

## Awareness of substance abuse amongst arts and science college students in Chennai.

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Substance abuse in India continues to be a substantive problem for the individual as well as the society. The processes of industrialization, urbanization and migration have led to loosening of the traditional methods of social control rendering an individual vulnerable to the strains of modern life thereby increasing the incidence of substance abuse. An essential step to combat this problem is to create awareness about substance abuse.

**Aims and objectives:** To know the level of awareness, to understand the grey areas about substance abuse which they are unaware of and to concentrate in those areas to create awareness.

**Material and Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study carried out amongst 100 college students of arts and science college belonging to first year in Chennai city during January 2015 to June 2015.

**Results:** On analyses, 96 % students were found to have knowledge regarding substance abuse, 43% stated alcohol to be the most abused substance followed by heroin. 46 % of the responders stated that students would be the likely group to abuse and peer pressure would be the main cause for it.

**Conclusion:** It may be concluded that the health education programs in the colleges and a combined effort from the public and public sector, community and government will curb the menace of substance abuse.

**Keywords:** substance abuse; awareness; alcohol; cannabis; tobacco; deaddiction; college students

### INTRODUCTION

The epidemic of substance abuse in young generation has assumed alarming dimensions in India. Changing cultural values, increasing economic stress and dwindling supportive bonds are leading to initiation into substance use. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) substance abuse is persistent or sporadic drug use inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practice.<sup>1</sup>

According to studies by Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse in 2007 and 2012, Sixty-eight percent of college students admitted to drinking alcohol at least occasionally and 86% of American high school students reported that some classmates used drugs, smoked and drank alcohol during the school day. The study also found that almost half of the 5.4 million full-time college students in the United States abuse drugs or drink alcohol on binges at least once per month. Approximately 23% of college students met the medical definition for alcohol or substance abuse or dependence. Furthermore, more than 90% of people with a substance problem began smoking, drinking or using other drugs before age 18. The study indicated that use rates for many substances increased between 1993 and 2014.<sup>2</sup>

Recent reports have documented a global increase in addictive drug availability and consumption and a pattern of vulnerability among those aged between 15 and 25 years.<sup>3</sup> The International Narcotics Control Board in its 2002 report released in Vienna pointed out that in India persons addicted to opiates are shifting their drug of choice from opium to heroin. Drug abuse has increased all over the world and the age of initiation of abuse is progressively falling. Encouragement from the peer group, deep desire to be popular, poor parental control and easy availability of the substances make an adolescent to go for drug abuse. Earlier initiation of drug use is found to have more impairment, rise in crime, and difficulty to quit and is usually associated with a poor prognosis and a lifelong pattern of deceit and irresponsible behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Several studies abroad have reported positive association between knowledge about substance abuse and their attitudes toward substances with limited data from India. This research was aimed to study the awareness about substance abuse in college students from Chennai.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

In this cross-sectional study, a total of hundred College students of Arts and Science Colleges in Chennai were selected. The inclusion criteria was to involve students who have recently entered the professional stream after

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passing out of their Schooling. We excluded the students from other years of the same stream .viz second and third year students who already had the basic awareness about substance abuse. The hundred students were randomly selected amongst the study group and were given a ten item semi-structured self-reported questionnaire on 'substance abuse related awareness questions'. Anonymous questionnaire survey was carried out separately after getting verbal consent and after giving verbal explanation and instructions for how to fill up the same. This study was carried out for a period of 6 months. Compilation of data was done manually. Analysis of the data was done by using appropriate methods using the SPSS Statistical analysis software 16.0 and Microsoft word and Excel was used to generate graphs, tables etc.

## RESULTS

During this study period, 100 college students were selected out of which 96 % were aware about substance abuse (**Figure 1**). According to the students, it was men who were mostly involved in substance abuse and Males dominated the females in substance abuse by the ratio of 9:1. The highest number of victims would belong to age group of 11-20 years (35%) followed by 25% amongst 21-30years and 20% would belong to 31-40years (**Table 1**). 43% of the responders answered that Alcohol was the most likely substance to be abused followed by heroin (25%). In Table 2, the least suggested reply was for cannabis accounting for 5%. In our study, the responders felt that student community would be the most likely group resorting to substance abuse (46%) followed by low income group (23%) and the least by medical professionals (13%). 29% of the students felt that peer pressure is the causative factor for resorting to substance abuse followed closely by job stress and curiosity (26% & 25% respectively). When questioned about whom would the substance abuse affect the most, 72 % of the responders stated that it affects people other than users, amongst which the family (50%) is affected the most. Majority of students (96%) were aware about harmful effects of substances on health viz. oral and throat cancer with chewing and smoking tobacco and HIV with injecting drugs. 65% of them would help the victims by referring them to a doctor or deaddiction center, while 29% would avoid them and 6% choose to do nothing about them. About 2/3rd of the study population felt the need to be aware of substance abuse to identify and help the victims of substance abuse.

## DISCUSSION

Adolescence is a transition phase when the mind is naturally motivated to experimentation and exploration of the world. It is the age when the majority of drug users

start use of substances like tobacco and later progress to alcohol and opioid preparations. Adolescents and young adults often believe that drug use improves their coping with personal difficulties and quarrels with parents/peers. Substance use disorders are quite prevalent (1.8% - 57.4%) in Indian adolescents.<sup>5-8</sup> In our study most of the students appeared to have adequate knowledge about addictive substances, their harmful effects to body and the treatment part of drug abuse. This was in accordance to the study conducted by authors at Jordan and Chandigarh.<sup>3,9</sup>

The ideology of male preponderance in the field of substance abuse was in accordance to the prevalence studies conducted by many authors.<sup>10,11</sup> The adolescents and young adults were the most likely group to abuse the drugs with the peer group. This is again in accordance with studies by few Indian authors and others.<sup>12,13,15</sup> Similarly, majority of students agreed that family of a substance abuser were the most affected and most of the students believed that occasional as well as frequent use of alcohol, cigarettes and illicit drug use were extremely harmful. Increase in incidences of HIV, hepatitis B and C ,cancer and tuberculosis due to addiction adds the reservoir of infection in the community burdening the health care system.<sup>13,14</sup>

One-third of study subjects were feeling risk of substance use on staying with such people, which may have preventive importance at one side thereby likely to avoid contact with drug-addicted individuals. However unlike a study from Ireland, lesser proportion of subjects in our study were having negative attitude towards substance abusers. Hence 65% of the subjects were willing to refer the drug addicts to doctors and de addiction centers for the cure and rehabilitation of those individuals.<sup>16</sup>

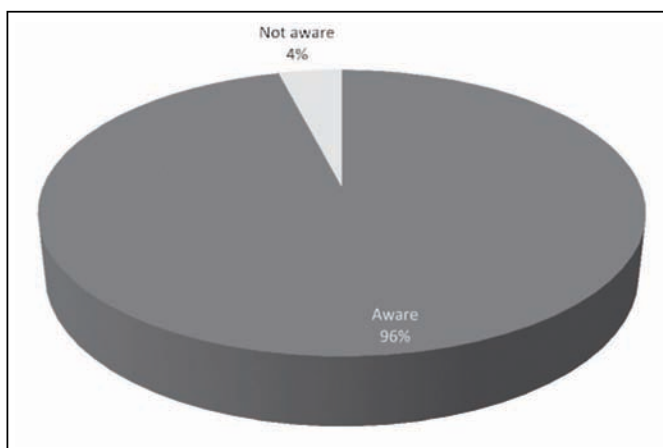
## CONCLUSION

There is a fair amount of knowledge regarding substance abuse among the student population. These findings can be utilized for developing comprehensive prevention programs targeted to the youth. Comprehensive strategy involving specific programmes to bring about an overall reduction in use of drugs has been evolved by the various government agencies and NGOs and is further supplemented by measures like education, counseling, treatment and rehabilitation programmes. These educational programs can be school or college based and should include information concerning addiction and forms of treatment as well as appropriate treatment services.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Declared none.

**Fig.1:** Awareness amongst study group



**Table 1 :** Age and sex wise distribution as per the respondents

| Sl.No | Age Groups | Male | Female | Total (%)   | Sex ratio |
|-------|------------|------|--------|-------------|-----------|
| 1     | 0-10       | 0    | 0      | 0           | -         |
| 2     | 11-20      | 32   | 3      | 35 (35%)    | 10.67:1   |
| 3     | 21-30      | 23   | 2      | 25 (25%)    | 11.5:1    |
| 4     | 31-40      | 19   | 1      | 20 (20 %)   | 19:1      |
| 5     | 41-50      | 8    | 1      | 9(9%)       | 8:1       |
| 6     | 51-60      | 6    | 1      | 7(7%)       | 6:1       |
| 7     | 61-70      | 1    | 1      | 2(3%)       | 1:1       |
| 8     | 71-80      | 1    | 1      | 2 (1%)      | 1:1       |
|       | TOTAL      | 90   | 10     | 100 (100.0) | 9:1       |

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**Table 2** : Profile of awareness amongst the study group

| Characteristics  |  | Percentage |
|--|--|------------|
| Substance most liable for abuse  | Alcohol  | 43 %       |
|  | Tobacco  | 19 %       |
|  | Heroin   | 25%        |
|  | Cannabis                                       | 5 %        |
|  | LSD  | 8%         |
| People who are likely to indulge in substance abuse  | Students                                       | 46%        |
|  | Low income group                               | 23%        |
|  | Medical professionals                          | 13%        |
|  | High income group                              | 18%        |
| Reason for People to resort to the act of abusing drugs  | Peer pressure                                  | 29%        |
|  | Job stress                                     | 26%        |
|  | Curiosity                                      | 25%        |
|  | Availability                                   | 20 %       |
| Whom does the Substance abuse affect   | Users  | 28%        |
|  | Others   | 72 %       |
| What are the health related issues with substance abuse  | Injecting drugs may cause HIV                  | 44%        |
|  | Chewing or smoking tobacco causes oral cancer  | 52%        |
|  | Not aware                                      | 4%         |
| What would you do if you find someone close to you getting addicted to/ starting to abuse a drug | Avoid them                                     | 29%        |
|  | Refer them to a doctor/ deaddiction centre     | 65%        |
|  | Nothing  | 6%         |
| Why do you think it is necessary to know about substance abuse?                                  | To create awareness                            | 30%        |
|  | To identify the people addicted and help them. | 67%        |
|  | Do not think it is necessary to know.          | 3%         |