

Impact of Society and Popular Media Culture on Substance Use Among Teenagers: A Holistic Field Study

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ABSTRACT

The matter of drug misuse has reached an alarming level in the present-day scenario. This issue holds paramount importance not solely based on the big numbers, but rather on the question of “who are the engaged?” It is a fact the younger people seem to be much more exposed to such vile substances, jeopardising their own life, along with society in which they live in. This dependence on psychotropic substances, which has emanated from increased accessibility and affordability along with changing socio-cultural norms has resulted into a vast chain of consequences. The youth, being in such impressionable age, are therefore vulnerable, as such addictions can negatively impact their future course of actions.

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that the youth of today stands on the cross-roads of either following ethics or seeking pleasure. Hence, there is a need to understand in detail, their viewpoints, interpretations, and outlook on the present situation, hence forming an important part of social sciences.

The objectives of the study are: 1) To investigate students’ perspective and level of understanding regarding substance use; 2) To examine the impact of media influence and popular culture in making substance use appear “attractive” to school-going teenagers; 3) To understand the impact of substance use on the respondents and their surroundings; and 4) To increase awareness and knowledge regarding drug use prevention amongst school going teenagers.

The survey was conducted in September and October 2022, covering all 42 Senior Secondary Schools of the UT Chandigarh, and primary data was collected through field surveys and direct contact with students. A well-structured Questionnaire was designed which were distributed at random to students in classes 9th - 12th covering 641 respondents including male, female, and transgenders in total.

The study unveils interesting facts and figures based on the young peoples’ perspective. It is found that crimes such as domestic violence and sexual harassment are most visible consequences of drug abuse in the respondents’ surroundings, unveiling a connection between crimes and substance misuse. Analysing the youth’s mindset and thought process in this era of short attention spans, craving instant gratification and seeking momentary pleasures are the driving force of this study.

Key words: Drug Abuse, Psychotropic Substances, Youth, School-goers, Society, Popular Culture.

1. Introduction

Prevalence of Psychoactive Substance and its effect on Young Adults: A psychoactive substance is one that, when consumed or given intravenously, affects one’s mental functions, such as intellect or emotions. The phrase is used to describe all drugs, legal and illegal, that are used for their particular, typically pleasurable effects on the mind. The society has regarded substance use from a variety of angles, including moral, legal, and cultural ones. However, it becomes necessary to seek medical assistance when the use of a substance starts to cause the user problems or stops being fully voluntary.

The use of psychoactive substances is an increasing problem across the board, including in developing countries as well as developed nations. Along with the existing high burden of alcohol and tobacco usage, there has been a significant increase in the number of young adults abusing prescription drugs and other psychoactive substances such as heroin, cannabis, smack, and crack among other similar substances. In India, the use of psychoactive substances is an increasing problem, particularly among young men; however, women are quickly catching up to the trend.

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The report "Magnitude of Substance Use in India, 2019" was published by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. As per that report 14.6% of Indians (aged 10–75) use alcohol, making it the most widely consumed psychoactive substance in the country. Only 2.8% of the population admits to having used cannabis during the past year, while 2.1% of the population reports using opioids within the same time frame. It's estimated that 2.7% of the population is alcoholic, while another 2.5% regularly engage in unsafe alcohol consumption. Less than one percent of Indians get assistance for opioid abuse. Tripura, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, and Arunachal Pradesh are some of the states with a high prevalence of alcohol use disorders (above 10%).

Substance abuse is a widespread issue. Young adults all around the world are known to use various types of drugs. Unfortunately, a significant portion of drug-using youth come from India. This is due to the fact that our nation's cornerstone is deceit. In India, drug trafficking is a frequent problem. Drug dealers target our nation's youth in order to boost their sales. They frequently target young individuals, ruining their future.

Different medications have varying effects on our senses. While some boost our self-esteem and stimulate our brains, others dull it, while still others elevate us to another level and frequently result in hallucinations. All drugs provide a momentary high, thus drug users continuously use them to maintain their happy state of mind. They are unaware of the harm it is doing to them. Drug-dependent young individuals in India are ruining their lives. The worst sort of addiction is a drug addiction. It contributes to many physical and mental disorders. Drug-dependent young people frequently experience depression. They try to use additional medicines in order to deal with stress and sadness. They never manage to escape their addiction; they just keep going in circles. They experience a loss of control and become exposed. Many of them engage in various forms of criminal activity or commit suicide. Adolescents who abuse drugs or alcohol run a significant danger of developing heart disease, stroke, mental breakdown, lung disease, liver issues, cancer, and other illnesses. Depression and problems with rage are other results. The addiction poses a threat to life.

2. Role of Information Technology and Mass Media on Youth

In the age of rapid transmission of data from one part of the world to another, people tend to get influences from the trends across the world. Exchange of culture, language and knowledge has been easier than ever imagined. The information technology revolution brought with itself a sense of freedom. As the barricades of topography and natural isolation broke, people experienced cultures around them they never knew even existed. Mass

dissemination of information was possible via various mediums like televisions, radio, and mobile phones etc.

Being at an impressionable age, when even the slightest of incidences leave a huge imprint over the individual's personality, the young adults are constantly in touch with technology. They have kind of wrapped themselves around this web. While the benefits of such interconnectedness are many, one must also keep in mind the negative aspects of such extended exposure.

"Influencing" has become a very important term in context to present day mass media and popular culture. It is the moulding of a group of individual's behaviours, who are impressed or deeply interested in some other person's or group's way of living. When we consider the selected theme for the study, such "influences" can become lethal especially when the individual lacks knowledge of the nature and efficacy of the drug. That's where most of vulnerable groups are most likely to be exposed to the world of illicit substances.

Driven by curiosity and peer pressure, the young adult population finds itself struck between the greater good and bad, leading to confusion, insecurity, and shame. Knowing that mass media as a "soft power" has the potential to influence minds, it must be understood that the widespread acceptance of such substances into young people's lives can be attributed to it. When young people read content or even see movies/dramas where psychotropic substances are consumed just to appear "cool" or to "relax", it sets a wrong impression in their minds in regard with such lethal substances.

It becomes crucial in the contemporary scenario to guide the youth and channelise their energy in constructive ways, keeping them away from the toxic and life-threatening influence of certain realms of information technology.

3. Laws Enforcement related to Substance Abuse

According to Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, 'the state shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medical purposes, of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health.' The onus of responsibilities lies with central and state governments Policy and Programmes in India. Following are the various Ministries involved in the issue of substance abuse and their respective roles:

- (a) Controlling the manufacture and trafficking of illegal drugs in India: Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Défense (Department of Revenue), and State Governments (Supply Reduction)
- (b) Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJE): Rehabilitation of substance abusers and provision of counselling services. (Demand Reduction)
- (c) Provision of treatment services and follow-up care are provided by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

(MOHFW) (Demand Reduction). The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare's Drug De-Addiction Programme (DDAP) was established in 1987–1988 and updated in 1992–1993 as a programme for Central sector assistance to States.

4. Narcotic Control Bureau (NCB)

The NCB is the primary law enforcement and intelligence organisation of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 charged the agency, which was established on March 17, 1986, with preventing the use and trafficking of illegal drugs.

Through its zones and sub-zones, the NCB acts as an enforcement body. Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Chennai, Delhi, Guwahati, Indore, Jammu, Jodhpur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Patna are among the zones. Ajmer, Amritsar, Bhubaneswar, Dehradun, Goa, Hyderabad, Imphal, Mandasaur, Madurai, Mandi, Raipur, Ranchi, and Kochi are among the sub-zones.

5. Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985

Previously, narcotic drug legislation was governed by the Opium Act of 1852, the Opium Act of 1878, and the Hazardous Drugs Act of 1930. The provisions of these enactments were found to be insufficient due to the passage of time and changes in the field of illegal drug trafficking and substance addiction at the national and international levels.

To reform and update previous narcotic drug laws, comprehensive legislation was required. As a result, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Bill was passed by parliament. It was passed in Lok Sabha on August 23, 1985 and became law on November 14, 1985. The act has been amended three times since 1988: in 1988, 2001, and 2014.

An important aspect of the act is that the process of adding and removing narcotics and psychotropic substances from the lists was simplified. As a result, no formal bill or amendment is required, and the government has been given the authority to make these changes based on available information or a simple notification in the official gazette. According to the Act, the government may seize, freeze, and forfeit property obtained by a person convicted under the Act of drug-related offences. All offences covered by the NDPS Act are not subject to bail. Additionally, drug convictions cannot be expunged, their sentences commuted, or their fines reduced.

6. Hypothesis

Information technology, Mass Media and shifting societal norms deeply influence young people's perception on Drug use and its implications.

7. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To investigate students' perspective and level of understanding regarding substance use.
- 2) To examine the impact of media influence and popular culture in making substance use appear "attractive" to school-going teenagers.
- 3) To understand the impact of substance use on the respondents and their surroundings.
- 4) To increase awareness and knowledge regarding drug use prevention amongst school going teenagers.

8. Methodology

To conduct this study, all 42-government model senior secondary schools of Chandigarh were covered. Around 650 students from classes 9th to 12th were a part of this study. The students were made to fill questionnaires related to drug use, media influence and general interpretation of their surrounding conditions. The questionnaire was pre-tested on 50 students to check its efficiency. After due scrutiny and recording of responses, discarding incomplete responses, this study covered 318 males, 318 females and 5 transgenders. Using this general sampling technique, due inferences were made on the theme.

9. Review of Literature

(Mohanani et al.) The goal of this study is to determine the prevalence of teenage risky sexual behaviour, alcohol use, and tobacco use as well as the socioeconomic factors that may have an impact on these behaviours. A cross-sectional study of 376 teenagers (15–19 years old) enrolled in several high schools and colleges in Udupi, India, is done between January and April 2011. The instructions and questionnaires from the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey have been used to obtain the data. The patterns of participants' smoking, drinking, and sexual behaviour are investigated. According to the study's findings, 5.7%, 7.2%, and 5.5% of participants, respectively, reported using alcohol, smoking, or engaging in sexual behaviour. The individuals' first sexual encounters, alcohol intake, and tobacco usage all began on average at 16.8 years old. Males were more likely than females to have used tobacco and alcohol, according to multivariate analysis. Other elements, such religion and family members' tobacco usage, are also found to be significant. The study's findings suggest that an integrated strategy is necessary to address the possibility of several risk behaviours coexisting in a student. In order to stop teenagers' behaviours from becoming a risk to their health, emphasis should be made on health education in schools and improved awareness among parents.

(Srivastava et al.) The current study investigates whether the substance use behaviour of teenage boys in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is related to substance use among

family members and in the community. In this study, researchers analysed information from the 2016 Understanding the Lives of Adolescents and Young Adults (UDAYA) survey, which included 5969 teenage boys between the ages of 10 and 19. To comprehend the relationship between teenage substance use behaviour and familial and social setting, a three-level random intercept logit model is used. According to the study's findings, 16% of adolescent boys used some type of drug (tobacco or alcohol or drug). Adolescent boys who dropped out of school had a 40% greater rate of substance use than those who were still enrolled in school. Additionally, a high prevalence of substance use (35%) was observed among individuals who were employed. Additionally, 19, 24, and 28% of the teenagers came from households where at least one person has used tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, respectively. Teenage boys who had family members who used drugs had 2.13 times [CI:1.44-3.17] higher chance of using drugs themselves. Moreover, among teenage boys from high-substance-use communities, the chance of substance use is 1.24 times [CI:1.01-1.68] greater. Additionally, teenage guys who live in the same household and belong to the same neighbourhood are more prone to use drugs. As a result, this study's conclusion is that it is clear that boys who are exposed to substance use in their families and communities are more likely to take drugs themselves. To reduce the risk of teenage substance use, systematic initiatives at the family and community levels are required. (Gupta et al.) By examining and contrasting the relationship between self-reported exposure to alcohol marketing on three popular SNS (Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter) and alcohol consumption among young people in various national contexts, researchers in this study sought to build on the scant current research (India and Australia). Cross-sectional research methodology has been used in this study to collect self-report data from a convenience sample of 631 respondents aged 13 to 25 (330 in India and 301 in Australia) that answered online surveys. Respondents provided information on their drinking habits and involvement with social media marketing for alcoholic beverages. According to the study's findings, a large number of participants from both nations admitted to interacting with alcohol-related online content, mostly on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The interaction mostly takes the form of posting, liking, sharing, and commenting on content published on the social media pages of alcohol firms, visiting the event page of an event that has been promoted by an alcohol company on social media, attending it, and/or visiting an alcohol website. With impacts varying by SNS, demographic category, and nation, multivariate studies showed a strong relationship between respondents' interaction with alcohol content and drinking levels. For instance, among Indian respondents, having friends who shared alcohol-related

content was a significant predictor of typical alcohol usage ($p < .001$), whereas among Australian respondents, sharing alcohol-related content oneself had been a stronger predictor ($p < .001$). Therefore, these findings imply that young people's alcohol use behaviours are correlated with their contact with alcohol-related information on SNS and that these behaviours differ depending on the national context. By proving this connection across several social media platforms and national contexts, this study builds on prior studies. The findings demonstrate the necessity of developing and trying to implement ways to effectively control alcohol marketing on SNS, particularly among younger SNS users.

(Saikia and Debbarma) Assessing the socioeconomic correlates of substance use among male adults in NEI is the goal of this study. In this study, authors investigated data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015–2016 that were nationally representative. In 14,555 men between the ages of 15 and 54, they looked at the prevalence and frequency of smoking, using smokeless tobacco products, drinking alcohol, and using other drugs. In order to look at the socioeconomic factors associated with substance use among male adults in NEI, they used binary logistic regressions. Results show that the percentage of male adults in NEI who use any substance—including alcohol, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco—is much greater than that of men in other parts of the nation. In comparison to the rest of the nation, NEI has higher rates of drinking and smoking. 10.2 million people take drugs worldwide, 6.7 million of whom are from the state of Assam. Teenagers (between the ages of 15 and 19) who use drugs or alcohol account for 44.38% of all adolescents. When users are between the ages of 25 and 49, substance usage reaches a plateau before starting to fall. In NEI, the chance of substance usage decreases as affluence and education levels rises. Scheduled Tribe adults have the greatest prevalence of substance use among all social groupings. As a result, there is a relatively high intensity of substance use in NEI. The groups who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are more likely to engage in these undesirable habits. To better comprehend the patterns of substance availability and usage in NEI, extensive research is required. Strong legislative initiatives are also required to lower substance usage among disadvantaged communities.

(Ghosh et al.) The purpose of the authors in this study is to examine the nature and focus of Indian online news coverage on substance misuse and addiction. Online news media reports from July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, are analysed using an exploratory qualitative design. One hundred papers are chosen because they fit all of the criteria. They employ a checklist method for content analysis. Careful data immersion and triangulation lead to the coding, categorization, and topic creation that

constitute thematic analysis. Sixty percent of the articles presented an unfavourable view of substance use or people who struggle with it in the headlines and body text. There are 51 percent alcohol-related articles. Only 5% of the publications described the role of therapy in a favourable light, while 27% of the articles focused on reducing the supply. Seven main ideas have been uncovered. Substance abuse’s legal and criminal implications (n = 39), the risks to users’ psychological well-being and physical health (30), and the furthering of societal stigma (25) appear most frequently. Sociocultural factors related to substance use (n = 9), and the alcohol industry and marketing (n = 20), are two more common themes. Only five articles have treatment strategies as a central focus. As a result, there is an immediate requirement for media standards for accurate coverage of substance abuse. Likewise, the study’s authors propose certain recommendations for the news media to follow.

10. Data Interpretation and Results

Based on the accumulated information from analysing the questionnaires, the data was carefully organised into tables and then into diagrams for easy comprehension and comparison. The process needed precision and the highest possible level of accuracy was maintained. The following few diagrams and tables bring forward the core of the study, that is the main findings and research outcomes.

Table 1 and figure 3 show a very important parameter of this research, that is the quantitative aspect. It can be seen that even when the sample population consists of students from 9th to 12th class, most of the male and female respondents knew more than five people in their immediate surroundings and of their own age groups, who were indulged in such activities. Around 126 females and 117 males knew more than 5 people who were engaged in illicit substance consumption. About 72 males and 102 females knew around 1 to 2 such people. The “2-5 people” category was selected by 96 male respondents and 36 female respondents. When one individual knows several others who are abusing psychotropic substances, it shows

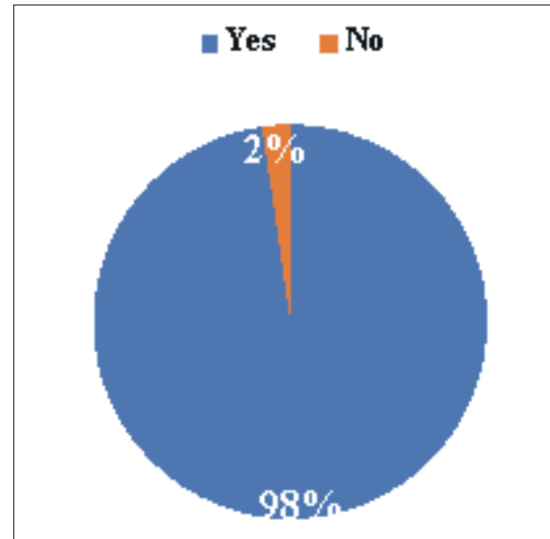


Figure 1: Have you ever heard about any Psychotropic Substance/Illicit Drugs?

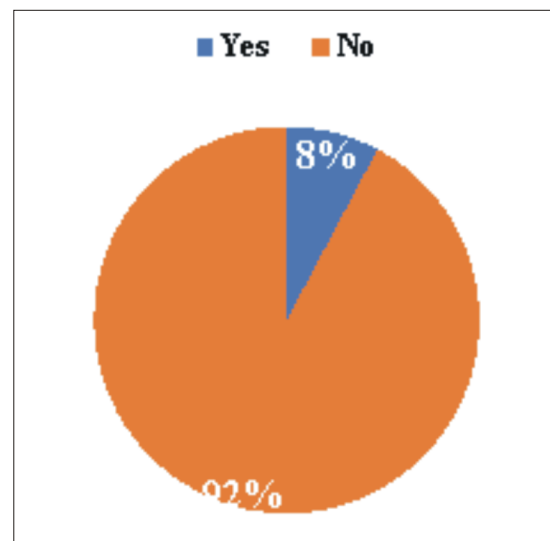


Figure 2: Do you have favourable opinions of the representation of illicit substances and their consumption in popular mass media?

Table 1: How many people of your age group, do you know are engaged in substance use?

How many people of your age group, do you know are engaged in substance use?		
	Females	Males
1-2 people	102	72
2-5 people	36	96
More than 5 people	126	117
None	54	33

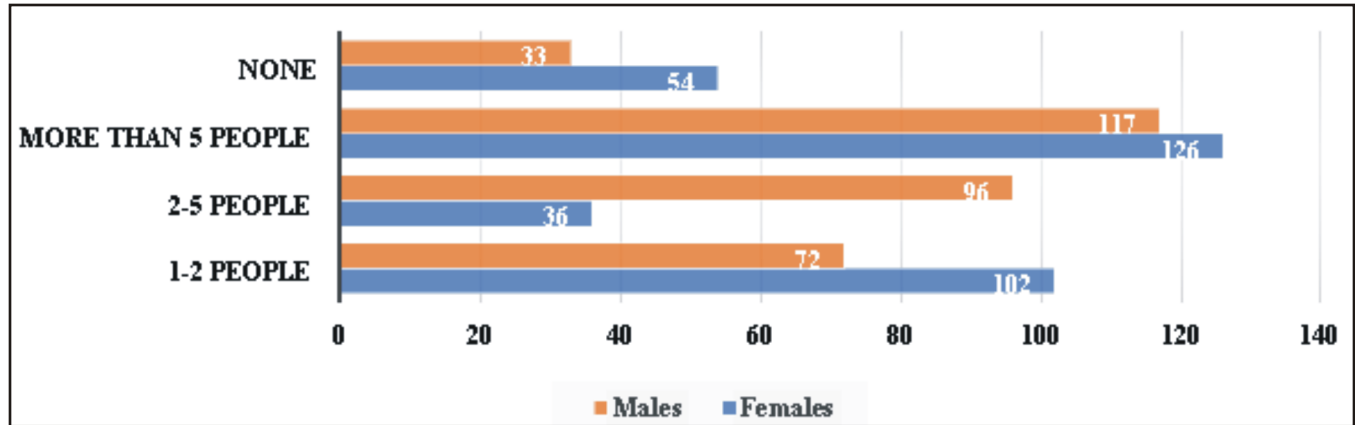


Figure 3: How many people of your age group, do you know are engaged in substance use?

that public health risk runs high and so does ignorance amongst people regarding their health.

Figure 4 and figure 5 show the number of male and female respondents who have been offered any kind of illicit substances. It can be inferred that 26% of the male respondents and 21% of the female respondents had been at least offered some kind of illicit substances. When we see this comparison keeping in mind the sexes of the respondents, then, it is evident that male respondents were 5% more exposed to such incidents. The reason behind this difference can be social outlook of masculinity and societal unacceptance of women engaged in such acts. Nevertheless, close to a quarter of female and male respondents did get drugs offered to them at some point.

Immediate surroundings play an important part in an individual’s overall upbringing. When asked about who were the most engrossed in such lethal substances around them, the answers were varied. Ranging from parents,

grandparents, friends, neighbours, and siblings etc, the responses changed. The notable fact remains that across both male (33.9%) and female (35.8%) respondents, “friends” were the most selected group of people who seemed to be the part of issue. This was followed by Parents (28.5% of males and 33.2% of females) and grandparents. Table 2 and Figure numbers 6 and 7 provide comprehensive insights on the research question.

Table 3 and figure number 8 list the reasons why the respondents think people around them are engaged in drug misuse. The major reasons listed were curiosity, family influence, friends, lack of awareness and lack of self-control. Again, the study points to the magnanimity of friends and peer groups influence as the single largest reason why people start with such habits (as per 132 male and 90 female respondents). This was followed by family influence (63 males and 75 female respondents), curiosity (57 male and 69 female respondents), lack of awareness

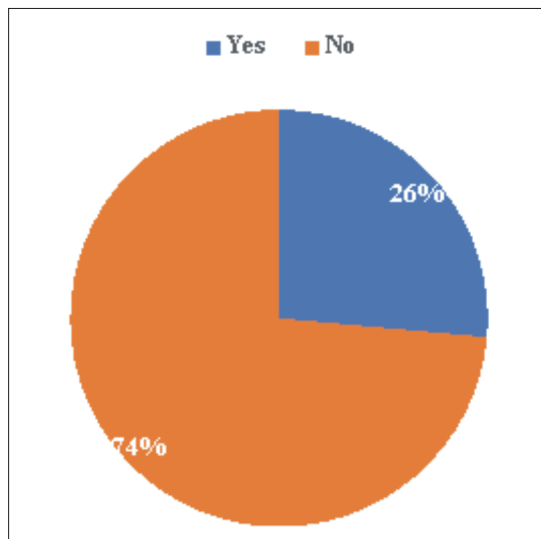


Figure 4: Have you ever been offered illicit substances? (Male Respondents)

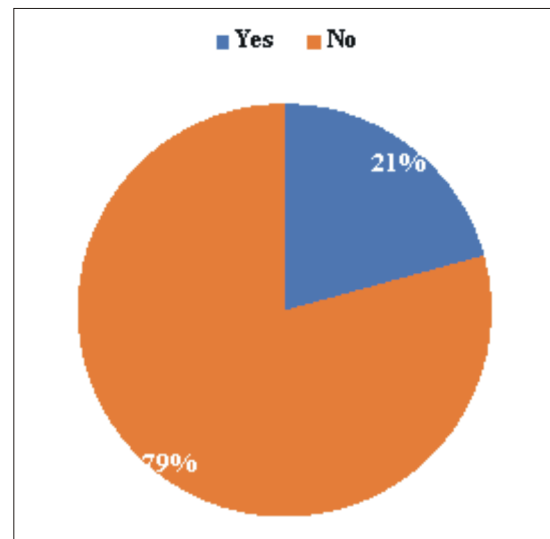


Figure 5: Have you ever been offered illicit substances? (Female Respondents)

Table 2: Who amongst the following according to you are deeply engrossed in substance misuse around you?

	Males	Females
Father/ Mother	28.50%	33.20%
Grandparents	12.20%	9.40%
Siblings/ Cousins	4.70%	1.80%
Friends	33.90%	35.80%
Neighbours	9.40%	1.80%
Others	11.30%	17.90%

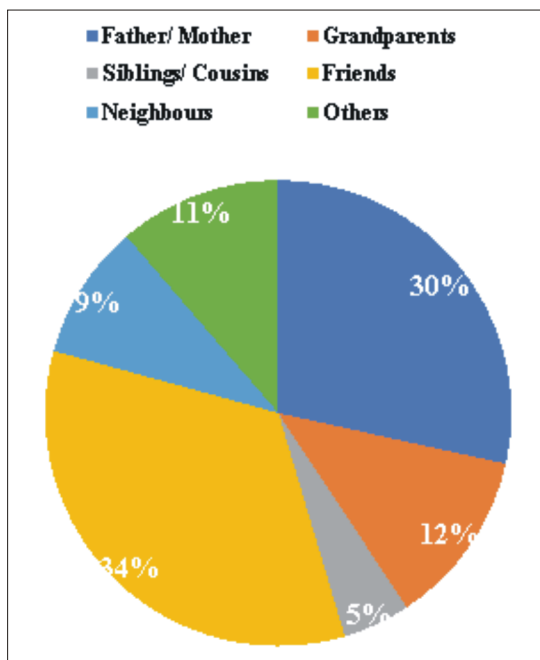


Figure 6: Who amongst the following according to you are deeply engrossed in substance misuse around you? (Male Respondents)

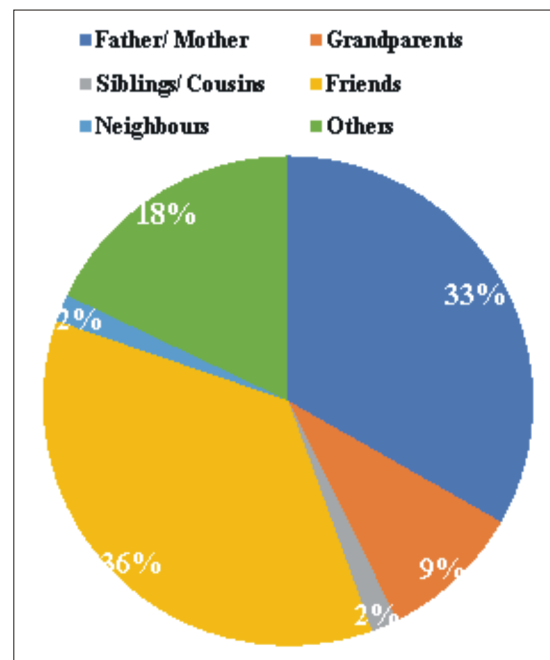


Figure 7: Who amongst the following according to you are deeply engrossed in substance misuse around you? (Female Respondents)

(39 male and 45 female respondents) and lastly, lack of self-control (27 male and 39 female respondents).

Consumption of illicit and psychotropic substances can have far reaching impact on people and community life. It is also notable that the brunt of societal oppression is faced by women alone. When we talk about drug misuse, the avenues of such crime widen too. Here, 3 major issues concerning women and gender linked to drug misuse were selected, namely, neglect, domestic violence, and sexual offenses. It was revealed that for 57% of the respondents, drug misuse in their surrounding led to domestic violence against women (for 57% of the respondents), followed by neglect (23% of the respondents) and sexual assault (20% of the respondents). Conditions of women say a lot about a society's health. The three major problems taken into this

study and the sheer magnitude of them show that women suffer greatly from such behaviours of their male counterparts. Creating a safe environment for women is directly linked with regulating the consumption of such psychotropic substances.

11. Discussion

According to the study's findings, it can be noted that despite knowing the adverse effects of illicit drugs and psychotropic substances, students responded that these substances are consumed in their surroundings. This demonstrates the accessibility and usage of substances. Although individuals are aware of the dangers of consuming such substances, the health aspect is usually ignored in favour of momentary gratification. The next point to be made is that technology and the media play a

Table 3: What is the single largest reason behind people's drug misuse habits according to you?

	Females	Males
Curiosity	69	57
Family's Influence	75	63
Friends	90	132
Lack of awareness	45	39
Lack of self-control	39	27

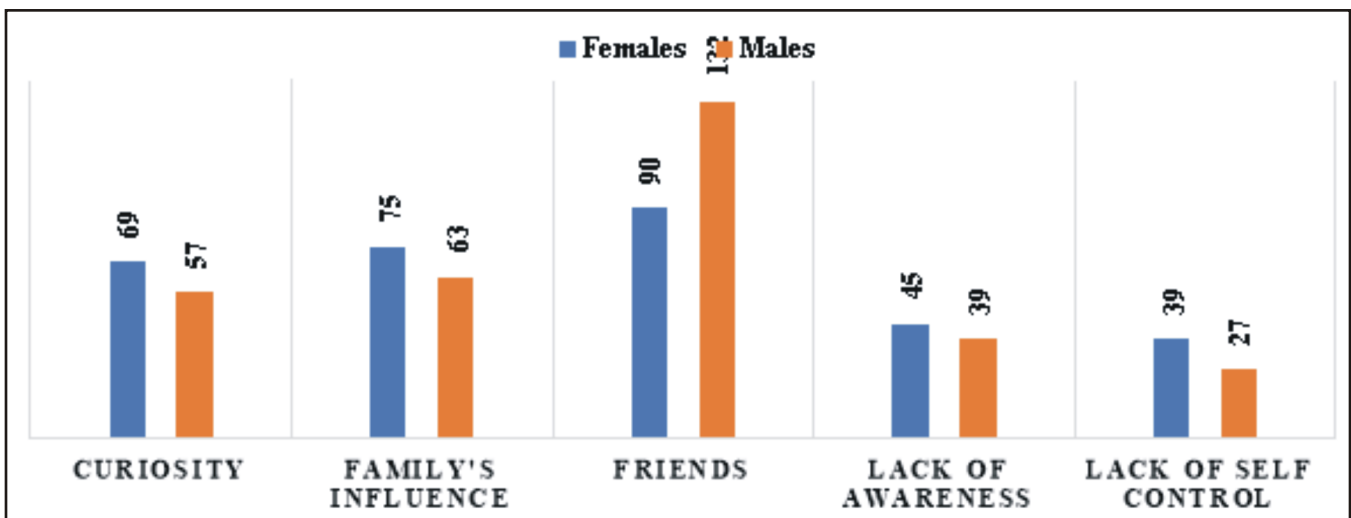


Figure 8: What is the single largest reason behind people's drug misuse habits according to you?

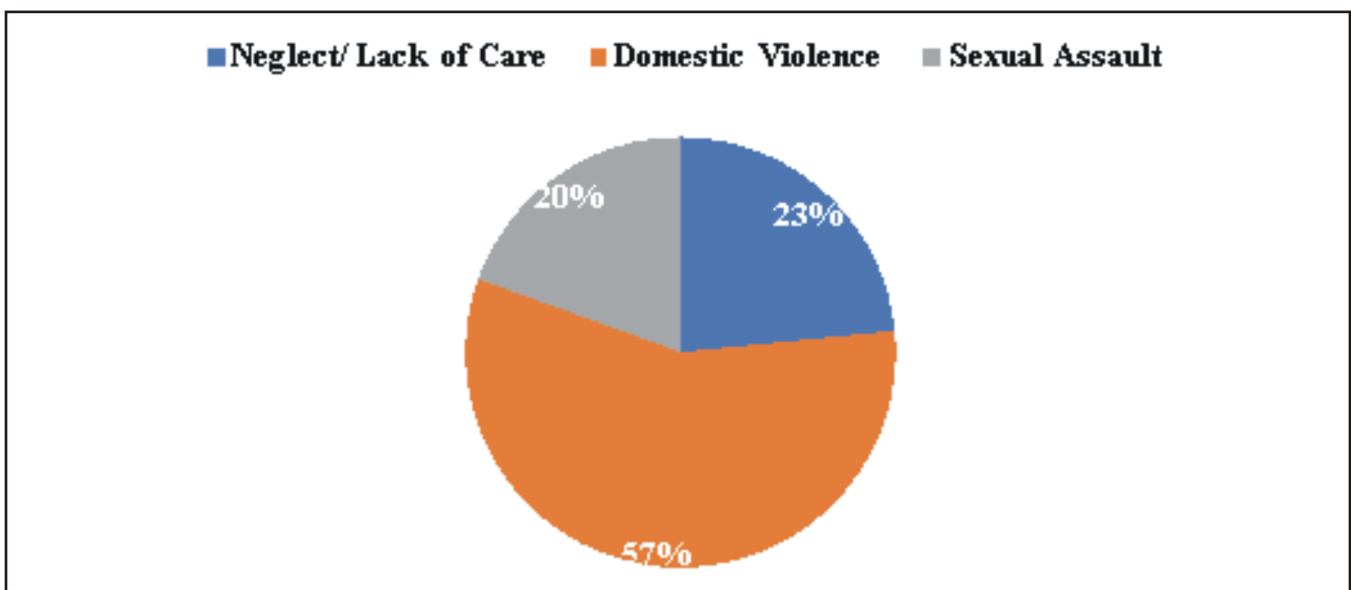


Figure 9: Which is the most widespread problem faced by women due to substance abuse in your surroundings?

significant part in moulding the perspectives of today's students. The use of digital media continues to shape the habits of adolescents and young adults. In order to demonstrate the effects of technology on these young adults, it is necessary to depict the use of psychoactive substances. It was found that most respondents were not supportive as to how drugs are portrayed in the media. Furthermore, as it can be observed, most male and female respondents knew more than five people in their immediate surroundings and of their own age group who have been engaged in such activities, and this was accurate even when the sample population consisted of students from 9th to 12th class. An increased public health risk and extensive lack of health literacy is demonstrated when a single person has multiple friends who are taking psychotropic substances. This led to the conclusion that more males than females have been offered drugs. Taking into account both sexes, it is clear that male respondents are more likely to experience this kind of thing. Alternative reasons for this disparity include societal values of masculinity and the widespread rejection of similar conduct on the part of females. However, about a quarter of respondents (both male and female) reported being offered drugs at some point. In addition, those who participated in the survey stated that curiosity, family influence, friends, a lack of awareness, and a lack of self-control are among the reasons that people in their circle of influence engage in drug usage. The generosity of friends and peer groups can be claimed to be the primary motivation for the initiation of such activities, according to the findings. Moreover, it is well-known that the use of illicit drugs and psychoactive substances can have serious consequences for both individuals and society as a whole. It's important to note that women experience unique forms of societal oppression. The scope of criminal activity expands when drugs are involved. Neglect, domestic violence, and sexual assaults are three important problems affecting women and gender that are linked to drug abuse. It has been discovered that most respondents believed that drug abuse in their community contributed to domestic violence against women, followed by neglect and sexual assault. Women's conditions reveal a lot about the health of a society. The three main issues have been included in this study and their enormity demonstrate how adversely these practices by men affect women. Controlling the use of such psychoactive substances is directly related to fostering a healthy environment for women.

12. Conclusion

The study puts into perspective the issues and concerns of psychotropic and illicit substances focusing on young adults. Comprising a significant part of the population, young adults form the most vulnerable group which is at risk for drug contamination. The study clearly derives a link between the misuse of drugs, impact of mass media

and the psychological conditions of young adults. While peer pressure and friend circle were deemed as the largest contributors to the habit of drug dependence, crimes and were seen as an outcome of the same. Hence, the hypothesis of the study is found valid.

13. Recommendations & Future Scope

The study's findings recommends that parents, particularly those of children from marginalised sections, should be educated and made aware on the topic of psychoactive substance use, with a particular focus on counselling and treatment practices. A robust PTA (Parent Teacher Association) focused on reducing drug usage among students is needed in schools. Schools should be mandated to submit a monthly report to the concerned Education Department detailing the number of drug abuse prevention-related awareness programmes, extra-curricular activities, and counselling sessions they have held. In order to understand the underlying causes of this issue and eliminate the stigma associated with substance abuse from the country, more research projects and innovations should be encouraged in the field of drug abuse prevention.

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