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# Factors Influencing Youth Drug Abuse: A Review Study

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## Abstract

Youth drug abuse appears to be influenced by various factors. Both traditional and contemporary addictive substances are abused by young individuals for multiple reasons. This review aims to assess the factors that contribute to youth drug abuse. The paper adopts a narrative approach to review studies. It draws information from published articles obtained through a general Google search and saturation of other articles using Google Scholar. A total of 18 published literature sources, containing information on the factors influencing youth drug abuse, were included in the study. The most prevalent influencing factors identified are peer influence and inadequate parental or guardian care. Therefore, it is recommended that research on the factors influencing youth drug abuse should undergo specific scientific scrutiny to address the unique challenges and develop appropriate solutions.

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## 1. Introduction

Drug abuse is widely recognized as a significant cause of morbidity and mortality among young individuals. Various factors have been identified as influencing non-medical drug use. This behavior is particularly prevalent in areas affected by natural disasters or armed conflicts, leading to displacement of populations (Horyniak, Melo, Farrell, Ojeda, & Strathee, 2016; UNODC, 2014). Drug abuse is responsible for 5.9% of global fatalities and an estimated 5.1% of the global burden of illness and injury (Horyniak et al., 2016; WHO, 2014). According to the United Nations, in 2014, nearly one in every 20 individuals between the ages of 15 and 64 worldwide were confirmed drug users (WHO/UNODC, 2018). The negative health effects of drug abuse are well-documented, causing cognitive, behavioral, physiological, and psychological dysfunctions among addicted youth, among other issues (Muganga et al., 2017; Nguyen-Louie et al., 2015; WHO/UNODC, 2018).

Drug abuse has become a subject of academic and policy interest globally, as it has emerged as a significant public health concern with increasing morbidity, mortality, and prevalence over the past few decades (UNODC, 2022; Ventura, de Souza, Hayashida, & Ferreira, 2015). The projected global burden of disease categorizes drug abuse among the top three leading causes of death worldwide. Addressing the issue of drug abuse requires context-specific information on the underlying factors to develop effective interventions (Tsvetkova & Antonova, 2013; Turn Bridge, 2021; UNODC, 2022).

To better understand the factors influencing youth drug abuse, this review acknowledges that no single factor contradicts another, as each was assessed with sufficient scrutiny. Consequently, the review examines the factors that influence drug abuse among young individuals and offers recommendations for curtailing this problem. The findings will provide researchers, policymakers, and decision-makers with practical solutions for drug abuse prevention and control.

## 2. Methodology

This paper adopts a thematic approach to the narrative review. The initial literature search was conducted through a desk survey of academic, policy, and practice websites, following a purposeful selection process. A combination of general Google search and saturation of articles in Google Scholar was employed to ensure the retrieved literature encompassed a wide range of topics related to factors influencing youth drug abuse. Published literature from academia, civil society, and the private sector was included in the review to gain comprehensive insights into the various factors contributing to

drug abuse among young individuals. Recognizing that drug abuse is a complex issue with multiple stakeholders across different settings, data collection for this review also involved retrieving relevant texts published outside the traditional academic literature. As a result, a systematic review protocol was not followed, but key actors' websites were used to identify pertinent scientific literature on factors influencing youth drug abuse.

The literature searches utilized various combinations of the following keywords: 'drugs', 'abuse', 'addiction', 'youth', 'framework', 'factors', 'adolescence', and 'teen'. The reference lists of the searched literature, relevant to the study, were further consulted for potential inclusion in the narrative presentation. While drug abuse is influenced by several interconnected factors, such as peer influence, this review specifically focuses on studies that examine influential factors of drug abuse among the youth. Additionally, given the political implications surrounding discussions on drug abuse, the review excluded works pertaining to politics within regional or local authority contexts.

### 3. Findings

A total of 18 relevant publications were identified for inclusion in this review. These publications provided explanations, definitions, and insights into factors associated with drug abuse, along with other related issues. From the perspective outside the drug abuse domain, the literature conceptualized the issue under various themes and sub-themes that categorically identified influential factors contributing to drug abuse. The following headings and sub-headings emerged from the literature search.

#### 3.1. Factors Responsible for Youth Drug Abuse

No single factor solely influences drug abuse among young individuals. Multiple factors contribute to drug abuse, and youth are more likely to develop drug abuse habits if they are exposed to these factors. Drug abuse habits are developed for various reasons, including:

- **Peer acceptance:** Young individuals may use drugs in order to fit in or gain acceptance from their peers who engage in drug abuse.
- **Emotional well-being:** Drug abuse can provide pleasurable emotions and a sense of improvement in how one feels. Some young people may experience physical pain, depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders, and they may turn to narcotics as a means of finding relief.
- **Performance enhancement:** Youth may abuse anabolic steroids to enhance their athletic or academic performance, or use stimulants for similar reasons.
- **Curiosity and thrill-seeking:** The desire to experiment with new experiences is common among young individuals, particularly activities perceived as exhilarating or daring (Medline Plus, 2019; Mohamed, Solehan, Mohd Rani, Ithnin, & Che Isahak, 2021; Sahu & Sahu, 2012).

##### 3.1.1. Circumstances that Contribute to Youth Drug Abuse

Various circumstances can subject youth to drug abuse practices, including:

- Stressful early childhood events, such as child abuse, child sexual assault, and other traumas.
- Lack of parental supervision or monitoring.
- Genetic factors.
- Exposure to illicit drugs during pregnancy (placental exposure).
- Family history of drug abuse.
- Association with peers who engage in drug abuse (Medline Plus, 2019; Morojele Neo K, Dumbili, Obot, & Parry, 2021; Patel, Chisholm, Dua, Laxminarayan, & Medina-Mora, 2016).

### 3.2 Risk Factors for Drugs Abuse

Risk factors for drug abuse often coexist with various demographic attributes. Examples of risk factors include low socioeconomic status, early initiation of drug use, social circumstances, and societal tolerance of illicit drugs, among others. Specific risk factors include:

- **Family factors:** Parental and sibling drug abuse, as well as poor parent-child relationships and parental conflict, can contribute to youth engaging in drug abuse (Degenhardt et al., 2010; Muganga et al., 2017).
- **Personal characteristics:** The development of externalizing disorders during childhood, such as attention-deficit challenges or behavioral issues like sensation-seeking tendencies, as well as low education levels, can increase the risk of drug abuse (Degenhardt et al., 2010; Patel et al., 2016).
- **Peer influence:** Associating with peers who engage in drug abuse is one of the most significant risk factors for youth drug abuse, surpassing the influence of familial and individual factors in intensity (Potapchik & Popovich, 2014).
- **Biology:** Approximately half of an individual's risk for drug use is determined by inherited genes. Other risk factors for drug use and addiction may be influenced by gender, ethnicity, and the presence of other mental health disorders (NIDA, 2019).
- **Environment:** The environment in which a person lives can have various effects, including family and peer influences, financial stability, and overall quality of life. Environmental factors such as peer pressure, physical and sexual abuse, early drug exposure, stress, and parental supervision can significantly impact an individual's likelihood of engaging in drug abuse and developing an addiction (NIDA, 2019).
- **Developmental factors:** Critical stages of development interact with genetic factors to influence the risk of drug abuse. While drug use at any age can lead to abuse, individuals who are particularly vulnerable to risky drug abuse activities may experience altered developmental processes, as the parts of their brains that regulate decision-making, judgment, and self-control are still developing (NIDA, 2019).

#### 3.2.1 Predisposing factors to Drugs Addiction

Certain individuals are more vulnerable to addiction than others due to specific events and environments that increase susceptibility to substance use. Preventing and delaying substance use for as long as possible can help decrease this susceptibility. Ensuring the safety of young individuals involves providing support from family members, implementing

mental health programs, and teaching them effective coping mechanisms (Drug Free, 2022; Nguyen-Louie et al., 2015; Turn Bridge, 2021).

- **Family history of addiction:** It is important to inform young individuals if there is a history of addiction in the family. These discussions should begin early in their teenage years, approaching the topic in a similar manner as discussing the history of medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or other illnesses (Drug Free, 2022; Turn Bridge, 2021).
- **Concerns about mental health:** Problematic drug use is more likely to occur in individuals with underlying mental health disorders. As a parent or guardian, it is crucial to watch for signs that your ward may be abusing drugs. Early detection can reduce the risk and enhance the prevention of recurring disorders (Drug Free, 2022; Turn Bridge, 2021).
- **Behavioral or impulse control issues:** Children who regularly take risks, struggle with impulse control, or have difficulty following rules are more likely to develop challenges with substance use. While most young individuals are aware of the risks involved, some struggle to control their urges to engage in risky behavior. Youth with these specific behavioral traits are often referred to as having an "addictive personality" (Drug Free, 2022; Turn Bridge, 2021).
- **Experience of trauma:** It has been demonstrated that youth who have experienced trauma, such as violence or abuse, are much more likely to engage in drug abuse and addiction in the future. It is crucial for parents and other adults to understand how trauma can impact a child and seek appropriate support (Drug Free, 2022; Turn Bridge, 2021).
- **External factors:** Risk factors include peers' access to drugs and other addictive substances, as well as exposure to advertisements promoting substance use (Drug Free, 2022).
- **Age at initial use:** Beginning drug use at a young age is one of the most reliable and powerful indicators of an increased risk of drug abuse (Drug Free, 2022).

Risk factors for substance use change as youth transit to adulthood. Changing situations can lead to life stress and pressure at other stage of life, making people more susceptible to drug abuse and addiction (Degenhardt et al., 2016). Young adulthood is the time when drug usage becomes prevalent, because these were critical years, when drug abuse often started by them. The youth consider the stress and the pressure felt during this transitional period as justification for using drugs (Turn Bridge, 2021). Sometimes the root causes of youth drug abuse appear much deeper.

### 3.2.2. Personal Factors Influencing Addiction

Many youths experience the consequences of drug abuse, and the development of drug abuse-related disorders often occurs without a clear-cut personal pathway responsible for the outcome. However, certain factors can increase the likelihood of drug abuse, including the following (Chris Foy, 2022; Dalal, 2020).

- **Localized poverty:** The economic circumstances in which a person is raised can be a risk factor for drug abuse. Early exposure to poverty increases the likelihood of developing a drug abuse habit in adulthood. Youth who experienced poverty during their adolescence are particularly at risk for drug abuse (Chris Foy, 2022; Dalal, 2020).
- **Presence of drugs in schools:** A person's likelihood of developing a drug abuse habit is significantly influenced by their educational environment. During the teenage years, friends and peers have a significant impact, especially on those who struggle with low self-esteem or social insecurity (Chris Foy, 2022; Dalal, 2020).

- **Aggressive behavior during early life:** Childhood aggression at an early age is a risk factor for drug abuse later in life. The age at which a person started using drugs was directly correlated with incidents of violence in early life. For example, it was found that children who displayed aggressive behavior during childhood were more likely to engage in drug abuse by the age of 14 (Chris Foy, 2022; Dalal, 2020).
- **Environmental vs. biological risk factors:** Environmental factors play a significant role in several risk factors for drug abuse. External influences and biological traits make drug abuse more likely to occur in individuals predisposed to it. Understanding one's genetic traits at an early stage of life can help prevent a genetic predisposition to drug addiction, enabling wise decisions that steer clear of drug abuse (Chris Foy, 2022; Dalal, 2020). In addition to genetics, other biological factors include gender and other mental health issues. Having a mental health issue increases the likelihood of substance use disorders (Chris Foy, 2022). Therefore, the likelihood of youth involvement in drug use as adults depends on the biological and environmental risk factors they were exposed to during early childhood and adolescence (Chris Foy, 2022).

### 3.2.3. Contributing Factors to Drug Addiction

Drug abuse among youth has detrimental effects on their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Drug abuse can affect individuals from various age groups and backgrounds, indicating different reasons for drug abuse, whether it be personal or influenced by peers. Drug addiction is a sickness that requires commitment to overcome, and it is important not to blame others for one's drug abuse. Taking responsibility for getting clean, staying clean, and leading a healthy lifestyle is crucial.

- **Hereditary:** Although the exact relationship between drug use and family history is not fully understood, it is widely recognized that individuals with a family history of drug abuse are more susceptible to developing addictions themselves. Growing up in an environment with substance abusers increases the likelihood of experiencing psychological development that favors addiction. Certain genes have been linked to addiction, although no single gene determines whether someone will become an addict. Genes play a role in how we respond to and experience drugs (Jason, 2021).
- **Lack of alternatives:** One of the commonly known contributing factors to drug abuse is the social environment. Individuals in social settings with supportive friends are less likely to develop drug abuse habits. On the other hand, people who lack social connections are significantly more prone to developing drug abuse habits. Therefore, drug use and addiction are influenced by various factors, including a sense of boredom and lack of alternatives (Jason, 2021).
- **Mental health conditions:** It is widely acknowledged that individuals with pre-existing mental health disorders are more susceptible to drug abuse. Up to three times as many people with mental illnesses engage in recreational drug or alcohol use. The presence of mental health conditions can contribute to the development of drug addiction (Jason, 2021).
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety significantly increases the risk factors for drug use. It not only enhances the risk of engaging in drug abuse but also affects drug use by making users more susceptible to other risk factors (Jason, 2021).
- **Prescription medications:** Many prescription drugs are highly addictive, making them a high-risk factor for drug



abuse. Antidepressants, sedatives, painkillers, and other prescription drugs can quickly lead to physical and emotional dependence by overstimulating the brain's dopamine receptors. Without proper monitoring, prescription drugs can result in long-term drug abuse (Jason, 2021).

Drug abuse entails various risks that can differ from person to person. It is important to remember that drug abuse is not the user's fault because no one chooses to become an addict. However, it is the user's responsibility to seek treatment, especially when they realize they are addicts (Abbo, Okello, Muhwezi, Akello, & Ovuga, 2016; Jason, 2021). Additionally, drug abuse can negatively impact a person's social life. Therefore, efforts should be focused on promoting psychosocial competence, including problem-solving skills, building self-confidence, and developing coping mechanisms for stress, anxiety, and depression. Establishing a mental health NGO to support vulnerable young people in identifying and addressing underlying addiction issues is also essential (Abbo et al., 2016; Allen, 2017).

#### 3.2.4. Causes and Effects of Drug Abuse in Youth

There are undoubtedly certain underlying factors and issues that contribute to youth drug abuse, which are as follows:

- **Media:** Many young people perceive drug abuse as a common occurrence due to its portrayal in movies, music, and television shows (Sahu & Sahu, 2012).
- **Boredom:** Youth who struggle with idleness are more susceptible to drug abuse. They often turn to drugs as a coping mechanism to alleviate inner emptiness (Sahu & Sahu, 2012).
- **Self-medication:** Young people who frequently experience disappointment may resort to drug abuse as a form of self-medication. If they cannot find a suitable and healthy outlet for their stress, they may turn to drugs for comfort (Sahu & Sahu, 2012).
- **Influence of others:** Young people often witness adults, including their parents, using drugs and other substances like tobacco. This exposure can create a sense of obligation to try what others are doing in their community, leading them to believe that drug abuse is beneficial (Sahu & Sahu, 2012).

## 4. Recommendations

- Further investigation is needed to identify specific influential factors related to drug use among youth in different settings. This understanding will enable tailored solutions to address drug abuse.
- Future studies should utilize standardized drug abuse tools that have been tested elsewhere to ensure consistent and comparable results.
- Primary healthcare, as the first point of contact for the community, should be equipped to handle drug abuse-related issues, ensuring accessibility, availability, and affordability of public healthcare systems.

## 5. Conclusion

Drug abuse among youth is a significant public health problem worldwide. The use of illicit drugs is associated with premature illness and death on a global scale. Effectively addressing drug abuse relies on understanding its underlying causes. This review offers valuable insights into these factors, which can be utilized by academics, policymakers, and decision-makers to combat the destructive impact of drug abuse on the future generations of all societies, regardless of their location. It is recommended that further research be conducted to examine the factors influencing youth drug abuse in specific settings, enabling tailored approaches to address the challenges and find solutions.

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