondents who are not under the purview of substance abuse have the opinion that there is the availability of the dangerous substances in their locality. Only 10% of the respondents who are not using substances have no knowledge of the availability of the substances in their residence area.

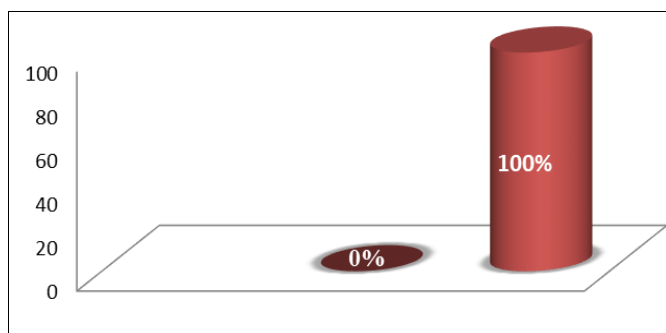


Fig 1: Persons or Shops Distributing Substances nearby the School

All the respondents of the study testifies that there the selling of dangerous substances nearby the school or in the school premises. That means there are intentional movements in and around the schools to trap the students or misuse the curiosity of the students. It is very puzzling factor that as the above table shows, all the respondents testifies that there are regular and occasional buyers of dangerous substances. If there is the availability and if it is near by the school premises, then students are prone to buy those substances without having any

type of reflection on its danger. 55% of the respondents in the study agree that there are student agents for distributing the dangerous substances in the schools. Whereas 45% of the respondents say that there is no student agent distributing the substances. It leads to an assumption that, 55% of the respondents are thoroughly known about the agents and they are working within in the students who are strongly support without fail or deceiving them.

Defective Family Influence

The majority of the respondents’ father that is 60% of respondents’ father is addicted to any of the substances. Only 30% of the fathers are not under the danger of Substance Abuse. 10% of the fathers are sometimes under this addiction. The above table mentions another possibility for the children to be influenced by the neighbours who are under the addiction to the substances. Here 95% of the respondents disclosed that, their neighbours are using substances and only 5% expressed the opposite point. If family fails to take sufficient care of this factor, the vulnerability of the children is definite.

Faulty Self-Motivation

55% of the respondents agreed that they are wasting time unnecessarily and 15% of them are sometimes wasting time. Only 30% of the respondents are spending their time fruitfully. Here majority of them are wasting their time without any purpose, which may lead to the situation of negative impacts upon their life. In this study out of 50 respondents, 30 students have a specific plan with regard to their future 20 of the respondents have no specific plan for their future education or career. Life without aim is volcanic and fury. Consequences of Substance Abuse among High School Children.

Young people who persistently abuse substances often experience an array of problems, including behavioural problems, academic difficulties, health-related problems, poor peer relationships etc. Additionally, there are consequences for family members, the community, and the entire society. This study found out certain mental health problems of the respondents which were explicit in the respondents who are under substance abuse.

Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal thoughts or suicidal ideation means thinking about or planning suicide. Thoughts can range from a detailed plan to a fleeting consideration. It does not include the final act of suicide. Suicidal thoughts are common and many people experience them when they are undergoing stress or experiencing depression. In most cases, these are temporary and can be treated, but in some cases, they place the individual at risk for attempting or completing suicide.

Table 5: Suicidal Ideation of the Respondent

		Suicidal Ideation		Total
		Yes	No	
Substance Abuse of the Respondent	Yes	20(40%)	15(30%)	35(70%)
	No	3(6%)	12(24%)	15(30%)
Total		23(46%)	27(54%)	50(100%)

The study disclosed that, 40% of the students who are under substance abuse are having suicidal ideation. Only 6% of the respondents who are not using any substances are having suicidal ideation. The reason is that, when they confront a problem, they are relying only on those dangerous substances and those substances cannot solve all the problems. Those who were relayed only upon those substances do not know how to manage each problem and that create confusion in them, thereby they think of suicide.

Irritability

Irritability is an emotional state characterized by feelings of frustration or annoyance and a common symptom of anxiety. Irritability has many causes, the most common of which is a stressful life situation. It indicates a mood or anxiety disorder (Weatherspoon, 2016).

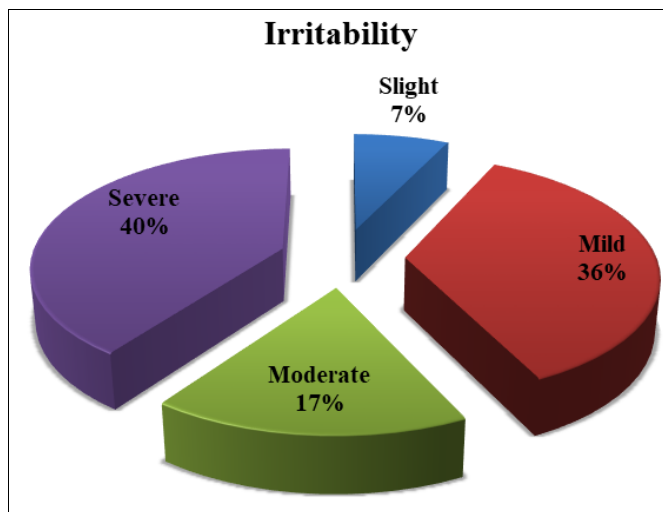


Fig 2: Irritability in the Respondent

A major portion of 57% of respondents has the problem of irritability, where 40% of respondents are having severe problem of irritability and 17% of the respondents are under moderate problem of irritability. There is 36% of the respondents face a mild problem of irritability if it is not confront properly, it may go up to the higher level of irritability. When a mood changes or anxiety comes and those people are not able to handle the issue, behave how their body and mind drives without considering the reason. The result is the aggressive behaviour

Inattention

Inattention can be simply put as a lack of attention or a reduced attention span. There are certain symptoms of inattention includes; making careless mistakes in work or schoolwork, difficulty in sustaining attention during a task or when playing, seems to not listen when spoken to directly, doesn’t follow through on instructions and doesn’t finish work or schoolwork, difficulty organising complex tasks, Forgetfulness, loses important items, avoids or dislikes activities that require long periods of concentration (Virtual Medical Centre, 2008).

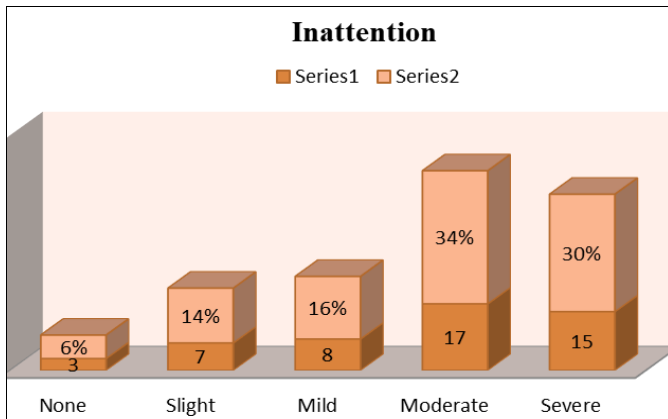


Fig 3: Inattention of the Respondent

There are 15 severe cases of inattention in the study and the 17 respondents are having moderate level of inattention. 8 respondents are suffering from mild problem and 7 respondents are suffering from slight problem of inattention. There are only 3 respondents are free from the problem of inattention. Use of psycho active substances changes the brain function and results in alterations in perception, mood, consciousness and behaviour. That is what the reason for inattention too.

Social Work Application

It is a vital problem to be addressed without any delay. There are primary and secondary methods in social work. In the

school scenario the first two primary social work methods such as case work and group work can be applied. Each teacher in the school should be trained in the area of counselling and who should be guided by the school counsellor. They must be very much thorough with regard to the helping process such as engagement, assessment, intervention and evaluation. An opportunity of personal meeting between class teacher and students should be provided once in a month. Most of the child related problem can be identified from that personal meeting where mutual participation, acceptance, confidentiality, honesty and responsible handling of the problem must be ensured. The students who need the help of the experts must be referred. Both cultural and creative activities can be organized for the students on the subject, ‘the reduction of death, disease and injuries caused by the harmful use of alcohol and other dangerous substances’. The awareness creation on the substance abuse among students from the small class onwards is a fruitful mean for the prevention of the problem. The problems identified by the teachers must be the subjects for the training of the parents which should be done once in a month by an expert of each area which should be coordinated by the school counsellor. An effective training on the identified issues and effective parenting can reduce the problems of the students especially the problem of substance abuse to certain extend. When students, teachers and parents come together against this problem, the prevention, restoration and remediation of the problem of substance abuse can be extended to policy level intervention.

Social Work Intervention Model for Addressing the Problem of Substance Abuse

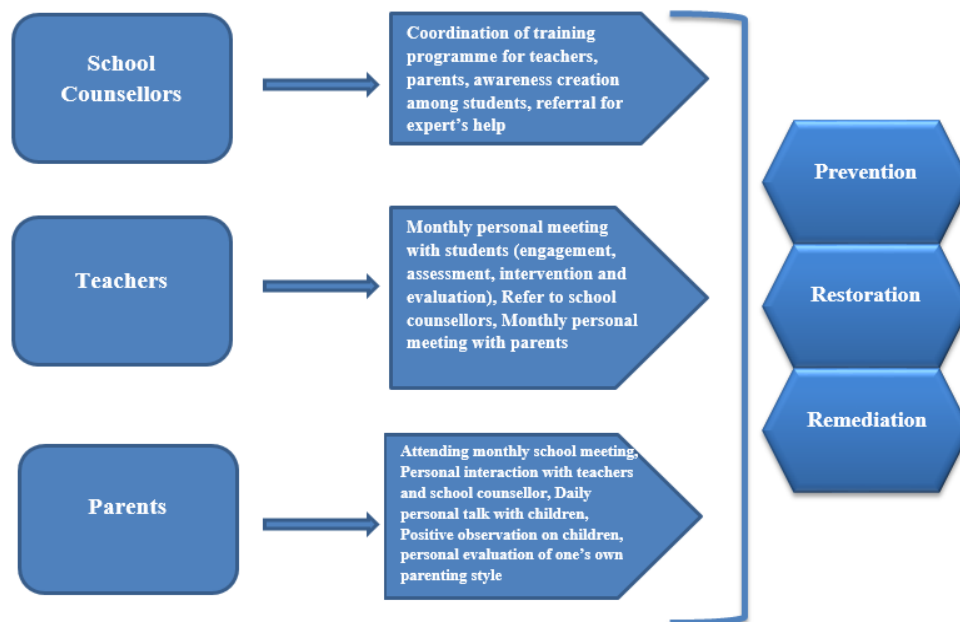


Fig 4

Suggestions

- Challenges of substance abuse need to be included in the curriculum of the school students
- The availability of the substances and its distribution need to be controlled by a strong legislation and its

implementation

- On-going formation to the parents and teachers is necessary to be vigilant of their children and keep a healthy atmosphere in the family
- Continuous counselling is recommendable to the students

who are under substance abuse

- Strengthen the frequency and effectiveness of the awareness creation by using new methods of communication
- Teachers need to develop and foster positive relationships with students and families

Conclusion

Substance abuse refers to the harmful and hazardous psycho active substances which will affect the biological, social, psychological, economic and behavioural realms of a person and after its repeated use, there will be a strong desire to take the drug, difficulties in controlling its use and lead to a wide range of consequences (WHO, 2017) ^[12]. Since Elappara is a place where large group of people are estate employees with lower educational qualification, most of them are resides in estate quarters and the economic condition is rather below the poverty line, there is the problem of substance abuse among them. That problem affected the adults and spreads to the life of the students. The study found out different causes for the problem of substance abuse among the high schools. They are peer pressure, poor family dynamics, and availability, and celebrity influence, faulty influence of the family members and lack of self-motivation. The study realized important consequences of the problem. They are suicidal ideation, irritability, anxiety and inattention. So it is very urgent to stop all the scope of its availability and its distribution, wide range of strong awareness creation, on-going formation for the parents related to the issues, a healthy teacher-student relationship and effective counselling facilities to the problematic students. When the community and the government accept this as a problem, then there will be radical change in the vulnerability of this problem.

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