



Contents list available <http://www.kinnaird.edu.pk/>

## Journal of Research & Reviews in Social Sciences Pakistan

Journal homepage: <http://journal.kinnaird.edu.pk>



### ANTECEDENTS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES OF DRUG ADDICTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Muhammad Usama Gondal<sup>1</sup>, Sadia Malik<sup>1\*</sup> & Rab Nawaz Lodhi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha.

<sup>2</sup>Hailey College of Commerce - University of the Punjab, Lahore

#### Article Info

\*Corresponding Author

Email Id: [drsadiamalik13@gmail.com](mailto:drsadiamalik13@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is driving a global shift. The present research is a qualitative exploration of antecedents of drug addiction and current psychological states of drug addicts. Using thematic analysis, different antecedents were tried to explore that lead to drug addiction. Moreover, current psychological and emotional states of addicts were also explored. For this purpose, a purposive sample of 5 drug addicts was taken. Data were collected through semi-structured interview method. Findings revealed that individuals tend to become drug addict because of conflicts in family, friends, psychological and emotional problems, physical diseases, usage of drug by close relatives, failure in love, and low levels of religiosity. Current psychological states of drug addicts were guilt, regret, sadness, anger, hatred, emotional pain, and hopelessness. Conclusion, limitations, and implications were discussed.

#### Keywords

Antecedents, Drug Addiction, Psychological States, Family



## 1. Introduction

Substance abuse is one of the most prevalent curses of twentieth century, affecting most of the people on different areas of the world (Tabatabaeechehr, *et al.*, 2012). Substance addiction is a chronic relapsing disorder, during which drug usage is not stopped or cut down, irrespective of how much adverse consequences are caused by it (Jiloha, 2010). Drug addiction and its dependence is one of the major mental and social problems in the whole world and is one of the important problems in healthcare services, worldwide, directly effecting individuals (IlbeigiGhalenei & Rostami, 2016). Different kinds of problems are associated with drug addiction, for example different infectious bodily diseases, psychological abnormalities, emotional and behavioural issues, occupational, economical, and familial problems etc (Jahedi, *et al.*, 2016). Substance abuse has been increasing at a rapid pace and there are different antecedents of this curse. Some people start taking drugs to conform to some social group (for example, at a party gathering). Some take drugs to feel and show that they are independent and grown up; whereas many people take drugs in response to some physical pain or emotional disturbance (Mahmoodi, *et al.*, 2009). Previous research had focused on predicting causes of drug use and they have identified different factors contributing to drug addiction. Results of some studies revealed that interactions among family members, parent-child relationship, and low levels of parental involvement in their children contribute to drug addiction among youngsters (Bray *et al.*, 2000). Some studies revealed that drug addicted friends

are major causes of taking drugs among individuals. Individuals, who use drugs regularly, reinforce and motivate their friends to take drugs (Andrews *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, individuals whose parents are separated or divorced also tend to be indulged in drug addiction (Jackson *et al.*, 2016). Stress is also a precipitating factor for substance abuse (Koob & Zorrilla, 2010). Regarding religiosity, it is observed that low level of religiosity is also one of the possibilities to take drugs (Unlu & Sahin, 2016). In another study, (Glynn, 1981) revealed that if one of the parents (or even both) uses drugs, then there are higher chances that children will also indulge in drug addiction. This is due to modelling of parental characteristics. It is observed that if the parent-child relationship is stronger, there will be greater probability that parent will be perceived as a role model. In this case, if parent is drug user, there will be great chance that child would also follow the parent's behaviour. Similarly, another study was conducted by (Andrews *et al.*, 1997) investigating drug addiction in adolescents. They revealed that if children have close bonding with parents, they tend to model/copy the marijuana use of their father and cigarette use of their mother. Apart from above factors, there are several psychological and psychiatric factors that can lead an individual to initiate drug use. For example, in a longitudinal study, it was observed that being male is itself an innate psychological factor for attraction towards drugs. Moreover, psychological disorders like conduct disorder and ADHD were also significant predictors of drug abuse. Usage of drug by sibling (particularly tobacco) was also an

antecedent for substance addiction of adolescents (Gau et al., 2018). Another study was conducted on psychosocial antecedents of substance addiction in HIV patients. Results concluded that being HIV positive was a significant predictor to drug addiction. Moreover, depression and chronic burden were also significant antecedents contributing to substance use. Regarding social factors, social undermining was a strong predictor towards drug dependency (Myers et al., 2008). Present study also focused on current psychological states of drug addicts. Due to abnormal drug use, certain changes are experienced in emotional states by the drug addicts. Some of the emotional changes are guilt, fear, helplessness, depression, anger, etc. Addicts are usually aware of the pain their parents and significant others feel for them; moreover, their own occupational functioning, relationships, etc also become disturbed. Hence, they feel guilt. Secondly, they may also develop feelings of fear regarding fear of losing their relationships due to addiction, fear of becoming a failure in life etc. Thirdly, they may also feel helplessness due to failure to cut down the drug use; they try to stop their drug use but may face failure to do so, hence feel helplessness. This helplessness may also affect their self-esteem and self-control. Fourthly, some addicts may undergo symptoms of depression. Due to drug addiction, they usually feel sad mood, loss of interest in everyday activities, problems in eating and sleeping habits, etc. Finally, they also feel anger on themselves for their addictive behaviour and problems in life caused by this addiction (The Emotional impact of

drug addiction, 2016). Drug addiction is widespread in Pakistan and affects the physical and mental health, occupational functioning, relationships, and well-being of people in varied significantly. This study qualitatively explored the antecedents and current psychological states of drug addicts. It is important to study these phenomena from the vantage point of young adults and adolescents, the primary sufferers globally as well as in Pakistan. Moreover, it was very important to qualitatively explore the factors behind substance abuse to give the rich human side of the picture. This study has focused both on the causal factors behind substance abuse and current psychological states of drug addicts in order to get a clear and comprehensive picture of this disorder. Very little qualitative research has been conducted on this topic in Pakistan. This study uses thematic analysis for exploring various factors related to drug addiction.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to explore the antecedents of drug addiction in Pakistani culture. Moreover, it was also intended to explore the current psychological states of drug addicts.

### *2.1 Research Questions*

- What are the antecedents of drug addiction in young adults
- What are the current psychological states of drug addicts

### *2.2 Method*

The present research was qualitative in nature and explored factors that lead to drug addiction among young adults by using thematic analysis.

### *2.3 Participants*

Data were collected through interviews from six young adults, which were found from drug rehabilitation centres in DHQ, PAF, fountain house, and Azm centre Sargodha. The participants were recruited via purposive sampling. All participants were young adults belonging to middle class and were the residents of Sargodha division, Pakistan. They belonged to the age group of 18-35 years.

#### 2.4 Procedure

Initial screening was done to select the drug addicts who are in drug rehabilitation centres with age range of 18-35. Semi-structured interview technique was used. The interview protocol was prepared in accordance with the general guidelines for semi structured and in-depth interviewing. It was ensured that the questions were open-ended, broad, clear and relevant. Written permission was taken from the rehabilitation centers supervisors. Moreover, consent was also obtained from participants prior to interview. It was assured to the participants that all information obtained will be kept confidential. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes. Interviews were recorded in audio form and transcribed. Each participant's understanding of the antecedents of their drug addiction was assessed by complete and detailed case studies of their lives, starting of drugs and the issues prevailing at that time, and careful analysis of their history.

#### 2.5 Analysis

The transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis. The text was analysed to find out similar

patterns, relationships etc. Then, phrases and codes were assigned to those phrases. The extracted common themes were assembled together to form super ordinate themes for each interview. Finally, themes were merged to form a master table that represented the entire themes of all the participants.

### 3. Results & Discussions

Various themes for antecedents and current psychological states have been emerged and presented in figures. Themes for antecedents are discussed first.

#### 3.1 Theme I

The first persistent theme was 'family' and it included sub-themes of conflict with father, conflict with brother, and conflict with wife. Conflicts within family lead to substance abuse. For example, about conflict with father, one participant said:

*"My father did not care for my feelings and married me to a girl other than my love, due to which my life has been disturbed"* (Interview 5)

About conflict with brother, one participant said:

*"My brother forcefully took my possession. I think of him as my enemy"* (Interview 2)

About conflict with wife, one participant stated:

*"My wife did not follow my orders. I usually had quarrels with her"*(Interview 2)

Family problems and maladjustments lead to drug abuse because family is the primary environment of a person; when there are problems within a family, the person usually suffers from a mental stress and tension. Some people resolve this mental stress through positive ways; while some find negative ways to deal with it. Drug addiction

is also one of the negative ways to relieve oneself from the tension. Theoretical support is available for this result; other researchers also found similar results. Results of some studies revealed that interactions among family members, parent-child relationship, low levels of parental involvement in their children contribute to drug addiction among youngsters (Bray et al., 2000). Parental monitoring is also related to the elements of parental control such as imposing rules and restrictions on children's activities and associations (Nash et al., 2005). It means that if parents have accurate check and control on their children, and maintain a positive relationship with their children, the children usually do not involve in drug addiction. A large amount of studies show that well-monitored youths are less involved in delinquency and other norm-breaking behaviours (Cleveland et al., 2012). Moreover, Al'Absi (2007) found that familial conflicts increase the risk of drug addiction.

### 3.2 Theme II

The second persistent theme was 'friends'. Friends are also the ones that make a person use drugs. For example, one participant said:

*"If your friends are not sincere/not good, they will lead you to drugs"* (Interview 1)

Another addict stated:

*"Whenever we (friends) were united, we usually used to take drugs"* (Interview 3)

Friends are also one of the triggering factors that lead individuals to use drugs. Friends and peers do affect a person in a number of ways. If friends support a problematic person, he is usually able to overcome his problems. Conversely, if friends

encourage a person for negative things, it can have devastating effects. Previous studies are also in line with this theme. Research has demonstrated that drug addicted friends are major causes of taking drugs among individuals. Individuals, who use drugs regularly, reinforce and motivate their friends to take drugs (Andrews et al., 2002).

### 3.3 Theme III

The third persistent theme about antecedents of drug use was 'psychological/emotional problems'. Sub-themes identified in this main theme were tension, sadness, aggression, tension, and curiosity or interest to use drugs. One participant said.

*"When persons do not get what they want, they tend to become sad. This sadness can lead to drug use"* (Interview 5)

Another said:

*"Before drug use, I usually remained in a state of tension about various things"* (Interview 2)

Another patient said;

*"Once I was so much angry that I attacked on her (wife) with knife"* (Interview 2)

Another said,

*"I used to take drugs due to interest. I was curious and had interest in drugs from very beginning"* (Interview 4)

It is obvious that psychological problems can lead a person to use drugs. Drugs are usually taken as a way to get relief from emotional problems. When people want to escape the emotional pain and psychological problems, they tend to use drugs in order to get themselves relaxed and free avoid from the harsh realities of life. Hence, these factors are also major contributing factors towards drug use. Numerous research studies support this

theme. Gau et al. (2018) found that several psychological and psychiatric problems can make a person indulge in drug use. Moreover, (Sinha & Jastreboff, 2013) found that stress is one of the major factors that lead individuals to drug use and its continuance. (Grant et al., 2011) revealed that people with tension and stress are more prone to involve in smoking and drug usage. Another research indicated that people use drugs to cope with emotional difficulties, to ease the symptoms of undiagnosed mental problems, or to change their moods. Unfortunately, using drugs also tend to worsen the symptoms of mental disorders (Saisan et al., 2019).

#### 3.4 Theme IV

The fourth identified theme about antecedents was ‘physical or health problems and diseases’. It included sub-themes of stomach problems, large intestine problems, problems related to sleep, and headache. For example, one participant said, “I had stomach and large intestine problems from almost 10 years. I had surgery of large intestine in 2007. Still it pains” (Interview 2)

Another participant stated, “I had difficulty falling asleep from almost 4-5 years... I also had headache from time to time” (Interview 2)

The reason for this factor is that physical ailments are also a big cause of mental tension and illness. Hence, in order to relieve oneself from this mental tension, people with physical ailments may lead to drug addiction. Previous research also found that having some sort of disease can lead to drug addiction. Research indicated that people use drugs to cope with emotional difficulties (caused by any source, particularly physical illness), to

ease the symptoms of undiagnosed mental problems, or to change their negative or gloomy moods (Saisan et al., 2019). Moreover, Myers, et al. (2008) revealed that being HIV positive was a significant predictor to drug addiction. Moreover, depression and chronic burden were also significant antecedents contributing to substance use.

#### 3.5 Theme V

The fifth identified main theme was ‘use of drug by some close relative’. Some of the participants reported that their close relatives were tobacco smokers and drug users. For example, one participant reported,

“My elder brother used to smoke cigarette” (Interview 1 & 3). Another said, “My uncle was drug user (Opioid-addict)” (Interview 4). Usage of drug by close relative can trigger drug use. It may be from the fact that close relatives, particularly father and elder brothers, are taken as role models by younger boys. Hence, if they use drugs, boys also perceive drug use to be a good thing. Previous research has also found similar results. Usage of drug by sibling (particularly tobacco) was an antecedent for substance addiction of adolescents (Gau et al. 2018).

#### 3.6 Theme VI

The sixth theme identified was ‘failure in love’. Failure in love or not getting the person one loves usually lead to drug addiction. This is more prevalent in adolescence because rejection or losing the loved ones has serious effects on mental well-being of adolescents who are in the stage of identity development and intimacy-finding. They suffer from a trauma after this failure in love; and

usually start taking drugs in order to avoid or escape from the reality of life. In the present study, one participant reported,

*“Whenever I think about my love, I get sad. This was also one of the reasons that I indulged in drugs. I think about my love that I did not succeed to marry her”* (Interview 5)

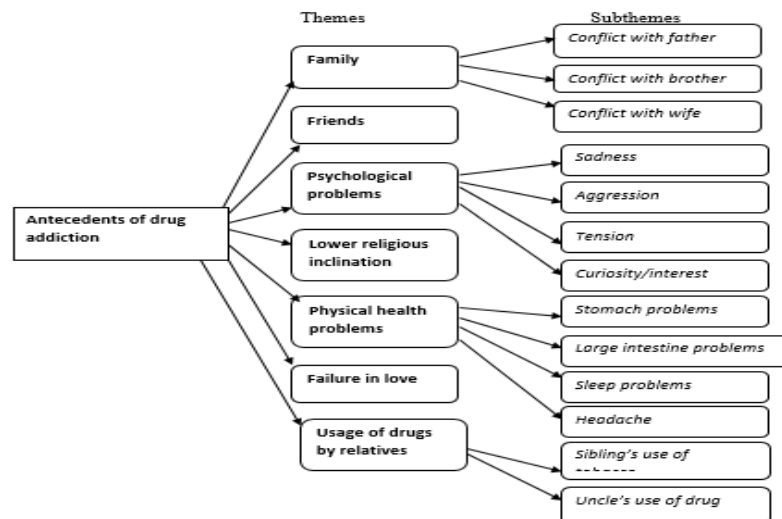
Another said,

*“I loved my cousin from my childhood. She also liked me. But her parents married her to someone else. This proved very painful to me”* (Interview 3)

**3.7 Theme VIII** Finally, the last theme identified was low religious inclination or low levels of religiosity. In this regard, one participant said, *“I used to offer Jumma prayers(only)”* (Interview 3). Another said, *“I had little inclination towards religion. Sometimes I offered Jumma prayer”* (Interview 4)

It is common observation that individuals who have high levels of religiosity usually do not use drugs because drug use is prohibited in religion. Hence, persons with low levels of religiosity tend to be attracted towards drugs. In previous

research, it was observed that low level of religiosity is also one of the possibilities to take drugs (Unlu & Sahin, 2016). Moreover, it is confirmed that high levels of religiosity are related to low levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Results of an empirical study found that strong faith and high trust in God linked with a lesser amount of anxiety and depression, and greater personal contentment (Rosmarin et al., 2009). Another research found that religion has strong positive relationship with mental health and well-being and negative relationship with anxiety and depression (Ismail & Desmukh, 2012). Recent research has found that having tawakkul in God helps in significant reduction in depression, anxiety, and stress (Gondal et al.,2022; Gondal et al.,2022; Gondal et al.,2023; Gondal et al.,, 2023). In the light of these findings, it can be inferred that as religiosity is negatively related to negative emotional states and positively related to mental health and well-being, it is negatively related to drug addiction. People higher in religiosity do not tend to involve in drug addiction.



**Figure 1:** Antecedents of drug addiction. Themes in italics are sub themes while the ones in boldface represent main themes.

**Table 1:** Frequency and Percentage of Themes and Subthemes Generated from the Current Data on antecedents of drug addiction (N = 6)

Main Themes	Sub Themes	f	%
Family	Conflict with father	2	40
	Conflict with brother	1	20
	Conflict with wife	2	40
Friends	Friends	3	100
Psychological/emotional problems <sup>7</sup>	Sadness	3	25
	Aggression/physical aggression	4	33.33
	Tension	3	25
	Curiosity/interest	2	16.67
Physical or health problems and diseases	Stomach problems	1	16.67
	Large intestine problems	1	16.67
	Sleep problems	2	33.33
	Headache	2	33.33
Use of drug by some close relative	Sibling use of tobacco	2	66.67
	Uncle's use of drug	1	33.33
Failure in love	Failure in love	3	100
low religious inclination / low levels of religiosity	low religious inclination / low levels of religiosity	3	100

Secondly, the present study also focussed on current psychological states of drug addicts. In this regard, various themes were identified that depicted current psychological states. These themes were guilt, regret, sadness, anger, hatred, emotional pain, and hopelessness. For example, a participant said,

*“This (drug addiction) is my life’s biggest mistake”* (Interview 1)

Another participant reported,

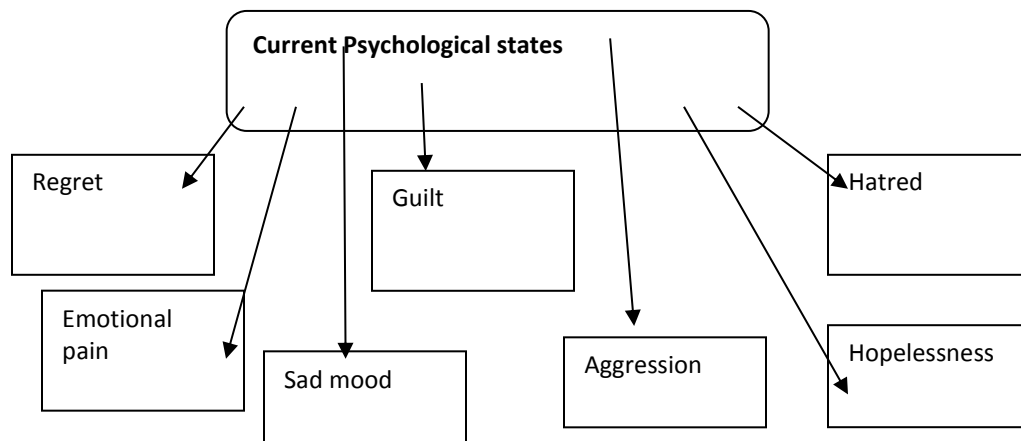
*“I hate drugs. I felt much emotional pain because of drugs”* (Interview 1)

Another participant said,

*“I do not feel anything good at present or about future. At present, I feel sadness. I often get angry”* (Interview 2)

Another participant expressed,

*“I often think that if I had not used drugs (then did not have these problems)”* (Interview 3)





**Figure 2: Psychological states**

The present results about current psychological states have a clear cut logical justification. During the period of drug use, people experience negative psychological and emotional states because drug addiction always leads towards failure in life. Moreover, certain drugs directly affect the nervous system, neurotransmitters, and hormones, etc; hence, causing problems for the drug user. For example, narcotics affect an individual by causing impairment in mental functioning and coordination; sedatives cause severely impaired coordination and emotional swings; stimulants cause irritability, anxiety, paranoia etc; cannabis cause dry mouth, reduced short term memory, sluggish motor coordination, and impaired mental functioning etc (Clifasefi *et al.*, 2006). Hence, it is clear that when drugs have such massive effects on the cognitive functioning of an individual, then he/she will must undergo all these negative emotional states like regret, guilt, aggression, hopelessness, sad mood, etc. Previous research has also explained some psychological and emotional current states that are experienced by drug addicts. Due to abnormal drug use, certain changes are experienced in emotional states by the drug addicts. Some of the emotional changes are guilt, fear, helplessness, depression, anger, etc (The Emotional impact of drug addiction, 2016). According to the reports of Journal of the American Medical Association, almost 37 percent of alcohol abusers and 53 percent of other drug addicts also have at least one major

psychological illness. Moreover, of all the individuals diagnosed to be psychologically ill, 29 percent are drugs abusers. Another research revealed that drug addiction can increase the underlying risk for mental disorders. Psychological disorders are caused by the interaction of different factors like genetic, environment, and some other factors. If an individual is at risk for a psychological disorder, drug usage and addiction may increase the vulnerability to develop the disorder (Saisan, *et al.*, 2019). Empirical evidence is also present for this fact. Marijuana addicts have an increased to develop psychosis while opium addicts tend to develop depressive symptoms (Saisan *et al.*, 2019).

**4. Conclusion**

The present study explained various antecedents of drug use. Conflicts within family can lead to drug addiction. Negative company of friends is also an antecedent. Moreover, different psychological, emotional, and physical problems like depression, stress, sleep problems, intestinal problems, headache, etc can lead to drug addiction. In addition, any relative that uses drugs may also become a precipitating factor for drug initiation. Adolescents can also lead towards drug because of failure in love. Lastly, low level of religiosity was also identified as one of the major themes that can contribute to drug use. The study also focussed on current psychological states of drug addicts. It was observed that drug addicts usually experience

negative psychological states of guilt, regret, sadness, anger, hatred, emotional pain, and hopelessness. Thus, the present study adds research-based evidence to the indigenous knowledge of drug-addiction in this culture and can help in reducing drug use by identifying potential antecedents.

### **5. Limitations**

Since the research is qualitative in nature and a small sample was studied in depth, no claims as to generalization can be made. However useful insights are gained about the nature of antecedents and current psychological states of drug addicts. Moreover, the study did not focus on female drug addicts. Finally, the individuals belonged only to Sargodha city and some of its surroundings; hence, it may not be true representative of the whole country.

### **6. Practical Implications**

Present study has various novel implications with respect to drug addiction. The study can help to understand the preventive factors for drug use for example, it can be seen that conflicts within family are not favourable in any case, friends should be good etc. Family environment should be healthy in order to prevent individuals from developing drug addiction. Society, particularly mental health experts, should focus on the importance of maintaining psychological well-being in order to reduce the risk for developing mental disorders; hence, reducing the risk for drug addiction. In addition, special focus should also be put on people with physical diseases because they are

also vulnerable to drug addiction. In this regard, patient's family should take a good care of the patient and provide moral and emotional support so that the patient's mental health is strengthened and will not move towards drugs. The factor of religion that has been identified by the present research is also a unique contribution True religion should be taught and promoted, especially within adolescents and young adults. As discussed earlier, religion promotes mental well-being and reduces negative emotional states, hence, teaching children about religion and motivating them to follow the religious orders will surely result in the reduction of drug addiction in the population and it will lead to an overall peaceful society. Moreover, the study can help counsellors to understand the current psychological states of drug addicts and to deal them accordingly. For example, counsellors should use those interventions with drug addicts that will result in the reduction of guilt, sadness, anger, hopelessness etc.

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