

## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

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### ABSTRACT

Post COVID-19, there have been rising concerns regarding mental health issues and substance abuse in youth. Present research aims to understand attitudes, patterns, and reasons for substance consumption among youth in Pune City. Using a stratified sampling method covering the geographical areas, data was collected from 1197 youth using a survey questionnaire measuring attitude, consumption patterns, and reasons for consumption as well as non-consumption. Significant attitudinal differences across gender ( $t=3.40$ ;  $p<.01$ ), family type ( $t=5.63$ ;  $p<.01$ ), and annual family income ( $F=10.37$ ,  $p<.01$ ) were noted. Also, a significant relationship was found between substance consumption and gender ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $n=1185$ ) = 26.25,  $p<.001$ ), and parents' working status ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $N=1173$ ) = 16.77,  $p<.001$ ), and annual family income ( $\chi^2$  (1,  $N=1179$ ) = 19.64,  $p<.001$ ). With 60% of the sample reporting to have consumed a substance in their life, the most prominent reasons for the consumption of substances were for enjoyment, social celebration, and relaxation. On the other hand, the most prominent reasons for non-consumption were for good health and secondly to feel energetic. Thus, the report reflects on the changing societal value system and highlights the need for primary and secondary prevention.

**Keywords:** *Substance Use, Youth, Attitude towards drugs, Alcohol, Nicotine*

Substance abuse is a global health concern because of its adverse effect on physical, mental and social wellbeing. According to the WHO (2018), the global mortality burden as well as the DALYs (Disability-Adjusted Life Years) burden of alcohol abuse in 2016 was approximately 5%. According to the World Drug Report (2022), the prevalence of people who use drugs was approximately 6%, while the prevalence for drug use disorder was less than 1%. The Government survey on Substance use in India, shows 14.6% of population consumes alcohol while 3% of population consumes narcotics/ drugs (Ambekar et al., 2019). The state of Maharashtra is among the top five states on high prevalence rate alcohol use which is 10% while that for different narcotics is approximately 0.5% (Ambekar et al., 2019).

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Youth is the most prevalent population that is engaged in substance use and abuse behaviour. Especially various epidemiological surveys with youths shows that prevalence of substance use is 52.7% among students belonging to age group 19 to 21 years (Baba et al. 2013). A survey with students shows prevalence of alcohol and tobacco use among undergraduates is 16.6%, 8.0% respectively, whereas for postgraduates its prevalence is 31.5%, and 14.5%, respectively (Goel et al. 2015). Even medical students show high prevalence, where 31.3% are regular users with higher prevalence among urban youths as compared to rural youths (Sahu, Bhati, & Sarkar, 2022). Also, In the urban set up of India, the evolution of corporate culture, western-style Malls, restaurants, bars and pubs are attracting youths to hang-out and use substance (Gururaj et al. 2021).

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown contributed to an increase in alcohol related emergencies such as withdrawal, methanol toxicity and related suicides at the global level. The review by Murthy and Narasimha (2021) noted an increase in alcohol consumption during lockdown as compared to pre-lockdown, especially in binge drinking and solitary drinking, in countries which did not ban sale of alcohol during the pandemic. There is ample evidence indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted mental health of youth and adolescents (Elharake et al., 2022; Kumar & Nayar, 2021; Liang et al., 2020; Loiwal, 2020; Panchal et al., 2023). A review of impact of pandemics on mental health conducted by Meherali et al (2021) noted that epidemics/pandemics caused worry, stress, helplessness among children and adolescents as well as an increase in risky behaviours such as substance abuse, suicide, academic and relationship issues, etc.

This highlights the fact that youths in the urban setup form a vulnerable population for drug and alcohol use and abuse. This use and abuse of substances such as alcohol and narcotics in youth is issue of concern as it as it leads to poorer performance in academics (del Carmen Pérez-Fuentes et al., 2021; Vorster et al., 2019), can be a serious threat to health (Agarwal et al., 2017; Rehm, 2011; Stein, 1999), lead to psychosocial issues, poor work performance (Ammerman et al., 1999; Spicer & Miller, 2016) and mental health problems (Connor et al., 2016; Dickey et al., 2002). So, considering these changing trends and vulnerabilities current survey is aimed at understanding the use and abuse patterns of substances among Pune city youths as well as the perceptions of youths about substance use.

### *Objective*

- To study the attitude of urban youths toward the consumption of substance.
- To study the pattern of consumption of substances among urban youths.
- To study the perception of urban youths behind consumption or non-consumption of substances.
- To study consumption patterns in relation to attitude, perception, and demographic factors.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

### *Research design*

Survey type

### *Measures*

A survey questionnaire consisting of three parts was developed for data collection. After obtaining informed consent of the participants before beginning the survey, pertinent socio-

## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

demographic details of participants were sought. Part I measured attitudes toward substance consumption, Part II measured the status and pattern of consumption, and Part III measured reasons for substance consumption or avoiding consumption.

### *Part I*

It consisted of 10 items measuring participants' attitudes toward substance consumption. The tool developed was based on the Attitude towards Substance Use Scale by Nanda & Verma (2017). Responses were given on a five-point Likert-type scale. A total attitude score was obtained where a high score indicates a positive attitude towards consuming substances, and a low score indicates a negative attitude towards consuming substances. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the current sample was .812.

### *Part II*

This part consisted of questions asking the respondents if they consumed substances under three categories and the frequency of consumption. The three categories were 1. Tobacco 2. Alcohol 3. Other substances (e.g., weed, cocaine, marijuana, opium, Hashish, Heroin). Consumption frequency was noted as never used, tried once, occasionally used, once a month, once a week, and daily.

### *Part III*

This part explored the reasons behind consumption or avoidance of consumption. The reason behind consumption consisted of a checklist of seven items. In contrast, reasons to avoid consumption included a checklist of four reasons. This part also included one question about whether the participant feels the need to get rid of the consumption pattern.

Thus, a total 17-item questionnaire was used for conducting the survey. The content validity of the survey was checked by the experts.

### *Sample*

A stratified sampling method was used to collect data. A total of 35 parts of Pune City representing east, west, north, south, and middle regions of Pune City were selected. And youths residing in respective regions were included in the study. The age range of the participants was from 18-25. A total of 1197 participants responded to the questionnaire. The description of the sample is given in Table 1. Sixty students from Sir Parashurambhau College (Pune) were trained for the data collection process. These student volunteers approached different parts of Pune city and collected data from youths residing in that area on a one-to-one basis. Following is the description of the sample.

*Table 1 Sample description*

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Sample %</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sample %</b>
<b>Student</b>	66%	Female	37.1%
<b>Service</b>	19%	Male	62.5%
<b>Business</b>	7%	Other	0.34%
<b>Agriculture</b>	1%	<b>Family type</b>	
<b>Other</b>	2%	Nuclear family	65%
<b>Unemployed</b>	4%	Joint family	34%
<b>Education</b>		Orphan	1%
<b>Uneducated</b>	1%	<b>Annual Family Income</b>	
<b>Below 12<sup>th</sup></b>	9%	less than 1 lakh	23%

## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

Occupation	Sample %	Gender	Sample %
Undergraduate	37%	below 3 lakhs to 1 lakh	21%
Graduate	40%	3 lakhs to 5 lakhs	28%
Postgraduate	13%	5 lakhs to 10 lakhs	20%
Parent working status		above 10 lakhs	8%
Both parents working	38%		
Single Parent working	62%		

## RESULTS

### *Attitude toward substance consumption*

The ten-item scale was used to measure attitude towards consumption. Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis. Also, the percentage analysis is done for each item as shown in table 2. Though the data is on a five-point scale, *agree* and *totally agree* as well as *disagree* and *totally disagree* responses were clubbed together to get a vivid picture of youths' attitudes.

**Table 2: Percentage of agreement and disagreement on attitude items (N=1197)**

Attitude toward consumption	%Agreement	% Disagreement
Drinking/ smoking is not good in any case	23%	63%
There is no harm in drinking/ smoking on special occasions	51%	31%
Drinking is acceptable until we do not create a nuisance.	33%	49%
Drinking is not bad, excessive drinking is bad.	50%	39%
Drinking is a status symbol.	17%	71%
If my parents drink, there is no harm in me drinking too.	17%	78%
If one can afford it, there is no harm in drinking.	21%	64%
Drugs act as a stimulant in sexual activity.	28%	34%
Drinking does not lead to any health or social issues.	14%	78%
To enjoy life, one should party hard.	45%	42%

Table 2 shows that the majority of youths do not perceive smoking and drinking as bad, especially if it is not creating a nuisance. They enjoy it on special occasions. They are not perceiving smoking and drinking as a status symbol, or as a behaviour that is associated with affordability. However, the majority show an understanding of the health and social effects of consumption. Parental behaviour of drinking is not considered a factor to allow one to consume smoking and drinking by most youths. But an equal percentage of youths' part on this perception reveals that substance consumption is an essential part of enjoying life.

### **Attitudinal differences across sociodemographic variables**

Attitudinal differences across gender, family type, parental working status, and annual family income were analysed.

## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

### *Attitude toward substance consumption across gender*

A significant difference in attitude between males (n=743) and females (n=442) was found ( $t=3.40$ ;  $p<.01$ ) with males (mean=25.83) scoring significantly higher than females (24.24) with low effect size (Cohen's  $d= .20$ ).

### *Attitude towards substance consumption across family type*

Participants belonging to the joint family (n=410) have a significantly higher score (mean=26.95) on positive attitudes towards drugs and alcohol use than those belonging to nuclear families (n=773; Mean=24.28) with low effect size ( $t=5.63$ ;  $p<.01$ ; Cohen's  $d=.35$ ).

### *Attitude toward substance consumption across annual family income*

There is a significant difference in attitude towards substance consumption across annual family income. Post hoc comparisons showed that the income range group having "5 to 10 lakhs" had significantly lower attitudinal scores than the income range group "below 1 lakh", "1 to 3 lakhs," and "above 10 lakhs". Annual family income below three lakhs is indicative of poor class, between 3-5 lakhs is indicative of lower middle class, 5-10 lakhs is indicative of middle class, and above 10 lakhs is indicative of upper-middle class. Thus, it shows that the middle class has a significantly low positive attitude toward substance consumption.

**Table 3 Attitude toward substance consumption across annual family income**

Family income	N	Mean	SD	F
below 1 lakh	269	26.36	6.99	
1 to 3 lakhs	242	26.86	7.01	
3 to 5 lakhs	335	24.65	8.41	10.37**
5 to 10 lakhs	234	22.92	8.31	
above 10 lakhs	99	26.37	7.37	

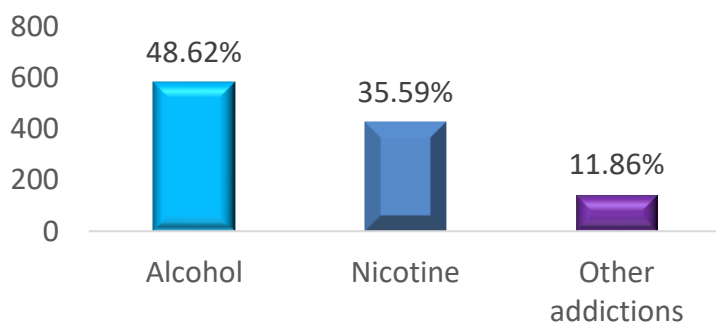
\*\*  $p<.01$

No significant difference in attitude towards substance consumption was found across parental working status, that is both parents working versus single parent working.

### *Patterns of substance consumption*

This part consists of the type of substance consumption and its frequency. It included mainly three categories 1. Tobacco 2. Alcohol 3. Other substances (e.g., weed, cocaine, marijuana, opium, Hashish, Heroin). Out of the total sample, 59% reported that they have consumed either of substances in their life, whereas 41% reported that they have not consumed any substance so far.

**Figure 1 Types of Consumption by Youths (N= 1197)**



## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

**Figure 2: Frequency of substance consumption by youths (N=1198)**

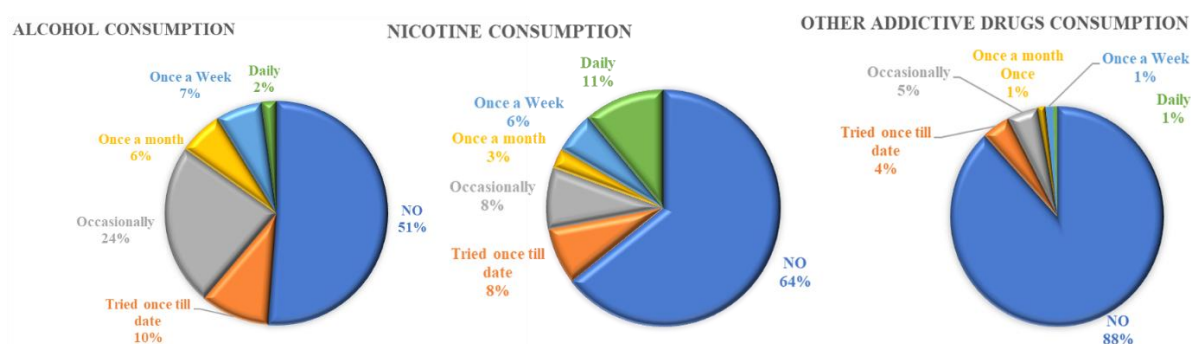


Figure 1. shows that the percentage of youths consuming alcohol is the highest among all substances. Figure 2 indicates the pattern or frequency of consumption of three category substances. It shows that 37% consume alcohol occasionally to once a week whereas 2% of the total sample consumes it daily. And 51% have not consumed it at all. For the 'nicotine category', 18% use nicotine occasionally to once a week and 11% consume it daily. Whereas 64% have not consumed nicotine at all. For the 'other substance' categories 7% consume it occasionally to once a week whereas less than 1% consume other addictive substances daily.

### Consumption patterns across demographic variables

This analysis is done based on the question in Part II, 'I consume drinks/ substances' which is responded as yes or no by participants. A total of 1185 participants of the 1197 responded to this question.

#### Comparison of substance consumption across gender

Chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between substance consumption and gender which was found to be significant,  $\chi^2 (1, n=1185) = 26.25, p<.001$ . Thus, a significantly higher no of males (64.5%) consumes substances as compared to females (49.3%).

#### Comparison of substance consumption across parents' working status

Chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between substance consumption and parents' working status, which was found to be significant,  $\chi^2 (1, N=1185) = 16.77, p<.001$ . Thus, a significantly higher no of youths whose both parents are working (66.5%) consume substances than youths whose single parent is working (54.4%).

#### Comparison of substance consumption across family income

Chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relationship between substance consumption and family income was found to be significant,  $\chi^2 (1, N=1185) = 19.64, p<.001$ . The highest percentage of consumption, 71.7.% is evident above the 10-lakh income group, which indicates the upper-middle class and above. And consecutively proportion of youth engaging in substance consumption is decreasing in '5 to 10 lakhs', '3 to 5 lakhs', and '1 to 3 lakhs' income groups (67.5%,57.6%, and 52.1% respectively). Thus, as there is an increase in income, more youths are engaged in substance consumption.

## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

However, no significant difference across ‘family type’ in relation to substance consumption is evident.

### Attitude toward substance consumption across reported consumption

Youths who reported consuming substances (n =703) showed significantly higher positive attitudes toward substances ( $t=14.11$ ;  $p<.01$ ) than the group who reported ‘not consuming substances’ (n=494)’.

### Perception for consumption and non-consumption of substance

This part explores the perception of youths behind consumption and non-consumption of substances. It includes a checklist of seven items that focuses on reasons for consumption and a checklist of four items that focuses on reasons for nonconsumption. This part also includes one question about whether the subject needs to get rid of the consumption pattern.

**Figure 3: Reasons for substance consumption**

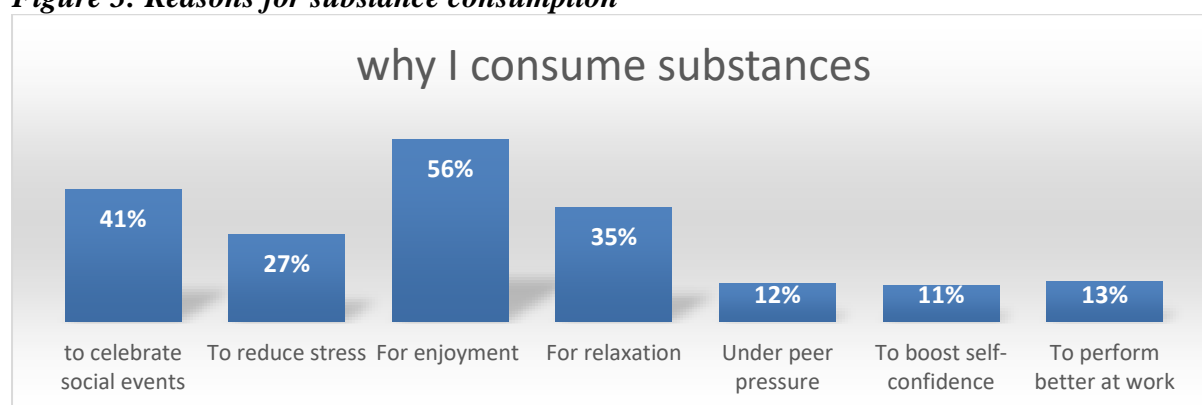
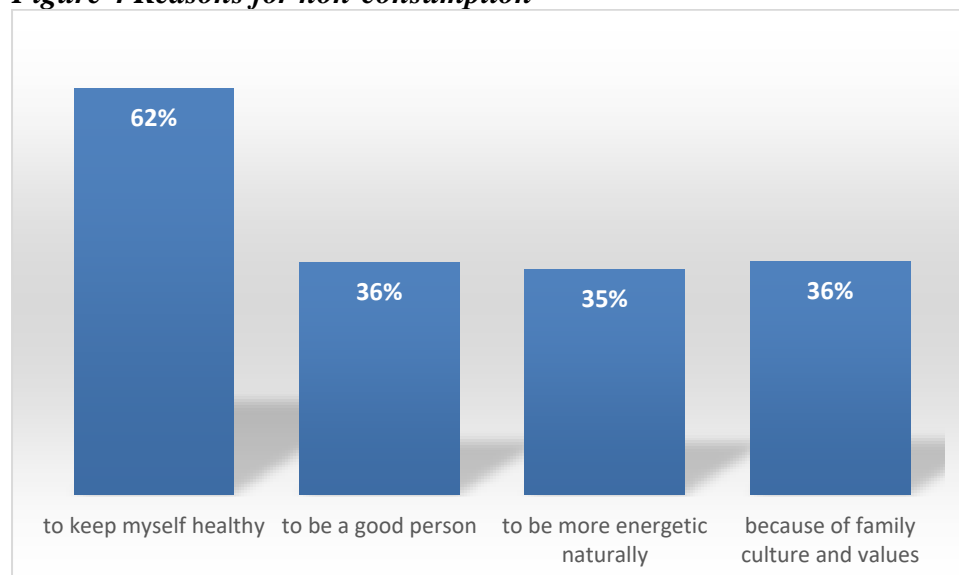


Figure 3 shows that the most prominent reason for the consumption of substances is for enjoyment, social celebration, and relaxation. But a small percentage admit the consumption of substances under peer pressure, for confidence boosting, to improve performance, and reduce stress. Among those who consume the substance, 43% communicated the need to get rid of their consumption pattern.

**Figure 4 Reasons for non-consumption**



## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

The survey also tried to explore the perception of youth who do not consume any substance. Figure 4 shows that the most prominent reason for non-consumption is for good health and secondly to feel energetic. Whereas a moderate percentage of youths have admitted family, cultural values, and personal value that is 'to be a good person'.

### DISCUSSION

The use of psychoactive substances among youths is an issue of national importance as it could be a serious threat to health, academics, work productivity, relationships, finance, and psychosocial issues that can impede the overall progress of society. Youths from different parts of India are migrating to metro cities like Pune for education and job opportunities. As Pune city has been recognized as an IT and educational hub in India, the city is a preferred destination for the youth. It is evident that in the last few years, there has been an increase in Bars and the development of Pub culture in metro cities (Ahemad, Jain, & George 2021). Pune is also one of them. Also, the three years of COVID pandemic have left a lot of impact in terms of academic challenges, and work-related issues, leading to increased vulnerability of mental health among youths (Elharake et al., 2022; Kumar, & Nayar, 2021; Loiwal, 2020; Panchal et al., 2023). On this backdrop, this study tries to explore Pune youths' attitudes and perceptions about substance consumption and their consumption behaviour patterns.

The result shows that with regard to the attitude of the young generation towards substance consumption, there is a major shift in the attitude towards substances from being 'not acceptable' to an 'acceptable' one. More than 60% of the respondents felt that it was okay to drink or smoke. 50% of the respondents believe that drinking is not bad, but excessive drinking is bad. 51% also believed there is no harm in drinking/smoking on 'special occasions'. Thus, attitude towards consumption shows that occasional drinking and smoking is widely accepted by youths and not considered as bad (Divya et al., 2018). In Indian culture, traditionally abstinence from substance consumption is highly valued by family, religion, and society (Murthy, 2015). But results indicate that once 'socially unacceptable' things are increasingly becoming 'socially acceptable'. The result also elaborates that the main reason to engage in substance use is for enjoyment, relaxation, and celebrating events (Ahemad et al., 2021). This indicates a hedonistic value shift and has its reflection on lifestyle. The enjoyment-seeking is the prime reason for consuming substances that supersede other reasons such as boosting self-esteem, peer influence, work performance, etc. A large chunk of this survey sample is that of students who are not yet earning and therefore, this changing trend among them is a matter of concern as substance consumption is an important predictor of impairment in academic performance (Mekonen et al., 2017).

It follows that once the basic attitude and values toward the consumption of substances become 'socially acceptable', the consumption pattern will also show an upward trend (Aggarwal et al., 2012). This is also evident in the survey which shows that 59% of youths are substance users versus 41% non-users.

The consumption patterns show the majority of youths are occasional consumers of the substance. Also consistent with national and international surveys, alcohol is the most widely used substance, followed by tobacco among youths. (National survey, 2021). But when it comes to daily consumption, tobacco users are more in percentage which is 11% as compared to alcohol (2%) and other substances (less than 1%). So, these youths could be probable problematic users. Though the majority are occasional consumers and might not display problematic use at this stage, the trend indicates that a positive attitude towards



## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

consumption, hedonistic values, and use of the substance as a stress buster might over the period show a rising trend leading to problematic use.

Previous literature shows that substance consumption behaviour is influenced by demographic factors such as gender (Baba et al., 2013; Goel et al., 2015), socio-economic factors (Boogar et al., 2014) and family variables (Barrett, & Turner, 2006). Though the current study highlights the gender difference where boys show a more favourable attitude towards consumption than girls, but the effect size of the difference (Cohen's  $d = .02$ ) indicates that the difference is not much. Previous Indian studies show girls believe in more negative outcomes of substances and have unfavourable attitudes (Kirmani & Suman, 2010). But the changing trend shows that this difference is diminishing and there is an increased number of girls showing a positive attitude toward consumption. This indicates a change in understanding of substance use as a cool practice of freedom, individualism, and equality by urban young girls (Murdeswar et al., 2019). These attitudinal changes are also reflected in consumption behaviour across genders, which shows that even though gender differences exist, this difference is reducing leading to an increase in the number of female youths engaged in consumption behaviour.

The survey also shows that different variables related to family are associated with substance use dynamics. Joint family youths show a more favourable attitude towards substance though they do not differ in consumption. Joint families are characterized by authoritarian practices and demand traditional values and a set of rules to be followed by the members (Mathur, 2018) Expressing a more favourable attitude towards substances by joint family youths could be an indication of demand for their privacy and freedom (Khalid et al., 2021) to the traditional value of abstinence. So, in attitude, it is reflected but not reflected in behaviour.

As far as family income is concerned there is no attitudinal difference on whether a single parent is working or both parents are working but when it comes to consumption, family income matters, and youths from families where both parents work and those from upper-middle class are more engaged in substance use. Results are consistent with the study showing rates of alcohol and drug use rise with increased levels of income (Galea et al., 2007). Also, the survey shows the least favourable attitude towards substance use among middle-class youths. This confirms the middle-class values of 'not engaging in health-damaging behaviour' (Backett, 1992).

There are also a few notable positive observations of urban youths' perceptions. Literature shows that media is an impacting factor in the substance use behaviour of youths (Davis et al., 2019). The way substance use is projected in media, it is likely that it is perceived as a status symbol by youths. But on a positive note, smoking and drinking are not perceived as status symbols by most urban youths. Also, literature shows that parental behaviour of substance consumption is associated with substance consumption among children (Baba et al., 2013; Gritz et al. 1998; Flay et al. 1998) but the majority of urban youths do not perceive 'parental use of substances' as a sanction for their own substance-related behaviour. Also, the majority of youths are aware of the health and social consequences of substances and only a small percentage of youths attribute their substance use behaviour to peer pressure. So, these perceptions could work as a protective factor against turning social substance use into problematic substance use.

## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

The survey also gives an understanding of the reasons for substance abstinence among non-users. Health awareness is a prominent factor that is keeping urban youths away from substance consumption. This concern for health is also reflected among users where 43% of users express the need to get rid of their current consumption pattern. Also, it is significant to note that family values and personal values contribute significantly to abstinence behaviour (Gopiram & Kishore, 2014).

### CONCLUSION

Survey shows that urban youths hold a positive attitude toward substance use. They perceive substance use as a source of enjoyment and social celebration. Alcohol is the most frequently used substance, but tobacco is the substance that is most frequently consumed on a daily basis.

Though gender differences exist, there is an upward trend among girls related to attitude and consumption behaviour. Attitude and consumption behaviour differ along demographic variables such as family structure, dual versus single-earning parents, and family income. Health concerns, family, and personal values are important reasons for abstinence among non-users of substance.

#### *Implication*

The survey highlights the hedonistic trend regarding substance consumption among urban youths. These youths are in the phase of persuasion of education and career. Substance use has detrimental effects on health, productivity, academic and work performance (Mekonen et al., 2017). For this dynamic age group to lose focus and only look at their enjoyment is a cause of serious concern. The survey highlights the need for primary and secondary prevention measures towards substance use practices. A majority of the youths are occasional drinkers and may not be showing problematic behaviour at this stage. So primary prevention at this stage is essential. As the majority of youths show good awareness about the consequences of substances, merely imparting knowledge and developing awareness is not sufficient (National Survey of India, 2021). This survey highlights the importance of attitudinal changes and also the role of personal values and family values in abstinence behaviour. Reinforcement of these values not only at the family level but also at the societal level is important. Life skill education can include these aspects in youth training. If this becomes a part of academics, more extensive platforms could be provided to youths (Kaur et al., 2022).

It was noted that 43% of youths who consume have expressed the need to get rid of their consumption pattern. So many times, youths are aware of their problematic patterns but do not know where to seek help at an early stage. So academic institutions and work organizations need to collaborate with mental health professionals and addiction centers who can identify high-risk youths and bring them into secondary prevention level programs.

Overall collaborative efforts of families, educational institutes, work organizations, NGOs working in de-addiction, mental health professionals, government initiatives, and policies are needed to keep these youths away from the detrimental effects of substances and develop a healthy society.

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## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

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## Perception and Patterns of Substance Consumption Among Youths: Survey in Pune City

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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