

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH ON DRUG AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an interdisciplinary approach, applying sociology, psychology, biology, public policy and educology in order to analyze the contemporary phenomenon of drug and substance abuse, its reasons, consequences and prevention methods. It emphasizes that the strategies to reduce drug and substance abuse should employ different complex knowledge of different fields while combining individual, group and societal levels.

Key words: Drug and substance abuse; drug abuse consequences; drug abuse factors; interdisciplinary approach.

Introduction

Drug and substance abuse is a global problem affecting individuals, families, communities and societies across cultures and socio-economic settings. It is a “harmful or hazardous” abuse of legal or illegal drugs (The World Health Organization) and substances in solid or liquid form, often composed of two or more specific properties. The drugs could be divided into the main categories of depressants (for example, cannabis, heroin, morphine, etc.), hallucinogens (for example, ketamine, LSD, etc.) and stimulants (for example, amphetamines, cocaine, etc.) (Australian Government, Department of Health and Aged Care).

Despite the harmful effects, which also may be long-term or even fatal, the consumption of drugs keeps increasing worldwide despite different socio-economic or cultural contexts. It is also the case of native countries of the authors of this paper. For example, as the Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control Department (Lithuania) states, 23.4% of 15-29 years old youth in Lithuania in 2021 used some kind of drug at least once in their life, while in 2016 there were only 19 percent of them. In addition, the availability of drugs keeps increasing (Euranet Plus, 2023) and thus creating more challenges to decrease the abuse of drugs. In the case of India, Indian authorities confirm that “despite governmental efforts the use of intoxicants other than alcohol has dramatically increased among young people aged 18 to 40” (KP Sai Kiran, 2024). The most frequently consumed drugs in India are reportedly cannabis, including charas, bhang, ganja, heroin and other Indian produced pharmaceuticals (National Crime Records Bureau Report, 2022).

If we take into account the global statistics of drug business, the scenario looks intimidating. Approximately with a turnover of around 500 billion US dollar, it could be seen

as the third largest business in the world followed by petroleum and arms trade. About 190 million people around the world consume various forms of substances (United Nations World Drug Report 2023).

Taking into account the complexity of the issue, a deeper understanding of the causes, effects and solutions to this problem is essential for designing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Thus, **the aim of this paper** is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of drug and substance abuse using an interdisciplinary approach (sociology, biology, psychology, public policy and educology).

The tasks of the paper are as follows:

- to describe the concept of drug and substance abuse and its consequences on individuals and societies;
- to analyze sociocultural, psychological and economic factors influencing drug and substance abuse across diverse populations;
- to provide the solutions and recommendations in order to decrease drug and substance abuse.

Research methods: scientific literature analysis.

Interdisciplinary approach is one of the most common ways used in social science research to study complex social issues and phenomena by using multiple knowledge and methods from various disciplines. Such an approach has scope of application throughout the different stages of research, such as identification of research problem, collection and analysis of data and drawing conclusions. Interdisciplinary approach helps to investigate complex topics or areas because it provides wider perspectives to study a particular research problem - what are the factors, increasing drug and substance abuse and the ways to decrease it?

The concept of drug and substance abuse and its consequences

Drug abuse could be defined as an “improper utilization of drugs in excessive quantities that results in clinically critical impedance as well as tolerance and withdrawal” (Kumar, Sharma, Kumar & Sharma, 2021). It is a pattern of regular and heavy use over a significant period of time, and despite experiencing various negative effects the attempts to terminate the drug abuse may be failed (Anderson, 1998) leading to drug addiction. Based on World Drug Report 2000, substance abuse or addiction is a broader term that refers to the compulsive use of any psychoactive substance, including alcohol, prescription medications, and illicit drugs. According to Kibria (2018), substance abuse may lead to the changes in brain, affecting self-control and persistence to avoid the drugs, thus drug addiction is called a “relapsing disease”. The incentive sensitization theory of addiction (Robinson & Berridge, 1993) states that addiction is an outcome of “intense, aberrant motivational states of craving” that have their origin in brain changes that occur after repeated exposure to addictive drugs. For example, Kumar et al. (2021) stated that the excess use of drugs causes shrinkage in the brain's region, neurodegeneration due to heroin abuse or diminished grey matter due to alcohol abuse. It could be stated that drug addiction could be seen as a chronic, degenerative disorder characterized by forceful drug seeking and its persistent use, despite harmful consequences causing long-lasting changes in the brain. It has been considered as both a complex brain disorder and a mental health condition (World Drug Report 2000).

Drug and substance abuse may lead to death as well. The World Health Organization states that “2.6 million deaths per year were attributable to alcohol consumption, accounting for 4.7% of all deaths, and 0.6 million deaths due to psychoactive drug use” (Greenfield, 2024).

Drug and substance abuse leads or may lead to health and safety issues, including transmission of HIV/AIDS, various cancers, body organ failure, traumas, unsafe sexual practices, experiencing violence and trauma (Sahu & Sahu, 2012); mental and psychological health issues, such as losing the meaning of life and having no value in the social environment, experiencing feelings of fear, helplessness, and emptiness, as well as feelings of hatred towards themselves (Manurung, 2024); social and economic consequences, including disrupted relationships with family and peers, poverty, loss of academic and professional life (Kibria, 2018; Manurung, 2024; Sahu & Sahu, 2012). Drug and substance abuse may lead to delinquent behavior, including crime, violent behavior (Sani et al., 2024), involvement in prostitution (Taghi Sheykhi, 2019).

The factors, which may lead to drug and substance abuse, are presented in detail in the next section.

The factors influencing drug and substance abuse

In the scientific literature, the factors causing drug and substance abuse are divided into various groups, such as *biological, psychological, socio-economic factors* (for example, see Sahu & Sahu, 2012).

According to Kendler et al. (1995), genetic predisposition to addiction (inherited genetic traits) could be in place and in such a case neurochemical change caused by substances (e.g., overstimulation of dopamine pathways) increase dependency risks. Volkow et al. (2016) conducted research on various biological and genetic factors responsible for drug and substance addiction. According to the scientists, human genetic predispositions sometimes lead to drug addiction - drugs hijack dopamine pathways, reinforcing long term dependency (Volkow et al., 2016).

Depression and anxiety make an impact towards drug and substance abuse (UNODC, World Drug Report, 2024). Some individuals take drugs in order to reduce anxiety and disappointment (Kibria, 2018), parental negligence (Sani et al., 2024). Rich Londt & Holtman (2023) emphasize the following drug abuse factors related to family: family structure (single motherhood and absent fatherhood), troubled parent-child relationships, poor family communication/interactions, parental/family substance abuse, and conflict-ridden, stressful and often violent and abusive family situations.

Drug and substance abuse may also emerge as a coping mechanism to deal with huge expectations at work and physical and emotional burnout (Amponsah-Tawiah, Lartey & Suleman, 2024). Although there are 2 million of alcohol and 0.4 million of drug-attributable deaths per year among men (Greenfield, 2024), both men and women similarly use drugs as coping mechanisms against various kinds of physical and mental trauma - for example, Weller et al. (2022) stated that significant gender differences were not found for overall drug use.

In general, one should note that the globalization, industrialization and urbanization processes caused the intensification of life, breaking or transforming existing social ties by deteriorating the traditional ways of socialization and social control among people. Due to

these phenomena, people became vulnerable towards the pressure and stressfulness of modern fast phase life. It may seem that adaptation of modern technologies is supposed to intensify the connections among individuals but on the contrary it weakened social ties and made even close people in the family distracted by the contemporary technological opportunities. One should emphasize that globalization brought radical changes in culture and lifestyle of people across borders through transformation of information, values, norms, etc.

The phenomenon of globalization can be defined as the process in which the world becomes increasingly interconnected and interdependent everyday squeezing the complexity in terms of time and space differentiation of culture, economic, political and social exchanges. It propels the integration of societies through global exchange of information, data and people (Giddens, 1990).

Globalization enhanced connectivity across borders and reduced barriers and obstacles in terms of travel, trade and commerce. One could state that globalization strengthened and multiplied the ties to access drugs. According to the report of UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes), (2023), globalization functions as a platform which facilitates trade and commerce of drugs around the world. It can be assumed that globalization is a catalyst of illegal manufacturing and distribution of drugs and substances. Emergence, growth and expansion of modern sophisticated technologies made transnational trade and commerce of drugs more viable. The growth and expansion of modern technologies such as internet and e-commerce facilities fueled both offline and online transaction of drugs and expanded drug markets beyond physical boundaries. Cyber-world itself is functioning as a parallel business filed for trade and commerce for drugs, minimizing the barriers for availability of drugs and making an easy accessibility of drugs at affordable cost. These things have made a conducive atmosphere for drug traffickers to expand their networks around the world (UNODC, 2023).

Globalization also made the assimilation of various cultural aspects much easier. In the case of drug use, some societies consider the use of a particular drug and substance a normal process but in other societies it is called deviant behavior. Thus, some traditional societies adapt particular practices and thus may create negative outcomes while starting to follow or adopt the lifestyle of foreigners especially in terms of lifestyle, way of living etc. (Singh, 2017).

However, despite the societal changes, some societal groups still experience more challenges than others. One of them is LGBTQ communities confronting problems such as physical, mental, societal rejection, discrimination, exploitation and violence that might intentionally or unintentionally expose them to drug abuse. The term LGBTQ can be defined as inclusive individuals who identify themselves as various gender categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer whose sexual orientations and gender identities, expressions vary from fixed social norms typically linked with heterosexual orientations (Plummer, 2011). The concept of gender can be defined as roles, behaviors and activities where both men and women are expected to perform, that are socially constructed. One should note that gender is different from sex that has nothing to do with biological traits but completely social (Connell, 1987).

Drug abuse within the LGBTQ communities can be identified as a coping mechanism against social separation, oppression, exploitation and psychological trauma because

persons with inter sexual identities might face problems like role conflict, physical and mental trauma and they may not be able to live according to societal expectations which leads to pressure to use drugs as means to eliminate it. One should note that some specific alcohol, tobacco and drug brands intentionally target gender minorities and marketing among them and thus normalizing drug and substance abuse.

Globalization also brings up some other disadvantages, such as economic exploitation, inequalities, unemployment, under employment, poverty, income disparities etc. As a result, plenty of people lost jobs, income sources and were forced to use drugs as coping mechanisms for mental trauma and stress (Wilkinson, Pickett, 2010).

However, some individuals are doing this because of simple curiosity (Sani et al., 2024). This curiosity may be strengthened by peer pressure, role-modeling/imitation, easy availability (Momen, Shahriar & Sultana, 2024; Sahu & Sahu, 2012).

According to the social learning theory of Bandura (1977) individuals sometimes get obsessed with substance abuse influenced by others they admire or follow. One should state that mostly young people don't think or even don't know much about the harmful outcomes of using drugs. For example, the research performed by Jiang Xie & Zhang (2020) with 1,425 respondents college students revealed that only 2.3% of the respondents had intentions of using illegal drugs but an easy availability, peer encouragement and lack of self-control played a significant role in drug abuse.

Scientific literature emphasizes the role of economic factors in increasing drug and substance abuse in society because economy is one of the most fundamental aspects of human life, it is quite difficult to separate economy from the existence of human society. A study conducted by Galea (2004) pointed out that social and economic factors such as unemployment, poverty, financial vulnerability leads to substance and drug abuse among individuals. This tendency most often can be seen in the marginalized communities, because the socially, economically and politically vulnerable population most often belongs to marginalized communities.

The equal distribution of resources is the major aspect of any economic system, however, that is not always the case, especially in the countries with emerging economies, ravaged by wars, political instability, etc. A major part of the population in such contexts is still struggling with access to health care, education, sanitation, housing and employment etc. and such individuals tend to resort to the consumption of drugs and substances to ease the mental and physical stress. Unemployment leads to poverty and financial crisis; which motivates people to become involved in drug and substance business as a monetary incentive to satisfy their daily needs. One of the major phenomena - migration - may also become a source for drug and substance abuse. Migration can be defined as both the inward and outward movement (fluctuation) of people from one particular geographical location to another that involves permanent or temporary shift in residence. Migration is basically classified into two types: internal and external (international); internal migration happening within a country and external migration occurs between countries (Lee, 1966). Migration often causes unemployment, underemployment, financial insecurity, poverty, which might lead individuals to drug trading for both living and using drugs as a coping mechanism against mental trauma. Migration is causing personal and psychological problems such as social isolation, disintegration, cultural dislocation, individuals might lose family, community

support, and this is resulting in loneliness and mental trauma, which might lead to drug addiction.

Findings and discussion: the means to overcome drug and substance abuse

In order to prevent and control the threat of drug addiction and substance abuse, a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach is needed as well, taking into account the complexity of the phenomenon. Combating drug addiction and substance abuse needs support from multiple stakeholders from education, healthcare, social policy formulators, law enforcement personnels, NGOs, government etc.

Prevention and control strategies and plans must start from grass root level by various government and non-governmental agencies who can contribute significantly towards the activities to restrain the problem of drug addiction and substance abuse.

The issue of drug and substance abuse should be fought taking into account individual, group and societal levels.

First of all, various psychological therapies could be provided in order to beat the substance abuse, such as Relapse Prevention and Psychotherapy, 12 Steps Facilitation, Motivational Technique, Methadone Replacement Therapy, Therapeutic Community (TC). Manurung (2024) emphasized the development of affordable mental health services, increasing mental health awareness and literacy, and development of specific mental health programs.

Social psychologists and social workers play an important role in fighting substance abuse. For example, Kibria (2018) emphasizes showing empathy, understanding and letting them to understand the issue, providing social, educational and marginal help. According to Sani et al. (2021), social workers and guidance counselors can help address the problem of drug and substance abuse by:

- identifying and rescuing drug addicts and individuals at risk;
- addressing factors that may influence individuals to engage in drug and substance consumption;
- collaborating with parents, community members, and other stakeholders to provide support and guidance to those battling drug addiction;
- organizing sessions to bring together individuals facing similar problems.

Iravani (2014) stated that a social worker must possess some basic skills to effectively deal with drug-addicted patients. Social workers should confidently ask about substance use and its effects on her/his clients and families, know what the response means and doesn't mean; discuss with them the positive and negative aspects of their substance use; assess the risk it poses to them and their family or partner relationships; offer brief interventions (advice and information) (Iravani, 2014).

Galvani (2015) indicates that there are three key roles for social workers regarding substance use:

- to engage with the topic of substance use as part of their duty of care for the support of the patients and their families;
- to motivate people to consider changing their problematic behaviour and support them (and their families and carers) in their efforts to do so;
- to support people in their efforts to make and maintain changes in their substance use.

In the case of practitioners, they need to have flexibility and autonomy to work creatively to find ways to engage, connect, and inspire (Duke et al., 2020). Hechanova et al. (2023). It reflects the statement of Hechanova et al. (2023), which emphasizes the client-centered approach to treatment and community-based drug rehabilitation programs.

The governmental authorities and other agencies should take effective initiatives to the prevention and control of drug addiction and substance abuse. Initiatives such as organizing public campaigns against substance abuse and drug addiction, to disseminate information about its harmful effects is highly desired.

Government should also take appropriate actions to reduce stress and pressure of individuals by creating more opportunities for recreation and entertainment. In order to prevent and control drug addiction and substance abuse, early detection and interventions are crucial. The government should give more attention towards the treatment and rehabilitation for both the victims and survivors of drug addiction, by providing better treatment and rehabilitation facilities. These facilities must be affordable, accessible especially to the socially and economically marginalized sections of the society. The type treatment that is given to the victims of drug addiction must be holistic which includes exercise, therapy and other activities apart from medicines which enhance the physical and mental health of victims.

The government must give high priority to strengthen laws against drug trafficking, illegal production, distribution and consumption of drugs and chemical / altered substances along with taking precautionary measures to regulate the access of drugs and control its use and misuse. Formulation, execution, implementation and monitoring of policies regarding the prevention and control of drugs and substance is also required. It is the joint responsibility of both government and public to ensure support and care to the victims and survivors of drug and substance abuse by providing them employment opportunities, education & medical care along with adequate mental and psychological support.

In the modern world, *media, both print media and online media* can play vital roles in the prevention and control of drug addiction and substance abuse by promoting awareness and also spreading information / resources about services provided by agencies in tackling the problem.

Educational institutions can also play a significant role in the preventive activities by organizing seminars, workshops, training addressing the problem which would benefit students, teachers and parents.

Public healthcare institutions can also contribute significantly towards the preventive activities by organizing awareness programs on stress management, emotional intelligence, also teaching various coping mechanisms to overcoming peer pressure etc. Identification and minimization of risk factors is a basic way of controlling drug addiction and substance abuse.

In addition, the consciousness of families of youth's substance use has a positive impact on preventing drug and substance abuse (Callak et al., 2022). In general, family support, life skills, and psychological well-being are significant factors to fight drug and substance abuse (Hechanova et al., 2023).

Conclusions and implications for future research

1. Drug and substance, including alcohol, prescription medications, and illicit drugs, abuse is a multifactorial and multidimensional problem, when biological, socio-demographic, economic, cultural, structural, institutional factors that are responsible for both the causes and consequences of drug abuse are in place. Thus, this phenomenon calls for the analysis that exceeds the individual centric (micro level) analysis and examines how social norms, peer influence, economic inequalities, family dynamics, community structures have an impact on drug use and abuse. One should state that the sociological approach is one of the best tools to redefine and analyze drug and substance abuse as a complex social issue which needs collective effort and actions from society for a meaningful change. Thus, further research in this area could be enriched using the sociological theories such as Structural-Functionalism, which adopts macro view regarding society, seeing it as a complex system, where consensus and conformity ensures stability and vice versa; Symbolic Interactionism, which takes a more micro-level orientation to deviance and drugs; The Social-Conflict Paradigm, seeing society as an arena of inequality and conflict.
2. Major common causes of drug and substance abuse occur because of social, economic, cultural discriminations, inequalities, exploitations, marginalization, unemployment, poverty, underemployment, social stigma related to gender etc. Many of these factors are driven by major phenomena, such as globalization, migration, global pandemics affecting the processes and structure in the society.
3. In order to fight drug and substance abuse in the society, a multilevel approach is required involving various scientific knowledge and employment of competences in psychology, educology, public policy, management and related areas of social science. Further research in order to develop a comprehensive model to apply this knowledge could be of great importance.

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TARPDISCIPLININIS POŽIŪRIS Į PIKтнаUDŽIAVIMĄ NARKOTIKAIS IR KITOMIS MEDŽIAGOMIS: PRIEŽASTYS, PASEKMĖS IR SPRENDIMAI

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pateikiamas tarpdisciplininis požiūris, taikant sociologijos, psichologijos, biologijos, viešosios politikos ir edukologijos mokslų žinias, siekiant išanalizuoti šiuolaikinį piktnaudžiavimo narkotikais ir kitomis medžiagomis reiškinį, jo priežastis, pasekmes ir prevencijos metodus. Straipsnyje pabrėžiama, kad piktnaudžiavimo narkotikais ir kitomis medžiagomis mažinimo strategijose turėtų būti taikomos kompleksinės skirtingų sričių žinios, vienijant individualų, grupės ir visuomenės lygmenis.

Raktiniai žodžiai: piktnaudžiavimas narkotikais ir kitomis medžiagomis; piktnaudžiavimo narkotikais padariniai; piktnaudžiavimo narkotikais veiksniai; tarpdisciplininis požiūris.