

Patterns of substance abuse and types of crimes in juveniles kept in observation home

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Abstract : *The aim of the present study was to determine the patterns of substance abuse in juveniles in observation home, types of crimes committed by juveniles and to determine relationship between crime and substance abuse. 38 cases kept in observation home of district Faridkot were assessed according to ICD-10 criterion. Data of crime was examined. A total of 33 out of 38 detainees (86.84%) were found to have substance abuse. The substances abused in preferential order in juveniles were opioids(N=25), cigarette smoking(N=20), alcohol(N= 18), tobacco(N=10) and cannabis(N= 5). There was history of polysubstance abuse in all 33 adolescents. The study also shows that substance abuse is not related with the severity of crime. Adolescents without substance abuse were involved in even more serious crimes like murder.*

Keywords : Substance abuse, crime, juvenile observation home

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INTRODUCTION

Studies conducted on juvenile detainees reveal that rate of substance abuse in them are on higher side.^{1,2} According to studies, most commonly abused substances are alcohol, cannabis and volatile substances.^{2,3} Lifetime prevalence of substance use was found to be 38% to 58%.^{1,4} There is established correlation between conduct disorder and unlawful activities. Conduct disorder was reported in 91-100% juvenile detainees.^{5,6}

A significant correlation between substance abuse and psychopathic behaviour in 40 detainee male adolescents was seen.⁷ In a study to find out relationship of substance abuse and conduct disorder, it was found that 78% of juvenile detainees started abusing substances regularly at 13 years of age and conduct disorder was detected 3.6 years before the substance abuse.⁶

Conduct disorder as an early sign for

cannabis and other substance abuse was also reported.⁸

These studies emphasize the need to focus on conduct problem and substance use among the young generation.

The present study aimed to determine the patterns of substance abuse in juveniles in observation home, types of crimes committed by them, to determine the relation between crime and substance abuse and to determine the priorities for prevention programs.

MATERIAL & METHODS

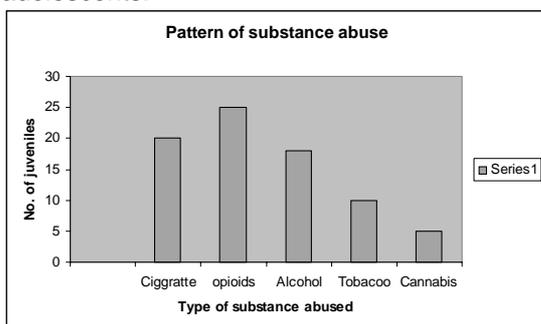
The present study was conducted in observation home situated in district Faridkot of Punjab. This is a juvenile observation home for arrested young adolescent male criminals. All juvenile detainees staying in this observation home comprised the sample (N=38). All 38 adolescents consented to participate in study. During the study, they were interviewed and diagnosis made according to ICD-10 criterion. Law files and data of crime were

examined. The rate of substance abuse, type of substance abused, duration of abuse and any family history of substance abuse was assessed. Type of crime committed was determined and association of crime with presence or absence of substance abuse was assessed.

RESULTS

The juveniles included in study were between 12 and 19 years of age (mean \pm SD 17.52 \pm 1.15 years). 33 out of 38 juvenile detainees were found to have substance abuse. The sample was divided into two groups based on their substance abuse and were compared with respect to their criminal data. The mean age of substance abusers and nonabusers was 13.36 \pm 1.29 years and 13.28 \pm 1.09 years respectively and the difference was not statistically significant (P > 0.05).

The substances abused in preferential order were opioids (N=25, 75.75%), cigarette smoking (N= 20, 60.6%), alcohol(N=18, 54.54%), tobacco(N=10, 30.3%) and cannabis(N=5, 15.15%). Age at first drug use was between 8 and 17 years and the mean age was 13.5 \pm 2.15 years. 18 children had one year history of substance abuse, 10 children abused since last two years and 5 children abused since last five years. Family history of substance abuse was found in 24 cases. There is history of polysubstance abuse in all 33 adolescents.



Graph I showing patterns of substance abuse in juveniles

In the total sample of 38 children, 33 were using substances and 5 were not using the substances. The severity of crime like murder is even more in the non-substance users (3 out of 5 i.e 60% v/s 10 out of 33 i.e 33.3%).

This study concludes that substance use is not related with the severity of crime. Adolescents without substance use were involved in even more serious crimes like murder.

Table 1
Types of crime committed

S. No	Type of crime	Substance abusers N=33(%)	Nonabusers N=5(%)
1.	Murder	10 (33)	3 (60)
2.	Rape	9 (27)	1 (20)
3.	Theft	7 (21)	0
4.	NDPS act	2 (6)	1 (20)
5.	Homicide	2 (6)	0
6.	Weapon	2 (6)	0
7.	Border crossing	1 (3)	0
Total		33 (100)	5(100)

Among the most frequently committed crimes were murder(34.21%), rape (26.31%), theft(18.42%), possessing narcotics (7.89%), homicide(5.26%), possessing weapon (5.26%) and attempt to cross international border (2.63%).

DISCUSSION

In our study, 86.84% of adolescents had history of substance abuse which shows that substance abuse is highly prevalent in the adolescents kept in observation home. Lightfoot and Hodgins noted that alcohol and substance abuse were highly correlated with crime.⁹ A study on 275 Canadian criminals showed that those with alcohol addiction and psychosocial problems related to substance abuse had a higher previous detention rate.⁹