

IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE ON FAMILIES

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Abstract

Over the last few decades, the use of illegal drugs has spread to practically every part of the globe. No society remains immune to the devastating problem of substance abuse. Substance abuse poses various problems impacting not just the individual user, but also his/her family and community. The adverse impact of drug use on families is tremendous. Relationships suffer, financial sources are depleted, health care costs increases, and employment problems and increased emotional stress arise. There is also a serious risk of transmission of HIV/AIDS, STI's and other blood-borne viruses to partners of infected persons. Within the family, it is often the women, in the role of wife or mother, who is the most affected by an individual's drug abuse and has to bear a significant part of the burden on the family.

Keywords: drug abuse, alcoholism, the family

Introduction

Like many other societies and communities, our region is also undergoing changes with the impact of globalization. Changing roles and increased demands on work add stress and alterations in lifestyle that brings with them the menace of substance abuse. There is a great demand for parents today than ever before to nurture and to cultivate values that can protect and preserve their kids from falling into any addictive habits.

Contemporary Views of the Family

Contemporary society generally views family as a haven supplying absolute fulfillment. The family is believed to encourage “intimacy, love and trust where individuals may escape the competition of dehumanizing forces in modern society from the rough and tough industrialized world, and serve as a place where warmth, tenderness and understanding can be expected from a loving mother and protection from the uncaring world can be expected from the father. However, the idea of protection is declining as civil society faces less internal conflict combined with increased civil rights and protection from the state. To many, the ideal of personal or family fulfillment has replaced the earlier concept of protection as the major role of the family. The family now supplies what is vitally needed but missing from other social arrangements.

The idea of family implies an enduring involvement on an emotional level. Family members may disperse around the world, but still be connected emotionally and are able to contribute to the dynamics of family functioning. The family system can be divided in several ways.

- Extended families, which include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other relatives.
- There are nuclear families in the cities.
- In search of quality education many young people travel to urban areas from rural areas and stay as guests in some rented place or stay with their relatives.
- Hostels are also on the increase that increases the vulnerability of the young adolescents who are coming from rural areas.
- In rural agriculture being the main source of income, most of the elders become bread winners of the family and spent time in the fields from morning to evening. They hardly have time to interact with their children.
- There are some families where a single parent is playing a double role, especially mothers, whose husbands are alcoholics, take on the role of both father and mother.

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Broken relationships and inconsistencies in marriages are also on the increase and many have not understood the institution of marriage as a concept of a life long journey.

Addiction and Family

A Positive and healthy atmospheres at home along with a supportive nurturing environment at school are of prime importance. However, many homes and schools are not ideal and therefore, the temptation is so great that youngsters succumb to this attraction and start on the road to addiction (Eastern Panorama, Nov 2006). Children with substance abused parents are more likely to have emotional problems than whose parents are not addicted to any substance abuse. The addict is the symptom carrier of the family dysfunction and this is a manifestation of society's illness. In the earlier times, in a joint family system, if one member of a family fell on hard times, other members used to help him out. But in the present age, where joint family has given way to nuclear family, there is no way to help an individual out from his crisis (Eastern Panorama, Nov 2006, p.13). In order to come out of the web of addiction, families of drug addicts (co-dependents) have to start living their own lives in order to help the addicts. Instead of becoming frustrated and pessimistic with their own kith and kin, who have taken to drugs, they should learn balancing their energy, time and dedication between their own activities and their responsibilities towards the abusers (Eastern Panorama, Nov 2006, p.13).

Family is the primary potent influence upon the direction, which an individual takes and maintains in his life. The cause of drug usage was influenced by the quality of affectionate family relationships and bonding. Parents take an interest in the career of their children and are conscious of their parental obligations and when these demands are not fulfilled there exist family problems. The nature of family control, the discipline imposed by the parents over the children, the parents' interest in their friends, leisure activities and their future career prospects and parents remaining conscious of their obligations towards their children were found to be important factors which determine children's inclination to step into the world of drugs. Drinking, smoking and drug taking behaviour of family members also have a bearing on the use of drugs. So family environment is an important factor in drug usage. One of the major problems in Dimapur among the young people is that many of them are

experiencing the dissolution of the marriage of their parents. A young boy of 18 who is on to drugs says that 'my father and mother are separated for more than a year now after a big fight. I did not know what to do or how to manage this situation and drugs gave me a solution. And I am a full-blown addict now. Whose fault is it? Inadequate parenting could be also considered a valuable point because most of our parents are not educated. Even if they are educated they do not know how to bring up children inculcating moral values in them. There are many educational institutions within the city. Many parents keep their children in the boarding or in rented houses. This creates a chance for non-guided young children to enter into drugs. Many parents do not spend quality time with their children and are not bothered about what is happening to them. In the name of freedom and growth there is widespread misuse of money. Money is replaced by love and care and this trend is very high among the affluent families. Easy availability of money enables them to buy drugs and to experiment with them.

Children from addictive families may suffer emotional problems like guilt, anxiety, embarrassment, and inability to have or form close friendships, this increases confusion, anger and depression in them. Children feel lonely and helpless as they think that they cannot change the situation. Experts think that the following behaviours may indicate a drinking problem at home: failing in or not attending school, lack of friends, withdrawal from classmates, anti-social behaviour such as stealing, fighting, frequent physical complaints, abuse of alcohol or drugs and aggression towards other children. Professional help is important in preventing more serious problems in children, such as alcoholism and substance abuse. Even if the parents are not receiving treatment for alcoholism or substance abuse, the children should have educational programmes that can benefit them to deal with addiction. This may prevent many from being a prey to this menace.

Families of drug-dependent persons face a number of problems including violence, disruption of family rituals, separation, divorce, inappropriate role models and economic difficulties. Addiction does not burst into the family the way a heart attack would; instead it creeps in slowly and silently, until it is finally detected and perhaps only then it is faced by the family members. However, by this time it has left its mark on each member of the family. Addiction is not a condition which once treated can be completely cured. It is a chronic and relapsing condition, it is always likely to

bring the individual back to the same situation of dependence if the individual and his/her family do not take adequate precautions. Treating drug dependence therefore involves more than just getting the drug user to stop using drugs. It also involves counseling the family and thus improving family relationships and its functioning. Many partners of drug dependent persons suffer anxiety, insomnia, tension and depression. Other family members often have serious social and psychological problems. They often feel a strong sense of guilt or anger and have a desire for vengeance, which they take out on their children or colleagues at work and in society.

The effects of substance abuse frequently extend beyond the nuclear family. Extended family members may experience feelings of abandonment, anxiety, fear, anger, concern, embarrassment, or guilt; they may wish to ignore or sever ties with the person abusing substances. Some family members even may feel the need for legal protection from the person abusing substances. Moreover, the effects on families may continue for generations. Intergenerational effects of substance abuse can have a negative impact on role modeling, trust, and concepts of normative behaviour, which can damage the relationship between generations. For example, a child with a parent who abuses substances may grow up to be an overprotective and controlling parent who does not allow his or her children sufficient autonomy. The family's reactions to the dependent:

1. Denial: In order to avoid humiliation and embarrassment the members of the family deny the existence of the problem. As a result, the family members protect the person, deny that the relationship is troubled and so on.
2. Preoccupation: Most of the time the family members are preoccupied or obsessed like the dependent on how to handle him and this affects the personal life as well health of the members. Some of them develop self-destructive, manipulative and some other unhealthy coping mechanisms.
3. Problem finding: The family members strongly feel that the dependent takes drugs due to certain problems. It often changes the way of life in the family atmosphere by caring for him/her, giving extra time and trying to please him/her, thinking that family atmosphere is not conducive for

the dependent. Many of them believe that this problem is temporary and would end soon. They look for a new morning in their life.

4. Bargaining: To cope with the crisis, parents or partners bargain with the dependent saying that we will set up business for you if you give up drugs, or we will send you to another place for studies and many other options to give up drugs. But it does not help them, instead it leads to depression and frustration.
5. Blaming: Blame Game is often played as they have no means of expressing their feelings. Parents blame each other and the family feels threatened by the presence of the dependent and there are quarrels among the family members. Sometimes they try to send him/her to hostels or to a faraway place. This brings tension in the family.
6. Controlling: When the family members are not able to control them or their behaviour, they try to control him/her through taking away the drugs that are hidden in the toilets or in beds. They also keep the house under lock and key. Most of the time, the family denies the victim opportunities for them to get drugs. They ask him/her to avoid friends. But it does not help them but rather increases the vulnerability of the individual.
7. Disorganization: All the attempts to help the client have failed. There seems to be no solution to the problem. The parents or partners become frustrated and adverse reactions takes place and it affects the other members of the family. Very often the children become the victim of this menace. There are sudden outbursts, quarrels, breaking of things and many unhealthy behaviour patterns are often developed.
8. Aggression: It becomes a way of expressing one's helplessness over addiction.
9. Change in Sexual Relationships, conflicts and lead to other psychosocial problems.

Negativism: Any communication that occurs among family members is negative, taking the form of complaints, criticism, and other

expressions of displeasure. The overall mood of the household is decidedly downbeat, and positive behaviour is ignored. In such families, the only way to get attention or enliven the situation is to create a crisis. This negativity may serve to reinforce the substance abuse.

Parental Inconsistency: Rule setting is erratic, enforcement is inconsistent, and family structure is inadequate. Children are confused because they cannot figure out the boundaries of right and wrong. As a result, they may behave badly in the hope of getting their parents to set clearly defined boundaries. Without known limits, children cannot predict parental responses and adjust their behaviour accordingly. These inconsistencies tend to be present regardless of whether the person abusing substances is a parent or child and they create a sense of confusion in the children.

Parental Denial: Despite obvious warning signs, the parental stance is: (1) "What drug/alcohol problem? We don't see any drug problem!" or (2) after authorities intervene: "You are wrong! My child does not have a drug problem!"

Miscarried Expression of Anger: Children or parents who resent their emotionally deprived home and are afraid to express their outrage use drug abuse as one way to manage their repressed anger.

Self-Medication: Either a parent or child will use drugs or alcohol to cope with intolerable thoughts or feelings, such as severe anxiety or depression.

Unrealistic Parental Expectations: If parental expectations are unrealistic, children can excuse themselves from all future expectations by saying, in essence, "You can't expect anything of me—I'm just a pothead/speed freak/junkie." Alternatively, they may work obsessively to overachieve, all the while feeling that no matter what they do it is never good enough, or they may joke and clown to deflect the pain or may withdraw to side-step the pain. If expectations are too low, and children are told throughout youth that they will certainly fail, they tend to conform their behaviour to their parents' predictions, unless meaningful adults intervene with healthy, positive and supportive messages.

In all of these cases, what is needed is a restructuring of the entire family system, including the relationship between the parents and the relationships between the parents and the children. The next section discusses treatment issues in different family structures that include a person who is abusing substances.

The consequences of an adult who abuses substances and lives alone or with a partner are likely to be economic and psychological. Money may be spent for drug use; the partner who is not using substances often assumes the provider role. Psychological consequences may include denial or protection of the person with the substance abuse problem, chronic anger, stress, anxiety, hopelessness, inappropriate sexual behaviour, neglected health, shame, stigma, and isolation. Over the last few years the increasing numbers of untimely demises of young people are witness to the problem of substance abuse. The families need to reconsider the way in which the system is functioning; the social workers and other indicators have to point the way to bring a change in the social system and society.

Co-Dependency Traits

Codependent people are thought to have several patterns of behaviour:

- They are controlling because they believe that others are incapable of taking care of themselves.
- They typically have low self-esteem and a tendency to deny their own feelings.
- They are excessively compliant, compromising their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.
- They often react in an oversensitive manner, as they are often hyper vigilant to disruption, troubles, or disappointments.
- They remain loyal to people who do nothing to deserve their loyalty (CoDA 1998).

Substance use and abuse among adolescents continues to be a serious condition that impacts cognitive and affective growth, school and

work relationships and all family members. As youth abuse alcohol and illicit drugs, they may establish a continuing pattern of behaviour that damages their legal record, educational options, psychological stability and social development. Drug use (particularly inhalants and solvents) may lead to cognitive deficits and perhaps irreversible brain damage. Adolescents who use drugs are likely to interact primarily with peers who use drugs, so relationships with friends, including relationships with the opposite sex, may be unhealthy, and the adolescent may develop a limited repertoire of social skills.

- Families possess *nonsummativity*, which means that the family as a whole is greater than—and different from—the sum of its individual members.
- The behaviour of individual members is interrelated through the process of *circular causality*, which holds that if one family member changes his or her behaviour, the others will also change as a consequence, which in turn causes subsequent changes in the member who changed initially. This also demonstrates that it is impossible to know what comes first: substance abuse or behaviors that are called “enabling.”
- Each family has a pattern of *communication traits*, which can be verbal or nonverbal, overt or subtle means of expressing emotion, conflict, affection, etc.
- Families strive to achieve *homeostasis*, which portrays family systems as self-regulating with a primary need to maintain balance.

Remedial Measures

The family is the fertile bed where the children strike roots and grow mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It is in the family that children learn their social skills and the ways of interacting in a civilized manner with those they encounter. Nothing can replace the family in one’s life.

Parenting has to take place naturally, but unfortunately, we are all bombarded with so much information from the media that parenting has become a crisis. Gone are the days where all members of the family stayed

together, where grandparents played a great formative role in the lives of the youngsters and mothers spent their time in cuddling their babies. Parents have a difficult job of instilling values that will help them build their lives.

1. Allot time for your children: Accept them as they are because they will be like you. They need your time and not your money alone.
2. Belief in your child: When we believe in someone it brings out the best in them. Children want their parents to believe in them.
3. Get involved: Play together, get to know the friends of your children, create a welcome environment and foster strong family bonds.
4. Learn to communicate:
 - i. Be a good listener
 - ii. Being free to express their thoughts and feelings
 - iii. Being clear with them what you don’t want from them
 - iv. Exposing children to music, art, reading and other activities
 - v. Teach your children to be assertive when appropriate
5. Help to develop positive self-esteem by appreciation and encouragement
6. Be a role model
7. Have principles in life

Conclusion

The impact of substance abuse on families has marked the future with a question mark. What would happen to the young generation after 10 years and the accelerated growing numbers of people getting infected with HIV/AIDS is alarming. Drug and alcohol abuse is a problem for adults in our world today. But it is probably an even bigger problem for the children of today who are being raised by alcoholics or drug users. These children have to endure a family life that is often unpredictable and chaotic, which can lead to many problems later in life. To think that these children have their

whole future lying ahead of them to face should cause a lot of concern on how they are being raised today. The society is yet to accept the fact of addiction and its impact on families. Alcohol abuse, by either an adult or an adolescent, alters metabolism and affects the internal organs, particularly the liver, the central nervous system, cognitive and emotional functioning. Intravenous drug use is frequently associated with HIV infection, hepatitis and endocarditic within the adolescent population. Prolonged use of inhalants causes irreversible neuropsychological damage. The families are not aware of the consequences of substance abuse though the prevalence is high.

Substance abuse adversely affects psychosocial maturity of adolescents, compromises their school performance, contributes to low achievement and increases the rates of school dropouts. Substance abuse interrupts normal psychosocial functioning, decreases social support, diminishes participation in age appropriate activities, produces anxiety, tension, and lowers self-esteem. Many parents that abuse drugs or alcohol will treat their families differently on different days, depending on their level of sobriety at the time. Often the mood swings and changes in parenting that these parents exhibit will confuse the child or make them insecure. Inconsistent care by a parent can lead to a child that either has to grow up quickly and assume adult responsibilities, or one that rebels and gives up trying to do well in school or life. Children in these homes need to constantly be prepared for a parent that is high or drunk, one that is irrational and unable to provide the care that a child needs.

Families that suffer with substance abuse are more at risk for domestic violence, mental illness, divorce, and sexual and physical abuse than other families. These issues are very detrimental and can lead to children with depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Children in these situations may be withdrawn and have trouble bonding with others. Often they feel that the problems of the family are their fault or that it is their job to conceal the problem, and this can lead to low self-esteem, lack of desire to perform well in school or fear of failure. It would be difficult for these children to make friends because of the fear that someone in the outside world will find out about their secret, or will witness the chaos firsthand. The majority of people misunderstand the addicted individual. Typically, the alcoholic or addict has been contrasted with the drinker or drug user that society accepts as normal. The normal drinker or substance user can consume and then behave

within a range of conduct that our society prescribes as normal. These individuals possess immunities that the addicted individual lacks. The normal drinker and substance user does not have socially defined problems with their consumption practices. Nor do they have the chronic, deadly disease. Society struggles to accept individuals who do not drink or use drugs within the normal range of conduct. As a general rule, abnormal drinkers are considered enigmas. This group of individuals exists in perpetuity whether or not they are understood by society. These individuals need help. Many of them have a disease.

If a child is living with an alcoholic or drug user, the child is likely to develop a warped sense of normality when it comes to using these substances. They may know that their parent drinks too much, or uses drugs, but over time, the child may not know what other families are like, or how many drinks a regular person is expected to have in a day. Children of alcoholics are four times more likely to become alcoholics themselves, which leads these families into a cycle that is hard to break. Fathers drink to deal with stress in their life, and when their children get older, they have learned that the way to handle stress is to drink.

The good news is that children of alcoholics and drug abusers often develop an inner strength that helps them get through the tough times at home. With a lot of love and encouragement from a sober parent, another relative, or even a social worker or teacher, these children can go on to live happy, successful lives. And of course, the best scenario is if the addict in the family receives treatment and overcomes the problem, and then the child can continue to live his life and work for a brighter future.

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