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Determinants of Narcotics Consumption Among Youth and Pathways for Change: A Study Conducted in Lahore

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the contributing factors of drug usage among youth in Lahore, with a focus on identifying the socio-economic, psychological, and cultural elements that drive young individuals towards substance abuse. The research highlights several key factors, including peer pressure, family dynamics, and socio-economic challenges such as

Poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, the availability of illicit drugs, combined with the lack of education and awareness about the consequences of addiction, has been identified as a critical factor. These elements not only influence the inclination towards drug usage but also hinder preventive measures and intervention efforts. By understanding these contributing factors in the context of Lahore's urban environment, this study provides valuable insights into the root causes of youth drug addiction.

1 Introduction

Drug addiction among youth is a global issue, affecting millions of lives and posing challenges to societies. In developing countries like Pakistan, the problem has reached alarming proportions, particularly in urban areas. Lahore, one of the largest cities in Pakistan, is witnessing an increasing prevalence of narcotics usage among its youth. The city's socio economic dynamics, coupled with the availability of

drugs, make it a significant focus for research on substance abuse. Understanding the factors that lead youth toward drug addiction is critical for developing targeted interventions.

Narcotics usage among young people not only affects their health but also disrupts their personal and social lives (Friedman, Rossi & Braine, 2009). Addiction leads to decreased productivity, strained family relationships and increased criminal activities. In a society where youth are considered the backbone of future progress, the growing trend of drug addiction represents a serious threat to societal development. This study aims to delve into the underlying factors contributing to this issue and propose solutions to curb it.

The rising tide of drug addiction among youth in Lahore is fueled by a complex array of factors, including socio-economic hardships, peer pressure and the increasing availability of narcotics. In many cases, young individuals, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, face limited opportunities for education and employment, pushing them toward substance use as a means of coping with their frustration and feelings of hopelessness.

Additionally, the influence of social networks and the desire for acceptance among peers further exacerbates the issue, with drug use often seen as a way to gain social status or alleviate emotional distress (Alexander, 2010). These factors, combined with the growing drug trade, have created a vicious cycle, where addiction not only affects individual health but also weakens the fabric of the community as a whole.

2 Research Question

What are the furnishing factors of drug usage among youth?

3 Research Objectives

To examine the imparting factors of drug usage among youth

4 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on global factors influencing drug usage highlights a complex interplay of socio-economic, psychological and cultural dimensions. Studies conducted in North America and Europe emphasize the role of peer pressure, family dysfunction and mental health issues as critical drivers of youth substance abuse (Windle, 2000). Additionally, globalization and technological advancements, such as the rise of dark web markets have made narcotics more accessible to young people contributing to a surge in addiction rates.

Furthermore, cultural and regional variations significantly influence patterns of drug use.

For instance, the opioid crisis in the United States differs starkly from cannabis use trends in African nations (Gfroerer, Larson & Colliver, 2007). Such global research underscores the importance of context-specific strategies in addressing youth drug addiction. These findings provide a foundation for examining regional and local factors contributing to narcotics usage among the youth of Lahore.

The global patterns of drug usage also reveal a significant link between economic instability and substance abuse. In regions plagued by poverty and unemployment, youth are more likely to turn to drugs as a means of escapism or as a response to their limited opportunities for growth (Casal, Rivera &

Costa-Storti, 2023). This is particularly evident in developing countries where social safety nets are inadequate, and drug trafficking networks exploit vulnerable populations. Similarly, the growing influence of social media and pop culture, which often glamorize drug use, has further normalized these behaviors, creating an environment where substance abuse is perceived as a coping mechanism or a marker of social identity among young people.

In Lahore, these global trends are mirrored and compounded by local challenges. The city's urbanization has brought about significant socio-economic disparities, leaving many young individuals feeling alienated and disillusioned. Peer pressure, combined with the easy availability of drugs, has created a fertile ground for substance abuse to thrive. Additionally, the stigma surrounding addiction and mental health in Pakistani society often prevents youth from seeking help, exacerbating the problem (Pakistan, 2024). By drawing on global research and analysing its relevance to Lahore's socio-cultural context, this study aims to uncover actionable insights for addressing youth narcotics usage in a way that is both contextually relevant and informed by international best practices.

In South Asia, a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors contributes to the rising prevalence of drug usage, particularly among youth. Economic hardship, poverty, and limited job opportunities often push individuals toward substance abuse as a means of coping with stress and hopelessness (Rhodes & Jason, 1990). Additionally, peer pressure and social networks play a significant role in initiating drug use, as young people often seek acceptance or validation through substance experimentation. Cultural factors also contribute, with certain substances like opium and cannabis being historically integrated into traditional practices, reducing their perceived risk. Furthermore, the proximity to major drug producing regions and weak law enforcement exacerbates the availability and accessibility of narcotics, especially synthetic drugs, in urban areas. Mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, often lead individuals to self-medicate, further fueling addiction. Together, these factors create a challenging environment for addressing drug usage and addiction in the region.

4.1 Poverty and Socio-Economic Stress

Poverty and socio-economic stress are significant contributors to drug usage in South Asia, particularly among youth. Economic hardship, lack of employment opportunities and low social mobility often lead individuals to seek escape through substance abuse. The pressures of poverty, combined with feelings of hopelessness and frustration, can drive young people to use drugs as a means of coping with their circumstances, leading to a cycle of addiction. In many cases, these socio-economic factors create a fertile ground for drug trafficking networks to exploit vulnerable populations (Benfer, 2015). Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that combines poverty alleviation with targeted interventions to break the link between economic struggles and substance abuse.

4.2 Drug Trafficking and Accessibility

Drug trafficking is a major factor influencing drug usage in South Asia, where the region's proximity to key drug-producing countries makes it a hotspot for smuggling and distribution. Weak border controls, corrupt practices, and limited law enforcement allow

illicit drugs to flood local markets, making them easily accessible to youth (Emmers, 2003). The availability of drugs, particularly in urban areas, increases the likelihood of experimentation and addiction, as young people encounter these substances in their communities and social circles. This unchecked flow of narcotics not only undermines public health but also strengthens organized crime networks, further destabilizing the region. Combating drug trafficking requires regional cooperation and robust policy implementation to curb supply and reduce its impact on vulnerable populations.

4.3 Peer Influence and Social Networks

Peer influence and social networks play a critical role in the initiation and continuation of drug use among youth in Lahore. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, often experimenting with drugs as a means to fit in or gain acceptance within their social groups. Social networks, including family and close friends, can normalize substance use, making it easier for young people to access and become involved with drugs (Amara, Rao & Siddiqui, 2023). As these networks often shape behavior, their influence can significantly contribute to the escalation of drug use within communities. Moreover, the lack of positive role models and constructive social environments further amplifies this trend. Interventions aimed at reshaping social norms and fostering supportive peer relationships are crucial to breaking this cycle of influence.

4.4 Cultural Acceptance and Traditions

In some regions of South Asia, drug use is intertwined with cultural practices and traditions, which can normalize substance consumption within certain communities. For instance, substances like opium and hashish have historical and ritualistic significance in some cultures, leading to their widespread acceptance. This cultural context makes challenging to view drug use solely as a health issue, as it may be seen as a socially accepted behavior or even a rite of passage, especially among certain social groups. Such cultural attitudes can reduce the perceived risks of drug use, increasing the likelihood of young people engaging in substance abuse (Westermeyer, 2005). Additionally, these traditions often hinder the implementation of modern prevention strategies, as they conflict with deeply rooted societal norms. Addressing this issue requires culturally sensitive approaches that respect traditions while promoting awareness of the risks associated with substance abuse.

4.5 Lack of Education and Awareness

A significant factor contributing to drug usage in South Asia is the lack of education and awareness about the dangers of substance abuse. In many communities, there is limited access to accurate information regarding the health risks of drugs, and young people may not fully understand the long-term physical, psychological, and social consequences. Without comprehensive educational programs in schools, communities, and media, youth remain vulnerable to experimentation and addiction (Moloney & Hunt, 2012). Additionally, the stigma around drug use often prevents open discussions, further exacerbating the issue and hindering efforts to address the problem at its roots.

5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The constructivist paradigm, which forms the philosophical basis of this qualitative study, acknowledges that individuals actively construct their own understandings of reality via social interactions. Denicolo (2016) asserts that this point of view emphasizes the significance of background, culture and individual experiences in shaping a person's worldview. To examine the contributing factors of drug usage among youth qualitative research method approach is adopted. This approach is particularly beneficial as it facilitates a deep and comprehensive understanding of the various factors that shape youth perceptions and behaviors regarding substance use. The universe of this study is Lahore.

The target demographic for this research include youth, students of colleges and university who are involved or have seen their colleagues getting involved in drug use. To gain an over view and insight of factors contributing for pushing youth towards drug use, data has also be gathered from the parents of these students, police officials, medical officials and legal experts. Participants has been selected using purposive sampling technique, which helped in narrowing down the participant pool to those most relevant to the study.

The sample size consists of 35 participants, including ten students, six parents, five medical officials, ten law enforcement officials, two legal experts and two educational institution officials. The chosen research design for this study is a case study methodology, which is particularly effective for achieving an in depth understanding of the topic.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors	Description
Escape from Emotional Struggles	The initial motivation behind drug use was driven by a desire to escape emotional pain, loneliness, and stress, revealing that many youths may turn to substances as a coping mechanism.
Peer Influence	The influence of friends and social circles played a significant role in the decision to start using drugs, highlighting the importance of peer pressure in young people's choices.
Family Dynamics	Dysfunctional family environments, lack of support, and emotional neglect were key factors in the inclination toward drug use, as they contributed to feelings of isolation and low self-worth.
Impact on Family Finances	The drug habit created an economic strain on the family, as financial resources were diverted to support the addiction,

	leading to financial instability and emotional distress for parents.
Family's Efforts to Intervene	Despite the challenges, family members tried various methods to intervene, including seeking professional help and enrolling in rehabilitation programs, showing the vital role of family support in the recovery process.
Denial and Resistance to Help	Initially, there was resistance to accepting the addiction, which delayed intervention, emphasizing the difficulty addicts face in acknowledging their problem and accepting help.
Financial and Emotional Sacrifices	In South Asia, a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors contributes to the rising prevalence of drug usage, particularly among youth. Economic hardship, poverty, and limited job opportunities often push individuals toward substance abuse as a means of coping with stress and hopelessness (Rhodes & Jason, 1990). Additionally, peer pressure and social networks play a significant role in initiating drug use, as young people often seek acceptance or validation through substance experimentation. Cultural factors also contribute, with certain substances like opium and cannabis being historically integrated into traditional practices, reducing their perceived risk. Furthermore, the proximity to major drug producing regions and weak law enforcement exacerbates the availability and accessibility of narcotics, especially synthetic drugs, in urban areas. Mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, often lead individuals to self-medicate, further fueling addiction. Together, these factors create a challenging environment for addressing drug usage and addiction in the region.
Mental Health Decline	Drug use resulted in severe mental health consequences, including anxiety, depression, and cognitive impairments,

	demonstrating the long-term psychological impact of addiction.
Physical Health Deterioration	Addiction led to noticeable physical health problems such as weight loss, fatigue, and organ damage, reflecting the severe toll drugs take on the body.
Cycle of Addiction and Recovery	The answers highlight the cyclical nature of addiction, where drugs initially provide temporary relief but ultimately cause more harm, and underscore the importance

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 Strengthen Awareness and Education Campaigns
- 7.2 Enhance Accessibility to Mental Health Services
- 7.3 Family-Centered Interventions
- 7.4 Empower Educational Institutions
- 7.5 Community-Based Prevention and Rehabilitation
- 7.6 Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks
- 7.7 Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration
- 7.8 Leverage Media for Advocacy
- 7.9 Improve Rehabilitation Facilities of family support and professional help in breaking the cycle and starting recovery.

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