

## SUBSTANCE USE, PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS AND PROPENSITY FOR VIOLENCE: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY ON DRUG ADDICTS

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### ABSTRACT

The complicated relationship between drug abuse, psychotic disorders, and any potential link to violent behaviour is explored in this study. The study's objective is to provide a thorough analysis of how drug use and symptoms of psychosis may affect a higher propensity for violence. By carefully analysing empirical data and relevant literature, this study explains the complex interactions between these variables. The findings highlight the importance of addressing these co-occurring issues in comprehensive intervention and prevention strategies by demonstrating a strong correlation between drug use, psychotic disorders, and violent tendencies. Making policies and treatment plans that advance public safety and help those battling drug addiction and psychiatric disorders require an understanding of these connections.

**KEY WORDS:** Violence, Substance Abuse, Psychological problems, Anxiety, Addiction, Alcohol, Impaired judgment, Mental health, Hallucinations, Intolerance

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the relationship between substance use and its potential to influence violent behavior has garnered significant attention among researchers, policymakers, and society at large. The intricate connection between substance use and violence is a multifaceted phenomenon that necessitates comprehensive investigation. This research paper delves into the role of substance use and its psychological effects, with a specific focus on understanding whether substance use can be considered a catalyst for violent tendencies. By exploring this critical topic, we aim to shed light on the underlying mechanisms and implications for intervention and prevention strategies.

#### Background:

Substance use, encompassing a wide range of drugs such as alcohol, illicit substances, and prescription medications, has long been associated with a lot of social and health-related issues. One particularly concerning aspect is the potential correlation between substance use and violent behavior. Numerous studies have indicated a notable overlap between individuals engaged in substance use and those prone to exhibiting violent

tendencies. While this association is far from deterministic and varies among individuals, there exists a compelling body of evidence suggesting a significant relationship between substance use and violent behavior.

Understanding the psychological effects of substance use is crucial in comprehending its potential influence on violence. Substance abuse has been shown to impact various cognitive and emotional processes, including impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation. These alterations in psychological functioning can potentially heighten the likelihood of engaging in aggressive or violent acts. However, it is essential to acknowledge that not all individuals who use substances will demonstrate violent behavior, as other contributing factors, such as pre-existing mental health conditions and social determinants, can play a role.

#### Significance and Implications:

Understanding the potential link between substance use and violence is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, it can

inform the development of effective prevention strategies that target high-risk populations and mitigate the escalation of violent incidents. Secondly, exploring the psychological effects of substance use can contribute to the advancement of evidence-based interventions and treatment approaches, allowing for tailored support to individuals struggling with substance use disorders. Lastly, unveiling the intricate relationship between substance use and violence can foster a more comprehensive understanding of the social factors and systemic challenges that perpetuate this cycle, facilitating targeted policy interventions and social support systems.

This research paper aims to address the following question:

- i. To find the influence of substance use amongst addicts on propensity for violence.
- ii. To find the influence of psychotic disorders amongst addicts on propensity for violence.

By exploring the intricate interplay between substance use, psychological effects, and the propensity towards violence, we aim to ascertain the potential causal relationship between these factors. Additionally, we seek to evaluate the broader societal implications and the necessity for addressing this complex issue from both preventive and intervention perspectives. In conclusion, this research paper seeks to delve into the connection between substance use, psychological effects, and propensity towards violence. By examining the existing literature and conducting an analysis of the available data, we aim to contribute to the current understanding of this complex issue. It is our hope that this research will provide valuable insights that can inform evidence-based strategies for prevention, intervention, and the development of support systems, ultimately working towards a safer and healthier society.

#### **Literature Review:**

The society today is witnessing violence in different ways due to multiple factors. One causal relation can't be established for one action leading to violence. If we want to find some mediators and variables that may lead to violence are Poverty, Illiteracy, Religious extremism, Domestic & International Terrorism and Substance Abuse (Harriet A 2015). Here the focus is on the relationship between Substance use leading to psychological problems and intolerance which can

be a cause for violence. To understand the concepts first we need to understand what these literally means according to Amanda Cawson in her book "What is violence" states that violence isn't mere a narrow concept i.e physical, paradigmatic and violent actions but also a range of social, political and economic paradigms. Even though criminologists, political scientists, public policy makers, and members of the general public occasionally treat violence as distinct from aggressiveness, most social psychologists believe that violence is a subset of aggression. The most prevalent scientific definition of violence is an extreme type of aggressiveness with the intention of causing great bodily harm (such as major injury or death). Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Bushman & Huesmann, 2010; Huesmann & Taylor, 2006) The terminology "substance" can refer to any drug of abuse, a medication, or a toxin (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994) Various classes of substances include: alcohol, amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, nicotine, opioids, phencyclidine (PCP) and sedatives, hypnotics, or anxiolytics (APA, 1994). There can be different types of substance abusers i.e Type A&B Users also the types of drugs also matter i.e whether they are uppers or downers. The usage of substance can lead to psychological effects and also cause intolerance where the user may not be able to keep calm and may resort to violence. The tendency of a user to be violent is more probable than a non-user. Although laboratory and empirical data suggest that alcohol may play a causal role in violent behaviour in this scenario. Similarly, stimulants like cocaine and amphetamines may contribute to violent behaviour, according to the psychopharmacodynamics of these drugs. However, the majority of real-world research show that this link is incredibly complex and is influenced by a wide range of personal and environmental variables. In addition to psychopharmacological consequences, substance abuse may cause violence through social mechanisms such as drug distribution systems (systemic violence) and economic compulsive violence (violence committed in order to obtain drugs or money for drugs). Substance abuse and violence: A review of the literature.

Another study was conducted where a group of people with drug dependency and another group

with no dependence for examined. This study showed that the level of aggression exhibited by the drugs dependent group was more one more than that exhibited by the non user group(TJAAllen). This does not mean that a substance user shall always be aggressive but studies have proved that use of substance increase the propensity of a person to become aggressive or Violent.

The American Journal of psychiatric association published study where The effects off certain drugs i.e Sodium amytal, previtin and mescaline on the same individual showed psychological changes In them(PH hOCH). The journal of nervous and mental disease also conducted a study where an experiment was designed and conducted on group of participants building on the studies of other sociologists and psychologists.This experiment conducted a group research on the previous studies and found that Ranging from good feelings to suicidal feelings and from hopelessness to sexual encounters all of these were studied and the end result showed a lot of changes in the psychological state of the participants(mental disease journal). Both of these previous list mentioned studies shows us that the use of drugs or substances have effect on the state of an individual whether it be direct causal relationship or psychological effect mind of the user.

It can also be seen that alcohol and violence have a complex causal relation. Studies have shown that use of substance can alter a person in different ways. The level of aggression is far more in users than compared to non-users. It isn't necessary that the use may have a direct link with violence and aggression but also economically motivated crimes and violence along with the systemic drug violence (H WHITW 2019)

Not only direct causal linkage leads to violence but the use of substance also leads to psychosis and hallucinations which might result into non intentional harm i.e traffic accidents etc.From this perspective, it is likely that problems with cannabis and tobacco use are linked to underlying issues and struggles that, on their own, are associated with psychopathology. Researchers must be careful to distinguish between the selection effect—which results from being a member of the population segment that prefers high escapist lifestyles—and any putative negative effects of drug use itself. Additionally, it's likely that the outlawing of narcotics changes the demographics of the user

community in favour of people who exhibit more dysfunctional behaviour. According to this perspective, the connection between substance use disorder, underlying problems, and life challenges is particularly pronounced for substances that are criminalised. This is because people who have difficult lives are less likely to be deterred by the prospect of legal repercussions. (P JHONSTAD 2022).The size of the effect is related to the extent of cannabis use, with greater risk for early cannabis use and use of high-potency varieties and synthetic cannabinoids. Accumulating evidence suggests that frequent cannabis use also increases the risk for mania as well as for suicide. However, the effect on depression is less clear and findings on anxiety are contradictory with only a few methodologically robust studies. Furthermore, the relationship with common mental disorders may involve reverse causality, as depression and anxiety are reported to lead to greater cannabis consumption in some studies.( John McD.)In some older studies the link between substance use and violence was eliminated by examining the criminal records and basing they will findings on that.( H White 2000)

Use of alcohol has a significant role been increasing the propensity of a person to become violent. Studies show that is more likely person to become violent and deviant under the influence of all. From petty crimes to many gruesome ones the influence of alcohol Can be seen amongst many offenders (G Banks) Alcohol abuse is widespread in the United States, as is access to firearms, including private handgun ownership. They both seem to be related to one another and both raise the likelihood of using a handgun in violent crime. If limitations were properly created and implemented, restricting access to firearms for those who abuse alcohol would probably avoid violence. States would be operating in accordance with a substantial amount of empirical evidence if they enacted such limits. Garen J. Wintemu

A study was conducted on Evidence of connections between specific subtypes of drug use disorder and violent outcomes has been synthesised in this systematic review. According to the findings, all types of drug use disorders carry a higher risk of violent behaviour, and differences in risk estimations between studies may be partially explained by differences in study design and the nature of violent outcomes. They found primary

case-control and cohort studies using validated clinical criteria that documented the risk of violence against others among people with drug use disorders by following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. found 18 research that included data on 591,411 people with drug use disorders and were published between 1990 and 2019. (Drugs use disorder shaoling zhong).

In another study the relationship of Drugs, Youth and Violence was examined. It explored whether drug trafficking as primary cause of violence in youth gangs or merely a related factor, while also acknowledging the presence of other significant contributors to gang violence. The first section provides a historical overview of gang involvement in drug use and trafficking, highlighting the increasing participation of youth gang members in drugs and violent criminal activities. The second section examines the current perception of youth gangs, distinguishing between street gangs and drug gangs, and exploring the link between youth gangs and adult criminal organisations. Moving on to section three, the bulletin delves into studies that explore the relationship between youth gangs, drugs, and violence. This section investigates additional crucial sources of violence within the gang context, with a specific focus on youth gang-related homicides, drug trafficking (including the impact of firearms on gang violence), and the factors contributing to and associated with youth gang violence. This research draws from long-term studies conducted on adolescent samples to provide insights into these matters. Finally, after summarizing the research findings, the bulletin presents policy and program implications aimed at breaking the cycle, emphasizing strategies to address the identified issues. (J HOWEL S DECKER 1998)

The effects of drugs and propensity of a person to become violent are studied in research of Sp Baughman and found higher frequency in users rather than the nonusers (Drugs and violence Sp Baughman).

It can't be declared that substance abuse has a direct causal linkage but also the role of substance abuse as a mediator can't be ruled out. The mental and psychological effects of substance use, the amount & frequency and the time span of use have significant effect on the propensity of a person to become violent or aggressive.

#### **METHODS AND METHODOLOGY:**

This research follows a qualitative methodology. Since, this research attempts to find the influence of substance use and addiction on propensity for violence. Also this research involves finding out the influence of psychotic disorders on propensity for violence. Therefore, choosing a qualitative methodology was considered appropriate. Regarding data collection a semi-structured interview was developed. It consisted of two sections both the sections dealt with two objectives of the research. Four questions were asked regarding each objective, respectively. In the interviews questions were asked about the effects of usage of different amounts of drugs and how psychological factors contributes to violence. For the purpose of data collection, the sampling technique adapted was convenience sampling. This type of sampling was adopted in order to ensure the response was taken from experts and practitioners is the relevant field. The target population was addicts and mentally & psychologically challenged people. Staff and experts from drugs rehabilitation and mental rehabilitation were engaged. The sample size was ten respondents.

The respondents included following:

Mr Aman Nawaz Khan, Doctor, Peshawar, HOD Radiology RMI

Ms Sana Naseer Khan, Doctor, Peshawar, Clinical Researcher, KMU

Mr Jawad Ali, Social Welfare Department, Peshawar, Social Welfare Officer

Ms Hina Khan, Psychologist, Peshawar, CMH

Mr Mamoor Khan, PASI, Hangu, KPK Police

For the purpose of data analysis, the interviews conducted were transcribed and the data was codified. Firstly, we started with open coding then axial coding, the most common and important codes were selected according to selective coding. The data from interviews was tagged and labelled which lead us to finding out the most repetitive ideas and answers. From this data the key words and main idea of research was deduced.

#### **Analysis & Results:**

As a result of the analysis of qualitative data a number of results have been derived. These results are provided below.

The first objective focused on the propensity for violence in addicts of different types of users. Analysis of the data collected from the interviews



had the following main ideas and themes/codes. The most recurring and highlighted concepts which were found in the data are given below:

- 1- Anxiety
- 2- Rage and Psychological Problems
- 3- Alcohol induced rage and aggression
- 4- Impaired judgment
- 5- Violence emerging from procurement and distribution of drugs

The examination of the interview data provides important new insights into the tendency for violence among various categories of addicts. An extensive picture of the causes influencing violent behaviour is provided by the recurrent themes of anxiety, addiction and psychological issues, alcohol-induced wrath and aggressiveness, impaired judgement, and violence resulting from drug acquisition and distribution. First off, anxiety seems to increase the likelihood of violence since it may cause addicts to have heightened emotional reactions that may manifest as aggressive behaviour. Second, the confluence of addiction and psychological difficulties raises the possibility that violent tendencies may be exacerbated, as underlying mental health problems may make drug-related aggressive behaviours worse. Thirdly, the link between wrath brought on by alcohol and violence highlights the risky effects of substance usage on behavioural restraint. The analysis of data from the interviews reveals significant insights into the propensity for violence among addicts of different types. The recurring themes of anxiety, addiction and psychological problems, alcohol-induced rage and aggression, impaired judgment, and violence arising from drug procurement and distribution provide a comprehensive picture of the factors contributing to violent behavior. Firstly, anxiety appears to heighten the risk of violence as it may trigger a heightened emotional response in addicts, leading to aggressive actions. Secondly, the coexistence of addiction and psychological problems suggests a potential exacerbation of violent tendencies, where underlying mental health issues may amplify aggressive behaviors associated with drug use. Thirdly, the connection between alcohol-induced rage and violence underscores the dangerous impact of substance abuse on behavioral control. Fourthly, impaired judgment resulting from drug use can lead addicts to make impulsive and violent choices they would otherwise avoid. Lastly, the involvement of

violence in the procurement and distribution of drugs highlights how the illicit nature of drug trade fosters a hostile environment where conflict and aggression become the norm. Together, these deductions point towards a complex interplay of psychological, pharmacological, and sociological factors that promote violence among addicts, emphasizing the need for multifaceted interventions to address this concerning issue.

The second objective focus on how psychological and mental diseases relates to the propensity of the person to become violent. During the data analysis the following codes/themes were most recurring and are listed below:

1. Intolerance
2. Damaged judgment
3. Medical purpose use and effects
4. Health problems
5. Hallucinations
6. Inability to comprehend situations and aftermaths.

Several important themes are highlighted by data analysis on the connection between mental and psychological disorders and the propensity for violence. First of all, the theme of intolerance suggests that people who suffer from psychological or mental disorders may have a lower tolerance for stress and frustration, making them more prone to violent outbursts when confronted with difficult circumstances. Second, the idea of damaged judgement implies that these people might have trouble making rational decisions, which might result in impulsive and violent behavior. Thirdly, the analysis of drug use for medical reasons and its results shows that some drugs, even when prescribed for mental health conditions, may have unintended effects on mood and behavior, possibly raising the risk of violence. Fourthly, the emphasis on health issues highlights the possibility that people who are dealing with mental illnesses may see a decline in their physical health, which can aggravate irritability and aggression. Fifth, the existence of hallucinations in some cases suggests that warped perceptions of reality may be a factor in violent behaviour motivated by fear or confusion. Last but not least, the theme of an inability to comprehend situations and their effects suggests that people with specific mental or psychological disorders may find it difficult to comprehend the effects of their actions, which could result in unintended violent outcomes.

Overall, these recurring themes highlight the complex relationship between mental health and violent tendencies, emphasising the significance of early intervention, support, and suitable treatment to address and manage such issues.

**Discussion:**

The findings from the analysis offer valuable insights into the underlying factors that promote violence in each cohort. In the case of addicts, anxiety emerges as a significant theme, indicating that individuals struggling with addiction experience heightened emotional responses, potentially leading to violent behaviour (J McD 1992). Furthermore, addiction and psychological problems are closely intertwined, suggesting that addressing mental health issues could play a vital role in violence prevention among addicts (Allen T J 1997). The link between alcohol-induced rage and violence highlights the need for targeted interventions to address substance abuse and its impact on aggressive behaviour (G Banks). Additionally, the impaired judgment among addict's points to the importance of educational campaigns and counseling to enhance decision-making skills and reduce violent tendencies arising from impaired cognitive function (Hoch P H 1952). In contrast, individuals with psychological and mental diseases display unique themes that contribute to their propensity for violence Weeghel, J.V & Dorsselaer S.V. (2014). The theme of intolerance suggests that reduced tolerance to stress may trigger violent outbursts among this group. Additionally, the presence of damaged judgment raises concerns about decision-making abilities, requiring tailored support and therapeutic interventions to mitigate violent actions. The consideration of medical purposes for drug use and its effects emphasises the need for vigilant monitoring of medication impacts on behaviour and emotional states to prevent violence resulting from unintended consequences. The link between health problems and violent behavior among this group underscores the importance of integrated care that addresses both mental and physical well-being. Moreover, the presence of hallucinations implies that addressing distorted perceptions of reality is essential to minimize violent reactions driven by fear or confusion (Baughman S B 2015). Finally, the inability to comprehend situations and aftermaths highlights the necessity for improved

communication and coping strategies to prevent violent outcomes stemming from a lack of understanding.

**Conclusion:**

This study shows how psychotic disorders and substance abuse creates or increase the propensity of a person to become violent. The mental and rehab facilities were the target population and data was collected from their staff and experts. After consulting and interviewing concerned experts, the findings of this study reveals that there is a connection of substance use and psychotic disorders with propensity for violence. An addict and a person with psychological disorder, both are more likely to take wrong decisions due to their impaired judgement and powers. So, in a way these both phenomena and population contribute to violence.

Some recommendations for the future researchers are listed below:

- 1- This study was of a qualitative nature; researchers are invited to approach this concept from a quantitative point of view.
- 2- A study of same nature with larger scope and increases population should be conducted.
- 3- Any and every rebuttal or recommendation is graciously welcomed.

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