

Alcohol abuse and high risk Sexual Behavior among college going youth of district Ambala, Haryana, India

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Abstract

Background:- Alcohol abuse among youth have become an issue of concern throughout the world. It is cited as risk factor for exposure to HIV infection through risky sexual behavior and Intravenous drug abuse which is especially common among them. **Objectives:-**This study was planned to assess prevalence, pattern of alcohol abuse and high risk sexual behaviour among college going youth. Risk factors responsible for the above behavioural problems were also studied. **Material & methods:-** A cross- sectional study was done among college going youth (15-23 years) in the rural and the urban areas of the District Ambala, Haryana. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to get the desired sample size of 1058. WHO model core questionnaire was used to find the prevalence and pattern of alcohol abuse and a self-designed, semi structured proforma was used to assess the socio demographic and high risk behavior pattern. **Results:-** The prevalence of alcohol abuse was found to be 49% for ever users and 28% for regular users. Overall students belonging to urban areas were more involved in alcohol abuse as compared to their rural counterparts. High risk sexual behavior was found significantly more in regular alcoholic users (46.80%) as compared to alcoholics (ever users) and non-alcoholics ($p<0.000$). Risk factors having significant effect on alcohol abuse were experimentation, easy accessibility and family alcohol abuse ($p<0.001$). High risk sexual behavior was associated with curiosity effect, alcohol effect, lack of knowledge and motivational factors ($p<0.001$). **Conclusion:-** Alcohol abuse related problems are fairly common in youth rendering them vulnerable to high risk sexual behavior. Qualitative studies should be conducted to understand web of risk factors responsible for this problem prior to development of innovative and comprehensive approaches towards its control.

Keywords: Alcohol abuse, High risk sexual behavior, Intravenous drug abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol abuse and HIV among youth is an issue of concern throughout the world. Increasing alcohol use and abuse and its impact on physical & psychosocial health is a worldwide public health concern¹. Various factors have been responsible for changing youth's behaviour and attracting them towards substance abuse and high risk sexual behaviour which include rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, changing life styles, easy

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access to internet, introduction of foreign media and Plethora of cafes and discos ². Among the youth, college students are particularly involved due to increasing academic pressures, encouragement by peers, lure of popularity, easy availability of many such substances like drugs, tobacco etc. Early initiation of alcohol and other substance abuse is usually associated with a poor prognosis and a lifelong pattern of deceit and irresponsible behaviour ³. Factors contributing to substance abuse evolve over a complex relationship between personal, community, cultural and ethnic factors. Genetic vulnerability may be influenced by environmental factors and psychological deregulation. Cultural and ethnic factors affect patterns of substance misuse and recovery among children. Other variables predicting childhood substance use include parent's poor parenting skills, parental substance abuse and childhood mis-treatment⁴. This study was therefore undertaken as it is imperative to have a baseline data on alcohol abuse and high-risk sexual behavior among this age group and also because an understanding of social dynamics of substance use-related high risk sexual behaviour within a particular cultural setting is also necessary ⁵. In addition to this, an understanding of social dynamics of substance use-related sexual risk behaviour within cultural settings is also necessary. With the above background the aim of the study was to find out the prevalence, pattern of alcohol abuse and risk factors for high risk sexual behavior among college going youth.

METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional study design was undertaken and stratified random sampling technique was employed for selecting the study subjects. The study was carried out in selected rural & urban colleges of District Ambala of Haryana for a period of six months from Jan 2010 to June 2010. Out of a total of 1076 students, 1058 college going youth in the age group of 15-23 years participated in the study. Ambala has a total number of 26 colleges situated in rural and urban areas of the district. Both the type of colleges was taken for the study. Only undergraduate students in age group from 15-23 years studying in these colleges were included in the study. Care was taken to include the students in age group from 15-23 years. As the number of colleges in the rural & urban areas were in the ratio of 2:1 so the number of students to be taken from rural and urban colleges came out to be 738 and 320 respectively. The study tool consisted of two questionnaires:

- 1) WHO model core questionnaire: is a self-administered questionnaire used to know the prevalence and pattern of alcohol abuse⁶.
- 2) A self-designed, semi structured & pre-tested questionnaire which was used to study the prevalence & associated risk factors for high risk sexual behavior.

Working definitions

- *Ever user*: - Those who have taken alcohol in the past but did not consume one or more drinks during the past 6 months.
- *Regular user*: The respondent, who accepts having taken alcohol during past one year and has been taking it at least once a week or several times in the previous month.

Written permission was taken from District Education Officer, Ambala. Permission was also obtained from the principals of the colleges selected. Following this the weekly

schedule of the students was taken. The students were explained the purpose of the study and were assured of utmost confidentiality. The correct method of filling the questionnaire was explained to them and subsequently filled in our presence. Teachers were not allowed to be present in the rooms and the students were not allowed to discuss or copy. On an average 50 minutes were taken to fill the questionnaire.

Ethical consideration: Approval of ethical committee of our institution was sought before conducting the study. Proper permission from District Education Officer & Principals of the participating colleges was taken. Informed & written consent from all the participants was taken. Confidentiality was always maintained during the course of the study. There was no financial burden to the participants. The completed questionnaires were scored according to the guidelines of WHO Model Core Questionnaire to identify alcohol abuse problems. Association of alcohol abuse with high risk sexual behaviour was analysed using SPSS software (version 20).

RESULTS

An epidemiological study was conducted to find out Alcohol abuse and high risk Sexual Behavior among college going youth of district Ambala, Haryana, India. The study was carried for a period of six months from Jan 2010 to June 2010. Our study observed an overall higher prevalence of alcohol abuse of 61.81% with male student predominance (81.75%).

Fig-1 depicts the general profile of the study population. It was found that out of the total study participants (1058), 72.02% were males and 28.85% females respectively. Regarding the background, it was observed that 71.65% of males and 64.86% females belonged to urban areas whereas 28.5% boys and 35.14% girls hailed from rural areas. Age wise distribution depicted that maximum of the study participants belonged to middle age group (18-20 yrs-53.12%), followed by higher age group (21-13 yrs-32.80%) whereas comparatively less study participants were from younger age group (15-17 yrs-14.08%) respectively (**Fig-2**).

The general prevalence of alcohol abuse observed in our study came out to be pretty high (61.81%). It was further found that the prevalence was much higher among male students (81.75%) as compared to their female counterparts (10.44%) respectively (**Table-1**).

Table-2 observed that male students belonging to urban areas (65.65%) were having a higher prevalence of alcohol abuse whereas in rural areas female students were more indulged in alcohol abuse (41.93%). However no statistical association could be found between gender and background of the students ($p=0.38$).

Table-3 reveals high risk sexual behavior as per alcohol consumption. It was observed that maximum of the students who were regular alcoholic users had a higher affinity towards high risk sexual behavior (46.80%), followed by alcoholic ever users (21.83%) were as very minimal non-alcoholics were indulged in high risk sexual behavior (3.46%). The association between alcohol consumption and high risk sexual behavior was found to be statistically highly significant ($p=0.000$).

Table-4 depicts various risk factors for alcohol abuse. It was observed that the commonest risk factors for alcohol abuse among male students were peer pressure (71.93%), easy accessibility (71.13%) and familial alcohol abuse (64.56%) whereas the risk factors responsible among females were peer pressure (52.90%), experimentation (49.81%) and lure of popularity (42.60%). Further risk factors having a significant

association on alcohol abuse were easy accessibility, experimentation and lure of popularity ($p < 0.001$).

Table-5 reveals various factors responsible for high risk sexual behavior. It was seen that the most common factors for HRSB among male students were lack of knowledge (77.90%), motivations (67%) and peer influential effect (62.3%) whereas in females the factors responsible were peer influential effect (68.1%) and lack of knowledge (33.40%). Moreover, risk factors having a significant association on HRSB were curiosity effect, motivations and lack of knowledge ($p < 0.001$).

DISCUSSION

Global studies have revealed that alcohol abuse is widespread and the age of initiation is falling rapidly. It is dependent on multiple variables that have been explored in details in developed countries but still in developing countries like India, there are not many studies done on this problem. The present study was carried out to find out the prevalence, pattern of alcohol abuse and risk factors for high risk sexual behavior among college going youth. The study has been conducted in 6 rural schools (4 government and 2 private) and 6 urban schools (4 government and 2 private). The present study included college going children in the age group of 15-23 years.

In the present study, age of the students ranged from 15-23 years which was almost similar in the study done by Juyal et al⁷ at Dehradun (13-22 years) whereas it was 10-18 years in the study done by Kushwaha et al⁸ at Gorakhpur. Similarly the age group was 10-19 years in a study done by Saxena et al⁹ in Dehradun.

Males are more as compared to females in the studied population. This is in accordance with the study population as reported by Dube et al¹⁰ (63.1% and 36.9%) in Agra. In our study it was found that the prevalence of alcohol abuse was 61.81% which is almost similar in a study done by Ningombam et al¹¹ in Manipur (54%).

In the present study, it was found that substance abuse was significantly more in higher socioeconomic classes (II, III and IV) as compared to lower classes (V). Juyal et al⁷ in their study in Dehradun also found maximum number of substance abusers in higher socioeconomic classes (II, III and IV).

Alcohol abuse among rural and urban students was significant. Urban students were using more alcohol as compared to their rural counterparts (39.65% and 29.78 % respectively) which supports the observations of Juyal et al⁷ in Dehradun (urban-37.9% and rural-24.4%) and Tsering and Pal¹² in West Bengal (urban-15.1% and rural-10.7%).

In the present study, it was found alcohol abuse had a significant association with parental physical/mental abuse which supports the findings of Sarangi et al¹³(Sambalpur) who found in their study that a significant proportion of alcohol abusers were associated with parental abuse.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Alcohol related problems are fairly common in youth rendering them vulnerable to high risk sexual behavior and subsequently to HIV/AIDS. Peer related effects were the major source player regarding alcohol use. Extra-curricular activities were also found to be significant protective effect. Access to sources of information played a key role in maybe accelerating the HRSB among our youth. Development of innovative and

comprehensive approach towards prevention will help identify youth at greater risk and can help stop problems before they develop. Need for *qualitative research* in order to understand the complex relationships between alcohol use and high risk behavior in the youth is the need of the hour.

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FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure: 1 General profile of the study population

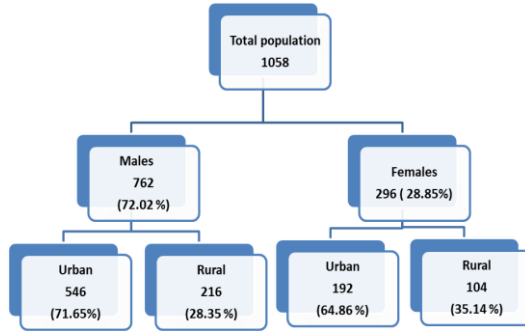


Fig 2:-Age wise distribution of the sample

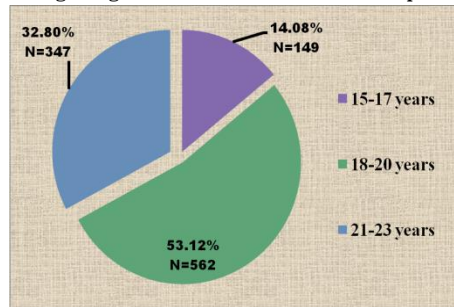


Table 1:- Overall prevalence of alcohol abuse among study population.

Gender	Alcoholics	Non-alcoholics	Total
Male	623(81.75%)	139(18.24%)	762
Female	31(10.47%)	265(89.52%)	296
Total	654(61.81%)	404(38.18%)	1058

Table 2:- Variation of alcohol use with Gender and Background (N=654*)

Gender	Rural		Urban		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
Males	214	34.34%	409	65.65%	623
Females	13	41.93%	18	58.06%	31
Total	227		427		654

*Alcohol users (ever+ regular)

P value=0.38(Not-significant)

Table 3:- High risk sexual behavior as per Alcoholic consumption (N=1058)

Characteristics	High risk sexual behavior (Yes)	High risk sexual behavior (No)	Total
Non-alcoholics	14 (3.46)	390 (96.53)	404
Alcoholics (Ever users)	112 (21.83)	401 (78.16)	513
Alcoholics (Regular users)	66 (46.80)	75 (53.19)	141
Total	192	866	1058

P value=0.000(highly significant)

Table 4:-Various risk factors for alcohol abuse

Risk factors	Alcoholics		
	Males	Females	P value
Alcohol use at home by family members	64.56%	12.05%	<0.000
Experimentation	18.90%	49.81%	<0.001
Peer pressure	71.93%	52.90%	<0.05
Relieve stress	9.75%	6.00%	>0.05
Lure of popularity	15.00%	42.60%	<0.05
Easy accessibility	71.13%	26.00%	<0.000

Table 5:- Various factors for High risk sexual behaviour

Risk factors	High risk behaviour		
	Male	Female	P value
HRSB – related to experimentation “ <i>curiosity effect</i> ”	38.50%	18.10%	<0.000
Use of alcohol before sex “ <i>Alcohol effect</i> ”	56%	3.10%	<0.000
HRSB not viewed as risky “ <i>lack of knowledge</i> ”	77.90%	33.40%	<0.002
Internet/TV/media access “ <i>motivations</i> ”	67 %	18.7%	<0.001
Friends who have had sex “ <i>Peer influential effect</i> ”	62.3%	68.1%	0.06
Protected sex	51.5%	NA	NA
Multiple sex partners	12.9%	NA	NA