

A Systematic Review Of Knowledge, Attitudes, And Prevention Strategies Related To Adolescent Substance Abuse (2016–2024)

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Adolescents, Substance Abuse, Prevention, Knowledge, Attitudes, India	Adolescence is a critical period marked by physiological and psychological changes that increase vulnerability to risky behaviours, including substance abuse. This literature review synthesizes studies from 2016 to 2024 on adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and preventive strategies related to substance use. Findings reveal that while awareness of harmful effects exists, peer influence, media exposure, and poor mental health often promote use. Effective prevention requires integrated approaches, including school programs, family involvement, mental health services, and media regulation. Policy implementation, especially in India, remains inconsistent despite strong legal frameworks.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a transformative phase marked by rapid developmental changes, which can increase vulnerability to risky behaviours like substance abuse (WHO,2014). Peer pressure, family dysfunction, curiosity, and mental health issues often contribute to the initiation of substance use (Thompson B et al.,2021, Clark R & Peterson M, 2021). Despite varying levels of awareness about health risks, many adolescents experiment with substances such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and inhalants.

In India, urban youth typically have greater access to drug education programs, whereas rural adolescents often lack such resources, increasing their risk (Singh & Gupta, 2019). Given the long-term consequences of substance use—including academic failure, social disintegration, and chronic health issues—understanding and addressing this issue is critical. This review synthesizes literature from 2016 to 2024, aiming to evaluate adolescents' knowledge, attitudes, and the effectiveness of preventive strategies, with an emphasis on Indian contexts.

2. Methodology

A narrative review was conducted using sources from academic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Studies were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Focused on adolescents aged (10–19) years.
- Examined substance use knowledge, attitudes, and prevention.
- Published between 2016 and 2024.
- Included global and Indian populations.

Articles were evaluated for methodological quality and relevance. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were included to provide a comprehensive understanding.

3. Results

3.1 Knowledge of Substance Abuse

Most adolescents possess some awareness of the dangers associated with substance abuse. However, gaps exist, especially among those in rural or low-income settings (Smith J,2020, Carter & Wilson,2021) Studies show:

- Interactive school programs yield better results than lecture-based approaches.
- Parental history of substance use negatively affects adolescent knowledge levels.
- Social media plays a dual role—educating some while misinforming others (Roberts et al. 2022).

3.2 Attitudes Toward Substance Use

Attitudes vary widely and are shaped by peer groups, family values, media portrayals, and individual mental health:

- Adolescents exposed to permissive peers are more likely to initiate use (Thompson et al., 2021).
- Those with supportive families tend to develop negative attitudes toward drugs.
- Substance use is often perceived as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, or academic pressure.

3.3 Preventive Measures

Several evidence-based strategies emerged as effective:

- **School-Based Programs:** Life skills training and peer education significantly reduce initiation rates (Miller & Roberts, 2020).
- **Parental Engagement:** Active involvement and setting clear boundaries correlate with lower substance use.
- **Media Literacy:** Teaching critical thinking about media content helps adolescents resist glamorized drug portrayals.
- **Mental Health Services:** Early intervention and counselling reduce substance use linked to emotional distress.
- **Legal Enforcement:** Policies under India's NDPS Act restrict adolescent access to controlled substances, although enforcement remains variable.

4. Discussion

4.1 Indian Context

India's socio-cultural diversity creates unique challenges and opportunities:

- In rural areas, poor access to health education and services exacerbates the risk.
- Religious and cultural norms can either deter or have no effect on behaviour depending on the community.
- Initiatives like *Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan* are improving outreach but need better implementation and follow-up (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2023).

4.2 Challenges and Gaps

- A gap remains between knowledge and actual behaviour.
- Media and peer influence are powerful forces that current strategies don't fully counteract.
- There is limited mental health infrastructure in schools.
- Policies exist but often lack execution at the grassroots level.

5. Conclusion

Adolescent substance abuse is a growing concern that requires a holistic, multi-layered response. While awareness is relatively high in some groups, behavioural change lags behind due to peer pressure, media influence, and lack of comprehensive prevention. School-based programs, parental involvement, community initiatives, and stronger policy enforcement are essential to combat this issue

effectively.

6. Recommendations

- Implement interactive, nationwide school education programs.
- Enhance parental awareness and involvement through workshops.
- Integrate digital media literacy into school curricula.
- Establish adolescent mental health support systems in schools.
- Strengthen policy enforcement and grassroots implementation.

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