

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND INDIVIDUAL DETERMINANTS OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE USED AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN NORTH KASHMIR, INDIA

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Abstract

The epidemic of substances among college students has caused great concern in recent decades. However, most research studies have focused on the biological and psychological aspects of drug addiction. Few researchers have studied the socio-cultural and personal variables that influence substance abuse, resulting in limited findings. The present study addresses the socio-cultural and individual determinants which influence the use of psychoactive substances among college students in the North Kashmir region of India. The present study was conducted in the six government degree college located in the North Kashmir region of India. 320 respondents (college students) were selected by snowball sampling technique, and their demographic information and type of substance use were assessed by a standard questionnaire. The study results show that most of the respondents are males from the age group of 20-22 years, from nuclear families and urban backgrounds. A high prevalence of psychoactive substance abuse was found among the students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts course. Psychoactive substances such as spasmoproxyvon tablets, opium, charas, and codeine phosphate are the main substances. Socio-cultural factors like peer group influence, easy availability, family problems, as well as personal determinants like curiosity, seeking for pleasure, academic stress, and failure in love affairs are the main causes of substance abuse. Therefore, the results of this study can be utilized for understanding the cause of the problem, prevention, and treatment. Substance use was more prevalent among male students with arts academic backgrounds. It suggests that we require goal-directed programs to regulate and minimize the extent of substance use, enhance students' awareness, and increase students understanding of the negative consequences of substance use in their entry.

Keywords: psychoactive substances, students, causative factors

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization defines substance abuse as “consistent or sporadic use of a drug inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practice” (WHO, 1994). Approximately 5.6% of the global population (275 million people) between the age group of

15 and 64 use illicit substances at least once a year (UNODC, 2018). Psychoactive substance use is more prevalent among the young population than other age groups. Psychoactive substance use among the student community has become a major concern and results in many adverse consequences (Sadock et al., 2003; and Adlaf et al., 2003). It impedes societal growth and inflicts significant economic and social harm on the health-care system (Greenberg et al. 1999; Sarkar et al. 2016). Psychoactive substance abuse during this stage leads to many challenges and difficulties in the academic career, including poor performance, dropouts, failure in exams, indiscipline, irregularity, involvement in illegal activities, violent behaviour, and damage to the cognitive system (Welsh et al., 2019). Several variables encourage students to substance abuse behaviours, including psychological, socioeconomic, cultural, personal, psychological, and other environmental influences (Rutter, 2002; Bevilacqua & Goldman, 2009; Tam & Foo, 2012). Research studies conducted across India and abroad have reported that substances such as nicotine, cannabis, alcohol, depressant drugs, stimulants, and inhalants are commonly abused by students (Murthy et al., 2010; Garnier-Dykstra et al., 2012).

Drug abuse is not only a problem in western countries, but developing countries like India are also facing drug smuggling and addiction problems. India, being the largest country and its proximity to the golden triangle and golden crescent countries, is emerging as the main transit for illicit drug trafficking and its widespread consumption among the younger generation. The trend and magnitude of drug abuse in India have assumed a frightening picture, notably in the north eastern states, Punjab as well as Jammu and Kashmir. In the armed conflict and terrorism zone of Kashmir, substance and drug abuse has reached an alarming level. The younger generation, especially the student community, has become its main target. The use of various illicit substances, especially among younger generations, has emerged as one of the most serious and pressing social issues in the North Kashmir region, with thousands of young people dying every year due to overdose deaths. It has become the main concern for civil society, the state police, and the health department. Besides, the geographical location of the north Kashmir region along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has increased smuggling and consumption of substances.

Furthermore, the north Kashmir region has been considered a transit point and the main route for the smuggling of various illicit substances. The region has also become very fertile for cannabis and opium cultivation. The cultivation and production of various illicit substances

such as opium, charas, ganga, bhang, and other substances have been easily cultivated like other crops in the field. After South Kashmir, it has also been ranked top in the production and consumption of cannabis and opium. Further, socioeconomic challenges and conflict-related situations like poverty, unemployment, corruption, and underdevelopment have accelerated the menace of substance use. In addition, the conflict and terrorism-related situations such as disillusionment, destruction of property, inhuman torture, innocent killings, encounters, illegal detentions, curfews, closure of educational institutions, restrictions on communication, and the internet associated with terrorism and armed conflict have also led to a rise in substance use among the student community. The report by the media and drug de-addiction centres has revealed that substance use has increased rapidly among the student community, and a large number of college students in the North Kashmir region are using illicit substances.

Since the mid-Kashmir insurgency or armed conflict, the smuggling and consumption of psychoactive substances have become a central concern after terrorism in Kashmir. The conflict-ridden zone of Kashmir has witnessed the destructive effects of narco-terrorism, with lakhs of college-going students, females, rich and poor, and educated young people being lured into the menace of substance abuse. It has engulfed all sections of Kashmiri society, posing a significant threat to humanity, public health, and the nation's security (Parvaiz, 2019). Continuous media reports, law enforcement agencies, and experts have reported that the use of psychoactive substances, especially among college students, has increased rapidly and has resulted in significant dropouts, crimes, and violence, agitation, and fatal deaths. Besides, the growing number of seized drugs, overdose deaths, and illicit drug trafficking-related cases registered by the state police and health professionals indicates that the Kashmir region has become a main hub of drug business and consumption (Margoob, 2008). Dilbag Singh, the director general of police of Jammu and Kashmir, has said, "Narcotics is the biggest challenge after terrorism. It keeps alive terrorism (by financing it) and second it destroys youth" (The Week, 2021). The world drug report has estimated that there are 70,000 thousand substance users including, 4000 women in Kashmir (UNODC, 2008).

Further to the recent nationwide survey conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Government of India has reported that there are 6 lakh substance users in J&K (accounts 4.65%) of the total population. Further, the report also stated that 80% of substance users are from the Kashmir region (MoSJE, 2019). In addition, many studies conducted in the valley has reported that various illicit substances such as charas, ganga, heroin,

cocaine, alcohol, morphine, codeine, inhalants, and other harmful psychoactive drugs are frequently abused by the student community in Kashmir (Naqshbandi & Mudasir, 2012; Bhat & Imtiaz, 2017). The use of psychoactive substances has destroyed the moral and cultural ethos of society and brought disastrous consequences for drug users' health, families, and society at large. The widespread proliferation of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances has painted a bleak image, especially among students. In this background, the study was carried out to investigate the socio-cultural and individual determinants of substance abuse among college students in the North Kashmir valley.

METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this study was to investigate the socio-cultural and individual determinants of substance abuse among college students. The specific objectives of the study include:

- To identify the socio-demographic profile of the respondents
- To find out the various substances abused by the respondents
- To find out the socio-cultural and individual determinants of the substance use

The study was carried out among students currently enrolled in different colleges viz, Government degree college Sopore, Baramulla, Sumbal, and Bandipora located in the North Kashmir region of India. For this study, 320 respondents (college students) with different academic backgrounds were selected, and 280 respondents finished the study. The present study used snow ball sampling type of non-probability sampling techniques. Through the snowball sampling technique, active substance abusers were contacted from different colleges in the North Kashmir region of India. The snowball sampling technique, also known as chain sampling, is actually used to scrutinize and study the specific, sensitive, and hidden or vulnerable group of individuals such as drug users, sex workers, delinquents, and criminals. Besides, this technique was also used because it was evident that the sampling frame does not exist and the best method of selection was personal contact. A questionnaire was used as the main research tool for collecting data. Respondents were instructed on how to fill the questionnaire and informed consent before disturbing the questionnaire. They were also assured that their personal information should be kept confidential and used for academic

purposes only. The questionnaire comprises a number of questions, including demographic profile, types of substance (including charas, codeine, opium, alcohol, spasmoproxyvon tablets, tramadol, diazepam, and inhalants, etc.), and socio-cultural and individual determinants of substance use. Students who used other substances such as smoking cigarettes, bidi, hookah, gutkha, and pan were excluded from this study. After collecting information, the data was tabulated with the help of statistical analysis by using simple percentages and graphical representations.

RESULTS

Demographic profile

Among 320 college students (respondents), 280 respondents completed a questionnaire. The demographic profile of the respondents is summarized in Table 1. Out of 280 respondents, 78.5% were males, and 21.5% were females in this study. All the respondents were categorized into four age groups, the high prevalence of substance abuse found in the age group of 20-22 years which accounts for 32.1%, followed by 28.6% in the age group of 22-24 years; 21.5% in the age group of 18-20 years and 17.8% in the age group of above 24 years. More than three-fourth (76.8%) of respondents are unmarried, and 23.2% are married. The overwhelming majority (60.7%) of respondents were from nuclear families, and 39.3% are from joint families. A 53.5% respondent is from an urban background, and 46.5% are from rural areas. The majority (55%) of the respondents have enrolled BA (Bachelor of Arts) course, followed by 25% in the BSC (Bachelor of Science) course; 14.2% in BCA (Bachelor of Computer Science), and 5.8% of respondents are pursuing other courses such as Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Fine Arts. This study reveals that a large number (78.5%) of substance users are males (76.8%), are unmarried and (60.7%) belong to the nuclear family, and (53.5%) are from an urban background. In addition, the study also found that the majority of the substance users fall between the age group of 20-24 years (accounts together 60.7%), and a high proportion of respondents were studying Bachelor of Arts course.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (college students)

Variables	Frequency (%)	Variables	Frequency (%)
Gender		Marital status	
Male	220 (78.5)	Married	65 (23.2)
Female	60 (21.5)	Unmarried	215 (76.8)
Age group (years)		Course pursuing	
18-20	60 (21.5)	BA	154 (55)
20-22	90 (32.1)	BSC	70 (25)
22-24	80 (28.6)	BCA	40 (14.2)
Above 24 years	50 (17.8)	Other courses	16 (5.8)
Family type		Residence	
Nuclear	170 (60.7)	Rural	130 (46.5)
Joint	110 (39.3)	Urban	150 (53.5)

Types of substances used

Figure I shows the various types of substances used by the respondents. The information obtained from the respondents reveals that 22% of respondents were used charas, followed by 33% were used opium, 3% used alcohol, 16% used codeine, and 40% used spasmoproxyvon (for non-medical purposes). Further, a small number (5%) of respondents were using tramadol, 4% were taking diazepam tablets, and 9% were taking other substances, including inhalants like shoe polish, paint thinner, fluid, ganga, and nicotine. The study indicates that college-going students are used various substances in which spasmoproxyvon tablets; opium, charas, and codeine are the main substances. However, it is important to note that most of the respondents are poly users; they are using multiple substances at a time.

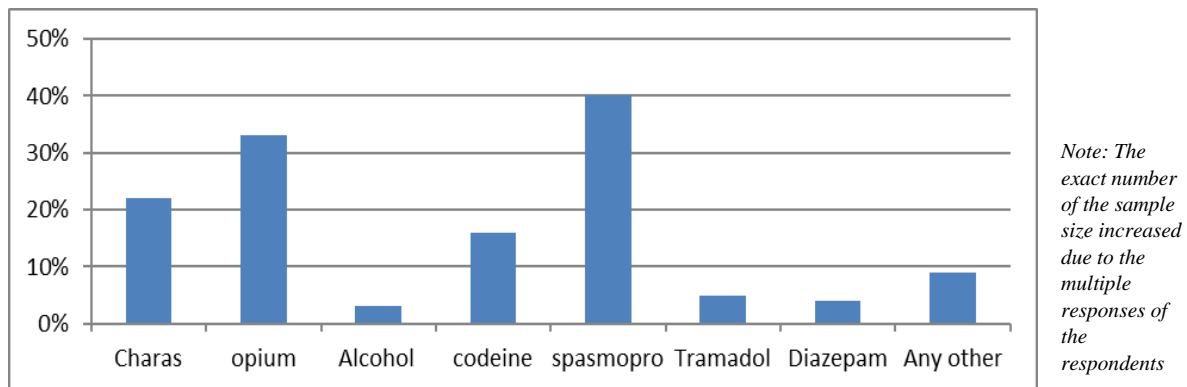


Figure 1: Types of substances used by respondents (college students)

Socio-cultural determinants of substance abuse

The Figure 2 shows the socio-cultural determinants of substance abuse among respondents. The data in the graph reveals that 36% of respondents were using substances due to the influence of peer groups or pressure groups. Further, 28% has used substance due to the easy availability in their locality, 21% has reported a family problem, 11% has said financial stress, and 4% of respondents have mentioned other reasons including parental divorce, separation, and parental deaths, etc. their involvement in substance abuse. The study found that socio-cultural determinants such as peer group influence, easy availability, and financial and environmental conditions play a vital role in shaping individual substance abuse behaviour.

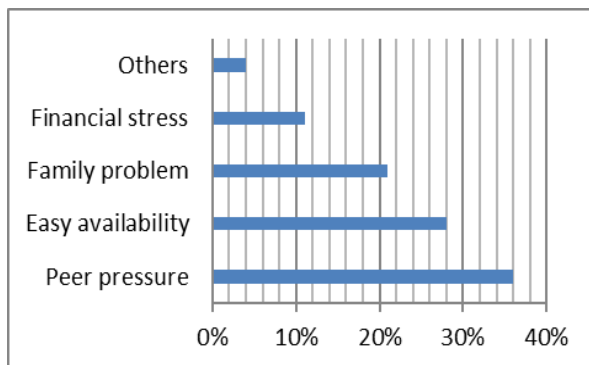


Figure 2: Socio-cultural determinants of substance use

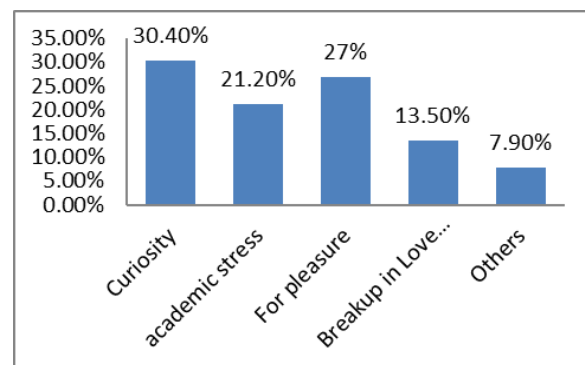


Figure 3: Individual determinants of substance use

Individual determinants of substance abuse among

The data in Figure 3 represents the individual determinants of substance abuse among respondents. The study results show that 30.40% of the respondents are consuming substances due to curiosity, followed by 27% has reported seeking pleasure, and 21.20% of respondents have said academic stress is the leading cause of the use of substances. Further, a small number (13.50%) of respondents have said breakup in love affairs, and 7.90% have mentioned other reasons such as low performance in exams, unemployment, intimate partner violence, and chronic stress. The study confirms that substance abuse among college students is the result of many socio-cultural and individual determinants beyond psychological disorders and genetic factors.

DISCUSSION

Substance abuse among students is a global public health concern. Many researchers have become a focus due to its high prevalence and adverse consequences on health, family, and academic achievements. The trend and pattern of illicit substance use among students are quite frightening in Kashmir valley. There are various factors attributed to this problem. Research studies have shown that social, cultural, family, and individual factors play a main in the use of substances (Morera et al., 2015; Malla, 2019; Feyisa, 2021). This study investigates the socio-cultural and individual determinants of substance abuse among the college student community. In this study, large numbers of respondents (78.8%) are males and (76.8%) are unmarried. This supports O'Hara's study, which found that male and unmarried youth are more susceptible to substance use than females for various reasons (O'Hara et al., 2016). This may be because married users have more family responsibilities than unmarried people. Besides, marriage has been found to be the most protective factor against anti-social behaviour like drug abuse, gambling, and crimes. The study found that respondents from nuclear families and urban backgrounds are more involved in psychoactive substance abuse than those from joint families and rural areas. This supports the findings of many research studies (Miller & Volk, 2002; Rabie et al, 2020), who revealed that structure, type of family, and living place influence the individuals' involvement in aberrant behaviour like substance abuse.

Further, in our study, a high proportion of the substance users (students) fall into the age group of 18-24 years, which together accounts for 82.5% of the total samples. This is a very worrisome picture, especially during this stage. Raphael (2010) presented relative findings, who conducted a community-based study, among students and revealed that most of the drug users belong in the age group of 19-25 years. Studies have reported that the adolescent period, which is known as the period of stress and strain, is the most vulnerable group for substance and drug abuse behaviour (Barkus & Murray, 2010). With regard to course pursuing, arts bachelor's degree students have a higher prevalence of substance abuse than others. This may be due to the fact that medical and other courses students are more conscious of the negative effects of substance abuse on health, academics, and family. This study finds that substances such as spasmoproxyvon tablets, opium, charas, and codeine are the most frequently abused psychoactive substances, followed by alcohol, tramadol, diazepam, and other

substances like shoe polish; paint thinner, fluid, and nicotine. Many research studies conducted in India and abroad have confirmed that substances such as nicotine, alcohol, cannabis, opioids, depressant drugs, pharmaceuticals, and psychoactive substances are commonly abused by students (Jenkins, 2011; Bhat & Imtiaz, 2017). Social and cultural determinants play an important role in shaping individuals' behaviour, including substance abuse. The findings of this study demonstrated a substantial relationship between most socio-cultural variables and substance abuse. Peer group influence, easy availability, negative family relationships, history of substance use, and financial stress can be regarded as potential risk factors because they are more directly connected to the dynamic use of legal and illicit substances (Namita, 2017; Jiloha, 2009). The influence of peer groups during adolescence or schooling years has a crucial impact on one's engagement in substance abuse behaviour (Simons-Morton & Farhat, 2010). This study supports the findings of several regional and global research studies that show the social influence of sociability on substance use behaviour is extremely substantial, and social attitudes play a major role in drug use behaviour (Kobus, 2003; Caceres et al., 2006; Steinberg & Monahan, 2007).

In addition, there is also evidence that social, environmental factors such as easy availability of drugs, parental substance use, and family problems play a leading role in an individual's substance abuse behaviour (Ahmadi et al., 2006; Daley, 2013). Regarding the individual determinants of substance abuse, our study found that curiosity, seeking pleasure, fun, and academic stress were the main individual determinants of substance abuse among students. This supports the findings of many research bodies who revealed that being curious, seeking pleasure, and coping with academic stress are the main motivating factors for substance use among the student community (Boys, 2001; Bahreinian et al., 2004; Foo et al., 2012). The phenomenon of psychoactive substances and the involvement of college students is a complicated problem associated with many determinants, such as socio-cultural, familial, psychological, and individual. However, this study examined certain elements of the relationship between socio-cultural and individual determinants as moderating agents for the use of psychoactive substances. It found that the use of psychoactive substances in this community is rising and should be a warning to all professionals working in higher education, parents, drug control agencies, and policy-making organizations.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, we conclude that many socio-cultural and personal variables have a significant impact on the use of illicit psychoactive substances among college students. Substance abuse during this period has destructive consequences on their health, academic career, and goals and prevents them from utilizing their talents and skills. So it appears that we need goal-directed programmes to minimize and prevent the use of psychoactive substances, improve awareness and increase students' understanding of the adverse effects of the use of psychoactive substances during this period.

LIMITATION

The present study was limited only to college students, consists 280 respondents from six government degree colleges located in two districts of the North Kashmir region in India. The study population was too large, consisting of thousands of substance users. Hence, the researcher could not study the substance abuse among college students in all the colleges of North Kashmir within the available resource. Students experience different conditions in each college, and various variables impact their attitudes. Therefore, we cannot generalize these findings to the whole college students because of the availability of the substance, location, exposure, and different lifestyle, familial, socioeconomic, and individual determinants. We attempted to address this problem by choosing students from several government colleges to uniform our sample, decrease research bias and collect more homogeneous information about them.

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