



Review Article

Growing Menace of Drug Abuse Among Youth in India: An Analysis


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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>Drug abuse among youth in India has escalated into an important public health crisis, with profound implications for individuals, families, and society at large. The consequences of this crisis extend beyond health, leading to increased criminal activities, academic failures, and family disruptions, ultimately impacting economic productivity and social stability. Current interventions, including government policies and community-based programs, are critically assessed for their effectiveness in addressing this multifaceted issue.</p> <p>This paper examines the alarming trends of substance abuse in the demographic aged 15-35, revealing a prevalence that has risen sharply due to various socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors. This paper also highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that integrate education, mental health support, and community engagement, aiming to not only prevent drug abuse but also rehabilitate affected individuals to pave the way for a healthier future for India's youth.</p> <p>Key substances abused include alcohol, cannabis, opioids, and stimulants, often exacerbated by peer pressure, mental health issues, and societal stigmas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 11-05-2025 ▪ Accepted: 15-06-2025 ▪ Published: 30-06-2025 ▪ IJCRM: 4(3); 2025: 597-601 ▪ ©2025, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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KEYWORDS: Youth, Drug Abuse, Legal and Mental Health Issues, Socioeconomic Conditions, India

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, drug abuse has emerged as a substantial public health challenge among the youth in India, signaling a crisis that demands urgent attention. The evolving socio-economic landscape, coupled with rapid urbanization and globalization, has contributed to increased drug availability and shifting social norms. As young individuals navigate the complexities of modern life, including academic pressures, unemployment and

mental health issues, many turn to substances as a means of coping or escape.

The youth population, defined here as individuals aged 15 to 35, constitutes a significant demographic that plays a vital role in shaping the nation's future. However, rising substance abuse not only threatens the health and well-being of this group but also imposes considerable challenges on families, communities, and

the economy at large. According to recent studies, approximately 8-10% of Indian youth are engaged in some form of substance abuse, highlighting an urgent need for comprehensive understanding and intervention.

The spectrum of substances abused is varied, ranging from alcohol and cannabis to more severe drugs such as opioids and stimulants. These substances are often misused due to a host of factors including peer pressure, social influences, and mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Additionally, societal stigmas surrounding mental health issues can hinder individuals from seeking necessary help, often leading to self-medication through the use of drugs.

As this crisis unfolds, the repercussions extend beyond individual health problems; they encompass broader social issues such as family breakdown, increased crime rates, and potential lapses in economic productivity. The need for effective and sustained intervention strategies becomes paramount. While the Indian government and various organizations have made strides to address this issue through policy frameworks and community programs, the effectiveness of these interventions varies significantly across regions.

Therefore, this paper aims to critically analyze the patterns of drug abuse among Indian youth, identify the underlying factors contributing to this trend, and assess the socio-economic and health implications. Ultimately, it seeks to formulate comprehensive recommendations that can aid in preventing substance abuse and supporting rehabilitation, ensuring a brighter future for the youth of India.

PREVALENCE OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUTH IN INDIA

The prevalence of drug abuse among youth in India has emerged as a critical public health issue, with studies indicating an alarming increase in substance use across various demographics. Recent surveys and research highlight that approximately 8-10% of young individuals aged 15 to 35 engage in some form of substance abuse. This statistic underscores the extensive reach of drug abuse, which varies significantly across urban and rural areas.

KEY FINDINGS ON SUBSTANCE USE

1. Alcohol: Alcohol remains the most widely abused substance among Indian youth, often normalized in social contexts. Data shows that binge drinking is prevalent, particularly in urban settings, with young males being the most affected demographic.

2. Cannabis: The use of cannabis is steadily rising, with many young individuals perceiving it as a 'soft drug.' Reports indicate that around 4% of youth admit to using cannabis, with higher rates reported in metropolitan cities.

3. Stimulants: The usage of stimulants like cocaine and methamphetamine is steadily increasing, particularly in urban centers. Young professionals and college students are often the primary users, driven by the pressures of academic and work-related performance.

4. Opioids: The misuse of prescription medications (including painkillers like oxycodone and codeine) and the increasing rates

of heroin dependence have raised significant concerns. Some regions, particularly in the northeastern states, have documented high levels of opioid abuse.

5. Polydrug Use: Many youths do not limit themselves to a single substance; there is a growing trend of polydrug use where individuals simultaneously consume multiple substances, exacerbating health risks and complicating treatment efforts.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS

1. Urban vs. Rural: Urban youth are more likely to engage in substance abuse compared to their rural counterparts, often due to greater accessibility and the influence of peer groups. However, rural areas are facing rising numbers due to limited recreational avenues and economic despair.

2. Gender Disparities: Historically, drug abuse has been viewed as a male-dominated issue; however, increasing numbers of females are also engaging in substance use, particularly with alcohol and prescription drugs.

3. Socioeconomic Factors: Youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are at higher risk for drug abuse, primarily due to stressors such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUTH IN INDIA

The rising incidence of drug abuse among youth in India is a multifaceted issue influenced by various socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors. Understanding these contributing factors is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Below are the key factors driving drug abuse among young people in India:

1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** Economic instability and high unemployment rates among youth lead to a sense of hopelessness and frustration, prompting some to seek solace in drugs as a coping mechanism. The lack of opportunities can create a vacuum where drug abuse becomes a prevalent escape.
- **Peer Pressure:** The influence of peers is particularly strong during adolescence and early adulthood. Young individuals often experiment with drugs to fit in or gain acceptance within their social circles, leading to increased rates of substance use.
- **Accessibility and Availability:** Increased availability and accessibility of drugs, particularly in urban areas, result in higher consumption rates. The proliferation of illicit drug markets, along with lax enforcement of existing drug laws, facilitates easier access for youth.

2. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NORMS

- **Stigma Surrounding Mental Health:** Mental health issues are often stigmatized in Indian society, preventing young people from seeking help. Instead, many may turn to drugs as a

way to self-medicate, exacerbating their mental health conditions.

- **Media Influence:** The portrayal of drug use in films, music, and social media can glamorize substance abuse, particularly among youth. This exposure can distort perceptions of drug use, leading to an increase in experimentation and consumption.
- **Societal Attitudes:** Certain cultural norms and attitudes may normalize or trivialize drug use, particularly alcohol and cannabis. This normalization can create an environment where young people feel less inhibited about trying drugs.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- **Mental Health Disorders:** There is a strong correlation between mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and trauma with substance abuse. Many youths may use drugs to alleviate symptoms or escape from painful emotions and experiences.
- **Stress and Coping Mechanisms:** The pressures of academic performance, relationships, and the uncertainties of future job prospects create significant stress for youth. Some may resort to drug use as a maladaptive coping mechanism, believing it helps manage their stress.
- **Trauma and Adverse Experiences:** Experiences such as family dysfunction, abuse, or exposure to violence can increase vulnerability to drug abuse among young people. These traumatic experiences may drive individuals to substance use to numb their emotional pain.

4. EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- **Academic Pressure:** The intense pressure to excel academically can lead youth to seek drugs like stimulants to enhance focus or performance. This 'performance-enhancing' drug use can easily spiral into dependence.
- **Lack of Awareness and Education:** Insufficient education regarding the risks and consequences of drug abuse can lead to naive experimentation. Comprehensive drug education programs in schools are often lacking, leaving youth ill-informed about the dangers of substance use.

5. FAMILY DYNAMICS

- **Family History of Substance Abuse:** A family history of substance abuse can predispose youth to similar behaviors. Children of parents who abuse drugs may normalize such behaviors, thereby increasing their likelihood of engaging in substance use.
- **Family Structure and Support:** Young individuals from broken or dysfunctional families may lack emotional support, making them more susceptible to peer influence and the subsequent risk of drug abuse.

CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG ABUSE AMONG YOUTH IN INDIA

The prevalence of drug abuse among youth in India has numerous and far-reaching consequences,

affecting the individuals involved their families and society as a whole. The following sections outline the major consequences of drug abuse among young people:

1. HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

- **Physical Health Implications:** Substance abuse poses severe risks to the physical health of youth, including:
 - i. **Chronic Illnesses:** Long-term drug use can lead to serious health conditions such as liver disease (due to alcohol abuse), respiratory problems (from smoking), and cardiovascular issues.
 - ii. **Infectious Diseases:** The injection of drugs increases the risk of transmission of infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS and hepatitis, particularly among those who engage in sharing needles.
 - iii. **Accidents and Overdoses:** Drug abuse is a significant factor in accidents, injuries, and fatalities. Delayed reaction times and impaired judgment increase the likelihood of accidents, while overdoses can lead to death.
- **Mental Health Disorders:** There is a strong link between drug abuse and the development or exacerbation of mental health disorders. Common issues include:
 - i. **Anxiety and Depression:** Many youths who abuse drugs also struggle with anxiety and depression, with substance use being a potential catalyst for these conditions.
 - ii. **Psychosis and Cognitive Impairment:** Some drugs, especially stimulants and hallucinogens, can trigger psychotic episodes or long-lasting cognitive impairments.

2. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

- **Breakdown of Family Relationships:** Drug abuse can lead to significant familial distress, resulting in:
 - i. **Strained Relationships:** Families may experience heightened conflict, mistrust, and emotional pain, leading to breakdowns in communication and relationships.
 - ii. **Child Neglect:** Parents who abuse drugs may neglect their children's needs, leading to a cycle of dysfunction across generations.
- **Academic and Occupational Impacts:** Youth involved in drug abuse often face academic and career-related challenges, including:
 - i. **Poor Academic Performance:** Drug abuse is linked to decreased concentration, absenteeism, and a higher likelihood of academic failure.
 - ii. **Decreased Employability:** Many young individuals who abuse drugs struggle to find and maintain stable employment due to drug-related issues or criminal records.
- **Criminal Activities:** Drug abuse can lead to involvement in criminal behavior, including:

- i. **Theft and Violence:** Some youth may resort to theft or other illegal activities to fund their drug habits, leading to increased crime rates in communities.
- ii. **Legal Consequences:** Many youths face arrest and incarceration for drug possession or trafficking, affecting their future opportunities and societal reintegration.

3. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

- **Financial Burden on Families:** The financial strain of supporting a youth who abuses drugs can be immense for families:
 - i. **Healthcare Costs:** Families may incur significant medical costs due to rehabilitation, treatment of health conditions related to drug abuse, and emergency medical interventions.
 - ii. **Loss of Income:** Families may also face income loss if the affected youth is unable to maintain employment or contribute economically.
- **Societal Costs:** The broader economy also suffers from the consequences of youth drug abuse through:
 - i. **Increased Healthcare System Burden:** Healthcare systems must allocate more resources to treat drug-related health issues, straining public health budgets.
 - ii. **Reduced Productivity:** A workforce diminished by drug abuse leads to lower economic productivity and increased absenteeism among potential young employees.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

- **Emotional Distress:** Youth who abuse drugs often experience psychological issues, including:
 - i. **Guilt and Shame:** Many struggles with feelings of guilt and shame related to their substance use, further complicating recovery and well-being.
 - ii. **Isolation:** Drug abuse can lead to withdrawal from friendships and family, resulting in feelings of loneliness and further mental health deterioration.

CONCLUSION

The escalating crisis of drug abuse among youth in India poses profound challenges that demand immediate and concerted action from all sectors of society. The rising prevalence of substance abuse, driven by a confluence of socio-economic, cultural, and psychological factors, has significant health implications, social repercussions, and economic burdens that affect not only individuals but also families and communities at large.

The multifaceted nature of this issue underscores the necessity for a holistic response. Education and awareness campaigns are crucial in informing youth about the dangers of drug use and fostering an environment conducive to open discussions on mental health. Increased access to mental health support services must be prioritized, as many young individuals resort to substance use as a means of coping with underlying emotional issues. Furthermore, community engagement and family

involvement are vital components in addressing the root causes of drug abuse.

Current interventions, including government policies and rehabilitation programs, require rigorous evaluation and enhancement to ensure their effectiveness. Collaboration between governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, schools, and communities is essential to develop targeted strategies that address the diverse needs of youth in different socio-cultural contexts.

In conclusion, addressing drug abuse among youth in India is not just a public health issue; it is a societal imperative that requires a commitment to creating supportive environments, enhancing educational initiatives, and providing comprehensive care. By undertaking a unified and informed approach, we can strive towards reducing drug abuse rates, improving the well-being of young individuals, and fostering a healthier society for future generations. The road ahead may be challenging, but with collective effort, it is possible to turn the tide against this emerging crisis.

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