

Application of Psychosocial and Legal Correlates in Developing Effective Police Intervention Strategies for Prevention of Youth Drug Abuse

Dr. Ranjeeta Kumari¹, Dr. Keshav Kumar², Dr. Asha Srivastava³

¹ Assistant Director & Scientist 'C', Forensic Psychology Division, CFSL, DFSS, MHA, Delhi, India,
Email: ranjeeta.gfatm@gmail.com

² IPS (Retd.) Forensic Consultant & Advisor, Govt. of Assam, India, keshavkumar_ips86@yahoo.co.in

³Prof. (Dr.) Asha Srivastava, Dean, School of Behavioural Forensics, NFSU, Gujarat, India
ashacbi@gmail.com

Abstract

Youth drug abuse is a significant global and local issue. Young people who engage in drug abuse often face multiple physical, psychosocial and legal challenges. Although governments provide various services, the problem continues to grow. This study aims to explore evidence-based police intervention strategies that promote prevention and contribute to building a healthier, corruption-free-society. This paper reviews the psychosocial and legal factors contributing to youth drug abuse and explore effective evidence-based police strategies for its prevention and management. A web-based review was carried out using predefined keywords and thematic criteria. Relevant literature was screened and synthesized to develop evidence-based preventive and management approaches. Police intervention efforts primarily focused on awareness-raising campaigns and community partnership programmes. Key strategies include the 4D investigative model, community and problem-oriented policing and the deployment of school resource officers (SROs). Undercover operations, referral mechanism and rehabilitation support further contribute to early identification and reduction of drug-related risks. By adopting a holistic and evidence-based strategy, police agencies can play a transformative role in reducing youth drug abuse. This study recommends the implantation of evidence-based interventions and the establishment of functional intersectoral networks to address shared challenges effectively.

Keywords: Psychosocial Factors, Legal Correlates, Drug Abuse, Youth, Police Intervention Prevention Strategies, Community Collaboration, Law Enforcement Agencies, Holistic Approach.

1. Introduction

Drug abuse refers to the misuse or excessive consumption of substances, whether legal or illegal, resulting to adverse physical, psychological, social and legal consequences [1] and it is well established that such substance use represents a major public health burden [2]. Types of drug abuse include misuse of prescription medications, recreational drug use of substance and the harmful use of alcohol, tobacco and inhalants [3].

Consequences of youth drug abuse include long-term health problems, academic decline, increase risk of criminal activity and delinquency and a higher likelihood of continuing substance abuse into adulthood [4]. Effective police intervention plays a crucial role in combating youth drug abuse due to its significant psycho-social and legal impact; through active participation in prevention, early identification, enforcement and correctional & rehabilitation efforts. Police personnel can disrupt drug supply chains, deter potential offenders and facilitate support for at-risk youth [5]. Moreover, building trust and positive relationships with young people and collaborating with community stakeholders can strengthen the sustainability and impact intervention programmes [6]. Thus, effective police action is vital to safeguarding the well-being and prospects of young people by creating a healthier and safer environment.

Psychosocial and Legal Perspectives of Drug Abuse

Drug abuse and the people addicted to drugs are often viewed as people in need of medical treatments. The issue has classically been seen through the lens of a medico-legal perspective, but it is important to consider psychosocial perspectives in relation to the medical and legal viewpoints in order to arrive at best strategies for prevention. According to Boyum and Klieman, (1995) [7], the relationship between drug abuse and criminal activity is extensive. About 40% of the crimes are committed by people addicted to drugs in the want of purchasing and consuming more drugs (Rajkumar & French, 1997) [8]. Therefore, the criminal justice system becomes a stakeholder in prevention efforts and acquires a major role in the treatment and rehabilitation of the drug abuser. In this matter, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) [9], which is the national body responsible for the prevention and control of narcotics in the country, is assigned the job to conduct training sessions on demand reduction with police officers and to organize awareness programs for the youth in schools, colleges and other institutions. However, this by itself is not sufficient. The state police also hold a responsibility to address drug abuse, since the cases booked under the NDPS Act, 1985 are investigated by them. Their role extends beyond enforcement to include community engagement and demand reduction efforts.

The Impact of Drug Abuse

Drug abuse has a devastating impact on human life, affecting not just the individual but their friends, family and the individuals involved directly, indirectly or circumstantially. There has been a massive surge in the rates of drug abuse and crime among the youth, with nearly 356 million Indian youngsters affected. The psychiatry department of IHBAS (Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences) in Delhi estimates that over 87 percent of the total examined adolescents had a history of drug abuse, while a report by the DCPCR (Delhi Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights) on substance abuse by children found that a 100 percent of children in conflict with the law were drug abusers in 2015 [10]. Nowadays, polysubstance use has become increasingly common, particularly amongst some age groups and subcultures. It is also associated with elevated risk of psychiatric and physical health problems [11].

Police Intervention Strategies for Prevention of Youth Drug Abuse

Police intervention forms an essential component of drug abuse prevention among youth, operating alongside broader social and educational strategies that emphasizes safe, nurturing and supportive environments for healthy youth development. Evidence-based frameworks by UNDOC and WHO underscore that effective prevention requires reducing drug availability, interrupting trafficking network and reinforcing community safety, while also supporting schools, colleges, families in protecting behaviours [14].

2. Objective of the Study:

The following objectives have been designed for the present study:

- To analyze the impact of drug abuse on youth.
- To identify and evaluate suitable strategies for prevention and early detection of youth drug abuse and promotion of healthy lifestyles.
- To propose evidence-based recommendations for strengthening police intervention approaches for effective prevention and management of youth drug abuse.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a web-based review was carried out across multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus and PubMed, using predefined keywords and thematic criteria. The search strategy incorporated theoretical framework, manuals, journals and research articles directly addressing the core themes of this review. Relevant studies were screened, evaluated and integrated to develop an evidence-based understanding and to formulate practical strategies for effective prevention and management.

4. Results

The impact of narcotic substances on youth is significant and long-lasting, affecting them physically, mentally, socially and legally and resulting in a decline in overall quality of life. The findings of the review are summarized [Table – 1], which outlines the major effects of drug use across physical, psychological [12], social [13] and legal domains.

Table – 1: Effects of Drug Abuse on Physical, Mental, Social and Legal Aspects

Effects on Physical Health	• Irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure and increased risk of stroke. • Organ damage including liver fibrosis and cancers of throat, mouth, breast, liver and esophagus. • Increased risk of engagement in unsafe sexual practices which can lead to spread of infectious disease such as sexually transmitted disease (STI),
-----------------------------------	--

	HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis. • Heightened tendency towards thrill-seeking and participating in potentially dangerous activities.
Effects on Mental Health	• Impaired cognitive function including poor judgment, decision-making, memory and attention, along with perceptual disturbances such as delusions and hallucinations. • Difficulty with learning, concentration and coordination. • Slowed reaction time and reduced alertness. • Development of mood disorders such as anxiety, depression and psychosis. • Low self-esteem, identity confusion and increased risk of suicidal tendencies.
Effects on Family, Personal and Social Relationships	• Strained relationship with family, peers and authority figures. • Poor academic performance, lack of motivation, declining grades and higher school/college dropout rates. • Impaired Social Skills leading to social withdrawal and stigmatization. • Increased incidence of domestic violence, abuse and delinquent behaviour. • Economic hardship and instability in employment or academic engagement.
Legal and Criminal Consequences	• Driving Under the Influence (DUI) and related traffic offences. • Involvement in drug trafficking, possession, or illegal distribution of substances. • Commission of property crimes such as theft, burglary, or robbery to sustain drug use. • Public Intoxication and disorderly conduct. • Increased propensity for violent or criminal behaviour leading to arrests, prosecution, imprisonment and a lasting criminal record.

4.1 Risk and Protective Factors associated with Youth Drug Abuse

Protective factors significantly mitigating the influence of risk factors that increase the likelihood of youth drug abuse. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. The following table summarizes the key risk and protective factors across individual, family, school and community domains, synthesized from multiple sources [1-4].

Table – 2: Risk and Protective Factors associated with Youth Drug Abuse

DOMAIN	RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Individual	• Low self-esteem and poor impulse control. • Sensation Seeking and thrill-seeking behaviour.	• High self-esteem and emotional resilience. • Strong coping and problem-solving skills.

	• Mental health problems (Aggression, inattentiveness). • Impulsiveness, stress reactivity & poor coping). • Lack of Emotional intelligence.	• Positive self-image and goal orientation. • Awareness of drug-related harms.
Family	• Parental neglect, inconsistent discipline, or family conflict. • Family history of drug abuse. • Lack of parental supervision or attachment. • Negative role modelling • Exposure of domestic violence.	• Supportive and cohesive family environment. • Effective communication and monitoring by parents. • Positive parental modeling and guidance. • Stable family structure.
Peer and Social Environment	• Association with peers involved in drug use or delinquency. • Peer pressure and desire for social acceptance. • Social isolation or rejection.	• Positive peer relationships. • Engagement in extracurricular or community activities.
School Environment	• Poor academic performance and lack of school attachment. • Truancy and negative school environment. • Lack of preventive education or counselling services.	• Positive school climate promoting inclusion and discipline. • Access to counselling and mentorship programs. • Recognition of achievements and strong academic support.
Community and Societal Factors	• Easy availability of drugs and weak law enforcement. • Exposure of poverty, crime and social disorganization. • Limit access to health or social services.	• Active community-based prevention programs. • Strong law enforcement and Anti-drug initiatives. • Media campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles.

It is essential to prioritize prevention, early intervention and the creation of comprehensive support systems to address drug abuse. By promoting education, healthy coping mechanisms, positive peer influences and access to appropriate treatment and support services, substance abuse can be significantly reduced.

4.2 Strategies of Police Intervention to Prevent Drug Abuse

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the WHO highlights the importance of safe, nurturing and supportive social environments in preventing risky behavior and promoting healthy adolescent development [14]. Police intervention strategies to prevent youth drug abuse focus on reducing drug availability, deterring drug-related activities and promoting community safety [1-4]. The following strategies are commonly employed by law enforcement agencies:

4.2.1 Law Enforcement and Investigation:

Police actively enforce drug laws, conduct investigations and apprehend drug dealers and suppliers to disrupt the drug market and reduce the availability of drugs in communities [1, 3]. Drug abuse investigations involve forensic analysis, surveillance, witness interviews and cooperation with other law enforcement agencies. We can analyze drug abuse cases with the 4D investigation model, which can support the investigation and provide valuable evidence for the legal proceedings [6].

- a) Drugs:** In drug abuse cases, it's important to understand the types of drugs involved, their effects and the relevant laws and regulations. Drug abuse investigations typically involve identifying and analyzing the illicit substances, gathering evidence of possession and establishing the link between the suspect and the drugs [1, 3].
- b) Dactylogram (Fingerprint):** Fingerprint analysis is a crucial tool in forensic investigations, including drug abuse cases. Fingerprints are unique to each individual and can be used to identify suspects or link them to the scene of a crime. Investigators collect fingerprints from various surfaces associated with drug-related activities, such as the drug packaging, paraphernalia, or other objects found at the scenes.
- c) DNA:** While DNA analysis is not relevant for every drug abuse case, it can play a role in certain scenarios. DNA evidence can be used to link suspects to drug-related crimes, such as cases involving the production or distribution of drugs. DNA analysis may be conducted on items like drug equipment, packaging, or traces of biological material left behind by individuals involved in drug-related activities.
- d) Data Analysis:** Data analysis plays a crucial role in modern investigative techniques. Investigators collect and analyze various types of data, such as phone records, financial transactions, communication logs and surveillance footage, to establish connections, identify patterns and build a comprehensive picture of drug-related activities. Advanced level of data analysis techniques can help uncover hidden networks, identify key players and gather evidence for successful prosecutions.

4.2.2 Community Policing:

Police departments engage in community-oriented policing, forging partnerships with community members, schools and organizations to address drug abuse issues collaboratively. This approach involves proactive problem-solving, community engagement and mutual trust-building.

4.2.3 Problem-Oriented Policing:

Problem-oriented policing compels officers to think creatively to find solutions to persistent crime problems within a community. Problem-oriented police are trained to uncover patterns of crime, to identify solutions and to find the resources needed to address the problems.

4.2.4 School Resource Officers:

Placing police officers in schools as resource officers foster a positive and safe educational environment. They provide guidance, counseling, mentorship and drug abuse education while promoting strong relationship between students and law enforcement.

4.2.5 Drug Awareness Programs:

Police collaborate with schools, community organizations and healthcare providers to deliver educational programs on the risks of drug abuse, aiming to raise awareness and promote health behaviours among youth. Considering the above mentioned strategies, an attempt has been made to design a comprehensive and holistic prevention programme. This preventive training program, grounded in relevant studies and research findings, aims to support police and law enforcement agencies in addressing the psychosocial and legal challenges associated with drug abuse. The program is expected to have a significant impact in following key areas:

- Prevention or reduction of youth drug abuse through increased awareness of its risks and consequences.
- Promotion of healthy behaviors, positive attitudes, constructive beliefs and resilience.
- Development of essential life skills including effective coping mechanisms and the ability to deal with daily stressors and major life challenges.

To translate these objectives into structured and practical format, the training program has been organized into focused module that address the effective drug abuse prevention. The detailed content [Table – 3] designed to strengthen police capacity in address youth drug abuse.

Table 3: Contents of Youth Drug Abuse Prevention Training Program

Programs	Contents
School Drug Prevention (SDP) Program	• Help students recognize internal pressures (anxiety, stress) and external pressures (e.g. peer influence, advertising) that may lead to alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs use. • Develop personal, social and refusal skills to resist these pressures. • Correct misconceptions that using substance is normal among teenagers. • Provide age-appropriate material and activities covering short-term and long-term effects of substance use. • Use interactive teaching techniques such as role plays, discussions, brainstorming and cooperative learning. • Conduct at least ten sessions per year, with three to five booster sessions in the following two years. • Actively involve families and the community. • Include teacher training, support and culturally relevant material that easy to implement.
Life Skill Training	Module 1 – Drug Abuse Awareness:

(LST) Program	• Provide information on tobacco, alcohol and marijuana including immediate effects. • Correct myths, e.g. smoking does relieve stress, nicotine is a causing tremors and increased heart rate.
	Module 2 – Self-Management Skills: • Techniques for mindfulness, managing anxiety, such as deep breathing, mental rehearsal and muscle relation. • Training on decision making, goal setting, planning for the future and semester-long projects to achieve personal goals.
	Module 3 – Social Skill Training: • Develops general social skills, conversational abilities and cross-gender communication to handle social situations confidently. • Teacher’s strategies to resist peer pressure tactfully, assertiveness training and expressing feeling directly.

4.2.6 Reaching Youths Outside School/College:

After-school or college hours are high-risk periods for alcohol and illicit drug use. Research indicates that approximately one-third of all violent juvenile crimes occur between the hours of 3 PM and 7 PM, when many children are unsupervised.

- Targeted after-school or college programs during these vulnerable hours can help prevent reduce drug abuse. These programs can also reinforce social skills learned in the school/college and home.
- Police departments can take the initiative to engage youths positively. Zonal senior officers can recognize reward efforts in creating drug-free zones. Establishing youth centers can provide a range of services, including substance abuse counselling.
- Sports and extracurricular programs offer prime opportunities to reach large numbers of youth with prevention messages. Coaches and supervisors can be trained to recognize warning signs of substance abuse and intervene appropriately. For instance, the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Team Up Anti-Drug Sports Program trains coaches and school administrators to actively participate in prevention and education within schools.

4.2.7 Undercover Operations and Sting Operations:

Police can conduct targeted undercover and sting operations to identify and apprehend drug dealers and distributors. These operations aim to disrupt drug supply chains and deter individuals from engaging in drug-related activities, thereby reducing community-level drug availability.

4.2.8 Support and Referral Services:

Law enforcement personnel can collaborate with social service agencies, treatment providers and community organisation to connect youth struggling with drug abuse to appropriate support and treatment services. Coordinated referral system ensure timely intervention and reduce the risk of continued substance abuse.

4.2.9 Youth Engagement and Rehabilitation Programs:

Police agencies can implement diversion programs that provide alternatives to arrest and incarceration for young individuals involved in non-violent drug-related offenses. These programs focus on rehabilitation, counselling, educational interventions and skill building activities to address the underlying causes of drug abuse, promoting long-term positive outcomes.

5. Recommendations for Policy Makers and Law Enforcement Agencies to Reduce Drug Abuse:

In order to eliminate the drug-abuse pandemic amongst the youth, policy-makers and law enforcement agencies should focus on the following key areas:

- Enhancing training and resources
- Strengthening collaborative partnerships
- Implementing evidence-based practices
- Addressing the root causes of drug abuse

6. Conclusion

Effective police intervention plays a critical role in preventing youth drug abuse by disrupting drug markets and reducing availability and promoting safer communities. Collaboration with stakeholders, active community engagement and a holistic approach, evidence-based approach are essential for the success of these initiatives. Such Strategies provide communities and law enforcements agencies with guidance on most effective approaches for reducing substance abuse and its associated social and legal problems. The program highlighted in this article is intended to assist police officers and law enforcement agencies in designing tailored strategies to foster healthier and safer environments for youth.

7. Authors' Biography

- **Dr. (Mrs.) Ranjeeta Kumari**, Assistant Director & Scientist 'C', Forensic Psychology Division, Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL), New Delhi.
- **Dr. Keshav Kumar, IPS (Retd.)**, Forensic Consultant and Advisor, Government of Assam, India, Vice President of the Indian Police Foundation (Centre for Forensic Sciences).
- **Prof. (Dr.) Asha Srivastava**, Dean, School of Behavioural Forensics and Centre Head of the Centre of Excellence, Investigative and Forensic Psychology and Centre for Happiness and Wellbeing, National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU), Gujarat, MHA, GOI.

References

1. World Health Organization. Adolescent substance use: A growing public health concern, WHO, 2022. Available: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/substance-use>
2. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. World Drug Report 2023. United Nations, Vienna: UNODC, 2023.
3. Jones, L., A summary of Health Harms of Drugs. Liverpool: Department of Health, John Moores University, 2011.

4. National Institute on Drug Abuse. Drugs, Brains and Behavior: The Science of Addiction, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, 2022.
5. Bennett, T., Holloway, K., Farrington, D. P., “The effectiveness of drug treatment programs in reducing criminal behaviour: A meta-analysis”, *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 2020, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 359–381. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-019-09391-4>.
6. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Community-based crime and drug prevention: Lessons from global practice, UNODC, 2020.
7. Boyum, D., & Kleiman, M. A. R., Alcohol and other drugs 1995, In J. Q. Wilson & J. Petersilia (eds.), *Crime* (pp. 295-326).
8. Rajkumar, A., & French, M., Drug Abuse, Crime Costs and the Economic Benefits of Treatment, September 1997, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 13, 292.
9. <https://narcoticsindia.nic.in/>
10. Sharma, Shridhar; Sharma, Gautam; Barkataki, Bristi, “Substance use and criminality among juveniles-under-enquiry in New Delhi”, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, DOI: 10.4103/0019-5545.183791.
11. Connor, J.P. et al., “Polysubstance use: Diagnostic challenges, patterns of use and health”, *Current opinion in psychiatry*, 2014, 27(4), 269-275, DOI: 10.1097/YCO.0000000000000069.
12. Murthy, e. al., Substance use and Addiction research in India, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, S190, 2010 Retrieved from <http://nimhans.ac.in/cam/sites/default/files/Publications/2.pdf>.
13. WHO, “The health and social effects of nonmedical cannabis use, World Health Organization”, 2016, www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/msbcannabis.pdf.
14. El Khatib, Z et. al., “The Role of Law Enforcement Officers/Police in Drug Prevention within Educational Settings—Study Protocol for the Development of a Guiding Document Based on Experts’ Opinions” March 2021, *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 5;18(5):2613. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18052613.