

## Understanding the Psycho-social and Cultural Factors of Substance Abuse in the State of Sikkim

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### INTRODUCTION :

Although the term substance can refer to any physical matter, substance abuse has come to refer to the overindulgence in and dependence of a drug or other chemical leading to effects that are detrimental to the individual's physical and mental health, or the welfare of others (Nutt, King, Saulsbury and Blakemore, 1998).

The fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) issued by the American Psychiatric Association, the DSM-IV-TR(1994) defines substance dependence as "when an individual persists in use of alcohol or other drugs despite problems related to use of the substance, substance dependence may be diagnosed." followed by criteria for the diagnose (DSM-IV-TR,1994).

DSM-IV-TR defines substance abuse as (APA, 1994): A maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by one (or more) of the following, occurring within a 12-month period:

1. Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home (e.g., repeated absences or poor work performance related to substance use; substance-related absences, suspensions or expulsions from school; neglect of children or household)
2. Recurrent substance use in situations in which it is physically hazardous (e.g., driving an automobile or operating a machine when impaired by substance use)
3. Recurrent substance-related legal problems (e.g., arrests for substance-related disorderly conduct)
4. Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems caused or exacerbated by the effects of the substance (e.g., arguments with spouse about consequences of intoxication, physical fights)

The symptoms have never met the criteria for Substance Dependence for this class of substance.

**Alcoholism in Sikkim (Sikkim Human Development Report, 2001):**

'Sikkimese are very fond of alcohol' is the general impression of people in the rest of the country- just as most people are convinced that all hill people in the hills drink a lot of alcohol. There are social stigmas attached to drinking, but no celebration or occasion can be complete without alcohol, mostly indigenous but increasingly foreign (Prof. Mahendra P. Lama, 2001; Sikkim Human Development Report).

Hill people themselves subscribe to the notion that alcohol is essential for their climatic conditions. Moreover, alcohol is easily available in all the districts of Sikkim. The indigenously manufactured brews like rakshi, chhang and tongba are also relatively much cheaper than anywhere else. Sikkim breweries are known for their products in the eastern Himalayas.

Data pertaining to alcohol consumption and alcohol-related illnesses contradicts the popular belief that alcoholism is the norm in Sikkim (Sikkim Human Development Report, 2001). According to the data, from surveys conducted in 1989 and 1997, there has been a decline in the number of people consuming alcohol. In 1997, 18 percent of the rural population (as against 21 percent in 1989) and 7 percent of urban population (as against 12 percent in 1989) were consuming alcohol (Chutani and Gyatso, 1989; Gyatso and Bagdass, 1998). Alcoholism among women is much lower than that among their male counterparts both in urban and rural areas.

**USE OF ALCOHOL/SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN SIKKIM (SOCIO-ECONOMIC SENSUS, DESME: 2006):**

A house-hold survey in the state of Sikkim by Socio-economic Census, Department of Economics, Statistics Monitoring and Evaluation (DESME: 2006) found the following key features:

- Percentage of alcohol consumption in urban area is higher than the rural counterparts.
- Overall consumption of alcohol is higher in East district of Sikkim (60.85 percent) where the percentage is very less in North district.
- As far as other substance abuse is concerned, there is no difference between respondents of rural and urban area.
- However, no data is available regarding the age, educational level, occupation, religion, marital status, gender wise difference and different causes of substance abuse in Sikkim.

Since any systematic information on epidemiology of substance abuse behavior in Sikkim is not available, it is necessary to find out the trend of Substance abuse in a prosperous state like Sikkim. It is necessary to understand the role of

psycho-socio-cultural factors of substance dependence among people of Sikkim for finding all time solution to this problem by empowering the society and the community to deal with the problem of drug abuse/alcoholism. The present study is a preliminary attempt to understand the psycho-social and cultural factors of substance abuse in Sikkim, a state in Northeast India.

### **Objectives of the Research:**

- To find out the Psychological causes of substance abuse.
- To find out the Social/any other causes of substance abuse.
- To study the role of cultural and social milieu (Family and Society) in substance abuse.
- The objective of the entire strategy is to empower the society and the community on the basis of the emerging causal factors of substance abuse to deal with the problem of substance abuse.

In order to understand the whole issue of the study, it was conducted in two phase:

#### **Phase-I:**

In the phase-I for understanding the pattern of substance abuse, data were analyzed that were provided by Sikkim Human Development Report (2001) and house hold survey by DESME (2006). After analyzing the secondary data and identifying the pattern of substance abuse, the phase-II of study was started.

#### **Phase II:**

In phase II, Sikkim Rehabilitation and Detoxification Society, 32 No., Nimitar, East Sikkim (Sikkim) was selected for the purpose of conducting in-depth interview of patients to identify the role of psycho- social, cultural and other factors as mediator in substance abuse.

#### **Sample:**

Sample size was 20 patients (10 male and 10 Female) having a history of current substance use and utilizing services at Sikkim Rehabilitation and Detoxification Society, 32 No., Nimitar, East Sikkim for any reason related to substance use behavior. The age range of the six male patients varied from 25 years to 60 years and in case of six female patients, it ranged from 14 years to 60 years.

#### **Inclusion Criteria:**

- Current substance user: Substance use for more than 10 days in the past 30 days (WHO, 2000)
- Seeking treatment for any medical reason related to substance use, as diagnosed by the attending physician

- Either sex
- Any age group

**Design:**

On the basis of the emerging factors, in-depth interview was conducted on 20 (twenty) admitted patients (10 male and 10 female) to understand their perception towards substance use. This was done after getting permission from the president of the Rehabilitation Centre, Nimitar. Narrative as the tool of inquiry was chosen in this study.

**Interview Setting:**

A detailed in-depth interview was conducted with 20 patients (10 male and 10 Female) within the premise of Drug/Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre, Nimitar (Sikkim). Before conducting the interview, the researcher was indulged in informal interactions with them so as to develop rapport with them. The data of the patients was collected after getting consent from them. Order and nature of questions in the interview varied according to the respondents and their life experiences.

**Interview Protocol:**

There was no fixed interview protocol for all the respondents. Order and nature of questions varied according to the respondents and their life experiences. In these free floating interviews the inquiry centered on eliciting the following information: Each participant was interviewed for more than an hour, depending on the flow. For maintaining the confidentiality of participants, each patient had been given a pseudo name.

The interview contained the following information:

- Demographic variables, e.g. age, sex, religion, marital status, community, occupation, etc.
- Socioeconomic variables, e.g. income, education, family information, etc.
- Drug/alcohol use variables, e.g. type of drug/, duration, route of use, etc.
- Reasons for starting drug/alcohol, e.g. psychological, social, cultural and any other factors

**Analyses:**

The information gathered from the in-patient sample was analyzed to obtain the following information:

- Socio-demographic variables, e.g. age, sex, religion, marital status, community, occupation, income, education, family information, etc.
- Drug/alcohol use variables, e.g. type of drug/, duration, route of use, etc.
- Reasons for starting drug/alcohol, e.g. psychological, social, cultural and any other factors

**Table-1: Category wise mentioned indicators are reasons for starting substances by the substance abusers**

Sr. No.	Category	Indicators	Operational Definitions
1.	Psychological Factors	Curiosity	<b>Curiosity</b> is an emotion related to natural inquisitive behavior such as exploration, investigation, and learning, evident by observation in human and many animal species
		To overcome Frustration	<b>Frustration</b> is the blocking or prevention of a potentially rewarding or satisfying act or consequence of behaviour; or the emotional response to such hindrance.
		To overcome Low self confidence	<b>Self confidence</b> is defined in terms of positive and negative evaluation about own self.
		To overcome Worthlessness	<b>Worthlessness</b> a negative mindset in which the individual feels that he is useless, he does not have any value or good quality in him.
		To overcome Depression	<b>Depression</b> is a mental set or state of mind where individual have state of sadness, gloom, pessimistic ideation with loss of pleasures in normally enjoyable activity, great unhappiness and hopelessness.
		To overcome Loneliness	<b>Loneliness</b> occurs when a person has fewer interpersonal relationships than desired or when these relationships are not as satisfying as desired. It has two streams: Emotional (absence of intimate attachment) and Social (lack of friendship and network).
		To overcome Shyness	In humans, <b>shyness</b> (also called <b>diffidence</b> ) is a social psychology term used to describe the feeling of apprehension, lack of confidence, or awkwardness experienced when a person is in proximity to, approaching, or being approached by other people, especially in new situations or with unfamiliar people.

			<p><b>Anger</b> is a feeling of displeasure resulting from mistreatment, opposition, injury, etc., and usually showing itself in a desire to fight back at the supposed cause of this feeling</p>
		For Pleasure/Happiness	<p><b>Pleasure</b> describes the broad class of mental states that humans and other animals experience as positive, enjoyable, or worth seeking. It includes more specific mental states such as happiness, entertainment, enjoyment, ecstasy, and euphoria. In psychology, the pleasure principle describes pleasure as a positive feedback mechanism, motivating the organism to recreate in the future the situation which it has just found pleasurable.</p>
2.	Social Factors	Peer group pressure	<p><b>Peer pressure</b> refers to the influence exerted by a peer group in encouraging a person to change his or her attitudes, values, or behavior in order to conform to group norms. Peer pressure can cause people to do things they would not normally do, e.g. take drugs, smoke, etc.</p>
		Disturbed family environment	<p><b>Disturbed family environment</b> is one where there is frequent violence in the family, where the parents torture their child physically and mentally, where there is frequent conflict among spouse and where there is frequent sibling rivalry.</p>
		Lack of parental supervision	<p><b>Lack of parental supervision</b> means parents are either too strict or too permissive / easy going, they do not spend time with their child, there is no parental discipline, no moral support, too much autonomy is given to the child, there is conflict between parents, etc.</p>
		Poor school performance	<p>When the student gets poor marks in the school examination because of various reasons including scholastic backwardness and substance abuse, it is known as Poor school performance.</p>
3.	Cultural factor	Alcohol is accepted in the culture (drinking culture)	<p>When alcohol is a symbolic vehicle for identifying, describing, constructing and manipulating cultural systems, values, interpersonal relationships, behavioural norms and expectations, it is called <b>drinking culture</b>. Choice of beverage is rarely a matter of personal taste.</p>

**Factors of Substance Abuse....**

3.	Social Factors	Doctor's advice (To overcome weakness)	Sometimes <b>doctors advice</b> to their patients to take brandy in the evening in order to overcome weakness.
		To lose weight	Some times because of lack of knowledge, people start taking Marijuana (also called the grass, pot or weed) to <b>lose their weight</b> and hooked in to this habit.
		To increase sexual performance	Sometimes, because of misconceptions, people start taking various drugs in order to <b>increase their sexual performance.</b>
		To increase body weight	Because of lack of knowledge, some people start taking alcohol in order to <b>increase their body weight</b> without knowing its bad consequences.
4.	Other factors	Family history of substance abuse	Children of alcoholics or drug abusers are known to be at high genetic risk for <b>alcoholism</b> or drug-abuse themselves. Though the biological mechanisms underpinning alcoholism/substance use ( <b>Family history of alcoholism/substance abuse</b> ) are uncertain, however, person can start taking alcohol/ substances because of the chaotic family environment and stress.
		Alcohol is economically affordable	<b>Alcohol is economically affordable</b> in Sikkim compared to the market rates of alcohol in other states of India; alcohol is cheaper in Sikkim because it is tax free in Sikkim.
		Easy availability of alcohol	Since alcohol is tax-free in Sikkim and there is more demand for alcohol, therefore frequency of liquor shop is more in Sikkim. So, <b>alcohol is easily available</b> in Sikkim.
		Easy availability of drugs	Counter-drugs like sleeping pills, pain killers, cough syrups (codeine), injections, etc. are available at higher rates easily in the chemist shop without prescription. Other illicit drugs are available from the peddlers in Sikkim.

**Findings:**

An overall global look at the results of varied analyses performed in the study reveals the following main findings:

**1. Socio-demographic Variables:**

- Mean age of the substance abusers was 41.2 years in the range of 14 to 60 years.
- Percentage of respondents belonging to no income group, mainly house wives was substance abusers.

- As far as occupation is concerned, percentage of respondents belonging to the category of self-employed and house wives was addicted to various substances.
- Percentage of substance abusers from urban areas was more.
- Percentage of substance abusers was from nuclear family.
- Maximum percentage of the substance abusers was from Nepali community.
- Percentage of respondents was more from Hindu religion.
- Maximum percentage of the respondents was dependent upon a single substance before their admission.
- Among the respondents interviewed, percentage of alcoholic was more.
- 25 percent of the respondents who were interviewed were injectables.

**2. Psychological factors of substance abuse:**

The major psychological factors for substance abuse revealed by the substance abusers are: Curiosity, To overcome Frustration, To overcome Low self confidence, To overcome Worthlessness, To overcome Depression, To overcome Loneliness, To overcome Shyness, To overcome Angry outburst and For Pleasure/Happiness.

**3. Social Factors:**

The major social factors for substance abuse revealed by the substance abusers are: Peer group pressure, disturbed family environment, lack of parental supervision and poor school performance.

**4. Cultural Factor:**

The major cultural factor for substance abuse including alcohol in Sikkim revealed by the substance abusers is: Drinking culture.

**5. Health Factors:**

The major health factors for substance abuse in Sikkim revealed by the substance abusers are: Doctor's advice (To overcome weakness); to increase body weight to lose weight and to increase sexual performance.

**6. Other Factors:**

The other factors for substance abuse in Sikkim revealed by the substance abusers are: Family history of substance abuse, alcohol is economically affordable, easy availability of alcohol and easy availability of drugs.



### **Policy Recommendations:**

Based on the various factors of substance abuse, the following suggestions are recommended-

- The indigenously manufactured brews in Sikkim like rakshi, chhang and tongba are relatively much cheaper than anywhere else. Therefore, Government of Sikkim should discourage these local products by strict vigil and by making policies and taking legal action against them.
- Since alcohol is easily available in all the districts of Sikkim, Govt. of Sikkim should give a serious thought on its decision to open up a large number of liquor shops in Sikkim.
- Hill people themselves subscribe to the notion that alcohol is essential for their climatic conditions. This negative notion among people has to be changed at every level.
- Sikkim breweries are known for their products in the eastern Himalayas which also supply a large quantity of brews in the local market in a cheaper rate. This kind of attitude by the brewery manufacturers should be changed by changing the policy by the state government.
- There is a tax rebate on the sale of liquor products in Sikkim which is one of the major reasons of alcohol consumption among people in Sikkim. The government of Sikkim should change its decision and impose tax on the production as well as sale of breweries in the state.
- External penalties, such as legal or social sanctions, may reduce the likelihood of substance use in Sikkim.
- Since Sikkim shares international borders with Nepal, Bhutan and China, strict vigil should be maintained by the security forces at state and central level in these border entry points to prevent drug trafficking.
- Since most of the respondents were in the age group of 16 to 60 years who are educated and unemployed, the government should focus on improving the occupational structure in the state so that more employment can be generated which would provide satisfaction to the individuals.
- As alcohol use has become an important public health issue in Sikkim, there is an urgent need for spreading awareness among people about its harmful effect on health, family, economy and development of a prosperous state like Sikkim.
- The awareness should particularly target to certain community in Sikkim where the alcohol consumption is culturally acceptable.
- There is also need for opening of a number of Rehabilitation Centers (particularly for women)/ Psychiatric Units in the state in order to treat people who are already in to the habit of alcohol.

- Counseling services should also be available for helping people who have various misconceptions for starting different substances, for changing their positive attitude towards various substances and also helping people those who are suffering from various psychological problems in their life.
- One of the major factors related to substance dependence is social environment. In this model, drug-taking is essentially a socially learned behavior. Local social norms determine the likelihood that a person is exposed to the substance and whether continued use is reinforced. For example, individuals may, by observing family or peer role models, learn that substance use is a normal way to relieve daily stresses. So, ideal role model by the parents as well as peer groups helps individuals to stay away from substances by adopting positive coping mechanism for stress.
- As far as the psychological factors of substance abuse particularly among the children are concerned, a healthy family environment is required where parents and other family members have to play an important role.
- As a parent, it is vital that they should have an open line of communication with their child. They must have consistent and appropriate discipline techniques. Parents should also take an interest in and supervise their child in extracurricular activities.
- The parental supervision should not be too strict or too lax. Children who are comfortable talking to their parents, who often talk to their parents about what is going on in their daily lives, and who feel as though their parents really listen to them are less likely to turn to drugs.
- Apart from that, policy makers, law enforcement agents, local pressure groups, teachers and intellectuals, religious leaders, NGOs, health professionals, media, educationists and people of Sikkim at large will have to come forward and work together hand in hand in disseminating information to people on physical, psychological and socio-cultural effects of substance abuse to save today's youth from different substances.
- A thorough house-hold survey should be conducted in Sikkim in order to understand the prevalence rate of various substances by taking various socio-demographic correlates like caste, community, religion, gender, age, education, occupation, income, types of substances, ethnicity, marital status, type of family, etc.
- Finally, in order to understand the prevalence rate of substance abuse in Sikkim, particularly among the vulnerable age group i.e. youth, as well as the factors responsible for drinking culture in Lepcha and Bhutia community of Sikkim, an intensive research should be carried out on larger sample in order to empower the society and the community to deal with the problem of substance abuse.

## CONCLUSION:

26<sup>th</sup> June is celebrated as International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking. Though it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest business in the world after Petroleum and Arms trade, we should always be optimistic in defeating this malpractice in a prosperous state like Sikkim. Laws are there, but before it we have to realize the problem by heart and consider a victim with a strong sympathy because it has been found that mostly the productive group i.e. between 18- 35 years of age group who are trapped by substance abuse.

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