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SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE ON UNDUE USAGE OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN**Dr. Chamila Siriwardene**

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Abstract: Undue usage of psychoactive substances, on the other hand substance abuse among the school children is presently increasing highly in Sri Lanka. Since, Substance abuse significantly associated with serious violent acts in the community it is becoming a socio economic problem. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention immediately to identify the direction to preventing the problem. Many school children start using this kind of licit and illicit substances cause of influence on peer groups. The parents and other authorities must pay high attention regarding the problem and the policies must stricter. Children who addicted to substance, the pursuit and use of substance take center stage in the line and become even more important than family, studies and their own welfare.

The main objective of the research is to identify the most popular licit and illicit substance among the school children and its

physical and mental harmfulness to them. To establish proper linkage between existing government institutions which presently act on the issue, parents, educators, community leaders and other government officials are sub objectives of the research.

The study depends on the non probability sampling methods and according to that random sampling method was used for data collection. According to the sample 09 schools where selected by three Districts in western province in Sri Lanka. The study conclude that the undue usages of Psychoactive substances among the school children are increasing highly and government and nongovernment organizations highly taken action to prevent the problem. Establishing an agency to protect the school children from substance is recommended.

Key words: Psychoactive Substances, Substance Abuse, School Children, Mental and Physical Disorders, Addiction

INTRODUCTION

Undue Usage of Psychoactive Substances on the other hand Substance abuse among school children is presently increasing highly in Sri Lanka. Since, substance abuse significantly associated with serious violent acts in the community and it is becoming a socio-economic problem. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention immediately to identify the ways of preventing the problem. In Sri Lanka – by law, the child is identified as adolescence below age of 18¹. The age range between years 6 - 18 is the schooling age of children and this is the period of subjecting a child into both physical and mental developments and changes. Also this is the time that a child is considered as a dependent. According to WHO Definition, “Substance abuse” refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs. Some time ago it was focused on psychoactive substances in two categories as licit (cigarettes and alcohol) and illicit (e.g., Cannabis and Heroin). But today in Sri Lankan surface it is expanded up to, Chewing Betel, undue use of pharmaceuticals such as cough syrups, Cosmetic items such as Hair Gel & Spirits such as Surgical Spirits. Then, as observed it is difficult to identify the substances, since the users concern is on novel alternatives time to time and those are fallen in a large range. Further, it is difficult to control the substance abusing by law, since some of those are not illicit, and even useful in day to day life. Therefore, making the people aware would be more effective than making law enforcements and identified high-risk groups could be targeted for the preventive programs. Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, and craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one’s behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response.”² Addiction to alcohol and drugs can negatively affect every part of an individual’s personality and actions. It often takes a professional with sophisticated training to help unravel the multiple aspects.

It is critical to draw a distinction between use and abuse of substance. But the abuse of drugs in general concern can be identify as a universal issue irrespective of the culture, economy etc. The concern of this matter has been discussed in many international forums and polices and regulations have been developed to use worldwide. During the past several years, there has been a renewed national concern about substance abuse, with the current tragedy of drugs. Even though child or teenage drug use is an individual behavior, it is embedded in a socio-cultural context that strongly affects the whole society. There are direct and indirect impacts of this issue. The impacts on health both physical and mental are very crucial and significant. Undue substances cause cancers, respiratory problems, impotency, etc. in physically since those substances are vitally affected to the body in growing age. Mental hazards are very significant among the addicts of substance. Addiction of substance is itself a mental disorder and it accumulates in the long run. This problem causes impotent society in future.

¹ *Child and Adolescent Development Module, UNHCR*

² *American Society of Addiction Medicine’s, <https://www.asam.org/quality-practice/definition-of-addiction>, retrieved September 2017*

PROBLEM

Do Undue Usage of Psychoactive Substances Make Mental and Physical Disorders among School Children?

Background of the Problem

It is important to prevent usage of undue usage of substance in among the school children and society. However no policy has systematically reviews regarding the problem. The prevention of poor mental and physical health habits and the behaviors among the school children have the potential to provide better health throughout the life span. In order to be better able to initiate preventive intervention, it is important to get an overview of the effectiveness, sustainability and the socio-economic effects of preventing substance abuse. (Licit and illicit drugs)³ Many school children start using this kind of licit and illicit substances cause of influence on peer groups. The parents and other authority figures must pay high attention regarding the problem and the policies must stricter. Addiction to substance, the pursuit and use of substance take center stage in the line and becomes even more important than family, studies and their own welfare.

The policy makers and the relevant government and nongovernment authorities initiate high-quality research on substance abuse in Sri Lanka. But the problem is still in Sri Lanka have no basic evidence to prove to growth on substance abuse among the school children. They are using both licit and illicit drugs, but no evidence base research done for the purposes of prevalence of the situation. The physical and mental wellbeing of children is important in terms of how they experience their childhood but also with respect to their development and mental and physical health in adulthood.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Psychoactive substance use can lead to dependence syndrome - a cluster of behavioral, cognitive, and physiological phenomena that develop after repeated substance use and that typically include a strong desire to take the drug, difficulties in controlling its use, persisting in its use despite harmful consequences, a higher priority given to drug use than to other activities and obligations, increased tolerance and sometimes a physical withdrawal state. Being impotent both physically and mentally affect the development of the country. Also individually the addict and the family of the addict degrade by economically and socially. The involvement in crimes by students who abused by substances are significant. Children physically feel difficult to tolerate the psycho changes by substances.⁴ So, eventually they become violent or mentally disordered. This leads to crimes in society. Finding money to buy substances also leads in crimes. There should be strong social dialogue concerning substance abuse and its consequences among the school community including students, teachers, administrators, parents etc. Although the substance abuse is spread among various age groups, School children are victimized severely. Therefore there is a potential tendency spread from higher level to premier level.

³ Dante Cicchetti, Donald J. Cohen (2006), *Developmental Psychopathology, Volume 3: Risk, Disorder, and Adaptation*, John Wiley & Sons Publications, America

⁴ Thalagala (2003). *Physical, Emotional, & Sexual Abuse of Children in Sri Lanka - Parents' and children's perspectives*. Unpublished report. Unicef. Colombo.

OBJECTIVES

The main Objective of the research is to identify the most popular licit and illicit substance among the school children and its physical and mental harmfulness to them. There are more sub objectives in this research as follow.

1. To identify the characteristics, patterns and trends of Substance abuse among the school children.
2. To apply the knowledge towards the development of more effective strategies to prevent children from substance abuse.
3. To rehabilitate the victims of substance abuse with the expectation of preventing children from substance abuse.
4. To establish proper linkage between existing Government institutions which presently act on the issue, Parents, educators, community leaders and other Government officials.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Research Design

School children are the target group of this research. To take out the opinions, thoughts and to analyze the behavior of targeted group, it is necessary to use survey research design.

Data Collecting Method

In this research both preliminary and secondarily data collecting methods will be using. In-depth interviews, Questionnaires used to collect data and for secondarily collection done by using existing policies, scholarly articles, News paper articles and manuscripts in related institutions etc.

Data Analysis Method

Quantitative and Qualitative data analysis would be advantage for this research and according to qualitative analysis collecting data through the structured questionnaire to provide to target group and the teachers. Qualitative data collecting done by case studies with selected sample and Focus Group discussion with Students, Teachers and Parents. The Key information will be collected from the related government and nongovernment organization's key personalities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The target group of the study is school children in Sri Lanka. It is difficult to study all the school children in Sri Lanka. Therefore the research limited to western province and selected 3 types of schools as follow. Mixed schools, girls' schools and boys schools in western province. There are number of schools in western province and those are Colombo, Kalutara and Gampaha. Selected 09 schools from each districts and it is divide to 3 mixed schools, 3 Girls schools and 3 boys' school and data collected basically from entire schools.

The types of schools and the percentage of the usage of psychoactive substances among the school children can mentioned as follow according to the field survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

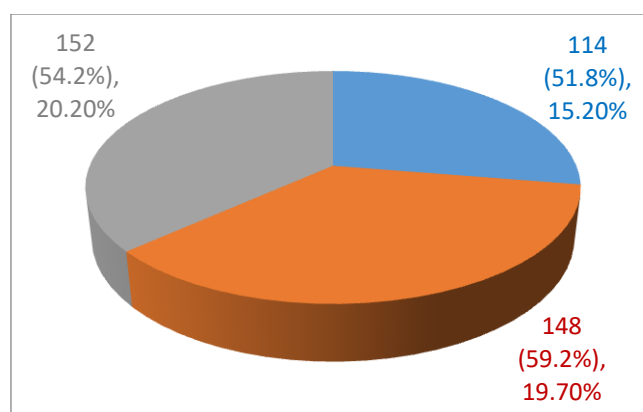
The total number of school children of the selected Girls, Boys and mixed schools are as follow.

Table 01: Total Number of the sample

Type of School	Total Students		5% Percentage Selected Sample		Usages	
					as School Level %	out of Total Sample %
Girls	1700	4400	85	220	114 (51.8%)	15.2%
	1440		72			
	1260		63			
Boys	960	5000	48	250	148 (59.2%)	19.7%
	2100		105			
	1940		97			
Mix	2340	5600	117	280	152 (54.2%)	20.2%
	2120		106			
	1140		57			
Total	15000		750		414	55.1%

(Field Research – 2016)

Figure 01: Usages of Psychoactive Substances among the School children



(Field Research – 2016)

There are 15.2% out of the total sample girls schools have been victimized of the psychoactive substances and 19.7% was Boys schools. The mixed schools are identified as highly usage of substance in school level. That is 20.2%.

According to the qualitative data the Mental and Physical disorders identified among the school children. One of the male students stated *"It was flutter my hands and I cannot control it sometimes. At that time I used to dink cough syrup and it getting me normal for few hours of the day"*. Based on the above statement it is possible to identify that there is a personality disorder with that student. Another student of a mix school cited that he has terrible headache at all time and at that time he is used to take a toffee from the pharmacy for the wellness. Furthermore, also he has Gastritis and it is too painful.

A 16 years old boy stated like this. *"I need to be alone and I don't want to be disturbed by others, even my mother. When they calling me I just feel that they will come to me and I don't have*

pleasant feeling with them. My mother always school me like a child and I don't like the way she treats me. Therefore I just need to be alone. Sometimes I think that I need to kill myself". This boy seems like most aggressive and when he talked in front of me there were no such smile on his face. This kind of situations must be avoided and these types of children need more attention, love, protection from the families, teachers and the peer groups.

Some of the students who involved for the focus group Discussions mentioned that they have some friends who don't sleep all over the night. They said that their friends say that they need to sleep, but they can't sleep without taking substances in nights. According to the psychological view can mention that this kind of children must have Insomnia. But they don't know that they have mental disorder called Insomnia.

Most of the children using psychoactive substances stated that they cannot keep remember lessons and they don't like to study. They just need to go somewhere to be calm and peaceful. Especially they don't like to learn Mathematics and Science. One of the students stated that *"I don't remember anything sometimes and even I don't hear what teacher says".*

Further according to the Case studies and the Focus group Discussions can identify the following mental disorders among the school children and they are falling such disorders and they are used take psychoactive substances for their wellness. The Psychological Disorders can be mentioned as Personality Disorders, Anxiety, Phobia, Aggressiveness, Insomnia and Learning Disorders (Memory). Apart of this there are some physical illness can be identified as Headache, Gastritis, Allergies, Stomachache, Flutter and Breathing Problems in maximum level of the addiction of psychoactive substances.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION

Using psychoactive substances is highly increasing problem among the children in Sri Lanka. Parents, Teachers or even Child victim cannot think that she is or she was a victim of the addiction. The charity and Volunteer Organizations took part to prevent the situation from grassroots level. Based on that, they have started poster campaigns, awareness programs from urban level to rural level. The Government, Nongovernment and International Non government organizations also take part in preventing the problem in school level.

This research have paid more attention for the social work intervention for the prevent using psychoactive substances in school level in Sri Lanka. Social Work Intervention for Preventing the Problem among the School Children. There are no attentions of social work in Sri Lankan society but social care. The intervention of social worker in this regard has to pay more attention to detect the problem in grassroots level and make solution to prevent the situation.

Empowering group counseling in the school level is necessary to prevent the problem. It is important to make awareness and special training between the parents, children and the teachers etc. It means that Family counseling is an important part of any substance abuse treatment program. It provides education and support to help family members to understand the cycle of addiction and avoid participating in it. Social workers recommend that loved ones detach emotionally because the addict needs to own the problem and take responsibility for their recovery Strengthening family support

through this awareness programmes and evaluate the situation is necessary. Beyond that it is necessary to build a social network among the government and nongovernment organizations and the rural awareness and the extracurricular activities among the students can be done from the grassroots level.

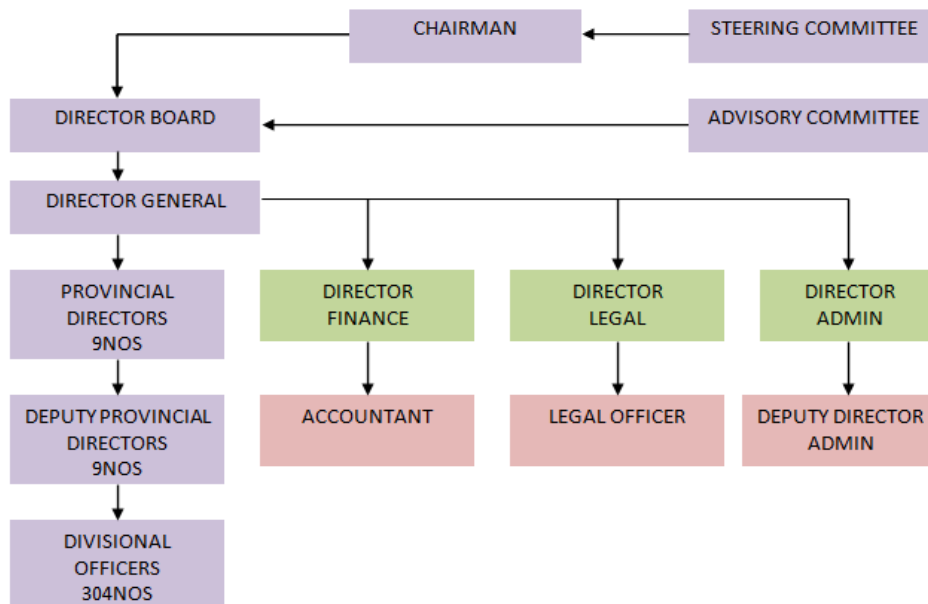
CONCLUSION

Considering the implementation of the national policy to eradicate drug menace from Sri Lanka it is observed that various government and Non- governmental organizations are involved in this regard. National Dangerous Drugs Control Board has taken some masseurs in the areas of training, guidance counseling and intervention, education & awareness, and information dissemination. Sri Lanka anti narcotic association is a nongovernmental organization which functions against the drugs menace of Sri Lanka with the understanding of the need to break the vicious cycle of crime, poverty, poor education, and drug abuse. Apart from these organizations and institutions the Narcotic bureau of Sri Lanka, police and the Department of Excise also function against drugs specially towards freeing society from scourge of drugs. All these institutions launch their campaigns in order to mitigate the issue of the drugs in Sri Lanka in way of awareness programs, rehabilitation programs leading to take legal actions against drugs. But usage of psychoactive substances among the school children in highly increasing it can be identifying as risk factor.

SUGGESTIONS

In addition to abstinence of all psychoactive substances, treatment should focus on areas such as academic and vocational activities, vocational counseling, the environment and social relationships, as well as leisure activities, all of which are critical to the reestablishment of normal adolescent development. Strategies for the prevention are important.

Establishing an **“Agency to protect School Children from substance abuse”** is highly recommended.



Introducing a policy for Awareness programs and Introducing a Research Policy regarding Substance Abuse is necessary.

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