

Position Paper: Addressing Global Youth Substance Abuse: Focusing on Prevention, Intervention, and Long-Term Solutions

Committee: World Health Organization (WHO)

Topic: Addressing Global Youth Substance Abuse: Focusing on Prevention, Intervention, and Long-Term Solutions

Country: Republic of India

School: Bal Bhavan Public School, Swasthya Vihar

Delegation: Delegate of India

I. Topic Background

Youth substance abuse stands as a pervasive global health and social crisis, impacting millions of young lives and undermining the very fabric of communities worldwide. Defined as the harmful use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol, illicit drugs, and the non-medical use of prescription drugs, this issue transcends geographical boundaries and socioeconomic strata. It manifests in various forms, from early experimentation to severe dependence, affecting individuals primarily in their formative years, typically between the ages of 10 and 24. This vulnerable demographic, comprising over 65% of India's population under 35, is disproportionately susceptible due to developing brains, peer pressure, curiosity, and the search for identity. The consequences are far-reaching, encompassing severe health complications, impaired academic performance, increased risk of mental health disorders, heightened vulnerability to violence and exploitation, and long-term societal burdens. The urgency of this topic stems from its detrimental impact on human potential, public health systems, and national development, making it a critical area for concerted international action.

II. Past International Action

The global community, spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN bodies, has consistently recognized the gravity of youth substance abuse. UNODC's World Drug Reports highlight the expanding range of drugs and diversifying markets, including the alarming rise of non-medical use of prescription drugs and online trafficking. Relevant UN resolutions, such as the Commission on Narcotic Drugs' Resolution 57/3, emphasize "promoting prevention of drug abuse based on scientific evidence as an investment in the well-being of children, adolescents, youth, families and communities." This resolution explicitly invites Member States to expand evidence-based prevention systems and policies, with a focus on at-risk individuals and groups.

Furthermore, the WHO's Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030 aims to reduce the harmful use of alcohol through effective, evidence-based strategies. Numerous Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) globally, and within India, such as SPYM and STAIRS Foundation, actively work on the ground, providing prevention education, treatment, and rehabilitation services, often leveraging sports and community engagement as tools. Despite these commendable efforts, the scale of the problem necessitates a more robust, coordinated, and

innovative international response, especially considering that the number of people suffering from drug use disorders receiving treatment remains low globally.

III. Country Policy

India, as a nation with a vast youth population, is acutely aware of the challenges posed by youth substance abuse. The Government of India has adopted a "zero-tolerance policy" towards drugs, transforming this fight into a "Jan Andolan" (people's movement) through widespread public awareness campaigns. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 serves as the primary legislative framework to prevent and control drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

A cornerstone of India's strategy is the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA), launched in 2015 in 272 of the most vulnerable districts. This flagship initiative, implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, focuses on community outreach, sensitizing over 16.5 crore people about the ill effects of substance abuse and providing treatment and rehabilitation support to over 27.76 lakh individuals. It actively involves diverse stakeholders, including women, children, educational institutions, and civil society organizations, and has trained thousands of "Master Volunteers" to lead activities. The government also supports over 730 free rehabilitation centers across the country, alongside the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR), which provides financial assistance to voluntary organizations for prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Initiatives like the recent "Nashe Se Doori Hai Zaroori" campaign by the Madhya Pradesh Police further demonstrate India's commitment to protecting its youth.

Building on these domestic efforts, India believes the WHO should adopt policies that are:

- * **Holistic and Evidence-Based Prevention:** Emphasize the development and implementation of comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based prevention programs, especially targeting schools and communities. These should include life-skills education, stress management techniques, and fostering resilience among youth. Investing in research to identify and scale up successful prevention models is crucial.

- * **Accessible and Integrated Intervention and Treatment:** Advocate for the expansion of accessible, affordable, and integrated intervention and treatment services for young people. This includes early identification, counselling, detoxification, rehabilitation, and long-term aftercare, with a strong focus on mental health co-morbidity. Telemedicine and digital health solutions can play a significant role in reaching remote populations.

- * **Community-Centric Approaches:** Promote community-led initiatives that engage families, local leaders, educational institutions, and NGOs. Recognizing that substance abuse is a societal problem, empowering communities to take ownership of prevention and support mechanisms is vital for sustainable change.

- * **Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks and Law Enforcement:** Support Member States in strengthening their national regulatory frameworks to control the supply of illicit drugs and prevent the non-medical use of prescription drugs. This includes international cooperation on drug trafficking and robust monitoring mechanisms.

- * **Addressing Social Determinants of Health:** Recognize and address the underlying social determinants of substance abuse, such as poverty, lack of educational and employment

opportunities, and social marginalization. Policies should promote inclusive development and provide alternative pathways for youth.

* Data Collection and Research: Call for enhanced data collection, surveillance, and research on youth substance abuse patterns, emerging trends, and the effectiveness of various interventions. This will enable evidence-informed policymaking and resource allocation.

The Republic of India stands ready to collaborate with the WHO and all Member States in forging a unified and effective global strategy to safeguard our youth from the scourge of substance abuse, ensuring they can realize their full potential and contribute to a healthier, more prosperous future.

Un