EXPLORING THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO YOUTH DRUG ADDICTION IN DISTRICT LAHORE, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses socioeconomic and psychological causes of youth drug addiction in Pakistan District Lahore. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was adopted to obtain the data using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed through SPSS and both descriptive and inferential statistic (Multiple Linear Regression (MLR), correlation of Pearson, and logistic regression) were used. The results indicated that unemployment (M = 4.36, SD = 0.78) and poverty (M = 4.28, SD = 0.82) were the most significant socioeconomic factors that contributed to addiction. Among psychological predictors perceived stress (M = 4.32, SD = 0.79) and anxiety (M = 4.18, SD = 0.83) had greatest effect. Regression results (R^2 = 0.682, p = 0.01) revealed that both socioeconomic and psychological conditions were interrelated and explained 68 percent of the variance in addiction levels. The logistic regression also indicated that peer influence (Exp (B) = 5.70) and exposure to city life (Exp (B) = 3.38) were significant factors that increased the probability of drug use. The study recommends creating better employment and education opportunities for youth to improve their financial status. Further, psychological counseling and rehab facilities should be accessible to youth.

Keywords: Drug addiction among young people, Socio-economic status, Psychological factors, Peer pressure, City life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Drug addiction has become a significant social, psychological and health issue in Pakistan, especially among young people in big cities like Lahore. It is not only a health issue, but also a sociocultural and psychological crisis in society. Lahore is one of the most densely populated, economic and educational center in the Pakistan, experiencing an increase in drug addiction among young people, as per United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2022). According to the report, Pakistan hosts more than 7 million drug users, and almost 60 percent of them are younger than 30. The situation is particularly concerning in urban centers.

The youth is the future deciding factor of any nation and at the same time it the most vulnerable. However, youth require proper education, training, mentorship and guidance in their early careers. Therefore, socioeconomic deprivation, psychological stress, peers influence, and institutional weaknesses can lead young ones towards bad habits. Further, prevalence of poverty, unemployment, income inequality, and drugs business have determined to be root causes of drug addiction among youth. Low-income, unemployment and no hope of future success make young ones frustrated, helpless and alienated from society, ultimately leading to drug abuse (Ahdi, 2022). As Ahmadi (2023) mentioned that due to the lack of recreational areas, young people are inclined to drugs abuse.

In addition to economic deprivation, psychological issues also a critical in causing behavioral change among individuals for drug abuse. For example, emotional instability, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and neglect by the family (Mohammadullah et al., 2025). Akbari (2023) and Tayebi (2021) found that family disruptions, domestic abuse, and emotional instability are factors that make the youth more prone to drug addiction. According to Ahmed et al. (2023), the problem of weak governance, corruption, and poor law enforcement further led to the spread of drug networks. Therefore, the problem of youth addiction is a complex phenomenon that combines not only the economic and psychological factors but also the failure of the system to protect and rehabilitate its citizens.

Hence, this study was conducted for a detailed exploration of factors responsible for addiction behavior of young people in city Lahore. The study aimed to present evidence-based information that can guide policymakers, educators, and health professionals regarding the processes behind increasing drug addiction among young people. Specific objectives of study include: (i) to explore key socioeconomic and psychological factors behind drug addiction among youth, (ii) to find out the relationships between socioeconomic factors and psychological determinants among addicted youth and (iii) to evaluate the extent of peer influence and urban lifestyle as factors in the initiation of youth drug addiction among youth.

To prevent the disease, treat it, and rehabilitate the victims, the ground-level causes need to be comprehended to be able to devise effective prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs that would be specific to the situation. This research will use the case of District Lahore. This comprehensive analysis is an attempt to guide policymakers and government to target on root causes of drug abuse by knowing the intrinsic and extrinsic factors triggering drug addiction. The findings can be helpful in taking actions towards designing mitigation and rehabilitation programs to safeguard young generation and the future of Pakistan.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is quantitative in nature and used cross-sectional research design was to empirically explore the socioeconomic and psychological conditions behind the addiction of youth to drugs in District Lahore. Cross-sectional design is helpful in collecting data quickly and will least expenses.

2.1. Population and Sampling

The population of interest will consist of young people between 15 and 35 years old living in the District of Lahore with a history of substance use or those who are now receiving treatment in rehabilitation facilities. A list of persons residing in Lahore who have undergone rehab in the last few years was obtained from the rehabilitation center for research purposes. After that, a systematic random sampling technique was used to determine the sample size. According to Cochran sample size formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 P(1-P)}{e^2}$$

Where n = required sample size, Z = 1.96 (for 95% confidence level), P=0.5 (estimated proportion), and e=0.05 (margin of error), the estimated sample size was approximately 384, which was rounded up to 385 respondents to enhance reliability.

2.2. Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was developed, comprising four sections: (i) Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, income, education, family structure, occupation), (ii) Socioeconomic factors influencing addiction (poverty, unemployment, parental education, neighborhood environment), (iii) Psychological determinants, such as stress, anxiety, and family relationships, measured using standardized scales like the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and (iv) Social influences, including peer pressure, urban lifestyle, and exposure to drug-promoting environments.

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Prior to data collection, the instrument was validated through pilot testing on 30 respondents and evaluated for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The measured values for each component of the questionnaire were greater than 0.70, indicating an acceptable level.

2.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 28). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) were computed to summarize respondents' demographic profiles and perceptions. Further, the inferential statistical models applied were Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) to identify the major socioeconomic and psychological factors contributing to youth drug addiction.

The model is specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \epsilon$$

Where:
Y = degree of drug addiction (dependent variable),
X1 = socioeconomic status (income, education, occupation),
X2 = psychological stress and anxiety,
X3 = family relationship quality,
X4 = peer and urban lifestyle factors,

$\beta0$ = constant term,
$\beta1...\beta4$ = regression coefficients, and
ϵ = error term.

This model examines how each independent variable significantly predicts the extent of youth substance use.

Moreover, to analyze the relationship between socioeconomic status and psychological distress, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated:

$$r = \frac{\sum(X - \bar{X})(Y - \bar{Y})}{\sqrt{\sum(X - \bar{X})^2 \sum(Y - \bar{Y})^2}}$$

Where X = socioeconomic indicators and Y = psychological distress scores. Values of r close to +1 or –1 indicate a strong linear relationship.

Additionally, to assess the influence of peer pressure and urban lifestyle, a multiple logistic regression model was used when categorizing addiction status as binary (addicted = 1, non-addicted = 0):

$$Ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right) = \beta0 + \beta1X1 + \beta2X2 + \beta3X3 + \epsilon$$

where PPP represents the probability of being addicted to drugs, and the independent variables (X1, X2, X3) represent peer influence, lifestyle exposure, and family background factors, respectively.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage. All data were anonymized to ensure privacy and compliance with research ethics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socioeconomic Factors

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics concerning the key socioeconomic variables that influence the addiction to drugs among young people in the District Lahore. According to the results, the unemployment factor (M = 4.36, SD = 0.78) is the most crucial factor causing drug addiction among young people. This indicates that when youth lack livelihoods and are not financially stable, they may incline toward using drugs as a mean of coping with frustration in society and the economic world. This finding is in line with that of Zare et al. (2022) and UNODC (2022), who found that unemployment and underemployment are paramount structural factors for drug abuse in urban Pakistan. The second influential factor is poverty (M = 4.28, SD = 0.82). Young people who live in households having financial pressure and hopelessness would tend to find high-risk, short-term solutions, which can lead to mental problems and ultimately to consuming drugs. Similar findings came from Ahmed et al. (2023), who identified poverty as one of the fundamental reasons for increased drug abuse. Low parental education (M = 4.07, SD = 0.91) and peer pressure in low-income neighborhoods (M = 4.03, SD = 0.94) also attained high mean values, indicating that low-income family, and exposure to peer groups of socially deviant members trigger young ones towards drug addiction. The factors that attained moderate scores for causing drug addiction were family financial instability (M = 3.89, SD = 0.97) and lack of education (M = 3.76, SD = 1.02).. Further, easy availability of drugs (M = 3.52, SD = 1.08) and social neglect (M = 3.39, SD = 0.97), although attained low scores, are also significant factors. Similarly, Fang and Mushtaque (2024) found that easy access to drugs in urban areas raises the rate of addiction among unemployed young people. Factor with the lowest rank is lack of social welfare programs (M = 3.27, SD = 1.14). The lack of institutional support and social safety nets affects the education and awareness of youth, as well as leaving them without effective rehabilitation and prevention channels.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Factors Contributing to Youth Drug Addiction in District Lahore (N = 385)

Socioeconomic Factors	Mean	SD	Rank
Unemployment	4.36	0.78	1
Poverty	4.28	0.82	2
Low parental education	4.07	0.91	3
Peer influence	4.03	0.94	4
Family financial instability	3.89	0.97	5
Lack of education	3.76	1.02	6
Easy drug availability	3.52	1.08	8
Social neglect	3.39	1.11	9
Lack of social welfare programs	3.27	1.14	10

3.2. Psychological Determinants

Table 2 is a representation of the psychological factors affecting youth substance abuse in District Lahore, according to the standardized scale of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). The data indicate that the strongest psychological determinant is high perceived stress (M = 4.32, SD = 0.79). This observation highlights the fact that stress levels lead people to use drugs as a form of coping mechanism to overcome the emotional burden. Cohen et al. (1983), who have developed the PSS, showed that people with high stress scores have more chances of indulging in manipulative coping mechanisms. The second most significant determinant is anxiety symptoms (M = 4.18, SD = 0.83). This finding is consistent with the results of Beck et al. (1988), who discovered that clinical anxiety is strongly correlated with drug addiction. When young people experience persistent anxiety or panic attacks, they frequently resort to the use of drugs to afford a temporary mental relief (Mushtaque et al., 2021).

Table 2: Psychological Determinants Associated with Youth Substance Abuse (N = 385)

Psychological Determinants	Mean	SD	Rank
High perceived stress (PSS)	4.32	0.79	1
Anxiety symptoms (BAI)	4.18	0.83	2
Family conflict and poor communication	4.05	0.89	3
Low self-esteem and emotional instability	3.92	0.94	4
Feelings of loneliness and social isolation	3.81	0.96	5
Exposure to traumatic life events	3.69	1.02	6
Lack of emotional support from parents	3.61	1.07	7
Depression (Self-Reported)	3.54	1.09	8
Inability to cope with academic or social pressure	3.47	1.12	9
Impulsivity and risk-taking behavior	3.33	1.14	10

The third factor is family conflict and poor communication (M = 4.05, SD = 0.89), which means that dysfunctional family relationships are the major factors that promote emotional distress and drug abuse. Emotional instability and low self-esteem (M = 3.92, SD = 0.94) were also found to be significant determinants. Such results are also supported by Sarfraz et al. (2022), who found that people with low self-esteem and unstable emotions are more vulnerable to addictive behaviors. Mediocre factors, such as loneliness (M = 3.81, SD = 0.96), trauma exposure (M = 3.69, SD = 1.02), and parental emotional support deficiency (M = 3.61, SD = 1.07), are indicative of the general psychosocial sources of stress that incline young people to addiction. The determinants that attained low values and have weak effect to addiction are depression (M = 3.54, SD = 1.09), academic pressure (M = 3.47, SD = 1.12), and impulsivity (M = 3.33, SD = 1.14). Still, nonetheless, these factors are vital emotional and behavioral vulnerabilities. Impulsivity and depression are mental risk factors that deteriorate decision-making and increase predisposition to being addicted (Sawangchai et al., 2022).

3.3. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Between Socioeconomic Factors and Psychological Determinants

Table 3 illustrates the relationships between socioeconomic factors (such as family income, education, employment, and family structure) and psychological determinants (perceived stress, anxiety, and depression) among addicted youth in District Lahore. The correlation coefficients reveal a significant negative association across all variables, indicating that as socioeconomic status improves, psychological distress declines. Family income level is among the analyzed variables with the strongest inverse relationship with perceived stress ($r = -0.472$, $p < 0.01$) and anxiety ($r = -0.451$, $p < 0.01$) and depression ($r = -0.423$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that family income instability is one of the primary causes of emotional distress in addicted youth. The observation is consistent with that of Ahmad et al. (2020), Ali et al. (2019) and UNODC (2021), who found that poverty and economic deprivation can make a person more vulnerable to substance abuse by exposing them to stressors and decreasing access to coping mechanisms. Equally, the education level correlates strongly negatively with anxiety ($r = -0.412$), perceived stress and depression ($r = -0.394$), just like Bashir and Malik (2021), who highlighted that the level of education increases resilience, awareness in society and drug resistance. Unemployment was another variable that is correlated with stress ($r = -0.405$) and anxiety ($r = -0.376$) and depression (-0.359). These findings are in line with those of Khan et al. (2018), who established that unemployed Pakistani young people have increased vulnerability to psychological pressure and addiction behaviors because of restricted economic and social opportunities.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients Between Socioeconomic Factors and Psychological Determinants Among Addicted Youth (N = 385)

Socioeconomic Factors	Perceived Stress (PSS)	Anxiety (BAI)	Depression (Self-Reported)
Family Income Level	-0.472**	-0.451**	-0.423**
Education Level	-0.438**	-0.412**	-0.394**
Employment Status	-0.405**	-0.376**	-0.359**
Parental Occupation	-0.362**	-0.341**	-0.328**

Family Structure	-0.315**	-0.298**	-0.281**
Housing Conditions	-0.288**	-0.271**	-0.254**

Note: $p < 0.05*$, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed significance)

Also, family set-ups and housing situations show weaker yet significant correlations with all variables (between -0.315 and -0.254), indicating that people living in broken families or in poor housing conditions are more likely to develop psychological turmoil. This corresponds to the Social Determinants of Mental Health framework by the UNODC (2021), which includes the roles of living conditions and family cohesion in psychological well-being. The findings reveal that socioeconomic deprivation is a potent predictor of psychological distress, which can be used as a triggering factor towards addiction to drugs among the youth.

3.4. Influence of Socioeconomic and Psychological Variables on Youth Drug Addiction

Table 4 shows the findings of Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) model that were used to test the interaction of socioeconomic and psychological factors and found it statistically significant ($F_{(9, 375)} = 75.23$, $p < 0.01$), with high explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.682$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.673$), indicating that the level of drug addiction among the youth is vastly explained by the chosen independent variables. Family income level ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = 0.002$) and education level ($\beta = -0.201$, $p = 0.001$) are socioeconomic predictors that have a significant negative relationship with drug addiction. As Rahman et al. (2020) revealed that economic deprivation predisposes the urban youth in Punjab to have drug dependence. UNODC (2022) also added that the structural forces that are driving drug use in developing nations are poverty, lack of education, and unemployment. The relationship with employment status ($\beta = -0.167$, $p = 0.010$) was also negative, indicating that unemployed or underemployed young people are more willing to use drugs because of financial instability and social frustration, as it was observed during Sansakorn et al. (2024).

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Socioeconomic and Psychological Factors Contributing to Youth Drug Addiction (N = 385)

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	1.284	0.312	—	4.115	0.000
Family Income Level	-0.214	0.067	-0.218	-3.194	0.002**
Education Level	-0.186	0.058	-0.201	-3.207	0.001**
Employment Status	-0.158	0.061	-0.167	-2.588	0.010*
Family Structure	-0.097	0.049	-0.105	-1.982	0.048*
Perceived Stress (PSS)	0.293	0.072	0.302	4.069	0.000**
Anxiety (BAI)	0.241	0.065	0.258	3.708	0.000**
Depression (Self-Reported)	0.217	0.070	0.219	3.100	0.002**
Peer Influence	0.265	0.068	0.274	3.897	0.000**
Urban Lifestyle Exposure	0.179	0.059	0.192	3.034	0.003**
Model Summary	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-value	Sig. (p)
	0.826	0.682	0.673	75.23	0.000**

Dependent Variable: Level of Drug Addiction (measured by frequency and dependency index)
Note: $p < 0.05*$, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed significance)

Conversely, psychological factors as perceived stress ($\beta = 0.302$, $p = 0.000$), anxiety ($\beta = 0.258$, $p = 0.000$), and depression ($\beta = 0.219$, $p = 0.002$) demonstrate high positive relationships with drug addiction. These findings demonstrate the notable psychological load contributing to addiction. As Shah et al. (2019) discovered that mental health distress, especially stress and anxiety, were among the main instigators of addictive behaviors in Pakistani youth. There was also a positive correlation between peer influence ($\beta = 0.274$, $p = 0.000$) and urban lifestyle exposure ($\beta = 0.192$, $p = 0.003$) and addiction levels. The results align with Ahmed et al. (2023). and Ahmed et al. (2021), and (Farooq et al., 2022).

3.5. Assessing the Role of Peer Influence and Urban Lifestyle in Initiating and Maintaining Drug Addiction

Table 5 shows the findings of a multiple logistic regression indicate the overall model fit, as indicated by a Chi-square value of 127.93 ($p < 0.01$), and that the variables used are significant in predicting the probability of drug addiction among respondents. In addition, Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.584 indicates that the independent variables explain the change in addiction status, and the model is strong.

Peer influence is the most important and strongest predictor of youth drug addiction (B = 1.742, $p < 0.01$, Exp(B) = 5.70), which implies that those who were exposed to negative peer influence are almost 5.7 times more

likely to use drugs. This observation is consistent with those of Rehman and Zafar (2020) and UNODC (2022), which indicated that peer influence is the most dominant social factor contributing to drug addiction.

Table 5: Multiple Logistic Regression Model Assessing the Role of Peer Influence and Urban Lifestyle in Initiating and Maintaining Drug Addiction (N = 385)

Independent Variables	B (Coefficient)	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig. (p)	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
(Constant)	-2.184	0.611	12.764	1	0.000**	—
Peer Influence (High vs. Low)	1.742	0.413	17.797	1	0.000**	5.70
Urban Lifestyle Exposure	1.218	0.378	10.392	1	0.001**	3.38
Social Media Exposure	0.986	0.352	7.853	1	0.005**	2.68
Availability of Drugs in Community	0.793	0.331	5.753	1	0.016*	2.21
Family Monitoring (Low vs. High)	0.657	0.295	4.954	1	0.026*	1.93
Model Fit Statistics	−2 Log Likelihood	Cox & Snell R^2	Nagelkerke R^2	Chi-square	Sig. (p)	
	298.47	0.476	0.584	127.93	0.000**	

Dependent Variable: Drug Addiction (1 = Addicted, 0 = Non-Addicted)
Note: $p < 0.05$*, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed significance)

On the same note, exposure to urban lifestyle has a significant positive relationship with drug addiction (B = 1.218, p = 0.001, Exp(B) = 3.38). This implies that young individuals who are more exposed to modern lifestyles of big cities nightlife, and liberal social settings have higher chance of becoming addicted by 3.4 times. These results are in line with those provided by Yousaf et al. (2020). Another important factor is social media exposure (B = 0.986, p = 0.005, Exp(B) = 2.68), suggesting that digital platforms are highly instrumental in shaping perceptions, behaviors, and social validation of drug use. This finding aligns with the results of Khan et al. (2021). Further, the easy accessibility to drugs (B = 0.793, p = 0.016, Exp(B) = 2.21) and weak parental control (B = 0.657, p = 0.026, Exp (B) = 1.93) significantly predict drug addiction, and such results are consistent with the study of Mohammadullah et al. (2025).

4. CONCLUSION

Unemployment, poverty, and low parental education are found to be significant factors of drug abuse behaviour among youth. Further, psychological variables such as stress, anxiety and family conflicts were also found to be potent predictors. The correlation and regression models confirmed the high negative correlation between the socioeconomic status and psychological well-being. Effect of peer exposure, urban lifestyle and exposure to social media proved to be important social stimulants to initiate or restrain drug use. Such results help to emphasize the better employment and education opportunities for youth. Further, psychological counseling and rehab facilities should be accessible to youth. Above all, rules and regulations should be strengthened.

Declarations

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability: All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript.

Authors' Contributions: Madiha Liaqat conceived and designed the study, developed the research instruments, and supervised data collection, Urva Yousaf; interpreted the results, drafted the manuscript, and critically reviewed, Uzma Shafiq; Reviewing, editing and writing, Summayyah Shafique; performed data analysis, reviewing and editing

Generative AI Statement: The authors confirm that no generative artificial intelligence tools (including DeepSeek) were used in the writing or preparation of this manuscript.

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