

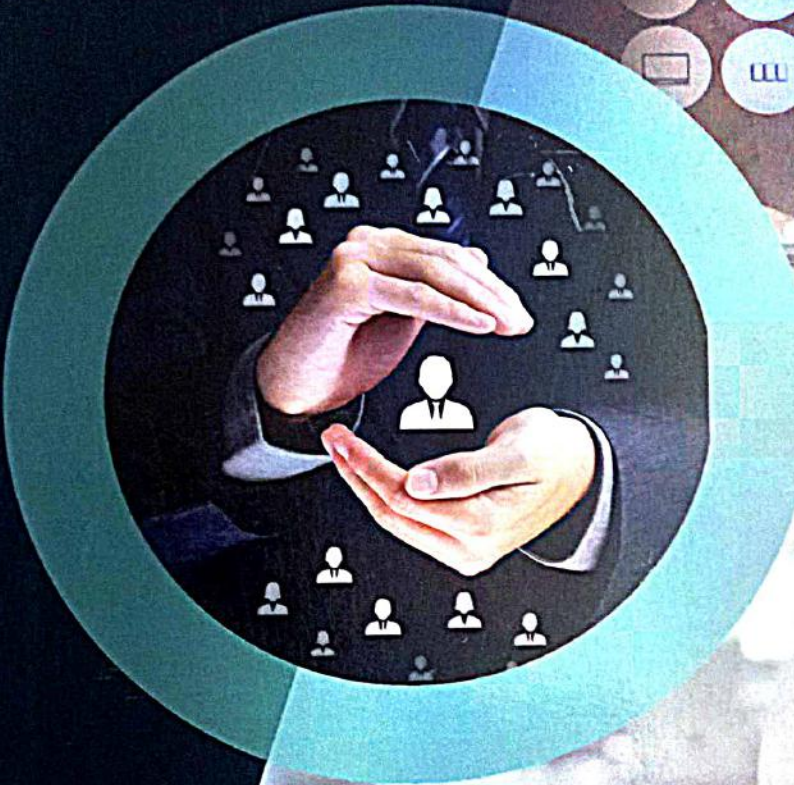


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15. Paterns of Substance Used by Child Labourers in Some Slums of Siliguri Municipal Corporation

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Geography Department.

Abstract

The present study highlights substance use patterns of 200 child labourers from 6 slums in Siliguri city and identifies the microsocial and macrosocial stressors which initiate and perpetuate their substance use. It was observed that 145 (72.5%) of the child labourers had used some substance with a mean of 1.5 substances used per child. Alcohol was the most common form of substance abuse followed by tobacco chewing, cannabis, snuff, and opium. This study highlights an urgent need for the containment of substance abuse by these vulnerable early initiators.

Keywords: Microsocial, Pragmatic, Psychological, Maldeveloped

Introduction

The recent years have witnessed a substance abuse epidemic with serious health, social, economic and political repercussions. Epidemiological data point to an increase in substance abuse, especially in the younger generation. Initially a problem of the developed countries, this has now assumed alarming dimensions for developing countries as well (Doll & Hill, 1964; WHO, 1979a & 1986; NIH, 1986; Ross et al, 1988; Gossop & Grant, 1990). Most studies carried out so far in India have focussed on substance abuse by young adults and college students. Scant attention has been paid to the various psychosocial aspects of child and adolescent initiators who are increasingly using substances earlier, due to the changes caused by industrialization, urbanization and the resultant adverse effects in the microsocial and macrosocial environment (WHO, 1979b & 1986). Among children, child labourers as a group are Highly vulnerable and more at risk to substance use and subsequent abuse due to the complex operation of a number of predisposing factors caused by the aforesaid changes in the environment. Hubbard et al (1988) has reported that the younger initiator may be at even greater risk for regular, multiple, increased and problem related use. Many of these younger initiators may eventually become criminals or unsocial persons with maldeveloped physical, mental a

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migration, lack of job security and job satisfaction, hostile interpersonal relationships, physical and mental abuse, job stress, low pay and lack of career opportunities. These stressors via different body systems or psychological processes may alter the psychosocial environment itself to create a vicious cycle (WHO, 1979b). Hence, the smooth traditional transition from childhood to adolescence to youth may be disrupted. It has been well documented that substance use can potentiate and add to the hazards of occupational exposures. This results in a higher mortality and morbidity in child workers, which is further compounded by their poor nutritional status and various infectious diseases as a result of their unhygienic residential environment (WHO, 1981b). The ringing proclamation made in 1959 by the U.N. general assembly that "Mankind owes to the child the best it can give" seems to be mere lip service and appears to be a mirage even today and in the foreseeable future. There is an urgent need to search for pragmatic and effective approaches to the containment of substance use by these young initiators so that they may not graduate to harder drugs. Every society owes a moral commitment with respect to its young and must ensure every effort to provide them with an environment which can protect, promote and sustain their health and well being.

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