

UNDERSTANDING DRUG ADDICTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF HAZARA UNIVERSITY

Arif Muhammad¹, Khalil Ur Rahman², Rabia Bibi³, Navid Ahmad^{*4}

^{1,*4}Affiliation Hazara University mansehra, M.Phil Scholar,

²Associate professor department of sociology Hazara University Mansehra

³Hazara University Mansehra

¹arifaadee@gmail.com, ²khalil.socio@hu.edu.pk, ³rb4730186@gmail.com, ^{*4}navidahmad526@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16750342>

Keywords

Drug addiction; University students; Peer pressure; Pakistan; Hazara University; Substance abuse

Article History

Received: 06 May, 2025

Accepted: 20 July, 2025

Published: 06 August, 2025

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Corresponding Author: *

Navid Ahmad

Abstract

This study explores the underlying causes and consequences of drug addiction among students at Hazara University, Pakistan. Both qualitative and quantitative method were used for 15 undergraduate students identified through snowball sampling. The results indicate that family-related factors, peer pressure and psychological stress were key contributors to drug use. Commonly abused substances included snuff (naswar), cigarettes, marijuana, and, in fewer cases, ice and alcohol. The study also reveals significant academic, social and health implications of drug addiction. Recommendations are made for institutional monitoring, targeted intervention programs and awareness campaigns to moderate drug use among university students.

INTRODUCTION

Drug addiction to drugs is evolving into a serious problem of public health concern and a social disorder, not only in a country like Pakistan but also in many other parts of the world. Pakistan is reported to have approximately 6.45 million drug users (UNODC, 2013) in the age cohort of 15 to 64 years and more recently, there are alarming reports of rising drug use among university students (Sajid et al., 2020). In spite of some efforts being made by the government and other relevant bodies, the situation continues to exist because of rampant drug availability and ineffective blockage approaches, and the acceptance of drug abuse amongst social circles (Zaman et al., 2015).

This case study is centered on Hazara University, a public sector university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in order to explore the reasons, and the scope of the problem as well as the consequent effects of drug abuse among students. By working directly with the students impacted, this study seeks to develop evidence based strategies to address this issue. Addiction to alcohol and drugs is identified as a major public health issue owing to its detrimental repercussions on health, mental well-being, society and the economy at large. Substance misuse, as outlined by Degenhardt et al. (2016), is linked with a myriad of health conditions such as hepatitis, heart disease, and a range of mental health disorders.

Furthermore, the socioeconomic ramifications encompass unemployment, dysfunctional familial interactions, and deviant criminal activities. The United Nations reports over 180 million drug users globally (Rahaman et al., 2021).

1. Literature Review

Some scholars have noted that students from top-tier colleges, regarded as elite academic institutions, exhibit a greater propensity for drug use (Banken & Foster 2008). Often, adolescents use drugs as a form of entertainment due with a combination of poor family relationships and peer influences (Ahmed et al., 2020). The literature also suggests that males have a greater tendency towards abusing alcohol and drugs in comparison to females (Roncero et al., 2014; Beman, 1995).

Zaman et al. (2015) noted a greater prevalence of drug abuse among male students, particularly enrolled in private colleges in Pakistan. Other studies also point to peer influence, high educational expectations, and lack of family connections as significant factors that promote drug abuse (Sajid et al., 2020). Depression and anxiety, alongside other psychological difficulties, commonly drive students to drugs as a means of coping. Stigma is a prominent factor contributing to the deterioration of drug abuse patients. Stigmatization, as Manthey et al., (2022) noted, deters many individuals from receiving treatment and, as a result, the individual becomes chronically addicted and continues to socially isolate themselves.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

In the context of this study, The Social Learning Theory and The Health Belief Model serve as the two major theoretical perspectives that, respectively, underpin and elucidate student's drug use at a university level.

2.1.1. Social Learning Theory

According to Bandura (1977), behavior is learned through social observation, particularly in contexts that reward specific actions. In high school and college settings, social circles and campus culture can strongly influence the initiation and perpetuation of drug use. Students are more likely to engage in substance use when it is modeled by peers and when it is socially accepted, particularly in contexts where there are no

immediate negative repercussions. This supports the finding that peer pressure was the most common reported reason for drug use initiation among students at Hazara University.

2.1.2. Health Belief Model

Rosenstock (1974) accounts for behaviors in health domains by their associated risks and benefits, focusing on the individual's perception of the specific risks and benefits, together with options to act. It includes the major components: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits of taking preventive action, and perceived barriers. In the case of this study, most students seemed to underestimate the severity of substance abuse, indicating that there was no long-term risk and that usage was controllable. However, the students with the intent to quit suggested that they have, at some point, undergone a perception change where health threats and benefits of cessation were accepted. This perception change reflects the need for holistic awareness and intervention programs aimed at changing, in this case, students' health beliefs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was implemented in both quantitative and qualitative narratives through combining surveys and interviews. Participants were given both closed-ended survey and open-ended interviews.

3.2 Sampling and Population

The scope of this project was Hazara University, focusing on undergraduate students who were identified and/or suspected to be illicit drug users. The selection of participants was done through snowball sampling which yielded a total of fifteen participants.

3.3 Data Collection

The data that was needed was acquired through semi-structured interviews and a pre-tested questionnaire on types of drugs used, drug use initiation, its psychosocial impact, and health ramifications.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative portion of the data was analyzed using SPSS while the qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The respondents' identity was kept confidential. They were informed that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time.

4. Results

4.1 Types of Drugs Used

Reviewing interviews and survey responses demonstrated a shift towards the consumption of more readily available and low-cost drugs (refer to Figure 1). The most frequented drugs were cigarettes and sleeping pills, each noted by around 30% of respondents. Naswar, a smokeless tobacco product, was reported by 25% of participants, along with 10% who reported using marijuana. A smaller fraction (5%) confessed to using alcohol, crystal meth (ice), and other synthetic drugs. While the penetration of hard drugs remains limited among students of Hazara University, these findings suggest that there is widespread concern within the university about substance abuse because of the availability and social acceptance of lighter drugs.

4.2 Initiation and Causes of Drug Use

As reported by 45% of students, peer pressure arises as the primary factor motivating the onset of drug use. Respondents who reported experiencing psychological stress of any kind, such as depression, academic failure, or trauma, composed 25% of the sample. Family issues were reported by 30% of respondents, while permissive parenting or pervasive stress within the home was described as the causative household environment (see Figure 2). Issues such as low institutional oversight or poor availability of drugs were cited by other participants as ancillary contributing factors.

4.3 Health Impacts

Students who abused drugs suffered from a number of health-related issues. From the student's perspective, the most common issue was memory loss (65%), followed by insomnia and anxiety (50%), and

finally, difficulties in breathing, or headaches (40%) (Refer to figure 3). Many students recognized the negative impact drug abuse had on their physical and mental well-being, especially in the long run. While some of the participants believed they could control their drug abuse, the symptoms of dependency and withdrawal, like irritability, low attention span, and fatigue suggested otherwise.

4.4 Academic and Social Consequences

With the information from figure 4, drug and academic performance seem to be correlated and participants had mixed responses as to the academic impact of drug use. While 70% believed drug use was neutral to their performance, anecdotal evidence showed lower attendance, decreased concentration, and diminished motivation. Socially, 67% of participants reported drug-related isolation or interpersonal relationship difficulties. Financially, 88% had problems, the majority of whom reported lending money and compromising their basic needs to feed their addiction. In a positive note, all participants (100%) reported a desire to quit – simply stating they wished to be healthy, regretted the choices made, and sought to stop living under the addiction.

5. Discussion

The results indicate an intricate combination of psychological, social, and environmental elements in motivating students to use drugs. Social support networks are both protective and risk promoting. The acceptability of lower-risk drugs such as cigarettes and snuff desensitize students to the dangers of higher use. While students claimed academic impacts were minimal, the long-term psychological impacts of dependency and memory loss were significant. The impact of family attitudes, whether lax or excessively authoritarian, also emerged as crucial to the problem of drug abuse. The relatively high readiness to quit reported by students suggests that they are likely to respond positively to effective rehabilitation and awareness campaigns. In Pakistan, around 25 to 44 percent of students reported using alcohol and/or drugs, with the numbers steadily increasing. This scenario poses a significant threat to Pakistani educational institutions—schools, colleges and universities (Khattak et al., 2012; Sheffield, Darkes, Del Boca & Goldman, 2005). Rodents and monkeys,

when provided with unlimited access to intravenous cocaine and trained to respond for the drug, will take increasing amounts of cocaine and keep taking it until the point of overdose, convulsing, and death (Wise & Bozarth, 1987; Deneau et al, 1969; Johanson et al, 1976).

6. Conclusion

Students of Hazara University are increasingly vulnerable to addiction as influenced by psychological factors, family dynamics, and peer activity. The results show this demands action in the form of comprehensive institutional reforms and dedicated welfare frameworks. A majority of students wish to stop but are unable to access structured support environment.

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Figures

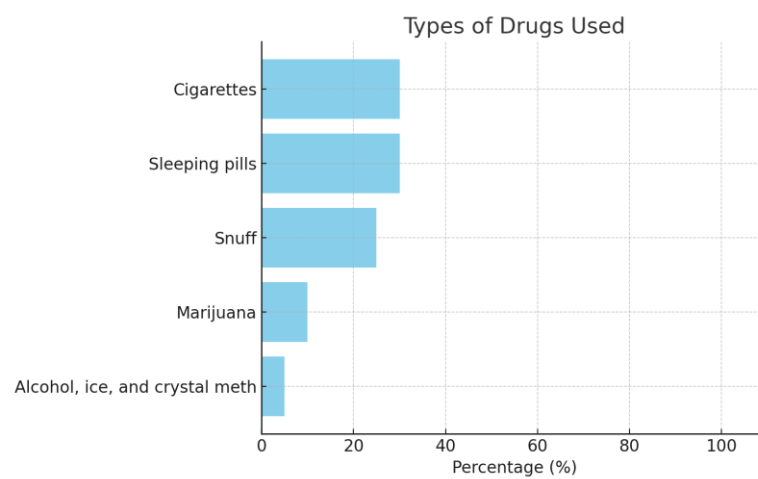


Figure 1. types of drugs used

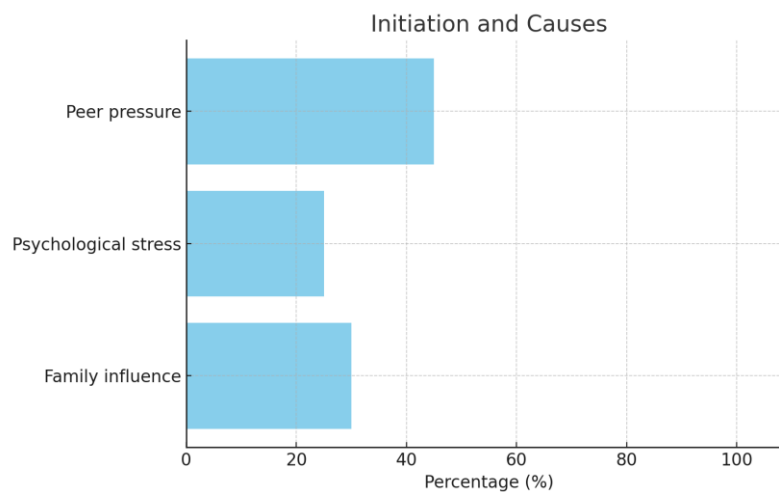


Figure 2. Initiation and Causes

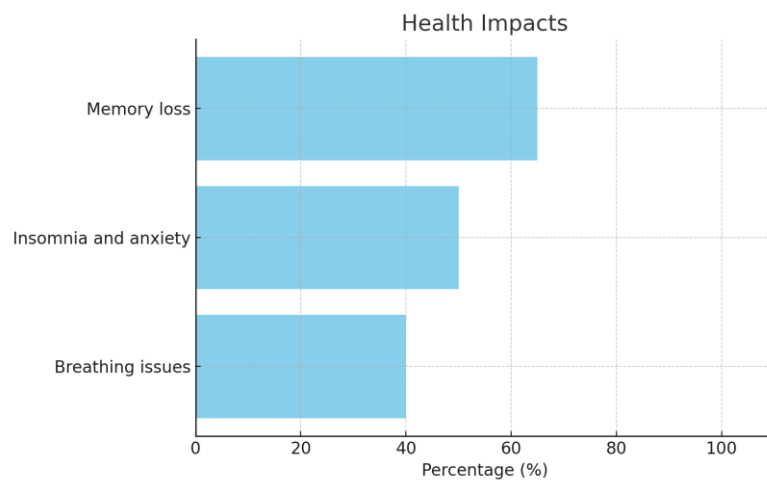


Figure 3. Health Impacts

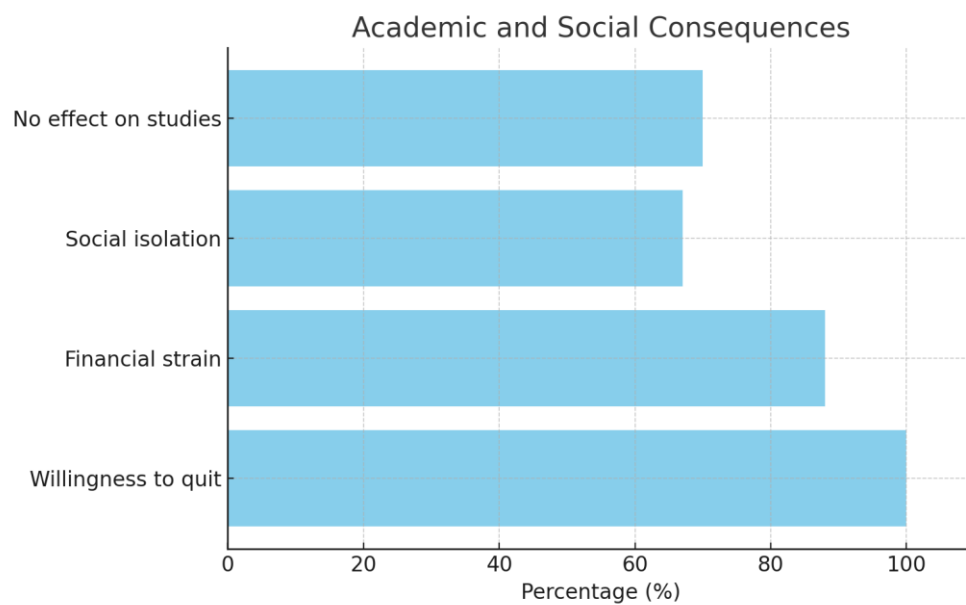


Figure 4. Academic and social consequences.