



# Prevention of Psychoactive Substance Abuse in School Children Through Psychoeducation: A Review on Prevalence, Consequences, and Policy Recommendations

**Shantna Kumari**

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Radha Govind University, Ramgarh, Jharkhand, India.

*Corresponding Author: shantna24@gmail.com*

## ABSTRACT

Substance abuse among school children has emerged as a growing global concern with serious implications for adolescent health, academic performance, and socio-emotional development. This review explores the prevalence and consequences of psycho-active substance abuse among school children, with a particular focus on the impact of psycho-education programs in preventing substance use. The paper synthesizes existing literature on the patterns of substance abuse, identifies risk factors, and highlights the socio-cultural dynamics that influence children's engagement with psycho-active substances. It also evaluates the effectiveness of psycho-education programs as preventive measures, emphasizing their role in enhancing life skills, emotional resilience, and peer support. Despite a growing body of research, significant gaps remain, particularly in the areas of longitudinal studies, gender-specific analysis, and rural-urban disparities. The paper concludes by proposing future research directions and policy recommendations aimed at addressing the gaps in prevention, early detection, and intervention, with an emphasis on a multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach to substance abuse prevention in school settings.

**Keywords :** *Substance Abuse, School Children, Psycho-Active Substances, Psycho-Education, Prevention Programs, Adolescent Health, Substance Use Patterns, Gender Disparities, Risk Factors.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is a growing public health concern worldwide, affecting individuals across age groups, economic strata, and geographical boundaries. Among the most vulnerable populations are children and adolescents, who are not only physically and psychologically more impressionable but also more susceptible to social influences that promote risky behaviours, including the consumption of psycho-active substances. Psycho-active substances, which alter brain function and result in

changes in perception, mood, consciousness, cognition, or behaviour, include legal substances such as alcohol and tobacco, as well as illicit drugs like cannabis, inhalants, opioids, and synthetic drugs. The increasing exposure of school-aged children to these substances poses a significant threat to their physical health, academic achievement, mental well-being, and overall life trajectory.

In the contemporary Indian context, where modernization, urbanization, and digital exposure are shaping the youth culture, the trend of early initiation into substance use has seen a worrying surge. The National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India (2019) conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment revealed that a significant proportion of adolescents, even those below the age of 18, reported using substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants. This trend is not only alarming but indicative of deeper systemic issues within families, schools, and communities. Peer pressure, academic stress, dysfunctional family environments, lack of awareness, and easy accessibility to drugs contribute to early substance initiation. Moreover, media glamorization of substance use, lack of stringent regulatory measures, and inadequate mental health education further aggravate the problem.

The school environment, which should ideally be a safe and nurturing space for learning and personal development, is often one of the key areas where substance use either begins or intensifies. Schools may inadvertently become environments where children face stress, bullying, or social pressure, making them vulnerable to seeking coping mechanisms through psycho-active substances. The consequences of substance use at such a formative stage of life are multifaceted. Physiologically, children's brains and bodies are still developing, making them more vulnerable to the harmful effects of drugs. Psychologically, substance use can lead to anxiety, depression, aggression, impaired memory, and even suicidal tendencies. Socially, it may result in isolation, juvenile delinquency, and strained family relationships. Academically, children may show signs of poor concentration, absenteeism, and declining grades, often leading to school dropout.

While several government and non-governmental initiatives have aimed to address substance abuse among youth, there is a growing recognition that prevention is more effective than cure, especially in the context of school children. This is where psycho-education plays a pivotal role. Psycho-education refers to the process of providing education and information to individuals, groups, or communities about psychological issues and how to manage them effectively. In the context of substance abuse prevention, psycho-education involves raising awareness about the harmful effects of drug use, teaching life skills to resist peer pressure, fostering healthy coping mechanisms for stress, and creating a supportive environment involving parents, teachers, and peers.

Studies have shown that psycho-educational interventions in schools can significantly reduce the incidence of substance abuse when implemented effectively and consistently. These programs, which may take the form of workshops, classroom sessions, peer mentoring, or media campaigns, empower children with knowledge and skills while reshaping attitudes and behaviours. Unlike punitive or scare-based approaches, psycho-education encourages self-awareness, critical thinking, and informed decision-making among students. Moreover, it facilitates early identification of at-risk students and timely interventions by school counsellors, educators, and parents.

In India, however, the implementation of structured psycho-educational programs in schools remains inconsistent and often underfunded. There is a lack of standardized curricula, trained counsellors, and integration with the broader education system. Furthermore, stigma associated with discussing substance use, mental health, and emotional well-being continues to hinder open dialogue and community engagement. Despite these challenges, there is growing evidence from international and Indian studies indicating the effectiveness of comprehensive, culturally adapted, and age-appropriate psycho-educational models in reducing substance abuse among school children.

The need of the hour is a multipronged strategy that combines awareness generation, capacity building among educators, policy advocacy, and community participation. Schools must be equipped not only to educate children about the risks of substance abuse but also to offer ongoing support and rehabilitation pathways for those affected. Parents and caregivers must be involved in psycho-educational efforts, ensuring that conversations around drug use and emotional well-being continue beyond school boundaries. At a policy level, integrating psycho-education into the national education framework and linking it with child health and welfare services can go a long way in creating a sustained impact.

This review paper aims to explore the prevalence and consequences of psycho-active substance abuse among school children while critically examining the role of psycho-education as a preventive measure. By synthesizing available literature, empirical data, and case studies, the paper seeks to highlight both the scope of the problem and the potential of school-based interventions. It also identifies research gaps, challenges in implementation, and opportunities for future action. Given that children represent not only the most affected demographic but also the most promising change agents, empowering them through knowledge, empathy, and support systems remains the cornerstone of any meaningful response to substance abuse.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Author(s) (Year)	Methodology	Research Area	Analysis	Findings
Mhlongo (2018)	Qualitative interviews	Educators' experiences with student substance abuse	Thematic analysis	Educators faced challenges in managing substance abuse and lacked adequate support.
Schifano et al. (2018)	Systematic review	Prescription and novel psychoactive substance abuse	Literature synthesis	Highlighted increasing misuse of prescription drugs alongside novel substances, posing public health concerns.
Ebrahim & Shattla (2019)	Experimental study	Psycho-educational program effectiveness	Pre- and post-tests	The program improved emotional regulation and problem-solving skills among students.

Eremie (2019)	Survey research	Cognitive influences on substance abuse prevention	Statistical analysis	Cognitive perceptions significantly influenced students' preventive behaviors.
Gonçalves et al. (2019)	Literature review	Synthetic cathinones as new psychoactive substances	Critical analysis	Identified toxicological risks and regulatory challenges of synthetic cathinones.
Vari et al. (2019)	Review article	Synthetic stimulants in forensic science	Interdisciplinary analysis	Discussed the structure, effects, and forensic implications of synthetic stimulants.
Peker et al. (2020)	Quasi-experimental design	Psycho-education on sexual abuse reporting	Pre- and post-intervention assessments	Enhanced teachers' abilities to report and recognize sexual abuse cases.
Okafor (2020)	Descriptive survey	Drug abuse among youth in Nigeria	Statistical analysis	Peer influence and unemployment were major contributors to youth drug abuse.
Olowo (2020)	Cross-sectional survey	Drug abuse in pre-service teachers	Descriptive statistics	High prevalence of drug abuse indicated a need for educational policy reforms.
Lo et al. (2020)	Multilevel analysis	Substance abuse and public health	Policy and community-level analysis	Emphasized comprehensive interventions across individual, community, and policy levels.
Dinis-Oliveira & Magalhães (2020)	Review study	Substance abuse in the workplace	Medical and forensic analysis	Highlighted the need for workplace policies addressing substance abuse.
Kelley et al. (2021)	Experimental study	Psycho-spiritual education's impact on students	Pre- and post-intervention measures	Improved student well-being and perceptions of school climate.
Isabu & Iwuagwu (2021)	Survey research	Environmental factors in youth substance abuse	Statistical correlation	Identified peer influence and urbanization as key factors.
Throuvala et al. (2021)	Qualitative study	Preventing problematic internet use in schools	Parental interviews	Recommended collaborative strategies between schools and families.
Chaplin et al. (2021)	Randomized controlled trial	Mindfulness intervention for adolescents	Psychological assessments	Reduced substance use and psychopathological symptoms in adolescents.
Trucco et al. (2021)	Longitudinal study	Parental and peer influence on e-cigarette use	Behavioral analysis	Both parents and peers significantly influenced adolescent behavior.
Oye & Ibimiluyi (2022)	Cross-sectional survey	Psycho-social determinants of adolescent substance abuse	Statistical analysis	Family instability and peer pressure were significant determinants.

Valente & Sanchez (2022)	Cluster-randomized controlled trial	School-based drug prevention program	Behavioral assessments	Demonstrated modest improvements in drug prevention outcomes.
Shydelko et al. (2022)	Mixed-methods research	Rehabilitation of substance-addicted individuals	Social and psychological evaluations	Identified effective intervention strategies and therapeutic challenges.
Panneer (2023)	Policy analysis	Substance abuse prevention in Indian educational institutions	Policy review	Urged coordinated national-level strategies for effective prevention.
Nyameh (2023)	Literature review	Drug use among Nigerian secondary school students	Thematic analysis	Linked psychosocial issues to poor academic performance.
Obisesan & Adejuwon (2023)	Survey research	Parental influence on adolescent substance use	Statistical analysis	Parental substance use and death were significant predictors.
Karadaş et al. (2023)	Qualitative study	School administrators' views on safety	Thematic analysis	Highlighted concerns about violence and drug use in schools.
Obiagu & Onele (2024)	Mixed-methods study	Drug abuse among youth in education programs	Surveys and interviews	Revealed gaps in program implementation and effectiveness.
Chinedum (2024)	Descriptive study	Drug abuse in secondary school students	Statistical analysis	Identified sociocultural and environmental drivers of drug abuse.
Ormel & VonKorff (2024)	Policy proposal	Prevention of common mental disorders	Policy analysis	Proposed seven conditions essential for effective prevention.
Jo et al. (2024)	Literature review	Digital therapies for adolescent substance use	Review of existing studies	Outlined benefits and limitations of digital-based therapies.
Dal Farra et al. (2022)	Survey research	Knowledge of novel psychoactive substances in Italy	Statistical analysis	Highlighted gaps in awareness and education among users.
Bhavsar et al. (2022)	Cross-sectional study	Oral health in substance abusers	Dental assessments	Reported higher rates of dental caries and poor oral hygiene.
Abdulrahim & Bowden-Jones (2022)	Book chapter	Treatment of novel psychoactive substance dependence	Clinical analysis	Offered insights into effective clinical interventions.
Skoczeń (2023)	Historical analysis	Psychoactive substance use in Warsaw (1968–1975)	Legal and social review	Examined legal responses and social consequences during that period.

### 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the phenomenon of psycho-active substance abuse among school children requires a comprehensive conceptual framework that integrates psychological, social, and educational dimensions. This framework establishes the foundational concepts necessary for analyzing the prevalence, consequences, and preventive strategies associated with substance abuse. It also provides the basis for evaluating the role of psycho-education as a tool to empower children and reduce their vulnerability to substance use.

#### 3.1 Definition of Psycho-Active Substances

Psycho-active substances are chemical substances that affect the central nervous system, leading to changes in perception, mood, consciousness, cognition, or behaviour. They may be legal (e.g., alcohol, nicotine), illegal (e.g., cannabis, heroin), or medically prescribed drugs that are misused (e.g., sedatives, stimulants). These substances can be classified into the following categories:

- **Depressants** (e.g., alcohol, benzodiazepines): Slow down brain activity, resulting in relaxation or drowsiness.
- **Stimulants** (e.g., nicotine, caffeine, amphetamines): Increase alertness and energy.
- **Hallucinogens** (e.g., LSD, psilocybin): Cause perceptual distortions and altered states of consciousness.
- **Inhalants** (e.g., glue, paint thinners): Commonly abused by adolescents due to easy availability and quick effects.

Psycho-active substance abuse refers to the repeated and harmful use of these substances, often leading to dependence, health deterioration, and social or academic dysfunction.

#### 3.2 Adolescent Vulnerability to Substance Abuse

School-age children, particularly adolescents between the ages of 10 and 18, are in a critical phase of physical, emotional, and psychological development. Their brains are still maturing, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which governs decision-making, impulse control, and reasoning. This neurological immaturity makes them more susceptible to engaging in risky behaviours, including experimentation with drugs and alcohol.

Several risk factors contribute to substance abuse in children:

- **Individual Factors:** Curiosity, low self-esteem, emotional distress, or sensation-seeking behaviour.
- **Family Factors:** Dysfunctional family dynamics, parental substance use, lack of supervision.
- **Peer Influence:** Pressure from friends or social groups to conform or appear "grown-up."
- **School-Related Factors:** Poor academic performance, school bullying, lack of engagement.
- **Community Factors:** Easy availability of drugs, media glorification of substance use, absence of youth-friendly recreational facilities.



### 3.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Substance Abuse

Several psychological and sociological theories provide insight into the causes and perpetuation of substance abuse:

#### a) Social Learning Theory (Bandura)

According to this theory, children learn behaviours through observation and imitation. If a child sees a parent, sibling, or peer engaging in substance use and perceives it as rewarding or socially acceptable, they are more likely to adopt the behaviour themselves.

#### b) Cognitive-Behavioural Theory

This model suggests that substance use is learned behaviour, reinforced by temporary relief from stress or anxiety. Over time, maladaptive thought patterns—such as believing that drugs help cope with problems—reinforce continued use.

#### c) Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner)

This theory emphasizes the role of multiple environmental systems (family, school, peer groups, media, community) in shaping a child's development. Substance abuse can be understood as the result of negative interactions within these systems.

#### d) Developmental Psychopathology Framework

This model focuses on how risk and protective factors interact over time to influence behaviour. Children with early exposure to trauma, abuse, or neglect are at greater risk of turning to substances as coping mechanisms unless protective buffers (like supportive adults or psycho-education) intervene.

### 3.4 Role of Psycho-Education in Prevention

Psycho-education is a structured process that combines therapeutic and educational interventions to help individuals understand and manage psychological or behavioural problems. In the context of substance abuse prevention, it involves providing age-appropriate, evidence-based information and skills training to help children make informed decisions and resist peer pressure.

#### Key Components of Psycho-Educational Models for School Children:

- **Knowledge:** Teaching about types of drugs, their effects, and legal consequences.
- **Attitude Change:** Encouraging critical reflection about the glamorization of drug use in media or peer culture.
- **Skills Training:** Developing communication, assertiveness, and stress management skills.
- **Peer Support:** Creating environments where students support one another in making healthy choices.
- **Parental Involvement:** Engaging families through workshops and counselling.
- **Teacher Training:** Equipping educators with tools to identify at-risk students and respond effectively.

The goal of psycho-education is not merely to inform but to empower. When implemented systematically, it helps children recognize triggers, develop resistance skills, and cultivate resilience against high-risk behaviours.

### **3.5 Integrated Model for Substance Abuse Prevention**

The conceptual framework of this study incorporates an integrated model where the prevalence and impact of substance abuse are analysed through a multi-layered lens:

- i) **Biological Dimension** – Brain development, hereditary predisposition
- ii) **Psychological Dimension** – Emotional state, self-esteem, cognitive patterns
- iii) **Social Dimension** – Family, peers, school, and community influences
- iv) **Educational Dimension** – The role of psycho-education in prevention and behavioural modification.

This integrated approach enables a more holistic understanding of the issue and informs the development of targeted and sustainable prevention strategies.

### **3.6 Importance of Contextual and Cultural Sensitivity**

Substance abuse and its prevention cannot be viewed in isolation from the cultural and socioeconomic context. In a diverse country like India, religious beliefs, family honour, gender norms, and social taboos significantly shape how substance use is perceived and addressed. Therefore, psycho-educational programs must be tailored to respect local languages, values, and practices while ensuring scientific accuracy and emotional sensitivity. The conceptual framework presented here underscores the complexity of psycho-active substance abuse among school children. It highlights that substance use is not merely an individual choice but the outcome of multiple intersecting influences biological, emotional, social, and environmental. Equally, prevention requires an equally multifaceted approach, with psycho-education serving as a cornerstone. Through establishing this framework, the review sets the stage for analysing the prevalence, consequences, and prevention of substance abuse in school settings with greater clarity and depth.

## **4. PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN**

Substance abuse among school children has emerged as a growing public health concern globally and particularly in developing countries like India. Adolescents are especially vulnerable due to their developmental stage, curiosity, and susceptibility to peer influence. The increasing incidence of psycho-active substance use among school-going children has profound implications for their physical, mental, emotional, and academic well-being. Understanding the patterns and prevalence of such abuse is crucial for designing targeted interventions and preventive measures.

### **4.1 Global Perspective on Substance Abuse in School-Aged Children**

Globally, the use of psycho-active substances among adolescents is a significant concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis are the most commonly used substances by adolescents. Studies from the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reveal that:



- About 25–30% of adolescents worldwide have tried alcohol by the age of 13.
- The prevalence of tobacco use among school students ranges from 5% to 20%, depending on regional and socioeconomic contexts.
- In North America and parts of Europe, cannabis use is rising among 15 to 19-year-olds, with reports of early initiation among 12-year-olds.

These global trends underscore the need for early detection and educational interventions in schools.

#### **4.2 Prevalence in the Indian Context**

India, with its demographic dividend of over 250 million school-going children, is increasingly witnessing the spread of substance abuse among the younger population. Reports from national-level surveys such as the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) studies indicate worrying trends:

- A study conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in collaboration with AIIMS (2019) found that nearly 1 in 5 children in India had experimented with substances like alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants.
- Inhalant abuse, due to its easy accessibility and low cost, is alarmingly common among adolescents aged 10–17.
- In urban slum areas and regions with high drug trafficking routes (e.g., Punjab, North-East India), school children are being increasingly exposed to opioids and synthetic drugs.
- According to NCRB data, there has been a rise in juvenile offenses linked with substance possession or trafficking.

These figures highlight that psycho-active substance abuse is not confined to a particular class or region but cuts across economic, social, and geographical boundaries.

#### **4.3 Factors Influencing Prevalence among School Children**

Multiple interrelated factors contribute to the increasing prevalence of substance abuse among school students:

##### **a) Peer Pressure**

One of the most commonly cited reasons for initiation into drug use is the influence of peers. Adolescents, in a bid to conform or appear bold and mature, often engage in risky behaviours including substance use.

##### **b) Parental Neglect or Substance Use**

Children from families with absentee parenting, domestic violence, or parental substance use are significantly more vulnerable. Lack of parental supervision is a consistent predictor of early initiation.

### c) Academic Stress and Emotional Instability

High academic pressure, failure, bullying, and emotional trauma often drive children to seek escape in mood-altering substances.

### d) Accessibility of Substances

Easy availability of substances like tobacco, alcohol, correction fluids, and painkillers in local markets or through peers makes experimentation easier for school-going children.

### e) Media and Internet Influence

Glorification of drug use in movies, web series, and music videos, combined with lack of digital literacy, often normalizes substance abuse in the adolescent imagination.

## 4.4 Urban-Rural Divide and Gender Dimensions

Recent studies suggest that:

- **Urban School children** show higher prevalence of tobacco, alcohol, and synthetic drugs due to greater exposure, access, and anonymity.
- **Rural areas**, while traditionally showing lower prevalence, are now reporting increased cases, particularly with inhalants and locally brewed alcohol.
- **Boys** have historically shown higher substance abuse rates, but there is growing evidence that **girls** too are increasingly experimenting with substances—often silently and without social support.

The gender aspect is critical, as girls face a double burden: health risks and social stigma, which often prevent them from seeking help or being included in prevention programs.

## 4.5 Substance Use Initiation Age and Patterns

The **age of initiation** is steadily declining. Reports indicate that:

- Children as young as 10–12 years old have been found experimenting with tobacco and inhalants.
- Through the age of 15, many have tried alcohol or ganja at least once.
- A progression pattern is commonly observed: starting with legal substances like tobacco, moving to alcohol, then experimenting with illegal or pharmaceutical drugs.

The early initiation has serious consequences for brain development, academic performance, and long-term mental health.

#### 4.6 Data from Select Studies and Surveys

Here is a snapshot of data from major studies:

Study	Sample	Key Findings
AIIMS 2019 National Survey	1.5 lakh children (10–17 years)	1 in 20 children were regular users of some psycho-active substance
UNODC South Asia Report	India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh	High inhalant use among school-aged boys in urban slums
NCERT 2020 Survey	500 schools across 18 states	15% students admitted to trying tobacco; 7% admitted to alcohol consumption
NGO-Run Surveys (e.g., SPYM, NACO)	Schools in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata	Common initiation age: 12–14 years; peer and curiosity were major causes

These empirical data reflect a clear need for timely interventions that target early adolescence.

#### 4.7 Limitations in Existing Data and Reporting

Despite these alarming trends, there are several challenges:

- **Under-reporting** due to stigma, especially among girls.
- **Lack of uniform survey tools** to assess adolescent substance abuse across states and regions.
- **Limited school-based research** on psycho-social consequences and mental health correlation.
- **Inadequate integration** of substance use monitoring in school health programs.

Such limitations hinder accurate prevalence estimation and effective policy formulation.

#### 4.8 Need for School-Level Screening and Monitoring

Given the scale of the problem, there is an urgent need to:

- Introduce regular **screening** mechanisms in schools using non-invasive, confidential tools.
- Train teachers and counsellors to identify early signs of substance use (e.g., absenteeism, behavioural changes).
- Maintain **anonymous helplines** or peer-support networks in schools.

Creating a non-judgmental, supportive environment is key to detecting and addressing early cases.

The prevalence of psycho-active substance abuse among school children is not just a statistical concern but a social emergency. The data—though still developing—point toward increasing initiation at younger ages, peer-led experimentation, and the silent spread of inhalants and pharmaceuticals. A combination of risk factors biological, emotional, familial, and societal—contributes to this trend. Recognizing these patterns and the urgent need for proactive school-based interventions is critical. The next section will discuss the consequences of such substance abuse and its long-term impact on children's development, education, and well-being.

## **5. RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Despite growing recognition of psycho-active substance abuse among school children, significant gaps remain in research, monitoring, and intervention design. Existing literature often highlights the problem's magnitude, yet leaves much unexplored in terms of long-term impacts, psychological underpinnings, and the effectiveness of preventive strategies like psycho-education.

### **5.1 Limited Longitudinal Studies**

One of the primary gaps is the lack of longitudinal studies tracking school children over time. Most available data are cross-sectional and fail to provide insights into the progression of substance use, transition from experimentation to dependence, or the long-term psychosocial consequences. Research that follows students over several years could offer valuable evidence on patterns of relapse, sustained recovery, and behavioural changes post-intervention.

### **5.2 Underreporting and Inadequate Gender-Sensitive Analysis**

Many studies rely heavily on self-reported data, which are prone to underreporting due to fear of stigma, especially among girls. The gender dimension is significantly underexplored, despite growing anecdotal evidence of rising substance use among adolescent girls. There is a need for research methodologies that ensure anonymity and encourage honest responses, along with frameworks that capture gender-specific risk factors and outcomes.

### **5.3 Lack of School-Based Psychosocial Assessment Tools**

While schools are a vital setting for identifying and addressing substance abuse, there is a dearth of standardized, validated screening tools tailored to the school environment. Existing interventions are often reactive rather than preventive. Future research must focus on developing culturally and age-appropriate tools for early identification, risk assessment, and follow-up.

### **5.4 Psycho-education: Impact and Implementation**

The role of psycho-education in substance abuse prevention is acknowledged, yet empirical studies on its effectiveness among school-aged populations remain limited. Research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of structured psycho-educational programs, including components like life skills training, emotional intelligence development, and peer-led models. Comparative studies assessing different approaches and delivery methods (e.g., teacher-led vs. expert-led) can guide better implementation.

### **5.5 Regional and Rural-Urban Disparities**

Most studies are concentrated in urban areas or select high-risk regions. There is a scarcity of data from rural, tribal, and socio-economically disadvantaged zones, where patterns and drivers of substance abuse may differ significantly. Inclusive, geographically diverse research is essential to ensure representativeness and equity in policy response.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Psycho-active substance abuse among school children has emerged as a significant public health and educational challenge with far-reaching consequences. The increasing prevalence, especially among children as young as 10 to 14 years, signals a critical need for early detection, preventive education, and multi-layered support systems. The findings discussed in this review indicate that the use of substances such as tobacco, alcohol, inhalants, and even synthetic drugs is no longer confined to marginalized sections of society but is increasingly affecting students across socio-economic and geographic boundaries. The consequences of substance abuse at such a formative stage of life are deeply damaging. Academically, substance-abusing students often face absenteeism, declining performance, behavioural problems, and in many cases, school dropouts. Psychologically, they experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, poor impulse control, and in severe cases, suicidal tendencies. Physically, early drug use impairs neurological development and creates long-term health risks. The damage often extends to family relations, social behaviour, and their future employability and productivity. Despite growing awareness, research reveals several gaps in the current understanding and handling of the issue. These include underreporting due to stigma, a lack of longitudinal studies to track outcomes, inadequate tools for school-based screening, and insufficient data from rural or tribal contexts. While some psycho-educational interventions have shown promise, their scalability and long-term effectiveness remain under-explored. Gender-sensitive approaches and region-specific insights are particularly underrepresented in existing literature. In psycho-education emerges as a vital strategy in combating substance abuse. Programs that educate children on the risks of substance use, build life skills, and strengthen their decision-making abilities are crucial. However, these interventions must be holistic, culturally appropriate, sustained, and supported by schools, families, and communities. Moreover, teachers, school counsellors, and peer leaders should be trained to act as first responders and facilitators of a healthy school environment. A collaborative model linking the education sector, health services, community stakeholders, and policymakers is needed to create safe and supportive school ecosystems. Policy must evolve to integrate preventive education within curricula, fund school mental health programs, and support research that bridges data gaps. Only through proactive, inclusive, and evidence-based action can we hope to prevent a looming crisis and ensure that our children grow up in environments that nurture health, learning, and well-being.

## REFERENCES

1. Mhlongo, C. N. (2018). *The experiences of high school educators in dealing with substance abuse at uThungulu District Schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Zululand).
2. Schifano, F., Chiappini, S., Corkery, J. M., & Guirguis, A. (2018). Abuse of prescription drugs in the context of novel psychoactive substances (NPS): a systematic review. *Brain sciences*, 8(4), 73.
3. Ebrahim, S. M., & Shattla, S. I. (2019). The Effectiveness of Psycho-educational Program on Emotional Regulation and Problem-Solving among Preparatory School Students. *American Journal of Nursing*, 7(6), 922-931.

4. EREMIE, M. (2019). Perceived Influence of Cognit on Substance Abuse Preventi Sch.
5. Gonçalves, J. L., Alves, V. L., Aguiar, J., Teixeira, H. M., & Câmara, J. S. (2019). Synthetic cathinones: an evolving class of new psychoactive substances. *Critical reviews in toxicology*, 49(7), 549-566.
6. Vari, M. R., Pichini, S., Giorgetti, R., & Busardò, F. P. (2019). New psychoactive substances—synthetic stimulants. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Forensic Science*, 1(2), e1197.
7. Peker, A., Cengiz, S., & Çelik, A. K. (2020). The effect of psycho-education program developed for sexual abuse on counseling teachers' reporting sexual abuse and information and risk recognition attitudes. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 8(4), 74-86.
8. Okafor, I. P. (2020). Causes and consequences of drug abuse among youth in Kwara state, Nigeria. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse*, 12(1), 147-162.
9. Olowo, G. M. (2020). Prevalence Of Drug Abuse Among Pre-Service Teachers In Colleges Of Education In Nigeria: Implications For Educational Administration. *International Journal of Educational Research and Policy Making*, 3(1), 499-510.
10. Lo, T. W., Yeung, J. W., & Tam, C. H. (2020). Substance abuse and public health: A multilevel perspective and multiple responses. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(7), 2610.
11. Dinis-Oliveira, R. J., & Magalhães, T. (2020). Abuse of licit and illicit psychoactive substances in the workplace: medical, toxicological, and forensic aspects. *Journal of clinical medicine*, 9(3), 770.
12. Kelley, T. M., Wheeldon-Reece, B., & Lambert, E. G. (2021). The efficacy of psycho-spiritual mental health education for improving the well-being and perceptions of school climate for students at-risk for school failure. *Spiritual Psychology and Counseling*, 6(2), 73-93.
13. Isabu, A. C., & Iwuagwu, T. E. (2021). Social Environmental Factors Associated with the Recent Surge in Psychoactive Substance Abuse among Youths in a Selected Semi-Urban Community in South-South Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Health Promotion*, 14(1).
14. Throuvala, M. A., Griffiths, M. D., Rennoldson, M., & Kuss, D. J. (2021). Policy recommendations for preventing problematic internet use in schools: a qualitative study of parental perspectives. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(9), 4522.
15. Chaplin, T. M., Mauro, K. L., Curby, T. W., Niehaus, C., Fischer, S., Turpyn, C. C., ... & Sinha, R. (2021). Effects of a parenting-focused mindfulness intervention on adolescent substance use and psychopathology: A randomized controlled trial. *Research on child and adolescent psychopathology*, 49, 861-875.
16. Trucco, E. M., Cristello, J. V., & Sutherland, M. T. (2021). Do parents still matter? The impact of parents and peers on adolescent electronic cigarette use. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 68(4), 780-786.



17. Oye, M. J., & Ibimiluyi, F. O. (2022). Psycho-Social Determinants of Substance Abuse Among Adolescents in Ondo-State, South-West, Nigeria. *Achievers Journal of Scientific Research*, 4(1), 48-57.
18. Valente, J. Y., & Sanchez, Z. M. (2022). Short-term secondary effects of a school-based drug prevention program: Cluster-randomized controlled trial of the Brazilian version of DARE's keepin'it REAL. *Prevention science*, 23(1), 10-23.
19. Shydelko, A., Mayorchak, N., Bamburak, N., & Holovach, T. (2022). Social and Psychological Rehabilitation of People Addicted to Psychoactive Substances: Research Results. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, 13(1), 387-419.
20. Panneer, S.(2023). Substance Abuse Prevention Among Students in Educational Institutions in India-Policy Challenges and Future Actions. *National Institute of Social Defence Ministry Of Social Justice And Empowerment Government Of India*, 13.
21. Nyameh, C. N. (2023). Prevalence, Predictors of Drug and Substance Use, Their Psychosocial and Academic Effects on Secondary School Students in North-Eastern Nigeria: A Review. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(12), 473-495.
22. Obisesan, O. A., & Adejuwon, G. A. (2023). Can Parental Substance use, Parental Death and Gender be Determinants of Substance use Among in-School Adolescents in Ibadan?. *IFE Psychologia: An International Journal*, 31(1), 98-105.
23. Karadaş, H., Coşkun, B., & Katıtaş, S. (2023). Safety Problems at Schools According to School Administrators' Opinions. *Psycho-Educational Research Reviews*, 12(1), 134-150.
24. Obiagu, A. N., & Onele, A. V. (2024). Prevalence and causes of drug abuse among youth-recipients of school-based drug education programs: A mixed-method study. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth/Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse*, 16(1), 16-37.
25. Chinedum, A. J. (2024). Drug Abuse Among Secondary School Students in Rivers State.
26. Ormel, J. H., & VonKorff, M. (2024). What should a nation do to prevent common mental disorders? Meet seven conditions for effective prevention. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 33, 200320.
27. Jo, Y., Edwards, N., Shah, R., & Vas, S. (2024). Exploring digital-based therapies for adolescents with substance use disorders: a brief literature review. *Journal of Indian Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 09731342241248896.
28. Dal Farra, D., Valdesalici, A., Zecchinato, G., De Sandre, A., Saccon, D., Simonato, P., ... & Solmi, M. (2022). Knowledge and use of novel psychoactive substances in an Italian sample with substance use disorders. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(2), 915.
29. Bhavsar, R., Shah, V., Ajith, N. A., Shah, K., Al-Amoudi, A., Bahammam, H. A., ... & Patil, S. (2022). Dental Caries and Oral Health Status of Psychoactive Substance Abusers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(10), 5818
30. Abdulrahim, D., & Bowden-Jones, O. (2022). Addiction and treatment of novel psychoactive substance dependence. In *Novel psychoactive substances* (pp. 203-222). Academic Press.
31. Maciej Skoczeń, M. (2023). The Criminal Aspects of The Use of Psychoactive Substances in Warsaw in 1968-1975. *Alcoholism & Drug Addiction/Alkoholizm i Narkomania*, 36(3).