

## Parent-child conflict: A risk factor for substance abuse among adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

In modern societies, addiction has spread to such a degree that it is now regarded as a chronic social disease. Drug addiction has reached increasingly dangerous proportions in many parts of the world. Adolescents have a strong propensity for experimentation, are highly inquisitive, are disposed to peer pressure, rebellious against authority, and have low self-confidence, which makes them prone to Drug addiction. The literature highlights a positive correlation between substance use and disruptive family interactions, impacting a child's development. This study aims to explore substance abuse in the context of parent-child conflict, emphasizing the importance of effective parenting. The investigators utilized secondary data by conducting a comprehensive review of relevant literature. This review involved searches across various databases like Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Eric, employing a filter to specifically identify studies published in English related to substance abuse/drug addiction, parent-child conflict, and positive parenting. The results of the study found parent-child conflict as one among the strong predictors of adolescents' likelihood to develop addiction problem. High level of parent-child conflict can have a negative impact on a child's development and mental health, as well as increase the risk of drug dependence. The implications of the study are discussed.

## Introduction

The Substance abuse is one of the most dangerous social phenomena that exists worldwide. The extent of addiction has grown so much in the modern society that it is now considered a chronic social disease. In many regions of the world, drug usage and addiction have reached to increasingly deadly levels. The UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs' Report notes that drug addiction has become more prevalent in some nations and has worsened in others, particularly in Africa, the Caribbean, and the post-communist republics of Central and Eastern Europe. In a study carried out on adolescent drug addiction in north India by Saluja, et al. 2007, it was discovered that many adolescents who are involved in drug addiction hailed from nuclear families (63.5%), some were from urban backgrounds (83.5%), and had dropped out of school (54.1 percent). In India, there are more than five lakh street children who work and live in awful circumstances and are at high risk of abusing drugs. However, this figure may be greatly

underestimated. Even if conservatively assessed, it is possible that 25–29% of street children in India alone engage in drug usage (Kar, et al, 2014). Drug abuse is on the rise for a variety of complex causes that vary from nation to nation and some of them are most challenging to address. The issue is made worse by the ongoing release of new psychoactive drugs that could be abused.

Adolescents have a strong propensity for experimentation, are highly inquisitive, are disposed to peer pressure, rebellious against authority, and have low self-confidence, which makes them prone to Drug addiction (Degenhardt, 2016). Keeping this under consideration, the purpose of this research article was to foresee the likelihood of addiction among adolescents based on parent-child conflict. Parent-child conflict has previously been linked to teenagers' alienation from their families and participation in deviant peer networks, such as having large number of friends who engage in smoking, drinking, or antisocial activity. (Blackson et al., 1996; Wills et al., 2000).

## **Method**

This study sought to explore the impact of parent-child conflict on adolescents' susceptibility to substance addiction by examining relevant literature. Additionally, it aimed to present a comprehensive overview of substance abuse and parent-child conflict, drawing insights from a review conducted across various databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Eric.

## **Substance abuse: An overview**

As a cross-disciplinary area of study and concern, substance misuse necessitates the application of numerous theoretical justifications and empirical findings in collective efforts to find more effective ways to reduce its spread and to mitigate any direct and indirect harm. (Abou-Saleh, 2006; Coffey, et al. 2009; Mignon, 2014; Bowser, et al. 2014). Substance use is simply the detrimental or dangerous use of psychoactive chemicals, including both legal and illegal drugs, for purposes other than those prescribed for medical use (WHO, Smart, et al.1980). Substance abuse has become one of the most important human problems in recent years, as well as one of the many complicated phenomena undermining human society's foundation. Substance abuse poses a threat to the social, economic, and health fabric of families, communities, and countries. This habit has a negative impact on one's health, education, and professional career, as well as acts as a significant financial and social burden (Swadi, 1992).

A drug that causes an addiction not only impairs an individual's mental capabilities and behaviour, but also enduringly damages various capacities reliant on the amount of drug dosage (Bhat & Imtiaz, 2017). The negative effects of addictive substances on adolescents have been linked to interpersonal violence, traffic accidents, dangerous sexual behaviours, thoughts of suicide, poor academic achievement, absenteeism, and higher rates of school dropout (Nagamatsu et al., 2013; Borges & Loera, 2010; McCaffrey et al., 2010). Early use of addictive substances by adolescents increases the risk of abusing them, developing dependency, and experiencing mental illness (Grant & Dawson, 1998).

Nowadays no region of the world is free from the evils of drug trafficking and addiction. Around the world, millions of drug addicts dangle on the verge of life and death. In spite of steady increase in drug users, India is also caught in this destructive drug consumption cycle. However, in recent years there has been a resurgence of national concern on the high rate of substance usage among children. According to the UNDCP's 1999 World Drug Report, substance misuse has increased significantly among youngsters in numerous Indian states, including Punjab, Haryana,

Rajasthan, Gujarat, Hyderabad, and Andhra Pradesh. Many Indian boys are said to have tried at least one substance of abuse by the time they are in the ninth grade (Ramachandran, 1991). Drug use is quite frequent among adolescents under the influence of peers and close friends (Bala, et al. 2015). The five most popular drugs taken by adolescents in India are heroin, opium, alcohol, cannabis, and propoxyphene. The Juvenile Justice Act of (2015) defines children who are afflicted by substance misuse as children in need of care and protection.

Reports state that 46.36% of adolescents who live in slums use cannabis, smokeless tobacco, and alcohol, and that many of them started taking drugs as early as childhood. (Sharma & Chaudhary 2016). According to research conducted by the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, inhalants and cannabis are the most abused narcotics among children and adolescents, followed by alcohol and tobacco. (Tikoo, et al. 2013). The principal substance usage starts at an average of 14.8 years old (Saluja, et al. 2007). The earliest age for addiction was 12.3 years old for tobacco, followed by 12.4 years for inhalants, 13.4 years for cannabis, and 13.6 years for alcohol, before 14.3 years and 14.9 years for harder substances like opium, pharmaceutical opioids, and heroin, as well as 15.1 years for injectable substances (Tikoo, et al. 2013). Many adolescents in Assam were found to be alcohol consumers, with a male preponderance. Because of their parents' cigarette, alcohol, or both uses, they begin drinking alcohol at a young age. (Mahanta, et al. 2016).

According to the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP, 2017), couple of years ago there were around 70000 drug users in the Kashmir valley alone, with 4000 of them being females. The drug-addicted population in Kashmir valley has now been estimated to be around 2.5 lakhs, with about 50,000 Kashmiri women making for 20% of the total (Beigh, J. 2021). According to a study conducted by Khan (2008), 80% of the state's younger generations, including both males and females between the ages of 16 and 25 years, are victims of the drug abuse in the state. What is more alarming is that heavy drug use, such as Heroin, has risen across the Kashmir valley, affecting people of all ages and from all parts. It has been stated that the trend of drug usage among school children is on the rise, as many cases have been registered, where pupils in Class 9th to 12th are involved with drugs" (Khan, 2011). Naqshbandi, M.M. (2012) found Conflict and unemployment to be the leading causes of drug addiction among young people in Kashmir.

Substance misuse has become more prevalent recently, and some studies suggest that it has moved into early adolescent and younger generations (Kokkevi, et al. 2007; Schulden, et al. 2012). Adolescents still abuse substances despite being aware of the harmful effects of doing so (Sing, et al. 2017). Numerous risk factors for substance abuse have been identified by research studies, including early onset of mental and behavioural health issues, experimental curiosity, peer and family pressure, inadequate school facilities, poverty, inadequate parental supervision and connections, a dysfunctional family structure, lack of opportunities, isolation, gender, personality issues, and the ease with which drugs can be obtained. (Liddle, et al. 2006; Somani, 2016; Nawi, et al., 2021).

### **Parenting and parent child conflict**

One of an individual's most crucial relationships in life is relationship with their parents. Parenting approaches have a direct impact on several significant outcomes for children. For them to be able to promote the growth of a positive self-image, it is essential to have strong, healthy relationships with them. The socialisation of children is one of the fundamental goals of parenting; it is the process by which parents instil in their child the morals and conduct that are appropriate for a member of society. Parent-child interactions are distinctive and stand out from all other forms of

relationships because of their level of intimacy (Troll & Fingerman, 1996). Parental warmth, encouragement, and verbalization were discovered to be positively connected with academic success (Hickman et al., 2000). Future adults' mental health depends on their ability to form strong attachments with their parents (Bowlby, 1973). According to Boutelle et al. (2009), a parent's steadfast focus on their child's needs results in the internalisation of an attachment model and the growth of a loving relationship, both of which are regarded to be the foundation for the development of attachment in young children. A child's capacity to develop socially and emotionally may be hampered by the anxiety and grief that come with the loss of a parental attachment (Tarabulsky, 2012). The behaviours that are most discussed in the literature include aggression and delinquency, which have supposedly been directly related to the results of disrupted parent-child relationships (Parveen et al., 2023; Raja & Parveen, 2022; Stevens et al., 2007; Aunola & Nurmi, 2005). A meta-analysis found that aggressive behaviour, emotional instability, and low self-esteem are all more common in children who experience a variety of parental hostility manifestations, such as strict discipline, pressure, and physical and verbal abuse. Children of parents who have high levels of psychological control frequently exhibit higher levels of depressive symptoms, fear of failure, and social disengagement (Deneault et al., 2020; Romm et al., 2020).

The most common cause of conflict between parents and children is when the children wish to exercise their growing independence. Better parent-child communication is required because of their desire for independence. 18.3% of teenagers think that having a quarrel makes it more likely that they will argue with their parents. Other unfavourable emotions include anger, hopelessness, the desire to flee one's house, offence, and inadequacy, with frustration being the most common (Hanh, 2023). Conflict can arise for a variety of reasons, including conflicting values, opposing behavioural patterns, and poor parent-child communication. Although conflict between parents and their children is inevitable, it has been consistently shown that families with a high conflict rate have socio-emotional issues with children from school age through adolescence.

Conflict occurs when two persons hold divergent values and ideas (Onongha, 2015). From this perspective, parents as well as children deal with lot of problems. From the perspective of teenagers, arguments happen when parents do not react emotionally as expected, when parents believe that the child is unable to live up to their expectations, or because of a lack of peace within the family. Conflicts sometimes provide people the chance to express their worries and discontent, bring up important topics for discussion, and open opportunities for personal growth and ongoing parent-child relationship modification. For instance, when children complain to their parents about how little they pay attention to their concerns and needs, the parents may start to understand their children's unique viewpoint (Kerr & Stattin 2000).

### **Parent child conflict and substance abuse**

Gorman-Smith and colleagues (2000) suggested that parent-child conflict is a mechanism through which youth antisocial problems are sustained and reinforced in terms of the development of behaviour disorders. High amounts of parent-child conflict may be harmful to a child's growth and mental health. Majority of research have found that parent-child conflict is a risk factor for poor mental health, including depressive symptoms (Yan et al., 2019), emotional instability (Cummings et al., 2015), and externalising issues (Samek et al., 2015; Weaver et al., 2015). In addition, despite disputes with parents being described as "minor," a comprehensive analysis found that parent-child conflict was the most frequent antecedent of child suicide behaviours (Soole et al., 2015). Children who have stressful family upbringing tend to have less flexible coping mechanisms and personality functioning. Poor parent-child communication can cause a teen to abuse substances when combined with external variables such genetic predisposition,

environmental stresses, cultural pressures, distinctive personality traits, and mental health problems. Additionally, the analysis of the literature shows that parenting techniques that involve low parental involvement, inconsistent discipline, and poor supervision may cause mood disorders and depression in adolescents (Brewer, 2013; Timpano, 2015). The course of teenage substance addiction problem is highly impacted by parent-child conflict, which has a considerable impact on substance dependency (Mathibela & Skhosana, 2020). In interviews with a community-based sample, Brook, and colleagues (2009) suggested that a poor parent-child relationship was related to the establishment of personality traits that were conducive to drug use. Adolescent and young adult substance abuse is directly correlated with poor parenting practises. Negative parent-child relationships can also contribute to adolescent substance use disorders (Mathibela, 2020).

The development of a child may be significantly impacted by the dynamic relationship between parents and children. Parent-child conflict can considerably predict pupils' tendency for addiction (Farzin et al. 2021). Adolescent and adult substance abuse is directly correlated with poor parenting practises. When Luk et al. assessed the mediator effects between parenting style and substance misuse, they found that the mother psychological control dimension was a significant variable (Luk, et al., 2017). The mother's psychological control had a two-fold stronger effect on her children's engagement in drug addiction than the other factor did. On the other hand, a study that looked at a secondary risk factor for adolescent drug addiction discovered that parents' lack of education increased the possibility that their kids would use drugs in the future by diminishing their awareness of the risks (Guttmanova, 2019; Ogunsola & Fatusi, 2016). The father can play the role of family protector by keeping an eye out for and protecting his children from negative influences if he has the appropriate knowledge (Muchiri, 2018). Parental neglect may potentially make the addiction problem worse. The most frequent neglectful variables, according to Kazdouh et al. (2018), were the absence of parental monitoring, children's uncontrolled use of pocket money, and the presence of drug-using family members. According to Jacob, et al. (2015), parental attitude is a significant risk factor for alcohol use among adolescents between the ages of 18 and 20. Adolescents' use of drugs was influenced by their relationships with their parents, peer pressure, accessibility, and religion (Alhyas et al., 2015).

An individual who grows up in a dysfunctional family that has little parental support is at risk for having worse psychosocial functioning. According to Patterson et al. (1989), such circumstances might not adequately model prosocial behaviour and might potentially favour violent methods of social interaction and problem-solving. They might not be able to build the necessary coping mechanisms to handle the challenges of adulthood. Prior studies have identified several aspects of the family environment that put children at risk for drug use during adolescence (Ary et al., 1993; Hoffmann, 1993; Simons & Robertson, 1989) and put teenagers at risk for continuing their drug use into adulthood (Newcomb & Bentler, 1990; Stein et al., 1987). Nelson et al. (2009) showed how negative parenting is exacerbated by parent-child conflict, while harsh discipline and neglect were linked to negative feelings in children, such as aggression, anxiety, and depression (Sturge-Apple et al., 2006). Such children are hence more susceptible to experiencing psychological issues. Prior research has revealed that parental conflict is a predictor of children's internalising and externalising difficulties (Carmody et al., 2015; Coln et al., 2013; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017). Increased conflict between parents and children is likely for parents who use an authoritarian parenting approach (Baumrind, 1971). Such interactional patterns have been linked to teenage substance use (Barnes et al., 1986; Barnes & Windle, 1987).

Previous studies have found several potential risk factors for adolescent's substance misuse, including dysfunctional family relationships, a lack of control or excessive control, lack of affection, unmonitored pocket money, and parental and sibling substance use behaviours (EL

Kazdouh, et al., 2018). According to a study on parenting styles, adolescents who experience negligent and authoritarian parenting are more likely to use drugs and alcohol. However, levels of substance use were lower when parenting methods included an environment of acceptance, communication, and affection (Calafat, et al., 2014). Parents should freely discuss their children's use of drugs before it becomes an issue since this will help to decrease the effects of addiction (Hight, 2005). Hurt and colleagues (2013) emphasised the importance of parents keeping constant surveillance on their children to keep them from consuming drugs.

### **Implications of the study**

It has been established that positive parenting is both a science and a skill that must be acquired and put into action. Parents who are well-versed in parenting strategies and abilities are more likely to raise their children in a healthy and effective manner. With these abilities, they can produce accomplished people who can think critically, make well-informed decisions, and handle problems creatively and rationally. The important elements in preventing drug addiction are provided by positive parenting, which offers the child a balance of reasonable support and restrictions as well as a warm, loving relationship and appropriate supervision. Its key features include:

#### **Potential positive attachment**

According to research, a parent's positive attachment to their child or their relationship with them may help keep teenagers away from drugs. Children who have positive attachment can have a safe foundation that allows them to explore, learn, and relate as well as to build stronger bonds with others, a higher sense of self-worth, and better coping mechanisms (Roskam, et al., 2016). Parents should be educated on the value of regularly spending quality time with their children to counteract any negative impacts that the peer group may have on them. Parenting programmes to prevent or reduce teen substance use should also include components on parent-child attachment. Promoting positive body language, such as eye contact, touching, smiling, and making nice facial expressions while engaging with children, can help to foster positive attachment. For children to feel secure and attached, parents must demonstrate appropriate parenting skills (Eslami-Shahrbabaki & Iranpour, 2016).

#### **Effective communication**

The social, emotional, and mental health of children can be improved with effective interaction between parents and children. It improves problem-solving and conflict-resolution abilities while strengthening the link between parents and children. The development of adolescent self-esteem and the avoidance of dangerous behaviours, such as substance misuse, depend on it. Children grow up with good self-esteem, confidence, and a positive self-image when they perceive that their parents actively listen to and understand them. Trust and empathy are also fostered and developed through effective parent-child communication. Effective communication depends on listening, developing a sense of trust, and spending time with children. Positive parent-child interaction decreases subsequent risk factors at older aged (Arranz, et al., 2016).

#### **Effective methods of discipline**

It is advised to use positive discipline techniques that can successfully educate children to control their behaviour, keep them safe, and encourage healthy development. Parents must get guidance on how to handle the discovery or revelation of a child's drug use, including suggestions for suitable or efficient forms of punishment. Drug de-addiction campaigns can help parents in approaching the matter or resolve any conflict. The suggestions included avoiding overreacting,

keeping friends out of talks, seeking help, and establishing connections with relevant organisations.

### **Monitoring and supervision**

In a domestic environment, universal substance abuse prevention usually takes the shape of promoting the growth of parenting skills, such as parental support, nurturing behaviours, setting clear limits or norms, and parental supervision and monitoring. Children will understand they are being watched by their parents if parents have these talents. Thus, it seems that authoritative parenting style protects the child against different behavioural problems and addiction (Matejevic, et al., 2014).

When there is a positive relationship between parents and adolescents, parental supervision is most successful. Teenagers who are content with their interactions with their parents are more inclined to follow the rules. An authoritative parenting approach offers the essential elements for preventing addiction by combining logical support with a caring, affectionate relationship and appropriate supervision of the child (Vermeulen-Smit, et al., 2015).

### **Resolving family problems**

Conflict between parents and children is inevitable, however it has been demonstrated repeatedly that partnerships with high conflict rates cause socio-emotional problems in children from school age through adolescence. Research indicates that to prevent substance abuse, parents should avoid family conflicts (Hayakawa, et al., 2016). It is normal for disagreements to occasionally arise, but parents should be able to settle them on their own and, if necessary, consult experts to discuss or address the issues. For children to feel content being at home, there should be pleasant atmosphere.

### **Conclusion**

Addiction is widely recognised as a chronic social evil in modern societies due to its widespread prevalence. In many regions of the world, it has grown to increasingly hazardous proportions. Children and Adolescent are vulnerable to drug addiction due to their strong experimenting tendencies, high levels of curiosity, susceptibility to peer pressure, rebellion against authority, and low self-confidence. The current study which was purely based on secondary data, investigated substance abuse in context to Parent-child conflict. In terms of the emergence of behaviour disorders, it was indicated that parent-child conflict serves as a mechanism for maintaining and reinforcing young antisocial behaviours. Children who have conflicts with their parents are more likely to turn to drugs as compared to adults. They also have a higher propensity to start drinking at a younger age and develop substance use disorders quickly. Therefore, fostering a positive relationship between parents and children may help prevent the risk of substance addiction throughout childhood and puberty, which is the outcome of this piece of research.

Given the crucial impact of proper parenting on children's mental well-being and the prevention of behavioural issues and substance abuse in adolescence and beyond, it is essential to enhance parents' knowledge and skills in improving their parenting styles. Incorporating training on these principles into comprehensive intervention programs for parents seeking counselling and therapy at health centres is crucial. Parental interventions ought to incorporate instruction in family management skills, such as monitoring, communication, and disciplinary practices, as research (Dishion & Andrews, 1995) indicates that these strategies effectively deter the intensification of problematic behaviours. Equipping parents with proper monitoring, communication, coping, and

other skills can empower them to adopt a more proactive parenting approach, potentially fostering resilience in youth, even in challenging environments. Additionally, policymakers, especially community mental health officials, should focus on developing education programs on parenting skills for young couples and individuals before marriage.

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