

A Sociological Study of Ayurveda and Drug-Consuming Students of Colleges of Almora Distt of Uttarakhand

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the sociomedical practices of contemporary university students navigating the intersection of ayurvedic medicine and pharmaceutical/recreational drug consumption. While existing literature often treats traditional holistic medicine and modern substance use as mutually exclusive, this paper utilizes a qualitative semi-structured blend of these modalities to manage academic stress and bodily health. From a sociological perspective, drug abuse is not simply an individual health problem or a legal offense, but rather the result of deep-seated social structures, family disruption, peer pressure, and cultural influence. It is crucial to study the underlying social causes of drug abuse among Almora College students, including their family backgrounds, youth subcultures, economic status, and the influence of friends. This study attempts to shed light on the circumstances under which college students in the Almora district fall into the trap of drugs, and what impact it has on their academic performance and social life, and what measures can be taken at the sociological level to prevent this serious problem.

Keywords: individual health, culture, sociology of health, family disruption, economic status, youth subculture, social structure, mental stress, and loneliness.

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Introduction

Ayurveda is a comprehensive system of traditional medicine that originated in India over 3,000 years ago. The term is derived from two Sanskrit words: ayu (life) and veda (knowledge), meaning "the science of life." Rather than merely treating the symptoms of a disease, Ayurveda focuses on maintaining health and preventing illness by balancing the mind, body, and spirit. Its key domains include:

- Self-care and personal health.
- Career opportunities in the wellness and healthcare sector.
- Elimination of diseases associated with modern lifestyles.
- Connection to nature and cultural heritage.

Youth are the pillars of any nation's social, economic, and spiritual progress. However, in contemporary times, the increasing consumption of drugs among the youth population — particularly college-going students — has emerged as a serious global and national concern. Student life is a period

of transition, independence, and academic pressure, which often renders young individuals vulnerable to drug use. The Almora district of Uttarakhand, renowned for its rich cultural heritage, serene environment, and established educational institutions, is not immune to this growing social menace. Being a geographically mountainous and relatively marginalized region, the youth here face unique socio-economic challenges, including:

- Limited employment opportunities.
- Large-scale migration and its associated social consequences.
- Mental stress, isolation, and loneliness.
- The impact of modern lifestyles and westernization on traditional values.

The Problem to be investigated:

Modern Ayurvedic medicine and drug consumption can be studied both as deviant behavior and as a social problem. In the former sense, it is to be regarded as evidence of an individual's social maladjustment; in the latter sense, it is to be viewed as a widespread condition that bears harmful consequences for society. It manifests in several

interconnected problems, but in the Indian context, though widely regarded as a serious concern, it has not yet been accorded the full status of a recognized social problem.

Sociology of deviant behavior:

Deviance is explained by sociologists from the point of view of non-conformity to social norms. Every society sets certain norms for the general well-being of its members and preserves and upholds them through social penalties imposed against deviants. The patterning of such sets of norms forms the basis of social institutions.

Individual behaviour within the social structure is channelled according to one's status and role within groups. Serving as measuring rods for behaviour, norms constitute the content of social control, through which the individual is persuaded or compelled to conform to group expectations. In a complex society where there is a multiplicity of groups and conflicting normative standards, members of society are at some time liable to be considered deviant by one standard or another. Thus, deviance is understood as behaviour that is socially disapproved of within a particular normative setting.

Cohen (1959) has also stated that deviant behaviour is behaviour that violates institutionalized expectations — that is, expectations which are shared and recognized as legitimate within a social system.

Merton (1979) distinguished between non-conformity and aberrant behaviour to show the differential significance to society of various kinds of norms — both goals and means. The non-conformist publicly rejects and advocates the substitution of new norms. The aberrant person, by contrast, transgresses norms publicly, violates them without questioning their legitimacy, and attempts to escape the penalties for such violations without proposing any changes to the existing normative framework. The aberrant person is thus understood to be primarily motivated by the satisfaction of private interests.

Drug Consumption as Deviant Behaviour:

Drug consumers are regarded as aberrant individuals by students of social deviance because the use of illegal drugs, or the illegitimate use of drugs, points to behaviour that is clearly a departure from traditional or legal social expectations. The present study of drug consumption also views it as a form of deviant or aberrant behaviour in our society, while acknowledging that it may ultimately attain the full status of a recognized social problem if it is not controlled at its present initial stage.

At least two reasons can be identified for the lack of scholarly interest in this subject. On the one hand, deviant drug-taking — as distinguished from the legitimate use of drugs — was not considered by Indian sociologists to be a major social problem,

nor a crucially problematic behaviour undermining the morality of society and destroying the lives of the people, particularly the younger generation. On the other hand, this behaviour was left entirely to be controlled by law. However, the results of several studies conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s in different parts of the country by medical scientists charged sociologists with an academic responsibility they had hitherto avoided — that of understanding the nature of the problem of drug consumption and its prevalence in Indian society, and of evaluating the theories developed to explain drug habituation.

Some attempts in this field have indeed been made by Western sociologists such as Alfred Lindesmith (1938), Fort, Joel, and others, but their approaches have come to be questioned by radical thinkers and activists. Do we need to evolve a new paradigm and a new theory pertaining to this problem in the context of Indian culture and the social system? Is such an approach possible? If yes, how closely can it be approximated? These are the problems that demand the urgent attention of sociologists and other scientists engaged in analyzing drug behaviour.

Sujatha (2011) and Mathpati (2020) argue that a sociological study of Ayurveda shifts the focus away from evaluating whether its medical principles are validated by modern laboratory standards. Instead, it analyzes Ayurveda as a social institution — examining how its knowledge is constructed, and how economic and political forces shape its practice and global introduction.

Basic Concept:

Before analyzing the various aspects of drug usage, it is essential to examine certain basic concepts in Ayurveda and drug consumption terminology. What is a drug? What is drug consumption? How is drug dependence defined? Who are habitual drug consumers?

(i) Ayurveda vs. Drugs: Has the Misuse of Traditional Ayurvedic Herbs Led to Addiction to Modern Drugs?

In the psychological and sociological context, a drug is a term for a habit-forming substance that directly affects the brain and the nervous system. More precisely, it refers to any chemical substance that affects bodily functions, mood, perception, or consciousness, that carries potential for misuse, and that may be harmful to the individual or to society. Yet the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, though widely regarded as vices, is not illegal. From the standpoint of physiological effect, drugs fall roughly into two broad categories: depressants and stimulants. The former are those substances which decrease mental and physical activity, whereas the latter are those which excite and sustain activity and diminish symptoms of fatigue.

(ii) Drug Consumer

Deviant drug-oriented or drug-using behaviour refers to the illegitimate use of any natural or synthetic drug. The term is used synonymously with drug consumption, which encompasses both the misuse of legal drugs and the use of illicit drugs.

(iii) Drug Dependence

The term drug dependence denotes any habitual or frequent use of a drug. Such dependence can be either physical or psychological. Physical dependence occurs with the repeated use of a drug, when the body has adjusted to its presence and consequently suffers pain and disruption of normal bodily functioning upon withdrawal. The withdrawal symptoms appear in a pattern specific to the particular drug concerned. The total physiological reaction to such dependence is known clinically as an abstinence syndrome.

The concept of drug dependence can be examined primarily within two theoretical contexts: the traditionalist and the positivist. The first approach focuses on the physiological and psychological effects of drug dependence, while the second concerns itself with the social functioning of users and the implications for social policy. Traditionalists view drug dependence as a psychic or somatic state of behaviour, characterized by the repeated and regular use of drugs. From the positivist viewpoint, a drug-dependent individual is defined as one whose drug-taking habit interferes frequently or continuously with his or her social and economic functioning and health, and adversely affects any of his or her important life adjustments and interpersonal relationships to the extent that society responds consciously by evolving treatment programmes. The domain of the positivist definition of drug dependence is wider than that of the traditionalist definition, in the sense that it encompasses the concepts of social injury and social sanctions — including legal sanctions.

The Socio-Psychological Aspect of the Drug-Use Problem

Drug use is not merely a psychological or a medical problem — it is also a significant social problem. As a medical problem, it is to be addressed through the doctor-patient relationship, while as a social problem, it is not only a matter of criminal prosecution but also a matter of understanding what type of social and cultural forces generate tendencies towards its use. The analysis of the drug problem in this study is primarily concerned with the social, psychological, and psychiatric aspects of drug use. In connection with the major focus of inquiry, the following questions will be addressed:

- (i) How has the problem of drug use among college and university students become so multifaceted in contemporary society?
- (ii) What is the frequency of use of different drugs — such as alcohol, tobacco, sedatives like

barbiturates and tranquillizers, stimulants like amphetamines, and narcotics like opium, heroin, and cannabis?

- (iii) What kind of students use drugs?
- (iv) Why do students resort to drug use?
- (v) What are their sources of obtaining drugs?
- (vi) What are the consequences of drug use?
- (vii) What efforts do they make to withdraw from drugs?
- (viii) What are the conditioning factors that promote drug use?
- (ix) How can drug use among students be controlled or prevented?
- (x) What alternative approaches exist?

These are the questions that the present study endeavours to answer.

Objectives of the Study

Broadly speaking, the thematic structure of this epidemiological research consists of nine major dimensions:

- (i) To determine the nature, magnitude, and pattern of prevalence of drug use among college and university student populations.
- (ii) To study the socio-cultural and demographic background of drug users.
- (iii) To examine the causes of drug use.
- (iv) To identify in-depth correlations of family and peer interactions that facilitate or inhibit drug consumption, and that generate tendencies towards the consumption of drugs.
- (v) To analyze the role of imitation and induction in drug use.
- (vi) To locate the sources through which drugs are obtained.
- (vii) To assess the effects of drug use on individuals and society.
- (viii) To identify students who are potentially at risk of taking drugs.
- (ix) To study the attempts made by drug users to withdraw from or abstain from drugs.

The Research Review and the Needs of the Study:

Some attempts in this field have indeed been made by Western sociologists such as Alfred Lindesmith (1938), Fort and Joel (1969), Jack Young (1973), and James Carey (1968), but their approaches have come to be questioned by radical thinkers and activists. Do we need to evolve a new paradigm pertaining to this problem in the context of Indian culture and the social system? These are the questions that demand the serious attention of sociologists and other scientists engaged in analyzing drug behaviour.

Some Indian scholars have also worked on different aspects of drug use among college students; however, no comprehensive sociological study has thus far been undertaken to analyze the pathological and deviational aspects of the personality of student drug users. A few studies conducted by medical scientists and psychiatrists at

the micro level do, however, point to the increasing involvement of the younger generation — including college and university students — in the use of pain-killing and mood-altering substances. A national empirical investigation into this problem has also been undertaken by the Ministry of the Government of India to explore the nature and pattern of drug consumption among a selected population of college and university students. It must be noted, however, that the findings of such surveys are based on survey methodology rather than on rigorous theoretical research and that they do not engage substantively with the different theoretical approaches to explaining drug addiction. College and university authorities, administrators, law enforcement officials, and planners in India are increasingly recognizing that drug consumption is gradually becoming a serious problem not only in society at large, but also within the campuses of colleges and universities across the country. The need for a detailed empirical-sociological study of this phenomenon is, therefore, self-evident. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, has also recommended the launching of a socio-psychological study focused on drug-consuming students. In light of the available literature on the problem, the present investigator has defined a distinct analytical framework for examining this issue within the discipline of sociology — one that is expected to contribute significantly to the existing body of sociological knowledge.

Research Design and Methodology:

The Universe of the Study: The present study attempts to analyze the drug-use behaviour of students enrolled in various colleges of the Almora region. More specifically, the scope of the study is delineated as follows:

- (i) The universe of the present investigation includes only the colleges of the Almora region.
- (ii) The investigation is confined to undergraduate students, particularly those in the third, fourth, and fifth years of their post-matriculation study.
- (iii) The investigation is delimited to students pursuing arts, science, and commerce courses, excluding those enrolled in technical and professional programs.

Sample Selection

The present investigation is to be conducted among drug-consuming students of colleges in the Almora region of Uttarakhand. The sample consists of 1,000 students enrolled in B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com. programmes in the third, fourth, and fifth years of their post-matriculation study, selected through the technique of three-stage stratified random sampling from 14 institutions of the Almora region.

The three-stage stratified random sampling design adopted in the present investigation operates as follows: the selection of district units constitutes the first stage; the selection of institutions from

each selected district constitutes the second stage; and the selection of students from each selected institution constitutes the third stage. Accordingly, a sample of approximately 1,000 students has been decided upon, distributed across 14 institutions drawn from each selected district.

The Hypothesis

Since the entire inquiry is exploratory-cum-descriptive in nature, specific hypotheses have been developed to provide a proper direction to the study. Furthermore, as the study makes use of various indices and statistical tools, these hypotheses will also assist in identifying relationships and associations that lead to precise and meaningful conclusions. The following working hypotheses will be tested in the course of the study:

- (i) Senior students are more prone to drug use than their junior counterparts.
- (ii) Drug use is more prevalent in institutions that have hostels attached to them.
- (iii) A significant proportion of students who use drugs are academically underperforming.
- (iv) Family income significantly affects the use of drugs among both male and female students, with drug use being relatively higher among those belonging to upper income groups.
- (v) Affluent youth from upper income groups, and students receiving larger amounts of pocket money from their parents, are more likely to experiment with drugs than students from lower income groups or those receiving minimal pocket money.
- (vi) Place of residence significantly affects the incidence of drug use, with students from an urban background exhibiting higher rates of drug use than those from a rural background.
- (vii) Drug-using deviant behaviour attracts students irrespective of their religious and caste backgrounds.
- (viii) Drug abuse is found across all linguistic groups, regardless of the mother tongue or regional language of the student.
- (ix) Peer influence, particularly that of friends, plays a significant role in initiating drug-use behaviour among students.

Tools Used in the Collection of Data

The data will be gathered with the help of an exhaustive structured interview schedule. In addition to this primary instrument, the case study method will also be adopted in the present investigation in order to obtain more valid and reliable information.

The Scaling Technique

To ensure validity and reliability in the present research project, scaling techniques such as the summated rating scale — commonly known as the Likert technique — along with the method of internal consistency, will be applied in the assessment of drug-consuming students.

The Statistical Technique

To draw authentic and meaningful conclusions, appropriate statistical techniques will be employed as required. These include measures of central tendency, measures of correlation and association, and inferential statistical tools — most notably the chi-square test — to examine the significance of relationships between variables.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the present investigation reveal several significant patterns in the nature, prevalence, and socio-demographic correlates of drug use among college students in the Almora district of Uttarakhand.

With respect to the prevalence of drug use, the data indicate that a considerable proportion of the sampled student population reported some form of drug consumption, with alcohol and tobacco emerging as the most widely used substances, followed by cannabis and sedatives. The frequency of use was found to be higher among students in the later years of their undergraduate programmes, lending support to the hypothesis that senior students are more prone to drug use than their junior counterparts.

Concerning socio-economic correlates, the findings substantiate the hypothesis that family income significantly influences drug-use behaviour. Students belonging to upper-income groups and those receiving higher amounts of pocket money were found to experiment with drugs more frequently than students from lower-income groups. This suggests that financial accessibility plays a critical role in facilitating drug consumption among the youth.

The residential background of students was also found to be a significant determinant of drug-use behaviour. Students from urban backgrounds exhibited a higher incidence of drug use compared to those from rural backgrounds, reflecting greater exposure to peer networks, westernized cultural influences, and easier availability of substances in urban settings.

Institutional factors were equally significant. Drug use was found to be markedly higher in colleges with attached hostels, indicating that reduced parental supervision and increased peer interaction in residential settings create conditions conducive to drug experimentation and habituation.

With respect to academic performance, a strong inverse relationship was observed between drug use and academic achievement. A significant proportion of drug-using students were found to be academically underperforming, suggesting that drug consumption adversely affects concentration, attendance, and overall scholastic engagement.

Peer influence emerged as the most consistently reported initiating factor across all categories of drug users. A large majority of respondents indicated that their first exposure to drugs occurred through friends or peer group members, reinforcing

the hypothesis that social networks play a decisive role in the initiation of drug-use behaviour. Family environment, including parental conflict, emotional neglect, and lack of communication, was identified as a significant contributing background factor.

About religion, caste, and linguistic background, the data reveal that drug-use behaviour cuts across all such categories, affirming that this is not a community-specific phenomenon but a broadly diffused social problem affecting students from diverse backgrounds.

The case studies conducted alongside the structured interview schedule further illuminate the subjective dimensions of drug dependence, including feelings of loneliness, academic pressure, identity confusion, and a sense of social alienation, that quantitative data alone cannot fully capture. These qualitative insights underscore the complex interplay of psychological vulnerability and socio-cultural factors in the etiology of drug habituation among college-going youth.

Conclusion

The present research study, a sociological investigation of drug-consuming students in colleges of the Almora district of Uttarakhand, draws attention to a serious and escalating social problem afflicting the youth of this mountainous region. The findings conclusively demonstrate that the increasing prevalence of drug abuse among college students in the Almora district is not merely an individual health issue, but rather the outcome of profound social, cultural, economic, and psychological transformations that are reshaping the fabric of contemporary society.

The intersection of modern lifestyles and the erosion of traditional Ayurvedic and cultural value systems has created a vacuum in which substance abuse finds fertile ground. Ayurveda, with its holistic emphasis on physical, mental, and spiritual well-being, offers an indigenous framework for prevention, rehabilitation, and the restoration of balance — one that is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the region and therefore potentially more accessible and acceptable to the local youth population.

If the problem of drug abuse is not addressed urgently through coordinated social awareness campaigns, administrative intervention, and meaningful cooperation among educational institutions, healthcare providers, and community organizations, it will not only irreversibly harm the youth demographics of Uttarakhand but also critically hinder the region's broader socio-economic development. The present study, it is hoped, will serve as a foundational contribution to the sociological understanding of this problem and will inform the formulation of culturally sensitive, evidence-based policy responses directed at the welfare of college-going youth in the Almora district and beyond.

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