

A Study on Teenage and College Culture: Why Substance Abuse is Considered as Cool?

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to investigate the reasons why teenagers and college going students consider using substance abuse as cool. A sample of 40 students from Pune University ranging from the age of 17 to 21 years was collected through individual interviews and verbal consent was taken from the students. The sample was collected using snowball sampling and accidental sampling. The interview was conducted in small batches of 10 per day. A comprehensive data about the regularity and pattern of substance abuse was collected. The students were labelled as habitual- using once a day, casual- using once a week and experimental- using once a month or less. Data was collected among three categories- smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and other drugs. Results indicated that substance abuse was prevalent among 26 (70%) of the total population, out of which 67% students were smokers, 57% drank alcohol, 41% used other drugs; specifically, habitual smokers (42%), casual smokers (31%), experimental smokers (26%); habitual drinkers (7%), casual drinkers (28%), experimental drinkers (57%); habitual substance users (10%), casual substance users (27%), experimental substance users (42%). There was significant increase in the consumption of cigarettes/ marijuana, alcohol and other drugs. Majority of the population of students reported starting using the substance after joining the university and were mostly influenced by “the pop culture” and peer pressure being the main reasons for these increasing numbers. Furthermore, not being concerned by the long term usage or the consequences of using these substances was reported by the students. The study raises a question about how it is not conducted across other geographical locations. Further studies can explore these possibilities.

Keywords: *Teenage and College Culture, Abuse*

Adolescents and college students are from the age of 13 years to 22 years. “It is a period of life that starts with the biological, hormonal and physical changes of puberty and ends at the age at which an individual attains a stable, independent role in the society”. These are years that mark the beginning of the formative years of a personality. The young adults are highly influenced by their peers, have a heightened sense of curiosity. They indulge in a lot of risky behaviors and one such behavior is substance abuse.

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Substance abuse also known as drug abuse, or chemical abuse, refers to using hazardous and harmful psychoactive substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs. Using these substances causes significant biological, psychological and social problems not only for those who use them but also for people around them such as their families, friends, colleagues and others. Substances of abuse include alcohol, opiates, cocaine, amphetamines, hallucinogens, prescription and over the counter drug abuse.

College student's substance use problem has been ages old. Students after school tend to indulge into trying new drugs and it has become a widespread health problem across the globe. Students all over are performing poorly in academics with a significant decrease in their attendance. They are failing to graduate and eventually remain unemployed after graduating.

Colleges have endorsed "drinking culture", and the young adults tend to binge drink as an act of "freedom and independence". Adolescents also tend to make decisions that are irrational, impulsive, not thinking about the consequences and before they know it they are addicted to a substance.

There is a difference between drug use and drug abuse and one is not exactly sure that at what stage one might become addicted to a substance and become a drug abuser.

The amount of drug/ alcohol consumed does not define one's addiction, it is to do with the effects and consequences.

BASIC CONCEPTS

Alcohol

Alcohol (ethanol or ethyl alcohol) is a component found in beer, wine and spirits which causes intoxication. Alcohol is formed by fermenting yeast (which breaks down with the help of oxygen) and sugars in different foods; for example, wine is made from sugar in grapes, beer is made from sugar in malted barley and cider is made from sugar in apples.

Alcohol is classed as a sedative hypnotic drug which weakens the central nervous system at high doses. At a lower dose, alcohol stimulates the feelings of euphoria and talkativeness and high consumption of alcohol in one session can lead to depression, drowsiness, coma or even death. Irregular but binge drinking of alcohol can lead to accidents and injury, aggressive/ violent behavior, unsafe sex, loss of personal items, lack of routine and hangover. Long term consumption/ dependence on alcohol can lead to high blood pressure, stroke, pancreatitis, cancer, liver diseases, depression, dementia, sexual dysfunctionality, infertility. Excessive consumption of alcohol can also lead to alcohol poisoning. (Zuskin, E., et al., 2006)

Cannabis

Cannabis is the most frequently used substance in the world. It is produced from dried leaves, flowers, stems and seeds of cannabis sativa or cannabis indica plant. It contains mind altering chemical THC and other similar compounds. The THC quickly passes from the lungs to the bloodstream and the blood carries the chemical from the bloodstream to brain and organs throughout the body. Acute use of cannabis can cause euphoria, continuous laughter, talkativeness, sedation, lethargy, intensifies sensory perception, perceptual disturbances and social withdrawal.

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High amounts of Cannabis can lead to psychosis in people without any history of mental illness. It can also cause short term symptoms such as depersonalization, derealisation, hallucinations, delusions, disorientation, psychomotor agitation, aggression and lability. Physical symptoms can increase respiratory problems, cardiovascular consequences, metabolic problems, Gynecology and obstetrics problems and cancer.

Heroin

Heroin is obtained from seed pods of various opium poppy plants. It is an opioid class of drug made from morphine. One can inject, snort, sniff or smoke heroin. Opiates or opioids bind to certain specific receptors in the brain, imitating pain relievers that are being naturally produced. It blocks the perception of pain.

Post the consumption of heroine one feels the effect of euphoria and other common side effects such as dry mouth, nausea/ vomiting, clouded mental itching, whereas the long term effects include insomnia, collapsed veins for injectable users, damaged tissue of the nose for the people who snort, liver and kidney diseases, lung complications mental disorders, infection and abscess, sexual dysfunctionality and irregular menstrual dysfunctions. It can also cause other severe diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis.

Cigarette Smoking

The definition of smoking is the inhalation of the smoke of burned tobacco that may occur occasionally or habitually as a consequence of a physical addiction to some chemicals, primarily nicotine. (Leone, A. Et al, 2010). There are three major pharmacological basis of nicotine addiction:

1. All forms of tobacco are addicting.
2. Addiction from tobacco is caused by "Nicotine".
3. Nicotine causes the same pharmacological and behavioral processes as Heroin and Cocaine.

Significance of the Study

More than half the population of college students are smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and doing other drugs. This has become a worldwide problem. Cigarettes and other substances were always available yet their consumption has increased drastically over the years. There is little evidence about the reasons why college students abuse drugs and consider it cool. One of the main reasons for this research is to know the various psychological and social reasons for doing the drugs and considering it cool. Keeping this in mind, the current study was conducted to find out the reasons for students of Delhi University to consider doing drugs "cool".

In conclusion, I would highlight some points and discuss a few primitive strategies/ treatments for students to fight against the need to use substances in their early years.

Objective

To elicit the reason why college students consider drugs cool.

METHOD

Young adults of 17-21 years of age going to Pune University are the sample population. Through individual interviews, relevant data was obtained from the students. Verbal consent was obtained from the student(s) itself.

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The informants were interviewed in small batches and not exceeding more than 10 per day for a week. A Total sample population of 40 were collected.

Comprehensive data about the regularity and pattern of substance abuse was collected. The students who admitted to smoking were labeled as smokers. Out of which those who disclosed smoking at least once a day were classified as habitual smokers, and those who admitted to smoking once a week were termed as casual smokers; and those who smoked even less i.e. once a month were called as experimental smokers.

Similar criteria were used for those who consumed alcohol and drugs. The data was collected voluntarily. The interview took about 15-20 minutes each.

After the interview, necessary education and counseling was provided to the individuals. SPSS was used for the statistical analysis of the data.

RESULTS

Substance abuse was found to be prevalent amongst 26 (70%) of the total population of 40 young adults.

Out of which the data showed 67% students were smokers, 57% drank alcohol and 41% used other drugs.

Among smokers, around 42% were habitual smokers, 31% were casual smokers and 26% were experimental smokers.

Around 7% were habitual drinkers, 28% of the alcohol drinkers were casual and the remaining 57% were experimental drinkers.

According to the data collected, 10% of the population were habitual substance users, 27% were casual users and 42% were experimental users.

There was a significant increase in the consumption of cigarettes/ marijuana, alcohol and other drugs. Most of the students reported starting using these substances after joining the university. The students conveyed being influenced by pop culture and the peer pressure to be the main reason for doing drugs in university. They further reported that they were not concerned about the long term or recent usage of the drugs and that everyone was doing it and they were doing fine so can they. They also stated that it was legal in many countries and that it did not affect anyone adversely. They were also of the opinion that it was available naturally and would not harm somebody. Although, most of them were marijuana users out of which only 20% were concerned with their usage. The students were then each given "brief feedback and counseling".

DISCUSSION

Numerous studies were conducted in the field of substance abuse. The present research was conducted to study reasons why the college students consider doing drugs cool. There could be many reasons contributing to this such as research done by Baba, T., Ganai, A., Qadri, S., Margoob, M. (2013). The research indicated that life time prevalence of substance abuse in college going students was 31.3%. Ratio of number of females consuming substance was less than the ratio of males. The reasons for significantly high number of students using

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substance was mainly because of lack of knowledge, propensity towards risk taking behaviors, and a substantial prevalence of substance use practices.

CONCLUSION

There is a significant increase in the consumption of substances after becoming a graduate student.

Substance abuse is not a simple problem but rather a complex issue that the majority of the people are facing these days irrespective of their socioeconomic strata. Involvement in substance abuse can lead to depression, anxiety, psychosis and mood disturbances which if left untreated can lead to a permanent damage to the brain. Excessive consumption of alcohol can lead to higher risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The implications of the study were the fact that children at a growing age with their new found freedom tend to develop a risk-taking personality and with continuous exposure to substances leads to habituation and forming a pattern which results in becoming an addict. This along with half-baked knowledge makes it difficult for them to make functional choices in life.

Recommendation

Based on the findings the following measures must be taken in order to prevent any further addiction:

1. Parental education about the disease of addiction and healthy parenting style.
2. Introducing Substance Use, Abuse and Dependence in the curriculum.
3. 10.3 More and more De Addiction programs and rehabilitation centers to be formed.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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