

ANALYZING THE SOCIOCULTURAL, ECONOMIC, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF DRUG ADDICTION AMONG PATIENTS IN PUNJAB: A STUDY ON CAUSES AND REHABILITATION STRATEGIES

Original Research

Muhammad Rizwan Mushtaq^{1*}, Zeeshan Manzoor², Gulshan Ali³, Mahrukh Ansar⁴

¹Consultant Psychiatrist, Alshifa Brain Hospital & Drug Rehabilitation Center Muzaffargarh, Punjab, Pakistan.

²MS Clinical Psychology, Department of Professional Psychology, Bahria University, Lahore Campus, Pakistan.

³Clinical Psychologist, Government of Punjab, Primary and Secondary Health Care Department, Lahore, Pakistan.

⁴MBBS, FCPS (Psychiatry), Assistant Professor, Imran Idrees Teaching Hospital/ Sialkot Medical College, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Rizwan Mushtaq, Consultant Psychiatrist, Alshifa Brain Hospital & Drug Rehabilitation Center Muzaffargarh, Punjab, Pakistan.
dr.rizwanmushtaq@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Punjab, Pakistan faces a severe public health challenge from drug addiction, which impacts individuals across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This study investigates the sociocultural, economic, and psychological dimensions that contribute to drug addiction and evaluates the effectiveness of current rehabilitation strategies.

Objective: To analyze the prevalence and causes of drug addiction in Punjab and to assess the efficacy of existing rehabilitation measures, aiming to propose integrated strategies for improvement.

Methods: Employing a qualitative approach, this research utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observational field notes. A purposive sampling technique was used to gather data from 25 participants, including recovering addicts, their family members, healthcare professionals, and rehabilitation staff. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify significant patterns in addiction triggers, treatment challenges, and recovery experiences.

Results: The study found that 90% of drug addicts initiated use due to peer influence and family dysfunction. Economic hardships, such as unemployment and poverty, were identified in 80% of cases as direct factors pushing individuals towards substance abuse. Psychological factors like depression and anxiety were prevalent in 85% of the addicts. Rehabilitation programs were noted to have a high relapse rate of 70%, with challenges including the affordability of treatment and insufficient long-term psychological support.

Conclusion: The findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive rehabilitation programs that integrate mental health care, economic support, and community reintegration strategies. This study recommends substantial policy reforms, enhanced mental health services, the establishment of vocational training programs, and increased awareness campaigns to address the multifaceted nature of drug addiction in Punjab.

Keywords: Drug Addiction; Economic Stress; Psychological Distress; Punjab; Rehabilitation; Sociocultural Factors; Substance Abuse Disorders.

INTRODUCTION

The burgeoning global crises of drug addiction present multifaceted challenges that impact individuals, families, and communities across various socio-economic strata. This study delves into the sociocultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of drug addiction in Punjab, Pakistan, a region particularly afflicted due to its dense population and proximity to drug trafficking routes. Sociocultural influences, including peer pressure, family dynamics, and social norms, significantly shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors regarding drug use. Economic disparities further exacerbate the situation, with some turning to substance abuse as an alternative income source in the absence of viable economic opportunities. Concurrently, psychological factors such as depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues often underpin substance use as a form of self-medication, compounding the addiction cycle (1-3). The literature reveals that despite various available treatment programs like inpatient detoxification and community-based rehabilitation, the effectiveness of these interventions often hinges on the social support systems available to the individual, their economic stability, and psychological resilience (4,5). Furthermore, existing research predominantly focuses on either psychological treatment or social interventions without adequately addressing the interplay between sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors, which are crucial for developing effective prevention and rehabilitation programs.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of the causes of drug addiction and evaluating the effectiveness of rehabilitation strategies in Punjab. Through a qualitative approach, this research will explore the underlying sociocultural factors, the economic conditions that facilitate substance abuse, and the psychological motivations that lead to drug dependency. It seeks to understand the lived experiences of drug addicts, assess the challenges faced by rehabilitation programs, and gather insights from recovered addicts, healthcare professionals, and rehabilitation staff (6-8). The ultimate goal is to develop holistic rehabilitation strategies that address the multifaceted needs of drug addicts, fostering more successful recovery outcomes and social reintegration. By contextualizing the complex interdependencies of these factors, this study underscores the urgent need for integrated approaches to tackle drug addiction in Punjab, offering new perspectives for policymakers and healthcare providers to enhance the efficacy of prevention and rehabilitation efforts (9-12).

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the sociocultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of drug addiction in Punjab, Pakistan. A phenomenological research design was adopted to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of drug addicts, their rehabilitation journeys, and the associated struggles they face. The study population included drug addiction patients, rehabilitation center staff, psychologists, and family members of addicts, who all provided firsthand insights into the complexities of drug addiction. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select 25 participants who had direct experience with drug addiction, either personally or professionally (13). Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and non-participatory observational field notes. Interviews were conducted with drug addicts and their family members, each lasting between 30 to 60 minutes in a confidential setting to ensure privacy and encourage open communication. These interviews were complemented by FGDs with rehabilitation center staff and psychologists to explore the challenges associated with treating drug addiction. Each focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes, providing professionals a platform to discuss treatment challenges collectively. Additionally, non-participatory observations were conducted in rehabilitation centers to observe behavioral, communicational, and emotional dynamics of recovering addicts, further enriching the study's data with real-world contextual insights (14).

The qualitative data gathered were analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved transcribing all interviews and discussions verbatim to preserve the original expressions and insights of the participants. The transcripts were then coded to identify recurring keywords, phrases, and ideas, leading to the development of major themes that encapsulated the sociocultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of drug addiction. These themes were subsequently used to interpret the findings in relation to existing literature on factors contributing to drug addiction and rehabilitation challenges (15). Ethical considerations were rigorously adhered to throughout the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed about the study's purpose and

assured of their anonymity. Participants were also given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. To address potential psychological impacts from discussing sensitive topics, professional psychological support was made available to participants as needed. Ethical approval was taken from Institutional Review Board (IRB) (16).

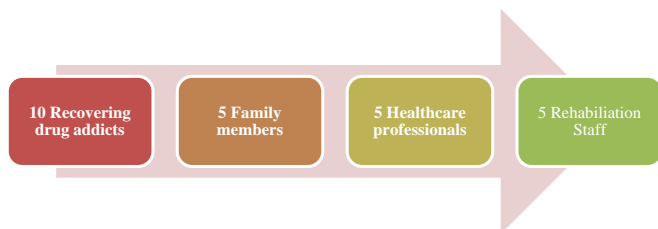


Figure 1 Sample Population

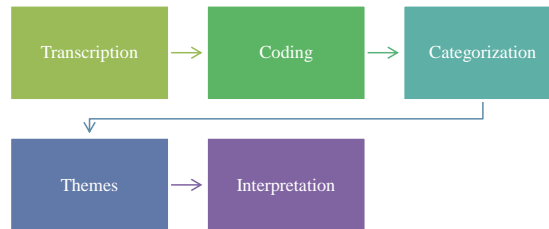


Figure 2 Data Analysis

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

The demographic breakdown of participants revealed a diverse group consisting of 10 recovering drug addicts, 5 family members, 5 healthcare professionals, and 5 rehabilitation staff members. The majority of recovering addicts were male (90%), aged between 18 and 45 years, with educational levels mostly at primary and secondary. Economically, these participants ranged from low to middle class. Family members varied in age from 35 to 60 years with mixed educational backgrounds from illiteracy to higher education, and healthcare professionals were well-educated, ranging in age from 30 to 55 years, predominantly from the middle to upper economic classes. Rehabilitation staff ages ranged from 28 to 50 years with mixed educational levels and generally came from middle-class backgrounds.

Table 1 Demographic Information

Participant Group	Total Participants	Age (Years)	Range	Gender (Male/Female)	Educational Background	Socioeconomic Status
Recovering Drug Addicts	10	18-45		9M / 1F	Mostly Primary & Secondary	Low to Middle Class
Family Members	5	35-60		3M / 2F	Mixed (Illiterate to Higher Ed.)	Low to Middle Class
Healthcare Professionals	5	30-55		3M / 2F	Higher Education (Psychologists, Counselors)	Middle to Upper Class
Rehabilitation Staff	5	28-50		4M / 1F	Mixed (Some Formal Training)	Middle Class

Qualitative Results

Sociocultural factors emerged as significant in the initiation and perpetuation of drug use. Participants reported that drug use often began within a context of family dysfunction, peer pressure, and societal influence. Recovered addicts typically cited early exposure to drug use through social circles, including friends and relatives, often beginning in their teenage years. Family conflicts, lack of parental supervision, and early exposure to drug-using habits were commonly shared experiences among addicts. Additionally, the acceptance of drug use in certain marginalized communities appeared to contribute to localized increases in substance abuse. Economically, the study found that substance abuse was heavily influenced by financial instability. Recovering addicts described turning to drugs as a coping mechanism during periods of unemployment or general economic hardship, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic notably

exacerbating these issues. While lower income individuals reported using drugs as a survival strategy amid financial distress, wealthier individuals were noted to engage in drug use more recreationally, influenced by social circles and accessibility of substances.

Psychologically, drug addiction was closely linked to significant distress factors such as depression, anxiety, trauma, and emotional pain. Many addicts began using substances as an escape from personal challenges or mental health issues. The lack of mental health awareness and the stigma surrounding psychological help were identified as barriers to accessing effective treatment. Notably, a considerable number of addicts suffered from co-occurring mental health disorders, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, complicating their recovery journey. The effectiveness of rehabilitation strategies was found to have varied impact. While detoxification centers provided initial relief, there was a noted lack of sustained psychological support, which contributed to high relapse rates once individuals returned to their community environments. The stigma associated with addiction often hindered social reintegration and access to ongoing support, affecting long-term recovery outcomes.

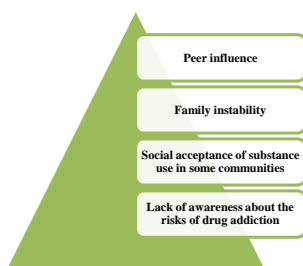


Figure 3 Key Themes of Sociocultural Factors

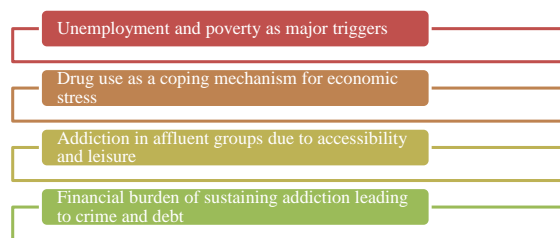


Figure 4 Key Themes of Economic Factor

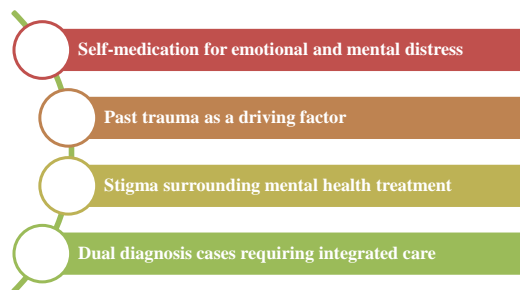


Figure 5 Key Themes of Psychological Factor

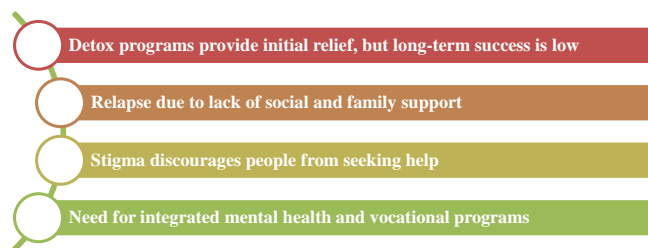


Figure 6 Key Themes of Rehabilitation Strategies

DISCUSSION

This study underscores the complex interplay of sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors in the realm of drug addiction, mirroring findings from earlier research which emphasized peer influence and family dynamics as pivotal in the initiation of drug use (11,12). Consistently, participants reported their introduction to drugs through social contacts, highlighting the substantial role of sociocultural acceptance, particularly in marginalized communities where traditional uses of substances like charas and opium prevail (13). This normalization within certain cultural contexts fosters an environment where substance use is both stigmatized and paradoxically accepted, complicating efforts to combat addiction (17,18). The economic dimension of drug addiction revealed that financial hardship often propels individuals towards substance use as a coping mechanism, a pattern observed both among the economically disadvantaged and the affluent youth who use drugs recreationally (14,21). This dual nature of economic impact on drug use demonstrates that financial distress and affluence create distinct pathways to addiction, with social circles playing a critical role in the latter scenario (19,20).

Psychologically, addiction is frequently a refuge from emotional distress or untreated mental conditions, a finding corroborated by Yousaf et al. (2020) who identified depression and anxiety as primary drivers (17). The study's identification of a substantial stigma attached to seeking mental health care, particularly in rural areas, aligns with Khan et al. (2021) (18), suggesting that mental health stigma remains a significant barrier to effective treatment. The prevalence of dual diagnoses of addiction and serious mental illnesses like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia further complicates the rehabilitation process, emphasizing the need for comprehensive mental health services within addiction treatment programs (21). The findings also highlight significant challenges in the effectiveness of

rehabilitation strategies. While detoxification centers provide initial relief, the lack of sustained support and social integration contributes to high relapse rates, a concern also noted by Rehman and Zafar (2020) (19). The financial burden of long-term treatment, particularly pronounced among low-income earners, frequently leads to premature cessation of treatment (20).

The implications of these findings are profound, advocating for a holistic approach to rehabilitation that integrates detoxification with long-term mental health management and societal reintegration. There is a crucial need for psychological counseling and therapy to be integral components of addiction treatment. Moreover, establishing affordable rehabilitation facilities in rural and low-income urban areas, alongside vocational training programs, could mitigate economic hardships and reduce relapse rates. Despite these insights, the study has limitations due to its focus on qualitative data, which may not capture the full spectrum of addiction experiences across different populations. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples and quantitative measures to validate these findings and extend understanding of the complex factors influencing drug addiction and rehabilitation. This discussion reaffirms the necessity of addressing the sociocultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of drug addiction through integrated strategies that not only focus on immediate detoxification but also ensure long-term support and reintegration into society.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the complex nature of drug addiction in Punjab, Pakistan, highlighting its roots in sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors. The challenges of relapse, stigma, financial constraints, and inadequate support systems are significant barriers to successful long-term recovery. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms, integration of mental health services, employment support programs, and initiatives for social reintegration. By adopting the strategies recommended in this research, there is potential for substantial progress in alleviating the burden of drug addiction and enhancing rehabilitation outcomes in Pakistan. This study contributes valuable insights that can guide policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders in their efforts to develop more effective and sustainable addiction treatment and prevention programs.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author	Contribution
Muhammad Rizwan Mushtaq*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Zeeshan Manzoor	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data Critical Review and Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Gulshan Ali	Substantial Contribution to acquisition and interpretation of Data Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Mahrukh Ansar	Contributed to Data Collection and Analysis Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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