

## Awareness towards Drug Abuse and its Associated Factors in Young Adults of Kashmir, North India: A Cross Sectional Study

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### Abstract:

**Introduction:** Drug abuse has been defined as an extreme desire to obtain and use increasing amounts of one or more substances. The risk factors for developing drug abuse problems include peer pressure, curiosity, and conflict in personal relations. **Objective:** 1. To assess awareness of young adults of Kashmir towards drug abuse. 2. To assess the perspectives of the participants regarding factors responsible for drug abuse. **Method:** An online cross-sectional study was conducted among 300 young adults of Kashmir, North India in month of September 2022. Details regarding the socio-demographic characteristics and awareness about the drug abuse were collected using semi-structured questionnaire. **Results:** Almost all of the participants (96.6%) had heard about drug abuse and about (63.3%) reported mass media as the main source of information. Half of participants knew that sedatives, painkillers, opiod derivates (like charas, heroine and cocaine) cause addiction. **Conclusion:** The present study showed that young adults of Kashmir had good level awareness regarding substance abuse, which helped in analyzing youth awareness of substance abuse and associated harm from their use..


**Keywords:** Awareness, Drug Abuse, Young adults

### Introduction:

Drug abuse has become a global phenomenon affecting almost every country though the extent and characteristics vary depending on the country in question. The most common substance abused are alcohol, marijuana (ganja), bhang, hashish (charas), various kinds of cough syrups, sedative tablets, brown sugar, heroin, cocaine, tobacco (cigarette, gutka, pan masala) etc. Drug abuse has been defined as a disease in 1956 by the World Health Organization and the American Psychiatric Association. Drug abuse defined as "the excessive, maladaptive, or addictive use of drugs for nonmedical purposes despite social, psychological, and physical problems that may arise from such

use."<sup>[1]</sup> Studies have found a strong correlation between adolescent abuse and becoming a problem drug user in adulthood. Adverse childhood events included abuse (physical, emotional or sexual), neglect (physical or emotional), growing up with household substance abuse, criminality of household members, mental illness among household members, parental discord and illicit drug use. These are the environmental factors that might contribute to drug abuse. However, various biological factors are also suggested to be responsible, including genetic predisposition toward addictive behaviour as well as mental illness like those with ADHD, depression or anxiety.<sup>[2]</sup>

The abuse of alcohol and prescription drugs continues to be a major health problem

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internationally. In 2020, an estimated 284million people worldwide aged 15–64 years, majority of whom were men, had used a drug within the last 12 months. This corresponds to approximately 1 in every 18 people in that age group, or 5.6 per cent, and represents a 26 per cent increase on 2010, when the estimated number of people who used drugs was 226 million and prevalence was 5 per cent.<sup>[3]</sup>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC estimates that worldwide costs related to treating drug abuse total \$200-\$250 billion or 0.3-0.4 per cent of global G. DP.<sup>[4]</sup> In India 28.6% of the population use tobacco and 8 lakh people in India die every year due to tobacco-related diseases.<sup>[5]</sup> UNODC, UNAIDS, WHO and the World Bank jointly estimate that some 11.2 million persons worldwide injected drugs in 2020.<sup>[3,4]</sup> There has been no measurable change in the estimated global prevalence of injecting drug use from the previous estimate for 2019, which was also 0.22 per cent of the population aged 15–64.<sup>[4]</sup>

Kashmir has been through the two decades of turmoil that resulted in an increase of psychiatric illness and psychosocial disturbances. A number of psychiatric problems have emerged like depression, OCD, PTSD, Drug Addiction, etc. According to a survey conducted by United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) there are seventy thousand drug addicts in Kashmir division alone. In Kashmir valley 65% to 70% students are drug addicts.<sup>[6]</sup> As per government psychiatric disease hospital statistics, 90% abusers belong to the age group of 17 to 35 years with a lifetime prevalence of drug addiction.<sup>[6]</sup> Kashmir, known for its attraction for tourists and migrant laborers which increases rate of different drug use among drug addicts. Easily availability from parent gateway drugs like Cigarette, Naas, Hookah etc are commonly used by young people aging 12-15 years. The current study is conducted as the research regarding awareness on drug abuse is grossly lacking among Kashmiri young adults.

### Objectives:

1. To assess awareness of young adults of Kashmir towards drug abuse.
2. To assess the perspectives of the participants regarding factors responsible for drug abuse.

### Method:

A cross-sectional study was carried out in Kashmir, part of northern India. An online semi structured questionnaire was developed using Google forms with a consent form attached to it. The link of the questionnaire was sent through emails, WhatsApp and other social media platforms to the participants. The online self-reported questionnaire contained the sections related to awareness towards drug abuse and questions for factors responsible for drug abuse. A total of 300 responses were recorded using convenience sampling technique. Ethical approval was sought before conducting the study. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participant's information were also ensured

### Statistical analysis:

The data was analysed in SPSS version 23 using descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages in tables.

### Results:

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the respondents, that half of the respondents were between the age ranges of 21-25 years and predominantly males (60%). About 53% belonged to rural areas. Nearly half of the participants (48.3%) were graduates. Around 52.3% were unemployed.

Table 2 depicts that almost all of the participants (96.6%) had heard about drug abuse and about (63.3%) reported mass media as the main source of information. Half of participants knew that sedatives, painkillers, opioid derivatives (like charas, heroine and cocaine) cause addiction. Almost all (94%) of the respondents knew that drugs cause complications

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Study Participants (N=300)**

Variables	N(%)
<b>Age (Years) N=300)</b>	
16-20	77(25.7%)
21-25	159(53.0%)
26-30	24 (8.0%)
31-35	40(13.3%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	180 (60.0%)
Female	120(40.0%)
<b>Residence</b>	
Urban	132(44.0%)
Rural	168(56.0%)
<b>Educational status</b>	
Illiterate	30(10.0%)
Primary school	0
Middle school	0
High School	125(41.7%)
Graduate and above	145(48.3%)
<b>Occupation</b>	
Unemployed	157(52.3%)
Government employee	63(21.0%)
Private employee	18(6.0%)
Self employed	62(20.7%)
<b>Monthly Family income (INR)</b>	
5000-10000	97 (32.3%)
11000-20000	30 (10.0%)
21000-30000	45 (15.0%)
31000 and above	128 (42.7%)

**Table 2: Awareness of study participants about drug abuse (N=300)**

Variables	N (%)
<b>Ever heard about drug abuse</b>	
Yes	290(96.6%)
No	10(3.3%)
<b>If yes, source of information (n=290)</b>	
Mass media	189(65%)
Family	35(12%)
Friends	17(6%)
Relatives	19(7%)
Teachers	30(10%)
<b>Drugs which can cause addiction (n=290)</b>	
Sedatives	188(62.6%)
Charas (Cannabis)	260( 86.6%)
Codeine	203( 67.6%)
Cocaine	200 (66.6%)
Sedatives	188 (62.6%)
Heroin	155 (51.6%)
Painkillers	150(50%)
Morphine	92(30.6%)
Naswar	82(27.3%)
<b>Complications caused by addictive drugs (n=290)</b>	
Dependence to drugs	282 (94%)
Anxiety and depression	263( 87.6%)
Aggressiveness	250(83.2%)
Sleep disorder	243( 81.9%)
Seeing and hearing images	240 (79.9%)
Forgetfulness	234(77.9%)
<b>Various forms of drugs available in market</b>	
Oral	194(66%)
Injectable	96 (34%)

**Table 3: Participants' Perspectives on Factors Responsible for Illegal Drug Abuse**

Variables	N (%)
Peer pressure	215 (71.8%)
Unemployment	175(58.4%)
Curiosity	167(55.7%)
Easy availability	145(48.3%)
Lack of awareness	145(48.3%)
Family dispute	139(46.3%)

like dependence to drugs followed by anxiety and depression (87.6%) and aggressiveness (83.2%). About (66%) were aware that oral forms of drugs are available in market. Table 3 shows factors responsible for illegal drug abuse among study participants. Majority of participants revealed peer pressure as important reason for illegal drug abuse.

Participants suggested various ways for prevention of drug abuse. About 83.6% of them considered counseling and awareness programmes as effective ways for prevention of drug abuse.

### Discussion

The current study illuminated awareness towards drug abuse among young adults of Kashmir. Around 190 (96.6%) had awareness regarding drug abuse and there was a significant difference ( $p$  value  $<0.005$ ) between the male and female respondents on the level of awareness regarding drug abuse, especially the males reported higher level of awareness compared to females. Similar result was also found in the study conducted on drug abuse among secondary institution in Bayelsa state<sup>[8]</sup> Respondents in the study reported mass media as main source of information which was similar with the study that revealed mass media as most frequent source of information<sup>[9-12]</sup> The study highlighted that the respondents in the age group 20-25 years reported to have a good awareness about drug abuse and various forms of drugs available although no significant difference was found between them. In spite of having adequate awareness regarding drug abuse and its complications, still the respondents especially, the females in age group 20-25 years reported to have abused locally purchased prescription drugs more than once in their life time and a significant difference was found ( $p$  value  $<0.005$ ). The possible reason for this might be due to the fact that prescribed drugs are easily available and affordable in the market this was in line with study that showed substance abuse among young adults depends upon its availability in their neighborhood<sup>[11,12]</sup>

Level of awareness of drugs that cause addiction among respondents include charas(86 %), cocaine (66%), sedatives( 62%), heroine (52%), painkillers (50%). About two third had awareness that oral form of drug is readily available in market. Almost all respondents considered dependency to be the most common complication of drug abuse followed by anxiety and depression, sleep disorder and aggressiveness. Among the psychotropic substance, respondents believed that charas usually caused drug addiction which was in line with the study on the predisposing factors associated with drug abuse who reported that the rate of charas abuse amongst youths has increased radically.<sup>[13]</sup> In a similar way, a study on the factors influencing substance abuse among undergraduate students also revealed that charas is cheap and can easily be purchased from drug peddlers.<sup>[14,15]</sup> The respondents of this study gave their various reasons why these substances are consumed and majority pointed out that peer pressure, unemployment, curiosity, family dispute, lack of awareness and easy availability of drugs to be the common reasons for drug abuse. This study helped us to identify the various reasons why these substances are abused by young adults and this was in favor with the study done in students in tertiary institutions which showed the reasons that led to the high consumption of these substances includes peer pressure, curiosity, relieve from anxiety etc.<sup>[15]</sup> It was also revealed that peer pressure may serve as a powerful tool to much deviant behavior because pressure from friends can impair good sense, wisdom and prove hazardous to students into dangerous activities and this was in line with the study done by Bhat et al<sup>[16]</sup> The awareness among respondents regarding drug abuse prevention showed that majority believed supportive counseling session, awareness programmes to be the main methods of drug abuse prevention, about (79%)considered rehabilitation and supportive treatment as ways to prevent abuse among young adults.<sup>[17]</sup>Liddle et al compared multidimensional

family therapy with individual cognitive behavioral therapy and found it to be more effective in reducing the severity of drug addiction<sup>[18]</sup> as well as awareness programmes in schools like reconnecting youth at school based prevention programmes for high school students with poor school progress and a potential for not completing their education aims at increasing school performance, reducing the drug abuse and improving the learning skills to manage mood and emotions.

### **Conclusion:**

The present study showed that young adults of Kashmir had good awareness of substance abuse. According to participants, factors that can be responsible for increasing drug usage were peer pressure, unemployment, curiosity, family dispute, lack of knowledge awareness and easy availability of drugs. As per the respondents prospects drug abuse prevention could be possible with supportive counseling session, rehabilitation, awareness programmes at family, community and school level.

### **Declaration:**

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