



# SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN TEENAGERS: A GROWING PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

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## Abstract:-

Substance abuse among teenagers has emerged as a significant and growing public health concern worldwide. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, psychological, and social changes, making teenagers particularly vulnerable to experimenting with psychoactive substances. Commonly abused substances include alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, prescription medications, inhalants, and other illicit drugs. Early exposure to these substances increases the risk of addiction, mental health disorders, poor academic performance, and long-term health complications. Multiple factors contribute to substance abuse in teenagers, including peer pressure, family dysfunction, academic stress, mental health challenges, and increased exposure to substances through media and social environments. The misuse of substances during this developmental period can negatively impact brain development, impair decision-making abilities, and lead to risky behaviors such as unsafe sexual practices, violence, and criminal activity. Furthermore, substance abuse places a significant burden on families, healthcare systems, and society as a whole. Management of substance abuse in teenagers involves early identification, counseling, and strong family and community support. Open communication between parents and teenagers helps build trust and encourages adolescents to seek help without fear. Professional counseling and behavioral therapy are important to address underlying emotional or psychological issues linked to substance use.

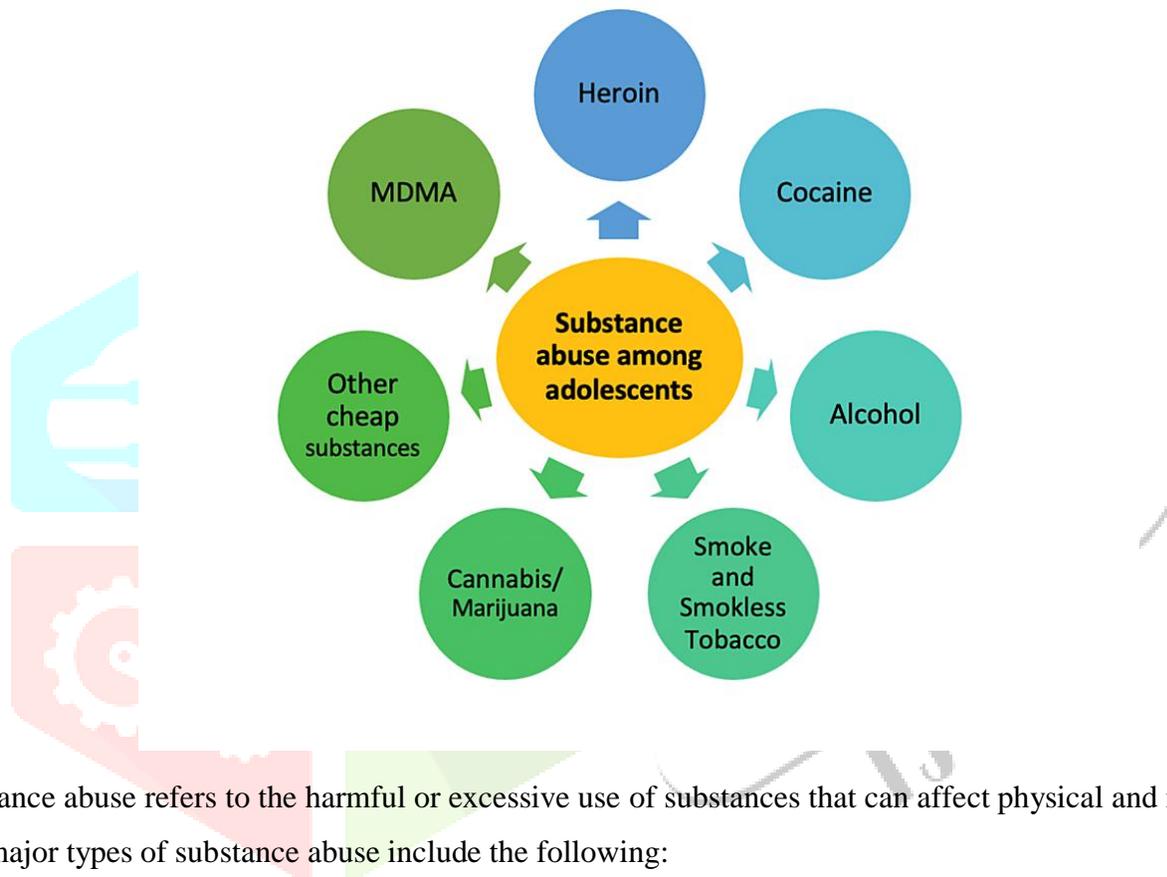
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## Substance Abuse in Teenagers

Substance abuse among teenagers is a growing social and public health concern worldwide. Adolescence is a critical stage of development marked by physical, emotional, and psychological changes. During this period, many teenagers experiment with substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs, often without fully understanding the long-term consequences. Substance abuse not only affects a teenager's health but also impacts their academic performance, relationships, and future opportunities.

One of the primary causes of substance abuse in teenagers is peer pressure. Adolescents often feel the need to fit in with their social groups, and substance use may be seen as a way to gain acceptance or appear mature. Family factors also play a significant role. Teenagers from unstable homes, where there is neglect, lack of supervision, or parental substance use, are more likely to engage in similar behaviors. Additionally, stress related to academic pressure, mental health challenges, and exposure to substances through media can increase the risk of experimentation and addiction.

### Types of Substance Abuse:



Substance abuse refers to the harmful or excessive use of substances that can affect physical and mental health. The major types of substance abuse include the following:

#### 1. Alcohol Abuse

Alcohol abuse involves excessive or frequent drinking that interferes with daily life. It can lead to health problems such as liver damage, poor judgment, addiction, and risky behaviors, especially among teenagers.

#### 2. Tobacco and Nicotine Abuse

This includes smoking cigarettes, using chewing tobacco, or vaping e-cigarettes. Nicotine is highly addictive and can cause lung disease, heart problems, and long-term dependency.

#### 3. Drug Abuse

Drug abuse refers to the misuse of illegal drugs or the improper use of legal drugs. Common examples include:

- **Illegal drugs** such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine
- **Prescription drugs** such as painkillers, sedatives, and stimulants when used without a doctor's advice

#### 4. Inhalant Abuse

Inhalant abuse involves breathing in chemical vapors from household products like glue, paint thinners, aerosol sprays, or gasoline. This type of abuse is especially dangerous and can cause sudden death or permanent brain damage.

#### 5. Prescription Medication Abuse

This occurs when prescribed medicines are taken in higher doses, shared with others, or used for non-medical reasons. It can lead to addiction, overdose, and serious health complications.

#### 6. Performance-Enhancing Substances

These include anabolic steroids and other substances used to improve physical appearance or athletic performance. Abuse can cause hormonal imbalance, aggression, and long-term organ damage.

The effects of substance abuse on teenagers are severe and far-reaching. Physically, drug and alcohol use can damage the developing brain, leading to memory problems, impaired judgment, and increased risk of addiction later in life. Mentally, substance abuse is closely linked to anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Academically, affected teenagers often experience a decline in concentration, poor grades, absenteeism, and in some cases, school dropout. Socially, substance abuse can strain relationships with family and friends and may lead to involvement in risky or criminal behavior.

### World Health Organization (WHO) & Global Substance Use (2025)

#### 1. WHO Global Status Report on Alcohol & Substance Use Disorders (2025)

The WHO's Global status report on alcohol and health and treatment of substance use disorders (2025 edition) provides an updated overview of:

- Patterns of alcohol consumption worldwide
- Harmful use of alcohol and other psychoactive substances
- National responses to prevention and treatment
- Service capacity for treating substance use disorders. It aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.5, which aims to strengthen prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including alcohol and narcotic drug abuse. The report includes policy recommendations and tracks progress toward global public health goals.

#### 2. WHO Findings on Opioid Use & Treatment (2025)

According to a WHO update:

- Around 64 million people globally have drug use disorders.
- Opioids are a major contributor, with about 60 million people engaging in non-medical opioid use (e.g., heroin, prescription opioids).
- An estimated 600,000 annual deaths are attributed to drug use, with about 450,000 due to opioids alone.

- Despite the high burden, less than 10% of people with opioid dependence access treatment. WHO has emphasized *expanded access to evidence-based treatment* including opioid medication–assisted therapy (e.g., methadone, buprenorphine) and psychosocial support.

### 3. Estimated Global Illicit Drug Use (WHO-Referenced)

While the formal **UNODC World Drug Report 2025** is the primary source for detailed drug-use stats, WHO sources cite global drug-use figures:

- About 292–316 million people globally aged 15–64 used drugs (excluding alcohol and tobacco).
- Cannabis remains the most widely used drug, followed by opioids, amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy.
- Drug use prevalence has risen over the past decade, especially in parts of the world with instability and conflict. (These figures are consistent with WHO regional reporting, though the core estimate originates from the UNODC 2025 report discussed alongside WHO analyses.)

### 4. E-Cigarette Use in Teens

A *specific 2025 WHO estimate* highlights:

- At least 15 million teenagers aged 13–15 globally use e-cigarettes.
- Young people are about nine times more likely to vape than adults where data are available.
- Vaping is a growing public health concern due to nicotine addiction and potential long-term harms.
- ❖ **“According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment’s** recently released report on the “National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India” (2019), the magnitude of substance use is:

16 crore people (14.6%) between the age of 10 and 75 years are current users of alcohol, and out of them, 5.2% are alcohol dependents.

- About 3.1 crore individuals (2.8%) are cannabis users, and 72 lakh (0.66%) people suffer from cannabis problems.
- Overall opioid users 2.06% and nearly 0.55% (60 lakh) require treatment services/health
- 1.18 crore (1.08%) are current users of sedatives (non-medical use).
- 1.7% of children and adolescents are inhalant users as compared to adults of 0.58%. Nearly 18 lakh children need help for inhalant use.
- It is estimated that about 8.5 lakh people are injecting drugs (PWID – people who inject drugs)

Protecting children from the widespread prevalence of substance abuse is one of the biggest policy challenges being faced by India. Recent reports, of both official and private agencies, indicate that there has been a substantial increase in the prevalence of use and abuse of substances in young children.

**Target Audience:** The programmes will be carried out through collaborative efforts of other Central Ministries, State Governments, Universities, Training Institutions, NGOs and other voluntary organizations. The following have been enlisted under the NAPDDR:

1. School and college students
2. Teachers, counselors and teaching faculty of school and colleges
3. Functionaries of IRCAs and professionals in drug prevention sector etc.
4. Service providers, both in Government, Semi-Government and Non-Government Settings
5. Representatives of PRIs and ULBs, police functionaries, paramilitary forces, judicial officers, bar council etc. on drug abuse prevention
6. Staff in Prisons and Juvenile Homes and ICPS functionaries.

## **Policies of Govt. for substance abuse in teenagers**

### **1. Drug Addiction (Narcotic and Psychotropic Substances)**

Drug addiction is governed primarily by the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. This law aims to control and regulate narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. It strictly prohibits the production, possession, sale, and consumption of illegal drugs and imposes severe punishment for trafficking and organized drug crime. At the same time, the law recognizes addiction as a health issue.

To complement legal control, the government launched the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR). This policy focuses on:

- Preventing drug use, especially among youth
- Creating awareness in schools and communities
- Establishing de-addiction and rehabilitation centers
- Supporting NGOs and community participation

### **2. Alcohol Addiction**

The directive principles of state policy (DPSP) in the constitution of India (article 47) state that. The State shall endeavor to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health.

Sale and consumption of alcoholic liquor for human consumption is prohibited in the states of Bihar, Gujarat, Mizoram, and Nagaland. All other Indian states and union territories permit the sale and consumption of alcohol.

The government views alcohol addiction mainly as a public health and social issue. Measures include:

- Regulation of drinking age and sale outlets
- Awareness campaigns on harmful drinking
- Treatment of alcohol dependence in government hospitals

- De-addiction services under mental health programs

Although alcohol is legally consumed, excessive use is discouraged through health education, taxation, and restrictions, especially to protect youth and vulnerable populations.

### 3. Tobacco Addiction

Tobacco addiction is addressed through strong public health legislation. The main law is the **Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003**. This Act aims to reduce tobacco consumption by:

- Banning smoking in public places
- Prohibiting sale of tobacco to minors
- Restricting tobacco advertising and promotion
- Mandating health warnings on tobacco products

In addition, the **National Tobacco Control Program (NTCP)** focuses on:

- Creating awareness about health risks
- Providing tobacco cessation services
- Training health workers
- Implementing tobacco-free school initiatives

### 4. Prescription Drug and Pharmaceutical Addiction

Addiction to prescription medicines such as opioids, sedatives, and painkillers is regulated under:

- NDPS Act
- Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940

These laws aim to ensure that medicines are used only for medical purposes and are not misused or illegally sold. The government regulates pharmacies, monitors drug distribution, and penalizes illegal sale.

Treatment for prescription drug addiction is managed through:

- De-addiction centers
- Mental health services
- Hospital-based counseling

The focus here is on regulation, monitoring, and treatment rather than criminalization of patients.

### 5. Behavioral Addictions (Internet, Gaming, Gambling)

India does not yet have a separate law exclusively for behavioral addictions such as internet addiction or gaming disorder. However, these are increasingly recognized as mental health concerns.

Under the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, individuals suffering from behavioral addictions have the right to:

- Mental health care
- Counseling and psychiatric treatment
- Protection from discrimination

Schools, parents, and healthcare providers are encouraged to identify early signs and seek psychological intervention. The policy approach is therapeutic rather than legal.

## 6. Child and Youth-Specific Policies

Children and adolescents are given special protection under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The Act:

- Penalizes supplying alcohol or drugs to minors
- Emphasizes rehabilitation and social reintegration
- Encourages counseling and care rather than punishment

School-based programs, life-skills education, and peer awareness campaigns are used to prevent early initiation into substance use.

## 7. Rehabilitation and Support Systems (Common to All Addictions)

Across all types of addiction, the government supports:

- Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCA's)
- District De-Addiction Centres
- NGO-run treatment facilities with government funding
- A national de-addiction helpline (14446)

Rehabilitation policies focus on recovery, social reintegration, and relapse prevention.

### **Management of substance abuse in teenager :-**

Management of substance abuse in teenagers involves early identification, counseling, and strong family and community support. Open communication between parents and teenagers helps build trust and encourages adolescents to seek help without fear. Professional counseling and behavioral therapy are important to address underlying emotional or psychological issues linked to substance use. Schools can support management through awareness programs and peer support groups, while communities should provide access to rehabilitation services and mental health care. With proper guidance, monitoring, and a supportive environment, teenagers can recover and develop healthy coping skills.

### **Conclusion:-**

In conclusion, substance abuse in teenagers is a serious issue that demands attention and proactive intervention. By addressing its causes, understanding its consequences, and promoting effective prevention strategies, society can help teenagers make informed choices and lead healthier, more productive lives. The Indian government's policy on substance abuse among teenagers reflects a comprehensive and balanced approach that recognizes adolescent substance use as both a public health concern and a social challenge. Through a combination of legal measures, preventive education, treatment, and rehabilitation, the government aims to reduce both the supply of substances and the demand among young people.

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