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Research Article

Awareness of Drug and Substance Abuse Among Female Undergraduates: A Survey-Based Analysis

Monita Dhiman *

Department of Zoology, Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana, Punjab-141002, Bharat(India)

ORCID:0000-0002-5386-9178 *Email:monid.84@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Substance abuse is a significant public health issue, especially among young adults in higher education, due to distinct social, psychological, and biological factors. This study underscores the importance of addressing knowledge of substance abuse in educational settings, particularly among female students who face unique challenges and obstacles both in college and at home.

Purpose: This study aims to evaluate the knowledge and awareness of drug and substance abuse among undergraduate female students, highlighting the need for enhanced and targeted awareness initiatives.

Methods: A survey was administered to a sample of 948 female students enrolled in various graduate-level programs. Data were collected electronically using Google Forms and analyzed to assess the knowledge and awareness of drug and substance abuse among the participants.

Results: The findings reveal varying levels of awareness and knowledge regarding substance use among the respondents, with significant gaps identified. While some students recognize the importance of drug abuse education, there is a clear demand for more comprehensive and focused awareness programs. The literature review highlights global and regional trends in substance addiction, particularly the increased vulnerability of female students but the literature regarding knowledge among students is very less. In India, drug addiction among university students is influenced by factors such as peer influence, easy access to narcotics, isolation and sometimes academic pressure which demands a motivation for change in substance abuse.

Conclusions: This study provides insights into the understanding and awareness about the various forms of drug addiction in youth. By understanding their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences, educational institutions can develop more effective strategies to avoid substance abuse. To enhance knowledge about the negative impact of drug use and create a safer, healthier learning environment, addressing the motivation for substance use disorders is essential.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, substance abuse in adolescence, motivation for substance abuse disorder, addiction counselling, mental health and substance abuse

1. Introduction

Drug and substance abuse represents a significant public health concern globally, impacting individuals and communities across all demographics. According to the World Drug Report 2022 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), around 275 million people worldwide used drugs in the past years [1]. Among these, a substantial proportion are young adults, highlighting the critical need for targeted awareness and prevention efforts within this age group. In the context of India, substance abuse is an escalating issue. The National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use (NSEPSU) in India [2] indicates that approximately 2.1% of the Indian population (aged 10-75 years) use opioids, with a considerable portion of these users being young adults. Research reveals that drug abuse manifests differently among males and females,

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influenced by distinct biological, psychological, and social factors. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), while men are more likely to use illicit drugs, women are more susceptible to addiction at lower levels of use and are more likely to experience intense cravings and relapse [3]. Sociocultural expectations and gender roles also play a crucial role. Women, especially young female students, may turn to substances as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, or depression, often exacerbated by social dynamics. Furthermore, studies highlight that women face unique barriers to seeking help for substance abuse, including fear of stigma and lack of gender-sensitive treatment options [4]-[5].

Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the lives of young adults, providing not only motivation in academic education but also influencing their social and personal development. For female students, this period can be particularly trans formative, but also challenging, as they navigate personal and professional issues. The susceptibility to drug abuse during this phase is heightened by emotional stress, making awareness and prevention programs within educational settings essential. University students are a demographic particularly vulnerable to drug abuse due to the transitional nature of this life stage. Studies by Johnston [6] and the Monitoring the Future survey consistently show high levels of substance use among college students, with factors such as peer pressure, academic stress, and newfound independence contributing to this trend. In the Indian context, researchers underscores a similar pattern [7]-[8]. These studies reveal that drug abuse among university students in India is influenced by factors like easy availability of drugs, curiosity, peer influence, and the desire to cope with professional pressures. A similar study conducted on the school students regarding their knowledge about the substance use and it was concluded that the source about their awareness was their own educational institute [9].

The knowledge about drug abuse among female graduate students is significantly influenced by their immediate environments, including their homes. The prevalence of drug use by male family members can profoundly impact these students. Studies have shown that exposure to substance abuse in the family can lead to higher stress levels, emotional distress, and increased susceptibility to substance abuse themselves [10]. This environment often normalizes drug use and can create a stressful and unstable home life, further increasing the risk of mental health issues and negatively impacting academic performance and social relationships [11]. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective support systems and intervention strategies for female students who are indirectly affected by drug abuse in their homes.

Awareness and knowledge about the risks associated with drug abuse are crucial for prevention. The Theory of Planned Behavior [12] suggests that knowledge and attitudes significantly influence individuals' intentions and behaviors. In the context of drug abuse, awareness programs that educate students about the dangers and provide coping strategies can significantly reduce the likelihood of substance use.

Among graduation-level female students, the issue carries particular gravity due to the unique social, psychological, and biological factors influencing this group. This survey investigates the knowledge and awareness of drug abuse among graduation-level female students, aiming to uncover their understanding of commonly abused substances, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, as well as their views on prevention and support programs. However, studies indicate a gap in awareness among students. Research by McCabe [13] highlights that while students may have general knowledge about drug abuse, they often lack specific information about the risks and consequences. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive education and prevention programs tailored to the unique needs of female students. The study aims to shed light on the knowledge and awareness of drug and substance abuse among graduation-level female students. By understanding their perceptions and experiences, stakeholders can develop more effective educational, preventive, and support mechanisms to combat this pressing issue. The findings of this survey will provide a foundation for meaningful interventions and positive

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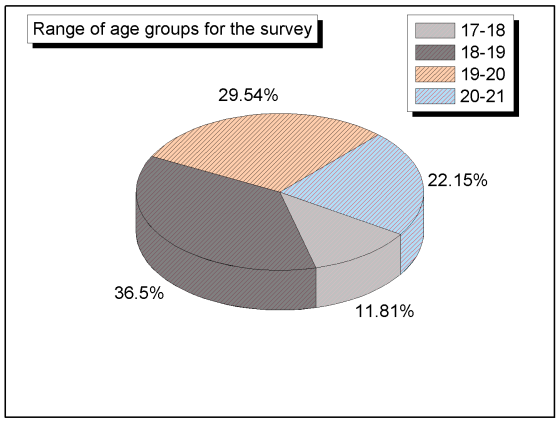


Figure 1: Range of age groups taken for the drug and substance abuse survey

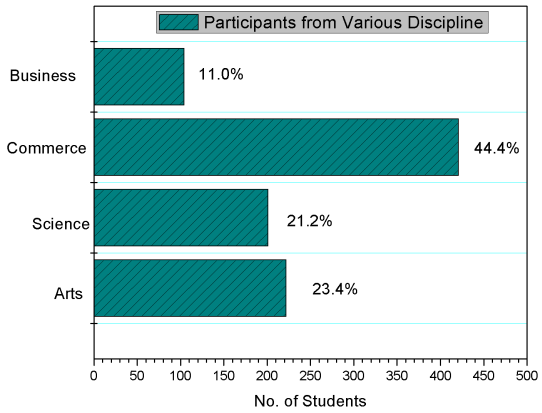


Figure 2: Participants in the drug and substance abuse survey from various disciplines

change in the lives of young female students. The study aims to shed light on the knowledge and awareness of drug and substance abuse among graduation-level female students. By understanding their perceptions and experiences, stakeholders can develop more effective educational, preventive, and support mechanisms to combat this pressing issue. The findings of this survey will provide a foundation for meaningful interventions and positive change in the lives of young female students.

2. Method and Materials

The survey was administered to 948 female students enrolled in graduation-level programs across various fields studying at Khalsa College for women, Ludhiana, Punjab. The survey was distributed electronically and collected through Google form. Responses were collected over a period of 6 days (17 Nov to 22 Nov, 2023). We selected four ranges for age and four disciplines for the data collection and the collected data was analyzed quantitatively.

3. Results and Discussions

As seen in Fig. 1, the girls in the 18–19 age group had the highest number of responses out of the four chosen age groups; the 17–18 age group had fewer responses. This could be because the college must be having the highest number of students in this age group, while the 17–18 age groups may have had less exposure to the term drug abuse. Fig. 2 makes it clear that the commerce students provided the most answers. Following study, we learned that a larger proportion of students in college are from the commerce stream than from other ones.

3.1. Knowledge and Awareness of Substance Abuse

The data indicates a high level of awareness and recognition of the term "drug abuse" among the respondents, with 94.6% indicating familiarity with this concept. This suggests that drug abuse is a well-recognized issue within the surveyed population, with a widespread understanding of its significance and implications. As suggested by one study conducted by Alenazi et al. [14] on having knowledge regarding alcohol consumption and drug usage there is a disconnect between awareness and actual behavior. So we can say in this study also the respondents having knowledge does not mean they can play a role in curbing this menace. In the present survey, approximately 43% of participants rated their knowledge of drug abuse as "moderate" to "high" (scoring 3 or above on a scale of 1 to 5), indicating that a substantial portion of the respondents feel they have a reasonable understanding of the topic. This suggests that many individuals within the surveyed population believe they possess at least a moderate level of knowledge regarding substance abuse, which may encompass aspects such as its causes consequences, prevention strategies, and available resources for intervention and treatment. The data regarding the knowledge about the

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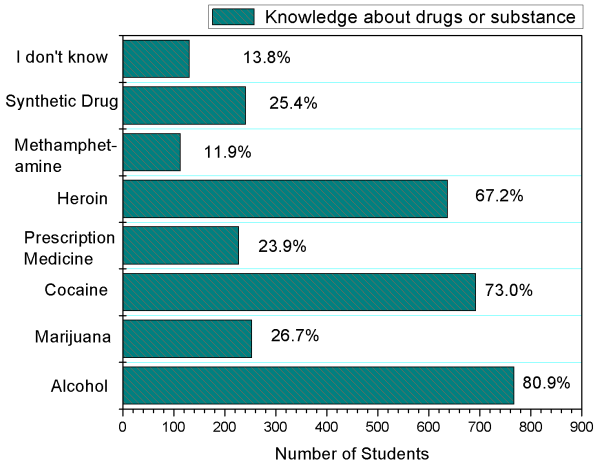


Figure 3: Knowledge about the commonly used drugs or substance

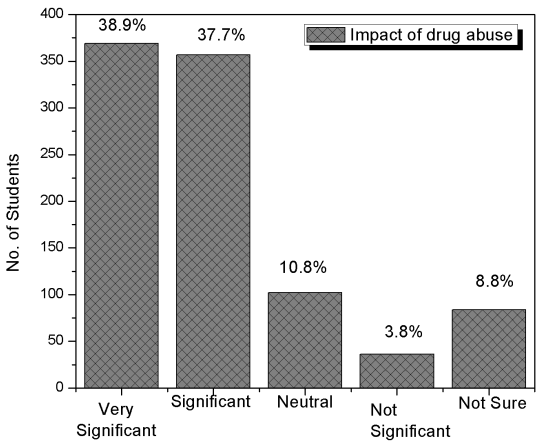


Figure 4: Presentation of the girls believe about the drug abuse as a significant issue.

commonly used drugs or substance is represented as a graphical form in Fig. 2. The survey revealed that alcohol is the most commonly abused substance among the students surveyed, with 80.9% reporting its abuse. This high prevalence may be attributed to the legal status and wide availability of alcohol and those who do not consume like the severed population in present study are likely to have knowledge about its use and abuse fron their social circles, observing its role and effects in the lives of their dear ones. Cocaine abuse was reported by 73% of the respondents, indicating significant exposure to this powerful stimulant, which is known for its high potential for addiction and serious health issues. Heroin abuse was reported by 67.2% of the respondents, highlighting the prevalence of this illegal opioids that is highly addictive and can severely impact both physical and mental health [8]. Marijuana abuse, though less prevalent than alcohol, cocaine, or heroin abuse, was reported by 26.7% of the respondents. This aligns with global trends where marijuana is often cited as the most commonly used illicit drug worldwide [6]. The abuse of prescription medications was reported by 23.9% of respondents, which is a significant concern due to the potential for addiction and overdose, particularly with opioids and benzodiazepine [15]. Additionally, 25.4% of respondents reported abusing synthetic drugs, such as synthetic cannabinoids or synthetic cathinones (e.g., bath salts), which can have unpredictable effects and pose serious health risks [8].

It is noteworthy that 13.8% of respondents indicated a lack of knowledge about commonly abused drugs. This suggests that despite the high overall awareness, there remains a subset of graduate students who may lack education about substance abuse, highlighting an area for targeted awareness efforts. Overall, the data highlights a concerning prevalence of substance abuse among graduate students, with alcohol, cocaine, and heroin being the most commonly abused substances reported. It is possible that female students are more likely to recognize the names of certain drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and marijuana due to exposure from various sources, including social media, educational programs, or discussions within their social circles. These platforms and interactions may contribute to their familiarity with these substances, even if they do not personally engage in their abuse. The respondents displayed a strong understanding of drug abuse, recognizing its potential health and social consequences. Commonly mentioned effects included physical health deterioration, mental health issues like addiction and psychosis, social ramifications such as strained relationships and legal troubles, and negative impacts on academic or professional life [3]. This awareness underscores the multifaceted nature of substance misuse and its broad-reaching effects on individuals and society, providing a foundation for comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies aimed at addressing drug abuse and mitigating its

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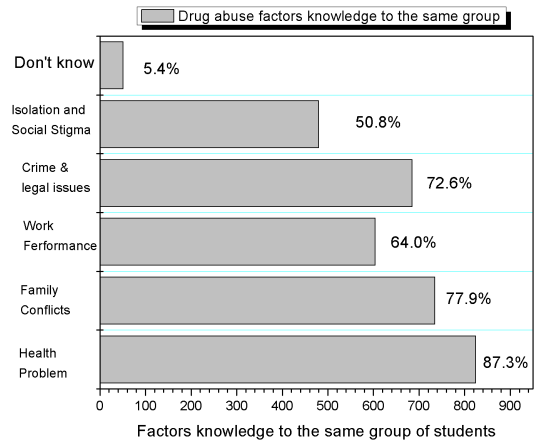


Figure 5: Representation showing girls knowledge regarding the affect of drug abuse to the individual and communities.

adverse outcomes. Comparing these findings with previous studies [6] [8] we observe similar trends in substance use among university students, highlighting factors like peer pressure, academic stress, and easy availability of drugs. This consistency with existing literature reinforces the validity of our findings and underscores the need for targeted interventions in educational settings to address these issues effectively.

3.2. Perceptions and Attitudes about Substance Abuse

The data suggests that respondents recognize drug and substance abuse as a significant issue among young adults in their community or college/university, with a considerable percentage considering it "significant" or "very significant" which is shown in Fig. 4. This underscores the perceived severity of the problem within the surveyed population. These findings align with previous studies indicating the prevalence of substance abuse in university settings [6] [8]. Regarding the impact of drug abuse on individuals and communities, respondents provided diverse perspectives as represented in Fig. 5. Common themes included physical health deterioration, such as addiction-related diseases and weakened immune systems, and mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and psychosis. These health concerns are consistent with findings in existing literature that highlight the severe health risks associated with substance abuse [3] [5]. Social consequences identified by respondents included strained relationships with family and friends, social isolation, and impaired social skills. Economic consequences were also mentioned, including loss of income, increased healthcare costs, and reduced productivity. These socioeconomic impacts are well-documented in substance abuse research, underscoring the broad-reaching effects of drug abuse on society [7].

Legal ramifications were another significant concern, with respondents noting issues such as arrests, legal fees, and incarceration. This highlights the intersection of substance abuse with the criminal justice system, which is a critical area for policy and intervention [8]. Disruptions in academic or professional pursuits were frequently mentioned, including poor academic performance, dropouts, and job loss. These disruptions reflect the adverse impact of substance abuse on educational and career trajectories, emphasizing the need for supportive services within educational institutions [6]. Overall, the data reflects a widespread recognition of the significance of drug abuse, an understanding of its impact on individuals and communities, and personal experiences with this issue among the surveyed population. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive approaches to address drug abuse effectively, encompassing prevention, education, intervention, and support services.

3.3. Prevention and Support

The data suggests a significant level of awareness among respondents regarding programs, initiatives, or resources related to drug abuse prevention and support within their college/university or community, with 77% being cognizant of such efforts. This indicates a proactive approach to addressing substance misuse, with individuals actively seeking out available resources and support mechanisms. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of awareness and preventive measures in combating substance abuse [3]. Commonly known programs or resources mentioned by respondents encompass a range of interventions, including awareness campaigns, counseling services, support groups, and educational workshops. These initiatives likely serve to provide information, guidance, and assistance to individuals struggling with drug abuse or seeking to prevent its occurrence. The diverse

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range of known programs reflects a comprehensive approach to addressing drug abuse, encompassing both preventive measures and supportive interventions. For instance, the availability of counseling services and support groups is crucial in providing psychological support and fostering recovery, as highlighted in the study conducted by Greenfield [16]. The data indicates that educational workshops and awareness campaigns play a significant role in disseminating information about the risks associated with drug abuse and strategies for prevention. Such educational initiatives are vital in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards substance use, as suggested by the Theory of Planned Behavior [12]. By providing factual information and practical advice, these programs help equip students with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions.

Furthermore, the presence of support groups within the college/university or community setting provides a network for individuals to share their experiences and gain support from peers facing similar challenges. This peer support is often instrumental in promoting recovery and reducing the stigma associated with seeking help for substance abuse [5]. The awareness and utilization of available programs suggest a willingness among the surveyed population to engage with the issue of drug abuse and actively seek solutions. This proactive stance is critical for the effectiveness of preventive and supportive interventions, as it indicates an openness to accessing and benefiting from the resources provided. Comparing these findings with previous studies, it is evident that the availability and awareness of preventive and support programs are crucial in mitigating the adverse effects of substance abuse. The studies also highlight the significance of comprehensive educational and support mechanisms in reducing substance use among university students [6],[8].

3.4. Personal Actions and Awareness

The data indicates a proactive stance among respondents regarding drug abuse prevention and awareness efforts. A notable percentage reported taking personal actions to address drug abuse in their college, university or community. These actions likely included organizing educational events, participating in advocacy campaigns, or supporting initiatives aimed at reducing substance misuse. This proactive engagement reflects a commitment to addressing drug abuse at a grassroots level, which is crucial for effective prevention and intervention strategies [6].

Additionally, a majority of respondents expressed interest in furthering their knowledge about drug abuse prevention and awareness programs, signaling a desire for continued education and involvement in addressing this issue. This interest in ongoing education is supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes the role of knowledge and attitudes in shaping behavioral intentions [12]. The commitment to both individual and collective efforts suggests a proactive and engaged approach within the surveyed population. This aligns with previous research indicating that active involvement in prevention and awareness activities can significantly enhance the effectiveness of substance abuse interventions [15]. By participating in these efforts, respondents are not only increasing their own knowledge and resilience but also contributing to a broader culture of awareness and prevention within their communities. Comparing these findings with previous studies, it is evident that personal and collective actions are integral to combating substance abuse. Research by Murthy et al. [8] and SAMHSA [3] underscores the importance of community engagement and advocacy in reducing the prevalence of substance misuse. These studies highlight that when individuals take an active role in prevention and support initiatives, the overall impact on drug abuse reduction is significantly enhanced.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this survey indicate that graduation-level female students possess a moderate to high level of knowledge about drug abuse, with awareness of commonly abused substances. They recognize the significance of drug abuse as an issue among young adults and generally understand its consequences. Many have encountered situations related to drug abuse and are interested in learning more about prevention and awareness programs. The report

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suggests that there is potential for further education and awareness initiatives in addressing drug abuse among this demographic. It is recommended that educational institutions and relevant organizations take note of the survey findings to tailor programs and resources that meet the specific needs and interests of these students.

Recommendations-

Enhanced Awareness Programs: Develop and promote awareness programs related to drug abuse tailored for graduation-level female students, highlighting the consequences and prevention strategies.

Resource Dissemination: Increase awareness of existing programs and resources, ensuring students are informed about the support available.

Personal Action Promotion: Encourage and support students in taking personal actions to raise awareness and prevent drug abuse.

Interdisciplinary Initiatives: Promote interdisciplinary collaboration to address drug abuse comprehensively.

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