

# ABSTRACT

## OBJECTIVES

The drug menace in India is a rising concern that threatens our public and social health. Drug abuse and addiction have increased steadily owing to factors like modern lifestyle, family problems, nuclear family, economic challenges, unemployment, academic pressure. Youngsters experiment with drugs mostly to deal with psychological stress and to experience the feel-good factor despite knowing their harmful effects. The civil society and academia need to come forward to address and remedy this issue of drug and substance abuse, mental health and well-being of the vulnerable young individuals. According to WHO estimates, there are around 2 billion alcohol users, 1.3 billion smokers, and 185 million drug users across the globe who use psychoactive substances. According to studies done all across the world, including in India, between 20 and 40 percent of students from different academic programs take drugs. Cannabis and opioids account for the majority of users in India's illegal drug marketplaces. In India, cannabis in the form of bhang is legal. The other types, such as charas (hashish) and ganja (marijuana), are prohibited. The AIIMS report from 2019 estimates that there are 3.1 crore cannabis users in India. While the remainder drink bhang, 1.3 crore of them utilise ganja and charas. Opioids are marketed as pharma opioids, heroin (brown sugar, smack), and opium (doda, phukki, or poppy husk). As per the global average, opioid use is three times higher here, whereas the use of illegal cannabis is lower.

Substance abuse is a global concern. The necessity of robust international cooperation to address substance use and addictive behaviour as significant determinants of mental health and well-being has become more apparent as the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly affected our lives and public health priorities.

India is predominantly a youth centric nation. India's population is 1.38 billion of which 22% are the youth (18-29 years). Of these, 34.3 million are college going students according to the Annual Status of Higher Education (ASHE). Statistics show that there is an addiction problem in India. According to a report in 2016, 2 million college students have used an illicit drug. The students fall prey to abusing drugs and substances in the college as they are vulnerable. The prevalence of drug related problems gets reflected in the data of death due to substance abuse and it is alarming to note that the students make up a considerable part of it. There is a need for educational research on the drug menace prevalent in Kolkata. Geographical vulnerability is a contributor to Kolkata being a drug hotspot though national surveys do not reflect the scenario. The post pandemic academic world is undergoing major upheavals which is taking a toll on the psychological wellbeing of the students thereby adding to the pressure. So it becomes more imperative to study the problem of drug and substance abuse prevalent in students and how it affects their mental health. Another dimension that calls for attention is the relationship between substance abuse and mental health.

One of the leading cities in India for the sale of illegal substances like hashish and LSD is Kolkata. The city's advantageous location close to the borders of Bangladesh and Nepal makes it simple for drug dealers to enter (NCB). According to NCB, college students in the city are roped in to sell drugs. Kolkata has turned into a drug hotspot as is evident from the series of recent raids conducted by the NCB which busted international cannabis smuggling ring in Kolkata in 2021 seizing a huge amount of the world's strongest marijuana.

It is important to find out the extent and pattern of drug menace in Kolkata, especially its reach among the college students at the UG level in the post-pandemic time period. The students had to face a lot of uncertainty during the pandemic period. The drug menace used to exist in the pre pandemic era so it becomes imperative that extensive research is carried out to find out the challenges of drug abuse that the college students faced as they had to cope up with the pressure of online and blended classes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the present study, the researcher sought responses from 350 undergraduate students studying in general and professional degree courses at the UG level in colleges of Kolkata. In a research study, the tools or instruments are important elements for quantitative study. For collection of relevant data from the respondents, the researcher used Drug and Substance Abuse Survey Questionnaire recommended by WHO. A standardized socio-demographic questionnaire or demographic data sheet was also administered to collect data related to the socio-demographic attributes of the respondents. The “Mental Health Inventory developed by Dr Jagdish and Dr A. K. Srivastav (1983)” was used to assess the mental health of the respondents. 300 students were finally selected as the others were discarded for reasons like incomplete data or because of their reluctance to participate in the survey or their discomfort towards providing personal information. Out of the 300 respondents, 150 are boys and 150 are girls. 146 were studying in general degree courses and 154 were studying in professional degree courses. The age group of the respondents ranged from 18-28 years.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

The prevalence of abuse of substances was found to be 31.33% which calls for stringent measures to be taken to curb the menace. Among the addicted respondents, girls (70.21%) were found to abuse drugs and substances more than the boys (29.78%). Among the addicted respondents, the age group of 18-20 yrs was found to be the most prevalent age group abusing drugs and substances. 42 (44.68%) respondents belonging to the general degree courses were found to abuse drugs and substances whereas 52 (55.31%) respondents pursuing professional degree courses were found to abuse drugs abuse drugs and substances. 68 respondents belong to the “higher family income group”, 20 respondents belong to the “middle income group” and 6 respondents belong to the “lower income group”. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we find that the undergraduate girl students in the urban colleges in Kolkata have better mental health than the boys as the findings of the study show that they score higher than the boys in the mental health dimensions of “Positive Self-Evaluation”, “Perception of Reality”, “Integration of Personality”, “Autonomy”, “Group Oriented Attitudes” and “Environmental Mastery”. Upon testing the hypothesis, it was found that there is a significant relationship between substance abuse and mental health of the undergraduate students.

## **KEYWORDS**

Drug, substance abuse, mental health, undergraduate, Kolkata.