LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE AS A CATALYST FOR PREVENTING AND CONTROLLING SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT: Local Self-Government is significant in working at the grassroots level and reaching the community. The success of a Program has an effectual output only if it is reached or implemented for people in need. Local Self-Governance plays at the proletarian level in preventing and sensitizing potential substance abuses. **Aim:** The study aims to understand the role of Local Self-Governance in preventing and controlling the range of Substance abuse. It mainly focuses on the level of understanding of substance abuse among panchayat representatives and recommendations for the policymakers to reduce the gap between panchayat and Government institutions. **Methods:** The researcher has adopted a descriptive research design, with the convenient sample technique using questionnaire with Panchayat representatives to understand the reality. The sample size is 30. **Results:** The result states that there is a need for effective participation of the panchayat representatives through community engagement in policy making along with preventing and controlling substance abuse. **Conclusion:** By fostering community engagement and leveraging grassroots dynamics, local authorities can implement nuanced strategies that align with the unique needs of their constituencies.

Keywords: Local Self-Governance, Substance Abuse, Participation, Community Engagement.

INTRODUCTION: Local self-governance plays a crucial role in the prevention and control of substance abuse in rural areas, acting as a frontline defense against the challenges posed by drug and substance misuse. In rural settings, where community bonds are often strong and resources may be limited, local self-governance becomes a vital mechanism for addressing and curbing substance abuse. One of the primary functions of local self-governance in this context is community awareness and education. Local governing bodies can initiate and support awareness campaigns to educate residents about the risks associated with substance abuse, the signs of addiction, and available prevention and treatment resources. By fostering a culture of understanding and vigilance, these bodies empower individuals to make informed choices and recognize the early signs of substance abuse within their communities. Furthermore, local self-governance entities have the authority to implement and enforce policies that regulate the availability and sale of substances within their jurisdiction. It mainly focuses on the level of understanding of substance abuse among panchayat representatives and recommendations for the policymakers to reduce the gap between panchayat and Government institutions. This can include zoning regulations, licensing requirements, and monitoring of establishments that sell alcohol or other potentially harmful substances. By exercising control over these factors, local authorities can mitigate the accessibility of substances that contribute to substance abuse.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The first round table of Ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj held in Kolkata on 24-25 July 2004 recommended that Panchayati Raj Institutions should be empowered to function as institutions of

self-government for the twin purposes of (i) making plans for economic development and social justice for their respective areas, and (ii) implementing programs of economic development and social justice in their respective areas, for subjects devolved to the PRIs, including those listed in the Eleventh Schedule, (Government of India, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2004:2).

The research paper 'Youth in Danger-A Case Study of New Life Foundation' (A De-Addiction Centre), (2015) by K. M. Jahirul Islam, is based on the case study of 50 young people suffering from drug addiction admitted to New Life Foundation (a de-addiction centre) for treatment and rehabilitation to showcase how our youth are in danger of addiction. The study disclosed reasons behind pressures and circumstances that force individuals towards this curse. The basic reasons are unemployment, peer pressure, family crisis, and inappropriate social support. To initiate fighting against this abuse, the writer forces youth they be aware of this habit, its circumstances, and its nature.

According to Ranganathan, S. (2009). Local self-governance also facilitates the establishment of community-based support systems. Through the coordination of local resources and partnerships with social organizations, these governing bodies can create initiatives such as support groups, counseling services, and rehabilitation programs tailored to the specific needs of the rural population. This includes securing funding for education programs, treatment facilities, and law enforcement efforts aimed at curbing illicit drug activities in rural areas. The ability to channel resources according to local needs ensures a more targeted and effective approach in the battle against substance abuse.

Malick, R. (2017), in this article explores the multifaceted role of local self-governing bodies in weaving a tapestry of resilience against rural substance abuse through place-based strategies. Local self-governance, operating on the ground with a nuanced understanding of these interwoven threads, can effectively cultivate a proactive culture of prevention. Culturally tailored educational campaigns, utilizing familiar channels like village gatherings and folk performances, can normalize open conversations about substance abuse.

School-based peer education programs, empowered with accurate information and communication skills, can further penetrate the community fabric, dispelling myths and fostering early intervention awareness. By harnessing the strength of tradition and local voices, this grassroots approach chips away at the walls of silence and empowers individuals to make informed choices. Early intervention programs, tailored to the specific cultural context and local resources, become vital first lines of defense in this preventative battle. Cultivating Healing for those already entangled in the thorny grip of addiction, rehabilitation requires a holistic approach that extends beyond clinical interventions. The "base upwards" all-inclusive planning based on the micro-planning exercises comprising multiple stakeholders could be the key toward self-resilience and demand generation. Incorporation of these concepts into the research ecosystem has led to the emergence of participatory methods in community-based research (Rimal, R. N., Shrestha, S., & Maharjan, R, 2024).

Local self-governance can facilitate the establishment of community-based rehabilitation centers, blending traditional healing practices with evidence-based medical and psychological support. These centers, embedded within the familiar soil of the community, foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, crucial for sustained recovery. Culturally-specific therapies, coupled with vocational training and peer support networks, empower individuals to reclaim their lives and reintegrate into the community fabric. Local self-governance can play a pivotal role in facilitating livelihood training programs, opening doors to alternative income sources, and reducing

vulnerability to the economic pressures that often fuel addiction. Recreational activities and community engagement initiatives provide healthy outlets and a sense of purpose, weaving a robust social safety net that catches individuals before they fall (Ranganathan, S, 2009).

According to Mishra, A., Singh, A. K., Parida, S. P., Pradhan, S. K., & Nair, J. (2022), By actively engaging local stakeholders in prevention and support efforts, the community takes ownership of its well-being, building walls of resilience against the pervasiveness of substance abuse. Local self-governance, despite its inherent strengths, faces its own set of challenges. Limited resources, inadequate training, and entrenched interests can impede progress. The fight against rural substance abuse requires a tapestry woven from diverse threads. This perception has been backed by evidence from various studies in India. To further enhance the understanding in this context, this study was planned through a PLA approach while involving various stakeholders associated with rural healthcare delivery at the village level. Local self-governance, with its deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by rural communities, emerges as a central thread, capable of creating a resilient fabric of prevention, early intervention, rehabilitation, and community empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Aim:

The study aims to find out the role of local self-governance in the prevention and control of substance abuse in rural areas.

Objectives:

- To know the Socio-economic background of the respondents.
- To assess the level of understanding and challenges faced among Panchayat Representatives.
- Recommendations for the policymakers to reduce the gap between panchayat and Government institutions.

Methodology:

The researcher has adopted a Descriptive Research design and non-probability sampling technique. Convenience sample method is used to select the 30 respondents and the data was collected through the questionnaire with the Panchayat representatives to understand the reality. According to Creswell (2012) convenience sampling is when the researcher selects the participants that they are willing and available for this study, the researcher has taken 30 samples from the panchayat representatives who are available and willing to participate. The respondents from least experience to most experience in Local administration and irrespective of gender, both males and females were represented in the study. The research used SPSS for data analysis.

ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Table - 01

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENT

Socio-Economic Background	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender of the Respondent		
Female	19	63
Male	11	37
Age (in Years)		

18-45	9	30
46-60	14	47
61 and above	7	23
Educational Qualification		
Primary and Secondary Education	6	20
Higher Secondary Education	11	36
Graduation	13	44
Total	**30**	**100**

Table - 01 presents a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic background of 30 respondents, providing insights into key demographic factors such as gender, age, and educational qualification. The data reveals that the sample is slightly skewed towards female respondents, constituting 63% (19 out of 30), while male respondents make up the remaining 37% (11 out of 30). This distribution highlights the importance of considering gender-specific perspectives when analyzing the subsequent findings. The age distribution of the respondents is categorized into three groups: 18-45, 46-60, and 61 and above. The majority of respondents fall within the 18-45 age range, representing 47% (14 out of 30). The 46-60 age group constitutes the next significant portion, comprising 23% (7 out of 30), while those aged 61 and above account for 23% as well. This distribution enables a nuanced understanding of how different age groups may perceive or experience certain socio-economic aspects. The educational background of the respondents is segmented into three categories: Primary and Secondary Education, Higher Secondary Education, and Graduation. The data indicates a diverse educational profile, with 20% (6 out of 30) having completed Primary and Secondary Education, 36% (11 out of 30) possessing Higher Secondary Education, and the majority, 44% (13 out of 30), holding a Graduation degree. This distribution sheds light on the educational diversity within the sample, potentially influencing their perspectives on socio-economic matters. Analyzing the socio-economic background of the respondents is crucial for understanding how different demographic groups may perceive and respond to various issues. The gender, age, and educational distribution within the sample provide a foundation for interpreting subsequent survey responses or studying specific aspects of socio-economic factors that may vary across these demographic categories.

Table - 02
DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS BY CONDUCTING AWARENESS PROGRAMS TO PREVENT AND CONTROL SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Awareness Programs to Prevent and Control Substance Abuse	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	7	23
No	13	43
Not sure	10	33
Total	**30**	**100**

Table - 02 presents the distribution of respondents based on their awareness of programs aimed at preventing and controlling substance abuse. The majority of respondents, accounting for 43% (13 out of 30), reported that they are not aware of any programs focused on preventing and controlling substance abuse. This finding raises concerns about the effectiveness or reach of existing awareness efforts within the surveyed population. It may also indicate a potential gap in communication or access to relevant information. A significant portion of respondents,

constituting 33% (10 out of 30), expressed uncertainty regarding their awareness of substance abuse prevention programs. This ambiguity could stem from a lack of exposure to such initiatives or a need for more targeted communication strategies to enhance awareness within this particular segment. A notable portion of the respondents, comprising 23% (7 out of 30), indicated that they are aware of programs designed to prevent and control substance abuse. This suggests a level of engagement or knowledge within this subgroup, potentially reflecting the impact of existing awareness initiatives or campaigns. The distribution of responses underscores the importance of evaluating the reach and effectiveness of substance abuse prevention programs. While a portion of the respondents are aware of such initiatives, a substantial number remains uninformed or uncertain.

Table - 03
LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE BY THE RESPONDENTS

Level Of Understanding of Substance Abuse	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not aware at all	15	50
Moderately aware	6	20
Extremely aware	9	30
Total	**30**	**100**

Table 03 outlines the distribution of respondents based on their level of awareness regarding substance abuse prevention programs. A significant portion of the respondents, constituting 50% (15 out of 30), reported being not aware at all of substance abuse prevention programs. This suggests a substantial gap in knowledge within this subgroup, highlighting a potential need for more comprehensive and targeted awareness initiatives to reach and educate individuals who currently lack awareness. A positive aspect of the findings is that 30% (9 out of 30) of the respondents reported being extremely aware of substance abuse prevention programs. This subset likely comprises individuals who have actively sought information or have been effectively reached by existing awareness initiatives. Their high level of awareness could serve as a model for understanding effective communication strategies and channels.

A smaller but noteworthy proportion of respondents, comprising 20% (6 out of 30), indicated a moderate level of awareness regarding substance abuse prevention programs. While these individuals possess some level of knowledge, there is room for improvement in increasing their awareness, potentially through more focused communication strategies or educational efforts. The data suggests a varied landscape of awareness among the surveyed population regarding substance abuse prevention programs. While a considerable number of respondents are not aware at all, a significant proportion falls into the moderately and extremely aware categories. Policymakers and organizations involved in substance abuse prevention should focus on addressing the gaps in awareness, particularly targeting those who are currently not aware at all. Tailoring communication strategies to the specific needs of each awareness level can help improve overall knowledge and engagement in substance abuse prevention efforts. This analysis provides valuable insights into the current state of awareness and can guide the development of targeted interventions to enhance overall awareness levels within the surveyed population.

Table - 04
COMMUNITY SUPPORT TO PREVENT AND CONTROL SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Community Support to Prevent & Control Substance Abuse	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	5	16
No	19	64
Not sure	6	20
Total	30	100

Table 04 presents the distribution of respondents based on their perception of community support in preventing and controlling substance abuse. The majority of respondents, accounting for 64% (19 out of 30), reported a negative perception, stating that they do not believe their community provides support in preventing and controlling substance abuse. This finding raises concerns about the perceived lack of community involvement or the effectiveness of existing programs. Understanding the reasons behind this perception is crucial for developing targeted strategies to enhance community engagement in substance abuse prevention efforts. A notable proportion of respondents, comprising 20% (6 out of 30), expressed uncertainty regarding the level of community support in substance abuse prevention. This uncertainty may stem from a lack of awareness about community initiatives, limited visibility of programs, or a need for more transparent communication about ongoing efforts. A minority of respondents, constituting 16% (5 out of 30), indicated that they perceive community support in preventing and controlling substance abuse. This suggests that a limited segment of the surveyed population believes that their community actively engages in efforts to address substance abuse issues. The reasons for this positive perception may vary and could be influenced by visible community initiatives, awareness campaigns, or local interventions.

Figure - 01
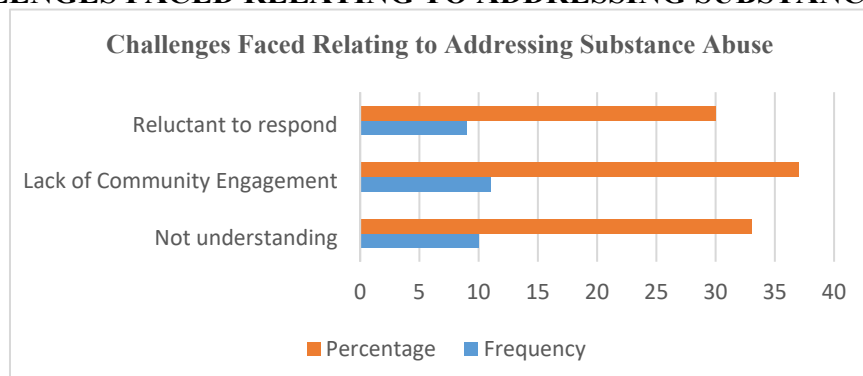**CHALLENGES FACED RELATING TO ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Figure – 01, outlines the distribution of respondents based on the challenges they face regarding addressing substance abuse issues. The data is categorized into three challenges: "Not understanding," "Lack of Community Engagement," and "Reluctant to respond. The most commonly reported challenge, accounting for 37% (11 out of 30) of responses, is the perceived lack of community engagement in addressing substance abuse issues. This finding raises concerns about the effectiveness of community initiatives or the level of collaboration among community members. Strategies to improve community engagement could include promoting awareness campaigns, encouraging community participation in prevention programs, and fostering a sense of collective responsibility. A notable challenge reported by 33% (10 out of 30) of the respondents is

a lack of understanding regarding substance abuse issues. This suggests that a significant portion of the surveyed population may face difficulties in comprehending the complexities and nuances associated with substance abuse. Addressing this challenge may involve improving awareness through educational programs, information campaigns, and community workshops to enhance understanding.

A significant portion, constituting 30% (9 out of 30), reported being reluctant to respond to substance abuse issues. This reluctance could be influenced by various factors, such as stigma, fear of reprisal, or a lack of perceived efficacy in individual responses. Addressing this challenge may require targeted efforts to reduce stigma, provide support for individuals to come forward, and highlight the importance of collective action in combating substance abuse. The distribution of challenges highlights key areas that may hinder effective responses to substance abuse issues within the surveyed population. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including educational initiatives to enhance understanding, strategies to foster community engagement, and interventions to overcome reluctance in responding to substance abuse.

Table - 06
SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THEIR EFFORTS TO PREVENT AND CONTROL SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES

Suggestions to Improve their Efforts to Prevent and Control Substance Abuse Issues	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Support from the Department	11	37
Improve effective IECs	5	16
Support from Community Participation	14	47
Total	**30**	**100**

Table - 06 provides insights into the suggestions made by respondents to enhance efforts in preventing and controlling substance abuse issues. The data is categorized into three suggestions: "Support from the Department," "Improve effective Information, Education, and Communication (IECs)," and "Support from Community Participation." The majority of respondents, accounting for 47% (14 out of 30), highlighted the importance of support from community participation. This suggestion emphasizes the need for active involvement and collaboration within the community to address substance abuse issues effectively. Community-driven initiatives, engagement programs, and collective efforts are seen as essential components for creating a supportive environment and fostering a sense of shared responsibility. A significant proportion of respondents, constituting 37% (11 out of 30), emphasized the need for support from relevant departments. This suggestion implies a desire for increased involvement and assistance from governmental or organizational entities in addressing substance abuse. Such support could manifest in the form of funding, resources, or policy initiatives that facilitate comprehensive substance abuse prevention programs. A smaller but noteworthy percentage of respondents, comprising 16% (5 out of 30), recommended improving Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) strategies. This suggests a recognition that existing communication methods may not be fully effective in reaching and educating the target audience. Enhancing the quality and reach of IEC materials, campaigns, and platforms could be crucial in improving awareness and understanding of substance abuse issues. The diverse range of suggestions reflects the multifaceted nature of addressing substance abuse issues. Respondents identify the significance of support from both governmental bodies and the community itself. The call for departmental

support indicates a recognition of the role of policy and resources in implementing effective prevention measures. Additionally, the emphasis on improving IEC strategies underscores the importance of clear and impactful communication in raising awareness. The predominant recommendation for support from community participation suggests a strong belief in the power of collective action. Community-driven initiatives may include awareness campaigns, educational programs, and support networks that actively involve residents in the prevention and control of substance abuse.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

The overall awareness of substance abuse among Panchayat representatives was found to be considerably limited. Half of the respondents (50%) reported being completely unaware of prevention programs, whereas only 30% demonstrated a high level of awareness. This finding aligns with earlier research emphasizing the need for improved grassroots knowledge dissemination in health-related governance (Panigrahi, Mohapatra, & Mishra, 2015). Furthermore, 43% of respondents reported that no awareness programs had been conducted in their area, and 33% were uncertain about their existence, suggesting deficiencies in communication and program implementation.

Secondly, perceptions of community involvement were notably weak. A majority (64%) of respondents indicated that their community lacked active participation in efforts to prevent and control substance abuse. Respondents identified three principal challenges: lack of community engagement (37%), inadequate understanding of substance abuse issues (33%), and reluctance to respond due to social stigma (30%).

In terms of desired interventions, 47% emphasized the importance of community participation, 37% advocated for stronger departmental support from government institutions, and 16% suggested enhancing Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) strategies.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION:

- ➢ **Community Organization:** Empowering local communities to come together and take charge fosters trust, hope, and collective action that makes prevention efforts meaningful and lasting.
- ➢ **Social Action:** Social workers raise their voices to ensure communities receive the resources, policies, and respect they deserve to fight substance abuse effectively.
- ➢ **Social Welfare Administration:** Through well-coordinated collaboration and transparent monitoring, social workers help build trustworthy programs that truly respond to the community's needs and bring positive change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ✓ Foster community resilience against substance abuse by nurturing a multifaceted, community-driven approach that builds capacity, increases awareness, promotes collaboration, and supports rehabilitation efforts.
- ✓ Prioritize continuous training and orientation for Panchayat representatives, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively prevent substance abuse, implement relevant policies, and oversee rehabilitation programs.
- ✓ Design culturally sensitive Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns that leverage local traditions, such as folk performances and festivals, alongside school initiatives, ensuring messages resonate across diverse community groups.
- ✓ Encourage the formation of village-level vigilance and health committees, youth clubs, and self-help groups to foster collective responsibility and a strong sense of ownership in substance abuse prevention efforts.

✓ Strengthen coordination among Panchayats, public health departments, and law enforcement agencies to implement a cohesive, proactive strategy that integrates prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation at the grassroots level.

✓ Advocate for the development of a National Rural Substance Abuse Prevention Framework that positions Panchayati Raj Institutions as central stakeholders, guaranteeing sustainable funding, institutional support, regular evaluation, and mandatory inclusion of substance abuse awareness in Gram Sabha meetings.

CONCLUSION:

The pivotal role of local self-governance in the prevention and control of substance abuse in rural areas is incontrovertible. The decentralized nature of governance at the local level allows for a more tailored, context-specific, and agile response to the intricate challenges posed by substance abuse. By fostering community engagement and leveraging grassroots dynamics, local authorities can implement nuanced strategies that align with the unique needs of their constituencies. The autonomy granted to local bodies in decision-making processes ensures efficient resource allocation, promoting targeted and sustainable interventions. This not only enhances the effectiveness of prevention and control measures but also instils a sense of community ownership and responsibility. As navigate the challenges of substance abuse, fortifying the role of local self-governance emerges as a cornerstone in the collective pursuit of fostering healthier and more resilient rural communities.

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