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Research

## Role of Relational and Psycho-behavioral Risk Factors in Substance Abuse among Adolescents

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### Abstract

Adolescence is a key time of change, with significant biological, psychological, and social developments. This period makes young people more likely to start using substances or increase their usage. Both genetic factors and personal traits impact this risk, but the surrounding social environment and new behaviors are often strong influences on substance abuse. It is important to understand how relational factors, such as relationships with family, friends, and community, interact with psychobehavioral factors, which include internal feelings and visible actions. This understanding is essential for creating effective prevention and intervention methods to combat substance abuse during adolescence. the need to focus on the connections between interpersonal relationships and psychological behaviors to address the risks associated with substance use in young people.

**Keyword-** Substance, Adolescents, Relationships, Psychobehavioral.

### Introduction

Substance use disorder in adolescents is a major global public health issue that can have lasting effects on physical health, mental well-being, academic success, and social integration. While biological vulnerabilities contribute to the problem, the development of substance abuse during adolescence is mostly shaped by various environmental and psychological factors. Key influences include relational factors, which arise from interactions with family, friends, and the wider community, and psychobehavioral factors, which involve internal psychological states, personality

# The Voice of Creative Research

*Vol. 6 & Issue 1 (January 2024)*

traits, and unhealthy coping strategies. Grasping how these factors interact is essential for creating focused and effective prevention and intervention methods.

## **Relational Risk Factors: The Influence of Social Context**

The adolescent period shows a key change in social focus from family to peer relationships and outside social structures. Issues in these relationships can lead to increased experimentation and use of substances. This shift highlights the importance of social connections during adolescence and the potential risks involved when they are disrupted. Family dynamics are essential for healthy relationships. Factors like parental monitoring, good attachment, and family togetherness help protect adolescents, while their absence can create significant risks. When parents are not involved and unaware of their child's activities, friends, and whereabouts, it can lead to higher chances of using substances. Additionally, harsh or inconsistent discipline and high family conflict can make adolescents feel unsafe and unstable. Parental substance use is a key factor in family dynamics. When parents model substance use, it can normalize the behavior for their children, making them more likely to try using substances themselves. If a parent struggles with substance use disorder, it can harm the child's sense of security, causing emotional issues that the adolescent might try to cope with by using substances. This cycle shows the profound impact family relationships have on the risk of substance use in adolescents.<sup>1</sup>

Peer relationships play a crucial role in social development during adolescence. Peer pressure, though sometimes exaggerated, is a real influence, particularly in the context of seeking social acceptance and belonging. Adolescents who spend time with peers who use or support substance use are more likely to start using substances themselves. This interaction often provides chances to access substances and encourages risky behavior. The presence of friends who use substances creates a standard for what is considered normal behavior regarding substance use. Studies show that adolescents who identify strongly with high-risk peer groups are more likely to participate in binge drinking or illegal drug use. The desire to fit in during this stage of development makes being rejected or excluded by these risky peer groups a strong, although indirect, factor in the decision to engage in substance use. Thus the influences of peer relationships and the associated pressures have significant effects on adolescent behavior concerning substance use.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Broader community and school environments contribute to relational risks for adolescents. A lack of positive adult role models outside the family and limited participation in structured activities can lead to unstructured time that may encourage substance use. Additionally, negative school climates, marked by high bullying rates and low teacher support, weaken protective social bonds. This environment can drive adolescents to seek comfort or escape through unhealthy coping mechanisms, including substance use. It is important to recognize these factors to help protect young individuals from adverse outcomes.

## **Psychobehavioral Risk Factors: Internal Vulnerabilities**

External relational stressors influence adolescent behavior, but internal psychological states and behavioral patterns play a crucial role in determining if they move from experimentation to problematic use. These factors are linked to underlying distress, personality traits, and ineffective coping skills. Understanding these connections can help address adolescent issues with substance use.

# The Voice of Creative Research

*Vol. 6 & Issue 1 (January 2024)*

One important predictor of substance use issues in adolescents is the presence of co-occurring mental health disorders, known as comorbidity. Many adolescents suffering from depression, anxiety disorders, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are likely to develop substance use disorders. For these individuals, using substances often acts as a way to self-medicate, helping to reduce troubling feelings like chronic anxiety or mood swings temporarily. However, this behavior can lead to a pattern of dependence, as alcohol or drugs might provide only short-term relief, ultimately making the underlying mental health issues worse. The cycle of reliance on substances continues as they use them to cope with distress.<sup>3</sup>

Personality traits greatly influence adolescent substance use. Impulsivity, which means acting without thinking about the consequences, is a key factor in the early onset of substance use. Impulsive teens are more likely to take risks and try new substances, making them harder to stop once they start using. Sensation-seeking, the desire for new and intense experiences, closely matches the initial attraction to psychoactive drugs, which provide strong sensory effects. Additionally, low self-esteem and low self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to handle challenges, may lead adolescents to use substances in search of confidence or validation through intoxication.<sup>4</sup>

Behavioral issues seen in early life often lead to substance use disorders later on. Childhood behaviors like aggression, conduct problems, and disobedience towards authority are closely linked to future substance use. These behaviors indicate challenges in controlling actions and a tendency to break social rules. Another important sign is academic failure or disinterest; when teenagers feel they are not succeeding in school or do not value education, they may see less risk in turning to substance use, which makes it seem like a more appealing option.

Finally, poor coping skills represent a fundamental psychobehavioral deficit. Adolescents lacking adaptive strategies for managing stress, frustration, conflict, or boredom frequently turn to substances as a readily available, though ultimately destructive, method of emotional regulation. If an adolescent has not learned how to constructively process difficult emotions, intoxication becomes the default response to negative affect, solidifying the substance as an essential tool for navigating life's inevitable difficulties.

## **Interplay Between Relational and Psychobehavioral Factors**

Relational and psychobehavioral factors often work together in ways that increase risk, creating cycles that reinforce each other. For instance, if parents do not monitor their children well, it can lead to issues like low self-control and impulsivity in adolescents. This happens because the children lack the guidance they need to learn self-regulation. Additionally, an adolescent who has high anxiety may face more conflicts with peers and experience rejection. As a result, they might turn to substances for comfort, especially if they do not have healthy peer support. Overall, these factors are interconnected and can compound problems for adolescents, highlighting the importance of addressing both relational and psychobehavioral issues in their development.

An adolescent experiencing significant depression may feel a strong urge to escape, which can lead to early marijuana use. This situation can worsen if the adolescent has critically demanding and emotionally unavailable parents. When the parents respond with punishment rather than support, it harms their relationship and may push the adolescent towards peers who accept

# The Voice of Creative Research

*Vol. 6 & Issue 1 (January 2024)*

substance use, making it more normal and frequent. The troubled home environment does not help protect the adolescent's mental health, and the ongoing psychological distress can further damage relationships.<sup>5</sup>

To effectively prevent these issues, it is important to address both the adolescent's internal struggles and their external social environment at the same time. Interventions that only focus on teaching refusal skills might not work if the home life is chaotic and lacks support. Therefore, comprehensive approaches need to consider both the psychological challenges the adolescent faces and the relational failures in their family dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

The development of substance abuse in adolescents is complex and influenced by both their environment and mental state. Key risk factors include troubled family relationships and negative friendships, which shape the chances and norms around using substances. Additionally, psychological issues like existing mental health problems, impulsivity, and poor emotional handling make some individuals more likely to turn to drugs or alcohol. Recognizing the two-way relationship between these external and internal factors is crucial for effective prevention and treatment. Stress within relationships can worsen personal vulnerabilities, while personal struggles can damage connections with others. To address these challenges, future strategies should focus on improving family communication, encouraging positive friendships, and enhancing young people's mental strength to better cope with these risks.

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