



ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

## Prevalence and Determinants of Drugs Abuse Among Youth in Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan

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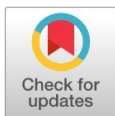
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**Abstract**— The current qualitative research focuses on substance abuse and addiction among young people as a primary area of investigation. This study aimed to shed light on the substance that young people in Hyderabad, Sindh, take the most frequently and the most critical factors contributing to drug addiction. The research was carried out by proceeding to a mental hospital drug rehabilitation ward in Hyderabad, Sindh, and conducting face-to-face interviews with a total of 36 participants, ranging in age from 16 to 22, including both males and females. The participants were selected using a technique known as purposeful sampling. The study's findings indicated that alcohol, heroin, and ice drugs are the three substances used by young people with the most significant prevalence. In addition, researchers found that intra-personal factors, such as problems with mental health and entertainment, and extra-personal factors, such as peer pressure and the influence of the neighborhood, as well as the impact of the media, are the primary contributors to substance abuse among young people. According to the findings of the study, one preventative measure that may be taken to lower rates of drug addiction among young people is for parents, schools, governments, and other social groups to work together to educate young people about the negative consequences of drug consumption.

**Index Terms**— Substance misuse, Drug addiction, Mental health issues, Young addicts, Peer pressure, Crystal methamphetamine.

**Received:** 17 March 2022; **Accepted:** 2 May 2022; **Published:** 21 September 2022



### Introduction

Addiction to drugs, which is now widely recognized as a distinct neuropsychiatric condition, is both a pressing global issue and a rapidly expanding one. It is detrimental to the addict's bodily and emotional health and tremendously strains society through higher crime rates. Drug usage is difficult to overstate as one of the most complicated issues confronting contemporary society. Substance abuse is a serious problem among today's youth, and early drug usage is common among first-time users of any age (Akbari et al., 2021). According to Welch (2013), the brain of young individuals may be particularly more susceptible to the effects of substance use and is linked to issues with mental health, addiction, and neurocognitive function that may even last into adulthood or old age. The earlier a substance is used, the more significant the correlation between frequency, dependence, and heavier usage in later life, as well as mental and social consequences (Marshall, 2014). The present trend of drug dependence among youth is a significant national challenge. It is alarming and has detrimental repercussions on youth, including health and behavioral issues and even mortality. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has identified

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worldwide drug addiction, including alcohol, prescription narcotics, and illicit drugs (UNODC, 2014). Literature also refers to it as a socioeconomic epidemic (Fischer et al., 2014). In addition, numerous studies and drug reports have proven that it is a worldwide concern (Burns, 2014; Degenhardt et al., 2011).

The abuse of drugs is one of Pakistan's most pressing problems at present. Pakistani society has been infected by drug addiction for a long time. Today, this widespread scourge affects all areas of society, and most men and women of all ages are hooked to at least one substance. Thirty years ago, a woman who smoked tobacco was an anomaly, but nowadays, many ladies and young teenage girls admit to using hashish and heroin (Siddique et al., 2012). A few young people who experiment with these substances for amusement become severe addicts. Approximately 6.4 million of Pakistan's adult population engages in drug usage. Heroin is one of the most often misused drugs in Pakistan, followed by hashish, charas, bhang, opium, and other psychotropic drugs, and alcohol consumption is widespread in both prosperous and disadvantaged societies (Malik, 2012; Masood, 2014). A few reports indicate that the substance misuse trend has moved from opium to other drugs. However, some research indicates that opium is Pakistan's most commonly abused substance (Sattari, 2012). This persistent increase in drug abusers poses a threat to the social and economic fabric of the community. Despite the government's corrective attempts to eliminate this problem, it is quite concerning that the proportion of drug addicts is increasing daily.

On the one hand, this issue negatively impacts the lives of the average citizen. On the other, it is becoming a significant barrier to the nation's socioeconomic development. It negatively impact the education of our youth, separate and ruins relations, places a considerable strain on the economy of entire communities, and hinders the competitiveness of business and industry. It is a hazard to our society, severely harming public safety via crime, accidents, illness, and other dangers (Daley et al., 2020). Although substance misuse has been an issue in Pakistan for many years, little is understood about the factors leading to drug abuse. Therefore, the present research examines the demographic, social and behavioral risk determinants of drug abuse and addiction among the young generation. The following research has two main goals:

- i. To find out the most prevalent types of drugs utilized by young people in Hyderabad.
- ii. To examine the underlying determinants contributing to younger generations' usage of illegal drugs.

The research paper can be helpful because it includes information on drug abuse among young people aged 16 to 22. This study shed light on the substance young people in Hyderabad, Sindh, most frequently consume and the most crucial factors that lead towards drug addiction, filling a substantial research gap since no previous studies have specifically addressed this issue. Besides, that drug addiction among young people is a significant social problem. However, there is a dearth of thoughtful qualitative research on the topic, which leaves many grounds open to research on this increasing problem. In the end, this paper will also provide preventive and control strategies to prevent young people from drug abuse.

## Literature Review

The term "substance usage" refers to the consumption of drugs or alcohol, which includes tobacco, synthetic narcotics, pharmaceutical medications, and inhalants (Snyder et al., 2012). Drug abuse problems emerge due to the harmful effects of alcohol and other substances, leading to addiction. According to health authorities, drug use crosses the line into substance abuse when regular use causes substantial harm, such as safety conditions, disease, inability to perform commitments, lack of discipline, risk-taking, and social problems (Batool et al., 2019, Memon, Arain, Kalhor, & Shaikh).

The danger of opium cultivation has reached Pakistan. The nation naturally suffered due to its location in an area that generates 90% of the world's opium. Due to Pakistan being one of the most popular drug routes for producers, traffickers, and smugglers, it has faced threats (Malik, 2011). Synthetics and solvents are among the new drugs that are being found to be abused. The severity of this issue is growing, and it cannot be denied that neighboring Afghanistan has seen a sharp increase in the cultivation of poppies and the production of heroin in recent years. As a result, more of these illegal substances are being transported into Pakistan via land and maritime channels to be sold there illegally. It is anticipated that as these illegal substances build up in Pakistan, their use will rise even more, increasing production and entangling the nation in a vicious cycle. In Pakistan, drug users increase by at least 50,000 yearly (Soomro, 2018).

A person's likelihood of developing a substance addiction or dependency disorder can be increased by several biological, psychological, and social factors, often known as risk factors. Some families seem to experience drug abuse disorders more frequently than predicted by the presence of an addictive environment in the home. The most considerable influence on a child's substance misuse was their parents' drug use (Lee, 2012).

According to Ghazal (2019), peer pressure and family conflicts were the main driving forces for substance misuse. Another cause of drug addiction is emotional distress; drugs can provide those experiencing emotional turmoil in their lives with a momentary reprieve from the harsh truth. Worldwide, depression has been noted as a mental illness that is rapidly expanding. It harms 121 million people's daily lives and performance at work, as well as their capacity to establish and manage relationships and cope with life's obstacles (Bromet et al., 2011). Due to several economic and societal variables, depression has sharply increased in Pakistan (Azhar, 2021). When depression is not treated promptly, victims may be compelled to seek unreliable remedies, such as drugs, to cope with their mental distress.

They may use drugs as a way to "escape," which they like doing because it relieves them of life's socioeconomic stresses (Skinner, 1965). Male gender, age between 18 and 44, unmarried marital status, and lower socioeconomic position are social risk factors that are other reasons for increasing drug usage and addiction. According to statistics by state, men are more likely than women to become addicted to drugs or become alcoholics; women appear to be more susceptible to addiction at far lower alcohol consumption levels (Zaman, 2015). A study conducted in Punjab concluded that the main social factors that impact the behavior of becoming a drug addict are peer pressure, loneliness, and parental coldness toward the youth (Siddique et al., 2012). The study in Faisalabad discovered many characteristics that contribute to drug addiction, including nuclear family structure, larger family sizes, and low levels of education. According to the authors, these characteristics have a crucial influence on drug addiction (Tanweer et al., 2019). Another study in Lahore found that various institutional, interpersonal, and individual factors contribute to youngsters starting to use drugs. While sedatives, ecstasy pills, shisha, cannabis, injectable substances, and alcohol are the most often used drugs by university students, hard drugs like heroin and cocaine are rarely used by young people (Sajid et al., 2020). According to recent research in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, four key factors contribute to drug usage, including peer pressure, easy drug access, and curiosity (Ali et al., 2022).

**Research Methodology**

The current study is qualitative; this method is well-known for being significantly and effectively applied in research (Choy, 2014; Bryman, 2017). The data collection consisted of visiting the Mental hospital in Hyderabad in January 2022. The participant in the study was young addicts, including males and females aged (16-22), which were selected through a purposive sampling technique (Emmel, 2013), and the size of the sample consisted of (36) young male and female respondents. The following study employed a survey method in which the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with respondents and recorded information on a written questionnaire; the questionnaire contains closed, and open-ended questions (16) questionnaires were filled by female and (20) male participants. The initial questions were organized in English with the assistance of earlier literature. However, during the interview process, other languages, i.e., Sindhi and Urdu were used instead of English for the respondents' ease. Finally, the entire data, including demographic information and all the filled questionnaires, was analyzed thoroughly by the researcher through content analysis; it is one of the many qualitative techniques currently accessible for studying data and deciphering its significance (Schreier, 2012). This approach is a methodical and objective technique for characterizing and quantifying phenomena. Using a content analytical approach, the research was able to generate codes, create broader themes, and reach out to the study outcomes.

**Findings**

The following study was based on drug abuse among the young generation of Hyderabad hospitalized in a Mental hospital. A total of 36 drug abusers, including males and females, who took part in this investigation revealed information on the most prevalent types of drugs utilized by young people and also on various internal and external determinants relating to the phenomenon of drug abuse.

The following study included (20) males and (16) females, and (table I) down below reveals the demographic information of those participants. The demographic information revealed which group is found to be highly involved in drugs, and it was found that only 08 males aged 16-18 were involved in drugs, while (12) males aged 19-22 were found to be drug addicts. Regarding females, only 06 females in the age group of 16-18 were drug addicts, while (10) females from the age group of 19-22 were found to be drug addicts.

Meanwhile, in participant's educational background, (11) males and (04) females were found to be literate, and (09) males and (12) were found to be illiterate.

According to an area of residence, it was found that (06) males and (07) females belong to the Qasimabad area, (09) males and (05) females belong to Latifabad, (03) males and (04) females belong to Hyderabad, and lastly only (02) males belongs to Saddar area.

Furthermore, according to the marital status of participants, it was found that there were (12) single males and (09) single females, (05) of the males and (02) females were married, and (03) males and (05) females were discovered to be divorced.

Table I  
Demographic information of participants

Gender	Age Group	Educational Background	Area of Residence	Marital Status				
Males (20)	16-18	08	Literate	11	Qasimabad	06	Single	12
	19-22	12	Illiterate	09	Latifabad	09	Married	5
					Hyderabad	03	Divorced	3
			Saddar	02				
Females (16)	16-18	06	Literate	04	Qasimabad	07	Single	9
	19-22	10	Illiterate	12	Latifabad	05	Married	2
					Hyderabad	04	Divorced	5

According to the study's first objective, this is to find out the most prevalent types of drugs utilized by young people, (table II) below reveals the most common type of drugs used by both young male and female participants hospitalized in a mental hospital in Hyderabad. It was found that out of 36 participants, a total of (09) of them were addicts of alcohol, including vodka, whiskey, rum, wine and beer, males (05) and females (04). In contrast, a total of (07) participants were addicted to heroin, of which (04) males and (03) females were found, and a total of (04) male participants took Cocaine drug. In contrast, a total of (05) participants (03) of males and (02) of females took opium, (02) of males and (01) females were involved in cannabis and (08) of the participants in which (05) males and (03) females were addict of Crystal methamphetamine drug also known as Ice drug.

Table II  
Type of Drugs used by Participants

Type of Substance	Male	Female	Total
Alcohol	05	04	09
Heroin	04	03	07
Cocaine	04	NIL	04
Opium	03	02	05
Cannabis (Ganja)	02	01	03
Crystal Methamphetamine (Ice)	05	03	08

The study's second goal is to investigate the factors that lead young people to experiment with illegal substances. The following study used content analysis to uncover two overarching themes and four sub-themes underlying the causes of drug abuse among youth. The themes are: "Intra-personal Factors" and "Extra-personal factors."

Table III  
Extracted themes from data

THEME 01	Theme 02
Intra-Personal Factors	Extra-Personal Factors
Sub-Themes:	Sub-Themes:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mental Health Issues</li> <li>● Entertainment Purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Peer Pressure and Neighborhood Influence</li> <li>● Media &amp; Social Media Influence</li> </ul>

**Discussion**

As a result of assessing the qualitative interview data, the overarching themes and sub-themes depicted in (table III) above were identified as the significant determinants behind drug abuse among the youth of Hyderabad, Sindh. Each of the themes is discussed below. To hide the participant's identity and name, the researcher used codes in stating the responses as (MP-1, MP-2) for male participants and (FP-1, FP-2) for female participants.

**Theme 01: Intra-personal factors**

The term "Intrapersonal factors" refers to those aspects of substance misuse that originate from within the individual. These elements are responsible for the events that take place within an individual's self or mind, as well as the factors that explain those events. Things that occur to describe or are a part of a person on the inside, as well as things that are a part of the person themselves. In this theme, the participants share personal determinants that encourage or motivate them toward drug abuse. This theme is divided into two sub-themes: "Mental health issues" and "Entertainment Purposes."

**Mental health issues**

Mental health issues, sometimes known as mental health disorders or illnesses, refer to a broad spectrum of mental health diseases that impact a person's mood, cognition, and behavior. Mental health issues include many disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic disorder, schizophrenia, eating disorder, and bipolar disorder, which leads to drug abuse and intoxication, suicide, murder and other violent behaviors and criminal activities. Pakistan has roughly 64% of young people under the age of 30. More than 90 million Pakistanis undergo physiological and mental illnesses, with a significant proportion being youngsters (Shahid, 2022). The participants in the following study revealed that they suffered from mental issues such as depression, and post-traumatic disorder, which compelled them to consume drugs and become addicted to drugs. Most female participants stated that they were the victims of domestic abuse by their husbands and sexual assault, which caused depression and post-traumatic disorder among them and are why they started taking

drugs. Few participants reported that they began using drugs because they were sick of having suicidal thoughts, while others claimed that they began using drugs due to insomnia. According to a recent study conducted in Sweden, mental health issues were prevalent among the study's participants, and a relatively large percentage of young people (34–54%) reported issues such as concentration troubles, sleeping difficulties, anxiety, and depression, which contributed to substance abuse (Richert et al., 2020). Research conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also established a strong link between mental health problems and drug abuse (Wazir et al., 2022).

Statements shared by participants regarding mental health issues:

My husband and other members of my in-laws used to beat and ridicule me because I could not have children, and as a result of their continual abuse, I sank into a deep depression and attempted suicide several times. After that, my husband divorced me, but I could not escape the trauma I underwent for years, so I began taking sleeping pills and later alcohol and regular consumption of ice (crystal meth) to escape from that trauma (FP-1).

My male tuition tutor sexually molested me quite a few times at his home when I was too young; later, he threatened me not to inform my parents. However, even though he was punished for what he did to me, I am still unable to forget that day. Later on, I was diagnosed with PTSD due to that abuse, which is how I first started taking heroin and became addicted to it (FP-2).

When I was in university a few years ago, I was constantly mocked and bullied in front of everyone by some of my classmates. That is when I decided I would never go to university again because I did not want to be humiliated again. Because of that humiliation, I suffered from insomnia and could not sleep, so I gave money to the hostel guard, who gave me some opium drugs. After taking it, I slept well after a long time (MP-1).

### ***Entertainment purposes***

During the course of the current study's investigation, it was discovered that most participants shared that entertainment was the primary cause of drug misuse. Therefore, these addicts were continuously looking for new and different substances to satisfy their cravings. During this voyage of drug experimentation, they become addicted, and then regular use becomes necessary. According to the participants, they began using drugs because they were dissatisfied with their everyday routines and wanted to experiment with something different to alleviate their boredom. They will switch to more potent drugs once they have mastered the milder drugs. They were under the impression that drugs brought them pleasure; nevertheless, the effects of drugs did not last for an extended amount of time; hence, they continued to use drugs to experience that fleeting sensation of pleasure. Dysfunctional family relationships, many party-based entertainments, and many friends who use drugs enhanced the likelihood of youth drug use (Parada, 2015). Many participants claimed that they use drugs like cocaine and ice because it increases their energy and boosts their confidence. Research conducted in Rawalpindi and Islamabad reached similar conclusions indicating that youths (ages 18 to 28) are highly involved in substance abuse due to peer pressure and to boost confidence and energy (Masood, 2014). Statements shared by participants regarding entertainment purposes:

I was living in a private dormitory and studying for the CSS exam. I did not have any friends to hang out with, and I was so bored with my studies that I wanted to try something new for enjoyment. I spotted a sanitary worker at the academy receiving drugs from a drug dealer, so I went after him, gave him money, and he handed him a small package of cocaine. After taking it, I felt excited. It makes me happy and delighted (MP-2).

A few years ago, I moved to Hyderabad to prepare for a test to get into university. One day, there was a party in a flat near my apartment. I was also invited by one of my close friend. At first, I did not want to go, but then I thought I should go for a while. When I walked into that apartment, I saw many boys and girls sniffing drugs, drinking alcohol, and some of them doing sexual acts. I had never done anything like that before, but seeing everyone enjoying and taking drugs, I could not control myself from doing the same. So, I sniffed marijuana and had quality time with two girls. I had much fun at that party, and after that, I could not discontinue taking drugs and going to parties through my Karachi-settled friends (MP-3).

### **Theme 02: Extra-personal factors**

The term "extra-personal factors" refers to those aspects of drug abuse that are external to the user; they go beyond what is considered to be "personal" or "individual" variables or characteristics. Within the context of this theme, the participants discuss various extra-personal factors that either encouraged or inspired them to engage in substance addiction. The following theme is divided into two sub-themes: "Peer Pressure and Neighborhood Influence" and "Media & Social Media Influence."

#### ***Peer pressure and neighborhood influence***

Peer pressure is one of the various contributing elements that can lead to substance abuse, and it is also a significant component in the beginning stages of drug usage. According to the study's results, participants' social circles significantly influenced their usage of various drugs. Peer influence profoundly affects drug usage (Riaz et al., 2020). Many participants reported that they began taking drugs due to

the influence of their drug-addicted peers to become like them or to impress their peers. Participants also reported that if they refused to take drugs supplied by their peers, they would be labeled as weak, timid, coward, and incompetent and also they would be thrown out of their group, and no one would interact with them again. Several female participants revealed that they began using drugs due to the pressure exerted on them by their boyfriends. They were constantly motivated by their boyfriends to take drugs, stating that their partners always tell them the positive side effects of ingesting drugs and that if they refuse to take drugs, their boyfriends become violent and aggressive with them. A small number of the female participants also reported that their partners had drugged them against their will and then raped them afterward. Similar results were revealed in a study conducted in Ghana, West Africa, which concluded that peer pressure significantly influences substance abuse (Kabore et al., 2019). Moreover, participants reported that many drug sellers in their neighborhood were selling drugs at significantly lower prices and that they had noticed a significant number of people consuming drugs on the streets, which also influenced them to purchase drugs. The facility where young people can obtain a variety of substances is one of the primary factors that predispose them to participate in substance misuse (Wanzala et al., 2020). Another study also concluded similar findings that; depression, poor parental supervision, peer drinking/pressure/approval, and drug availability in the neighborhood were all connected with an increased likelihood of young people abusing drugs (Athauda et al., 2020). Statements shared by participants regarding peer pressure and neighborhood influence:

When I was in college, I made friends who used a variety of illegal substances. I have never taken drugs before, but all of my friends do, and they have often offered them to me. However, out of worry for my father, I have always refused, and as a result, they make fun of me and refer to me as timid. I was weary of their continual taunting, so one day, I told them I wanted to try drugs; first, they gave me glue sniffing and alcohol, then after a few weeks, they gave me ice drugs. After that, my friends never made fun of me again, but I became addicted to drugs (MP-4).

I lived in a small slum near Khuda ki Basti, Kotri. Since childhood, I witnessed my surroundings with the availability of drugs, political unrest, and gambling centers. This is because of such organized drug mafias who polluted our society that so many other young people and I indulge in such dangerous habits of substance and drug abuse from our early childhood (FP-3).

I was an alcoholic and a chain smoker but never had any drugs. My friend always used to talk advantages of various stimulant drugs. Due to the hectic workload and late night sleep, I gradually developed the idea of taking stimulant drugs. On my wish, he just not provided me with Ice drug but also gave me his company. This way, I slowly indulge in the habit of consuming the same (MP-5).

### ***Media & social media influence***

Numerous studies have shown the role of social variables such as exposure to alcohol and drug content in the media and normative ideas about peer alcohol and drug use in determining substance use and repercussions during childhood and young adulthood (Jackson et al., 2018). Social media facilitates the discussion and exhibition of substance use-related ideas and behaviors, demonstrating that the act of uploading or seeing drug-related content may impact youth substance abuse. Social media has had a tremendous negative impact on young people's behavior and thought processes (Irum, 2020). According to the results of the following study, many of the participants indicated that social media had a significant impact on their decision to start abusing drugs. They claimed that after watching movies or videos on the internet, such as on Tiktok and Facebook, their favorite actors or actresses were smoking, drinking alcohol, and inhaling drugs through their noses while enjoying themselves. They wanted to try drugs because they believed they would look cool and stylish, just like the movie characters or videos. Participants spent the majority of their time on social media. They said that they enjoy certain Bollywood films that feature violence and drug-related content, such as (Udta Punjab, Kabir Singh, Kaalakaandi, and Sanju), and that after viewing these films, they attempted to imitate their styles and behaviors. Similar findings were reported by Janssen (2018), indicating that adolescents and young people are highly exposed to substance use through social media and that these depictions are connected with subsequent drug use. Research conducted in Pakistan stated that; the media is a crucial factor in youth drug addiction among the young generation in Pakistan (Ahmed et al., 2020). Statements shared by participants regarding social media influence:

My favorite actor is Shahid Kapoor, and I have seen his movies. I just saw his movie "Kabir Singh," where he smoked and took drugs, and he looked very cool. After that, I tried to copy his style. I got long hair like his, wore stylish t-shirts, a gold chain, and black glasses, and even bought ice drugs from a drug dealer, I had never done drugs before, but after that movie, I could not resist myself. I grew addicted to ice drugs after using them once and began to purchase them again and again (MP-6).

My friends and I watch movies regularly and spend most of our time doing so. We were all watching the movie "Sanju" one day and enjoyed it, so we all decided to try some drugs for fun. One of our drug-addict friends brought some drugs such as alcohol, charas, and cannabis (ganja), and we did drugs; after taking it once, some of my other friends became addicted to it and began using it daily (FP-4).

### **Recommendations**

- The issue of drug addiction is frequently overshadowed by other country development issues, such as poverty, illiteracy, and inadequate access to primary health care. It is essential for policymakers and the research community to attempt to predict how the drug problem will evolve so that policies and programs can be modified accordingly.
- Parents can collaborate with others in their community to raise awareness of the drug abuse problem in their area.
- Educators can collaborate with others in the school system to evaluate current programs and identify interventions based on research tailored to students.
- Community leaders can organize a community group to develop a community prevention plan, coordinate community resources and activities, and support research-based prevention across all community sectors.
- The initial step is to assess the prevalence of risk factors associated with drug users. The next step is assessing the community's readiness to launch a prevention program. The final step involves parents, educators, and community leaders planning how, when, and where to implement each program.

### **Conclusion**

The target population for this study was young people between the ages of 16 and 22, both male and female, who were admitted to a mental asylum in Hyderabad, Sindh. The following research was conducted to determine the most popular drugs among young people as well as the factors that contribute to drug usage and drug addiction. During the research, interviews were conducted, and demographic data were gathered from 36 participants. The findings revealed that alcohol, ice, and heroin were among the participants in this age group's most frequently used substances. In reference to the other purpose of the study, the factors responsible for drug usage among young people are issues relating to mental health, entertainment, peer pressure, neighborhood influence, and social media influence. The study suggests that parents, educators, governments, and other social agencies should collaborate and raise awareness about the adverse effects of drug abuse and organize a community group to develop a community prevention plan, coordinate community resources and activities, and support research-based prevention across community sectors. Future researchers are recommended to perform more in-depth research on the mental health difficulties that contribute to drug addiction and include a more significant proportion of young people, as the current study involved a small sample size.

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