

Screening for Alcohol Abuse among Indian Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The negative impact of alcohol is well documented and alcohol use disorders (AUDs) have become a significant public health burden. However, the epidemiological analysis of AUDs in the Indian setting is missing in the literature. The present review explored the prevalence of alcohol abuse among Indian adolescents based on available school or college based studies conducted in the Indian setting. The prevalence of AUDs in college students ranged from 6.9% to 19.2%. The current review provides a systematic summary of the alarming magnitude of alcohol consumption in India. Considering the changing trends of alcohol use in India, epidemiological data regarding the patterns of alcohol use forms the mainstay for proper health planning and to formulate further intervention strategies in this setting.

Keywords: Screening, Alcohol abuse, Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

Harmful use of alcohol and its impact on the individual, family, society, and the country at large are widely documented in the literature. Alcohol plays a significant role in the provenance of 230 different types of diseases, with a prevalence of three million deaths annually (5.3% of all deaths) and 5.1% of all Disability Adjusted Life Year (DALY) in a year [1]. The global prevalence of alcohol consumption (previous 12 months) is around half of the world's population (43% or 2.3 billion) and the total per capita consumption of alcohol by individuals above 15 years of age is at 6.4 Liters per year. Nonetheless, wide variation exists in

the different regions of the world. Alcohol per capita consumption has shown a considerable increase in the WHO Western Pacific and South-East Asia regions. These regions include the highly populated countries of China and India, which account for the increases (China: 4.1 liters, 7.1 liters and 7.2 liters in 2005, 2010 and 2016 respectively; India: 2.4 liters, 4.3 liters and 5.7 liters in 2005, 2010 and 2016 respectively). Adding on to the woes, 33.1% of current drinkers are from the southeast Asian Region. According to WHO (2016), the prevalence of alcohol consumers in India in the last 12 months was 38.8% (Males-51.4% and Females-21.4%)[2]. In comparison, the National Survey 2019, employing the screening instrument, The Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST), reported a prevalence rate of 17.1% for alcohol consumption with 5.2% of the population requiring help for alcohol use[3]. In addition to national surveys, several studies conducted across India have demonstrated wildly varying prevalence rates for alcohol use; 3.9% to 26.25% as reported by Kumar SG et al (2013), Eashwar VM et al (2019) respectively[4,5]. Indeed, the cultural and legal fabric of particular states, screening instruments used, and attributes of the sample account for this. Multiple instruments are being employed to screen alcohol use disorders; Alcohol use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), ASSIST, Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Concise (AUDIT-C), CAGE, Structured questionnaire, and ICD-10 criteria. Monitoring the prevalence of

alcohol use disorders is imperative since harmful alcohol consumption has a significant effect on many of the health-related priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including maternal and child welfare, infectious diseases (HIV, viral hepatitis, tuberculosis), non-communicable diseases and mental health, accidents, and toxicity. Besides, WHO has outlined the key alcohol indicators relevant to sustainable development which includes; alcohol consumers past 12 months (%), alcohol heavy episodic drinking (15+) past 30 days, alcohol heavy episodic drinking(population) past 30 days.[2] Given the momentum gleaned on the topic and the lack of systematic studies analyzing the epidemiological prevalence of alcohol use disorders in India we undertook this study to give an insight into the prevalence rates reported in the different parts of the country.

Aim

To estimate and compare the epidemiology of alcohol use disorders among Indian adolescents.

RESULTS

The review found a large school-based survey from Kerala which reported 3.8% hazardous drinkers among school-going adolescents in the age range from 12-19 years.[6] Two studies in the current review used AUDIT and reported 6.9-16.3 % AUDs among college-going students.[7,8] One college-based survey from Kerala reported that approximately 18% of the college students were hazardous drinkers.[9]

Epidemiology of alcohol use disorders as per screening instruments

Regardless of the study context, AUDIT based screening revealed a prevalence ranging from 3.69 % to 26.25% in the Indian setting. Studies that measured AUDs using structured questionnaires reported the prevalence from 5.1% to 8.3%. Two studies reported the magnitude of

AUDs from 23.9 % to 25.3% with the aid of ASSIST and CAGE respectively. [10,11]

DISCUSSION

The prevalence of AUDs ranged from 3.6 % to 26.2% as per community-based studies where as the prevalence of AUDs in college students ranged from 6.9 % to 19.2%. There is a significant variation in the prevalence of AUDs as per study contexts such as study setting, sample size, study population, and screening instrument. There are a few major concerns with the current study exploring the magnitude of AUDs in the Indian setting. Heterogeneity in the assessment tools and cut off parameters for AUDs led to difficulty in comparing the results across the studies. There are no longitudinal studies to explore the diagnosis of the screened positive subjects. The screening linked referral to treatment for AUDs is missing in the Indian setting. Overall, there is a paucity of intervention studies to investigate the effectiveness of such interventions to reduce harmful drinking in the Indian setting.

Although the methodological quality of the included studies was not explored, the present study provides the pioneer systematic summary regarding the status of AUD in the Indian setting. The current studies provide alarming evidence regarding the increase of harmful alcohol consumption in this setting. The findings of the review form an epidemiological overview regarding the prevalence of AUDs to formulate further intervention strategies. The current review has the following limitations. The search strategy findings were restricted to two databases. The methodological quality assessment of the included studies was not explored.

CONCLUSION

Alcohol consumption is one of the significant risk factors of many disease and AUDs has become one of the significant public health burdens. The current review provides a systematic summary of the alarming magnitude of alcohol consumption

in India. Considering the changing trends of alcohol use in India, epidemiological data regarding the patterns of alcohol use forms the mainstay for proper health planning and to formulate further intervention strategies in this setting.

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