

Prevalence and Impact of Alcoholism Among Undergraduate Students in Coimbatore Colleges: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract— Alcohol consumption among undergraduate students has emerged as a critical public health and socio-academic concern in contemporary India. This study explores the prevalence, causes, and multifaceted impacts of alcoholism among college students in Coimbatore. Drawing upon a quantitative framework, the research investigates patterns of alcohol use, socio-psychological determinants such as peer pressure, stress, curiosity, and environmental influences, as well as the consequences on academic performance, physical health, and behavioural stability. The findings reveal a significant prevalence of alcohol consumption among students, often initiated during late adolescence and reinforced by campus culture and social acceptance. The study highlights that excessive alcohol use contributes to declining academic outcomes, increased health risks, emotional instability, and social maladjustment. Furthermore, it underscores the role of institutional negligence and lack of structured intervention programmes in exacerbating the issue. By contextualising alcoholism within broader socio-cultural and psychological frameworks, the research advocates for targeted awareness campaigns, counselling services, and policy interventions at the institutional level. The study ultimately calls for a collaborative effort involving educators, policymakers, and families to mitigate alcohol abuse and foster a healthier academic environment conducive to holistic student development.

Index Terms— Alcoholism; Undergraduate Students; Peer Pressure; Academic Performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Alcohol consumption has historically occupied a complex position within Indian society, oscillating between ritualistic acceptance and social caution. In

earlier periods, alcohol was consumed in controlled, culturally sanctioned contexts, thereby limiting its adverse effects. However, the contemporary landscape reveals a dramatic shift, marked by increased accessibility, changing social norms, and a decline in age of initiation. Among undergraduate students, this transformation has become particularly pronounced, rendering alcohol consumption a significant public health concern.

College life represents a transitional phase characterised by newfound autonomy, identity formation, and exposure to diverse social influences. Within this milieu, alcohol often functions as both a social lubricant and a coping mechanism. Students encounter academic pressures, interpersonal challenges, and existential uncertainties, which may drive them towards substance use as a form of relief or experimentation. The convergence of these factors creates a fertile ground for the normalisation of alcohol consumption within campus culture.

The issue is further compounded by the paradoxical behaviour of educated youth, particularly those in professional courses, who, despite being aware of the detrimental effects of alcohol, continue to engage in its consumption. This contradiction underscores the limitations of knowledge-based interventions and highlights the need to address deeper psychological and social determinants.

Globally, substance abuse among young adults has been linked to a range of adverse outcomes, including physical morbidity, psychological distress, and social dysfunction. In India, the situation is equally alarming, with increasing reports of alcohol-related incidents

among college students. The implications extend beyond individual health, affecting academic institutions, families, and society at large.

Understanding the prevalence and impact of alcoholism among undergraduate students is therefore imperative. Such an understanding necessitates a multidimensional approach that considers cultural, psychological, and environmental factors. This study seeks to contribute to this discourse by examining the patterns of alcohol use in Coimbatore colleges and analysing their consequences. Ultimately, the introduction sets the stage for a critical exploration of alcoholism as not merely a behavioural issue but a complex socio-cultural phenomenon requiring comprehensive intervention strategies.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The scholarly discourse on alcoholism among college students reveals a convergence of psychological, sociological, and behavioural perspectives. Early studies, such as those by Pinto (1973), anticipated the emergence of substance abuse as a significant issue among Indian youth, attributing it to socio-economic transformations. Subsequent research has substantiated these concerns, demonstrating a steady rise in alcohol consumption among students. Carr-Gregg (2005) emphasises adolescence as a period of heightened risk-taking behaviour, wherein experimentation with substances becomes a normative aspect of identity formation. Similarly, Martin (2002) correlates substance use with developmental transitions, suggesting that pubertal maturation often precedes engagement in risky behaviours.

Empirical studies have consistently identified peer pressure as a primary determinant of alcohol use. Khosla et al. (2008) and Mehra et al. (2018) highlight the influence of social environments and peer networks in shaping drinking behaviours. These findings are further reinforced by Saini et al. (2022), who report that over 25% of undergraduate students consume alcohol, primarily due to social and psychological factors. International studies, such as those by Kendler et al. (2015), underscore the role of familial predisposition and genetic vulnerability in substance abuse. Meanwhile, Maier et al. (2013) explore the phenomenon of neuroenhancement, wherein students use substances to improve academic

performance, thereby blurring the line between recreational and functional use.

The literature also highlights the consequences of alcohol consumption, including academic decline, mental health issues, and increased risk of accidents and violence. Studies by Stanger et al. (2016) and Tibbetts et al. (2002) demonstrate the interplay between stress, coping mechanisms, and substance use. Indian studies provide valuable insights into regional variations. Kumar et al. (2017) report significant levels of alcohol use in Kerala, while pan-India surveys indicate a prevalence rate of nearly 32% among undergraduate students. These findings suggest that alcoholism is not confined to specific regions but represents a widespread phenomenon.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the prevalence and impact of alcoholism among undergraduate students in Coimbatore colleges. The choice of a quantitative approach facilitates the systematic collection and analysis of data, enabling the identification of patterns and correlations. The study population comprises undergraduate students from various colleges in Coimbatore. A structured questionnaire serves as the primary data collection tool, designed to capture information on demographic variables, drinking patterns, influencing factors, and perceived impacts. The questionnaire includes both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to ensure comprehensive data collection.

Sampling is conducted using a suitable non-probability technique, ensuring representation across different academic disciplines and socio-economic backgrounds. The sample size is determined based on feasibility and the need for statistical reliability. Data analysis is performed using percentage analysis and tabular representation. This method allows for the clear presentation of findings, facilitating interpretation and comparison. The analysis focuses on identifying trends in alcohol consumption, as well as correlations between variables such as peer influence, stress levels, and academic performance.

Ethical considerations are carefully addressed, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained throughout the study to ensure the integrity of

responses. The methodology also acknowledges certain limitations, including potential response bias and the constraints of self-reported data. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the patterns and impacts of alcohol consumption among undergraduate students.

IV. FACTORS INFLUENCING ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Alcohol consumption among undergraduate students is influenced by a complex interplay of psychological, social, and environmental factors. Among these, peer pressure emerges as one of the most significant determinants. Students often feel compelled to conform to group norms, leading to experimentation and eventual habituation.

Stress is another critical factor. The demands of academic life, coupled with personal and financial pressures, create a high-stress environment. Alcohol is frequently used as a coping mechanism, providing temporary relief from anxiety and emotional distress. Curiosity and the desire for new experiences also contribute to alcohol use. College life represents a period of exploration, and students may engage in substance use as part of their quest for identity and independence.

Social acceptance and cultural norms further reinforce drinking behaviour. Alcohol is often associated with celebration and social bonding, making it difficult for students to resist participation. Media representations and advertising also play a role in shaping perceptions, portraying alcohol consumption as glamorous and desirable. Accessibility and availability are additional factors. The ease with which students can obtain alcohol increases the likelihood of consumption. Institutional negligence and lack of strict enforcement further exacerbate the issue. In conclusion, the factors influencing alcohol consumption are multifaceted, requiring comprehensive strategies that address both individual and structural determinants.

V. PATTERNS AND PREVALENCE OF ALCOHOL USE

The study reveals diverse patterns of alcohol consumption among undergraduate students, ranging from occasional use to heavy and dependent drinking. The classification of drinking patterns light, moderate,

heavy, and very heavy provides a framework for understanding the extent of alcohol use. A significant proportion of students report occasional drinking, often limited to social gatherings. However, a concerning number engage in binge drinking, characterised by the consumption of large quantities of alcohol within a short period. This pattern is particularly prevalent among male students.

The age of initiation is another critical factor, with many students beginning alcohol use between 18 and 19 years. Early initiation is associated with a higher risk of dependency and long-term health issues. Gender differences are also evident, with male students exhibiting higher rates of consumption. However, the gap is narrowing, indicating changing social norms and increased participation of female students in drinking activities. The prevalence of alcohol use in Coimbatore colleges aligns with national trends, reflecting the growing normalisation of drinking behaviour among youth. This trend underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the issue.

VI. IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Alcohol consumption has a profound impact on academic performance, affecting both cognitive functioning and behavioural patterns. Students who engage in regular drinking often experience decreased concentration, memory impairment, and reduced motivation. Binge drinking is particularly detrimental, leading to missed classes, poor exam performance, and lower overall grades. The correlation between alcohol use and academic decline is well-documented, highlighting the need for preventive measures.

Alcohol also affects time management and organisational skills, further compromising academic success. Students may prioritise social activities over academic responsibilities, leading to a cycle of underperformance and stress. In addition to direct effects, alcohol consumption contributes to a range of indirect consequences, including disciplinary issues and strained relationships with faculty and peers. These factors collectively undermine the academic environment.

VII. HEALTH AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

The health implications of alcohol consumption are extensive, encompassing both physical and psychological dimensions. Short-term effects include impaired judgment, decreased reflexes, and increased risk of accidents. Long-term effects include liver disease, cardiovascular problems, and increased susceptibility to cancer. Psychologically, alcohol use is associated with depression, anxiety, and increased risk of suicide. The co-occurrence of substance abuse and mental health disorders presents a significant challenge, requiring integrated treatment approaches. Addiction further complicates the issue, characterised by compulsive use despite adverse consequences. The neurobiological changes associated with addiction underscore its classification as a chronic disease.

VIII. PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Addressing alcoholism among undergraduate students requires a multifaceted approach involving awareness, education, and institutional support. Awareness programmes play a crucial role in informing students about the risks associated with alcohol consumption. Counselling services provide a platform for addressing underlying psychological issues, helping students develop healthier coping mechanisms. Peer education programmes can also be effective, leveraging social influence to promote positive behaviour. Policy interventions, including stricter regulation of alcohol availability and enforcement of campus rules, are essential. Collaboration between educational institutions, healthcare providers, and policymakers is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies.

IX. CONCLUSION

The prevalence of alcoholism among undergraduate students in Coimbatore colleges reflects a broader societal shift characterised by changing cultural norms, increased accessibility, and evolving youth behaviours. This study has demonstrated that alcohol consumption is not merely an individual choice but a complex phenomenon shaped by social, psychological, and environmental factors. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of students

engage in alcohol use, often initiated during late adolescence and reinforced by peer pressure and academic stress. The consequences are far-reaching, affecting academic performance, physical health, and psychological well-being. These impacts extend beyond the individual, influencing families, educational institutions, and society at large.

One of the most concerning aspects is the normalisation of alcohol consumption within college culture. This normalisation obscures the risks associated with drinking, making it difficult to identify and address problematic behaviour. The lack of effective institutional interventions further exacerbates the issue, highlighting the need for proactive measures. The study underscores the importance of early intervention, emphasising the role of awareness programmes and counselling services. Educational institutions must take a more active role in addressing alcoholism, integrating preventive strategies into their policies and curricula. Collaboration with healthcare professionals and policymakers is essential for developing comprehensive solutions. Ultimately, addressing alcoholism among undergraduate students requires a holistic approach that considers the interplay of individual, social, and structural factors. By fostering a supportive and informed environment, it is possible to mitigate the risks associated with alcohol consumption and promote healthier lifestyles.

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