

Attitude towards substance use: A comparative analysis of male & female school students

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Abstract: The aim of the research was to study and compare the attitude of male and female school students, towards substance use. Survey research design was followed in the study. A purposive sample of 373 (boys=199, girls=174) students was drawn from 2 government schools and 2 public schools, in Delhi. A 28 item Likert type scale, with score ranging from 28 to 140, was designed to measure the attitude towards substance (alcohol, tobacco and other drugs) use. Higher score represented a more favourable attitude towards substance use. Data analysis was done by using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results indicate that boys have a more favourable attitude towards substance use as compared to girls ($t=6.909$, $df=371$, $p<.05$). From the results it can be concluded that although girls have a more negative attitude towards substance use, boys seem to be in a state of dissonance.

Keywords: substance use, school students, attitude

INTRODUCTION

Communities in India are in a state of transition amidst changing states of growth and development. While societies are undergoing continuous dynamic changes due to macro and micro level influences, people are embracing new life styles, cultures and practices. The impact of globalization, industrialization, migration, media invasion is gradually replacing the traditional societies and resulting in different life styles and behaviours as compared to yesteryears. There has been a gradual and significant decline in communicable, nutritional and infectious diseases. However, the burden of non communicable diseases which are linked with behaviour and life styles such as increased tobacco use, alcohol abuse, lack of physical activity, high risk sexual behaviour and many another are contributing substantially to the morbidity, disability and diminished quality of life (WHO, 2006). The use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD) poses tremendous health risks. According to WHO (2002), worldwide, the use of alcohol and tobacco is amongst the top ten risk factors to good health. In addition to the damaging health

consequences, substance use also often results in severe social and psychological problems. Many school aged children and adolescents experiment with drugs, and the eventual use and misuse of drugs can cause serious health, personal and social problems. It has been well established that the prevalence of drug use generally increases with age and progresses in a well defined sequence. Drug use typically begins with the use of alcohol and tobacco first, progressing later to the use of marijuana, and, for some, to the use of stimulants, opiates, hallucinogens, and other illicit substances. This progression corresponds exactly to the prevalence and availability of these substances. Because alcohol, tobacco and marijuana are among the first substances used they are referred to as “gateway” substances. The use of gateway substances significantly increases the risk of using illicit drugs.

Saxena (1997) reported that studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s found 12.7% of high school students, 32.6% of university students, 40 to 60% of medical students and 31.6% of non student young people used alcohol.

There is evidence that drinking is being initiated at

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progressively younger ages in India. Data from Karnataka showed a drop from a mean age of 28 years to 20 years between the birth cohorts of 1920–1930 & 1980–1990 (Benegal, 2005).

Sinha & Gupta (2004) conducted a study in northeastern India amongst 13-15 year old school students and concluded that the prevalence of smoking and drinking was 8.5%-19.6% amongst boys and 2.9-7.7% amongst girls. This high rate of smoking and drinking among such young children is alarming. Another study of drinking habits conducted in Bangalore city (Kumar, 1997) reported that a fifth of young people who frequented pubs on weekends were girls aged between 13-19 years.

Between 1977 and 1987 two large studies were carried out among senior high school students. One was a multicenter study carried out in 4 metropolitan cities. Alcohol was the most commonly abused substance (4-13%), followed by tobacco (3-6%), and minor tranquilizers (1-4%). There were no reports of cannabis or opiate use (Mohan et al, 1985).

A project named Drug Abuse Monitoring System 1989-91, was carried out in three cities (Delhi, Jodhpur, Lucknow) on behalf of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and sponsored by ICMR. The data generated the profile of drug users, their drug use history, drug related problems and treatment history. The consolidated report of data spanning three years showed that out of 10, 321 patients, 65% were initiated into drug use between the ages of 15-25 years. (Mohan et al, 1993)

AIM

The aim of the research was to study and compare the attitude of male and female school students, towards substance use.

METHOD

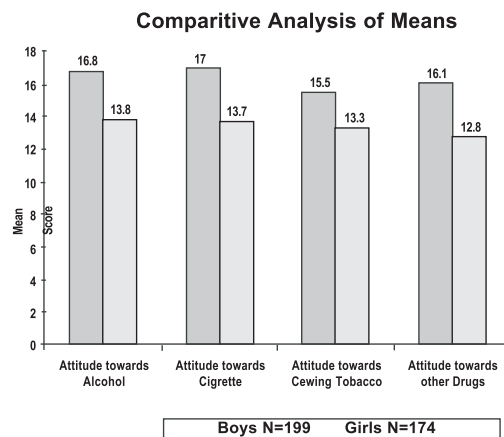
A 28 item Likert type five point scale was designed for measuring the attitude towards substance use (alcohol, tobacco and other drugs). The score on the scale could range from 28 to 140. High score represented a more favourable attitude towards substance use.

Sample

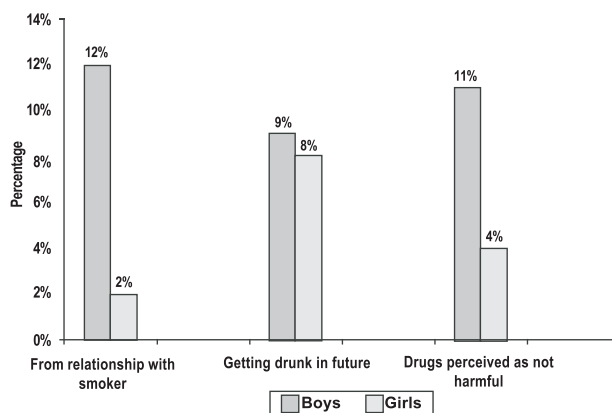
A purposive sample of 373 students from 10th and 11th class was selected from 2 government and 2 private schools in Delhi. The sample consisted of 199 boys (Mean Age = 15.5 years) and 174 girls (Mean age = 15.2 years)

RESULTS

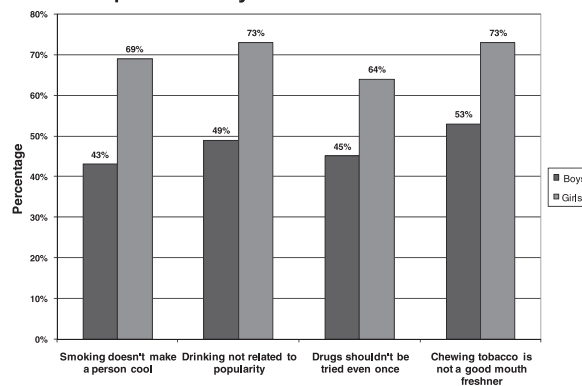
Results showed that boys obtained a mean score of 65.14 (SD=17.2) as compared to mean score of 53.85 (SD=14.2) obtained by girls, on the scale of attitude towards substance use.



Comparative Analysis of Attitude towards ATOD



Comparative Analysis of Attitude towards ATOD



This indicates that boys have a more favourable attitude towards substance use as compared to girls ($t = 6.909$, $df = 371$, $p < .05$).

Analysis of some specific questions reveals that 16% boys felt that drinking alcohol was not looked down upon by society as compared to 26% girls, who felt likewise. Only 40% boys strongly felt that smoking did not fit in their life style as opposed to 59% girls, who had similar views. 68% girls felt that they were not in favour of having close relationship with a smoker. In comparison, only 43% boys were opposed to having close relationship with a smoker.

Only 46% boys strongly felt that people need not take the help of alcohol to feel comfortable at parties, whereas, 63% of girls felt in the same manner.

46% of boys felt that smoking did not make one look cool as compared to 69% girls, who felt likewise. 19% boys and 13% girls felt that use of drugs should be legalized.

CONCLUSION

From the results it can be concluded that although girls have a more negative attitude towards substance use, boys seem to be in a state of dissonance. This implies that male students are perhaps, more vulnerable to experimentation and susceptible to health compromising habits than their female counterparts.

However, there is further need to investigate the effect of some other background variables such as age, socio-economic status, family environment, substance use status, type of school etc., on students' attitude towards substance use. Such studies, especially in the Indian context, can help in understanding the issues related to substance abuse, so that effective prevention programmes can be formulated.

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