

## **Familial influences on Risk-taking behavior of Youth**

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### **Abstract**

Nagaland is undergoing cultural transition from traditional isolated conservative society to a more open modern day society. Topographically the state has an easy access to the so called golden triangle infamous for drugs. It is perceived and believed that modernization and proximity to illegal drug sources have exposed more youths in the state to smoking, alcohol, drugs and unprotected sex. Under the prevailing circumstances, family and parental care plays a vital role to protect the growing number of youths from risk behavior. Keeping this view in this paper, an attempt is made to explore the association between parental attributes related to child rearing, religiosity, living arrangement, drinking habits and involvement of youth in risk taking behavior of substance use and unprotected sex. The study is based on primary data and our results substantiate the fact that familial attributes do matters significantly when it comes to risk behavior of youth.

**Key words: Youth, risk-taking behaviors, familial attributes.**

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## **Familial Influence on Risk-Taking Behavior of Youth**

### **Introduction**

Adolescence and youth is a stage where impetuosity and feelings of invincibility take precedence over rational decision-making leading to heightened tendency for risk-taking and for sexual experimentation. In this crucial stage of life, the family plays an important role in shaping youth's behavior with constant parental care and support to keep them motivated on good ways of life to become a good soul and spend a productive life. Keeping this view in the article an attempt is made to examine the familial influence on risk taking behavior such as smoking, drinking, substance use and indulgence in risky sex of adolescence and youth in Dimapur, Nagaland.

Nagas are the ethnic or tribal group that predominantly inhabits Nagaland, a small state in the remote north-eastern region of India. The state, sharing its border with golden triangle has an easy access to illegal drugs. In the last two decades HIV/AIDS has become a major concern of Nagaland and is rated as one of the sixth highest HIV/AIDS prevalent states in the country. Although not recorded there are increased incidences of pregnancy, of abortions, sexual exposure at early age, multiple partners, early initiation of substance among young people in Nagaland. This highlights the essentiality to search and urgency to understand the interwoven factors or situational factors influencing engagement in risk-taking behaviors, more particularly of familial parenting attributes.

Nagaland is undergoing cultural transition from traditional isolated conservative society to a more open modern day society. The changing society has created a faster growth in the youth culture and increased exposure to unforeseen issues such as other sides of penetrating electronic media and emerging party culture. Today's *Naga* youth have altogether different outlook in dealing with issues of alcohol, divorce families, drugs, increased peer pressures, values, risk-taking behaviors, smoking and sex. The *Naga* value system and social cohesion seems to be fast fading as increasing number of *Nagas* are finding comfort and pleasure in westernized lifestyle. Longer years of education- schooling/college in the company of friends, postponement of marriage and long spell of unemployment with the penchant to seek fun have its negative impact as well. The impact of westernization and modernization, coupled with changing outlook and the need for children to move to cities and towns in aspiration for education results in

the decline of co-existence of multigenerational members in the families. This transition stage also creates generation gap among the youngsters and preceding generations.

It is perceived and believed that modernization and proximity to illegal drug sources have exposed more youths in the state to smoking, alcohol, drugs and unprotected sex. Under the prevailing circumstances, family and parental care plays a vital role to protect the growing number of youths from risk behavior.

Although risk-taking behavior is an important health issue it has received less attention, most studies on adolescent/youth risk-taking behavior are from developed countries. Research on Asian youth's risk-taking behavior is sparse and limited studies exist on Indian population looking at the behaviors in isolation or dealing only with targeted vulnerable population and studies related to familial factors association with risk-taking behavior of adolescents and youth is yet to take off in India in general and more particularly there is absolute dearth of exploration in the context of Naga society.

### **Objectives and Hypotheses**

In this study, we aimed to explore the influence of family on youth's risk-taking behavior among Naga youth. Research concerning Naga youth risk-taking behavior is non-existent. The rapid increase in the HIV/AIDS cases, besides various internalizing (frustration/depression/unrest in the region) and externalizing factors e.g. delinquency points to the importance of taking up this issue.

The study focuses on the role that the family plays in influencing youth's risk-taking behavior. The main objective of this paper is to identify the familial correlates of risk-taking behaviors. The study can pave way for deeper understanding of invincible risk of *Naga* youths in the changing socio-cultural environment.

### **Data and Methods**

The data for this present chapter is primarily based on quantitative survey data collected from 300 youth aged 15-24 yrs. Self administered questionnaires were used to elicit information on attitude, knowledge, and behavior of Naga youth in a wide range of substance use and sexual issues along with the institutions of family, peers etc which are

believed to influence these behaviors. The respondents consisted of 200 college going youths and 100 non/out of college youth.

### **Measurements & Statistical Analysis**

In this study, focus is centered on family structure and family processes that are believed to have influence on the risk-taking behavior of youth.

Bivariate and multinomial logit analyses were used in the present study. We also used  $\chi^2$  tests to examine the bivariate associations between the familial covariates and risk-taking behavior variables. Multinomial logistic regression models were used to evaluate the effect of familial variables on the prevalence of risk-taking behaviors.

### **Findings**

In the present study, youth who had ever engaged in risk-taking behavior includes 64% for smoking, 67% for alcohol and 25% of youth have ever engaged in premarital sex. The age of initiation into risk-taking behaviors starts as early as 13.9 yrs for smoking; 15.6 yrs for alcohol and 18.2 yrs for initiating premarital sex.

It is worth noting that parental/family control variable like parenting style; prayer meetings, relationships and family behavior show significant influence on the behaviors of young people. Family control is found to be of protecting value. Parenting style also shows a significant influence on the youth's risk-taking behavior. Liberal parenting style shows greater propensity of involving in risk-taking behavior. Clearly, increased family control/strict parenting style helps lower the risk of premarital sex or engaging in substance use, suggesting that some control, at least, is better than no control. Parents may thus be advised to seek a measure of control over their adolescents/youth in culturally and socially appropriate ways.

Since family plays a primary role in the development of adolescents and youth, the policy aimed at addressing youth's risk-taking behavior and programs directed to young people, should take into consideration the role of family and individual characteristics as important precursors along with influences of other levels such as the local community.