

Mental health conditions among adolescents of substance dependent parents

Mahjareen Binta Gaffar¹, Farah Deebea²

¹MPhil Researcher; ²Associate Professor; Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The exact number of substance dependent people in Bangladesh is estimated approximately as 5,000,000.¹ Among them around 80% of the drug users are youth and more than 50% drug abusers are living in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh.^{1,2} Studies in our country show that all among the drug addicts, 6.71%-7.69% are above 45 years and 33.65%-35.20% are married who might have had children too.^{3,4} These people are in the vicious cycle of relapse and recovery of drug dependency, thus making their family members specially their young children highly vulnerable to develop some form of psychological or mental health problems at any point of their lives.^{5,6} Hence, it is needed to identify the substance dependent individuals with children and bring them family focused interventions.

It is a well-studied and already established fact that people, who are dependent on any kind of substances, face various difficulties and impairments in their lives. For instance, in their family lives, they face problems, like, stressful marital conflicts, poor interpersonal communication with family members, frequent arguments on trivial family matters, financial stress, nagging, etc.⁷ A substance dependent person generally suffers from problems like, loss of behavioral control, psycho-physiological withdrawal of substance dependency, various mental illnesses, disturbances in physical health, exposure to domestic violence and trauma, poverty, crime, homelessness, etc.⁸ Substance dependency of an individual and the resultant life problems as mentioned above cumulatively affects the mental health of every member of their family. Empirically it is also found that children of alcoholics or any other drug abusers are vulnerable to the risk of developing various maladaptive behaviors.⁹ Substance dependency significantly impairs parent-child attachment through conflict and violence and mediates the cohesion of parenting negatively.¹⁰ It has been seen that children from substance dependent families are more vulnerable to become alcoholics or drug dependents at early age, social withdrawal or isolation and show high rates of antisocial and emotional problems.¹¹ Families with substance dependent fathers are usually found to have higher levels of interpersonal conflicts, physical aggression towards partners and children, poor parenting and significantly higher levels of trauma, depression and anxiety in offspring, compared to substance non-dependent fathers.¹²⁻¹⁶

Psychologists in western worlds have tried to understand the psychogenesis or intra-psyche processes of mental

health problems of these children. According to social learning theory, such children initiate to abuse substance mostly considering parental non-verbal approval of substance use via their parents behavior of substance abuse.¹⁷ Studies also show that, criminal or delinquent behaviors and psychological distresses in children are results of poor parent-child and family relationship in a substance affected family.^{18,19} So it is very obvious that children and adolescents of substance dependent parents are highly vulnerable to become a psychiatric patient at their lives.

As we have been in rodent effects of substance dependency for several decades, our exponential estimation can tell that if appropriate management methods cannot be implemented, then contemporary substance dependent youth would gradually turn to a large number of older substance dependent within a short time. In due course, they will become parents with children soon and make offspring vulnerable to above mentioned difficulties as the result of the vicious cycle of drug dependency. To redress this continuous progress, adapted evidence-based treatment and prevention programs of psychological issues are needed to be introduced not only to the individuals but also to their family members and children.^{20,21}

In developed countries many organizations work especially with the children of substance dependent parents to assist them cope with the problems in their lives due to parental substance dependency.^{22,23} Informative and interactive techniques based preventive measures and early intervention strategies to manage mental health problems of such vulnerable young people are being used with normative education curriculum in both community and school settings who are the future of any community or a country.

Empirical information on these works are available from various developed and developing countries, for instance, Brazil, Sweden, Italy, etc.^{24,26} To use for problem solving or management purposes, these techniques mainly focus on interpersonal skills, such as, drug refusal skills, sticking to anti-drug norms, general social skills, by enhancing personal self-management skills, social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive and more competencies, building self-efficacy, involving adolescents as leadership role and improving social relationships.²⁴⁻²⁶ However, effectiveness of these methods in relation to the social

Correspondence: Mahjareen Binta Gaffar, MPhil Researcher, Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh. E-mail: mgaffar66@gmail.com.

and cultural context, we need evidence based information. Unfortunately in our context, the foci of empirical studies with substance dependency are not on understanding these vulnerable children's psychological problems, which in fact were always keeping us away from the fact-based knowledge on their (young people) contemporary and future conditions and probable effective management.

Therefore we recommend to conduct various research studies on such vulnerable psychological areas of the adolescents so that pathways to create a socio-cultural context that is essentially supportive and helpful for them to recover permanently from existing psychological problems and become resilient to any future vulnerabilities. Within this perspective, we could plan preventive steps through assessing the adolescents of substance dependent parent with proper measures and initiatives when the parent is getting admitted to a service. Educational settings like school, college, university-based workshops and training could be imparted to raise awareness and enhance social influence on substance dependency. Along with this, opportunity for funding from government and non-government organizations should provide for further research for these adolescents.

Media can play an instrumental role in creating awareness against not only substance dependency but also about the necessity of protecting vulnerable populations especially the young children and adolescents of substance dependents from developing further problem in later lives. Policy makers and stakeholders should also provide some special psycho-social services so that these adolescents could work as defense team against substance dependency.

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