

“INCREASE OF UNDERAGE DRINKERS IN INDIA AND THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF DRINKING”

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“Alcohol Is Not the Answer to All the Questions”

– Mahatma Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

Underage Drinking can be defined as drinking at an age that is prohibited by law and the violation of which amounts to punishment.¹ The legal age of drinking in India varies from 18-25. The government has made these laws for the benefit of the youth. Only certain states have a blanket ban on drinking, whereas more than half of the states allow drinking but, after a certain age. But these laws are flouted very easily. Have you ever wondered as to why there is no blanket ban on alcohol in India? Because the revenue earned from imposing taxes on alcohol is a major source of India's income. In fact, excise duty on Alcohol is the second largest source of income for India. In order to make the task easier for people to consume alcohol various restaurants, pubs and bars procure Liquor Permits from the registered authorities and serve liquor to the consumers. Certain restaurants, pubs and bars ask the customers to provide with Age Proof if they desire to consume Alcohol, but there are various devices and apps which allow people to change their age once you upload the photograph of your Identity Proof, and thus a document with incorrect birth details can be easily created.² On the other hand, some bars and pubs are either illegal themselves or do not ask for age proof which makes the work of underage drinkers a cakewalk. Underage Drinking has been widespread in India. It is very a common belief that drinking is a symbol of high status. Most of the teenagers believe that drinking will help them in confronting difficult times. However, drinking is the most common cause of health problems, crimes and much more. As per the report of the World Health Organisation 30% of Indians drink daily.³

¹ Sandra Marina Fernandes, City bars turn a blind eye to underage drinking, May 16, 2017, 00:00:00, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/city-bars-turn-a-blind-eye-to-underage-drinking/articleshow/58682544.cms>

² Staff Reporter, Underage drinking on the rise, reveals survey, March 24, 2016, 12:06:38+5:30, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/underage-drinking-on-the-rise-reveals-survey/article8030629.ece>

³ Heena Khandelwal and Laveena Francis, Number of Indian teenagers consuming alcohol increases: Is the future sloshed?, January 12, 2017, 08:00:00+5:30, <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-is-the-future-sloshed-2291610>

CAUSES OF UNDERAGE DRINKING

Underage Drinking is not only a crime but also dangerous to human health. However, there are various causes of as to why teenagers pick the habit of drinking.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure is an increasing and one of the prime causes for increase in underage drinking. The fear of being laughed upon, rejected, bullied or humiliated many a times makes a person succumb to peer pressure. Peer pressure is very powerful at any stage in life, but it is more influential during the adolescent stage. Very often teenagers drink to look cool among their peer group and thus slowly become dependent on it.⁴

Parents Behaviour

It's a common saying that "children need not be taught as to what is good or bad, they learn themselves by observing." Children are very good observers. They easily pick up the good as well as bad habits from the people around them, specially the parents as they are the ones with whom the children spend most of their time. Teenagers whose parents consume alcohol have easy access to drinks and thus consume at an early age.⁵

Boredom

There is a common saying that an, "idle mind is a devil's playground." Many a times parents are unable to give time to their kids, which makes them feel lonely and bored. Thus, many times teenagers who are unable to tolerate boredom and loneliness take to drinking to come out of such situation, unaware of the fact that drinking would in turn push them towards loneliness and boredom.

Self – Medication

Teenage is a phase of life when a person undergoes various changes. Several different emotions take toll on a person's life, some teenagers can confront this phase whereas some are unable to. When the teenagers are unable to find a healthy outlet of removing frustration triggered by conflicts at home, emotional pain, failure, breakups, and various other reasons then they resort to alcohol as a way of

⁴ Kalyan Ray, Alcoholism increasing in Indian adolescents: Study, August 6, 2014, 01:25:07+5:30, <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/423853/alcoholism-increasing-indian-adolescents-study.html>

⁵ The Partnership, Top 8 Reasons Why Teens Try Alcohol and Drugs, October 31, 2018, 18:18:09+00:00, <https://drugfree.org/parent-blog/top-8-reasons-teens-try-alcohol-drugs/>

comforting themselves. Alcohol affects one's memory and emotional response issues. Thus, whether a teenager or an adult people often resort to drinking to forget the pain and stress for some time.⁶

Addiction

Teenagers who drink for the very first time don't intend to be addicted to it. Very often they start drinking during parties or in order to get rid of the stress or to make them feel happier and for various other reasons. But after all it's a drug and one's going to be addicted to it. Thus, a teenager who initially drinks little may go up to drinking heavily and become an addict.

Curiosity

The onset of puberty leads to various reforms in one's body. The teenager tries to understand the various changes happening not only in his or her body but also in his behaviour. Puberty brings along with itself certain mood swings. This creates a curiosity among the teenagers to try drinking a little. But little do they know that this can soon become an addiction.⁷ Easy access to alcohol encourages teenagers to drink. Several shops sell alcoholic beverages without checking the buyers age, also lack of measures on the part of government in the implementation of these laws gives more strength and freedom to the youths.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEENAGE BRAIN

The brain is already 90 percent to 95 percent of the size by 6 years as compared to an adult brain, but it is less developed as compared to an adult brain. The remodelling of the brain begins with the onset of adolescent stage. The pre – frontal cortex, the main decision-making part in the brain is not developed in an adolescent brain, but in the process of development. The pre – frontal cortex is responsible for personality development, logical thinking, organized thinking and short -term memory. Till then the teenagers rely on the part of the brain known as “Amygdala.” This part of the brain helps teenagers to take decisions and solve problems. The Amygdala is associated with emotions, aggression, impulses and instinctive behaviour. The human brain does not fully develop till the age of 25, but for some people it may develop prior the age of 25. Thus, it is necessary to take effective steps in order to ensure the healthy development of brain.⁸

⁶ Promises Editorial Staff, 10 Reasons Teens Abuse Alcohol or Drugs, April 26, 2019, 09:20:16+00:00, <https://www.promises.com/blog/10-reasons-teens-abuse-alcohol-or-drugs/>

⁷ Editorial Staff, Peer Pressure of Teen Drinking, July 5, 2019, 13:27:11+00:00, <https://www.alcohol.org/teens/peer-pressure-drinking/>

⁸ Samantha, YOUNG PEOPLE VERSUS ADULTS. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?, July 9, 2010, 08:00:00+8:00, <https://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/alcohol/understanding-affects-on-body.html>

IMPACT OF DRINKING ON TEENAGE BRAIN

The pre – frontal cortex is that part of brain which is yet in the process of development in a teenager. Neurotransmitters are chemical messages. Neurotransmitters help the nerve cells to communicate with other nerve cells and other cells in the body. Alcohol suppresses the nerve cells thereby disrupting the pathways of the nerve cells. Although various parts of the brain are affected due to alcohol the two main parts of the brain that are affected during teenage due to alcohol are “Hippocampus” and “Prefrontal – cortex.”⁹

Effects on Hippocampus

The hippocampus is associated with memory and learning. Hippocampus is very sensitive to alcohol during teenage life. It is as good as poison for the nerve cells of hippocampus and thus can damage or destroy them. Research shows that teenagers who drink alcohol face a reduction in the size of hippocampus up to 10 percent.¹⁰

Effects on Pre – Frontal Cortex

The pre – frontal cortex is associated with planning, judgement, decision making, impulse control and language. Research shows that teenagers who drink have a small pre – frontal cortex as compared to those teenagers who do not drink. The pre – frontal cortex contains N-methyl-D-aspartic acid (NMDA) receptors. These receptors are very sensitive to alcohol. Thus, drinking alcohol during adolescent stage when the pre – frontal cortex has not yet fully developed leads to abnormal functioning of the brain. This leads to impulsive behaviour and in turn increases the dependence on alcohol.¹¹

INCREASE OF TEENAGE DRINKERS IN INDIA

As per the report of the World Health Organization about 30 percent of India’s population consumes alcohol daily. As per the report of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD) boys under 15 who had not had alcohol went down from 44 percent to 30 percent, and for girls it decreased from 50 percent to 31 percent. Alcohol consumption is increasing in the metros, around 45 percent of class 12 students drink excessively. According to a survey conducted by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) more than 32 percent of the teens drink when they are upset, 18 percent drink in order to get away from loneliness, 15 percent drink when they are bored, whereas as high as 46 percent of them drink to get high. The constant surveys and research done by various organisations reveal only one thing that although there may be laws passed by the state

⁹ Tara Haelle, Alcohol can rewire the teenage brain, July 3, 2016, 10:49:00,

<https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/alcohol-can-rewire-teenage-brain>

¹⁰ Michelle Trudeau, Teen Drinking May Cause Irreversible Brain Damage, January 25, 2010, 12:00:00,

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122765890>

¹¹ Priya M Menon, On a high: 45% teens drink excessively, October 18, 2010, 01:40:48+05:30,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/On-a-high-45-teens-drink-excessively/articleshow/6766142.cms>

and national governments for the crime of underage drinking, but there are various flaws in the implementation of the same. The team of the leading newspaper Mumbai Mirror conducted a survey in some of the posh Bars and Restaurant in Mumbai (which is the 4th largest consumer of Alcohol in India), half of the bars did not check or asked for an ID. Not only in Mumbai several other Bars and Restaurants all over India serve alcohol without even asking for a valid ID. Thus, over the years there has been an elevation of teenage drinkers in India. ¹²

EFFECTS OF DRINKING ON HEALTH

Effect on Heart

Alcohol leads to irregular heartbeat, increased heart rate, weakened heart muscle, heart attack, stroke and many more. Heart rate is the number of times the heart beats per minute. Alcohol disrupts the process of heart rate. Studies have found that alcohol can cause tachycardia (abnormally rapid heart rate), frequent episodes of tachycardia can cause blood clots which leads to heart attack or stroke. High blood pressure is a common problem now a days. High blood pressure means when the blood pumps with more force than normal.¹³ Alcohol can lead to High Blood pressure or Hypertension. In such a situation the arteries become thick and hard which in turn is a major risk factor for heart attack or stroke. The heart plays an important role in providing oxygen and nutrients to various parts of the body. The heart can contract due to the muscle present within the heart wall. This muscle is known as myocardium, and a damaged muscle is known as cardiomyopathy. Alcohol consumption leads to cardiomyopathy. Thus, cardiomyopathy leads to congestive heart failure.

Effect on Liver

The liver plays an important role in the functioning of the body. It filters out all the harmful substances present in the bloodstream. It also produces hormones, enzymes and proteins which is used by the body to ward off infections. It converts the essential nutrients and vitamins into substances that can be used by the body. It also produces an enzyme namely bile which helps in the digestion of food. The liver tries to process the alcohol consumed however in this process the liver cells get damaged which in turn leads to an inflamed liver.¹⁴ Alcohol damages the intestine, as a result the toxins present in the gut bacteria escape to the liver which also leads to an inflamed liver. Chronic Alcohol abuse destroys the

¹² Chaitanya Marpakwar, Lata Mishra, Rahi Gaikwad, Payal Gwalani and Mitaksh Jain, Kids as young as 14 make it large in bars, August 11, 2019, 05:06:45, <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/kids-as-young-as-14-make-it-large-in-bars/articleshow/66539147.cms>

¹³ Jeffrey Juergens and Theresa Soltesz, Alcohol and Liver Damage, July 16, 2019, 12:26:23+00:00, <https://www.addictioncenter.com/alcohol/liver/>

¹⁴ Ann Pietrangelo and Kimberly Holland, The Effects of Alcohol on Your Body, September 29, 2018, 00:59:51, <https://www.healthline.com/health/alcohol/effects-on-body#1>

cells of the liver which leads to various diseases such as liver cancer, cirrhosis, alcoholic hepatitis, cellular mutation and much more.¹⁵

Effect on Pancreas

The pancreas performs two important functions. Firstly, it produces digestive juices which helps the intestine to break down the food. Secondly it produces a hormone namely insulin which helps in regulating blood sugar levels.¹⁶ Binge drinking results in the inflammation of the pancreas which leads to Pancreatitis. Pancreatitis is a medical problem wherein the pancreas gets inflamed and the cells get damaged.

Effect on Lungs

Alcohol disrupts the functioning of the immune system in the lungs making it more vulnerable to infections. Thus, the alcoholics have an increased risk of respiratory problems such as pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome.¹⁷ When a person consumes more alcohol the lung cells produce fat in order to protect itself from the toxic effects of alcohol, over time this fat accumulates in the lungs which leads to problem in breathing and various other problems.¹⁸

Leads to Cancer

When a person consumes alcohol, the alcohol converts into a toxic chemical acetaldehyde, these chemicals damages the DNA and prevents the cells from repairing the damage done. This can lead to cancer. Alcohol increases the level of certain hormones in the blood, such as oestrogen. An increase in the level of oestrogen leads to breast cancer. Alcohol affects the body's ability to absorb the essential vitamins and nutrients. Alcohol consumption is linked to various types of cancers such as that of Mouth, Throat, Voice box, Oesophagus, Liver, Colon and Rectum, Breast, Stomach and various others

CONCLUSION

Mary Wilson Little quotes, "Almost anything can be preserved in alcohol, except health, happiness, and money." The above quote is indeed true and aptly written. Alcohol consumption is harmful not only to teenagers, but also to adults whether male or female.¹⁹ However consuming alcohol before the age as prescribed by the government is harmful for not only the development of body but also for the overall

¹⁵ Mark Huffman, Why drinking too much may cause lung disease, February 21, 2017, 23:31:48+00:00, <https://www.consumeraffairs.com/news/why-drinking-too-much-may-cause-lung-disease-070714.html>

¹⁶ Malini Gopalakrishnan, Underage Drinking, August 10, 2019, <https://www.parentcircle.com/article/underage-drinking/>

¹⁷ Alcohol Think Again, Impact of alcohol on the developing brain, <https://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/Parents-Young-People/Alcohol-and-the-Developing-Brain/Impact-of-Alcohol-on-the-developing-brain>

¹⁸ Drinkaware, Alcohol and Pancreatitis, March 29, 2019, <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/diseases/alcohol-and-pancreatitis/>

¹⁹ Alcohol Think Again, Alcohol and Cardiovascular Diseases, <https://alcoholthinkagain.com.au/Alcohol-Your-Health/Alcohol-and-Your-Long-Term-Health/Alcohol-and-Cardiovascular-Disease>

health of the person.²⁰ Laws are made for the betterment of the youth, and thus they must be followed. Although various laws are framed which prevent the teenagers from consuming alcohol but the laws are not strictly implemented.²¹ Thus, the government should take steps to ensure that the laws are implemented. Also, the parents should keep an eye on their children, they should educate their children about harmful effects and dangers of drinking. Drinking is not a solution to every problem as it is thought.²² Carl Jung quotes that, “Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the narcotic be alcohol or morphine or idealism.

²⁰ Drinkaware, Alcohol and Cancer, November 17, 2017, <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/diseases/alcohol-and-cancer/>

²¹ The American Cancer Society Medical, February 12, 2017, (time?), <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html>

²² Centre for Adolescent Health and The Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne, Understanding your pre-teen Brain development: teenagers, December 11, 2017, 00:00:00, <https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/development/understanding-your-pre-teen/brain-development-teens>
