

The Discovery of Perceptions and Causes of Substance Abuse in Schools' Students

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the attitude and reason behind substance abuse in adolescents based on the findings of students, parents, and teachers in District Lasbela, Pakistan. In This paper explores the perception and the root cause of smoking among teens in the District Lasbela, on the topic of smokeless used drugs, including pan, gutka, chalia, and mava. Through a mixed-methodology, the study surveyed 450 secondary school students and held in-depth interviews with 47 stakeholders, such as parents, teachers and head teachers. A mixed-methods design was provided to conduct surveys of students (n=450) and interviews with teachers, parents, and head teachers (n=47). The results indicate that peer pressure, family modelling, cultural normalization and the easy access to substances around school grounds are major factors leading to adolescent consumption. Also, Results show that pan, gutka, chalia and mava are the most popular substances. Peer influence, family modelling, cultural acceptance, and easy accessibility in the areas adjacent to schools are some root causes. Educationists and parents are viewing substance use as an increasing educational and health epidemic. The research indicates the necessity of family, school, and community-based intervention the lack of parental control, educational pressure, and non-existence of institutional regulations contribute to the problem. Concerns among the stakeholders such as educators and parents are increasing regarding the educational and health consequences of substance use and are seeing it as an emerging epidemic. The paper has highlighted the desperate necessity of multi-level interventions that include families, schools, communities, and local merchants as the most effective means of reducing and treating adolescent substance abuse.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, adolescents, accessibility, consumption, intervention

INTRODUCTION

Substance use among adolescents is a globally recognized public health concern, with significant variation in prevalence, type, and context across regions. According to the World Health Organization (2022), over 13 million adolescents worldwide engage in substance use, with smokeless tobacco products—such as Pan, Gutka, Chalia, and Mava—being particularly prevalent in South Asia. These substances are often culturally embedded, widely available, and perceived as less harmful than smoking or alcohol, contributing to their normalization among youth.

Smoking of Smokeless Substances as a normal part of culture. Pakistan has a great culture of using smokeless substances and this has been instilled in their culture and social rituals. Such products as Gutka and Chalia are usually taken on wedding days, religious events, and family get-togethers, and are typically considered to be festive or harmless. Such cultural framing lowers the stigma and enhances

accessibility, especially among adolescents who find themselves seeing the elders in the same environment who use these substances without any consequences.

Students is a very sensitive period of life as it is a period of exploration, development of identity and a period of exposure to societal pressures. Growing young individuals tend to engage themselves in risk-taking behaviours, such as substance use during this period. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescent substance abuse is one of the major health issues in the world, and tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis are some of the most used substances in the world (WHO, 2022). In South Asia, smokeless tobacco, including pan, gutka, chalia, and mava, however, are the most popular among adolescents, due to their low cost, availability, and acceptance by the culture (Sharma et al., 2022).

Adolescent Substance using is not only a health hazard, but also a detrimental factor to academic performance. It has been found out that substance use diminishes cognitive functioning, decreases motivation, and elevates the rates of absenteeism and dropout (Halladay et al., 2021). In Pakistan, where the education systems are already struggling to overcome the issues of their resources and a high dropout rate, adolescent substance use exacerbates the problems. The case of District Lasbela is an example of this situation, in which substance use trends are characterized by poverty, poor responses, and cultural normalization in combination (Ali and Hussain, 2022).

Statement of the problem

Adolescent substance abuse in Pakistan is a growing concern, but studies have mainly focused semi-urban cities like Lasbela have less attention due to the open sale of smokeless substances and lack of control. Parents and educators often respond to substance use as a disciplinary issue rather than a general health issue. The absence of coordination between families, schools, and community stakeholders exacerbates the situation. This paper uses a mixed-method approach to study perceptions and identify underlying causes of substance use in District Lasbela, addressing the gap in international literature.

Research Objectives

General Objective

This study's main objective was to investigate substance use, availability, the ultimate objective is to explore into the interplay of discourses emerging from professional narratives and their societal implication and justification in, secondary schools District Lasbela, Baluchistan.

Specific Objectives

- To compare attitude toward substance, use by the students, parents and educators.
- To determine the principal causes of the abuse of substances among high school and post-high school students

Research Questions

- Research Question How do the attitudes to substance use vary among students, parents, and educators?
- Purpose: To determine the principal causes of the abuse of substances among high school and post-high school students.
- Research Question: How are the primary causes of substance abuse among secondary and high education learners?

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two theoretical approaches: Social Learning Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. According to Social Learning Theory, adolescents acquire behaviors through observation of the role models especially those who are their peers and relatives (Bandura, 1977). This is the reason behind peer pressure and family habits, which lead to substance use in Lasbela. The Ecological Systems Theory focuses on the way people, families, schools and communities interact with each other in forming behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This model can be used to examine the interplay between accessibility, as well as weak school policies and cultural practices with regard to substance use among adolescents.

Literature Review

The topic of adolescent substance use has gained an acute problem in the world and is characterized by extensive health, educational, and social development outcomes. Studies indicate that adolescence is a time of experiment and such youth are very prone to peer pressure and environmental forces. Alcohol and cannabis in the West, pan, gutka, chalia, and mava in South Asia are examples of substances that adolescents use as a recreational, coping, and social belonging drug. Understanding the perceptions of students, parents, and educators and the reasons behind substance use is important in the formulation of culturally relevant prevention methods (Halladay et al., 2021).

International Views on Adolescent substance Use

In the world, drug use among adolescents is one of the most pressing social health issues. WHO estimates one out of every four adolescents use substances that cause risky use by age 15, with alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis the most prevalent ones (WHO, 2022). Studies indicate that drug use in adolescence predisposes one to dependency and low success in school. Westerners tend to make sexual activity use of alcohol socially acceptable, whereas illegal drugs like cannabis are still disputable among adolescents (George and George, 2024).

There is a difference in parental and educational reaction in different cultural settings. Schools in numerous high-income countries embrace systematized programs of health education that cover the substance awareness as well as resiliency-building. Another factor that motivates peer influence is the collaboration of parents with the schools to establish preventive settings. These international lessons signify the need to consider the perceptions and social situations when addressing substance abuse (Howard, 2023).

Teenage Substance in South Asia

The trend in South Asia of adolescent use of substances is distinct with gutka, pan masala, and chalia being the smokeless substances used. These are cheap, easily accessible and integrated into the culture of the day-to-day life. Surveys among the population in India show that almost three-quarters of those who use tobacco are inclined on smokeless tobacco products, and in Bangladesh, socio-economic deprivation is one of the factors that contribute to a high susceptibility to such practices (Sharma et al., 2022; Hasan et al., 2020).

The attitudes within the region facilitate the normalization of use. Parents tend to believe that smokeless substances are less dangerous than cigarettes, and teachers can often view the use of these substances among adolescents as a disciplinary issue but not a health concern. These dispositions restrain preventive measures, which expose adolescents to the risks of long-term damage. Similar results have been reported in Nepal and Sri Lanka, highlighting poor institutional structures and poor understanding on the part of families and educators (Rahman et al., 2021).

Drugs and Substance use in Pakistan amongst adolescents

Smokeless substances continue to be the most commonly used products among the adolescents in Pakistan specifically pan, gutka, chalia and mava. It has been surveyed that almost a third of teens use such substances before turning 16 (Mirza, 2023). Gutka and chalia are the most commonly used substances in Karachi because of affordability and cultural integration; in rural areas, such as Lasbela, they are openly sold in small sachets (not much more than several rupees) (Riaz et al., 2023).

Probably, teachers in Pakistan are not educated on substance use recognition or countering, and the cultural example of their parents keeps generations of consumers. The usage of girls is still secret because of cultural limitation but is becoming more and more reported in the domestic environment. Pan and gutka have become normalized in households and as a result, teenagers tend to fail to recognize their use as detrimental to reduce stigma and expose them to early initiation (Iqbal and Zafar, 2019).

Perceptions of Students

The perception of the students is a great determinant of whether they will start and sustain substance use. A large number of adolescents view smokeless products as the harmless stimulant and way to reduce stress and increase the level of concentration, and the other group of adolescents regards them as a sign of belonging to a specific social group. Pan or gutka is used by students in Pakistan to cope with exam anxiety or to fit in with peer groups (Shaikh and Ahmed, 2021).

The perceptions are also supported by the lack of awareness regarding health risks. Research indicates that majority of adolescents do not have sufficient knowledge of the risks associated with oral cancer, addiction or long-term dependency of smokeless products. The lack of enlightenment programs within schools contributes to the increased misconceptions and that is why students are poorly informed. In particular, peer pressure is often mentioned by students as the cause of experimentation, and they are afraid of being socially excluded in case they do not want to be involved (Hussain et al., 2021).

Perceptions of Parents

Parents are in the middle position of influencing the attitudes of adolescents towards substance use by either reinforcing risks or normalizing habits. Where the use of pan or gutka is the common practice in the household, teenagers tend to adopt the habit, thinking it is a culturally acceptable practice. Some of the parents do not take into account the health effects of smokeless substances, believing that they are less harmful than smoking (Baloch & Aziz, 2024).

Lack of parental care and low supervision also create more risks. Teenagers who lack parental supervision have a high probability of indulging in drug abuse. To parents, adolescent use is a manifestation of disobedience or moral incompetence and not a health issue and they would rather punish them instead of talking or helping them. Such attitudes do not lead to the development of family-based interventions (Zafar and Awan, 2021).

Perceptions of Trainers

Teachers and head teachers are the major participants in the identification and intervention of substance use of students. Pakistani studies though indicate that most teachers consider substance use to be a problem of discipline which they mostly address by giving punishment instead of counsel. Educators who have not been trained on health promotion do not have the ability to offer counselling or preventive education (Naseer et al., 2021).

Evidence International evidence indicates that teachers who undergo systematic training are very significant in preventing substance use among adolescents through the promotion of awareness and

resilience. However, in a situation such as Thailand, which is in Pakistan, there are not many schools that have health education programs regarding smokeless substances. Teachers in such educational districts as Lasbela recognize the issue but attribute the inability to take effective measures to insufficient resources and ineffective institutional support (Tariq, 2021).

Essential Reasons of Teenage Drug and Alcohol Consumption

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure always comes out as one of the most potent predictors of teenage drug use. According to the Social Learning Theory, which stresses on imitation and reinforcement, students tend to experiment with pan or gutka to accept the peer groups (Bandura, 1977). Social media has increased this process, and the material present online is becoming conventional to risky actions (Sharma et al., 2025).

Family Influence

The decisive role is also determined by family behaviors. Teenagers who live in families whose parents or siblings take smokeless products tend to start using by them. Families, on the other hand, which watch children and communicate with them, lessen the risk. Other forces that support substance use are poverty, home stress, and parental ignorance (Shaikh and Ahmed, 2021).

Environmental Accessibility

The substances are easily accessible and this is worsened due to their close proximity to schools. In Lasbela, gutka, pan masala and mava are sold by vendors in small cheaply packed packets. The laxity in imposing bans has resulted in easy use by students who are exposed to drugs on a daily basis. This is in parallel to the trends in South Asia where regulatory regimes are in place but are not well enforced (Shah et al., 2023).

Institutional Gaps and Academic Stress

The other issue that affects teen's substance use is academic pressure. Students usually say that they consumed pan or gutka to reduce stress before exams or to handle the academic pressures. Institutional support is constrained by the absence of school counseling services in addition to punitive disciplinary systems. Educators and administration are seldom prepared to offer an alternative or preventive education (Siddiqui & Gul, 2021).

Research Gaps

Although this field of adolescent substance use has been reviewed at the international and national levels, a number of gaps remain in Pakistan. To begin with, studies have mostly concentrated on the population in urban centers and rural and semi-urban parts like Lasbela have not been studied extensively. Second, not many studies combine the perceptions of students, parents, and educators with each other, even though they are significant in the prevention. Third, there is negligence in terms of gendered dimensions in smokeless substance use as female use is usually subdued. Lastly, it is uncommon to use mixed-methods methods, making it impossible to triangulate quantitative prevalence with qualitative information (Ali and Hussain, 2022). Theoretical Framework

The paper is based on two theoretical lenses Social Learning Theory and Ecological Systems Theory. According to the Social Learning Theory, adolescents learn behaviors by observing them and imitating them, especially that of peers and family (Bandura, 1977). This theory demonstrates that peer influence and modeling influence by the family lead to substance use among adolescents in Lasbela. The Environmental Theory, which is ecological in nature, focuses on the interplay of an individual, family,

school and community environments in influencing behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). This paradigm is also helpful in analyzing the effects of the interaction between structural variables like access to substances and ineffective school policies with cultural values to determine the effect on adolescent use of substances.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used in this study was mixed-methods research design, which includes both quantitative and qualitative designs to give a detailed account of the substance use among students of secondary schools in District Lasbela. There is a complex nature of the phenomenon of substance use, as it is influenced by individual, family, cultural, and institutional factors, and so the mixed-method approach was selected. Quantitative techniques can be used to determine the prevalence rates and statistical relationships, whereas qualitative techniques can reveal more information about the social and cultural factors behind adolescent behavior (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018).

Through the combination of these two methods, there was methodological triangulation in the study thus strengthening the validity and reliability of the results. It was designed in convergent parallel fashion, in which quantitative and qualitative data were gathered concurrently, analyzed independently, and incorporated into each other in the interpretation (Fetters et al., 2019). This method proved quite appropriate in terms of the research goals, as it demanded the determination of the commonly used substances, as well as the roles of family, peer, environmental, and school policies.

Study Population

The population of study included students of secondary school, teachers, parents and head teachers in District Lasbela. The key actors were students because the study was conducting research to determine the trends in the use of substances among adolescents. Teachers and head teachers were recruited to investigate institutional policies and school level responses and parents provided information regarding the family, as well as community level factors.

The selected district Lasbela is due to high levels of smokeless substance use, social-economic difficulties, and scarcity of institutional facilities (Ali and Hussain, 2022). The district is a rural-urban blend and, therefore, can be useful regarding its contribution to understanding how contextual influences influence adolescent behavior.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy used was multistage sampling to make it representative:

Stage 1: School Selection

Ten secondary schools (five in urban and five in rural location) were randomly picked by the list given by the District Education Department.

Stage 2: Student Sampling

A total of 45 students (13-18 years old) were chosen randomly in each school and this made a sample of 450 students. This was considered an adequate sample size in statistical calculations and reflected the whole student body in various socio-economic groups (Cohen et al., 2018).

Stage 3: Sampling of Teacher, Parent and Head Teacher

Besides the students, 19 teachers, 19 parents and 9 head teachers were purposely sampled to be interviewed and focus grouped. This sample was selected due to their close experience with the academic and social experiences of adolescents.

Such a mixture of randomized sampling and purposive sampling guaranteed both depth and statistical representativeness.

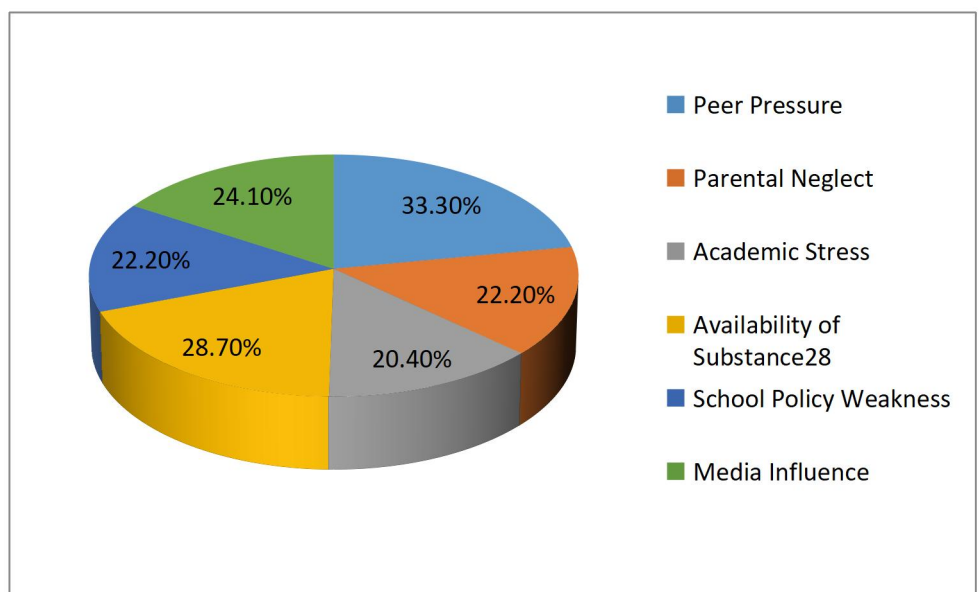
Data Collection Methods

The quantitative data collection is done through a survey approach that employs concurrent data collection. <|human|>3.5.1 Quantitative Data Collection The quantitative data collection will be realized by use of a survey method which will utilize the concurrent data collection. The structured questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data of 450 students. The questionnaire was based on the international validated tool like Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) and the Monitoring the Future (MTF) Survey, and localized to the Pakistani situation (CDC, 2019). The responses collected through questionnaire were measured by five-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). To provide clarity and reliability, a pilot test with 30 students was carried out, and the Cronbach alpha value was 0.82, which is a high indicator of internal consistency (Taber, 2018). The qualitative data collection is carried out through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups. <|human|>3.5.2 Qualitative Data Collection The qualitative data collection will be conducted using the qualitative techniques of in-depth interviews and focus groups. Investigations of the institutional reactions, parental dynamics, and communal views were done through interviews with 19 teachers, 19 parents, and 9 head teachers. The FGDs were carried out among students (groups of 8-10 at a time) to learn more about peer pressure, cultural norms, and personal experiences. Interview and FGD guides contained open-ended questions in accordance with the aims of the research,

FINDING/ RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Factor	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Peer Pressure	33.3%	33.3%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%
Parental Neglect	22.2%	24.2%	18.5%	16.7%	18.5%
Academic Stress	20.4%	25.8%	15.6%	19.4%	18.5%
Availability of Substance ²⁸	28.7%	29.6%	15.9%	14.1%	13.5%
School Policy Weakness	22.2%	24.1%	16.7%	18.5%	18.5%
Media Influence	24.1%	27.8%	16.7%	16.7%	14.8



Perception of drug user

Group	Summary of perception groups
Teachers	Saying it as a complete matter related toward deprived psychological strength care and reserved negligence
Parents	saying it as a complete matter related toward deprived psychological strength care and reserved negligence
Students	Observation /insight use of substance is peer pressure, coping mechanism of stress interest

Qualitative Themes

- Avoiding the responsibility (students)
- Disagreement and rejection (parents)
- Lack of structured assistance (teacher).

Peer Pressure as a Gateway

Students characterized the use of substances as a social norm which was usually facilitated by friends when the students were on a school break or when they were in a community setting. According to one of the respondents, they say that you are not a grown up, unless you chew Gutka.

Family background

A large number of students said that they saw substance use at home. One of the fourteen-year-old subjects said, My father and uncle use Chalia every day. I began because it was a regular thing to do.

Institutional Neglect

Teachers have recognized the lack of official policies or training to deal with substance use. One headmaster said that he saw students chewing Gutka in class, yet he is not aware of what to do.

Cultural Normalization

Drugs were commonly used in weddings, religious events and family dinners. This ritual application decreased the stigma and strengthened acceptance.

Gendered Patterns

Substance use among boys was open, and among girls was secretive because of the fear of social rejection. Women stated that they feared to be branded or scolded.

DISCUSSION

The results validate the idea that peer relations, family traditions, institutional voids, and culture interact in a complicated way to cause adolescent substance use in Lasbela. This high degree of association between peer pressure and substance use can be explained by the Social Learning Theory, in which behaviours are acquired by observation and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977).

1. Family modelling proved to be an important variable, which agrees with the intergenerational habits study by Iqbal and Zafar (2019) in rural Balochistan. Those teens who see it modelled at home are more likely to find it acceptable particularly when supported by the community practices.
2. Both the survey and the interview data reflected institutional neglect. Schools did not have personnel that had been trained, organized health education and policies. This is similar to Hussain et al. (2021) who stressed the necessity of school-based interventions in low-resource environments.
3. Media exposure, even if less statistically powerful, was a factor in perceptions. In Khan et al. (2021), adolescents exposed to substance-related content online had higher chances of experiencing it, which demonstrated the necessity of digital literacy programs.
4. The gendered disparities of use and stigmatization indicate that there is a need to have diverse prevention approaches. Sharma and Tripathi (2019) support the idea of gender-sensitive methods aimed at meeting the special needs of female adolescents.
5. By and large, the work substantiates the thesis of Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) of mixed-method research in the culturally complicated environments. Combined quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated a subtle insight on substance use in Lasbela and showed that policy, education, and community engagement have gaps in their approach.

The statistics prove that substance use is conditioned by a multifactor situation, namely, peer norm pressure, emotional control, family normative modelling, availability, and inadequate institutional reaction. The concepts of the Social Learning Theory and Ecological Systems Theory would serve to establish a foundation on which the acquisition and maintenance of behaviours can be understood with relation to the settings. Normalisation of a substance in the family and peer environments compromises school-based interventions unless supported by structural and parental factors.

CONCLUSION

This paper shows that the consumption of smokeless substances among adolescents in Lasbela is not just a behavioural problem but an expression of more sociocultural and institutional processes. All these factors along with peer influence, a model in the family and academic pressure, and normalization within the culture come together to produce a condition where drug use is pervasive and normalized. School-

based prevention programs and mental health support are unavailable, and the lack of regulatory enforcement makes the problem even more serious. Gendered patterns and media add an additional complexity to the situation, and the situation demands specific interventions.

The mixed-methods approach enabled the research to record a broad picture of the concern by allowing the researcher to record both statistical changes and lived experiences. These results highlight the importance of culturally competent, community-based solutions that empower the underlying causes of substance use among adolescents.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the study has the following recommendations to make:

- School-Based Interventions Implement modules of health education, peer-led awareness and training of teachers regarding substance prevention.
- Parental Engagement Programs Parents carry out workshops to create awareness on intergenerational modelling and early exposure risks.
- Community Outreach Work with local leaders and religious groups to critically oppose cultural normalization and healthy alternatives.
- Mental Health Support Program is a school counselling initiative that provides students with the opportunity to cope with stress and emotional difficulties at school.
- Media Literacy Education Incorporate digital literacy in the curriculum to enable students to critically assess online information pertaining to substance use Gender-Sensitive Strategies Creation of safe spaces and support systems to female students, where they will be confidential and have access to resources.
- Policy Reform Support Tougher regulation of smokeless substances around schools and impose age limit to their sales.

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