



EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN ADOLESCENTS: PERSPECTIVE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

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Abstract:

The issue of substance abuse among adolescents is a growing concern in contemporary society, posing serious risks to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Hence, it is imperative to establish effective interventions to combat this problem and provide essential support to young individuals grappling with substance abuse. The purpose of this research is to investigate the risk factors, difficulties, and contemporary therapies that social workers and psychologists are using to address adolescent substance misuse. and to ascertain whether radiologists have a role in detecting substance usage as well as the most efficient methods and approaches used by experts in this sector. According to recent studies, drug and alcohol misuse among teenagers in the nation is on the rise, with many young people turning to these substances. During adolescence, numerous detrimental behaviors tend to emerge, posing significant public health concerns. Substance abuse, in particular, exerts a profound influence on individuals, families, and societies, given its cumulative repercussions that lead to extensive social, physical, and psychological health issues. The initiation or perpetuation of substance abuse is often influenced by various factors such as socioeconomic status, parental upbringing, peer pressure, and inherent susceptibility to addiction. These factors collectively contribute to the complex and costly challenges associated with substance abuse.

Keywords: Adolescent health, Substance abuse, Drug abuse, psychologist role, social worker role.

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Introduction:

The issue of substance abuse among adolescents is a growing concern in contemporary society, posing serious risks to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Hence, it is imperative to establish effective interventions to combat this problem and provide essential support to young individuals grappling with substance abuse [1]. Professionals such as psychologists and social workers play a pivotal role in this endeavor, leveraging their specialized knowledge and skills to deliver comprehensive care and assistance to adolescents struggling with substance abuse. By adopting a holistic approach that takes into account each individual's unique circumstances, underlying issues, and support networks, psychologists and social workers can create tailored interventions that address the specific needs of each adolescent [2]. These experts possess the necessary expertise and resources to aid adolescents in developing coping mechanisms, fostering resilience, and instigating positive changes in their lives. Through their collaborative efforts, psychologists and social workers can significantly contribute to addressing substance abuse among adolescents and promoting sustained recovery and well-being. The escalating prevalence of substance abuse among adolescents in Saudi Arabia underscores the urgent need for action [3].

Recent research indicates a rising trend in substance abuse among adolescents in the country, with a considerable number of young people resorting to drug and alcohol consumption. A study conducted in 2006 among Saudi medical students reported an active smoking prevalence of 13%, with shisha being the most commonly used product (44.1%), followed by cigarettes (32.2%). Another study carried out among Saudi adolescents in 2010 revealed a tobacco smoking prevalence of 9.72% (12.43% among boys and 6.65% among girls) [4]. In contrast, the prevalence of substance abuse among male secondary school students in Saudi Arabia was found to be 8.8%, with a slightly higher rate of 9.3% among those who consumed alcohol. Among the illicit substances used by students, cannabis was the most commonly reported at 51.4%, followed by glue/solvents at 48.6% and amphetamine at 45.7%. A study in Saudi Arabia highlighted that students from higher-income families, with larger daily allowances, less study time, higher rates of skipping classes, lower religious observance, more time spent at home, and increased consumption of soft drinks were more inclined towards smoking and illicit substance use [5]. Additionally, having friends who smoke was identified as a significant predictor of smoking and

substance abuse among youths. Another study indicated that 82.4% of students had adequate awareness about smoking and substance abuse, a factor significantly associated with parental education levels, family income, and parental cohabitation [6]. Various factors such as peer pressure, easy access to substances, and lack of awareness regarding the risks of substance abuse contribute to this concerning trend. The repercussions of substance abuse on adolescents can be severe, leading to a spectrum of physical, mental, and social issues. Collaborative efforts among parents, educators, and policymakers are crucial to addressing this problem and providing necessary support and resources to guide young individuals towards healthier choices. The implementation of prevention programs, early intervention strategies, and improved access to treatment services are vital in combatting adolescent substance abuse in Saudi Arabia. By enhancing awareness, promoting education, and fostering a supportive atmosphere, we can safeguard the well-being of our youth and cultivate a healthier society for the future [7].

Objectives:

The primary objectives of this review are:

1. To explore the current interventions being utilized by psychologists and social workers in addressing substance abuse among adolescents.
2. To identify the most effective strategies and techniques employed by professionals in this field.
3. To assess the challenges faced by psychologists and social workers in providing interventions for adolescent substance abuse.
4. To determine whether radiologists have a role in diagnosing substance abuse.
5. To investigate the risk factors for substance abuse among adolescents.
6. To provide recommendations for improving interventions and support for adolescents struggling with substance abuse based on the insights gathered from psychologists and social workers.

Risk factors contributing to substance abuse among adolescents are multifaceted and can be categorized into various domains:

- Familial risk factors, such as childhood maltreatment, parental substance abuse, parental education level, parent-child relationships, socioeconomic status, and parental approval of substance use, have been identified as significant influences on adolescent substance abuse [8]. It is important

to note that not all maltreatment is perpetrated by family members, as defined by the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) [9]. Studies have shown a clear link between childhood maltreatment, including physical abuse and neglect, and increased likelihood of adolescent substance use, with percentages ranging from 16% to 29% [8].

- **Physical and sexual abuse.** Physical child abuse is defined as any deliberate act causing physical harm to a child, while sexual abuse involves unwanted sexual contact or behavior. Research consistently demonstrates a strong association between physical or sexual abuse and adolescent use of substances like nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol [10]. Moreover, victims of physical or sexual assault are at a significantly higher risk of engaging in substance use, with the likelihood increasing two to four times [11]. Studies have shown varying results regarding the relative impact of different types of abuse, with some indicating a higher risk associated with sexual abuse and others with physical abuse.

Furthermore, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is linked to an increased risk of developing a substance use disorder, particularly involving marijuana and hard drugs like LSD, cocaine, heroin, inhalants, and nonmedical prescription drugs [12]. Individuals with PTSD may turn to substance use as a coping mechanism to deal with the intense stress resulting from trauma, thus heightening their vulnerability to substance abuse [13].

- **Emotional abuse:** According to recent research findings, the impact of emotional abuse on adolescent substance use is noteworthy, although it appears to be less significant compared to the effects of physical or sexual abuse [14]. Moreover, studies indicate that exposure to violence can substantially elevate the likelihood of adolescents developing a substance use disorder involving alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, or other illicit drugs, with the risk increasing by two to three times. This heightened risk is attributed to the considerable stress induced by witnessing violence, particularly in cases where a child observes domestic violence [15]. Consequently, substance use may serve as a coping mechanism in such situations. Furthermore, there is a suggestion that in certain instances, substance use might precede exposure to violence, potentially occurring within a delinquent peer group where substance use is prevalent.

Nevertheless, the existing body of literature on the association between emotional abuse, including exposure to violence, and adolescent substance use and abuse remains relatively limited [16].

- **Social risk factors:** Adolescent substance use is frequently influenced by peers, either through deviant peer relationships, where adolescents associate with a group of substance users, or through perceived popularity [17]. Studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between deviant peer relationships and adolescent substance use [18]. It is hypothesized that individuals with a propensity for substance use may be drawn to form peer groups with similar inclinations, or that individuals may be motivated to use substances in order to gain social status or be accepted into a group, thereby forming a deviant peer group [19].

The role of psychologist and social worker in managing adolescents' substance abuse:

Psychologists play a crucial role in addressing the problem of substance abuse by providing assessment, intervention, and support to adolescents struggling with substance abuse. Additionally, psychologists work closely with other healthcare professionals, such as doctors and social workers, to provide a comprehensive treatment plan for adolescents in need. In adolescents, treatment goals should be informed by a comprehensive assessment that includes the adolescent patient's developmental history and evaluation of psychiatric comorbidity [20]. As regard the role of psychologist and social worker, treatment for behavioral, psychosocial, and psychiatric problems should be integrated with substance abuse interventions as follow:

- **Family-based interventions:** Family-based interventions, such as structural-strategic family therapy, parent management training (PMT), multisystemic therapy (MST), and multidimensional family therapy (MDFT), are rooted in family systems theory and operate under the belief that dysfunctional family dynamics play a role in adolescent substance use disorders (SUD) and associated issues. These interventions involve conducting a functional analysis to pinpoint problematic behaviors and relationship patterns, which are then addressed through restructuring techniques. Parents are instructed in enhanced monitoring techniques and fundamental behavioral management principles to enhance their adolescent's conduct and diminish substance abuse, alongside strategies to enhance

overall family functioning and maintain treatment progress [21].

- **Behavioral therapy approaches:** Behavioral therapy approaches are grounded in operant behavioral principles, which involve the reinforcement of behaviors or activities that are inconsistent with drug use, while also imposing consequences or sanctions when drug use or other undesirable behaviors occur [22]. This method establishes a system of positive reinforcement aimed at encouraging desired behaviors and extinguishing those associated with drug use. Regular urine monitoring is deemed essential for effectively linking consequences to the targeted behaviors. Research focusing on adolescents underscores the significance of not only delivering individual behavioral therapy but also involving the family in the treatment process. Studies have demonstrated that behavioral therapy can assist adolescents in achieving abstinence from drugs and enhancing various aspects of their lives, such as employment, school attendance, family dynamics, behavioral issues, and feelings of depression [23].
- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)**, which is grounded in learning theory, has demonstrated effectiveness in the treatment of adolescent substance abuse [24]. While individual CBT has garnered more empirical backing, early research suggests that group CBT could also play a role in diminishing adolescent substance use and enhancing overall behavioral outcomes. The therapeutic process involves the initial instruction and rehearsal of novel skills and coping mechanisms within therapy sessions, followed by their practical application in the patient's everyday life through designated "homework" tasks. Subsequent weekly sessions involve a review of the patient's achievements and challenges, reinforcing the assimilation of these new strategies [24].
- **Motivational enhancement therapy (MET)** has been utilized as a standalone, brief intervention as well as in conjunction with other therapeutic modalities such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This client-centered approach aims to assist individuals in resolving any ambivalence they may have towards seeking treatment and to enhance their motivation to create a plan for change [25]. Research has demonstrated that MET can enhance treatment commitment and motivation, leading to reductions in substance abuse and risky behaviors. In the case of adolescents, who typically exhibit resistance to more directive

interventions and may feel ambivalent about abstaining from substances, the use of MET techniques is especially crucial [26].

- **Community reinforcement therapy:** combines principles and techniques derived from behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, motivational, and family therapy, often using incentives to enhance treatment outcomes [27].

Consequences of substance abuse:

An individual who engages in substance abuse is at risk of experiencing a lower quality of life compared to a healthy non-abuser in various aspects, potentially leading to psychological, physical, social, educational, and functional impairments. Studies conducted in the United Kingdom have indicated that problematic Internet use is linked to a broad array of adverse social and psychological consequences, including but not limited to depression, bullying, alcohol and drug abuse [28]. Additionally, the severity of any health complications may double when individuals who abuse substances consume two or more psychoactive substances as opposed to just one. This group is also more likely to face increased risks of injury, lower educational attainment, violence, depressive symptoms, reckless driving, and suicidal ideation and attempts. Particularly in certain age brackets like adolescence and young adulthood, the concurrent abuse of multiple substances can result in significant and lasting repercussions that may impede their future prospects, given that this period is crucial as a transition from adolescence to adulthood. Substance abuse can have profound implications on the development of social relationships, identity formation, and educational progress for these individuals [29]. Furthermore, engaging in risky behaviors such as needle sharing can heighten the risk of HIV infection due to substance use, while exacerbating existing health issues related to HIV/AIDS [30].

Recommendations for improving interventions and support for adolescents with substance abuse:

In order to bolster interventions and assistance for adolescents dealing with substance abuse, it is crucial to take into account the suggestions put forth by psychologists and social workers with direct experience in aiding this susceptible demographic [31]. One pivotal suggestion is to give precedence to early detection and intervention by conducting routine screenings in educational institutions and other communal settings. Through the early identification of vulnerable adolescents,

professionals can offer timely aid and thwart the exacerbation of substance abuse issues. Moreover, it is vital to embrace a comprehensive approach that tackles the root causes contributing to substance abuse, such as trauma, mental health challenges, or familial dynamics [32]. This might entail collaborating with other experts, like therapists and family counselors, to deliver all-encompassing care. Additionally, establishing a nurturing and non-judgmental atmosphere is crucial in cultivating trust with adolescents and motivating them to seek assistance. This objective can be accomplished through peer support groups, counseling services, and educational initiatives that advocate for constructive coping mechanisms and resilience-building [33]. In conclusion, by incorporating these recommendations, we can significantly enhance the efficacy of interventions and support for adolescents grappling with substance abuse.

Conclusion:

In summary, the most effective way to address substance abuse in adolescents is through a collaborative effort between psychologists and social workers. By leveraging the unique perspectives and expertise of both professionals, a comprehensive and holistic treatment plan can be developed. This plan may include a combination of psychological interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy and social work strategies such as family therapy and community support programs. By working together, psychologists and social workers can identify and address the root causes of substance abuse in adolescents, providing tailored interventions that meet the individual needs of each young person. Through this multidisciplinary approach, we can achieve better outcomes and empower adolescents to develop the skills and resources necessary to lead healthy, substance-free lives.

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