



## School-Based Education Programme for Substance-Abuse Prevention

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### ABSTRACT

Substance-Abuse can be defined as a maladaptive way of substance use that leads to significant adverse changes in the abuser's physical, emotional, social and mental health. Research indicates the growing prevalence of substance abuse in the country. Preventive strategies for substance-abuse needs active and collaborative long-term efforts from the children, teachers, school management, parents and the society at large. School based education programme for substance-abuse is the cumulative experiences initiated at the school level for effective prevention and management of substance abuse among children. Teachers play a crucial role in its effectiveness. In broader terms, active and collaborative implementation supported by continuous and comprehensive evaluation determines the success of a school-based preventive programme. Presence of certain key elements facilitate success of the preventive approaches.

Present article is an initiative to reiterate awareness of substance abuse and rationalize the need and approach of a school based education programme for substance abuse.

### KEYWORDS

Substance-Abuse, School-Based Education, Essential Educational Elements, Prevention, Key Elements.

### Background

A study entitled "The Assessment of Pattern and Profile of Substance Use among Children in India" commissioned by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCP-CR) and conducted jointly by All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and National Drug Dependence Treatment Center, New Delhi emerged with certain findings that reiterated about the alarming rise in substance abuse among urban and rural children in the country. The study was the first Nation-wide research comprising school-going, out-of-school and street children in the country. The sample size was 4024 children from 135 cities and towns in India and covered children between 5-18 years from rural and urban areas. The study findings revealed that Alcohol use in this group was highest in Karnataka (88.9%), Tobacco use in this group was highest in Meghalaya (96.4%), Cannabis use in the group was highest in Uttaranchal (70%) and Heroin use in the group was highest in Meghalaya (27.3%).

Analysis of factors contributing to the degree of prevalence of substance abuse in various states is a potential scope of inquiry in itself. Nevertheless, the study has broadly rekindled the concern about the growing rate of substance abuse in the country. The prevention strategies demand a comprehensive collaboration between children, parents, teacher, policy makers and the community at large. As school is the most powerful platform for socialization in children and substance abuse being significantly triggered through social factors too, it becomes crucially essential to give thoughts on school-based education for substance-abuse prevention among children. The present article is an initiative towards explaining the identification of substance abusers and discussing the essential educational components of school based education for substance abuse.

### Introduction

In the broadest terms, a drug is ".....any substance which changes the way the body functions, mentally, physically or emotionally[2]. Substance abuse is described as a: 'maladaptive' pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by one (or more) of the following within a 12 month period:

- Recurrent use leading to failure to fulfill major role obligations (work, home, school, etc.)
- Recurrent use in situations where it is physically hazardous (e.g. drunk driving)

- Repeated substance related legal problems (repeated disorderly conduct while drunk)
- Persistent use despite recurrent social/interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated
- by the effects of a substance (e.g. arguments with spouse or physical fights)[3]

The commonly abused substances by children include Tobacco, Alcohol, Cannabis (bhang, ganja), Inhalants (ink eraser, correction fluid, glue, petrol), Opioids (street heroin and pharmaceutical opioids, including propoxyphene, pentazocine, buprenorphine) and Sedatives (Diazepam, Nitrazepam, Alprazolam). Research has identified that the reasons behind substance-abuse among children include Curiosity, Peer Pressure, Migration, Poverty, Street life, Easy Availability and Stress. There are two main reasons for the growing concern about the substance abuse menace among children. One is the adverse effect of substance abuse on the individual (abuser). This adverse effect is the maladaptive change the substance brings about in the individual mentally, physically, emotionally and socially. The other reason being the catastrophic effect of substance abuse on the immediate family of the abuser, relationships, community and the society in which they live. In both the ways, the effect of substance abuse is catastrophic with severe extended ramifications.

### School Base Education Programme

School-based education for drug abuse prevention can be defined as the total set of experiences to which students are exposed over their time at school that contribute to preventing drug use and mitigating the consequences of drug use[5]. The recent study quoted above has called for revisiting our strategies and perceptions on substance abuse and demands an active collaboration of teachers, parents, children and the community to tackle the social menace of substance abuse among children. From this perspective, planning an effective school-based education programme demands active participation of all stakeholders and a careful execution of the prevention strategies. Essentially the teachers are the primary stakeholder of such a programme as the programme originates from the school. Hence, as a preliminary step towards such a initiative, it becomes highly essential to identify substance abusers in an academic setting (school). Identification is facilitated by the manifestation of a few physical and psychological/ behavioral symptoms manifested by the abusers. Teachers need to be very vigilant to look for consistent manifestation

of these symptoms in a particular child and more importantly understand that presence of a few of these symptoms cannot be used as a diagnostic tool for substance abuse. Rather they only enable to make the teacher more keenly aware of the children so that early detection of drastic patterns of changes is possible. Nevertheless, expert opinion is always warranted. The table below enlists a few common physical and psychological/ behavioral symptoms to look for by the teachers in identifying substance-abusers at school.

Physical Symptoms	Psychological/Behavioural Symptom
Smell of alcohol, smoke, or other chemicals (eg. Glue) on the child's breath or clothing. Obvious drunkenness, dizziness, or strange behaviour. Change in dress, appearance and grooming. Deterioration of physical appearance and grooming. Wearing of sunglasses at inappropriate time. Continual wearing of long-sleeved garments ( particularly in hot weather) or reluctance to wear short-sleeved attire when appropriate. Difficulty focusing, glazed appearance of the eyes. Loss of memory ( blackouts). Change in eating and sleeping patterns.	Radical change in choice of friends. Frequent arguments, sudden mood changes and unexplained violent actions. Skipping School and failing grades. Runaway and delinquent behaviour. Suicide attempts. Abrupt changes-lower levels of self-discipline. Unusual flare-ups or outbreaks of temper. Withdrawal of responsibility. General changes in overall attitude. Association with known substance abusers. Unusual borrowing of money from friends. Stealing small items from home or school. Secretive behaviour regarding actions and possessions. Poorly concealed attempts to avoid attention and suspicion such as frequent trips to storage rooms, restroom, basement etc. Availability and consumption of abused substance becomes the focus. Changes in peer-group associations and friendships. Impaired interpersonal relationships ( unexplainable termination of deep relationships and/or alienation from close family members).

Essential Educational Elements of School-based Education Programme

Effective school-based education programme for substance-abuse prevention need to include certain educational component/ elements which are the major dimensions of the action strategy. These essential elements are the following.

1. A programme based on a concretely built fundamental guiding principles of substance abuse. These guiding principles are in turn the basic framework of action that provides the greatest probability of achieving success .The guiding principles are essentially integrated in the school curriculum and focuses on empowering students against dependence for substances.
2. A safe and supportive school environment that is built on collaborative relationship between the children, teachers, staff, parents, community members and the policy makers to ensure a conducive environment for learning and development.
3. Strategies for ensuring that all members of the school community contribute to and support school policies and procedures for dealing with substance-abuse.
4. Efficient and appropriate training and professional development to relevant staff.
5. Continuous and comprehensive information and support system for all the parents, especially those of substance abusers.
6. Mechanisms for continuous monitoring and review of the

preventive and management strategies.

What is a Successful School-Based Education Programme for Substance Abuse?

A successful school-based education programme focusing on prevention and management of substance abuse in children is characterized by the prevalence of a few key elements. These key elements are discussed below.

- (1)Close coordination between all stakeholders to address substance-abuse and related problems.
- (2) Need- based and contextualized prevention strategies.
- (3) Develops personal and social skills in the participants to effectively deal with substance resistance and stress management, facilitate social interaction, decision-making, conflict resolution and assertiveness.
- (4) Inclusion of “booster Sessions” in the prevention programmes to effectively follow up the initial preventive measure.

According to *Making the Grade: A Guide to School Drug Prevention Programs* in [1], successful school based drug prevention programs incorporate a variety of key elements. They are discussed below.

1. Help students recognize internal pressures, like anxiety and stress, and external pressures, like
2. peer attitudes and advertising, that influence them to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
3. Develop personal, social, and refusal skills to resist these pressures.
4. Teach that using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs is not the norm among teenagers, even if students believe that “everyone is doing it”.
5. Provide developmentally-appropriate material and activities, including information about the short-term effects and long-term consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
6. Use interactive teaching techniques, such as role plays, discussions, brainstorming and cooperative learning.
7. Cover necessary prevention elements in at least ten sessions a year (with a minimum of three to five booster sessions in two succeeding years).
7. Actively involve the family and the community.
9. Include teacher training and support and contain material that is easy for teachers to implement and culturally relevant for students.
- 10.Adequately integrated with life skills education which in turn needs to be intrinsically linked with the school curriculum.

As discussed in the background note, the recent National study has demanded an imperative action to revitalize our substance abuse preventive strategies. Both the State and Central level experts suggest for stringent enforcement of policies and an active, comprehensive and collaborative effort of the children, parents, teachers and the society to tackle the menace. Hence, the key elements mentioned above can serve as guiding principles to design effective preventive strategies for substance-abuse at school. However, in the Indian Context the programmes and strategies must be essentially state specific and begin at the grassroots level along a continuum.

Conclusion

Substance-abuse among children is a growing concern at the National and Global level. The catastrophic influence of these substances are adversely affecting the health of the abuser mentally, physically, emotionally and socially. Hence a school-based education programme becomes a crucial need for effective prevention of substance-abuse. The present article has highlighted the concept of a school-based education programme for substance-abuse in the background of a recently conducted National study on substance-abuse in the country.

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