

Myths and Facts of Substance Abuse: A Study on Graduate Students

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Abstract: Substance abuse or drug abuse are broad terms that refers to the use of any substances i.e. alcohol, Illegal drugs, prescription drugs, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, tobacco products, inhalant, narcotic and cannabis in excessive amounts. Now-a-days drug abuse is one of the burning problems in India. Some myths are encouraging the youth to have drugs, alcohol and tobacco products. The present study tested the knowledge levels of the graduate students on the social, psychological and economical myths and facts about substance abuse. The study adopted the convenience sampling method and collected the data from 317 graduate students. The data were collected through a questionnaire shared via Google form. There are some myths strongly believed by the student youth i.e. 29.3 per cent of the respondents answered that the drug addicts are homeless, unemployed, or basically losers which is a myth. And 45.4 per cent of the respondents answered that most of the addicted people get their first dose of a drug from a drug peddler or a drug pusher which is a myth. Most of the time, their friends, and relatives contact them to have substances. And 41.0 per cent of the respondents answered that the beer doesn't have much alcohol which is a myth. Drinking beer leads gradually to hard liquor which leads to addiction. The government and non-governmental organisations should increase the awareness levels among the student youth. The parents should have a careful eye on the day to day activities of their children to prevent drug abuse.

Keywords: youth, substance abuse, drug addiction, myths and facts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse or drug abuse are broad terms that refer to the use of any substance i.e. alcohol, Illegal drugs, prescription drugs, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, tobacco products, inhalant, narcotic and cannabis in excessive amounts (Jasmine Shaikh and Pallavi Suyog Uttekar, 2021). Drug Abuse is defined as a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant, impairment or distress. Recurrent substance use results in the failure to fulfil major roles at work, school or at the home. Substance abuse leads to physically hazardous accidents. The common substances abused in all over the world are alcohol, tobacco, cannabis or marihuana and khat. Reports show that these substances are widely used among students (Kumesa ST et al, 2015). Some people start using drugs because of the following reasons i.e. peer pressure, lack of social support, troubled relationships in the family, the youth of low socioeconomic conditions and stress in life. Drug addiction increases the strain on the liver, liver damage or liver failure, seizures, stroke, mental confusion and brain damage. There is a chance of lung disease, and also problems with memory, attention and decision making, which make it difficult in daily living. The impact of drug abuse shall be on many facets of life i.e. Education, employment, reduced work productivity, poor health, higher rates of HIV/ Hepatitis – B, C, social dysfunction, higher rates of violence, leads to poverty, homelessness, problems at home/family. There are many myths circulating among college students and youth about the usage of drugs and their pleasure. Due to these myths, some college students start taking drugs and alcohol. This study tested the knowledge levels of the students on the myths related to substance abuse.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Venturelli Peter (2000) conducted a study on 'Drugs in Schools: Myths and Realities' which discussed drug use in schools. This study described the effects of the drugs on the most frequently used and also discussed some of the myths about the drugs. The study examined the relationship between drug use or abuse and violence, among youth. The study found that between 1996 and 1999, the use of licit and illicit drugs among the nation's youths increased. This has led to abuse by youth and school violence.

Evan Senreich & Shulamith Lala (2013) conducted a comparative study on 'The Effect of MSW Education on Students' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding Substance Abusing Clients' compared knowledge and attitudes concerns work with substance abusing clients. In comparison to entering students, graduating students demonstrated modestly higher levels of knowledge, role adequacy, and role legitimacy, but less desire to work with this population. A multivariate analysis revealed numerous factors that affected students' knowledge and attitudes: gender; ethnicity; exposure to substance abuse through family, friends, or self; taking a substance abuse course in an academic setting; having an internship in a substance abuse setting; substance abuse training outside of an academic setting; and exposure to substance abusers through employment.

Cranford James et al. (2019) conducted a study on 'Substance use behaviours, mental health problems, and use of mental health services in a probability sample of college students' which examined 1) the prevalence of substance use behaviours in college students, 2) gender and academic level as moderators of the associations between mental health problems and substance use, and 3) mental health service use among those with co-occurring frequent binge drinking and mental health problems. The study collected the data from 2843 college students through an Internet survey on mental health problems, substance use behaviours, and utilization of mental health care. The study found that major depression, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder were positively associated with cigarette smoking. Frequent binge drinking was negatively associated with major depression and positively associated with generalized anxiety disorder, and these associations were significantly stronger for males than females. Among students with co-occurring frequent binge drinking and mental health problems, 67% perceived a need for mental health services but only 38% received services in the previous year. There may be substantial unmet needs for the treatment of mental health problems and substance use among college students.

Alan I. Leshner, (2021) conducted a study on "Exploring Myths about Drug Abuse". He presented more related five myths about drugs abuse i.e. Drug addiction is voluntary behaviour; more than anything else, drug addiction is a character flaw; you have to want drug treatment for it to be effective; treatment for drug addiction should be a one-shot deal, and we should strive to find a "magic bullet" to treat all forms of drug abuse. The author stated that the myths are more circulated among the student youth.

It is observed that majority of the studies related to the substance abuse are conducted in the foreign countries. The conducted studies are related to the psychological problems and addiction. In this regard the present study is chosen to test the knowledge of the student youth on myths of substance usage.

Need for the Study

Substance abuse or drug abuse is a broad term that refers to the use of any substance i.e. alcohol, Illegal drugs, prescription drugs, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, tobacco products, inhalant, narcotics and cannabis in excessive amounts. The usage of drugs, alcohol and tobacco-related products has been increased among youth in general, and student youth in particular. The major causes for increasing the number of drug usage among youth are peer pressure, lack of social support, troubled relationships in the family, the youth of low socioeconomic conditions and stress in life. The myths related to the drugs are also influencing the youth to start drug usage. Due to listening to these myths, the student youth have the desire to use drugs at least one time in their life and they start the usage of drugs. Not many studies were conducted on this topic previously. Hence, the present study tested the knowledge levels of graduate students on the myths about the drugs.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the socio-economic and demographic profile of the graduate students of various colleges in Visakhapatnam city

2. To test the knowledge levels of the graduate students on the social, psychological and economical myths and facts about substances abuse
3. To provide the appropriate suggestions to improve the knowledge levels of the students to prevent the drug abuse

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is the heart of any research study. The present study is quantitative and adopted the descriptive research design. The study purposively selected five colleges in Visakhapatnam city. The study adopted the convenience sampling method and collected the data from 317 students pursuing their graduation. The data were collected through a questionnaire shared via Google form. The data was collected in February and March of 2022. The data were analysed through MS-Excel and SPSS 17th version.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researchers collected the data from 317 graduate students from five colleges in Visakhapatnam city. The data were analysed and presented below. The following table presents the college wise respondents of the study.

Table No. 1: Distribution of the respondents by their college

S. No	College	Frequency	Percentage
1	ACTS Degree College	45	14.2
2	Samata College	52	16.4
3	Dr. L. B. College	91	28.7
4	Aditya Degree College	55	17.4
5	VMC College	74	23.3
	Total	317	100

The data in the above table revealed that 28.7 per cent of the respondents are from Dr.L.B. College, 23.3 per cent of the respondents are from VMC College, 17.4 per cent of the respondents are from Aditya Degree College, 16.4 per cent of the respondents are from Samata College and 14.2 per cent of the respondents are from Acts College. Majority of the respondents are the volunteers of National Service Scheme. The following table presents the information about the sex of the respondents.

Table No. 2: Distribution of the respondents by their sex

S.No	Sex	Frequency	Percentage
1	Male	108	34.1
2	Female	209	65.9
	Total	317	100

The data in the above table presents that 65.9 per cent of the respondents are female and 34.1 per cent of the respondents are male. The following table presents the age of the respondents

Table No. 3: Distribution of the respondents by their Age

S. No	Age	Frequency	Percentage
1	17	21	6.6
2	18	102	32.2
3	19	123	38.8
4	20	52	16.4
5	21	14	4.4
6	23	3	1.5
	Total	317	100

The data in the above table revealed that 38.8 per cent of the respondents are belongs to 19 years age group, followed by 32.2 per cent of the respondents belongs to 18 years age group and 16.4 per cent of the respondents are belongs to 20 years age group. The following table presents the graduation year of the respondents

Table No. 4: Distribution of the respondents by their graduation year

S.No	Graduation year	Frequency	Percentage
1	First Year	124	39.1
2	Second Year	180	56.8
3	Third Year	13	4.1
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that 56.8 per cent of the respondents pursuing their second year of graduation, while 39.1 per cent of the respondents pursuing their first year of the graduation. There are only 4.1 per cent of the respondents pursuing their final year of graduation.

Myths and Facts of Substance Abuse

Substance abuse can be defined as a pattern of harmful use of any substance for mood altering purposes. "Substances" can include alcohol, illegal drugs as well as some substances that are not drugs at all. There are some myths and facts about the drug addiction and substances abuse among youth of India. Myth is widely disseminated, but false belief or idea which is circulated among youth. And the fact is reality and true. This study is divided the myths into three types and tested the knowledge of the student youth. 1) Psychological myths and facts 2) Economical Myths and facts 3) Social Myths and facts. The Google form designed and asked them to identify the fact. They filled the form as per their knowledge and submitted. Then the data were analysed and presented below.

Psychological Myths and Facts Related to Drug

Table No. 5: Creativity and Change in the functioning

S.No	Creativity and Change in the functioning	Count	Percentage
1	Myth - Increase creativity and make the user more imaginative	48	15.1
2	Fact - Change in perception of surroundings and altered integration of sensory stimuli	269	84.9
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 84.9 per cent of the respondents answered that the substances abuse change in perception of surroundings and altered integration of sensory stimuli which is a true, while 15.1 per cent of the respondents answered that the substances abuse Increase creativity and make the user more imaginative which is a myth. This myth is circulating among youth to start their substances use.

Table No. 6: Thinking and body functioning

S.No	Thinking and body functioning	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Sharpens thinking and lead to greater concentration	43	13.6
2	Fact - Induce dullness and affects normal body functioning	274	86.4
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 86.4 per cent of the respondents answered that substances abuse induce dullness and affects normal body functioning. It is a true. While 13.6 per cent of the respondents believed that the substances abuse sharpens thinking and lead to greater concentration which is a myth. This myth leads the youth to start substance use.

Table No. 7: Treatment for Drug Addicted People

S.No	Treatment for Drug Addicted People	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Once you're addicted, there is no hope for you	69	21.8
2	Fact - Treatment is available	248	78.2
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 78.2 per cent of the respondents believed that the treatment is available to drug addiction and drug addicted people. It is a true, but if they are addicted, their physical health will be damaged. While 21.8 per cent of the respondents believed that there is no hope for the drug addicted people which is a myth. These 21.8 per cent of the respondents believe that there is no treatment for drug addicted people.

Table No. 8: Driving after a few drinks

S.No	Driving after a few drinks	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - I can manage to drive well enough after a few drinks	41	12.9
2	Fact - Affects motor coordination	276	87.1
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 87.1 per cent of the respondents answered that substances abuse affects motor coordination which is a fact. While 12.9 per cent of the respondents answered that the people can manage the driving after taking a few drinks which is a myth. Due to this myth we are seeing many accidents and spoil the functioning of families.

Table No. 9: Willpower and character

S.No	Psychological myth vs. fact	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Failure of will or of strength of character	154	48.6
2	Fact - Brain Disease	163	51.4
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 51.4 per cent of the respondents believed that substances abuse is a Brain Disease, while 48.6 per cent of the respondents believed that Failure of will or of strength of character which is a myth.

Table No. 10: Drug addiction adoptive behaviour

S.No	Drug addiction adoptive behaviour	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Drug addiction is voluntary behaviour	43	13.6
2	Fact - Changes your brain instructions	274	86.4
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 86.4 per cent of the respondents answered that substances abuse changes the brain instructions which is a fact, while 13.6 per cent of the respondents believed that drug addiction is voluntary behaviour which is a myth.

Economical Myths and Facts

Table No. 11: Drug addiction is a problem of rich or poor

S.No	Drug addiction is a problem of rich or poor	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth –It is a Problem in a lower income or socio-economic layers of society	128	40.4
2	Fact - It is a Societal Issue	189	59.6
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 59.6 per cent of the respondents answered that substances abuse is a societal Issue which is a fact. While 40.4 per cent of the respondents believed that drug addiction is a problem in a lower income or socio-economic layers of society which is a myth. The rich people believe that it is a problem of poor people and at the same time the poor people believes that it is a problem of rich people. But it is a social problem of all groups of the society will be affected.

Table No. 12: Who addict for drugs

S.No	Who addict for drugs	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Drug addicts are homeless, unemployed, or basically losers	93	29.3
2	Fact - Anyone can become Drug Addict	224	70.7
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 70.7 per cent of the respondents answered that anyone in the society can become a drug addict which is a fact. While 29.3 per cent of the respondents answered that the drug addicts are homeless, unemployed, or basically losers which are a myth. Anybody can become a drug addict. It depends upon the peer group who commonly introduce the substances.

Table No. 13: Drug addiction is a problem of developing countries

S.No	Drug addiction is a problem of developing countries	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Only affect individuals in developed countries	55	17.4
2	Fact - Significant impact on mortality, disease and injury	262	82.6
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 82.6 per cent of the respondents believed that substances abuse has significant impact on mortality, disease and injury which is a fact, while 17.4 per cent of the respondents answered that drug addiction affect the individuals in developed countries which is a myth. It is a problem of the world.

Table No. 14: Enough treatment and policies are available

S.No	Enough treatment and policies are available	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Enough research is available for policy making on drug problems	90	28.4
2	Fact - To develop new treatment, preventive strategies and support services	227	71.6
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 71.6 per cent of the respondents answered that need to develop new treatment, preventive strategies and support services to the drug addicted people which is a fact, while 28.4 per cent of the respondents believed that the there is an enough research is available for policy making on drug problems which is a myth.

Social Myths and Facts

Table No. 15: Lifestyle change among drug addicted people

S.No	Lifestyle change among drug addicted people	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - People who use drugs can't change	45	14.2
2	Fact - Right treatment, continued support and will power changes everything	272	85.8
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 85.8 per cent of the respondents answered that right treatment, continued support and will power changes everything in the life of drug addicted people which is a fact, while 28.4 per cent of the respondents answered that people who use drugs can't change their lifestyle which is a myth.

Table No. 16: Counselling and medication

S.No	Counselling and medication	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Drug addiction can't be cured.	39	12.3
2	Fact - Counselling and medication can help	278	87.7
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 87.7 per cent of the respondents answered that counselling and medication can help the drug addicted people to change their behaviour and their life style which is a fact, while 12.3 per cent of the respondents answered that drug addiction can't be cured which is a myth.

Table No. 17: First drug from friend or drug peddler

S.No	First drug from friend or drug peddler	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Most of the addicts get their first drug from a peddler or a pusher	144	45.4
2	Fact - Friend and event at a home is reason	173	54.6
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 54.6 per cent of the respondents believed that the friend and an event at a home is reason to start taking the substances which is a fact, while 45.4 per cent of the respondents believed that most of the addicted people get their first drug from a drug peddler or a drug pusher which is a myth. The drug peddler or a drug pusher may not contact the youth directly. They work with their customers only. Friends introduce the drugs and substances for many youth. It is opined that the youth should be careful with bad association of friendship.

Table No. 18: Punishment should be given to the Drug addicts

S.No	Punishment should be given to the Drug addicts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Substance users do not receive sufficient punishment	78	24.6
2	Fact - They are already marginalized in the society and need of treatment and care	239	75.4
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 75.4 per cent of the respondents answered that the drug addicts are already marginalized in the society and need of treatment and care which is a fact, while 24.6 per cent of the respondents believed that substance users do not receive sufficient punishment which is a myth.

Table No. 19: Social Myths and Facts

S.No	Social Myths and Facts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Drinking isn't all that dangerous	62	19.6
2	Fact - Contribute to sexual assaults, poor academic performance and unintentional injuries	255	80.4
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 80.4 per cent of the respondents believed that drinking alcohol contribute to sexual assaults, poor academic performance and unintentional injuries which is a fact, while 19.6 per cent of the respondents believed that drinking alcohol is not dangerous which is a myth.

Table No. 20: Social Myths and Facts

S.No	Social Myths and Facts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Myth - Beer doesn't have as much alcohol as hard liquor	130	41.0
2	Fact - 12 ounce bottle = Shot of 80- proof liquor	187	59.0
Total		317	100

The data in the above table revealed that majority 59.0 per cent of the respondents answered that beer is also mixture of alcohol and harm to the health which is fact, while 41.0 per cent of the respondents believed that the beer doesn't have as much alcohol as hard liquor which is a myth. It is the bad belief among youth and they are drinking beer. But it leads gradually to the hard liquor which leads to addiction.

In the present study, It is found that some myths believe by the above 20 per cent student youth i.e.21.8 per cent of the respondents believe that there is no hope for the drug addicted people; 40.4 per cent of the respondents believe that drug addiction is a problem in a lower income or socio-economic layers of society; 29.3 per cent of the respondents answered that the drug addicts are homeless, unemployed, or basically losers which are a myth; 28.4 per cent of the respondents believed that the there is an enough research is available for policy making on drug problems; 45.4 per cent of the respondents believe that most of the addicted people get their first drug from a drug peddler or a drug pusher; 24.6 per cent of the respondents believed that substance users do not receive sufficient punishment; and 41.0 per cent of the respondents believed that the beer doesn't have as much alcohol. These myths may encourage the student youth to start taking drugs, alcohol and tobacco related products. There is an urgent need to create the awareness on the above myths to prevent the usage of drugs, alcohol and tobacco related products.

5. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ There is myth that the beer is not an alcohol and it is used to build the body. But beer is a mixture of alcohol and it leads to use of country alcohol and addiction. The awareness should be created among youth
- ❖ There is a myth that the students believed that most of the addicted people get their first drug from a drug peddler or a drug pusher which is a myth. The drug peddler or a drug pusher may not contact the students directly. Friends introduce the drugs and substances for many youth. Be careful with bad associations of friendship.
- ❖ The government and Non-governmental organisations should organise awareness campaigns in colleges and in community to prevent drug abuse. Cultural programmes like role play, skits and kalajata programs will be useful to bring awareness among uneducated population also. .

- ❖ Peer group discussion about ill-effects of drug addiction should be increased
- ❖ Rehabilitation service to patients should be increased and sharing of success stories of the persons who stopped their habit and leading active social and economic life should be encouraged.
- ❖ The student leaders and volunteers should act as community police to identify the suspects and inform to responsible persons.
- ❖ The student youth should learn to deal with pressure by practicing and involving in. Learning music, yoga, meditation, sports, art, dance, participation in social activities and community service, etc.
- ❖ Create awareness and educate people about ill-effects of substance abuse on the individual, the family, work place and society at large and reduce stigmatisation and discrimination against groups and individual dependent on drugs in order to reintegrate them into the main stream of the society.
- ❖ Regular parental monitoring, supervision, and enhanced child-parent communication can act as preventive measures towards substance abuse. Efficient parent training with family skill building and structured family therapy can prevent illicit drug use among youth.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study tested the knowledge levels of the students on the myths and facts related to the student youth on drug abuse and addiction. The graduate students still believe some myths which lead to the consumption of alcohol and drugs. They should be very careful towards their bad association of friends who introduce the bad habits. Government and Nongovernmental organisations should create awareness among youth and colleges to prevent the drugs. The parents should have a careful eye on the day to day activities of their children. These steps help to prevent the drug usage among youth and build a better society.

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