

A Problem of Substance Abuse in India: Causes and Consequences

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Abstract

India is entangled in a never-ending cycle of substance abuse, with the number of abusers rising daily. Substance abuse is being encouraged by shifting cultural norms, worsening economic conditions, and dwindling social ties. This paper has analyzed the nature and extent of substance abuse in India. This paper is based on secondary sources. Many research papers, articles and relevant literature have been reviewed to inculcate related data. Peer pressure, unemployment, professional factors, delay in treatment and parental denial are some of the causes and it affects the society in many ways. Substance abuse involved negative economic repercussions on people, the community, and the government. Use of drugs by the general public has many detrimental societal repercussions, such as unstable family relations, domestic abuse, an increased risk of criminality in one's life, and a weakened sense of belonging to one's family and community. A firm political determination, community engagement, implementation of laws can be helpful to curb this social problem.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, Social Problem, Causes, Consequences.

JEL Classifications: L65, F34, Z19, O33

Introduction

Substance abuse can be considered as both a kind of deviant behavior and a social issue. It is viewed as a symptom of a person's societal maladjustment, a common disorder that has detrimental impacts on society (Dumain 2020, Sharma *et al* 2017 and Sahu and Sahu 2012). Merton (1938) used deviant behaviour to highlight the significance of different kinds of norm deviations. The unconventional behaviour publicly criticizes the norms and doubts their validity. They also advocate for the adoption of substitute standards. Sociologists in India consider substance abusers as deviants who engage in abnormal behaviour. The term substance abuse refers to the use of a substance for purposes other than medicinally when it is done so in a way that compromises one's physical or mental health (Buddy 2022 and Murthy *et al* 2010).

An estimated 275 million persons between the age of 15 and 64 years used drugs in 2019, accounting for one in every 18 of those individuals. The anticipated number of individuals who used any medication in the previous year increased by 22 per cent between 2010 - 2019, from 226 million to 274 million (World Drug Report 2021, World Health Organisation 2020 and World Drug Report 2020).

India had a fivefold (455%) spike in substance dragged in the three years from 2011 to 2013 (Mallapur 2015). A

total number of 59,625 persons were arrested in 2015, under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and 56,006 were arrested in 2017 (Anonymous 2017). There were 59,806 drugs reported under NDPS Act in 2020 as compared to 29,576 in 2010. A huge number of drug related cases were increased in these ten years (Anonymous 2020). Over the past ten years, there were more than double incidences of suicides in India caused by substance abuse. In the year 2010 and 2019, there were 3,343 and 7,860 reported cases of suicides respectively (Pavithra 2021, Rai 2021 and Kumar 2019).

Use of a variety of psychoactive substances, such as alcohol, cannabis, and opioids has been seen in India for decades. After alcohol and tobacco, the most often used narcotics in India are marijuana, heroin, opium, and hashish. Nonetheless, certain data suggest that methamphetamine usage is also on the rise (Sharma *et al* 2017 and Nadeem *et al* 2009). Because of the popularity of flavour-infused hookahs, smoking has become socially acceptable and common among the wealthiest people in the modern world. The desire to abuse substances to improve one's physical strength is a clue that substance abuse is a sign of masculinity. Adolescents frequently encounter social pressures from peers and family members that promote the recreational use of alcohol and opium (*afeem*). This normalization of regular drinking and socializing contributes significantly to the prevalence of substance abuse among this demographic (Dua

2022, Weinandy and Grubbs, 2021 and Singh, 2010). Due to a lack of reliable and thorough information regarding the country's substance abuse problem, it has been challenging to establish and implement effective substance use policies and initiatives. So present paper is an attempt to gauge the extent, causes and consequences of substance abuse.

Data Sources and Methodology

This paper is based on secondary data collected from various research papers and the surveys of National Substance Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi. Various articles, newspapers, books, many websites such as, SciHub, ResearchGate, Google scholar, ShodhGanga and other relevant literature have been reviewed. Then the available secondary data have been analyzed to reach the desirable results.

According to the study, World Health Organization (WHO) has defined three categories of persons who uses substances in any form. Those were: -

- Substance users- They used any substance, even once, in the previous 12 months.
- Problem users- They scored between 4 and 26 (for alcohol, between 11 and 26) WHO Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) and had any negative effects of substance use within the last three months.
- Dependent users - They were whom used substances at present stage and score greater than 26 according to WHO ASSIST.

Results and Discussion

Substance abuse is a widespread social problem that opens links to political, social, cultural, and economic fabric of any society, inflicting considerable harm on individuals and communities. It encompasses the excessive consumption of substances such as alcohol, prescription drugs, and illegal narcotics, resulting in addiction, health issues, and a multitude of social challenges. The repercussions of substance abuse extend beyond the afflicted individuals, impacting families, elevating crime rates, straining healthcare systems, and imposing economic burdens. Consequently, the situation is complex and necessitates an in-depth examination and evaluation.

According to National Substance Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi a significant portion of the population used psychoactive substances. Adult men were the most affected group across all demographic groups. Survey showed differences between amount of usage among different substances and across different states.

Above table showed top 5 states of India with number of substance abusers and type of substance abused by

them. According to this survey, alcohol is the psychoactive substance that Indians take most frequently. Approximately 14.6 per cent of people used alcohol between the age of 10 - 75. Men used alcohol at a rate far higher than that of women. Problem usage was seen in 5.2 per cent of the population. Alcohol dependence harmed 2.9 crore people i.e. 2.7 per cent of the total population. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of alcohol abusers (1.60 crore), followed by Andhra Pradesh (47 lakh), Tamil Nadu (37 lakh), Madhya Pradesh (31 lakh), and Maharashtra (30 lakh). In India, cannabis and opioids are the second most often consumed drugs after alcohol. Roughly 3.1 crore people i.e. 2.8 per cent of the population, have used cannabis products in the year 2019. The use of cannabis was further separated into two categories were legal (*bhang*) and those that were not (*ganja* and *charas*). About 40 lakhs were observed using *bhang*, while 50 lakhs were observed using illegal cannabi products i.e *ganja* and *charas*. Uttar Pradesh leads with 28 lakh cannabis abusers, followed by Punjab (5.7 lakh), Odisha (4.9 lakh), Maharashtra (4.6 lakh), and Chhattisgarh (3.8 lakh). Opioids such as opium (or its derivatives like poppy husk known as *doda/phukki*), heroin (or its impure form, smack or brown sugar), and a variety of medicinal opioids, were used by about 2.1 per cent of the country's population i.e. 2.3 crore people. Heroin was the most frequently used opioid, with 63 lakh problem users, followed by 25 lakh problem users of pharmaceutical opioids and 11 lakh problem users of opium. Uttar Pradesh has the highest prevalence with 10.7 lakh opioid abusers, followed by Punjab (7.2 lakh), Haryana (5.9 lakh), Maharashtra (5.2 lakh), and Madhya Pradesh (3.9 lakh). Overall, 0.70 per cent of Indians between the ages of 10 and 75 currently used inhalant products. With 8.5 lakh dependent users, this category had a higher incidence among children and adolescents.

Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of inhalant abusers (94,000), followed by Madhya Pradesh (50,000), Maharashtra (40,000), Delhi (38,000), and Haryana (35,000). Approximately 1.18 crore Indians aged between 10 - 75 (or 1.08% of the population) currently used sedatives for recreational, non-medical purposes. Almost 11.8 lakh people i.e. 0.11 per cent of the population, used sedatives in a dependent manner. Uttar Pradesh leads with 3.5 lakh sedative abusers, followed by Maharashtra (2.1 lakh), Punjab (20,000), Andhra Pradesh (1.4 lakh), and Gujarat (1.3 lakh). Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur, and Nagaland have the highest number of users and 46 per cent of people in the opioid group injected heroin and pharmaceutical opioids.

It is clear from the data alcohol is the most often used psychoactive substance in India. Opioid misuse, including the use of heroin and pharmaceutical opioids, presents substantial challenges that necessitate robust prevention and support measures. Inhalant and sedative use, though less prevalent, require tailored strategies to mitigate risks among vulnerable populations (National Substance Dependence Treatment

Table 1. Five Indian states with highest number of abusers and type of substance abused

Substance	Substance User (%)	Problem User (%)	Dependent User (%)	Top States with highest number of abusers
Alcohol	14.6	5.2	2.7	Uttar Pradesh (1.60 crore) Andhra Pradesh (47 lakh) Tamil Nadu (37 lakh) Madhya Pradesh (31 lakh) Maharashtra (30 lakh)
Cannabis	2.8	0.66	0.25	Uttar Pradesh (28 lakh) Punjab (5.7 lakh) Odisha (4.9 lakh) Maharashtra (4.6 lakh) Chhattisgarh (3.8 lakh)
Opioid	2.1	0.70	0.26	Uttar Pradesh (10.7 lakh) Punjab (7.2 lakh) Haryana (5.9 lakh) Maharashtra (5.2 lakh) Madhya Pradesh (3.9 lakh)
Inhalant	0.7	0.21	0.08	Uttar Pradesh (94,000) Madhya Pradesh (50,000) Maharashtra (40,000) Delhi (38,000) Haryana (35,000)
Sedatives	1.08	-	0.11	Uttar Pradesh (3.5 lakh) Maharashtra (2.1 lakh) Andhra Pradesh (1.4 lakh) Gujarat (1.3 lakh) Punjab (20,000)

Source: National Substance Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, 2019.

Centre (NDDTC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, 2019).

According to Ghuman *et al* (2024) there were almost 10 substances abused by people among study. The study was conducted in five states of India viz. Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan. The data reveals that there was more than one substance abused by people. Majority of abusers preferred heroin (53.68 %) and poppy husk (49 .00%) followed by opium (48.51%), cannabis (40.96%), tramadol (39.47%), marijuana (29.92%) and Buprenorphine (23.86%). Opium was more abused in Punjab (64.55%), cannabis in Himachal Pradesh (82.50%), tramadol in Punjab (50.15%), marijuana in Haryana (39.17%) and buprenorphine in Punjab (30.15%).

According to Sandhu (2014) 47.83 per cent people abused more than two type of substances. Less than one fourth of respondents abused synthetic drugs followed by *bhukki* (12.67%) and alcohol (11.33%). This study was conducted in Punjab state of India. *Bhukki* was abused more in Malwa region and alcohol in Majha and Doaba regions.

Causes of Substance Abuse

Substance use can develop into abuse if a patient keeps on taking the prescribed a medicine for the treatment of depression, pain management for the longer period of time. Many people discover that taking these medications increases their sense of confidence and self-assurance in social situations, hence in given the favorable effects of the situation; individuals are likely to repeat it. They started believing that substances are necessary for their survival. Abuse can also begin with a person's first substance or alcohol experimentation, even if it is relatively harmless and occurs at a social gathering. Some of the contributing causes are: -

Easy access through borders -Several Indian states, including Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, are impacted by the production of opium. Punjab's close proximity to the infamous Golden Crescent makes it particularly vulnerable to drug trafficking. These Indian states are close to the Indo-Pak border, making them potential hashish and heroin markets and supply routes. While marijuana enters Punjab through Himachal Pradesh,

opium and poppy husk originate in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Six districts—Ferozepur, Tarn Taran, Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Pathankot, and Fazilka—share a 553-kilometer border between Punjab and Pakistan. It serves as a hub of drug smuggling in India. Pakistan tries new strategies for smuggling drugs and weapons through drones (Deep 2022, Vijayan and Rajan 2022 and Tantia *et al* 2023). Heroin seizures increased from 2,146 kg in 2017 to 7,282 kg in 2021. Furthermore, there have been over 70 per cent higher seizures of opium (2,551 kg in 2017 vs. 4,386 kg in 2021) and over 90 per cent more seizures of cannabis (3,52,539 kg in 2017 vs. 6,75,631 kg in 2021).

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) seized substances valued at Rs 40,000 crore in a single year under Operation Samudragupt, following one of the largest drug confiscations off the Kerala coast on June 17, 2023. In a collaborative effort with the Indian Navy, a joint operation led to the interception of 529 kg of hashish, 221 kg of methamphetamine, and 13 kg of heroin in February 2022, originating from Baluchistan and Afghanistan. This marked a significant achievement for Operation Samudragupt (India Today, 2023). Through December 2023, Punjab Police had arrested 302 drug traffickers and suppliers and registered 221 First Information Reports (FIRs) (of which 34 were centered on commercial quantities of drugs) under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. In the same month, 1.57 quintals of poppy husk, 10. kg of opium, 24.08 kg of heroin, 1.05 lakh capsules, tablets, injections, and vials of pharma opioids were seized by state police along with Rs. 20.72 lakh in drug money (The Hindustan Times, 2023). The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Indian Navy worked together to seize almost 3,300 kg of heroin from a vessel close to Porbandar, Gujarat. According to the Navy, this is the largest drug seizure in recent memory. At the end of the operation, a small ship was seized, and more than 3,089 kg of cocaine, 158 kg of methamphetamine, and 25 kg of morphine were found (Business Standards 2024). Approximately 2.08 million kg drugs were seized in 2022 from India, under NDPS Act (Anonymous 2022).

Unemployment -There is no denying that substance abuse and unemployment rate is also rise in India. India's unemployment rate rose from 6.4 per cent to 7.8 per cent in October 2022. In rural India, the unemployment rate increased sharply from 5.8 percent to 8.0 percent, although it decreased slightly in urban areas from 7.7 per cent to 7.2 per cent. The percentage of unemployed people in the labour force is known as the unemployment rate. Young people who are qualified but lack opportunities are forced to utilize substances. Family strain and dissatisfaction are caused by unemployment. Nearly 15 per cent of respondents out of 1,059 were unemployed and abused substances. Intoxicating cooperate cultures is another factor. A culture that condones substance abuse can lead to more absences,

workplace accidents, and health issues among employees, which can disrupt the workforce. Moreover, companies with reputations for such problems may find it challenging to recruit and retain talented professionals, thereby weakening their position in the job market. Ultimately, intoxicating corporate cultures can indirectly lead to unemployment by reducing organizational efficiency (Ghuman *et al* 2024, Dua 2022, Motyka and Al-Imam2022 and Sandhu 2014).

Peer pressure - According to Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID) survey, 2019, which was carried out in five states (Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir) revealed that more than 70 per cent of substance abusers blamed peer pressure for their condition (The Times of India 2019). The major factor that usually determines the onset of substance abusing is peer pressure, especially in the early twenties. Peer pressure greatly influences one's perception of a given situation (Randhawa *et al* 2020 and Sahu and Sahu, 2012).

Professional factor - When people's professions or careers completely exhaust them, they started consuming alcohol or other substance. Over the time, they develop habits and, eventually, it becomes addiction. Farmers provide substances (*Bhukki/afeem*) to the labour working on their fields to get more work from them (Dhillon *et al* 2019 and Kaur 2017). Long hours spent in front of computers by corporate workers have a negative impact on both their physical and mental health. Consequently, they started taking tobacco, cigarettes and alcohol. Prescription substance abuse is becoming more common, particularly among stimulants, benzodiazepines, and opioids. These substances are frequently used to treat pain, anxiety, and tension. Marijuana usage is shift in social and legal norms, especially among younger professionals (Kumar 2023, Kumar *et al* 2023 and Mishra and Majumdar 2019). Low income is also responsible for pushing people towards substance abuse. Due to this factor, they didn't achieve desired goals in their life as a result they indulged in substance abuse. According to Ghuman *et al* 2024, 11 per cent of respondents indulged in substance abuse due to low income (Ghuman *et al* 2024, Rai 2021 and Phukan 2017).

Delayed treatment and parental denial - The majority of adolescent drug addiction starts with legal drugs like alcohol and cigarettes. Due to parents' ignorance and denial, treatment and therapy got delayed. Parents of children struggling with substance abuse and other addictions deny the existence of the problem, particularly when it comes to seeking treatment for their offspring out of a desire to avoid the stigma is the real dilemma for both parents and children. As a result, these youngsters turn out to be hardened substance abuser (Walia 2020 and Zaman *et al* 2015).

A Strong Drug taking Culture- In India, substance abuse has deep historical and cultural roots. Ancient texts such as the Vedas describe *Somras* and cannabis (*Bhang*) being used in religious ceremonies, particularly associated

with Lord Shiva and experiences of altered consciousness during meditation rituals involving *Datura* fruits at temples like Vishwanath in Varanasi. In modern times, there has been a noticeable shift towards social acceptance and recreational use, illustrated by the rising popularity of flavored hookahs among the upper class. Gender norms also influence substance consumption, with substances sometimes seen as enhancing physical strength, reinforcing traditional ideals of masculinity. The consumption of alcohol and opium (*Afeem*) among young people is often influenced by peer pressure and family practices, contributing to persistent public health challenges exacerbated by cultural norms around frequent drinking and social gatherings. Surroundings and house environment were other factors responsible for substance abuse (Dua 2022, Weinandy and Grubbs 2021 and Singh 2010).

Consequences of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse can have a number of detrimental effects on a person's physical and mental health as well as on their family life. Hazards associated with each type of dependency are different (Arlappa *et al* 2019, Kumar 2019,

Advani 2013 and Sandhu 2014). After reviewing the relevant literature following consequent effects of substance abuse were done. These are discussed under social, psychological, physical and economic consequences.

Social -The consequences of substance abuse on society are multifaceted and can be observed in various domains such as home life, career, education, personality, marriage partnerships, and so forth (Kumar *et al* 2023, Deep 2022 and Arlappa *et al* 2019). Certain medicines may even have long-lasting effects on a person's body, brain, or mood that may even be irreversible if they stop using them. Family members who are addicted to substances may feel abandoned, restless, afraid, resentful, anxious, ashamed, or guilty at times. Family members frequently ignore or minimise their interactions with substance abusers. A partner may find it difficult to deal with this, and the problem is even worse when children are around. For kids, witnessing one parent into slavery of substances can be distressing and puzzling. They felt isolated in the family, and even faced some kind of assault too. At workplace, substance abusers were unable

Social	Psychological	Physical	Economic
Conflict with spouse	Stress	Weakness	Indebtedness
Conflict with parents	Loss of appetite	Pain	Mortgage Land
Conflict with children	Fatigue	Health issues	Mortgage House
Problems with friends	Depression	Bodyache	Mortgage Household items/ vehicles/ agriculture equipment
Imbalance between home / school/ college/ job	Insomnia	Weight loss	Mortgage ornaments
Problems with boss/ colleagues	Boredom	Risk of illness	Lost job
Problems with neighbor	Anxiety	Infection	Unemployment
Conflict with sarpanch (over any issue)	Suicidal thoughts	Collapsed veins and blood vessel	Unable to fulfill the need of family
Insecurity	Stroke	Liver damage and liver failure	
Suspiciousness of others	Problems with memory, attention and decision- making	Hepatitis B/C	
Avoiding family members	Low expectations from life	Brain hemorrhage	
Unmet family needs		Mouth ulcer AIDS or HIV Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Lung disease Infertility Loss of Vision	

to maintain a balance between work and personal life that led to trust issues with organization. According to Ghuman *et al* 2024, 72.53 per cent respondents lost their self-image due to substance abuse. On the other hand, 28 per cent felt isolated from society. According to study, financial troubles were the sociological issue that 21 per cent of respondents mentioned the most frequently. The prevailing highlights the significant economic effects the area of finance. Another common social issue that was mentioned by 16 per cent of the respondents was relationship problems. These issues included interpersonal difficulties that arose in social, romantic, or family environments. Six percent of the individuals disclosed that their substance usage resulted in legal troubles (Jain 2023, Deep 2022 and Arlappa *et al* 2019).

Psychological -A person's mood can be changed by substances' bio-chemical reactions. It can cause a variety of behavioural issues, like hostility, poor decision-making, erratic emotions, nervousness, and forgetfulness. The probability of violent behavior also increased. substance abuser exhibit patterns of abnormal conduct that allow them to flout social standards is not shocking. Depression, anxiety, mood changes, and phobia were some of the other psychological issues. sadness, nervousness, and changes in mood were both a direct and an indirect outcome of substance abuse and continued even after it has been stopped. After experiencing so many negative emotions, at last stage, abusers started thinking about ending their lives and developed suicidal thoughts. Depression was the most common and widely reported side effect of substance use disorder (SUD) Ten percent of respondents mentioned "memory loss," indicating that it was one of the additional effects of SUD. However, just 4 per cent of participants said that they did not believe substance use disorder had any effect at all on their mental health (Ghuman *et al* 2024, Jain 2023 Kumar *et al* 2023, Kumar 2023 and Nadeem *et al* 2009)

Physical-Substance abuse has different physical consequences on different body systems, but generally affects all of them. Substance abuse alters the way the brain processes information and the way the body enjoys itself. These side effects of addiction result from the substance continual infusion of dopamine and serotonin into the brain, which have an impact on the user's whole body. Substance abuse can have physiological consequences such as abnormal breathing patterns, elevated blood pressure and heart rate, heart disease, arthritis, and lung illness. Certain substances can also harm an individual's internal organs, including stomach, gastrointestinal tract and liver. Long-term inhalation of sedatives can cause impairment to the brain's memory and attention centres as well as damage to sensory organs. injecting drugs through shared needles increases a person's risk of contracting HIV, Hepatitis C, and B. Lung cancer, and other respiratory issues, liver and kidney damage, change in sleeping patterns, stomach ache, nausea, compromised

immune system are other related ailments (Ghuman *et al* 2024, Jain 2023, Kumar 2023 and Nadeem *et al* 2009).

Economic- Different substances had different prices which depend on the availability, type and quality. It's not easy to purchase these substances by the abuser. According to Ghuman *et al* 2024, 35.61 per cent of respondents spent above 800 rupees for purchasing substances on daily basis. So, for this requirement they mortgage their land, houses, household items and ornaments to meet the requirements. With time they were not able to repay the loans and amount of debt increased day by day. They lost their jobs, and become unemployed. Sometimes they get involved in unlawful activities such as drug peddling. This additionally burdened the family which in turn result in problems within the family and children (Ghuman *et al* 2024, Jain 2023 and Kumar 2023).

Substance abuse has several social, economic, psychological and physical consequences, including feelings of abandonment, fear, anxiety, and guilty, decreased trust. It also led to issues like mental stress, and poor decision-making. There is indebtedness and isolation in their lives.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Substance abuse has a wider spread among different populations differently, emphasizing the pressing need for focused intervention techniques. Substance abuse was associated with negative effects like declining health, unstable economies, and social unrest. This reaffirms the need for community support networks and robust public health strategies. There is no doubt to say substance abuse is actually deep rooted and rampant problem in all dimensions of society. The issue of substance dependency has multiple dimensions, such social, psychological, educational, and criminological. It disrupts the victims' homes and families, endangering the happiness of the family, affecting the victims' physical and mental health. imparting education regarding the worst consequences of substance abuse should be such that people involve themselves actively and there is a free exchange of any information about substance abuse. At early stage the abuser should be supported by the parents, Doctors have to show a greater care and empathy while recommending the drugs and in the care of patients. Laws and punishments are there but need of the hour is their strict implementation to control this menace. Awareness activities such as, awareness camp, rallies, *nukar natak*, police- public meeting should be organized time to time. There should be the interactive sessions by representatives of religious organizations and efforts should be made by them to control the problem. Effective strategies must be implemented to cure this complex social problem.

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