

Perception Regarding Substance Abuse in Medical Students

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Abstract

Substance abuse can become hazardous for everyone, especially the medical students as the dependency may jeopardize their career. Substance Abuse refers to the hazardous use of psychoactive substances including alcohol, tobacco, pain medication and illicit drugs. It torments the physical, social and emotional well-being of an individual. Hence, we in our study will highlight the knowledge attitude and perception of medical students regarding drug abuse, so that we can combat this issue diligently.

Data was collected from the undergraduate medical students by using a pre-validated, self-administered questionnaire after taking approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee.

Demographic details of the participants in our study shows that the maximum study participants belong to the age group of yrs i.e. 21-23 yrs (50%), the mean age of the study group is 20.56 yrs, with female preponderance of 140 (66.67%). 149 participants (70.95%) believe that substance abuse has become a common problem in medical students and according to 190 (90.48%) participants, the most affected age group is 18-30 years.

11 (5.2%) believe that substance abuse can have potential benefits, while 84 (40%) were not sure regarding this and the benefits stated by the study participants were euphoria. 194 (92.38%) participants were aware of the long-term side effects of chemical dependence.

The findings of the study suggest that substance abuse is an ongoing issue among medical students associated with deleterious consequences in various domains.

Key words - substance abuse, perception, attitude, medical students, addiction, peer pressure

Introduction

Substance Abuse refers to the hazardous use of psychoactive substances including alcohol, tobacco, pain medication and illicit drugs. It torments the physical, social and emotional well-being of an individual.

In the current world, substance abuse has been cited as a major issue of health concern. Our youth is trapped in the conjectures of drug abuse mainly due to peer pressure and easy availability of these substances. The various risk factors of substance abuse include age, sex, family history, anxiety, depression etc. ⁽¹⁾

Medical students are not exempted from the wave of substance abuse, in a study it was found that a vast majority of medical students are addicted to “binge drinking”, cannabis and tobacco. ⁽²⁾ The beginning of medical school is marked with humungous lifestyle changes; students are exposed to high stress levels and adjustment problems leading to malicious consequences to their mental health. ⁽³⁾

Substance abuse can become hazardous for everyone, especially the medical students as the dependency may jeopardize their career. Medicine is a profession which is looked upon with a lot of dignity and respect. The world considers them as their role models, upon seeing

the doctors abusing drugs, it may lead the population falsely and create a havoc. ⁽³⁾

Hence, we in our study will highlight the knowledge attitude and perception of medical students regarding drug abuse, so that we can combat this issue diligently.

Objective

- 1) To study the perception of medical students regarding substance abuse.
- 2) To assess their knowledge and attitude towards substance abuse.

Material Methods

Study Subjects - Undergraduate Medical Students

Inclusion Criteria

1. Undergraduate Medical Students
2. Age group 18 – 26yrs

Exclusion Criteria

1. Students not willing to participate.

Study site - Dr. D.Y. Patil University, Navi Mumbai

Study Design - Cross-sectional study

Sample Size - 210

Sampling Method - Data was collected from the undergraduate medical students by using a pre-validated, self-administered questionnaire after taking approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee. Utmost care was taken to maintain the privacy and confidentiality. Prior waiver consent was taken from the students, who had participated voluntarily in the study. The questionnaire consisted of demographic details like age and sex, along with certain questions to the perception, attitude and knowledge of medical students regarding substance abuse.

Data Analysis - Statistical analysis of the data was done by using descriptive statistics tools like bars, charts, percentages & table.

Results

The study was conducted in Dr. D.Y. Patil University, School of Medicine, Navi-Mumbai. **210** undergraduate medical students had participated in this study. Demographic details of the participants in our study shows that **the maximum study participants belong to the age group of yrs i.e. 21-23 yrs (50%), the mean age of the study group is 20.56 yrs, with female preponderance of 140 (66.67%)**. The demographic details are given in **Table 01**.

Table 01: Demographic details of the participants			
Category	Sub-category	No. of participants (n = 210)	Percentage
Age	18-20 yrs	99	47.14%
	21-23yrs	105	50%
	24-26 yrs	6	2.86%
Sex	Male	70	33.33%
	Female	140	66.67%
	1 st year	45	21.43%

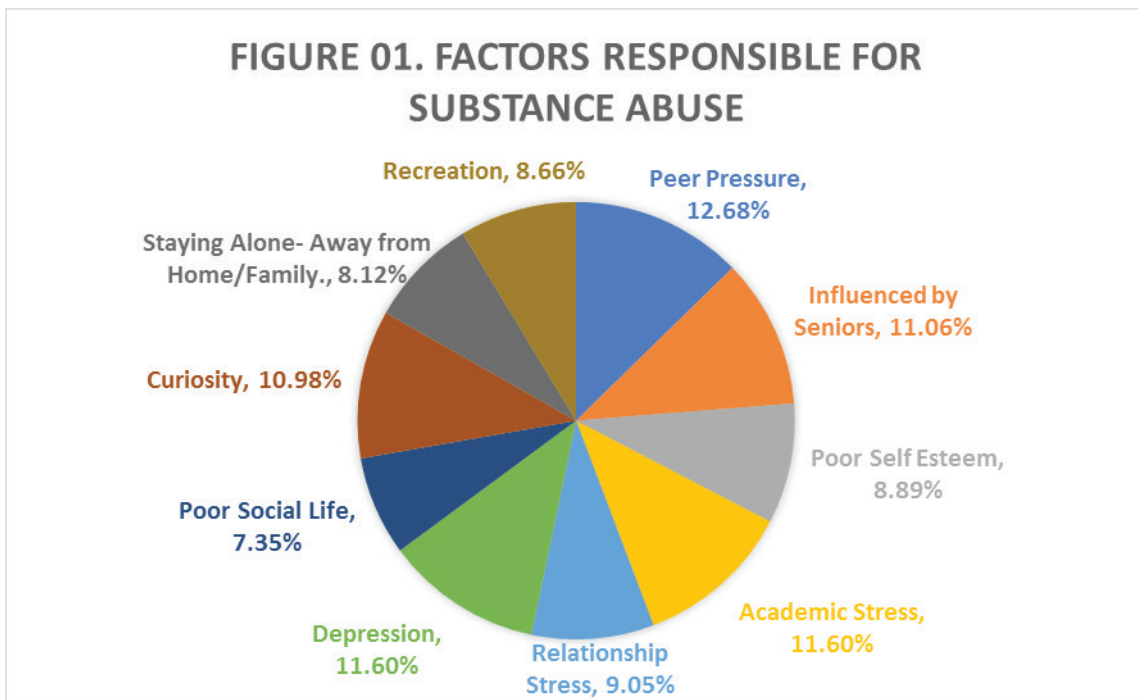
Cont... Table 01: Demographic details of the participants

Current Year of Under-graduation	2nd year	45	21.43%
	3rd year	82	39.05%
	4th Year	38	18.10%
Current Residence	Hostelite	139	66.19%
	Localite 	71 (n=71)	33.81%
	- Single Parent	2	2.81%
	- Nuclear Family	47	66.19%
	- Joint family	9	12.67%
	- Siblings	2	2.81%
	- Alone	6	8.45%
	- Room-mate	4	5.63%

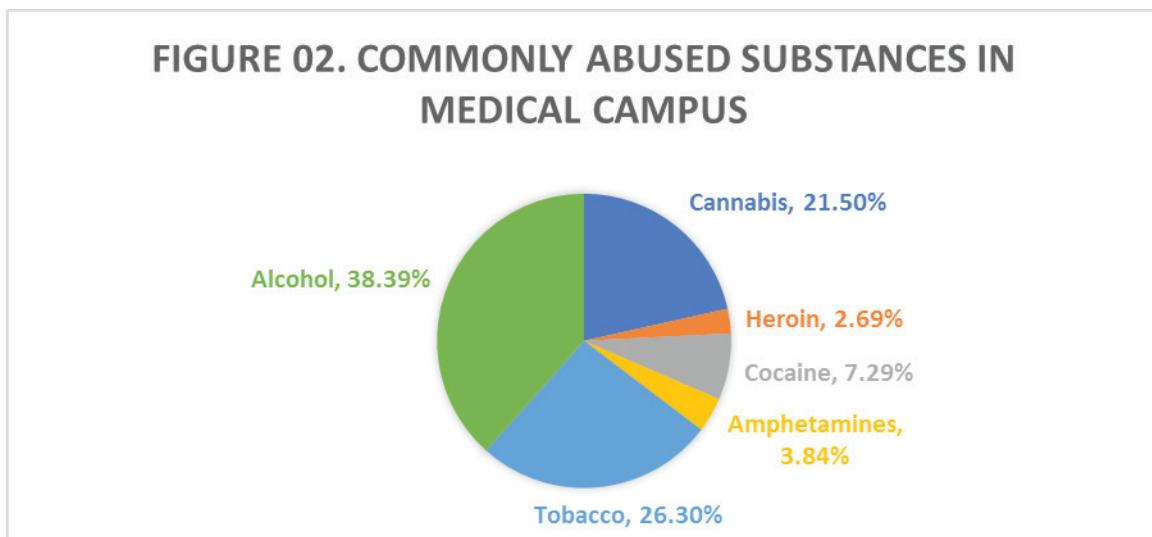
149 participants (70.95%) agree that substance abuse has now become a common problem in medical students. 190 (90.48%) participants stated that people belonging to the age group of 18-30 yrs in the medical community are commonly affected by substance/ alcohol abuse. 149 (71%) participants stated that drugs and other addictive substances are easily available on their campus and the main sources are either seniors or

peddlers/dealers. Majority of the participants i.e. 114 (54.29%) believe that both male and female gender has equal tendency to lean towards substance abuse.

The main reason for inclining towards substance abuse as stated by the study participants is peer pressure (12.68%). The other reasons are mentioned in Figure 01.

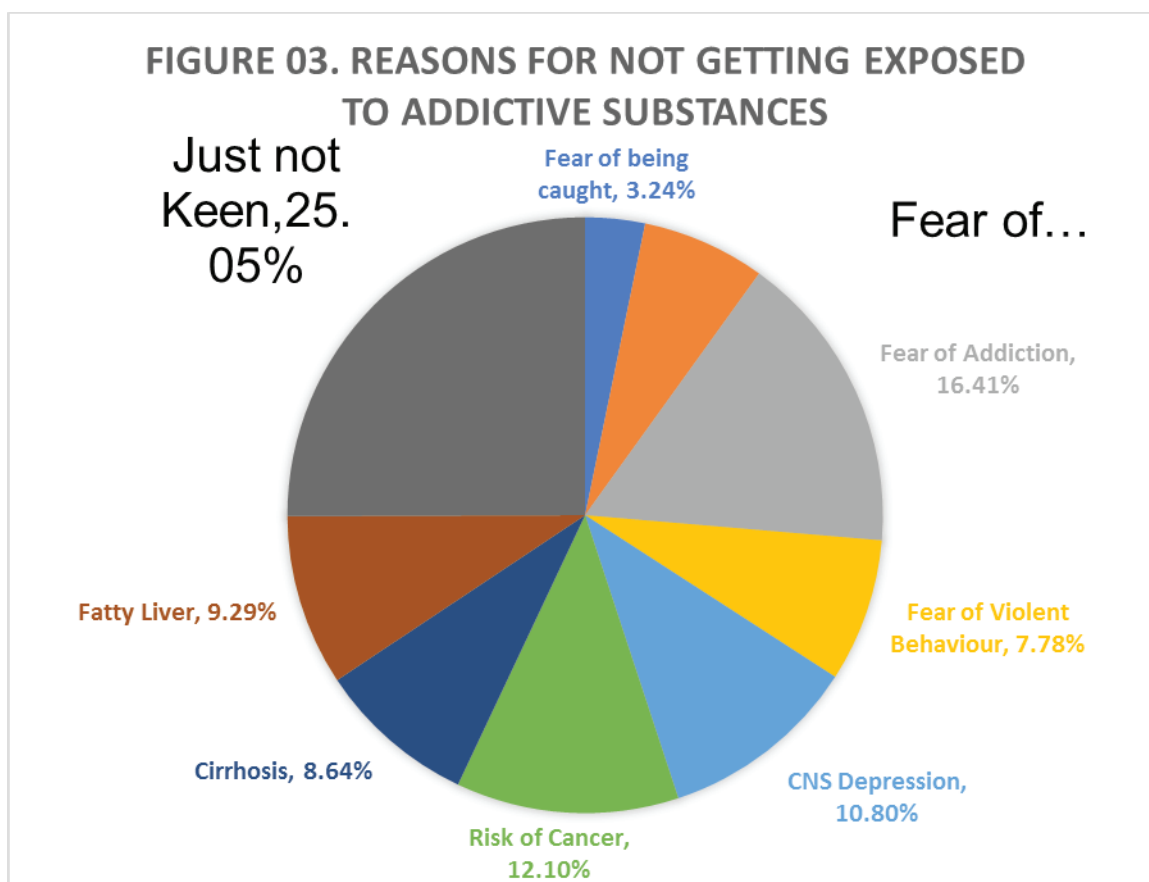


The most common substance abused at medical campus according to the study participants is **Alcohol (38.39%)**. The other commonly abused substances are mentioned in **Figure 02**.



Even though majority of the study participants **138 (65.71%)** are not sure, **54 (25.72%)** believe that these substances are expensive and the approximate amount spent on these substances by them/other fellow students is Rs. 1500/day. Although **56 (26.67%)** participants

have been exposed to these addictive substances, the remaining **154 (73.33%)** participants who have not yet exposed themselves to these substances stated the main reason was the **lack of curiosity and the fear of addiction**. The other reasons stated by the participants are mentioned in **Figure 03**.



Majority of the study participants **171 (81.43%)**, consider that daily abuse of substance/alcohol is serious and is a matter of concern. When asked about their initial response to a colleague who is abusing substance/s, majority stated **they will try and talk to them**. Other responses received from the study participants are mentioned in **Table 02**.

REASONS	PARTICIPANTS (%)
Talk to him/her	88 (41.90%)
Take him/her for counselling	77 (36.67%)
Ignore the situation	15 (7.14%)
Report the situation to a higher authority	15 (7.14%)
Be curious about the drugs- source and wanting to try them	6 (2.86%)
Psychiatry	9 (4.29%)

11 (5.2%) believe that substance abuse can have potential benefits, while **84 (40%)** were not sure regarding this and the benefits stated by the study participants were euphoria, helps in staying awake late night during exams, enhances creativity, relieves stress, helps in concentration, recreation, pleasure, and helps in socializing with others. **194 (92.38%)** participants were aware of the long-term side effects of chemical dependence. According to the opinion of majority of the study participants i.e. **192 (91.43%)**, Substance/Alcohol Abuse is a major public health concern.

Discussion

Substance abuse refers to the precarious use of psychoactive substances including alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs. It is said that with the use of these substances, the person feels a pleasurable high. There have been criminal acts reported under the influence of drugs, also this may lead to long term personality modifications. Substance abuse has a deleterious impact on the family, because of a person's uncontrollable desire to take various drugs, the family is tortured mentally, physically and economically. In the current study, we have included **210** Undergraduate Medical Students and the study was conducted in Dr. DY Patil University, School of Medicine. Out of the 210 undergraduate students, **140 (66.67%) are females** and **70 (33.33%) males**. This is most likely because of the **female preponderance** in the medical field. Majority of our study population resides in hostel i.e. **139 participants (66.19%)** which is similar to the study done by A. Arora et al in the year 2016. ⁽⁴⁾ **149 participants (70.95%)** believe that substance abuse has become a common problem in medical students and according to **190 (90.48%)** participants, the most affected age group is **18-30 years**.

In a study by *VK Jagnany in the year 2008*, it was seen that the substance abuse is much more prevalent in males than in females. ⁽⁵⁾ Our study stated otherwise, majority of our participants i.e. 114 (54.29%) believe that both the male and female gender has equal tendency to lean towards substance abuse. The main reason for inclining towards substance abuse as stated by the study participants was **peer pressure (12.68%)** which is in

line with study by A. Arora et al in 2016. ⁽⁴⁾ The other reasons listed were influence of seniors, academic stress, Depression, Curiosity, staying alone, relationships, poor self-esteem and recreation. The most common substance believed to be abused at medical campus according to the study participants is **Alcohol (38.39%)**, followed by **tobacco (26.30%)** and **cannabis (21.50%)**, similar findings were seen in the study by Erin E Ayala Et al in 2017. ⁽⁶⁾

Time and again we have read about the economical consequences of substance abuse; when we questioned the study participants regarding the same, **138** participants i.e. majority of them did not have a clear idea, while **54 (26.67%)** participants believe that these substances are expensive and approximate amount spent on these substance by them/other fellow students is **Rs 1500/day**. A study on Substance abuse by *A. Arora and et al* showed that majority of the students have not exposed themselves to the conjectures of drug abuse, which corresponds to our study as only 26.67% study participants have exposed themselves to these substances. ⁽⁴⁾ Although **56 (26.67%)** participants have been exposed to these addictive substances, the remaining which forms the majority of **154 (73.33)** participants have not exposed themselves to these substances citing **lack of curiosity** and the **fear of addiction** the major reason. **171 (81.43%)** participants consider daily substance abuse as a call of a catastrophic event in future. It was also seen that **88 (41.90%)** participant were ready to talk to their colleague when asked about their initial response to a colleague who is into substance abuse. The others opted for various other methods like taking them to a counsellor, ignoring the situation, reporting to higher authority and psychotherapy. Most of the participants are not sure whether there are benefits posed by various substances but a majority of **194 (92.38%)** participants were well versed with the long-term side effects of chemical dependence and **192 (91.43%)** participants accuse substance abuse to be a major health concern.

The study was limited by the facts that only students in the medical college were included without any control groups, many of the leading questions could not be avoided as the study was done via an online google form.

Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that substance abuse in an ongoing issue among medical students associated with deleterious consequences in various domains. Although in the current study we see a tremendous progression. Majority of the undergraduate students are not just aware of the long-term side effects (92.38%) but are also of the opinion that substance abuse (91.43%) is a major public health concern. The above data matched with perception of the study participants as well stating that a vast majority of the study participants i.e. 154 (73.33%) have not exposed themselves to the waves of substance abuse.

Ethical Clearance- Taken from institutional ethical committee

Source of Funding- Nil

Conflict of Interest - Nil

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