Inhalant abuse: An overlooked problem

Sir,
The abuse of inhalants is an underreported and overlooked problem. The article published in last issue of the journal encouraged us to share our cases.\[1\]

A 14 year old schoolboy was brought to de-addiction clinic with complaints of inhaling typewriter correction fluid, lying to escape punishment, truancy from school, bullying younger brother, stealing money, running-away from home and declining academic performance. He would find time for huffing typewriter fluid after school when his parents were at work. His parents worked as sweepers and belonged to the first evidence of any description of consciousness has come from none other than the Indian sacred texts of Vedas, which have vividly described the consciousness as a field phenomena. The words "Aatma" and "Chetna" had definitely the same meanings as the word consciousness that we have today.

Now I turn to a more important question. Why have these concepts not received adequate attention in the modern scientific literature of consciousness? Is it because these are all philosophical or completely abstract? I think not. Rather this represents the absence of the effort to develop a scientific stance towards these states, which is further limited when we see its Indian contributions, which I have mentioned earlier.\[2\] However, the past decade has evidenced the orientation of scientists across the world for understanding these concepts.

My inquisitiveness lead me to many such Yogic cults with the intention of unraveling their experiences and understandings of consciousness. I found the concepts of two of the Yogic cults specifically interesting in this respect, which are "Kriya Yoga" founded by "Swami Yoganada" and "Vihangam Yoga" founded by Swami "Sadafaldeoji Maharaj". The following is just a brief overview of what I collected from the vast literature presented in these and other Indian texts.

Consciousness is a non-material entity:
To start with, the followers of meditation clearly state that the entity of consciousness is non-material in the most subtle (Sookshma) sense.

Consciousness and attention are different but correlated:
Surprisingly, a matter of recent discussion \[4\] was clarified long back when Consciousness (Chetna) was differentiated from Attention (Dhyana) since the time these words were coined.\[3\] It is still conceptualized such in Indian Yogic practices.\[4\]

Yogic meditation is a way of understanding consciousness:
The practitioners of meditation speak of several instances when they passed through such states where they could perceive consciousness in a complete form. The firm statements of Vihangam Yogis defining Yoga as the "Science of consciousness" seems to be the result of personal experiences of passing through such states.

There are several states of consciousness:
Against the current understanding of only normal and altered states of consciousness, Vihangama Yoga followers believe that there are 6 states of consciousness-Sthul awastha, Sukshma awastha, Karana awastha, Mahakarana awastha, Kaivalya awastha and Hamsa awastha.\[5\] These are the purer states of awareness wherein the consciousness extends beyond body and other limitations that we know of at physical planes. I have appealed elsewhere to explore these states for having objective knowledge rather than discarding such states.\[6\] Recently we conducted both qualitative study and 192-channel EEG study on the Vihangam Yoga meditation states, from which we found that the meditation is a unique state of peaceful alertness as supported by both subjective statements and objective observation.

Through this letter, I am appealing all the inquisitive minds who are in search of consciousness to orient themselves towards these and similar yogic practices. I have received feedback comments from various researchers from different fields of study. If all of them make a collaborative approach towards this topic, the study of consciousness which is an integral part of the Indian heritage, can receive a multidimensional exploration and probably will lead us to the hidden and finer aspects of consciousness.

Ravi prakash
Department of Psychiatry, Central Institute of Psychiatry, Ranchi, India.
E-mail: drravi2121@gmail.com
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to lower Socio-economic status. His father was alcohol dependent and patient had witnessed him taking alcohol and fighting with his mother in drunken state on several occasions. The locality in which they resided had many children using inhalants and some were patient’s friends.

He was managed conservatively. He was psycho-educated about harmful effects of his behaviour. Parents were explained about behavioural reinforcement techniques and impact of role models on child behaviour. His father was enrolled in de-addiction clinic. For last three months, both patient and his father are maintaining abstinence and are on regular follow up. There is marked improvement in home atmosphere and bonding among family members.

In another case, Psychiatric consultation was sought for a 12 year old boy admitted in Orthopaedic Ward of associated Hospital. Patient was brought there in unconscious state after fall from a running train and both his legs and all fingers of right hand had to be amputated. On gaining consciousness on third day, patient was able to give his details.

The boy was a student of seventh standard and resided in a suburb of Delhi. Six months back, he came in contact with a neighbourhood child who used to inhale an adhesive used to fix punctured tyres. He started using the substance. He would collect money by begging outside a mosque and thrive on free food distributed by pilgrims and reside in the park facing the mosque. According to the patient, the park was residence of hundreds of persons of different age groups who abuse a variety of substances. He met with the accident after he fell out of the train in intoxicated state. His parents were illiterate and his father was an unskilled labourer. They belonged to lower socioeconomic status. Patient was managed conservatively and a rehabilitation plan was discussed with his parents.

These cases highlight that Inhalant abuse is a unique problem, as these substances are easily available, cheap and are not regulated by laws. The above cases highlight that it is more of a social problem stemming from poverty, parental neglect, poor role modelling, soft laws, changing societal norms; and thriving on child labour and beggary. The cases revealed the rampant use of such substances, although the reported cases are few; which implies that the problem is being overlooked. There is need of further research in this area.

Sumit K. Gupta, Sonali Bali, R. C. Jiloha
Department of Psychiatry, Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital and Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi-110 001, India. E-mail: drsumit@aol.in

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