



# Potential Contributing Factors To Substance Abuse Among Senior Secondary School Students

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## Abstract:

**Background:** Substance abuse has become a worldwide and ever-growing issue, especially in the Indian scenario. Chemical substances that cause transient feelings of euphoria or excitement are the main causes of this phenomenon; however, chronic exposure often ends in dependence and pathological addiction. There is epidemiological evidence highlighting the increased vulnerability of adolescents for whose mental health trajectory, a confluence of psychological determinants in the psychosocial environment is often detrimental to psychological resilience, including powerful peer influence. Once entrenched in an addiction, individuals tend to make drug use the first priority in their lives, with dire personal and societal ramifications. Accordingly, there is an imperative need to design education interventions that enlighten the etiological factors and detrimental consequences of substance abuse to reduce its prevalence at the national level.

**Aim:** The aim of this empirical research work was to identify and critically examine the antecedent variables that result in substance misuse among senior secondary school pupils.

**Methods:** A quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional design was used to interrogate the possible catalysts for substance abuse in this demographic cohort. Data collection was aided with a self-administered, researcher-constructed questionnaire carefully designed to capture salient risk factors and behavioral correlates.

**Result:** Results of analyses of the resultant data set showed that alcohol was the most easily accessible psychoactive agent, with 83% of respondents acknowledging its prevalence. Moreover, reduced parental supervision became the most important risk factor, mentioned by 68% of the participants. Paradoxically, some 73 per cent of students blamed substance misuse for the loss of personal self-control, and as many blamed the lack of institutional education and awareness programmes as substantially contributing to the problem.

**Conclusion:** The results provide empirical support that peer pressure with inadequate parental supervision is the major explanation system for substance abuse among senior secondary school students.

**Index Terms** - Substance abuse, antecedents, contributory determinants.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse has become a top public health issue which impacts adolescent and adult populations around the world. The chronic abuse of psychoactive drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and other drugs has increased significantly in popularity over the last several decades. Adolescence as a time of increased developmental vulnerability is a time of increased susceptibility to experimentation with risk behaviors, and this behavior is driven by curiosity, peer pressure, as well as emotional or psychological stressors. Consequently, the growth of substance use by adolescents has attracted increasing concern from families, educators, healthcare professionals and policymakers alike.

On a global level, a large percentage of juveniles confess to trying different types of substances like alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis during their school years. Empirical investigations have repeatedly found that alcohol and tobacco are the most often consumed substances by adolescents and that they frequently act as "gateway substances," that may facilitate the subsequent incorporation of more dangerous drugs. Early initiation of substance use can have a detrimental impact on an adolescent's physical health, mental well-being, educational attainment and social relationships. In addition, chronic substance abuse can lead to addiction, behavioral disorders, and a number of other long-lasting health conditions.

Multiple social, psychological and environmental determinants have a role in the onset and maintenance of substance use in youth. Peer pressure is generally recognized as one of the strongest triggers that lead teenagers to use drugs and alcohol. Adolescents often desire institutionalized acceptance by social groups and this desire may be the catalyst for adopting a behavior such as smoking, drinking or drug consumption. Additionally, family dynamics, especially inadequate parental supervision and lack of communication and familial conflict, increase the propensity for substance use in young people. Research has emphasized that strong parental monitoring and family relationships are salient protective factors against substance abuse.

The educational environment also plays a large role in the attitude and behavior of adolescents regarding substance use. The lack of comprehensive prevention programs, poor health education programs, and easy access to illicit substances all contribute to the growing number of students who abuse substances while in school. Furthermore, psychosocial factors such as chronic stress, low self-esteem, depressive symptomatology and deficient self-help strategies may increase the vulnerability of adolescents to drug use as a strategy to deal with emotional distress.

Recent empirical findings have made the issue of substance abuse extremely alarming among school going adolescents in varied parts of the world. Studies report that a considerable number of high school students at least experimented with alcohol, tobacco or other drugs at least once in their life. These patterns highlight the grave need for effective preventive measures, effective awareness campaigns and prompt interventions to curb the problem of substance abuse among the youth populations.

Substance abuse, in its traditional sense, refers to the harmful or maladaptive use of psychoactive drugs that leads to significant impairment to the individual's physical condition, psychological functioning, or social integration. Diagnostic frameworks like the DSM will show that substance abuse is recognized when recurrent substance abuse of drugs and/or alcohol brings on psychosocial distress, health complications, or difficulty in meeting personal, vocational or social obligations within a defined period of time.

Given the ongoing rise in the prevalence of substance use among adolescents and the concomitant ill effects, it is important to carefully outline the circumstances that drive adolescents to use substances. A thorough knowledge of the etiological pathways and patterns of use among students in the school population is essential in formulating targeted prevention strategies and promoting healthier lifestyles among the school-age adolescent population.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review identifies the complex and multifactorial nature of substance abuse among adolescents. Previous studies have shown that individual, social, familial and environmental factors interact in initiating and sustaining substance use among young people. Researchers often place these determinants into categories of predisposing, precipitating and environmental factors and each is important in developing adolescents' attitudes and behavior with regards to substances.

Predisposing factors are the characteristic of a person that makes him or her more susceptible to engaging in substance use. Studies have shown that certain characteristics such as low self-esteem, poor coping skills, sensation seeking behavior and psychological distress have shown to significantly increase the chances of experimenting with drugs or alcohol. Adolescents who are emotionally unstable or lack confidence will often turn to substances as an escape from their personal problems or as a temporary way to escape their stress. Similarly, curiosity and need for excitement during adolescence can make the person experiment with alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs (Swadi, 1999; Whitesell et al., 2013).

Precipitating factors, especially peer influence, have been widely acknowledged as one of the greatest contributors to adolescent substance abuse. Adolescents often want to be accepted and fit in with their social groups and this may lead them to copy the behaviour of their peers. When adolescents are surrounded by friends who use substances, it is much more likely that they will too. Several studies have shown that peer pressure and peer substance use are strong predictors of onset of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use by students (Henneberger & Mushonga, 2021; Farrell & White, 1998). In addition, adolescents who hang out with substance-using peers are more likely to develop permissive views about drugs and alcohol.

Family dynamics are also a key factor in developing substance use behavior in adolescents. Research has consistently revealed that poor parental monitoring, weak parent-child relationships and lack of communication are risk factors for adolescence substance abuse. When parents do not act as supervisors and emotional guides for their children, adolescents turn to their peers for guidance and validation, which is likely to make them vulnerable to risky behaviors. On the other hand, effective parental monitoring and supportive family environments are protective factors that lower the probability of substance use (Steinberg, Fletcher, & Darling, 1994; Ryan, Jorm, & Lubman, 2010).

Environmental influences also play an important role in normalizing substance use in adolescents. The availability and accessibility of drugs, exposure to substance use in communities, and a lack of enforcement of regulations can make the experimentation of drugs among young people easier. Additionally, there has been a trend in modern digital media platforms and social networking sites as having increasingly been linked to the normalization of substance use behaviors. Exposure to online content that makes alcohol or drug use appear socially acceptable or pleasurable, may promote adolescents to try such substances and hence reduces the perceived risks of their use (Scull et al., 2010; Okedare & Adisa, 2025).

Socio - Economic conditions and academic pressures also add to the vulnerability of adolescents to substance abuse. Some studies show that students who are under academic stress, experiencing family conflict, or having financial problems, can resort to drugs or alcohol as a coping strategy. Interestingly, research has suggested that substance abuse is not exclusive to any particular socio- economic group of people; adolescents that come from both high- and low-income families may engage in substance use as a result of different psychosocial influences. In cases where conventional drugs are not available or affordable, some adolescents may choose to abuse easily accessible substances like prescription drugs, inhalants or household chemicals to get high.

Cultural and religious contexts can also influence the attitudes of adolescents about substance use. In some societies, there are powerful cultural values and religious teachings that discourage substance use and serve as a protective factor against drug abuse. However, in other situations where substance use is socially tolerated or very common, adolescents may think of it as acceptable behavior. Thus, culture beliefs, community norms, and societal attitudes tend to have a major impact on the adolescent's choice to use a substance.

Overall, the current literature shows that adolescent substance abuse is a complex phenomenon affected by the combination of individual vulnerabilities, peer relationships, family dynamics and environmental situations. Understanding these factors is critical for the development of effective prevention strategies and intervention programs that aim at reducing substance abuse in adolescents and fostering healthier lifestyles.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study utilizes a quantitative research framework to scrutinize the possible etiological factors and detrimental effects associated with substance abuse among students in the senior secondary education. A descriptive research design has been used to systematically collect and analyze information that relate to patterns and factors of substance use among adolescents. This methodological choice is considered to be appropriate as it facilitates the gathering of measurable data and the detailed description of the characteristics, behaviours and experiences of the selected population.

The study population included students studying in senior secondary class in rural localities. A convenience sampling strategy was used to select participants, given its practical and accessibility. Using this approach, a total of 100 students were recruited as the study subject. Data was collected using a self-structured questionnaire which was developed by the researcher, which elicited information on the socio-demographic characteristics, familial background, exposure to substance use and any of the potential risk factors associated with adolescent substance abuse.

In order to guarantee the quality and consistency of the research instrument, the reliability of the research instrument (questionnaire) was tested through the split half method, and the reliability coefficient was calculated according to Karl Pearson's correlation formula. The resultant reliability value of 0.83 showed that the level of internal consistency and reliability of the tool is high, and it suggests that the instrument is suitable for purpose and reliable to collect data that aligns with the objectives of the study.

### IV. RESULTS

#### Socio - Demographic Profile of Study Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents show some salient features of the study population. Of the 100 students included in the study, more than half (57% n = 57) were in the 16-17 years of age group, while 36% were in the 14-15 years of age bracket and a smaller proportion (7% n = 7) were in the range of 12-13 years of age. This distribution is suggestive that the respondents were a sample of older adolescents, a group that has been known to be more vulnerable to experimenting with substances because of increased peer influence and social surroundings.

Concerning gender distribution, there was an equal number of male and female students, including 50 percent boys and 50 percent of girls. This balanced representation helped ensure that the findings represented views from both genders in a balanced manner.

In terms of educational attainment, there was an equal proportion of students who were enrolled in the 11th and 12th grade. 30% each represented the sample. Meanwhile 20% of participants were at the 9th and other 20% were at the 10th grade. All of the respondents were from rural areas, which emphasizes the importance of this study in determining issues of substance abuse among adolescents living in countryside communities.

#### Education Status of Parents

The educational background of parents varied quite a lot within the participants. Among fathers, the highest proportion (40 per cent) had a secondary level of education, and 20 per cent were illiterate. Additionally, 16 % of fathers had completed senior secondary education, 15 % had completed primary education and 9 % were graduates.

With respect to mothers, most had lower levels of education than fathers. Approximately 26% of mothers had completed secondary education, while 10% had attained senior secondary education. A low percentage (3%) were graduates and the rest of mothers had primary or lower educational levels. These results suggest that there were a high proportion of parents in the study population with limited educational backgrounds, which may impact on their awareness and supervision of adolescent behaviour.

### Occupational Status of Parents

The occupational distribution among fathers showed that 37% were farmers, so it was the most frequent occupation. This was followed by 27 per cent who was engaged as a labourer, 3 per cent who was a shopkeeper, 2 per cent who was a teacher and 1 per cent who worked as a doctor. Ominously, 5 percent of the study sample reported not having a father, which implies single parent family situations within a small segment of the study sample.

In contrast to this, most of the mothers were housewives and this represented 77% of the mothers of the respondents. A smaller proportion were tailors (12% of the population), laborers (10%) and teachers (1%). These findings indicate the socioeconomic aspects of rural families where fathers are mainly involved in farming or manual labour and mothers are mostly in charge of household activities.

### Substance Abuse History in the Family

The study also investigated whether students indicated any familial history of substance abuse. Findings revealed that 60 percent of students reported a history of substance abuse in their family and 40 percent of students reported no history. Of those with a family history, 35% stated that their fathers were involved in substance use, 21% of the cohort mentioned substance use among uncles, and 18% stated their grandfathers had a history of substance use.

These results indicated that a substantial proportion of adolescents in the study were exposed to substance use in their family environment and may be affected on their attitudes and behaviours towards substance use through modelling, normalization or perceived risk.

Overall, the socio - demographic results confirm that the study participants come mainly from rural communities that can be characterised as moderate to low parental education levels and occupations mainly associated with farming and manual labour. Additionally, a significant percentage of students have family members who have a history of substance abuse, which can make them susceptible to substance use.

**Table 1:** Most common available drugs for substance abuse according to study subjects.  
N=100

S.No.	Available Drug	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Marijuana	17	17.00
2.	Tabaccoo	69	69.00
3.	Caffeine	46	46.00
4.	Cannabis	52	52.00
5.	Alcohol	83	83.00
6.	Opioids	76	76.00
7.	Heroin	68	68.00

Table : 01 shows the availability of various substances for abuse according to the study participants. The results showed the most available substance was alcohol with 83(83) or 83 percent of the respondents reporting the availability of alcohol. This suggests that the availability of alcohol is very accessible to adolescents and might thus play a significant role in the use of substances by students. Following alcohol, opioids were said by 76 (76) of the participants, suggesting that this too is widely present in the communities where the students live.

Additionally, tobacco and heroin were claimed to be almost equally accessible with 69% (69) and 68% (68) reported respectively their presence. These results emphasize that tobacco products and heroin are relatively common substances that may be found in the environment of adolescents. Cannabis was said to be available by 52% (52) of the participants, indicating moderate accessibility when compared to other substances. Meanwhile, caffeine-containing substances were reported by 46 (46%) of the respondents which shows that almost 50% of the students were aware of their availability for consumption or misuse.

In contrast, marijuana was reported as the least available substance with only 17% (17) of the study subjects reporting its availability. This relatively lower percentage implies that marijuana may not be as readily available for adolescents in the study area as other drugs such as alcohol or opioids.

Overall, the results show that alcohol is the most common and available substance used by adolescents of the studied area and therefore a major concern with regard to substance abuse among the students. On the other hand, marijuana seems to be the least available of the substances among the participants. These results emphasize the importance of raising awareness, preventive measures and strict regulation to minimize the accessibility and abuse of substances that are accessible to the general population, especially alcohol, to adolescents.

**Table 2:** The causative factors of substance abuse. N=100

S.No.	Causative Factors	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Family history of substance abuse	25	25.00
2	Poor parental monitoring	68	68.00
3	Mental health issues	48	48.00
4	Peer pressure	60	60.00
5	Peer suggestion	34	34.00
6	Easy availability	25	25.00
7	Curiosity	22	22.00
8	Social media support	37	37.00

The data presented in Table 02 show the main determining factors that influence the misuse of substance among adolescents as reported by participants in the empirical investigation. The analysis suggests that insufficient parental monitoring came out as the most salient contributory factor, as stated by 68% (68) of the respondents. This finding strengthens the implication that a lack of supervisory oversight, lack of parent-child communication, and a lack of family involvement in the daily pursuits of adolescents may increase the propensity for the engagement of substance use.

The second-most commonly cited determinant was peer pressure (60% or 60) of the participants. Adolescents are especially vulnerable to the influence that is exerted by their peer collectives and the desire to achieve social acceptance or to fit in with friends can be a catalyst to the experimentation of alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs.

More than familial and peer relationships, mental health issues were also identified as major factors contributing to adolescent maladaptive activity with 48% (48) of the students reporting that psychological distress, emotional turmoil, or more general mental health problems could lead adolescents towards substance abuse. This pattern points to the possibility that one problem youth may turn to substance use as a maladaptive coping strategy when faced with the stress, anxiety, or affective distress.

Further analysis shows that the influence of social media on substance use behaviors is even more as 37% of the respondents (37) stated that the digital platforms may support the promotion or normalization of such behavior. In parallel, direct peer suggestion was reported by 34% (34) of participants, indicating that overt encouragement or persuasion from friends also can predispose persons to the initiation of substance-use practices.

About one-fourth (25%) of the respondents cited both familial history of substance abuse and easy availability of substances as contributing factors. This observation suggests that adolescents who grew up in an environment where drug use was stagnant or where alcohol and narcotics might be easily obtainable are more likely to imitate similar behaviors.

Curiosity was the reason cited by 22% (22) of the students for experimenting with substances. Naturally inquisitive at this stage of development, adolescents may seek out new experiences and as a result be at-risk with substance use without the full understanding of potential consequences.

In totality, based on the findings of Table 02, deficient parental supervision is the top influence on adolescent substance abuse risk followed by peer pressure and mental health-related issues. These results highlight the importance of strong parental supervision, fostering strong family relationships, as well as effective educational interventions designed to reduce the risk of substance abuse among young people.

**Table 3 :** The favorable environment that promotes substance abuse. N=100

S.No.	Favorable Environment	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Online	27	27.00
2.	At School	15	15.00
3.	In their Houses	07	07.00
4.	When hanging out with friends	64	64.00
5.	All of Above	46	46.00

Table 03 illustrates the favourable environmental conditions that may promote substance abuse among adolescents, as reported by the study participants. The findings reveal that hanging out with friends was identified as the most common environment encouraging substance use, reported by 64% (64) of the students. This suggests that spending time with peers in social settings may increase the likelihood of adolescents being exposed to or encouraged to experiment with substances.

The second most frequently reported environment was online platforms, with 27% (27) of respondents indicating that online interactions or digital exposure may contribute to substance abuse. This highlights the potential role of internet use, social networking sites, and online communities in influencing adolescents' attitudes and behaviors toward substance use.

Furthermore, 15% (15) of the participants identified the school environment as a setting where substance use could be promoted. This may occur due to peer interactions, lack of strict monitoring, or exposure to substance-using classmates within the school premises or surrounding areas.

A smaller proportion of students, 7% (7), reported that substance abuse may occur within homes, suggesting that family environments or lack of supervision at home may sometimes contribute to substance use among adolescents.

Interestingly, 46% (46) of the respondents selected "all of the above", indicating that multiple environments—including social gatherings, online spaces, schools, and homes—can collectively influence the likelihood of substance abuse among adolescents.

Overall, the findings suggest that spending time with friends is the most influential environmental factor promoting substance abuse, emphasizing the strong impact of peer interactions and social environments on adolescent behavior.

## V. Discussion

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research examining the factors influencing substance abuse among adolescents. A study conducted by Smith and Johnson, titled "Substance Abuse Among Senior Secondary School Students: A Causative Factors Analysis," reported similar results, highlighting that peer pressure, family history of substance abuse, and mental health issues are major contributors to substance use among high school students. Their study emphasized that adolescents often experience strong social influences from their peer groups, which can significantly shape their attitudes toward alcohol and drug use.

In addition, the study highlighted that lack of parental supervision and family-related factors may increase adolescents' vulnerability to substance abuse. When parents fail to monitor their children's activities or provide adequate guidance, adolescents may be more likely to engage in risky behaviors. The findings also suggested that psychological stress, emotional problems, and academic pressures may lead students to use substances as a coping mechanism.

These insights are valuable for educators, parents, and policymakers, as they highlight the importance of implementing preventive strategies, awareness programs, and counseling services to address substance abuse among adolescents. Strengthening parental involvement, promoting healthy peer relationships, and improving mental health support within schools can play a crucial role in reducing substance abuse among students.

## VI. Conclusion

Based on the findings reported by the study participants, it was determined that alcohol was the most prevalent substance of abuse among high school students, with 83% (83) of respondents reporting its availability and use. This indicates that alcohol remains the most commonly encountered substance among adolescents in the study area.

The results also revealed that poor parental monitoring was the most significant causative factor contributing to substance abuse, reported by 68% (68) of the students. Lack of supervision, limited parental guidance, and insufficient communication between parents and adolescents may increase the likelihood of substance use among young individuals.

Furthermore, the study identified that hanging out with friends was the most common environmental factor promoting substance abuse, as reported by 64% (64) of the respondents. This finding highlights the strong influence of peer groups and social environments on adolescents' behavior.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for increased awareness, parental involvement, and preventive interventions to address substance abuse among adolescents and promote healthier lifestyles.

## VII. Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. All personal information of the study subjects was kept confidential and anonymous to ensure privacy and ethical research practices.

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## IX. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this study.

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