



# Tackling the Menace of Drug Abuse in Teenagers with Sports

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*Abstract: As the world ushered into an era of globalisation, the way people lived transformed forever. The boons of modernisation in the past few years have also brought along with them the banes of fast paced lifestyles, afflicting the generation of the globalisation the most. Instances of stress and clinical depression in younger population are coming to the fore more than ever before and the children are increasingly resorting to drug use as a means of busting their stress. So much so that substance use among children and adolescents has become a public health concern in several parts of the world. India has a rich demographic dividend, however, according to a prevalence study, 13.1% of the people involved in substance abuse in India are below 20 years of age and this number is increasing at an alarming rate. The present paper aims to provide an overview of the situation of substance abuse among teenagers in India and how sports can be best used to support approaches to substance abuse prevention. The study observed that sports for young people can lead to an improved self-esteem, a better ability to handle stress, increased academic performance and better relationships with family and all these potential benefits have been shown to be protective factors for substance abuse. It was concluded that sports need to be used to keep the young away from drugs and help them canalise their energies for personal and economic growth.*

*Keywords: Drug abuse, Teenagers, Sports.*

## 1. Introduction

As the world ushered into an era of globalisation, the way people lived transformed forever. The boons of modernisation in the past few years have also brought along with them the banes of fast paced lifestyles, afflicting the 'Gen-G' or the generation of the globalisation the most. Instances of stress and clinical depression in younger population are coming to the fore more than ever before. With fast lifestyles squeezed into the schedules of nuclear families and increased experimentation in the wake of lack of parental influence, the children are increasingly resorting to drug use as a means of busting their stress. So much so that substance use among children and adolescents has become a public health concern in several parts of the world. Drug abuse and addiction is characterized as the intake of substances or over-the-counter medicines for purposes other than those for which they are intended, in a self-destructive pattern that leads to significant problems and distress. There are an estimated, over 190 million drug users around the world and the problem has been increasing at alarming rates, especially among young adults under the age of 30. Substance use among youth is uniquely associated with an increased risk of psychiatric disorders, e.g. depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorders.

## 2. Review of Literature

In India, despite the serious threat posed by child substance use and presence of a large proportion of the young, there is a dearth of countrywide or large survey that focusses on prevalence of substance use in children and adolescents. Studies related to substance use among children has remained grossly under-researched in India, limited to sporadic studies at a local or regional level. Another limitation of the prevalent literature is that they are based on small-to-medium samples, mostly conducted at a single setting or at a local or regional level.

**Ray (2004)** compiled the only large, national household survey on prevalence and pattern of substance use in males (12–60 years) conducted in India in 2001. Information incorporated the prevalence among males in the 12–18 years age group (n=8587; current use: 3% for cannabis and 0.1% for opioid use). Results showed that the pattern among these teenagers was strikingly similar to that of those in the age group of 19–30 years. As an extension of the study, a rapid assessment survey was also done at 14 sites, which found that nearly three-fourths of substance users had initiated their first substance use before completing 20 years of age. Another nationwide survey of various health and family welfare indices in a representative household sample across India conducted by the **National Family Health Survey (2006)**. Results showed that of the boys aged 15–19 years (n=13009), 28.6% reported tobacco use and 11% reported alcohol use. Countrywide findings are not yet available for the adolescent subgroup from the more recent NFHS-4 (2015–16) survey. **Pal and Tsering (2009)** gave a systematic review of 15 epidemiological studies published between 1991 and 2007 on Indian high-school students (classes VI to XII) and found that the median prevalence of 'ever tobacco use' to be 18%. **Ray and Dhawan (2009)** reported the use of inhalants as drugs to be especially common among street children, in addition to tobacco, alcohol and cannabis. Substance use was found to be common in



the marginalized populations such as trafficked or abused children. **Sharma and Joshi (2013)** analysed the situation among the street children in India and observed that use of substances was particularly high in this vulnerable population, with Indian studies reporting the dependence of 40%–70% of street children on substances.

### 3. Methodology

The present paper aims to provide an overview of the situation of substance abuse among teenagers in India and how sports can be best used to support approaches to substance abuse prevention.

### 4. Prevalence of substance use among Indian children

In India, children aged between 10 and 19 years constitute 22.8% of the population (243 million approximately) out of which nearly 65%–70% of children are enrolled for primary school. Earlier, the problem of substance use was associated mainly with street children who had either never had the opportunity to attend school or had dropped out of school after few years of schooling. However, over the years, drug menace is becoming a problem specifically of the urban children. According to a prevalence study, 13.1% of the people involved in substance abuse in India are below 20 years of age.

### 5. Sports as an antidote to the drug hazard

Sports have been played since ancient days for a mix of many reasons such as fun, self-improvement and competition and over time, many different kinds of sports have evolved to have a positive effect on individuals and societies in many different ways. Research has shown that sport for young people can lead to an improved self-esteem, a better ability to handle stress, increased academic performance and better relationships with family (Brettschneider, 1999). Since potential benefits including reduced stress, increased academic performance and improved family relations – have been shown to be protective factors for substance abuse, sport can be used to assuage the damage caused by substance use among youth.

The world of sports offers many choices that can appeal to a range of interests, and which can develop particular strengths or protective factors in youth. For example: Team sports such as football or rugby may be particularly good for developing social skills such as communication, conflict management and working effectively with others toward a common goal; individual sports, such as archery or table tennis, may be particularly suited to developing self-reliance, self-discipline and personal goal setting; extreme sports, such as white-water kayaking or mountain climbing, can build self-reliance and fill the need for adventure and a measure of risk that may serve as an alternative to drug use for some young people, outdoor sports, including cross-country skiing and cycling, can increase appreciation and care for the natural environment and indigenous sports like those played by aboriginal people around the world can help young people to connect with their culture and traditions.

### 6. Recommendations & Conclusion

Substance abuse among children has received attention only recently in India and much work needs to be done to address the issue. The first step is to acknowledge this emerging problem that needs to be proactively addressed. It is important to bring stakeholders together to address the issue through a multipronged approach with an equal focus on prevention as well as treatment efforts. The key ministries to be involved in a joint effort to prevent and treat substance use among children are the ministries of Social Justice and Empowerment, Health, Women and Child Development, Human Resource Development, Youth Affairs and Sports, Labour and Employment, and the Department of AIDS Control. The need for effective coordination between the different ministries cannot be over-emphasized for dealing with the problem of child substance use. Sports need to be used to keep the young away from drugs and help them canalise their energies for personal and economic growth.

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