



INDIAN JOURNAL OF  
LEGAL REVIEW

VOLUME 6 AND ISSUE 6 OF 2026

INSTITUTE OF LEGAL EDUCATION



## INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW

APIS – 3920 – 0001 | ISSN – 2583-2344

(Open Access Journal)

Journal's Home Page – <https://ijlr.iledu.in/>

Journal's Editorial Page – <https://ijlr.iledu.in/editorial-board/>

Volume 6 and Issue 6 of 2026 (Access Full Issue on – <https://ijlr.iledu.in/volume-6-and-issue-6-of-2026/>)

### Publisher

Prasanna S,

Chairman of Institute of Legal Education

No. 08, Arul Nagar, Seera Thoppu,

Maudhanda Kurichi, Srirangam,

Tiruchirappalli – 620102

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## MINORS SUCCUMBING TO DRUGS: A PRESSING ISSUE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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**BEST CITATION – KHUSHBOO SHARMA & DR PUJA PAUL SRIVASTAVA, MINORS SUCCUMBING TO DRUGS: A PRESSING ISSUE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA, INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW (IJLR), 6 (6) OF 2026, PG. 01-05, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN – 2583-2344. DOI – <https://doi.org/10.65393/IJLRV6I617>**

### ABSTRACT

India has a huge population base estimated to be approximately 142.11 Cr as of 2026<sup>1</sup>, according to the Census of India. Much of this population today is constituted of minors and youth. The problem of drug abuse is not new, as the cases of drug and narcotic abuse are reported almost every other day around the world. On the other hand, the same has now become an issue of growing concern in India among the young population. It is crucial to understand that the use of drugs and narcotics at a comparatively younger age has a far more devastating impact not only on the individual's own personal life but on society at large. Use of drugs has been reported to cause crucial side effects such as withdrawal from society, serious physical health issues, increased dependence on others for normal tasks, increased mental health disorders such as cognitive impairment, developmental delays and anxiety and depression.

Not only this, if we take the example of minors having easy access to drugs, it causes them to grow morally corrupt, drop out of school and limit their future employment possibilities, eventually contributing to a never-ending cycle of poverty. This dependence on drugs also makes them more susceptible to committing crimes and aids in criminal activities such as drug trafficking and peddling. Use of drugs has often been seen to contribute to rising healthcare concerns such as malnutrition, spread of infectious diseases and overdose incidents fatal to life.

The factors that contribute to the growing cases of drug abuse often are reflected due to lack of education, socio-economic differences, easy availability and peer pressure. It is observed that drug-consuming minors are more prone to resorting to crimes like theft, violence and drug peddling in order to sustain their addiction, contributing to increased incidents of juvenile delinquency. Timid enforcement, social vulnerability and drug trafficking networks exploiting children have increased the abuse of drugs among minors despite stringent legislation like the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985. This study explores the socio-legal drivers of easy drug availability at children and the links between drug addiction and criminal behaviour. The law enforcement agencies like the Narcotics Control Bureau have had a role to play in containing the drug menace apart from stronger preventive strategies, rehabilitation mechanisms and policy reform.

**Keywords:** *Drugs, Narcotics, NDPS Act, judicial decisions, protection against drug abuse Minors*

### A. INTRODUCTION:

Drug Trafficking is a whole concept of production, manufacturing, distribution and sale of drugs and trafficking across states and countries. People who regularly deal or consume drugs form an essential part of this dimension. Easy availability of narcotic drugs to the general public is not a new challenge; in fact, India has time and again noted the increased incidence of drug abuse across various demographics. Illicit activities don't just benefit organised crime. They also harm communities by causing more violence, addiction, and social instability<sup>2</sup>. The contemporary challenge that has arisen is the easy availability of drugs to kids and minors. Since India is located in the south of Asia, it makes it easier for the drugs to be transmitted through our country, which ultimately leads to increased availability of drugs to the population. Such a young population is vulnerable and can easily be manipulated by drug traffickers in to the vicious cycle of procuring and indulging in drug abuse.

The serious impact of narcotic drugs has been seen to pose multi-faceted ill effects on the population consuming it, including severe health, social and economic consequences. Consumption of drugs on a regular basis has been seen to cause rude behaviour in adolescents, making it more probable to drop out of school, be less socially engaged and resort to deviant practices in order to sustain their addiction. They often see social stigmatisation of their addiction and feel that they are helpless, and no one understands them. This not only destroys their childhood but handicaps their opportunity to live a dignified life in future as well. In such circumstances, it becomes the nation's utmost priority to address the issue before it goes out of control and destroys the entire population base of our country. The use of narcotics at a young age can lead to developmental issues, cognitive impairments, and chronic health conditions, which severely impact their physical and mental well-being<sup>3</sup>. Use of narcotics has been

observed to disrupt families and social structures.

Globally, the substance abuse has been seen to cause drastic physical and Mental Side effects since it causes damage to memory, learning abilities and a sense of unbalanced emotional control. Drug abuse has often led to poor academic performance, increased absenteeism from school and higher dropout rates. A study reported that 67% of drug users initiated substance abuse at the age of nineteen or younger, with 52% starting between sixteen and twenty years old, 21% between eleven and fifteen years old, and 4% at the age of ten or even younger. Among the female users, 20% were from Goa, followed by 16% from Thiruvananthapuram, and 15% from Mumbai<sup>4</sup>. It has also been observed that increased dependence on drugs causes depression, anxiety and other behavioural disorders and suicidal thoughts. Children and adolescents who are involved in drug abuse often resort to criminal activities such as violence, theft, and drug trafficking networks, which negatively impact and threaten community safety. It has also been seen that the higher the use of drugs in a particular state, the higher the risk of developing Communicable diseases, which also increases the risk of spread of sexually transmitted diseases, often as a result of poor choices.

Before moving forward, it is of utmost necessity to understand the root cause of this extensive use of drugs and easy availability to kids and young individuals, which can be significantly attributed to the family culture of such a child. If parents regularly consume narcotics, the children of the family get familiarised with the substance and are tempted to try it themselves or are likely to try the same in the absence of adults. Exposure to adverse childhood experiences is predictive of early drug use initiation, a significantly elevated risk of harmful patterns of substance or drug use and the risk of developing substance or drug use disorders in adulthood, thus perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of poor quality of life,

mental health disorders, drug use and drug use disorders, as well as adverse childhood experiences in subsequent generations.<sup>5</sup> Another important factor could be attributed to peer pressure, where friends, neighbours or colleagues tend to tempt such individuals to try drugs for social validation. The third example could be either direct or indirect communication with drug traffickers or peddlers who sell illegal or illicit drugs on a small scale or at a local level.

Substance abuse is also a direct violation of Children's rights, because every child has the right to lead a life of dignity and health and safety. It becomes necessary to understand that Drug abuse leads to Child exploitation, neglect, and often provides the child with an unsafe environment, detrimental to his overall growth.

### **B. Most Commonly Used Types of Drugs by Youngsters**

#### **i. Tobacco and nicotine products**

Tobacco and nicotine products are seen as one of the widely used stimulants by youngsters since they are easily available at local shops and hence indicating its relative accessibility. More often, children are prone to indulge in use of such products as they become familiar with the products through family or peers. Despite restrictions imposed by law on the sale of such products, such as Cigarettes, bidis and gutka to minors, the demand and supply largely remain unaffected. Lack of education is an important factor contributing to the increased consumption by minors since they are unable to know the adverse effects of consuming like products on health and social life.

#### **ii. Alcohol**

Among Adolescents, it has been observed that alcohol is the most consumed substance. It is observed that youngsters engage in drinking alcohol due to peer pressure, societal validation, or through

family members. Alcohol influences thinking patterns, which can result in the causation of fatal accidents and injuries, and can also lead to legal violations. The infamous *Pune Porsche Case*<sup>6</sup> of 2024 was one such example out of the thousand road accidents that happened as a result of such minors driving vehicles while intoxicated and killing innocents.

#### **iii. Inhalants (glue, paint thinner, etc.)**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the use of inhalants by kids and adolescents, such as glue, paint thinner, correction fluid and other substances of like nature, which are stated as volatile solvents. This is particularly so because these are not only easily available and are cost-efficient, but also lack strict legal regulation. Since these substances are readily available and legally sold for industrial as well as household purposes, unlike the other drugs as per the NDPS Act 1985, vulnerable children, such as the street children or the economically backward children, have access to them without any restriction. Inhalation of such intoxicating material provides a sense of euphoria or ecstasy that acts as a quick coping mechanism against hunger, stress, sleeplessness and trauma that these poor kids usually have to face on a daily basis, particularly due to lack of a safe and secure environment and unavailability of basic comforts. This continuous use of inhalants by minors and adolescents, especially, reflects that there is a combination that exists consisting of regulatory gaps, socio-economic vulnerability and accessibility, which poses a grave threat to public health and is a serious legal challenge.

#### **iv. Cannabis**

Cannabis, which often includes Ganja, Marijuana, Charas, is an extensively used psychoactive drug. It is derived from Cannabis sativa, with THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) as its key active

component, which tends to act on the brain's cannabinoid receptors. It primarily affects perception, memory, mood, and mental health when consumed, thereby creating a feeling of being 'high'. Cannabis can cause a euphoric effect, resulting in relaxation. However, it can cause paranoia or anxiety in others. In India, as per the NDPS Act, 1985, consumption of both ganja and charas is illegal, where possession of a small quantity of Ganja (up to 1 kg) and Charas (up to 100 grams) can be punished with rigorous imprisonment for extending up to 6 months, a fine of up to ₹10,000, or both. Whereas bhang enjoys partial legality, which leads to easier access among locals of various states, since it is revered as a holy drink during festivals. Although it must be taken into consideration that often taken as a mild drug, its continued use for a longer duration may lead to increased dependency and can also act as a path to other harder substances.

v. Synthetic or Illegal Drugs

Synthetic drugs include man-made substances that include, but are not limited to, methamphetamine, MDMA, and LSD. They are especially designed to mimic natural drugs; however, they are often more potent and dangerous, as they can prove fatal. Youngsters in Urban areas are often attracted to these drugs due to a rise in party culture. These drugs have a good demand due to their strong, lasting effects, along with easier concealment. Adverse effects of these drugs may include different health issues like cardiac problems, hallucinations and can even result in death. The Act of 1985 does impose strict penalties; however, enforcement is still considered to be challenging owing to the rapidly evolving drug compositions and distribution.

vi. Prescription Drugs Misuse (Stimulants, Painkillers, etc.)

Another type or way of drug consumption involves the misuse of prescription drugs,

using medicines such as opioids (i.e., codeine, tramadol, etc.) along with stimulants being administered without medical supervision. In our country, over-the-counter medicines are easily accessible, unlike many foreign countries, which directly contributes to growing abuse, specifically among youth. Misuse of prescription drugs can lead to dependence, overdose, and result in serious mental health disorders. Although the use is regulated under the NDPS Act 1985 and also under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, weak enforcement, along with a lack of general awareness, pose major challenges.

C. Causes of Drug Abuse Among Youngsters

Earlier, we have discussed as to what types of drugs are easily accessible to minors, but it is also equally important to analyse the causes of drug abuse among minors, what causes them to be tempted and what causes them to become regular consumers. The following are some psychological and social factors that determine the cause.

1. Family Factors

Latest research primarily emphasises that critical health issues that exist within the family, along with poor problem-solving skills, may pose as stronger predictors of drug abuse as compared to overall family functioning. However, it is fair to say that personal attributes do play an important role in an individual's choice to take up good or bad habits; however, such habits and impulses are often observed to be a direct influence of parenting style in a particular household. For instance, adolescents with lower emotional regulation and poor impulse control are found to be more susceptible to substance abuse, as they may use them as a coping mechanism<sup>7</sup>.

Normalisation of substance use in the household has also been observed as a factor promoting substance abuse by kids. An addicted parent who indulges in having drugs

creates easy access and promotes a behavioural model that makes narcotics abuse seem like a part of an ordinary lifestyle.

Another issue with poor parenting is the neglect of care and affection for the children. Kids and adolescents, especially, have their trust and confidence developed early in life, and a parent's support is crucial during the years of growth and is strictly a non-negotiable for their decision-making choices ahead in life. Therefore, if there is a lack of support from the parents, the children are likely to develop issues like low self-esteem, anxiety and poor attachment styles, making them prone to drug abuse for numbing their negative feelings and thoughts.

Lastly, even if the parents never indulged in substance abuse, a lack of awareness and supervision of their kids can also result negatively, promoting drug abuse. Hence, a more focused parenting environment must be in the family.

## 2. Social Factors

In today's modern world, social media plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's choices. A correct choice of content is also a decision one needs to make; however, access to content promoting drug abuse can tempt minors to look cool and try drugs for fun, hence opening a primary gateway to substance abuse and addiction. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram and

Snapchat often glamorise substance use, describing it as a harmless way to have fun or fit in.

These social media, contrary to their objective of connecting people, have created a gap in genuine relationships. People constantly compare themselves online and suffer from

something known as the 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO) phenomenon, creating increased

digital stress. This contributes to the growing use of substances, experimenting with drugs like cannabis to combat feelings of distress and overwhelming.

It is observed that adolescents with few or no close friends at all and those who are frequently bullied at school or college develop a significantly higher risk of turning to narcotics, alcohol or amphetamines as a path to cope with social isolation and feelings of being left out or being unwelcome.

## 3. Psychological Factors

Adolescence is a period of life where a human being begins to figure out the world around them. It becomes natural for him to make meaningful connections; however, if he is unable to do so, it feels like the end of the world to him, since it is his first negative experience. This is where most people feel that they are unable to fit in, and they usually withdraw from trying again as a coping mechanism that they use to prevent feelings of stress, anxiety and mental problems. It is pertinent to note that people unable to deal with such emotions are more likely to use drugs as a coping mechanism. Drug dealers/peddlers often target secluded individuals as they are more likely to make a deal and not report, as the drug becomes their daily need. According to a research report, it was seen that Tobacco at 4 per cent and alcohol at 3.8 per cent were the most commonly tried substances. The study also flagged significant use of opioids at 2.8 per cent, cannabis at 2 per cent and inhalants at 1.9 per cent. Much of the opioid consumption was linked to non-prescribed pharmaceutical pills, which researchers say is a particularly concerning trend because of how easily such medication moves among teenagers<sup>8</sup>.

Another psychological factor can be linked with the feelings of distress one has to face while dealing with online/offline harassment or bullying. Many people are unable to handle the mental stress they go through from their peers, seniors or even family members, and either attempt suicide or fall into the vicious cycle of drug abuse, mostly when they don't have a close one supportive enough to hear or help them out.

## 4. Risk Factors & Vulnerable Groups

Use of narcotics is evident, both in affluent and poor kids/ adolescents. However, their vulnerability towards substances is caused by reasons that are very different from each other. While affluent minors use drugs out of boredom, peer pressure or social validation, poor minors do it primarily due to the urge to escape from the chronic stress of a difficult lifestyle. It is also important to understand that even though richer kids have an increased inclination towards the use of drugs, the poor kids are often observed to be more impacted by the adverse effects of drug consumption, owing to the use of cheap alternatives, which mostly prove fatal.

Children who are dealing with mental issues such as anxiety, depression and schizophrenia are also inclined to use substances to escape their mental problems. It is also to be noted that children in an abusive household also develop these issues and a sense of insecurity. This leads to increased use of drugs among growing children.

Another vulnerable group of children can be found in areas where the crime rates remain reasonably high. The kids living in such a locality become accustomed to the abusive, threatening, and gun culture environment, where drug consumption is rather usual. Therefore, a normalisation or familiarity is created in a child's mind, and they continue to become what they usually see around. Therefore, they become more inclined to initiate drug abuse at a lower age.

A recent research published in the National Medical Journal of India showed that the average starting age of drug use is recorded as young as 12.9 years and in some cases as young as 11 yrs of age<sup>9</sup>. This is particularly concerning as minors are on the verge of being consumed by an endless pit of narcotics, which is not only detrimental to their own life but also negatively impacts society and the economy since their young potential is robbed by bad influence.

##### 5. Poverty and Lack of General Awareness

Poverty is one of the biggest issues that exists in our country, which leads to hunger, malnutrition, bad living conditions, and poor sanitation, along with other issues. All such factors lead to a lack of general safety, happiness and satisfaction in both kids and adults. Therefore, in the hope of finding peace and relaxation, poor kids as well as adults seek their comfort in narcotic substances, as they give a feeling of a certain 'high' in the brain and make it easier for them to deal with the daily ordeals of a tough life. In order to sustain their addiction, they do odd jobs during the day, like rag-picking and similar jobs and put all their money to buy cheap substances such as inhalers or poor-quality synthetics. They consume such substances without knowing the adverse effect it bears on health and as a result, these kids/adolescents are likely to develop diseases such as Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) which refers to fluid buildup in the lungs causing them to collapse, chemical pneumonia leading to respiratory failure, and compound toxicity that can lead to organ failure, tuberculosis and even cancer, thereby reducing life-expectancy significantly. Even though, for them it might be an escape, it is no doubt fatal for them and detrimental to our society where instead of being hopeful for an easy life, kids chase drugs to avoid suffering.

##### **D. Strategies to prevent Drug abuse in Minors**

Tackling drugs is not an easy issue, and the problem needs to be ripped at the root. Careful strategies must be employed to save the future of adolescents and young adults from the darkness of the drug culture. Such strategies may include:

1. Family-Based Prevention
  - Parental guidance, communication and government aid.

Encouraging and setting up awareness for drug abusers and parents of such kids to overcome communication gaps, spreading knowledge about the adverse effects of drug consumption

by the government, may prove beneficial in reducing the approach towards substances. As mentioned earlier, drug abuse is mostly a result of a lack of support and guidance from family and peers; therefore, if the same is addressed, the instances of drug abuse may reduce. Parents must be vigilant enough to monitor their kids and give positive redirection to them.

Alternatively, the government may provide support through nasha-mukti campaigns and free-of-cost counselling sessions to the victims of substance abuse who are willing to change.

### 2. School-Based Programs

- Awareness and Counselling

At the school level, the initiative must be taken to spread awareness about drug use, prevention and counselling sessions so that the children understand the gravity of drug abuse and are able to make a healthy choice for themselves.

### 3. Community Programs

- Youth support centres

Likewise, state-level governments must focus on creating campaigns and support centres for youth to give them a platform to share their issue, experiences and find a way out of the drug culture and seek appropriate rehabilitative measures.

### 4. Treatment and Rehabilitation

- Medical treatment for addiction

Alongside the counselling and therapeutic measures, the government should also seek to provide easy access to affordable medical treatment, necessary for addiction and withdrawal therefrom.

- Rehabilitation centres

Rehabilitation centres such as the Nasha Mukti-kendras are available throughout India; however, focus should be made on improving the services and including facilities such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI) rather than focusing on just religious or spiritual cleansing. Also, employment of licensed professionals

must be given emphasis.

### 5. Role of Government and other organisations

- Policies regarding control of Drugs

The State plays a key role in the regulation and control of the production, distribution, and consumption of narcotics by means of a comprehensive legal framework. In our country, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, forms the fundamental pillar of the drug control policy, whereby it gives provisions for imposing strict penalties for possession, trafficking, and consumption of illicit substances. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) is a governmental agency tasked with the enforcement, information gathering, and coordinating with international bodies in order to aid in the combat of cross-border drug trafficking. Though challenges such as procedural delays and abuse of stringent provisions often continue to hinder the efficacy of such policies, particularly in protecting youngsters from the vicious cycle of substance abuse.

### 6. Child Protection Laws

Laws made specially on the premise of child protection provide an added legal safeguard by recognising minors as a vulnerable group. India has various provisions and frameworks for the protection, rehabilitation and welfare of children. Child protection laws work on acknowledging the requirement of special protection of youngsters from exploitation, including drug abuse. Legislation, much like the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, intends to ensure the adequate protection, care, rehabilitation, and social reintegration of minors in conflict with the law as well as to those in need of care and protection. Involvement of kids in drug abuse cases is a matter often viewed as a criminal issue as well as a welfare concern, and therefore, it requires early intervention through Child Welfare Committees and rehabilitation institutions and support from the legislation in

promulgating such laws that suits to the changing circumstances of these days. Moreover, the provisions under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) are somehow intersecting with drug abuse instances, since substance use is more often linked with sexual exploitation and abuse. Despite the availability of these frameworks, gaps exist in implementation, along with inadequate institutional infrastructure, a deficiency in trained personnel, along with a lack of adequate coordination among the enforcement and welfare agencies.

#### 7. Role of NGOs

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are such organisations that work for the welfare of the society without direct support from the government. They play a critical complementary role in addressing the issue of substance abuse among minors by reducing the gap between policy and practice. Organisations such as Nada India Foundation and Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses (SPYM) exclusively provide rescue, treatment, outreach, counselling, and rehabilitation to the vulnerable children aged between 7 and 18 yrs with the collaboration of the Delhi Government's Child Welfare committees. Society for Promotion of Youth developed 'Navchetna' that aims to provide new consciousness on various life skills and Drug Education for school children and the masses. NGOs often operate at the base level, which makes them even more accessible and approachable to specific community issues.

NGOs such as the Stairs Foundation, Sammaan Foundation, and Ekta Jyoti Welfare Society aim to contribute to reducing harm through strategies, providing vocational training, and the effective reintegration of affected minors back into the society. Furthermore, NGOs often collaborate with governmental agencies in the appropriate implementation of schemes and provide feedback for improvements in policy making. Though their effectiveness is often witnessed to be constrained by a lack of adequate funding, a lack of regulatory

supervision, and unbalanced geographical presence.

#### 8. Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns are of crucial importance since they suggest a preventive strategy aimed at reducing the demand for drugs. Such strategies comprise of educating society, especially the youth, about the peril and repercussions of substance abuse. An effective collaboration between governmental policies and social contributors proves beneficial in disseminating crucial information and awareness among the masses by way of social media and public outreach.

Campaigns such as the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan are specifically introduced to focus on behavioural change, community participation, and early intervention among minors in drug abuse. Initiatives like these emphasise not only the legal repercussions of substance abuse but also the health and social consequences attached to it. Despite the potential of such campaigns, the impact is often limited. Major factors contributing to the limited reach include a deficient reach in rural areas, a lack of continued engagement, and inadequate evaluation mechanisms to measure the efficacy of such campaigns. Such Public Awareness Campaigns need to be strengthened through targeted messaging, communal involvement, as well as integrating with educational curriculum so as to considerably improve their preventive impact in the instances of drug abuse.

#### E. Conclusion Key Findings:

- 1) Strong preventive measures should be taken by society as well as the government in addressing the issue of drug abuse in minors and young adults.
- 2) Stricter measures should be enforced with a stringent penalty for the illicit suppliers and peddlers of such drugs to the general public.
- 3) Government and other institutions, such as non-governmental organisations

(NGO), must make rehabilitation and reformation of such minors and adults accessible and affordable.

- 4) Efforts must be made to track the drug supply chains and enforce border security reforms as much as possible.
- 5) Children and young adults should be counselled properly so that they do not fall for peer pressure or accept drug consumption for social validation.
- 6) The government must make efforts for the poor by providing adequate financial opportunities and providing free or accessible nutrition, education and medication to the needy so that they continue to lead a healthy life rather than to consume narcotics for an easier escape.
- 7) Society must join hands to curb the deep-rooted menace of drug consumption by being vigilant.

Thus, under this research, it can be concluded that drug consumption can massively end lives, and once a person falls into this pit, it becomes almost impossible to come out and become independent. Since children are innocent, they are supposed to be fooled easily and manipulated into the vicious cycle of drug consumption, leaving no scope for a healthy and hopeful life. It is important to target the illicit drug consumption and sale, and stringent laws should replace the lenient ones. It is also of utmost importance that the children, as well as adults who have succumbed to this evil, must receive adequate treatment, therapy and rehabilitation and therefore must be given a chance to live a life of freedom from addiction.

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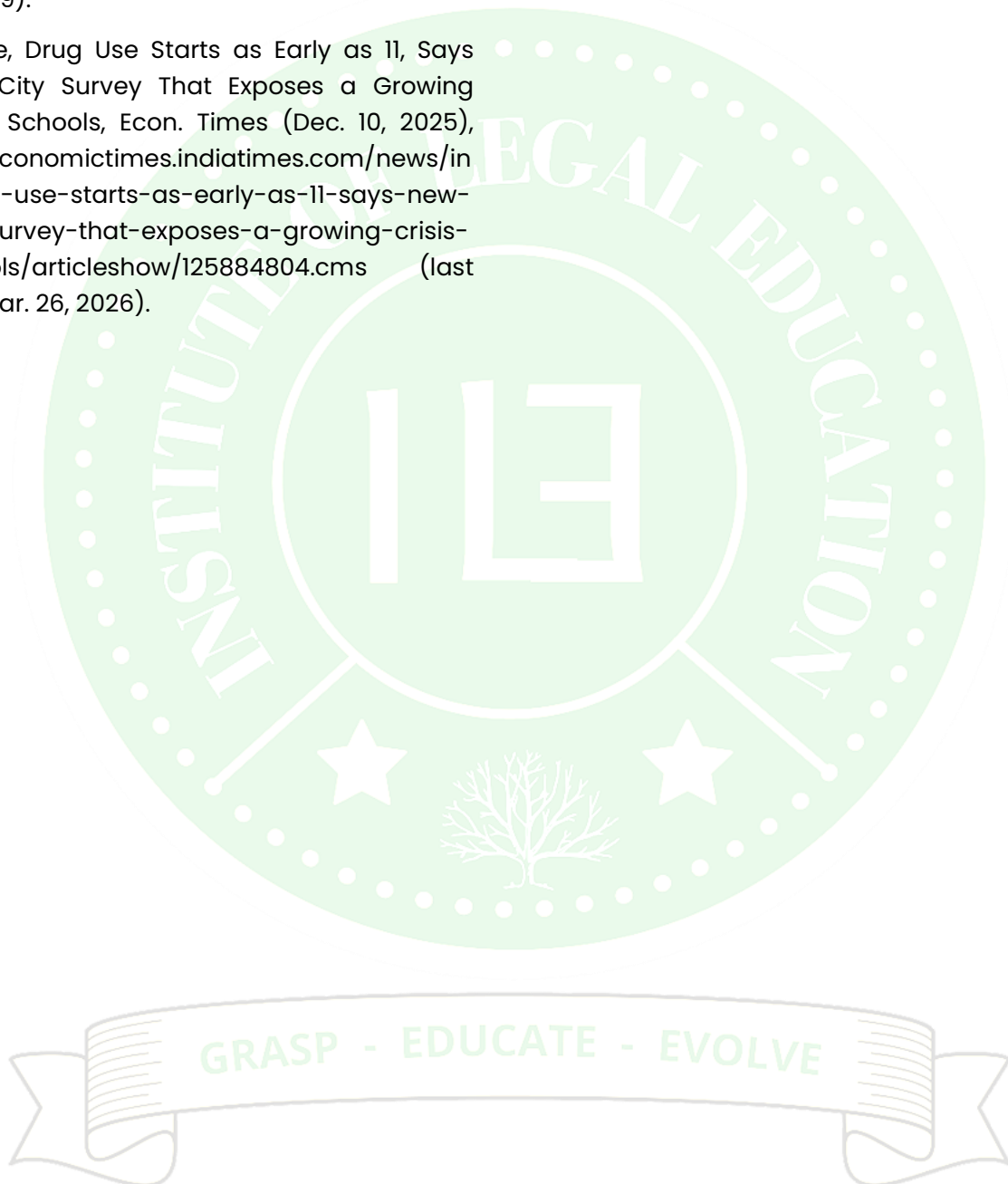
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