

## Exploring the Root Causes of Drug Addiction in Government Boys' and Girls' Colleges of Haripur

Naeem Akhtar<sup>1</sup>, Tahir Naseem<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*Drug addiction among young students in educational institutions has emerged as a critical social and public health concern in Pakistan. This study investigates the root causes of substance abuse among college students in Haripur District by examining various socio-economic, psychological, and institutional factors. Key drivers such as peer pressure, academic stress, family dynamics, and easy accessibility to drugs were explored. A total of 320 students were selected using a stratified random sampling technique from four major public colleges (three male and one female) in the district. To gain deeper insight into the personal experiences and motivations behind drug use, 40 purposively selected case studies were also conducted. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, and analyzed using both statistical and thematic analysis methods. Reliability of the survey instrument was confirmed through a pilot test (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81). The findings reveal an alarming trend of rising drug use among students, exacerbated by institutional neglect, social permissiveness, and lack of parental engagement. This investigation recommends increased parental involvement, targeted prevention strategies, and counseling programs at institutional level to address the growing threat of substance abuse among students in educational institutes.*

**Keywords:** Drug addiction, Peer pressure, Substance abuse, College students, Academic stress

### INTRODUCTION

A substance use disorder which is also known as the drug addiction has emerged as a significant global public health issue that particularly affects young individuals, including students in educational institutions. Addiction, characterized by compulsive drug-seeking behavior despite harmful consequences, significantly impairs an individual's academic, social functioning, and personal as mentioned in (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2020). The problem is especially concerning because of their exposure to developmental vulnerability, peer influence, and the increasing availability of narcotic substances. The use of drugs among students often starts with experimentation, which can quickly progress to regular use and dependency due to psychological, social, and environmental ventures as discussed by (Mushtaq & Bibi, 2018).

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It is observed by the study of (Brand, 2023) that the increasing trend of substance abuse among students in university as well as colleges is because of peer pressure, academic stress, family neglect, and easy access to substances. Furthermore, the dishonor connected with addiction often stops students from taking help, intensifying the severity of the issue.

Educational institutions, traditionally viewed as safe spaces for intellectual and personal development, are increasingly emerging as environments where drug use patterns begin and intensify. According to (NIDA, 2020) the early intervention and preventive measures in educational institutes can play a significant role in decreasing addiction rates.

A dynamical systems model describing the neurobiology of drug addiction, incorporating concepts like reward prediction error and opponent process theory to explain the progression to addiction was discussed by (Chou & D'Orsogna, 2022). The study of (Mao et al., 2024) developed a mathematical model to understand the cognitive and a psychological mechanism which leads to relapse in drug addiction.

WHO mentioned in its work (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021) that the substance use among the students in educational institutions is in alarming issue, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. It refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs, which can lead to social dysfunction, psychological disorders, and physical dependence. The rise in substance abuse among college students has been linked to a complex interplay of psychological, social, and institutional factors. Peer pressure is one of the main points for the increasing use of drug abuse among the youth pointed by (Mushtaq & Bibi, 2018). The young students are pressurized to follow the peer group norms and expectations to gain social acceptance, even when this involves engaging in risky behaviors such as drug experimentation. The groups and social identity in college students play an important role for accepting these pressures.

It is also noted in the study of (Sharma & Kaur, 2022) that the academic stress is another critical factor that compels students toward drug abuse. The fear of failure, competitive nature of modern education, and overwhelming workloads often create emotional distress which leads to anxiety among students. Some students resort to drugs as a coping mechanism to manage pressure and escape from academic burdens. Together, substance abuse, peer influence, and academic stress create a dangerous cycle that affects students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. This study investigates how these factors contribute to drug addiction among college students in Haripur District and offers evidence-based recommendations for prevention and intervention

While numerous studies have explored the causes of substance abuse among youth globally, much of the existing research tends to focus on broad urban populations or generalized student samples across entire provinces or countries. Limited attention has been given to localized, district-level investigations—particularly in rural and semi-urban regions like Haripur District, where socio-cultural dynamics, institutional structures, and parental supervision patterns may differ significantly from metropolitan areas.

Moreover, although peer pressure and academic stress are frequently cited as influencing factors, few studies have systematically investigated how these stressors interact with each other

in specific institutional settings, such as public colleges in smaller districts. The existing literature also often overlooks gender-specific analysis in male- and female-only institutions within such districts, which can provide critical insight into differential vulnerabilities and risk factors.

This study looks for to fill these gaps by conducting a focused investigation of drug addiction among students in four public colleges (3 male, 1 female) of Haripur District. The mixed-method design is used to combine survey data with qualitative insights from student case studies, offering a more nuanced and localized perspective for achieving the desired goals.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

A mixed-method approach (quantitative and qualitative methods) is adopted to find the root causes of substance use among students in public sector colleges of Haripur District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Through this approach we are able to integrate numerical data with in-depth personal insights by keeping in view the observation given by (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### Population and Sampling Criteria

In this investigation the intermediate and undergraduate students were selected from four public sector colleges of District Haripur. A stratified random sampling technique was adapted to choose 320 students (male & female), ensuring proportional representation across academic disciplines, gender, and institutions. This method improved the reliability and generalizability of the findings by capturing the diversity within the target population (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The sample size was based on actual enrollment figures and practical constraints. Furthermore, 40 participants with direct or indirect experience of substance use were purposively selected for qualitative case studies to explore the deeper emotional and social dimensions of drug abuse, following the principles of purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015).

### Sampling Distribution

College Name	Number of Students
Govt. Degree College KTS, Haripur	72
Govt. Degree College Khanpur	82
Govt. Postgraduate College Haripur	80
Govt. Postgraduate College for Women	86
Total	320

## **Demographics**

The most of the respondent's lies between the age 18 to 22 represent the youth demographic most at risk students to peer influence and behavioral experimentation as discussed in the study (UNODC, 2022). Out of the total 320 students, 270 were male and 50 were female, reflecting gender enrollment trends in public colleges at District Haripur.

Living Status	Number of Students
With Families	288
Boarding/Off-Campus	32

## **Data Collection Methods**

### **Surveys and Questionnaires**

A structured questionnaire was administered to 320 students to assess their exposure to drugs, motivational factors, academic stress, and social influences. A pilot study involving 30 students was conducted to validate the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated at 0.81, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). For the sample instrument, see Annexure-1.

### **Case Studies**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 40 purposively selected students. The qualitative approach helped understand behavioral patterns and lived experiences regarding substance use (Patton, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to examine relationships between demographic and psychosocial variables and drug use. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying recurring themes from open-ended responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and correlations between variables such as substance use, academic impact, and peer influence. Figures were generated using Microsoft Excel based on the quantitative data collected from the survey and case studies.

### **Justification of Sampling**

Stratified random sampling was chosen to ensure representativeness and reduce sampling bias. Although snowball sampling is often used for researching hidden populations (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), it was not adopted here due to ethical and administrative constraints within

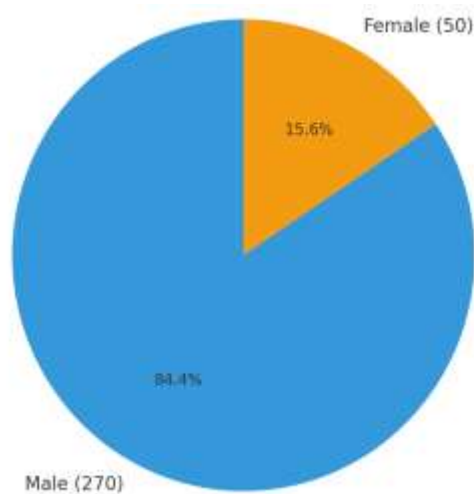
academic institutions. Instead, purposive sampling allowed focused exploration of students with direct experience or knowledge of drug use.

### **Result, Findings, and Discussions**

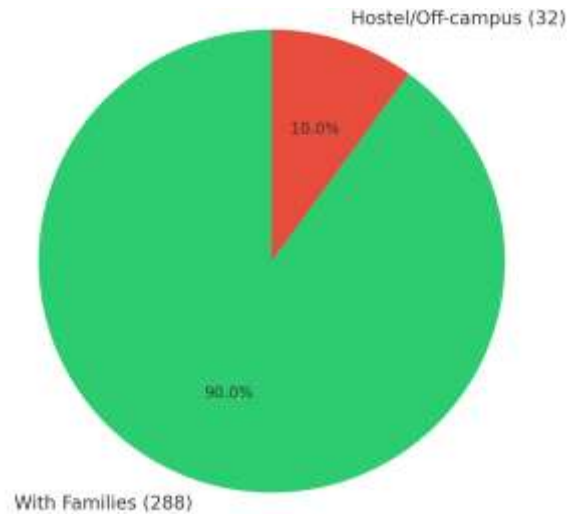
This section presents the results obtained from the survey of 320 students from four public colleges in Haripur District. It incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the root causes of drug addiction among young students.

#### **Demographic Overview of Participants**

A total of 320 students were surveyed using stratified random sampling. The sample included 270 male and 50 female students from different academic disciplines and age groups. The distribution of participants and arrangements of participant are presented in the Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 below:



**Figure. 1:** Gender distribution of participants (84% Male, 16% Female).



**Figure 2:** Living arrangements of students (90% with families, 10% in hostels/off-campus).

**Table 1:** Distribution of participants.

College Name	Number of Students
Govt. Degree College KTS, Haripur	72
Govt. Degree College Khanpur	82
Govt. Postgraduate College Haripur	80
Govt. Postgraduate College Women Haripur	86
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>

### Substance Use History

Out of the 320 respondents, 280 students reported no history of substance use, while 40 students admitted using substances such as cigarettes, e-cigarettes, alcohol, and cocaine. These findings are summarized in the Table 2 and Table 3 below:

**Table 2:** Data for History of Substance use.

Number of Students	Substance	User/Non-user
280	Nil	Non-User

40	Tobacco/e-cigarettes	Users
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**Table 3:** Substance Users' Details.

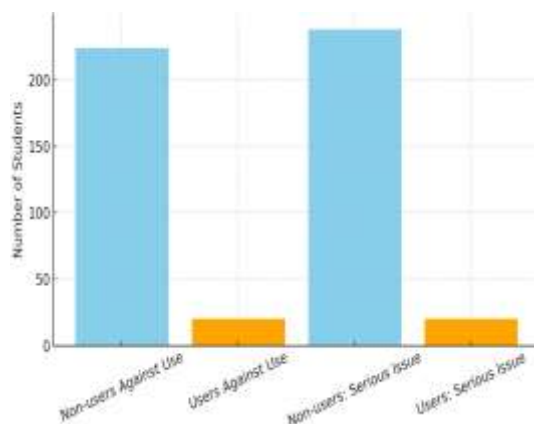
Substance	Department	No. of Students	Living Status
Cigarettes/e-cigarettes	English	6	With family
Cigarettes	Chemistry	6	Hostel
	Chemistry	2	Off-campus
	Chemistry	6	With family
Cigarettes	Economics	6	With family
	Economics	2	Off-campus
Cocaine/Tobacco	Economics	2	Off-campus
Cigarettes	Mathematics	4	With family
Alcohol	Mathematics	2	With family
Cigarettes	Islamic Studies	4	With family
Total		40	

### General Perceptions about Drug Use

Students were asked about their views regarding recreational drug use and whether drug addiction was perceived as a serious issue among college students.

- 224 (80%) of the 280 non-users disagreed with the recreational use of substances.
- 20 (50%) of the 40 users also considered recreational use to be socially unacceptable.
- 238 (85%) of non-users viewed drug abuse as a serious concern.
- 20 (50%) of substance users agreed that drug abuse is a serious concern.

These responses indicate a high awareness level among both users and non-users about the negative implications of drug abuse. The graphical presentation of the above data is given Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** General perception about Drugs

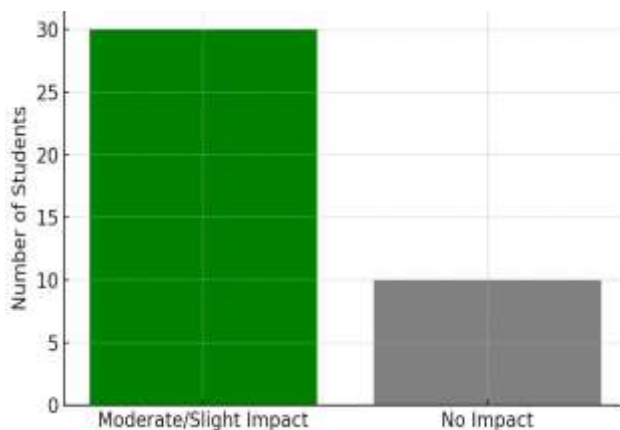
### **Peer Pressure and Academic Impact**

#### **a). Peer Pressure:**

- Among the 280 non-users, 266 reported no peer pressure, while 7 experienced moderate pressure.
- Among the 40 users, 6 reported slight peer pressure.

#### **b). Academic Impact:**

- Of the 40 users, 30 noted a moderate/slight impact on academics due to substance use.



**Figure 4:** Academic Impact of Drug Use

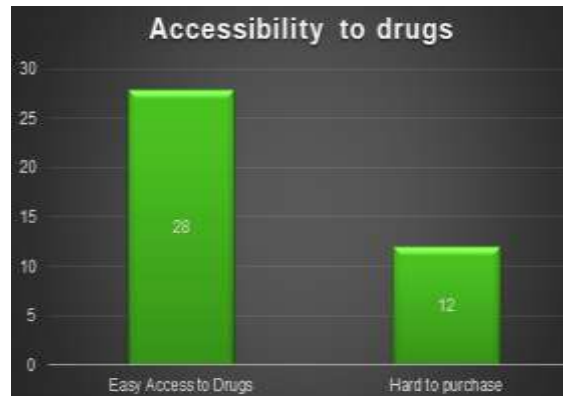
The Figure 4 shows that while most users report minimal academic impact, a significant number still acknowledge some level of influence on their performance.



### Drug Accessibility and Availability

When asked about the accessibility of drugs:

- 28 out of 40 substance users stated that substances are easily available near college campuses.
- Only 12 found it difficult to access such substances.



**Figure 5: Accessibility of Drugs to Users**

The Figure 5 reflects a troubling trend of substance availability in the vicinity of educational institutions.

### 3.6. Open-Ended Question Responses

Students were also asked to respond to open-ended questions about causes, preventive measures, and their general comments on substance use and responses are recorded in the Table 4 and Table 5 below.

**Table 4: Responses from Substance Users**

Causes	Prevention Measures	Comments
Social influence	Control on availability	Presentations on drug effects
Stress/Angriness	Treatment/medicine	—
Peer pressure	Awareness sessions	Reduction in drug usage
Academic pressure	ADAC	—
Lack of parental care	Improve on-campus environment	Monitor cafeteria areas

Mental satisfaction	Psychological therapy	Strict anti-drug rule enforcement
Bad friends company	Quick punishment/Fine	Closure of supply routes
Fun/enjoyment	Discourage availability	Health awareness campaigns
Easy access to drugs	Vigilance and monitoring	Ban on sale
Poverty/frustration	ADAC / Anti-drug policy	Complete ban near campus

**Table 5: Responses from Non-Users**

Perceived Causes	Suggested Preventive Measures
Family tension or stress	Promote physical activities and sports
Easy drug access near campuses	Crackdown with local authorities and police
Recreational drug use	Vigilance and periodic campus inspections
Lack of parental attention	Anti-drug policy enforcement through ADTC
Fear of failure, uncertain future	Awareness campaigns and mental health support

These qualitative findings confirm the complexity of factors driving substance use, which include academic, social, and psychological triggers.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

#### Limitations

- Limited Geographic Scope:** Study restricted to four public colleges in Haripur.
- Gender Imbalance:** 84% male participation may lead to bias.
- Self-Reported Data:** Subject to social desirability and recall bias.
- Lack of Statistical Testing:** No inferential analysis or reliability scores (e.g., Cronbach's alpha).
- Limited Qualitative Depth:** Open-ended responses not thematically coded.
- Living Arrangement Link:** Data not sufficiently analyzed for correlation with drug use.

#### Future Research Directions

- Widen Geographic and Institutional Scope:** Include private and regional institutions.
- Balance Gender Representation:** Ensure proportional inclusion of female participants.

- c. **Use Mixed Methods:** Combine thematic interviews with survey analysis.
- d. **Apply Reliability Measures:** Include validated instruments and statistical testing.
- e. **Longitudinal Studies:** Assess behavior changes over time.
- f. **Evaluate Interventions:** Test impact of awareness or policy programs.
- g. **Engage Stakeholders:** Parents, teachers, and community should be included.
- h. **Analyze Peer and Academic Pressure:** Study stress-related causal effects rigorously

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the growing concern of substance use among college students in the Haripur District, drawing attention to several root causes that include peer influence, academic pressure, lack of parental attention, and easy availability of substances near educational institutions. While the majority of students (280 out of 320) reported no history of substance use, the 40 identified users provided crucial insights into the social, emotional, and environmental triggers contributing to drug initiation and continued use.

Data from surveys and open-ended responses revealed that both users and non-users perceive drug abuse as a significant issue, albeit with varying degrees of concern and awareness. Substance users often cited emotional stress, social pressure, and academic struggles as primary motivators for their behavior, while non-users largely attributed drug use to poor supervision, peer influence, and mental health struggles.

The research further emphasizes the accessibility of tobacco-related products, particularly cigarettes and e-cigarettes, around campuses—a factor many users identified as facilitating drug experimentation. However, a positive aspect is that most respondents, including substance users, expressed support for awareness initiatives, stricter regulations, and institutional accountability in preventing substance abuse.

In conclusion, the study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated interventions. These should include enhanced parental engagement, mental health counseling, institutional support systems, strict enforcement of anti-drug policies, and awareness campaigns tailored to the needs of both users and non-users. The issue of substance abuse among youth is complex and multifaceted, requiring sustained efforts from educational institutions, government authorities, and communities to safeguard the health, potential, and future of students in Haripur and beyond.

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