



Escaping Reality: Why Today's Youth Are Turning to Drugs

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Date of Submission: 28-04-2025

Date of Acceptance: 07-05-2025

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a troubling increase in drug use among young people. Many people think it's just about seeking thrills or giving in to peer pressure, but a closer look suggests that a lot of youth are turning to drugs as a way to escape their reality. Faced with overwhelming emotions from school stress, family issues, identity confusion, and past traumas, they often seek temporary relief through substances. Unfortunately, the lack of coping skills and emotional support can make matters worse. Many young people fall for common myths like "it's just for fun" or "everyone's doing it," often fueled by the portrayal of drug use in social media and pop culture. Certain groups are at a higher risk, such as those from unstable family backgrounds, LGBTQ+ individuals who face discrimination, and students under intense pressure. Society contributes significantly to this issue, as inadequate mental health education, poor communication between parents and children, and easy access to drugs exacerbate the problem. To address this crisis, we need to promote mental health awareness, build strong support systems, and implement drug education and emotional resilience programs in schools. Encouraging therapy, creative outlets, and youth-led support groups can greatly help. Ultimately, young people need more than just rules—they need compassion and understanding. By tackling the emotional issues at the root of this crisis, we can approach this growing problem with both empathy and action.

I. Introduction

The brains of young people continue developing until their mid-20s, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which governs decision-making, self-control, and planning. This means that during their teenage years and early adulthood, young people are still learning to manage their emotions, control their impulses, and make responsible choices. Using drugs during this critical

developmental phase can hinder brain growth and negatively impact future functioning. Early drug use can cloud their ability to think clearly, solve problems, or make safe choices, potentially leading to risky behaviours such as unprotected sex, reckless driving, or even legal troubles. Studies indicate that the sooner someone starts using drugs, the more likely they are to struggle with addiction later in life, which can spiral into serious issues like dropping out of school, losing jobs, or encountering relationship difficulties. Additionally, drug use can lead to long-term health problems, including heart disease, liver damage, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. It can even compromise the immune system, making it harder for the body to fend off illness. In some instances, drug use can heighten the risk of developing mental health disorders or worsen existing ones. Overall, drug use at a young age can have profound and lasting impacts on an individual's brain, body, and future.

In a recent conversation with a young man pursuing his master's degree, he reflected on how his journey with drugs began in the seventh grade, initially influenced by an older boy he admired. What started as curiosity and a need to fit in quickly evolved into a desire to experiment further. He shared that feelings of loneliness were significant—often feeling unloved and emotionally neglected, he sought comfort in substances. His experience isn't isolated; many young people face similar challenges—emotional neglect, peer pressure, fractured family dynamics, academic stress, and the pressure to gain acceptance or appear "cool" among their peers. In these vulnerable moments, drugs may appear to offer a quick escape from emotional pain, but in reality, they only create more problems. Rather than healing, drugs can foster dependence, exacerbate mental health issues, and cause long-term damage to both the mind and body. What young people truly need is understanding, emotional support, proper guidance, and safe spaces where they can express themselves without fear of



judgment. Healthy coping strategies—like talking to someone, exploring creative hobbies, engaging in sports, or participating in support groups—can make a significant difference. It's essential to acknowledge that everyone's pain is valid, but drugs are never the answer. Through awareness, empathy, and early interventions, we can protect many young lives and guide them toward a brighter future.

Research Objective

The aim of this study is to investigate the psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to drug use among young people, focusing on issues like early exposure, emotional neglect, peer pressure, and mental health challenges. The research will delve into how drug use affects brain development, behaviour, physical health, and long-term well-being among youth. Additionally, the study will seek to identify early warning signs of substance abuse and evaluate effective prevention strategies that involve families, schools, and communities to minimise the risk of drug use and encourage healthier coping mechanisms among adolescents and young adults.

II. Literature Review

There are numerous reasons why a young person might begin using drugs. For some, it's about fitting in with friends who already use, while others seek relief from stress, sadness, or anxiety. Some try drugs simply for the thrill or out of curiosity, and others might use them to improve their performance in school or sports. Certain individuals are more at risk, particularly those who have faced difficult experiences during childhood, such as abuse or trauma. Genetic factors, prenatal exposure to drugs, or growing up without adequate support can also increase vulnerability. Spending time with friends who use drugs can further heighten this risk.

If a young person has a drug problem, there are certain signs to watch for. Changes in friendships, spending excessive time alone, losing interest in hobbies, neglecting personal hygiene, and exhibiting fatigue or sadness can all be indicators. Their mood may fluctuate rapidly, swinging from high energy to confusion. They might begin skipping school, lying, stealing, or struggling with family and friend relationships. Difficulty focusing, memory lapses, or slurred speech can also signal issues. Being aware of these early signs can help ensure they get the support they need.

Preventing drug use among youth is achievable, and it starts with care, support, and open dialogue. When families, schools, communities, and even media collaborate, they can help young people grasp the risks associated with drug use and make healthier choices. One of the most effective preventive measures is fostering open conversations with children and teens. When they feel heard and understood, they're more likely to share their thoughts and feelings. Parents and caregivers can also play a pivotal role by encouraging their children, recognising their efforts, and helping them build self-esteem. This supportive environment helps young people feel valued and less inclined to turn to drugs. Teaching kids how to navigate problems calmly and make sound decisions is crucial, and establishing clear rules and boundaries shows children that their safety is a priority. Providing supervision—knowing where kids are, what they're doing, and who they're with—can help identify early signs of trouble. Building relationships with their friends is also beneficial, as friends can significantly influence choices. With love, guidance, and attention, we can protect young people from making harmful decisions, allowing them to grow up feeling supported, secure, and confident.

III. Methodology

This research employs a comprehensive approach to gain insights into community drug use, focusing on key aspects like assessing the extent of the issue, evaluating treatment programs, and reviewing drug education initiatives. Data is gathered from various sources, including police reports, treatment program records, and surveys. These sources shed light on the incidence and prevalence of drug use, abuse, and addiction within different communities. The study thoroughly examines the strengths and weaknesses of each data source. For instance, while police records provide extensive information, they may not capture the full scope of the problem, as not all incidents are reported. Treatment program records contain rich data on recovery outcomes but may be limited by inconsistencies in patient follow-ups and a lack of standardised measures.

When evaluating drug treatment programs, the research identifies key challenges, such as ambiguous evaluative findings, disagreements on treatment goals, and issues in obtaining reliable



data. Difficulties in patient follow-up further complicate the assessment of treatment effectiveness. To address these challenges, it is recommended that future evaluations employ systematic, empirical methods, emphasising quasi-experimental research designs when true experimental methods aren't feasible. This approach can provide a more accurate assessment of treatment effectiveness and offer timely feedback to program administrators and staff.

Moreover, the research underscores the limitations of current drug education evaluation studies, which often fail to adequately assess the long-term effectiveness of programs. It highlights the importance of large-scale, controlled longitudinal studies that evaluate the long-term impacts of programs, as well as smaller experimental studies that investigate which elements of successful drug education programs contribute most to achieving desired outcomes.

IV. Research Overview

This research delves into three main areas: the extent of the drug issue within the community, the success of various treatment programs, and the assessment of drug education efforts. By looking at police reports, data from treatment facilities, and feedback from community surveys, the study aims to uncover how widespread drug use and abuse really are and the patterns that emerge. While these sources of information are certainly helpful, they do have their drawbacks, including inconsistent data reporting and issues with following up on patients.

When it comes to assessing drug treatment programs, the research highlights the importance of having clear goals, standardised measures of success, and dependable ways to track results. It points out several hurdles, like the lack of agreement on what it really means for a treatment to be considered "successful." To tackle this, the study recommends using quasi-experimental designs, especially in situations where randomised controlled trials are not an option. This approach could provide a better understanding of how effective treatments are and help improve future programs.

In contrast, drug education initiatives are facing their own set of research gaps that need to be filled. The study suggests that conducting large-scale longitudinal studies would be beneficial for understanding the long-term effects of these

programs, as well as smaller experimental projects to fine-tune different components. The objective is to pinpoint the most impactful elements of drug education to inform future strategies. This combined strategy will equip communities with the insights needed to combat drug abuse more effectively.

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