



## **Chronic Abuse of Drugs Among the Youth & It's Relation with School Dropouts in Slum Areas of Siliguri Municipal Corporation**

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### **Abstract:**

*Abuse can be defined as the excessive or improper use of a substance or practice, often motivated by dependency, escapism, or corrupt intentions that ultimately lead to harm. In this study, substance abuse—particularly among youth—is understood as the habitual misuse of harmful and addictive substances such as cocaine, marijuana, heroin, alcohol, and others. Among slum dwellers, the risk factors for such behavior are often compounded by poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and exposure to environments where drug use is either normalized or seen as a means of coping with hardship. This has led to a concerning rise in youth drug abuse, especially in urban marginalized areas.*

*The vulnerability of slum-dwelling youth to substance abuse is closely tied to the socio-economic instability they experience on a daily basis. Living conditions in slums are often overcrowded, unsanitary, and unsafe, leaving young people with limited access to recreational spaces, positive social engagement, or meaningful employment opportunities. With little hope for upward mobility or educational advancement, many youths turn to drugs as an escape from the harsh realities they face. In some cases, drug use becomes a social activity, reinforced by peer groups and local subcultures that view addiction not as a danger, but as a routine aspect of daily life.*

*Moreover, the absence of strong family structures and community-based support makes it even more difficult to intervene early or provide guidance to those at risk. Young people growing up in such environments often lack positive role models, and their exposure to crime, violence, and substance availability further normalizes addictive behaviors. Without targeted intervention, education, and rehabilitation efforts, these patterns are likely to continue, resulting in school dropout, deteriorating health, criminal involvement, and long-term socio-economic exclusion.*

*The goal of this research is to critically explore the patterns, causes, and consequences of youth drug abuse and to examine its significant implications for health, education, and social well-being. Addictive behavior among youth often stems from a complex interplay of peer pressure, emotional trauma, and socio-economic stressors. As a result, affected individuals suffer from a wide range of issues, including deteriorating physical and mental health, disrupted relationships, and declining participation in education. One of the most damaging consequences of addiction is school dropout, as addicted youth find it increasingly difficult*

*to focus on studies, maintain regular attendance, or participate in academic life. Many students from vulnerable communities disengage from school permanently due to the influence of drugs, further limiting their future prospects. This educational disengagement, in turn, increases their exposure to risky behavior and, in some cases, leads to conflict with the law.*

*Indeed, youth involved in substance abuse are at a heightened risk of coming into contact with the juvenile justice system, often due to petty crimes, violence, or drug-related offenses. The criminalization of these behaviors not only disrupts their development but also perpetuates cycles of marginalization, making rehabilitation and reintegration more challenging. Thus, the phenomenon of youth drug abuse—especially among slum dwellers—is not an isolated issue but one that is deeply rooted in broader systemic inequalities. It calls for multi-layered strategies that include prevention programs, rehabilitation services, family counseling, and community-based interventions aimed at protecting youth, promoting education, and preventing addictive behavior from becoming a lifelong barrier to opportunity and well-being.*

**Keywords:** *Slum Dweller, Substance Abuse, Addictive Behavior, Juvenile Justice System, Youth Drug Abuse, School Dropout.*

## **Introduction:**

Persistent drug abuse, classified as a malady or behavioral illness, damages brain function, leading individuals to compulsively use drugs despite negative consequences. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (2022) explains that the brain's distinct components are interconnected through neural circuits responsible for transmitting messages. Drugs like marijuana, cocaine, and inhalants disrupt these communications by interfering with neurotransmitter signaling. Genetics, mental health, family, and environment are major risk factors. Chronic drug use has dangerous consequences beyond just the substances used. It damages physical and mental health, disrupts education and employment, strains family and social relationships, and often leads to social isolation and economic hardship. For vulnerable populations especially youth in marginalized communities the impact is even more severe, deepening cycles of poverty and limiting future opportunities. Addressing chronic substance abuse therefore requires a comprehensive approach that not only treats addiction but also tackles the underlying social, economic, and psychological factors contributing to it.

Kumar, Dangi, and Pawar (2019) highlight that India's youth (ages 15–24), who represent a significant portion of the population, are crucial for the nation's future. However, drug abuse, especially among poverty-stricken youth in areas like the slums of Siliguri Municipal Corporation, poses a threat. Poor living conditions and unemployment contribute to chronic drug use and deteriorating mental health.

Gunjan (2020) found that recurring use of illicit drugs, or depress gens, can cause symptoms like disturbed sleep, reduced energy, cognitive impairment, and poor academic performance. Alcohol abuse, for instance, is linked to 25% of college dropouts and 40% of poor academic outcomes. According to May et al. (2015), hope, self-efficacy and goal-oriented thinking are key elements in recovery from addiction. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) aids individuals in identifying triggers, building coping mechanisms, and understanding the roots of addiction. Aftercare through therapy, support groups, or sober living environments strengthens long-term recovery. A research done by Stoelben et al. (2000) has highlighted the concept of "Self Medication". Self-medication which is a widespread practice, yet using drugs safely requires a fundamental understanding of them. However, there is limited information available regarding adults' knowledge about drugs. In many cases, adolescents acquire their understanding of drugs only after they have already begun using them, rather than beforehand. This lack of prior knowledge poses significant risks, especially when individuals choose to medicate themselves. Many young individuals are introduced to drugs—both legal and illegal—through personal experimentation or peer influence, rather than formal

education or medical advice. As a result, their knowledge about the substances they consume tends to come after use, rather than before. This post-exposure learning process increases the likelihood of misuse, dependency, and adverse health outcomes. Without prior understanding of the risks and proper administration, adolescents who engage in self-medication are vulnerable to accidental overdoses, harmful drug combinations, or delayed professional treatment for underlying conditions.

Moreover, the ease of access to over-the-counter medications and online drug markets contributes to the normalization of self-medication. The absence of preventive education in school curricula or public health initiatives further deepens the issue. Parents and caregivers also often lack adequate knowledge to guide young people in making safe medical decisions, creating a cycle of misinformation and risky behavior. In light of these concerns, it is imperative to implement early drug education programs that focus on safe medicine practices and critical thinking around self-diagnosis. Enhancing community awareness and encouraging responsible behavior through health campaigns can significantly reduce the dangers associated with uninformed self-medication.

As stated by Oetting and Beauvais (1987) psychosocial factors play one of the major roles in determining youth drug abuse, with peer groups such as gangs, close friends, or partners being the strongest direct influence on substance use. Young individuals often adopt the habits and behaviors of those within their immediate social circle, making peer clusters a powerful element in the development and persistence of substance abuse. As highlighted specially by a study done by Nega and Chacko (2021) street youth have an even stronger need for peer acceptance compared to their non-street counterparts. For them, earning recognition and acceptance is crucial, as they seek to avoid isolation in the harsh realities of street life. To fit in, these young individuals often imitate the behaviors and actions of their peers, adopting similar habits to gain approval which includes substance abuse. The fear of isolation and rejection drives them to seek approval in any way possible. As a result, many street-involved young people mirror the behaviors, attitudes, and activities of their peer groups. Engaging in similar actions not only helps them gain acceptance but also reinforces their identity within the group, providing a form of protection and emotional security in an otherwise unstable environment. However, positive social support in the recovery process and building strong, healthy networks through community programs, counseling services, and peer-led support groups can help redirect youth toward more constructive pathways. Support systems that offer emotional security, mentorship, and opportunities for personal development can gradually replace the negative peer pressures they face on the streets. In turn, fostering meaningful social connections based on trust and encouragement becomes a powerful tool for promoting resilience, personal growth, and long-term recovery among street-involved youth. According to Birtel, Wood and Kempa (2017) it is believed that perceived stigma negatively impacts the mental health and well-being of individuals undergoing treatment for substance abuse, while perceived social support is expected to foster a positive influence on their recovery and overall mental health.

According to a study done by Rokiyah et al. (2024), highlighted that support from family, friends, or the community plays a vital role in boosting a person's motivation, strengthening their resilience, and increasing their chances of sustaining recovery over time. Different types of assistance such as emotional encouragement, practical help, and the sharing of useful information aid individuals in managing the difficulties they face during the recovery process. Moreover, having consistent support system increases accountability, this can motivate individuals to stay committed to their recovery goals. The presence of a reliable network also fosters a sense of safety and trust, which is crucial when dealing with the emotional challenges of overcoming addiction. When individuals feel supported, they are more likely to seek help, participate in rehabilitation programs, and re-establish their roles within society. Therefore, social support is not merely a complementary aspect of recovery but it is a cornerstone of long-term success and reintegration into healthy, productive and peaceful living.

## Objectives

1. To study the rise and repercussions of drug abuse among the youth of Siliguri Municipal Corporation
2. To find out how substance misuse has affected society, resulting in a loss of focus that has raised the number of young people dropping out of academics.

## Methodology

The present study was conducted among 50 slum households within the jurisdiction of the Siliguri Municipal Corporation, aiming to explore the correlation between youth drug addiction and school dropout rates. A quantitative research approach was adopted to ensure the collection of measurable and comparable data.

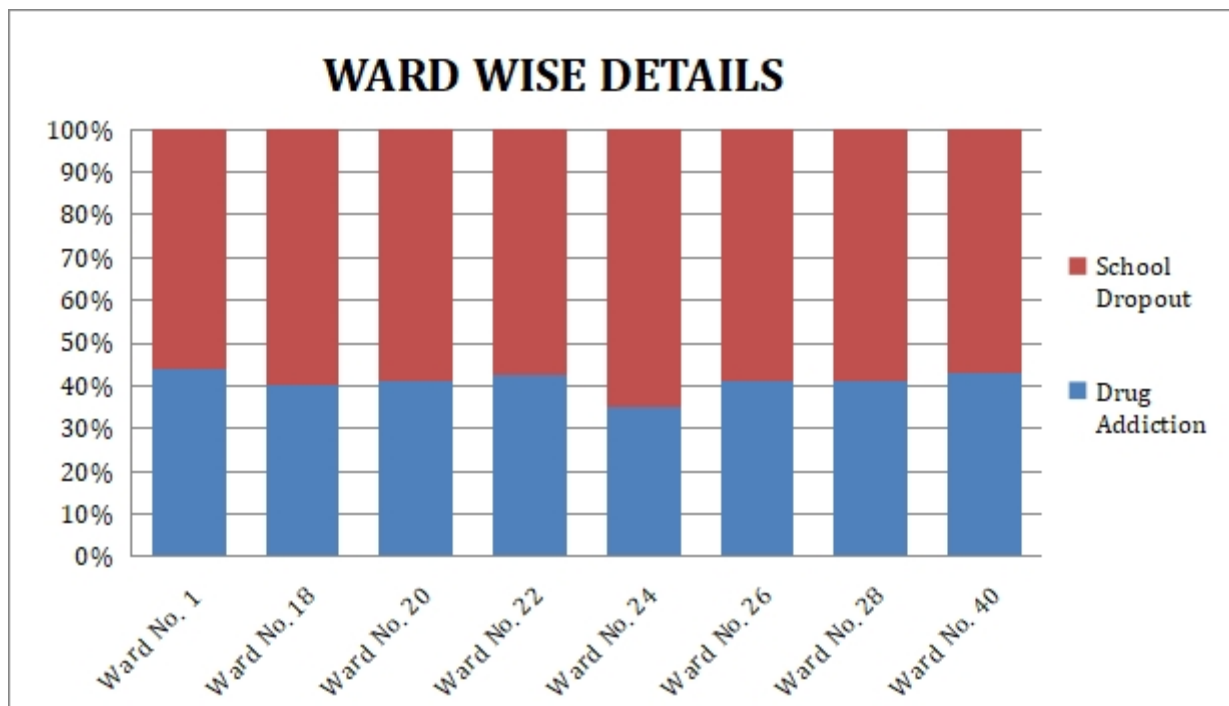
Primary data was obtained through door-to-door household surveys, enabling direct interaction with residents and allowing the researchers to gather firsthand insights into the living conditions, substance use patterns, educational backgrounds, and family dynamics of the youth in these households. This method provided an opportunity to understand the socio-economic contexts and personal experiences that may influence both addiction and academic disengagement.

To supplement the primary data, secondary data was collected through visits to government-aided schools, local institutions, and colleges. Discussions were held with school staff, counselors, and administrative personnel to obtain information on attendance patterns, dropout rates, and the perceived impact of drug use among students. Additionally, relevant public data records and statistical reports were reviewed to provide a broader contextual framework, helping to validate and support the findings derived from the fieldwork. The research design ensured that the findings were grounded in actual community experiences while also reflecting broader educational and social trends within the region.

## Data Analysis

The Siliguri Municipal Corporation is divided into 47 wards in total. According to Biswas Azizul (2022), out of 47 wards, 14 are in the Jalpaiguri district and the rest in Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district. Of these, 33 wards were classified as slum areas in the 2011 census. Eight wards served as the basis for the study, and five houses in each ward were surveyed. According to the secondary data the highest drug addiction rate was recorded in Ward no. 40 with a percentage of more than 60 % youth involved in chronic drug abuse. 80% of these young people have left school, with dropout rates rising sharply between the (ages of 13 and 16). As their addiction deepened, the majority dropped out of school, and pressure from other young people or peer pressure struggling with drug addiction made matters worse. In slum ward no. 1, 55% of youth ages 16-20 in surveyed households are reportedly involved in drug abuse. 70% of school-aged youth involved in drug addiction have dropped out of school. Most of these dropouts occurred during secondary school years ages 14-16, with youth choosing drugs over education and facing social and economic pressure to leave school, according to the survey records of both primary and secondary data. Ward no. 18 recorded the lowest rate of youth involved in substance abuse with a recorded rate of 10% traced according to the secondary data. 15% of drug-addicted youth have left school, age 12-15. Wards 20, 24 and 28 recorded moderate drug addiction levels among the youth with a trace of 30% which resulted in 55% of school and college dropouts. According to the ward's primary and secondary records addiction is seen as a significant cause of absenteeism because students were not able to concentrate due to high levels of intoxication, which eventually lead to permanent dropout, particularly for older students in secondary school and college level (aged between 16-21). According to the Secondary data wards 26 and 22 showed 28% of youth into chronic drug abuse with 40% getting permanently dropped out of academics due to lack of

concentration by persistently consuming drugs. The quantitative data analysis indicates that youth drug addiction is a major factor contributing to school dropout rates.



Further, the families of youth who were chronically affected by substance abuse were included in the study to gain a broader understanding of the social and emotional dimensions of youth drug addiction. A structured questionnaire was used during the household surveys, and their perceptions and attitudes were systematically recorded and evaluated using a Likert Scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” This method provided quantifiable insights into how families interpret the causes, consequences, and current interventions related to youth substance abuse and educational disengagement. A significant portion of the respondents “strongly agreed” that drug addiction was the primary factor contributing to their children’s school dropout. Many reported that their children, once enrolled in school, gradually lost interest in academics, withdrew socially, and eventually stopped attending altogether due to the overwhelming effects of addiction. In addition to academic concerns, parents expressed a deep sense of emotional exhaustion and helplessness, often stating that they felt powerless in guiding their children back toward a productive and drug-free life. Moreover, there was a clear correlation between negative perceptions of drug abuse and higher levels of parental disengagement from their children’s education. Parents who believed that addiction had completely overtaken their child’s potential were less likely to be involved in school-related activities or to pursue educational reintegration efforts. This emotional and psychological withdrawal not only worsens the situation for the youth but also isolates families from potential support systems. The study also revealed widespread dissatisfaction with existing support mechanisms. A majority of respondents selected “disagree” or “strongly disagree” when asked whether they believed that adequate resources, rehabilitation services, or community-based programs were available to address the issue. Families pointed to a lack of affordable counseling, unavailability of de-addiction centers nearby, and minimal engagement from local authorities or educational institutions in responding to the crisis. Several families emphasized that the government’s involvement was largely absent, and where it did exist, the efforts were inconsistent or inaccessible to low-income groups, particularly slum dwellers. In many cases, families were unaware of any intervention programs, highlighting a significant gap in communication and outreach. This suggests that not only are



services insufficient, but awareness about existing resources is also extremely limited. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted awareness campaigns, family-centered rehabilitation models, and policy-level initiatives that prioritize vulnerable communities where youth drug abuse and school dropout are most prevalent.

## **Interpretation**

Ward no. 40 had the highest rate of drug addiction, with 60% of the young adults addicted and, correspondingly, 80% of them having dropped out of school. The alarming figure that over 60% of young people abuse drugs chronically indicates that drug addiction has become firmly ingrained in society, especially among younger people. This may be the result of drugs being easily accessible, drug use becoming accepted in social settings, insufficient police enforcement, or a lack of preventative measures in the ward. The peer pressure to fit in grows stronger when young people see their peers abusing drugs. In this case, 80% of the youth dropping out of school signifies that many had already disengaged from the education system as their addiction worsened.

The high rate of drug abuse and school dropouts in Slum Ward no. one where 55% of youth ages 16-20 are involved in drug abuse and 70% of school-aged youth involved in drug addiction have dropped out at the age 14-16 reflects high levels of poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services, all of which contribute to the stress and frustration experienced by the residents. Youth growing up in such environments may feel hopeless about their future prospects, seeing little opportunity for upward mobility through education. As a result, drug abuse becomes a form of escapism, offering temporary relief from the daily hardships they face. Youth in this ward is vulnerable to substance abuse and are increasingly likely to abandon their education, perpetuating a cycle of social and economic disadvantage.

The significantly lower rate of youth involved in substance abuse in Ward no. 18, at just 10%, suggests that there are protective factors at play in this community that mitigate the risks of drug addiction. The moderate rate of drug addiction in Wards twenty, twenty-four, and twenty-eight has led to a notable disengagement from academics, as seen by the 55% dropout rate among students in the 16–21 age groups. The data indicate that 28% of youth in Wards twenty-six and twenty-two are involved in chronic drug abuse, with 40% permanently dropping out of academics due to persistent drug consumption.

## **Findings**

The study reveals a strong and consistent link between youth drug addiction and school dropout rates across several wards, underscoring the urgent need for localized and context-specific interventions. In Ward Forty, the situation is particularly severe. A significant number of young adults are battling addiction, which has directly contributed to a high rate of school dropout. The problem is further intensified by the normalization of drug use, peer influence, and the absence of structured preventative strategies within the community and educational institutions. Youth in this area are often exposed to environments where drug consumption is treated as a social norm, reducing the perceived risks and increasing susceptibility to addiction. The lack of school-based support systems or intervention programs means students struggling with substance use often disengage silently, without the necessary help to re-engage academically.

In addition, socio-economic challenges—including high rates of poverty, unemployment, and inadequate educational infrastructure—create a backdrop that fosters both vulnerability to drug abuse and diminished motivation for academic persistence. These structural issues not only limit access to opportunities but also weaken the safety nets that might otherwise protect at-risk youth from falling through the cracks.

Conversely, Ward Eighteen offers a valuable counterexample. Here, the prevalence of youth drug abuse is noticeably low. The ward benefits from strong family involvement, proactive community participation, and a sustained emphasis on education and extracurricular engagement. These protective factors work collectively to insulate youth from the lure of substance use. Schools in this ward tend to have better student support systems, and community activities provide healthy outlets for young people, keeping them meaningfully occupied and motivated.

Meanwhile, Wards Twenty, Twenty-Four, and Twenty-Eight reflect moderate levels of drug addiction among youth, with a growing number of students facing challenges in sustaining their education. Many of these youths begin their schooling with promise but eventually drift away due to the cumulative impact of substance use, family instability, and a lack of responsive intervention.

The challenges are more acute in Wards Twenty-Six and Twenty-Two, where chronic drug use has become deeply embedded in the youth culture. In these areas, addiction has severely undermined academic engagement, with a significant portion of students leaving school permanently. The persistent nature of substance use here has eroded attention spans, reduced cognitive engagement, and created behavioral patterns incompatible with academic success. These wards are marked by a noticeable absence of sustained mental health support and educational counseling, further perpetuating the cycle of disengagement.

Overall, the findings emphasize that while drug addiction among youth is a widespread issue, its manifestation and intensity vary significantly across different wards, depending on the availability of social support, educational resources, and community resilience. The study clearly points to the need for targeted, ward-specific interventions, the strengthening of support networks, and proactive, school-based prevention programs to effectively address the dual crises of addiction and school dropout.

## **Recommendations**

- Strengthen family and community support networks to create safe spaces. Families must be empowered with the tools and knowledge to recognize the signs of substance abuse and understand how to offer both emotional and practical support.
- Enhance local law enforcement and collaborate with community groups. Strengthening the partnership between law enforcement and local organizations ensures that there is a coordinated approach to both prevention and intervention.
- Implement drug awareness and prevention programs in schools. By integrating drug education into school curriculum, schools can help raise awareness, encourage healthy lifestyles, and ultimately prevent the initiation of substance abuse among youth.

## **Conclusion**

The study highlights a clear link between youth drug addiction and school dropout rates, demonstrating that substance abuse significantly hinders educational engagement. In areas where drug addiction is prevalent, students are more likely to leave school prematurely due to the overwhelming challenges posed by addiction. Socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment, and a lack of resources further exacerbate the issue, making it difficult for youth to stay in school. By helping them overcome the challenges of addiction, it is not only shaping their individual futures but also strengthening the foundation of our communities and ensuring a healthier, more productive society.

This deeply human struggle of substance abuse is one that affects not just the students battling addiction but their families schools and communities as a whole when young people fall into the grip of substance abuse

it's not merely an academic setback it's a life detour that can derail dreams strain relationships and limit future opportunities school which should be a safe space for growth and discovery often becomes another place of stress and disconnection for those caught in this cycle yet there is hope by recognizing the root causes such as poverty unemployment and lack of access to supportive services we can begin to build pathways back for these youth supporting them through comprehensive addiction recovery programs mentorship and educational interventions is not just about keeping them in school it's about reminding them of their worth potential and right to a brighter future when we invest in these young lives we do more than reduce dropout statistics we ignite possibility we help individuals reclaim their stories families rebuild trust and communities grow stronger ultimately addressing youth addiction is not only an act of intervention but a profound gesture of belief in the resilience of our young people and the promise of a more compassionate empowered society

The youth of today are the architects of tomorrow's world. They carry within them the energy, creativity, and vision that can shape the future of a nation. But to realize this potential, they must be shown that life offers more than the shadows of addiction; that there is light beyond the darkness, and a future full of purpose, dignity, and achievement. By guiding them toward healthier choices and standing by them in their most vulnerable moments, we are not just saving individuals but we are securing the future of our communities and our country.

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