

Familial and Socio-Cultural Factors Contributing to the Rising Trend of Drug Addiction in Youth in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To know about the major familial and socio-cultural factors contributing to the rising trend of drugs and substance use in youth in twin cities i.e. Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Methods: The study was conducted in July-September 2021 in Twin Cities i.e. Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Data was collected from 150 young drug addicts (between the age group of 15 to 40 years). Snow ball and purposive sampling techniques were used to collect the data. A pre devised interview schedule having close and open ended questions was used. Frequency analysis method was used to represent the basic demographic data whereas a 4-points Likert Scale was used to know the extent of factors contributing to the rising trend of drug addiction in youth.

Results: Results showed that slightly more than one third of the respondents (34%) were quite young (21-25 years). Peer group/bad company was found responsible factor to great extent (71%), To increase sexual pleasure was also found responsible (45.8%), Lack of knowledge about harms of drugs was found responsible to great extent (49.3%). Another factor i.e. curiosity to use / taste drugs was also found responsible to great extent (77.3%).

Conclusion: Problem of drug addiction in youth in Pakistan is rising at a worrying trend. Numerous familial as well socio-cultural factors in the etiology of drug abuse and addiction have been found responsible.

Keywords: Drug, Substance, Addiction, youth, familial, social-cultural, factors, Pakistan,

INTRODUCTION

According to the Global Commission on Drug Policy drug is any substance which has a negative effect on the mind or body of an individual. In the pharmacological sense, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol are drugs just like cocaine and heroin¹. Historical evidences divulge that using drugs by human being is a very old phenomenon. People used to take extracts of plants and herbals for relief of body pain as well as worries. Though these drugs were being used by the people largely but still it was considered as individual's problem rather a social problem till the recent era. But in our day, due to modernization and industrialization usage of drugs has been increased dramatically and affecting people at large scale. Due to the reason, drug addiction has become a serious social problem in current era². Although drug addiction is a problem for all nations but it has become a major problem for developing countries especially. These countries having large young population are at bigger risk of addiction. The young population expose to greater risk as a major and the most vulnerable segment of society. Some factors like puberty, adolescents and youth identity crises as well as psychological conditions are considered fundamental for tendency of youth group towards drug or substance addiction³.

The drugs and substance addiction is a grave social problem which cannot be wished away. It has severe social, economic, political, medical and legal implications. It is just like a time bomb and ignoring it may cause horrific consequences because it mostly effects young population which generally referred to as future leadership of any nation⁴. Drug addiction highly correlates with the mental disorder and psychological issues. It may cause severe health issues, academic problems, reduction of employment opportunities, family deterioration, increase in violence cases and even terrorism. Drug addiction is also a root cause of poverty⁵. When a drug addicted persons arrive at that stage, they can never discontinue taking drugs despite knowing that these drugs may cause unrecoverable severe health damage for them individually as well as for their loved ones around them. The harmful and destructive health consequences arise due to drug abuse are unambiguous and well documented, whether these are the effects on the individual, community or society⁴.

Pakistan, being one of the youngest countries in the world and the second youngest in the South Asian region with 64% population under the age of 29, has greater risk of drug addiction⁶. According to the United Nations report, 7.6 million population is drug addicted in Pakistan. The most terrific truth is that majority of addicts are heroine abuser under the age of 24 years⁷. Another calculation is that, in Pakistan about 8.9 million population is drug abuser and around 700 drug addicts die each day because of drug related health complications. These numbers of drug related deaths are much higher than deaths caused by the terrorism in the country⁸. A report of UNODC (2013) indicated that an estimated 0.86 million (0.8%) of the population of the country is routine heroin user while 0.32 million (0.3%) people use opium regularly. It means that 1.06 million population in total (1.0% of the population of age 15-64 years) is regular user of opiates⁹. Poverty, lack of awareness and education about harms of drugs, lack of employment, economic aggravation, stress, parent's negligence and changing social norms are deemed some key responsible factors for drug addiction problem in the country¹⁰. Some other factors associated with the addiction such as availability, cost method of administration as well as environmental factors like behaviors acceptable in a community, peer pressure and influences, and genetic and epigenetic factors are also considered equally responsible¹¹.

The major purpose or philosophy behind conducting this study was to create awareness among general public especially parents regarding factors contributing to the drugs addiction in youth so that they could be well aware in this regard.

METHODOLOGY

This micro level study was conducted in July-September 2021 in Twin Cities i.e. Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Data was collected from 150 young drug addicts (between the age group of 15 to 40 years) sitting at different places like foot paths, parks, roads and graveyards. In Pakistan "youth" is defined as people between the ages of 15 to 29 years but to expand the circle of study to those who are quite young, it was decided to collect data from the drug addicts of 15-40 years¹². Snow ball and purposive sampling techniques were used to find the respondents. A pre devised interview schedule having close and open ended questions was used to collect data. The respondents who were over 40 years or those were unwilling to be part of the study were sampled out. A

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pretesting was conducted on five respondents to refine the data collection tool. Data collected was fed into the SPSS version 20 for its tabulation and analysis. Frequency analysis method was used to represent the basic demographic data whereas a 4-points Likert Scale was used to know the extent of factors contributing to the rising trend of drug addiction in respondents. The principles of ethical approval, informed consent and voluntary participation of the respondents were followed accordingly.

RESULTS

Table-1 describes the basic demographic profile of the respondents. Data showed that slightly more than one third of the respondents (34%) were quite young (21-25 years). A majority of the respondents were literate as only few (15%) respondents were illiterate. About 70% respondents were belonging to the nuclear family system whereas about 72% were married. Slightly less than half of the respondents (48.6%) were earning while about 60% respondents had no children whereas 36% had four or more children.

Table-2 shows the data regarding usage of drugs by the respondents. Data revealed that slightly less than half of the respondents claimed that they having been using drugs since less than one year. 24% respondents were using drugs for 1-3 years, 13% for 4-6 years while about 15% were using drugs from 7 or more years. About 31 percent respondents were using single drug but 69% were multiple drug users. Majority of respondents (41%) were regular drug users. Most of the respondents (54%) claimed that they use drug only one time in a day while remaining (46%) told that they use 2-5 times in a day which was very alarming situation. Majority of the respondents (61%) reported that they

never got treatment to get rid of the drugs but 28% were using drugs again after getting treatment once.

Table-3 indicates about the major responsible factors contributing to the drug addiction in the youth. For the purpose, the respondents were asked which factors contributed to what extent to make them addicted. In case of "Genetics/ heredity" factor, about 45% respondents refused that this factor did not contribute which means that no member of their families has remained addicted. "Peer group/ bad company" factor was contributing to great extent as majority of the respondents (71%) admitted that this factor is responsible to indulge them in drug addiction. Another factor i.e. "Social and family stresses/ Being ignored by the family" was also not contributing largely as 37% respondents stated that this factor is not responsible, 14% stated it is responsible very little while about 31% stated that it is responsible to some extent (17%) or to great extent (14%). Total 92 percent respondents considered that "increase sexual pleasure" is a big responsible factor. Out of them 45% considered it is responsible to great extent, 21% to some extent while 12% considered it responsible to very little extent. However, 8% considered that it is not a responsible factor at all. Unemployment/ economic frustration was considered responsible to great extent by 38% respondents while only 18% considered that it is not responsible factor. About half of the respondents considered the factor "Lack of knowledge about harms of drugs" responsible to great extent. More than half of the respondents (57%) stated that factor "overcome frustrations/ tragedies" is not responsible. Curiosity to use / taste drugs was considered as responsible factor to great extent by majority of the respondents (77%). Easy availability of drugs has also been found a big responsible factor. A majority of the respondents considered that "Breakup in love" is also a major factor in rising trend of drug addiction in youth.

Table-1: Basic demographic profile of the respondents (n=150)

Variables	Label	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	15-20	35	23.3
	21-25	52	34.6
	26-30	32	21.4
	31-35	21	14.0
	36-40	10	06.7
Education	Illiterate	23	15.4
	Primary	58	38.6
	Matric	52	34.7
	Intermediate	17	11.3
Family system	Joint	45	30.0
	Nuclear	105	70.0
Earning status	Earns	73	48.6
	Do not earn	77	51.4
Marital status	Married	108	72.0
	Unmarried	42	28.0
No. of children	No child	59	39.3
	1-3	37	24.7
	4-6	31	20.6
	6 and above	23	15.4

Table-2: Percentage distribution of usage of drugs/ substance (n=150)

Variables	Label	Freq. (f)	Percentage (%)
Drug/ substance use duration (Years)	Below 1	73	48.7
	1-3	36	24.0
	4-6	19	12.6
	7-10	13	08.7
	10 and above	9	06.0
Drug/ substance use	Single drug user	47	31.4
	Multiple drug user	103	68.6
Frequency of using drugs	Regular	62	41.4
	Often	53	35.3
	Rare	35	23.3
How many times in a day	One time	81	54.0
	2-3 times	52	34.6
	4-5 times	17	11.4
Have got treatment	One time	42	28.0
	Two times	13	08.6
	More than two times	03	02.0
	Never	92	61.4

Table-3: Responsible factors contributing to the rising trend of drug addiction in youth (n=150)

Factors responsible	Responses frequency							
	To great extent		to some extent		Very little		Not at all	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Genetics/ Heredity	24	16	34	22.6	25	16.6	67	44.6
Peer group/ bad company	107	71.3	12	8.0	21	14.0	10	6.6
Social and family stresses/ Being ignored by the family	21	14.0	26	17.3	49	32.6	54	36.0
To increase sexual pleasure	68	45.3	32	21.3	18	12.0	32	8.0
Unemployment/ economic frustration	57	38.0	43	28.6	23	15.3	27	18.0
Lack of knowledge about harms of drugs	74	49.3	31	20.6	25	16.6	20	13.3
To overcome frustrations/ tragedies	25	16.6	23	15.3	17	11.3	85	56.6
Curiosity to use / taste drugs	116	77.3	14	9.3	11	7.3	9	6.0
Easy availability	58	38.6	45	30.0	39	26	8	5.3
Breakup in love	56	37.3	69	46.0	14	9.3	11	7.3

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to know about the major familial and socio-cultural factors contributing to the rising trend of drugs and substance use in youth in twin cities i.e. Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The respondents of the study were drugs/ substance users in the age bracket of 15 to 40 years. Results of the study showed that three fourth of the respondents (75%) were quite young falling in the age group of 15-30 years. A study conducted in Lahore in 2017 also authenticated the findings that 82.8% of the respondents started taking drugs before age 25 years¹³. Another frightening situation was that the majority of the respondents/ drug addicts were literate as only few (15%) were illiterate which indicate that the most precious asset and future of the nation was being spoiled. The same situation was reported by a previous study wherein it has mentioned that only 2% respondents was illiterate while about 73% were educated above grade-5¹³.

The results of our study also confirmed the notion that joint family system can be very helpful in socialization of the children as it has a strong social pressure and social bindings among the generations. Results of the study showed that about 70% respondents/ drug addicts were belonging to the nuclear family system. While looking at the economic state of the young drug addicted, it was found that about 72% were married but just slightly less than half (48.6%) were earning for their families. Furthermore, while studying the different aspects of the usage of the substance/ drugs by the respondents/ young drug addicts, the results of the study showed that slightly less than half of the respondents stated that they started taking drugs during the last few months (less than one year) which indicated that the current policies/ measures taken by the state are not effective or responsive enough to diminish this social problem. A report published in the journal "the Lancet" also confirmed that despite efforts by the Government of Pakistan through different campaigns against drug addiction, it could not be stopped¹⁴.

Likewise, our study also pointed out that slightly less than one third of the respondents were using single drug/ substance whereas remaining two third were multiple drug/ substance users. These results have been found in line with the findings of a previous study conducted in Rawalpindi and Islamabad which indicated that 80 percent young drug/ substance addicts were poly-drug users¹⁵. Findings of our study further indicated that majority of the respondents (41%) were regular drug/ substance users while 35 and 23% were taking drugs often and rarely, respectively. Actually these 58% respondents (in total) were those who started taking drugs recently but they may become regular drug users in few months, if they were not stopped. Findings of our study also showed that slightly more than half of the respondents (54%) were taking drugs one time in a day while remaining (46%) told that they use to take drugs 2-5 times in a day which indicated the scary state regarding our youth.

According to the results of the study in hand, majority of the respondents (61%) did never get treatment to get rid of the addiction however 39% started taking drugs again after getting treatment(s). This situation of high rate of relapse put a question mark over the effectiveness of the treatment/ health system

regarding drug addiction in Pakistan. Another study conducted in twin cities i.e. Rawalpindi and Islamabad also confirmed the high rate of relapse in young users in Pakistan. According to the findings reported by that study, 65% respondents had received medical treatment for 1-5 times while 5% drug addicts had received 19 times treatment¹⁵. Similarly, while finding out the major responsible factors for the rising trend of drug/ substance addicts in youth in Pakistan, few major factors were sought. Genetics/ Heredity as responsible factor was confirmed by the 16% to be responsible "to great extent", 23% "to some extent" while 16% stated that this factor is responsible "to little extent". The National Institute on Drug Abuse also validated that genetics/ heredity is one of the major risk factors and about half of risk of addiction is based on genetics¹⁶. However, about 45% respondents of our study stated that the Genetics/ Heredity was not responsible in their cases which means that those 45% were newly addicted in their families. This very alarming situation confirms the reports regarding recent rapid increasing trend of drug addiction in youth in Pakistan. A report published in Daily "The News" also reported that trend of using drugs in youngsters in Pakistan is increasing to an shocking level¹⁷.

Peer group or bad company has also been found as a big contributing factor for drug addiction in youth. Our study reported that this factor contributed to make about 71% respondents drug addicted. A study conducted in Pakistan in 2021 also reported that a big reason behind increasing trend of drug addiction in youth in Pakistan is bad society or bad company¹⁸. Additionally, social and family stress or being ignored by the family has been found another reason of drug addiction in youth. About half of the respondents mentioned this factor as responsible to great extent¹⁹.

The results of our study also exposed that slightly less than half of the respondents (45%) initially started taking drugs to increase sexual pleasure. These results are in line with the findings of a study conducted in Pakistan in 2021 which reported that one of the major reasons of drug addiction in Pakistan is sexual pleasure (long intercourse)¹⁸. Furthermore, Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) Pakistan also confirmed that one of the major reasons of taking drugs is increasing sexual pleasure²⁰. In our study, unemployment or economic frustration has also been found as one of the reasons behind the rising trend of drug addiction in youngsters. This factor was considered responsible by the 38% respondents "to great extent" and 29% "to some extent". These results are in line with a previous study which deduced that unemployment is associated with higher rates of drug addiction²¹.

In our study, lack of knowledge about harms of drugs has also been found as factor responsible for rising trend of drug addiction in youth. A previous study conducted in Pakistan in 2018 also confirmed that lack of awareness about the harmful effects of drugs is one of the big reasons of increasing drug addiction in Pakistan²².

To overcome frustrations/ tragedies was also found one of the factors responsible for drug addiction in youth. About 42% respondents stated that they started taking drugs due to frustrations and tragedies because they were unable to face the odd situation. The results are in accordance with the findings of a previous study conducted in Islamabad which pointed out that that

majority of drug addicts tend to use drugs as they were unable to face circumstances which they think to be beyond their control²³.

Curiosity to use or taste drugs has been found one of the big reasons for taking drugs by the youngsters. The results of our study pointed out that about three fourth of the respondents started taking drugs just due to curiosity to taste/ use it. Another study conducted in Lahore in 2017 also reported that curiosity to use drugs is one of the big factors as about 39% respondents of the study started taking drugs due to the curiosity factor¹³.

Easy availability of drugs in Pakistan has been known as one of the major factors. The results of our study found that about 68% respondents confirmed that this factor was contributing to drug addiction in youth to great extent. The researchers are of the view that one of the major reasons behind the easy availability of drugs in Pakistan may be the border sharing with the neighboring country i.e. Afghanistan. Many studies confirmed this notion. A study reported that Pakistan's border sharing with Afghanistan is one of the major reasons for easy availability of drugs in Pakistan. Some drugs like cannabis and heroin can be found and smuggled smoothly from Afghanistan which shares 75% of the world's heroin¹⁰. Another study also reported that after 9/11 incidence, Pakistan had to bear the burden of drug proliferation from Afghanistan²⁴. One other study also reported that main causes of drug menace in Pakistan are being situated with Afghanistan and political instability in Pakistan²⁵. Further, breakup in love has also been found as one of factors responsible for drug addiction in youth. About 83% respondents of our study considered this factor responsible to great extent or to some extent. A study conducted in Karachi reveals that a high proportion of drug users (45%) reported problem of break-up of a relationship²⁶.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been deduced that problem of drug addiction in youth in Pakistan is rising at a worrying trend. Youth which is our most precious asset and future of nation is simply at a great risk of drug addiction. Family members especially parents can do this by spending time and start talking with, helping to make good friends and guiding about good and bad. Relevant authorities and civil society also need to take actions to combat the phenomenon with more extensive interventions. Effective awareness campaigns through print and electronic media must be launched instantaneously. Drug Addiction and Rehabilitation Centers required to be established by the Government at Tehsil and town levels. Counseling services by involving the Medical Social Workers should be provided to the young addicts to realize and motivate them that they being youth are their own best resource for dealing with drugs issues.

Conflict of interest: Nil

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