

Development of a Framework for Family Therapy for Adolescent Substance Abuse: A Perspective from India

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Abstract : Family based therapy for adolescent substance abuse has been studied to be effective in the West. Whereas, based on literature review, family therapy and interventions for adolescent substance abuse is still in its nascent stages in India. A multidimensional perspective to treatment has been indicated consistently in the Indian literature, but standardized therapy which addresses early substance abuse, from a social-ecological perspective has not been developed and studied for Indian population. While numerous researches have been conducted in India on the need of engaging the family in therapy for the purpose of symptom reduction, long-term maintenance of gains, and reducing family burnout, distress and dysfunction; a family based model in the Indian context has not been developed and tried, to the best of our knowledge. Hence, from the aim of building a model to treat adolescent substance abuse within the family context, experts in the area of mental health and deaddiction were interviewed to inform upon the clinical difficulties, challenges, uniqueness that Indian families present with. The integration of indigenous techniques that would be helpful in engaging families of young individuals with difficulties were also explored. Eight experts' who were interviewed, have 10-30 years of experience in working with families and substance users. An open-ended interview was conducted with the experts individually and audio-recorded. The interviews were then transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis for building a framework and treatment guideline. Additionally, interviews with patients and their parents were conducted to elicit 'felt needs'. The results of the analysis revealed culture-specific issues widely experienced within Indian families by adolescents and young adults, centering around the theme of Individuation versus collective identity and living. Substance abuse, in this framework, was found to be perceived as one of the maladaptive ways of the youth to disengage from the family and attempt at individuation and the responsibilities that are considered entitlements in the culture. On the other hand, interviews with family members revealed them to be engaging in inconsistent patterns of care and parenting. This was experienced and observed in terms of fostering interdependence within the family, sometimes within adverse socio-economic and societal conditions, where enacted and perceived stigma kept the individual and family members in a vicious loop of maladaptive coping patterns, dysfunctional family arrangements, and often leading to burnout with poor help seeking. The paper inform upon a framework that lays down the foundation for assessments, planning, case management and therapist competencies, required to address alcohol and drug issues in an Indian family context with such etiological factors at its heart. This paper will cover qualitative results of the interviews and present a model that may guide mental health professionals for treatment of adolescent substance use and family therapy.

Keywords : Indian families, family therapy, de-addiction, adolescent, youth, substance abuse, behavioral issues, felt needs, culture, etiology, model building, framework development, interviews

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