



SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN A RURAL BLOCK OF UTTARAKHAND: A SOCIO-ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract: Substance abuse today poses a significant threat not only at the personal level but also to the socio-economic and familial fabric of society. Its adverse impact extends beyond urban areas and has increasingly penetrated rural regions, affecting mental health and social harmony. The severity of this issue has prompted both the Central and State governments of India to initiate various programs and campaigns to address the crisis. On August 15, 2020, the “Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyan” (Drug-Free India Campaign) was initiated with the objective of addressing the menace of substance abuse and guiding its direction and strategy. To understand the depth of this issue, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment conducted a comprehensive survey highlighting the widespread impact of substance abuse. Based on the findings, 272 districts across 32 States and Union Territories were selected in the first phase for intensive action to make them drug-free. Additionally, the campaign leveraged social media in 11 different languages to maximize outreach and awareness. Key implementation partners in this campaign included grassroots institutions like Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers, who played a vital role in mobilizing community participation and spreading awareness in remote and rural areas.

This research paper focuses on a micro-level study conducted in a remote village under the Syalde block of Almora district in Uttarakhand. The objective of this study was to investigate the patterns and prevalence of substance abuse in the village, understand the extent of community awareness regarding the issue, and assess their familiarity and engagement with government-led awareness initiatives. The findings revealed that while most villagers acknowledge substance abuse as a serious problem with social consequences, awareness about official de-addiction campaigns remains limited. However, a notable number of respondents expressed a willingness to participate in such programs in the future, reflecting a growing recognition of the problem.

Overall, this study offers valuable insights into the rural perspective on addiction and presents a strong foundation for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to develop more inclusive and targeted intervention strategies.

Index Terms - Substance abuse, rural survey, awareness campaigns, de-addiction, Syalde block, Uttarakhand

. Introduction

This life is a unique gift of nature, but due to social evils like drug addiction, we have put a question mark on its utility. We are all well aware that smoking or drug abuse is a curse for society. It is not that the use of intoxicating substances is a new phenomenon of the modern era — opium, cannabis, bhang, charas, etc., have long been prevalent in society. The consumption of intoxicants, from metropolitan cities to villages and remote areas, is more dangerous than even the horrors of war.

It is not that we are unaware of this issue. The government is also making several efforts in this regard. The central government has set a goal to declare India a drug-free nation by 2047. Alongside this, the Uttarakhand state government is also making efforts to support this initiative through the Drug-Free India campaign. Under the Drug-Free Devbhoomi initiative of the Uttarakhand Police, steps are being taken to curb the trafficking of narcotics. In educational institutions, Anti-Drug Cells have been formed to spread awareness among the youth so that they can also promote this cause in society. Related activities such as rallies, workshops, seminars, painting competitions, and oath-taking campaigns are being conducted. In addition, it is essential to mobilize the entire society against this tendency, and this is the responsibility of all of us. This research paper attempts to study drug-related trends, causes, solutions, and suggestions through survey conducted in the Syalde block and a selected village of Uttarakhand.

Objectives of the Study:

- 1 To study the trends of substance abuse in the specific village of Syalde, Almora (Talla Bhakura).
- 2 To assess the level of awareness about substance abuse among the villagers.
- 3 To understand public response towards awareness campaigns for de-addiction.

Methodology

This study is descriptive and survey-based. The study included 100 villagers, selected using the random sampling method. For data collection, a questionnaire was prepared which included questions related to addiction tendencies, behavior, and awareness. In addition to this, social responses and suggestions were also gathered through direct interviews and group discussions.

Literature review

Before beginning our study, we felt it was important to first understand what has already been done in the field of substance abuse prevention. To do this, we reviewed various research studies, reports, and government initiatives that shed light on the nature of addiction and the efforts made to control it. This included looking at national and state-level policies, awareness campaigns, and the availability of de-addiction and rehabilitation services. Through this review, we aimed to understand not just the data, but also the intent and direction behind the actions taken so far. It helped us identify key gaps—especially in rural areas—and guided the focus of our own survey. Our goal was to ensure that the study would not only add to the existing knowledge but also support efforts being made on the ground, particularly in under-served communities like Talla Bhakura.

In their paper “Drug Policy in India: An Analysis”, authors Bharti Thakur and Neeru Mittal provide an overview of the legal framework surrounding drug control in India. However, the paper does not specifically address the “Drug-Free India” campaign or similar public awareness initiatives. Instead, it primarily focuses on the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, emphasizing the legal and regulatory mechanisms related to narcotics and psychotropic substances. The analysis leans more towards the enforcement and punitive aspects of drug control rather than exploring preventive measures, rehabilitation efforts, or community-based awareness campaigns aimed at curbing substance abuse.

Community-based initiatives are essential in supporting India's anti-drug campaign by providing localized and accessible treatment and prevention strategies that cater to specific community needs. For example, community drug treatment clinics (CDTCs) have been established to offer integrated services, including pharmacotherapy and psychosocial support, effectively addressing substance use disorders (SUD) within local populations (Rao et al., 2021).

The anti-drug campaign in India takes a multifaceted approach to tackle the increasing issue of substance abuse through awareness, prevention, and legal frameworks. The Government of India has introduced significant policies, such as the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985, which regulates the trafficking and abuse of narcotics. Additionally, the Drug De-Addiction Program (DDAP) supports rehabilitation efforts (Parmar et al., 2023) (Jothieswari et al., 2023).

Recent research highlights the need for comprehensive public awareness campaigns that target various sectors, including schools and workplaces, to promote a culture of prevention and reduce the stigma associated with drug use (Kumar, 2023) (Sebastian & Stephen, 2015). Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment plays a crucial role in coordinating these initiatives, emphasizing the importance of a collaborative approach among stakeholders in public health and policy-making to effectively combat drug abuse in India (Parmar et al., 2023) (Sebastian & Stephen, 2015).

Research Gap

While the literature provides valuable insights into national policies, legal frameworks, and urban interventions, there is a noticeable gap in studies focusing on rural and remote areas—particularly in hilly states like Uttarakhand. There is limited research on the patterns of substance use, levels of awareness, and effectiveness of community-level interventions in such regions.

This research is expected to provide policymakers with ground-level insights and contribute to the development of more effective, community-driven strategies for drug abuse prevention in rural India. Serious efforts are being made by the Uttarakhand government towards drug eradication. On 15th August 2020, the *Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan* (Drug-Free India Campaign) was launched. To determine the direction of this initiative, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment conducted a survey to understand drug abuse and its major effects. In the first phase of the campaign, 272 districts across 32 states and union territories were selected to be made completely drug-free. A social media campaign was launched in 11 languages, and efforts were made in the selected districts with active participation from *Nehru Yuva Kendra* and *NSS* volunteers. To support Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Drug-Free India" mission, the government of Uttarakhand is working with full commitment. While the central government has set a target to make the country drug-free by 2047, the Uttarakhand state government has pledged to declare the state drug-free by 2025. Although this goal is challenging, continuous efforts are being made at various levels in the state, which are steadily moving towards achieving positive outcomes.

In addition to analyzing these efforts, our research paper also includes a field survey conducted in the Talla Bhakura region to assess the level of public awareness, regarding drug abuse and the ongoing government initiatives. The survey results have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of awareness campaigns and the active participation of educational institutions in promoting a drug-free society.

Basic profile of respondents

In the survey, the first step was to analyze the collected data, through which we derived the basic profile of the respondents as follows.

Fig-1, Basic profile of respondents

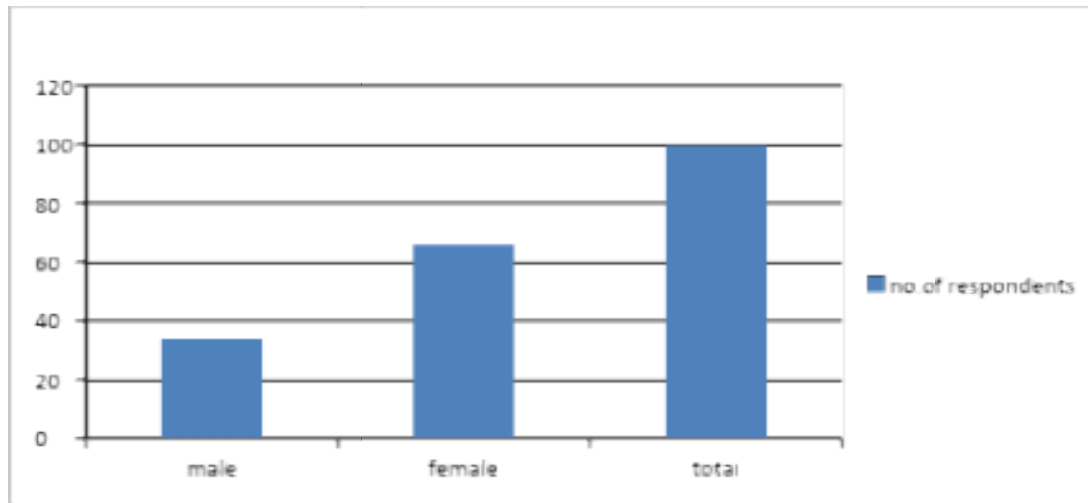


Table-1, Age-wise and gender-wise respondent distribution

S.NO	AGE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	Below 18 years	04	06	10
2	18–30 years	04	10	14
3	31–50 years	10	18	28
4	Above 50 years	16	32	48
	TOTAL	34	66	100

During the course of our survey, we observed a notable demographic imbalance among the respondents. A larger number of female participants were recorded compared to males. This disproportion can be attributed to the ongoing trend of outmigration in hilly regions like Uttarakhand, where a significant portion of the male population has moved to urban areas or other states in search of better employment opportunities. As a result, fewer male respondents were available during the field study.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents belonged to the age group of 50 years and above, indicating that older individuals were more accessible and willing to participate in the survey. In contrast, the youth participation was relatively low, which may reflect either their absence due to migration. This demographic skew is important to consider while analyzing the findings, as it may have influenced the perspectives and responses collected during the research.

Table-2 Opinion substance abuse a serious problem in area

S.NO	OPINION	NO.OF RESPONDENT
1	YES	88
2	NO	10
3	Don't know	02
	Total	100

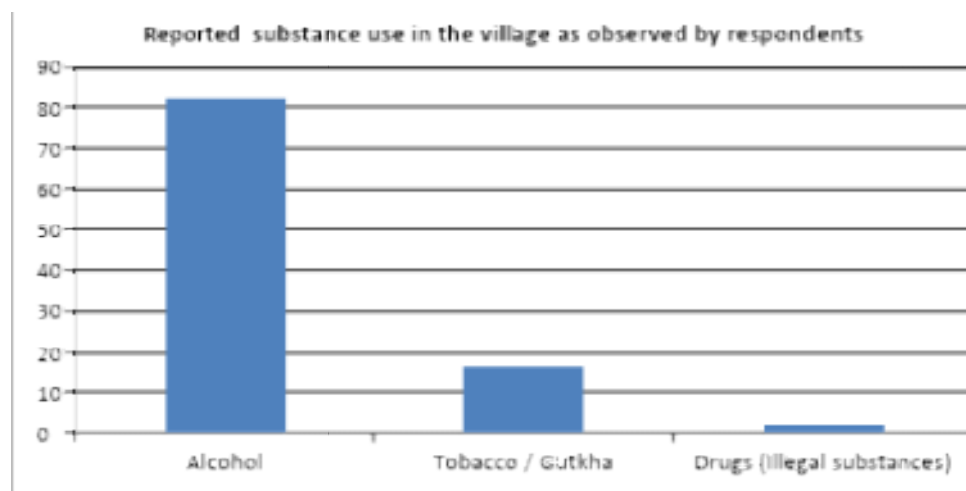
Figure-2, Opinion on substance abuse as a serious problem



Table-3, Reported substance use in village as observed by respondents

S.NO	Type of substance	No. of respondents
1	Alcohol	82
2	Tobacco / Gutkha	16
3	Drugs (Illegal substances)	12
	total	100

Figure-3, Reported substance use in village as observed by respondents



During the survey, when people were asked whether they consider substance abuse a serious issue, a large majority — 88% — said yes. Ten respondents did not see it as a serious concern, while two mentioned that they either didn't have much information or preferred not to respond. When we further asked which type of substance is most commonly used in their village, 82% of respondents pointed to alcohol. Based on these responses, it becomes clear that alcohol is not only the most widely used substance but is also seen by many as a major reason behind growing social problems in rural areas

Table-4, Does addiction leads as a cause of social crime

	S.NO	OPINION	No.of respondents
	1	Yes	84
	2	No	10
	3	Don't know	06

Figure-4, Does addiction leads as a cause of social crime

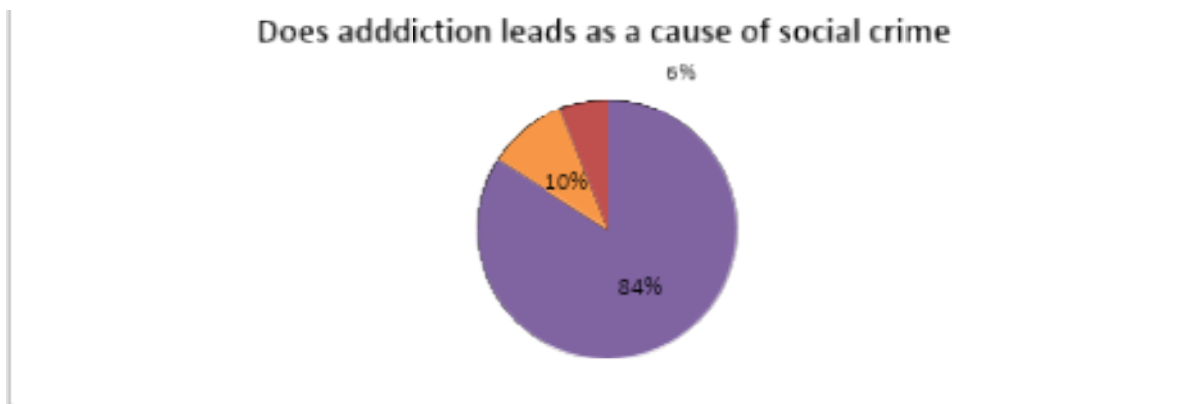


Table-5, Awareness about government / social campaign against substance abuse in your area

S.NO	Response	Number of respondents
1	Yes	16
2	No	74
3	Don't know	10
	Total	100

The majority of respondents (74%) reported that no government or social campaigns are currently being conducted in their area against substance abuse. Only 16% affirmed the presence of such campaigns, while 10% were unaware. This suggests a significant gap in outreach and awareness, highlighting the need for more visible and effective anti-substance abuse initiatives at the local level.

Table-6, Familial exposure to addiction among respondents

S.No.	Responses	Number of Respondents
1	Yes	28
2	No	72
Total		100

Table-7, Awareness about individuals who have successfully overcome addiction

S.No.	Response	Number of Respondents
1	Yes	48
2	No	52
	Total	100

Table-8, Primary source of support in quitting addiction

S.No.	Source of help	Number of respondents	Percentage
1	Family	40	83.33%
2	Friend	02	4.17%
3	De-addiction center	04	8.33%
4	Others	02	4.17%
	Total	48	100

The analysis of the responses reveals a significant connection between personal or familial exposure to addiction and awareness of recovery cases. While a considerable portion of respondents reported being directly or indirectly affected by addiction, a majority also acknowledged knowing individuals who have successfully overcome it.

Among those recovery cases, the data clearly shows that family support played the most influential role, with 83.33% of respondents crediting family members as the primary source of help in quitting addiction. Friends, de-addiction centers, and other sources played a secondary but still meaningful role.

This three-layered analysis suggests that:

Addiction is a socially visible issue, affecting not only individuals but also their immediate families.

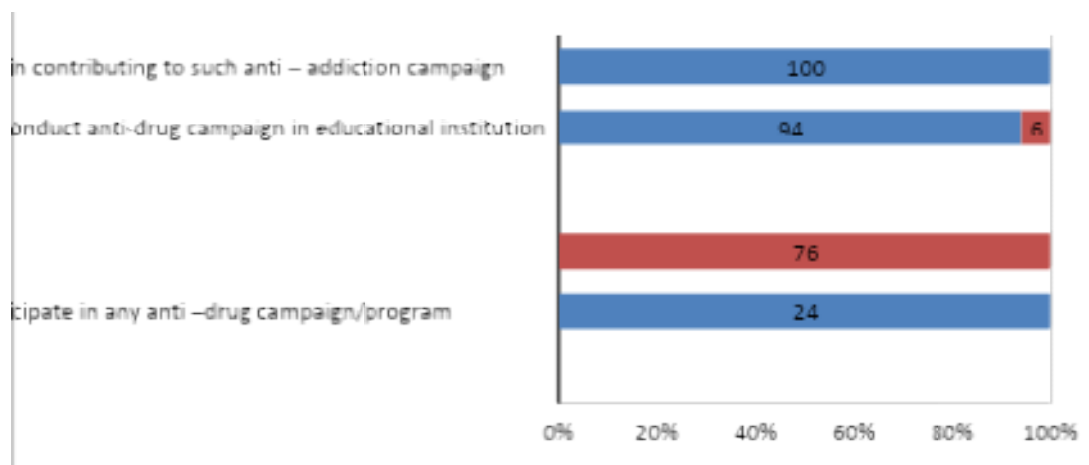
Awareness of successful recovery stories is relatively high, showing a positive shift in public understanding.

Family emerges as the strongest pillar of support in the process of recovery, underlining the need for stronger family-based intervention model in anti-addiction program. The analysis of the responses reveals a significant connection between personal or familial exposure to addiction and awareness of recovery cases. While a considerable portion of respondents reported being directly or indirectly affected by addiction, a majority also acknowledged knowing individuals who have successfully overcome it.

Table-9, Respondents' Opinion on Participation and Interest in Anti-Drug Campaign

S.No.	Question	Yes	No
1	Have you ever participate in any anti –drug campaign/program	24	76
2	Is it mandatory to conduct anti-drug campaign in educational institution	94	06
3	Are you interested in contributing to such anti – addiction campaign	100	00

Figure-5, Respondents' Opinion on Participation and Interest in Anti-Drug Campaign



The analysis reveals that while actual participation levels are low, there is a high degree of awareness and willingness among people to support and engage in anti-drug initiatives, especially in educational settings.

This survey was conducted with the primary objective of understanding the trends of substance abuse in the village of Talla Bhakura, assessing the level of awareness among residents, and evaluating their responses toward awareness campaigns conducted by governmental and non-governmental agencies. It is also important to note that the majority of our respondents were

women. This was primarily due to the demographic structure of the village, where more women reside, while many men are away for employment purposes. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents were from older age groups, as many younger individuals are also away from the village for work or education. These demographic realities had a direct influence on the data collected and the perspectives recorded during the survey.

The findings indicate that the majority of respondents perceive substance abuse as a serious social problem, which they believe contributes significantly to the rise in social crimes. However, awareness regarding existing campaigns or intervention programs appeared to be quite limited among the villagers. Interestingly, when asked whether any family members were addicted, most respondents reported low numbers. This could be attributed to social stigma or reluctance to disclose such information publicly. However, in a follow-up question regarding whether they personally knew someone who had successfully overcome addiction, 48 respondents responded affirmatively. This suggests that recovery from substance abuse is not entirely unfamiliar in the community.

Additionally, the responses revealed that although many had not actively participated in awareness programs yet, there was a general willingness and interest in doing so in the future. This could reflect an increasing recognition of the dangers posed by substance abuse within their community.

Overall, this survey offers valuable insights into rural perceptions and awareness concerning substance abuse and related programs. The data can serve as a foundational reference for policymakers, educators, and organizations to develop and implement more targeted, inclusive, and effective awareness and rehabilitation initiatives in rural settings.

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