Family and Social Factors as Predictors of Drug Misuse and Delinquent Behavior in Juveniles

Shridhar Sharma1, Gautam Sharma2, Bristi Barkataki1

ABSTRACT

Research suggests that children raised in supportive, affectionate and accepting home environment are less likely to become socially deviant. Consequently children rejected by parents are among the most likely to become delinquent. Negative family conditions and delinquent peers are seen as significant contributors in the development of drug misuse behavior. Understanding this complex relationship is important for prevention programs and policy makers.

Objective: 1) To study the social and family factors in Juveniles admitted in a juvenile home in Delhi. 2) To correlate criminal behavior with the socio-familial surroundings of the juvenile.

Materials and Methods: The research conducted is exploratory in nature. To achieve the objectives the study sample was collected from Prayas, a short stay home for juveniles under enquiry run by an NGO in Delhi. The information was obtained through a face-to-face, semi-structured interview of 487 juveniles under enquiry conducted by the social workers and the first author of this paper over a period of one year.

Results: The use of opioid and inhalant start relatively at much younger age, while the use of cannabis and alcohol is more common after the age of 13 years. Greater the involvement in drug use, more serious is the involvement in delinquency, and vice versa. Family and social factors are good predictors of drug misuse and delinquent behavior. In the present study, positive correlation has been observed between juvenile criminal behavior and family history of crime (p = 0.005).

Conclusion: The present study highlights the increasing trend of juvenile crime and drug misuse; its dependence on family and social factors which act as reliable predictors of drug misuse and delinquent behavior. The findings have significant implication for developing preventive programs emphasizing more on family focused strategies.

KEY WORDS

social and family factors, drug misuse, juveniles

INTRODUCTION

According to UNICEF estimates of 2002, 100 million children live in the streets world over where India records the largest number of street children. Further, WHO estimates that about 90% of theses street children misuse some kind of drug. Globally the problem emerges as a significant Public Health threat to World's 30 to100 million street children. The National Capital of India, Delhi with over 16 million populations has approximately 100,000 street children and drug misuse is reported as a major health problem in this segment of population. South Asia is the home to 584 million children of which 330 million are living in poverty with poor access to social, educational and health sectors. These children are seen everywhere selling trinkets, picking rags, polishing shoes, working in vehicle repair shops, or serving food in small restaurants. Research confirms that children raised in supportive, affectionate and accepting home environment are less likely to become socially deviant and misuse drugs. Consequently children rejected by parents are among the most likely to become delinquent and misuse drugs. Family conditions, like broken family, drug misuse and criminal background of the family could be used as reliable predictors of drug misuse and socially deviant behavior among children. Association with delinquent peers is the next significant factor in the development of drug misuse behavior. Recent research concludes that protective factors increase the probability of favorable outcomes, but least among individuals with severe drug use; hence, understanding the predictors of drug misuse and delinquent behavior is important for preventive programs and policy makers.

Juveniles under enquiry are often victims of multiple abuses, including drug misuse. Although substance misuse among children in India has been documented for over a decade, volatile substance misuse (VSM) is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Benagal et al. assessed 281 children and reported that 197 children as users of illicit drugs out of which 76% were smoking tobacco, 45.9% were chewing it, 48% were using inhalants, 42% were using alcohol, 15.7% were into cannabis addiction and 2% opioids. In the National Household survey of Drug use among Children and Adolescents in India, 2007-2008, 3.6% were found to be users of tobacco and alcohol, 1.9% were users of cannabis, and 0.2% were users of opioids. In the National Family Health Survey (2014-2015) conducted in India, 2.1% of the children were found to be users of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and opioids. The Indian National Commission on AIDS has documented that the number of children consuming any form of substance is on the rise, and it is important to understand the factors contributing to this trend.
Figure 1. Family type and composition

Table 1. Types of Drug Misuse and Age correlation of the present sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Alcohol (n = 77)</th>
<th>Cannabis (n = 83)</th>
<th>Tobacco (n = 125)</th>
<th>Opioids (n = 65)</th>
<th>Inhalants (n = 49)</th>
<th>Benzodiazepines (n = 22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-12 (n = 74)</td>
<td>14.9% (n = 11)</td>
<td>6.8% (n = 5)</td>
<td>13.5% (n = 10)</td>
<td>21.6% (n = 16)</td>
<td>8.1% (n = 6)</td>
<td>4.1% (n = 3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13-14 (n = 167)</td>
<td>16.8% (n = 28)</td>
<td>18% (n = 30)</td>
<td>25.1% (n = 42)</td>
<td>10.8% (n = 18)</td>
<td>12.6% (n = 21)</td>
<td>6% (n = 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16 (n = 218)</td>
<td>15.1% (n = 33)</td>
<td>20.2% (n = 44)</td>
<td>28.4% (n = 62)</td>
<td>11% (n = 24)</td>
<td>9.2% (n = 20)</td>
<td>1.8% (n = 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-18 (n = 28)</td>
<td>17.9% (n = 5)</td>
<td>14.3% (n = 4)</td>
<td>39.3% (n = 11)</td>
<td>25% (n = 7)</td>
<td>7.1% (n = 2)</td>
<td>17.9% (n = 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (n = 487)</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OBJECTIVE

1) To study the social and family factors in juveniles admitted in a juvenile home in Delhi.
2) To correlate the criminal behavior with the socio-familial surroundings of the juveniles.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was exploratory in nature and was conducted in Prayas Observation Home for boys, which is a short stay home for juveniles under-enquiry run by an NGO under an agreement with the Department of Social Welfare, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi. It houses around 150 children between the age group of 8 to 18 years for a maximum period of 3 months. For the purpose of this study random sampling was followed. The information was obtained by face to face semi-structured interviews of 487 juveniles under enquiry conducted by the social workers along with the first author of this paper over a period of one year.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the in-depth interviews of 487 juveniles were compiled together for further coding and analysis with the help of SPSS data matrices. Mean, SD, Frequency Distribution, and percentage was calculated as per demographic variables, types of substance misuse and nature of criminal behavior to achieve the study objectives.

The present sample of 487 juveniles belonged to the age range between 8 and 18 years and a mean of 14.17 years. Most of the juveniles under study belonged to the age group of 15 to 16 years, belonging to low Socio-Economic Status (SES) and poverty stricken areas. Only a minority (8%) belonged to the "not so poor" category while the majority was under the "very poor" category amounting to 56.3% and "poor" accounting for approximately 35.7% of the sample. In terms of religious background, the majority followed Hinduism (64.5%) followed by Islam (33.5%) while Sikhism and Christianity were a marginal few with 1.8% and 0.2% respectively.

1) Family Types and Juvenile Behavior:

Out of the total 487 juveniles under study, only 187 juveniles came from broken family background while the remaining 300 juveniles had both parents living with them. Furthermore, nuclear family was the general norm of the family composition of the study sample with 434 juveniles living in nuclear families and 52 juveniles (10% of the sample) living in a joint family system, with relatives living together in the same household.
Broken family structure and drug use among juveniles were found to be positively correlated \((p = 0.00)\) whereas family structure and drug misuse among juveniles were found to be negatively correlated \((p = 0.00)\). Similarly, broken family structure and criminal behavior among juveniles were found to be positively correlated \((p = 0.007)\) while emotionally intact/stable family structure and criminal behaviors among juveniles was found to be negatively correlated \((p = 0.007)\). There was also significant positive correlation between family structure and number of drugs misused \((p = 0.00)\).

2) History of Crime in Family and Juvenile Behavior

High prevalence of crime is reported by family members in the study sample \(42.0\%\). Significant relationship was also elicited between juvenile criminal behavior and family history of crime \((p = 0.005)\) and positive correlation was observed between criminal history in family with drug misuse in juveniles \((p = 0.001)\).

3) Drug Users in Family

There was a significant relationship observed between family use of drugs and juvenile criminal behavior with \(p = 0.00\) while contrary to the popular belief only 30% of the juveniles, in the present sample, had a drug misuse history in the family. Positive correlation was also noted with Family History of Drug Use and Juvenile Drug Use with \(p = 0.049\).

However, with reference to Table 1, it can be inferred that drug misuse versus age correlation in the present sample of juveniles has been observed. Consumption of tobacco and cannabis were relatively higher with 25.6% and 17% respectively when compared to the consumption pattern of alcohol \(15.8\%\), opioids \(13.3\%\) and inhalants \(10.0\%\). Consumption of Benzodiazepines was found to be fairly low in the present sample with meagre \(4.5\%\). With regards to age of drug initiation, initiation of opioids \(21.0\%\) is seen to start at earlier ages of 8-12 years while heavy use of inhalants \(12.6\%\) has been reported to have an onset at the start of 13 and 14 years. The use of cannabis \(20.2\%\) was seen between 15 and 16 years in the present sample whereas the late teens of 17 and 18 years reported the use of alcohol and Benzodiazepines \(17.9\%\) respectively.

DISCUSSION

Most juveniles involved with the juvenile justice system experience multiple personal, education, and family problems. The present study highlights juvenile crime to be dependent on family and social factors as predictors of drug misuse\(^6\). These factors include the socio-economic background; family dynamics; exposure to illicit drug use; violence and drug misuse history in the family. Substance misuse and delinquent behavior is emerging as an important health and social problem in Urban India. Study of drug misuse and delinquent behaviors also indicate that the use of opioids and inhalants start relatively at much younger age at 8 years and 13 years respectively whereas use of tobacco, cannabis and alcohol is more common after the age of 13 years. Further, greater the involvement in drug use, more serious is the involvement in delinquency, and vice versa. Family condition leading to crime is important factor. In the present study, positive correlation has been observed between juvenile criminal behavior and family history of crime \((p = 0.005)\). Parental fighting and domestic violence lead children turn into delinquents and makes them vulnerable to drug misuse.

History of criminal behavior in parents contributes to the children becoming criminals. Research state that men age 18-23 with a criminal father were 3.8 times more likely to have committed violent criminal acts than those with a noncriminal father\(^7\). Furthermore, poor family management practices when boys were ages 14-16 predicted self-reported violence by age 18; although poor family management practices when boys were age 10 did not predict violence at age 18\(^8\). Adults (ages 29-52) with criminal parents were much likely to be arrested for a violent offense than those with non-criminal parents\(^9\). Association with delinquent peers is the next significant development on the path to habitual crime. Delinquent peers also may have a greater influence on later violence during an individual's adolescence than they do earlier in development\(^10\). It is seen that children whose parents care for them supervise and guide their behavior and correct them at the right time, are less likely to be deviant. Hence, strong parental involvement can function as a protective factor against violence. Parent-child communication and involvement at age 14 predicted less self-reported violent behavior at age 16\(^11\). This relationship was weaker for females than for males. Similarly, sons whose fathers did not engage in leisure activities with them more often exhibited violent behavior as teenagers and adults and were more likely to be convicted for a violent offense\(^12\). Research also indicates that parental attitudes favorable to behaviors such as alcohol consumption predict use of alcohol and drugs by youth\(^13\).

The patterns of crime are transmitted from one generation to another. Children rejected by parents and those who come from emotionally broken families are most likely to become delinquent. A significant positive correlation \((p = 0.007)\) has been observed between broken family structure and criminal behavior among juvenile. Significant correlation between broken family structure and drug misuse among juvenile has been observed \((p = 0.00)\).

Similarly, negative social factors like poverty, poor neighborhood and disorganized community, being homeless, non-involvement in any occupation, the easy availability of drugs, exposure to violence and racial prejudice, laws and norms favorable to violence, and frequent media portrayals of violence, may contribute to crime and violence\(^14\). Significant correlation between income and occupational status for drug misuse has also been established on the basis of recent literature\(^15\). Being raised in poverty has been found to contribute to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence\(^16\), which has been clearly established in the present sample. Furthermore, exposure to violence at home or in the surroundings increases a child's risk for involvement in violent behavior later in life\(^17\).

CONCLUSION

The study addressed the issues of drug misuse and criminal behavior in juveniles. The role of family and other social factors have been seen to be important predictors of delinquent behavior and its associated issues of drug misuse, criminal behavior. Parenting style, family environment and pattern of substance use in family as well as children were found important predictors for the development of juvenile crime. Patterns of drug misuse and crime are also seen to be transmitted from one generation to another. Social environment like children living in streets and slums with absence of schooling / school drop-outs are also often predisposing factors of misuse and crime.

Thus, the study emphasizes on healthy parenting and a healthy social environment with a focus over schooling as an approach to alleviate delinquent behavior and drug misuse among juveniles. The findings have significant implication for developing the preventing programs emphasizing more on social and family focused programs.

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