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Substance Abuse Among School-Going Adolescents: Prevalence and Associated Factors in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal

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Introduction

Substance abuse among adolescents has emerged as a major public health issue that affects not only individual health but also the social and economic development of societies. Adolescence represents a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood characterised by rapid physical growth, emotional development and increased social interaction. During this period, adolescents often exhibit curiosity and a tendency toward experimentation, which may lead to engagement in risky behaviours including substance use. Psychoactive substances such as tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs are commonly used by adolescents across different regions of the world. Early exposure to these substances can significantly influence the physical and mental development of young individuals.

The use of substances during adolescence can result in numerous adverse consequences. These may include impaired cognitive development, poor academic performance, mental health disorders and behavioural problems. Adolescents who initiate substance use at an early age are also more likely to develop substance dependence later in life. Studies have shown that the majority of adult substance users begin experimenting with drugs during adolescence, highlighting the importance of early preventive interventions. The increasing accessibility of substances and the influence of peers, media and social environments have contributed to the growing prevalence of substance abuse among young people.

In India, substance abuse among adolescents has become a growing concern for public health professionals, educators and policymakers. Rapid urbanisation, changing lifestyles and social pressures have contributed to increased exposure of adolescents to substances such as tobacco, alcohol and inhalants. According to various studies conducted in different parts of India, a considerable proportion of school-going adolescents have reported experimenting with substances during their school years. Tobacco in both smoked and smokeless forms remains one of the most commonly used substances among adolescents, followed by alcohol and other drugs.

The state of West Bengal, like many other regions of India, faces challenges related to substance use among adolescents. School environments often serve as important settings where adolescents interact with peers and develop behavioural patterns. Therefore, schools provide an ideal platform for studying the prevalence of substance use and identifying factors that contribute to such behaviours. Understanding the patterns and determinants of substance abuse among adolescents is essential for designing effective prevention strategies and educational programmes aimed at reducing the risks associated with substance use.

In this context, the present study focuses on assessing the prevalence of substance abuse among school-going adolescents in selected government schools of South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. The study also aims to identify associated demographic factors influencing substance use behaviours among adolescents. The findings may provide valuable insights for educators, healthcare professionals and policymakers to develop targeted interventions and school-based prevention programmes.

Objectives

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- To assess the prevalence of substance abuse among school-going adolescents in selected schools of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.
- To identify the types of substances commonly used by adolescents in the selected schools.

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- To compare the prevalence of substance abuse between male and female adolescents.
- To determine the association between substance abuse and selected demographic variables such as age, gender, family background and socio-economic status.

Methodology

The present study proposes to adopt a descriptive research design in order to assess the prevalence and associated factors of substance abuse among adolescents. A descriptive design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to systematically collect and analyse information related to existing behaviours and conditions without manipulating the study environment. The research will be conducted in selected government schools located in the South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal.

The target population of the study will consist of school-going adolescents aged between 13 and 16 years who are enrolled in government secondary schools in the selected district. Adolescence is considered a critical period for the initiation of substance use, making this age group particularly relevant for the study. The study will include both male and female students in order to examine gender differences in substance use patterns.

A probability simple random sampling technique will be used to select participants for the study. A total sample size of 500 adolescents will be selected from ten government schools located in South 24 Parganas district. The participating schools include Harimati Girls High School, S.B. Girls High School, Ananda Ashram Girls High School, Boral Rishi Raj Narayan Girls High School, Khanpur Girls High School, Boral Swamiji Bidyapith, Boral High School, Boroda Prasad High School, Bidya Sagar Bidyapith High School and Boral Rishi Raj Narayan Boys High School.

Data collection will be carried out using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire will consist of two sections. The first section will include demographic information such as age, gender, family background and parental education. The second section will contain questions designed to assess the prevalence and patterns of substance use among adolescents. The questionnaire will include items related to the types of substances used, frequency of use and factors influencing substance use behaviours.

Prior to the main data collection process, necessary administrative permission will be obtained from school authorities. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, and confidentiality of the collected information will be ensured. Data obtained from the questionnaires will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to determine the prevalence of substance abuse and its association with selected demographic variables.

Results

Although the present study is in the proposal stage, certain expected outcomes may be anticipated based on findings from previous research conducted in similar contexts. It is expected that a proportion of school-going adolescents in the selected schools may report exposure to or experimentation with substances such as tobacco, alcohol and inhalants. Tobacco use, particularly in smokeless forms, is likely to be one of the most commonly reported substances among adolescents due to its accessibility and social acceptance in many communities.

The results may also reveal variations in substance use patterns based on demographic characteristics. Male adolescents may demonstrate higher prevalence rates of substance use compared with female adolescents, as reported in several previous studies. Age may also play an important role, with older adolescents within the selected age range showing higher likelihood of substance experimentation. Additionally, factors such as peer influence, family environment and exposure to substance use within the community may be identified as



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contributing factors associated with adolescent substance use.

The findings may also highlight the need for improved awareness and preventive interventions within school settings. Schools with limited health education programmes may show higher levels of substance experimentation among students. The results of the study may therefore emphasise the importance of school-based educational programmes, counselling services and community awareness initiatives aimed at reducing substance abuse among adolescents.

Discussion

The issue of substance abuse among adolescents has attracted increasing attention from researchers and public health professionals due to its significant implications for individual and societal well-being. Adolescents who engage in substance use may experience a range of physical, psychological and social consequences that can affect their overall development. Early initiation of substance use can interfere with cognitive development, academic performance and emotional stability.

Previous studies conducted in various regions of India and other countries have reported similar patterns of substance use among adolescents. Tobacco and alcohol are often identified as the most commonly used substances among school students. The influence of peer groups, curiosity and desire for social acceptance are frequently cited as major reasons for initiating substance use during adolescence. Family environment, parental supervision and socio-economic factors also play important roles in shaping adolescents' behaviour related to substance use.

The expected findings of the present study may contribute to the existing literature by providing region-specific data on adolescent substance abuse in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal. Such information is important because substance use behaviours may vary across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Understanding these local patterns can help educators and health professionals design targeted interventions that address the specific needs of adolescents in the region.

Furthermore, the study may emphasise the role of schools as important settings for preventive interventions. Educational programmes that provide accurate information about the risks associated with substance use, combined with life skills training and counselling services, can help adolescents make informed decisions and resist peer pressure. Collaboration between schools, families and community organisations may further strengthen prevention efforts and create supportive environments that promote healthy lifestyles among adolescents.

Conclusion

Substance abuse among adolescents represents a significant challenge for public health and educational systems. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to experimenting with substances due to curiosity, peer influence and various social and environmental factors. Early initiation of substance use may lead to long-term health complications, behavioural problems and increased risk of addiction in adulthood.

The proposed study aims to assess the prevalence and associated factors of substance abuse among school-going adolescents in selected government schools of South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. By examining demographic variables and patterns of substance use, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the factors influencing adolescent behaviour related to substance abuse.

The findings of the study may contribute to the development of effective school-based prevention strategies and awareness programmes aimed at reducing substance use among adolescents. Strengthening health education, promoting parental involvement and implementing supportive school environments may play an important role in addressing the issue of substance abuse among young people. Continued research and collaborative efforts



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from educators, healthcare professionals and policymakers are essential to safeguard the health and well-being of adolescents and to promote healthier communities.

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