

Unmasking the unresolved: alcohol abuse and addiction, a looming public health concern

Dear Sir,

India has been on the verge of epidemiological transition where the burden of infectious diseases is on one hand well under control and non-communicable and lifestyle diseases and re-emerging infectious diseases are on an increasing trend.^[1] In such circumstances, the burden of alcohol use persists to be a health problem in India. There has been profound impact of alcohol addiction on physical health and well-being, financial capacity, socio-economic standards and mental health of addicts and their kith and kin.^[2]

With the legal implications prevalent for the production and sale of alcohol in India, there is full control of the state. However, in a district in central India, having a ban on the sale of alcohol and the non-availability of licensed liquor shops, the amount of illegal sale and import of alcohol remain significantly high.^[1,2] The data over reported cases of alcoholic liver diseases (specified and non-specified) from a tertiary care rural hospital of a leading medical institute in Central India report significant increasing trends over reported cases admitted to the hospital. Surprisingly, in spite of the legal implications within the district, the admitted addicts report to be significantly high from within the district and apart from the referred patients drained from nearby districts. In such circumstances, Article Number 51 as per the state list, that is, "Alcohol for human consumption" and governance over the business of liquor within the state remain questionable.^[3]

The problem with illegal and non-branded liquor, that is country-made local liquor, is even high, and most of the morbidities with chronic alcoholics within the state are reported to be associated with the consumption of such local liquors.^[4] Article 47 has prohibited the drinks and drugs that are injurious to health; however, the illegal sale of locally made liquor products continues. The national data obtained from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) show a significant drop in the percentage of Indian men consuming alcohol, when compared to NFHS-4, but this significant drop is not reflected in health-related morbidities associated with alcohol consumption.^[5]

Overall, alcohol addiction and the health morbidities associated with it still remain a grave problem to the Indian health system

and persist to be a parasite thriving on the roots of the Indian economy. Studies report of significant increase in the young population, that is youth below 21 years of age who consume alcohol in India. Also, trends of regular alcoholics amongst women are on an increasing verge.^[4,5]

So, the problem persisting over decades is slowly and progressively ruining our youth, social stability and economy and also posing a challenge to our public health system, policy and legislations.

It is high time to focus on the alarming consequences of alcohol abuse and addiction. Streamlining and masking the legislations more stringent, creating mass awareness amongst youth and women, about the implications of alcoholism over health and economy and many related indicators can be some of the targeted interventions to tackle this issue of chronic concern.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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