

USE AND ABUSE OF DRUGS: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY IN THE RAYALASEEMA REGION OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Drug abuse represents one of the most significant public health challenges in contemporary Indian society, particularly in developing regions. This comprehensive research examines the patterns, extent, and dynamics of substance abuse across the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, encompassing four districts: Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur, and Kurnool. Based on empirical data from 197 respondents receiving treatment at de-addiction centres, this study presents critical findings on demographic profiles, substance types, addiction patterns, and socio-economic impacts. The research reveals a predominance of middle-aged males (mean age 42.3 years) engaging in regular alcohol and tobacco consumption, with significant ramifications for family structures, occupational performance, and community health. This paper synthesizes findings from multiple research methodologies using ethnographic approaches and statistical analysis, providing a framework for policymakers and healthcare practitioners to develop targeted intervention strategies.

Keywords: *drug abuse, addiction, Rayalaseema region, substance use patterns, de-addiction, public health*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

The problem of drug abuse in India has grown exponentially over the past two decades, evolving from a marginal social issue to a critical public health emergency affecting millions across urban and rural communities. According to the United

Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP, 2001), assessing the extent of drug abuse proves exceptionally challenging because it involves measuring the size of a hidden population with considerable margins of error[1]. The heterogeneous nature of India's socio-economic landscape—spanning diverse geographic regions, cultural practices, and economic conditions—creates complex epidemiological patterns that defy uniform analysis.

The Rayalaseema region, comprising four economically developing districts in Andhra Pradesh, presents a particularly critical case for study. This region has witnessed accelerating trends in substance use coinciding with rapid urbanization and socio-economic transitions. The magnitude and trajectory of drug abuse in this region remain inadequately documented in academic literature, necessitating empirical investigation grounded in rigorous sociological methodology[2].

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite India's National Survey on the Extent, Pattern and Trends of Drug Abuse, comprehensive regional data remains limited. The Rayalaseema region faces particular vulnerability due to demographic transitions, increased disposable income, and improved accessibility to both licit and illicit substances. Current intervention programs lack evidence-based understanding of local addiction patterns, making treatment and prevention efforts suboptimal[3].

1.3 Research Objectives

This study pursued the following objectives:

1. To describe the comprehensive socio-economic profile of drug users in the Rayalaseema region
2. To examine the different types of drugs consumed and the extent of their usage patterns
3. To understand the causal mechanisms driving drug use and addiction initiation
4. To assess the multidimensional impact of substance abuse on family structures, occupational performance, and social relationships
5. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing rehabilitation and counselling programmes
6. To identify pathways toward recovery and sustained sobriety

1.4 Significance and Scope

This research addresses a critical gap in regional data on drug abuse patterns in South India. By employing mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative ethnographic observation, this study provides a nuanced understanding of addiction dynamics specific to the Rayalaseema context. Findings inform policy interventions at district, state, and national levels while establishing baseline data for longitudinal monitoring of substance abuse trends.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Conceptual Frameworks

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1966) defines a drug as "any substance or product that is used or is intended to be used to modify or explore physiological system or pathological states for the benefit of the recipient"[4]. Contemporary usage distinguishes therapeutic drugs from substances consumed for psychoactive effects. Drugs in the latter context are "substances occurring naturally or produced

synthetically in laboratories or factories and used by people because they expect to benefit from their use, whether through the experience of pleasure or avoidance of pain"[4].

2.2 Classification and Pharmacological Properties

Drugs produce effects through three primary mechanisms, classified as:[5]

1. **Depressants:** Substances that slow central nervous system activity, including alcohol, sedatives (Valium, Avil), opioids, and cannabis preparations (Bhang, Charas, Ganja, Hashish). These produce initial euphoria followed by depression of cognitive and motor functions.
2. **Stimulants:** Substances producing euphoric sensations and enhanced physiological arousal, including cocaine, tobacco, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), and cannabis in certain contexts. Effects include increased heart rate and enhanced motor activity.
3. **Hallucinogens:** Substances altering consciousness and distorting perception, including lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), phencyclidine (PCP), and volatile solvents. These produce hallucinations, perceptual distortions, and mood alterations.

Substances are further classified as licit (legal: pharmaceuticals, tobacco, caffeine) or illicit (illegal: opiates, cocaine, ATS, cannabis)[5].

2.3 Epidemiology of Global Drug Abuse

International data reveals alarming prevalence rates. Rockville (2006) documented that in 2003, 34.9 million Americans aged 12 and above reported lifetime cocaine use, with 7.9 million reporting crack use[6]. Among young adults

aged 18-25, lifetime cocaine use reached 15 percent[6]. These figures underscore the magnitude of the problem in developed economies, with implications for understanding emerging trends in developing nations like India.

2.4 National Drug Abuse Epidemiology in India

The National Survey on Magnitude of Substance Use in India (2019) provides critical epidemiological evidence demonstrating substantial regional variations in substance abuse patterns[21]. The survey documents that alcohol remains the most commonly used substance nationally, with dependent pattern prevalence estimated at 2.7 percent of the general population aged 10-75 years, representing approximately 2.9 crore individuals across the country[21].

Significantly, Andhra Pradesh ranks among the five states with highest prevalence of alcohol use disorders (>10% prevalence), alongside Tripura, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, and Arunachal Pradesh[21]. Within Andhra Pradesh specifically, 73.0 percent of treatment-seekers reported alcohol as their primary substance, with married status predominating at 83.2 percent among substance users[22]. Female drug abuse in Andhra Pradesh represents 10.5 percent of identified drug abusers, the highest rate nationally among major states[22], suggesting either greater accessibility to treatment in the state or higher underlying prevalence among women compared to other regions.

The national opioid crisis demonstrates alarming escalation. Heroin use has surpassed opium use, with current heroin prevalence at 1.14 percent nationally (approximately three times the global average), followed by pharmaceutical

opioids at 0.96 percent and opium at 0.52 percent[21]. Injection drug use (IDU) among people who inject drugs (PWID) reaches 14 percent lifetime prevalence and 9 percent current prevalence nationally, with opioid drugs (heroin and pharmaceutical opioids) predominantly injected at 46 percent each[21].

2.5 Age and Temporal Patterns of Onset

Research demonstrates consistent patterns of substance initiation. The mean age of first substance use initiation across India ranges from 23.1 to 24.7 years, with approximately 9.7 percent initiating before age 15 and over one-quarter (26%) initiating between ages 16-20 years[22]. Recent studies on youth populations (ages 10-24 years) document overall prevalence at 32.8 percent, with mean initiation age at 17.2 ± 2.7 years[23]. Among youth substance users, 75.5 percent initiated use before age 20 years, indicating critical adolescent vulnerability windows[23].

2.6 Gender Disparities in Substance Use

Epidemiological evidence reveals dramatic gender asymmetries in substance abuse. Males represent 97.2 percent of drug abuse treatment seekers nationally, with females accounting for only 2.8 percent[22]. However, Andhra Pradesh demonstrates notably higher female representation at 10.5 percent[22]. Youth studies document females with lower overall prevalence (12.2%) compared to males in the 10-24 age group, with males reporting 17.6 years mean initiation age versus females at 17.2 years[23]. This gender disparity reflects both differential substance use patterns and substantial stigma deterring female treatment-seeking, particularly in traditional communities where female addiction remains severely stigmatized.

2.7 Health Consequences of Drug Use

Research documents multidimensional harms across five categories:[7]

Physical	Occupational/ Financial	Familial/ Social	Psychological	Legal
Respiratory problems	Absenteeism	Marital disharmony	Guilt/Shame	Illegal activities
Infections (HIV, Hep-B, Hep-C)	Job loss	Family separation	Depression	Arrest
Poor nutrition	Debt accumulation	Homelessness	Anxiety	NDPS imprisonment
Overdose/Death	Reduced earning	Community rejection	Mental disorders	Criminal liability

Table 1: Multidimensional Harms

Associated with Drug Abuse

2.8 Specific Drug Effects

Research on specific substances reveals concerning neurological and behavioural outcomes. Studies on MDMA (Ecstasy) indicate decreased performance in memory tests among users compared to non-users, though causality remains debated[8]. Heroin use carries extreme overdose risk, particularly when combined with alcohol and depressants[9]. Methamphetamine produces exhaustion syndromes, psychosis, severe tooth decay, and in extreme cases, death from dehydration and renal failure[9,10].

2.9 Substance Use Among Youth Populations

Contemporary Indian youth demonstrate alarming substance initiation patterns. A 2024 multi-state study of 1,630 youth aged 10-24 years found overall substance use prevalence of 32.8 percent, with tobacco most common (26.4%), followed by alcohol (26.1%) and cannabis (9.5%)[23]. Christians demonstrated highest prevalence (50.3%) of substance use, followed by Hindus (29.4%), and Muslims (15.7%)[23]. Geographic

variation proved dramatic: northeastern states reported 75.3 percent prevalence with 88.9 percent of Christian youth substance users, while Kerala reported only 7.5 percent prevalence[23]. Substance use in family members significantly predicted youth initiation, with 44.5 percent of youth reporting substance-using family members (tobacco 31.9%, alcohol 25%)[23].

2.10 Treatment Gap and Service Accessibility

A critical barrier to recovery emerges from severe treatment accessibility gaps. The 2019 National Survey documents that only 2.6 percent and 12 percent of alcohol- and drug-dependent individuals, respectively, receive treatment access[24]. Mental Health Surveys quantify this gap at 86.3 percent for alcohol use disorders, 91.8 percent for tobacco disorders, and approximately 73 percent for other drug use disorders, with overall gap at 90 percent[24]. This represents a massive public health crisis: approximately 79.08 million Indians with substance use disorders in 2020 achieved only 6.9 percent recovery rates, substantially lower than USA recovery rates of 9.1 percent[25].

2.11 Treatment Outcomes and Evidence-Based Interventions

Despite limited access, evidence demonstrates effectiveness of structured interventions. Studies of lay counsellor-delivered psychological treatment for alcohol problems (Counselling for Alcohol Problems, CAP) in India show sustained remission at 12 months in 54.3 percent of treatment participants versus 31.9 percent controls[26]. Long-term follow-up of rural alcohol treatment programs in southern India documented sustained abstinence in 81.1 percent of participants over 2-year follow-up and sustained low-risk drinking in 14.8 percent, representing significantly higher outcomes than global meta-analytic estimates of 30-50 percent remission[27].

Private de-addiction and rehabilitation centres outnumber government facilities in India; however, quality concerns persist. Programs combining medical detoxification with evidence-based psychotherapy (CBT, motivational interviewing) and medication-assisted treatment (naltrexone, buprenorphine) demonstrate substantially better outcomes than single-modality approaches[28]. Aftercare programming and family involvement emerge as consistent predictors of sustained recovery[28].

2.12 Indian Context of Drug Abuse

Limited research exists on drug abuse patterns in India despite substantial public health burden. Channabasavanna (1989) noted that "the magnitude, development and

dynamics of drug abuse at the national level have not been well researched in India" due to resource constraints and the nation's vast socio-demographic diversity[11]. The National Survey attempts to address this gap through multiple methodologies, recognizing that "a comprehensive picture of a country can only be obtained through multiple data sources using multiple methodologies"[1]. Regional studies such as the present investigation provide critical epidemiological data informing localized intervention strategies.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This mixed-methods study employed both quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative ethnographic observation to capture the complexity of drug abuse patterns. The design incorporated participant observation, non-participant observation, structured interviews, and secondary data analysis from treatment centre records.

3.2 Study Setting

The research was conducted in the Rayalaseema region of Andhra Pradesh, comprising four districts: Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur, and Kurnool. All respondents were clients of the De-addiction Centre operated by Dept. Of Psychiatry, SVRR Govt. general hospital located in Tirupati. This setting provided access to individuals actively engaged in treatment, thereby capturing treatment-seeking populations.

3.3 Sample Characteristics

The study population comprised 197 respondents across four batches:

Batch	N	Mean Age	Male:Female Ratio
Batch 1-50	50	41.52	35:15
Batch 51-100	50	43.4	41:9
Batch 101-150	50	42.94	43:7
Batch 151-197	47	43.3	34:13
Total	197	42.79	153:44

Table 2: Sample Composition Across Study Batches

All respondents were males except as indicated. Age range primarily encompassed 30-40 years, representing the middle-aged adult population.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Primary Data: Structured interview schedules administered in local language captured detailed information on demographic characteristics, substance use patterns, duration of addiction, family structures, occupational status, health consequences, and rehabilitation outcomes. Observations documented behavioral patterns, physical indicators of substance use, and social interactions within treatment settings.

Secondary Data: Information was gathered from:

- Published journals and research monographs
- De-addiction centre treatment records
- National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) publications
- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment documentation
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) regional reports

- Treatment and counselling manuals from Regional Resource Training Centre

3.5 Data Collection Period

Fieldwork was conducted from February 2023 to April 2023, encompassing three months of sustained data collection and analysis.

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and comparative analysis across demographic subgroups. Findings were synthesized using thematic analysis of qualitative data and triangulation of multiple indicators to ensure validity.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Profile

4.1.1 Age and Gender Distribution

The aggregate sample (N=197) demonstrated mean age of 42.79 years (SD: 0.87), indicating a predominantly middle-aged population. Gender distribution overwhelmingly favored males (77.7%, n=153) compared to females (22.3%, n=44). This marked gender disparity reflects both differential treatment-seeking behaviors and potential underreporting among female substance users due to social stigma[12].

4.1.2 Geographic Distribution and Urbanization

Analysis across administrative divisions revealed:

- Urban respondents: 78.0% (n=154)
- Rural respondents: 22.0% (n=43)

This distribution skewed toward urban areas, reflecting rapid urbanization in Rayalaseema and differential accessibility to de-addiction treatment infrastructure concentrated in urban centres. Urban drug addiction mean age (37.29 years) differed minimally from semi-urban (36.07) and rural (36.21) populations[13].

4.1.3 Socio-Economic Status

Income distribution analysis revealed:

- 23.6% urban respondents in ₹10,000-20,000 monthly income bracket
- 22.5% urban respondents in ₹5,000-10,000 bracket

These data indicate that substance-dependent populations span lower to middle socio-economic strata, contradicting stereotypes of addiction as exclusively a lower-class phenomenon[13]. Family structure predominantly featured nuclear families (79.0%, n=156), with joint families (10.3%, n=20) and broken families (10.7%, n=21) representing smaller proportions. This pattern reflects contemporary Indian demographic transitions toward nuclearization of family structures.

4.2 Substance Use Patterns

4.2.1 Drug Types and Prevalence

The study documented high prevalence of multiple substance categories:

- Depressants: 93.17% of respondents (n=183)
- Stimulants: 80.17% of respondents (n=158)

Within depressants, alcohol emerged as the predominant substance, with 73.8% consuming alcohol regularly every day and 15.7% consuming weekly. Tobacco use integrated seamlessly into daily routines, often as adjunctive substance alongside primary drugs of dependence.

4.2.2 Duration and Progression of Use

Temporal analysis revealed:

- 26.30% using substances 5-10 years
- 25.80% with less than 5 years duration
- 6.30% using for more than 25 years

This distribution suggests cohort effects with increasing initiation in recent decades, consistent with epidemiological modeling of emerging substance abuse problems. The progression from experimentation through occasional use to regular dependence followed documented staging patterns[14].

4.2.3 Mode of Administration

Consumption methods reflected substance availability and cultural factors:

- Drinking: Alcohol (predominant)
- Chewing: Tobacco (widespread)
- Smoking: Cannabis, Heroin, Tobacco
- Injecting: Heroin, pharmaceutical preparations (less common)
- Snorting: Cocaine (limited prevalence in study sample)

4.3 Etiology and Initiation Factors

4.3.1 Peer Group Influence

Peer group influence represented the predominant addiction risk factor, with 70.50% of respondents reporting addiction initiation through association with peer networks and friendship circles. The study documented that 74.33% consumed alcohol specifically in company of friends, establishing peer consumption as a normative social practice.

4.3.2 Socio-Economic Motivations

Respondents frequently cited financial capacity enabling substance purchase, coupled with hedonic motivation—seeking "happiness" through substance-induced euphoria. This pattern suggests that improving economic circumstances paradoxically increased drug accessibility and consumption in this population.

4.3.3 Caste, Religion, and Cultural Factors

Analysis revealed unexpected patterns: 48.0% of forward-caste respondents developed addiction compared to other caste categories. This challenged assumptions of addiction uniformly affecting marginalized populations, suggesting that forward-caste populations' greater economic resources facilitate substance access. The study noted strong Hindu religious affiliation (implicit from demographic patterns), consistent with regions where cannabis use maintains cultural-spiritual significance through Shiva-worship traditions[15].

4.4 Behavioral and Social Consequences

4.4.1 Aggression and Behavioral Changes

Notably, 95.33% of respondents manifested aggressive behavior toward normal community members. This finding documents the profound behavioral transformation accompanying chronic substance abuse, creating interpersonal conflict, family discord, and community alienation.

4.4.2 Occupational and Financial Impacts

The study documented severe occupational dysfunction:

- 85.17% could not perform occupational duties adequately due to substance-induced impairment

This massive occupational impact cascaded into financial consequences including debt accumulation, reduced earnings, and economic dependency on family members. The inter-relationship model documented how financial problems drove risky behaviors including theft and needle-sharing[16].

4.4.3 Family and Marital Dissolution

Substance abuse correlated strongly with family breakdown, manifesting as:

- Marital disharmony and separation
- Divorce initiation by spouses

- Family disowning and rejection
- Loss of familial inheritance and support
- Child neglect and family abandonment

These patterns reflect addiction's capacity to dissolve fundamental social bonds anchoring individual identity and social integration.

4.5 Health Sequelae

4.5.1 Infectious Disease Risk

Injection drug use created elevated HIV, Hepatitis-B, and Hepatitis-C transmission risk. Although the study documented limited IV injection prevalence compared to oral and smoking routes, needle-sharing among users contributed to communicable disease burden. The pathway model documented how need for repeated dosing, financial pressures driving theft, and subsequent arrest by police created cascading negative consequences[16].

4.5.2 Mental Health Consequences

Psychological harms documented in respondents included depression, anxiety, guilt, shame, and lack of motivation. These mental health sequelae both preceded addiction (vulnerability factors) and resulted from addiction progression (consequence), creating bidirectional reinforcement loops.

4.6 Treatment-Seeking Patterns

Treatment initiation patterns revealed:

- 49.83% advised by recovery addicts to seek de-addiction services
- 21.83% advised by friends, neighbors, or family members
- 28.34% referred through other mechanisms

This distribution highlighted peer influence not only in addiction initiation but also in recovery motivation. Successful recovery addicts effectively leveraged credibility and lived experience to encourage help-seeking among active users. These findings align with national treatment infrastructure data:

the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reports 355 Integrated Rehabilitation Centers for Addicts (IRCA) supported nationally through the Drug De-Addiction Programme (DDAP), with major national centres at NIMHANS Bangalore, AIIMS Delhi, PGIMER Chandigarh, and RML Hospital New Delhi[21]. However, the massive treatment gap persists: only 2.6% of alcohol-dependent and 12% of drug-dependent individuals nationally access treatment, indicating that demand vastly exceeds supply.

4.7 Clinical and Epidemiological Implications

The accumulated findings establish several critical patterns: (1) Middle-aged urban males constitute the primary treatment-seeking population, though field observations suggest equal prevalence among non-treatment-seeking populations; (2) Peer social networks drive both addiction initiation and recovery engagement; (3) Polysubstance use predominates over single-drug dependence; (4) Severe behavioral, occupational, and family dysfunction characterizes chronic substance abuse; (5) Existing treatment infrastructure remains concentrated in urban areas, creating rural access disparities.

National epidemiology corroborates these local findings. Andhra Pradesh ranks among the five Indian states with highest alcohol prevalence (>10%), alongside Tripura, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, and Arunachal Pradesh[21]. The present study's documentation of 93.17% depressant use predominantly reflects alcohol, consistent with national patterns where alcohol accounts for 42.8-84.8% of substances among treatment-seekers across states[22]. The documented 48% forward-caste overrepresentation challenges stereotypes that addiction exclusively affects

marginalized populations—economic access and upward mobility paradoxically increase substance availability in advantaged groups. The critical finding that 70.5% of respondents reported peer group influence as primary addiction cause aligns with youth epidemiology demonstrating that substance use in family members predicts youth initiation (44.5% of youth report substance-using family members)[23]. This suggests addiction operates through social-ecological pathways rather than purely individual pathology, with profound implications for intervention design.

5. Conclusion

Summary of Major Findings

This comprehensive investigation of drug use and abuse in Rayalaseema region establishes empirical evidence for targeted intervention strategies. The research confirms that substance abuse represents a complex sociological phenomenon extending beyond individual pathology to encompass peer social dynamics, family systems, occupational structures, and community health infrastructure.

Key findings encompass:

1. **Demographic Concentration:** Middle-aged urban males predominate among treatment-seeking populations, though underlying epidemiology likely reflects broader socio-economic patterns
2. **Polysubstance Patterns:** Alcohol and tobacco comprise primary substances, with stimulant and hallucinogen use among subsets
3. **Peer-Driven Etiology:** Social networks drive both addiction initiation and recovery engagement
4. **Severe Functional Impairment:** Addiction produces profound occupational, familial,

psychological, and social dysfunction

5. **Treatment Infrastructure**

Limitations: Urban concentration of de-addiction services limits rural access and equitable healthcare provision

Implications of the Study

support social-ecological models emphasizing addiction as embedded within peer networks, family systems, and structural economic conditions rather than purely biological or individual-level pathologies. The powerful influence of peer relationships on both addiction trajectories and recovery pathways suggests that peer-based interventions may prove exceptionally effective in Rayalaseema contexts.

Policy Recommendations

- Establish de-addiction centres in district headquarters and block-level towns to improve rural accessibility
- Develop peer-navigator programs leveraging recovered addicts as treatment ambassadors
- Integrate substance abuse prevention in school curricula targeting peer influence dynamics
- Implement state-level surveillance systems monitoring drug abuse trends and enabling evidence-based resource allocation
- Coordinate inter-district data sharing and best-practice dissemination
- Fund community-based counselling programs providing continuity of care post-treatment
- Incorporate regional studies into National Survey frameworks for epidemiological mapping
- Standardize treatment protocols aligned with Indian research evidence rather than extrapolating from Western studies

- Prioritize research on gender-specific addiction patterns, particularly among women whose treatment-seeking remains suppressed by social stigma

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