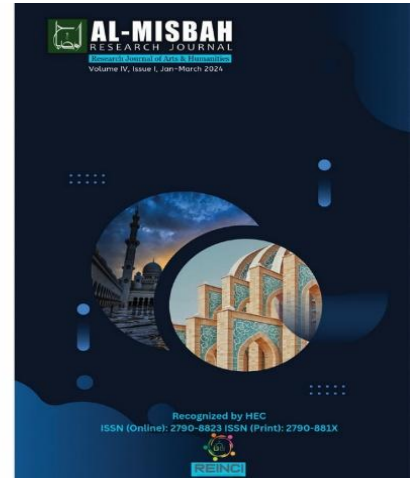




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**Article:**

**Substance Use and Suicidal Tendencies among Male Students of University**

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## SUBSTANCE USE AND SUICIDAL TENDENCIES AMONG MALE STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between substance use and suicidal tendencies among male students at University. The current study finds a possible connection between substance use and the persistence of suicidal tendencies. Correlational cross-sectional research design was used, data was collected anonymously from a sample of male students using structured questionnaires. The Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (SSDS) was used to measure suicidal tendencies, and the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10) was used to measure substance use among male students of University of Sindh, Jamshoro. It was observed that the participants' substance use patterns and their correlation with increased suicidal tendencies was significant. We analyzed demographic factors, like age and level of academics, to understand their influence on these behaviors. T-tests between final year students and first year students and between substance user and non-user students show a mean difference in suicidal ideation, indicating substance-use to be an important risk factor for mental health problems. The importance of this research stems from the magnitude of interventions, counseling programs, and awareness campaigns that need to be conducted in university settings to help in the prevention, or an intervention at least, of substance abuse and suicidal tendencies. This study gives valuable insights for policymakers, educators and the mental health professionals to design effective strategies that takes into account a healthier academic environment.

**Keywords:** *suicide tendencies, substance use, male students, mental health, Sindh University, DAST-10, SSDS.*

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# Substance Use and Suicidal Tendencies among Male Students of University

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## Introduction

The pattern of substance use and suicidal tendencies among university students has become a major public health problem worldwide, and it has a great influence on their mental health and academic performance. The transition from school education system to university introduces young adults to a range of pressures, including those related to academic adjustment, socialization, and the development of independence. Other challenges may result in some students using substances (for example alcohol or drugs or other substances) as a means of maladaptive coping with stress or anxiety.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, substance use has been strongly associated with increased risks of depression, impulsivity, and suicidal ideation, adding to the complex mental health picture for this at-risk group.<sup>2,3</sup> In spite of socio-religious norms in Pakistan discourage substance use, there is increasing prevalence of substance use among university students.<sup>4</sup> Especially male students may have higher chances of being vulnerable, as society expects more from peers and the easy availability of substances in academic settings.<sup>5</sup> Research findings indicate that substance use is not merely a response to academic stress but also a significant predictor of suicidal tendencies, particularly in resource-limited mental health settings.<sup>6,7</sup>

Research conducted worldwide has consistently highlighted a link between substance use and suicidal tendencies. In 2020, World Health Organization study<sup>8</sup> estimated that those who misuse substances are much more likely to experience suicidal ideation because their judgment is impaired and their inhibitions are low, and the substance misuse exacerbates underlying mental health disorders. In South Asia, where mental health stigma is rife, the combination of substance use and depression is compounded by the wider reluctance to talk openly about such issues.<sup>9,10</sup> Bandura's social learning theory provides insight that we develop behaviors such as substance use through observation and imitation. This theory suggests that social environments can normalize risky behaviors and create cycles of substance abuse.<sup>11</sup> The Interpersonal–Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior<sup>12</sup> says that three important factors contribute in suicidal tendencies: the need to feel burdensome, the lack of belonging, and the learned ability to cause one's own pain and death. Abusing drugs often make these problems worse.

This paper explores these issues using Sindh University, one of Pakistan's top academic institutions, as a microcosm. Male students in higher education are particularly susceptible to encountering stressors distinct from school education experiences. These stressors may include academic challenges, limited access to mental health resources, and cultural stigmas surrounding mental illness that are often associated with university settings. Such factors can potentially heighten the risk of substance use and persistent suicidal ideation.<sup>9</sup> While international studies have extensively explored these relationships, research focusing on Pakistani universities remains significantly limited. Addressing substance abuse and suicidal behaviors requires prioritizing efforts to bridge this research gap.

This study explores the relationship between substance use and suicidal tendencies among male students at University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Demographic, social, and psychological factors are examined in research to inform the development of targeted prevention and intervention strategies, fostering a safer and healthier university experience.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the interrelationships between key constructs: depression, suicide tendencies and substance use. It also includes the impact of the social and demographic variables.

*Substance Use as a Direct Risk Factor:* Drug use of any kind is closely associated with suicidality, as it disrupts cognitive functioning, heightens impulsivity, and intensifies emotional distress.<sup>3</sup>

*Depression as a Mediator:* Depression mediates the relationship between substance use and suicidal tendencies. The risk of suicidal ideation is higher for students who engage in substance use, who are more likely to develop depressive symptoms.<sup>13</sup>

*Social and Environmental Influences:* Early social pressure, including peer influence and cultural expectations, leads to dependency on substance use. At the same time, cultural stigma around mental health stops students from getting timely help.<sup>6</sup>

*Demographic and Academic Variables:* Factors such as age, academic level, and socioeconomic background significantly impact the occurrence and severity of substance use and suicidal tendencies.

The framework for this study aligns the study's objective with its theoretical foundations in order to demarcate a structured and logical view of the complex dynamics among substance use, depression, and tendencies toward suicide. In this way, it shows how important it is to address both the direct and mediating behaviors, figuring out where to focus behavioral interventions.

## Significance of the Study

This study analyses the prevalence and patterns of substance use and suicidal behaviors in male students in detail, setting a baseline for future research. Through this study, key psychological, social and environmental determinants are identified that contribute to these issues and therefore help us understand why these issues exist. The study also shows how depression can affect substance use and suicidal thoughts, as well as how academic and social pressures can make these things worse. This helps researchers figure out how to help reduce these problems.

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The findings offer unique, culturally specific insights that can be used in the creation of mental health and substance abuse programs specifically developed for Pakistani university students who face unique challenges. The research assists policymakers, university administrators and mental health professionals to create effective support systems, including counselling services, peer support program and awareness campaigns. This completes the limited body of literature on substance use and suicidal tendency in South Asia and provides the basis for comparative studies and future research.

This study not only contributes to an academic discourse but also provides practical resources for stakeholders to improve student well-being and mental health by addressing such critical issues in culturally specific contexts.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: There would be significant positive relationship between substance use and suicidal tendency among male students at Sindh University.

H2: Male students with substance use are more likely to be at risk of suicidal tendencies than male nonusers.

H3: Final year students have a higher rate of suicidal tendencies as compared to first year students.

### **Research Design**

This study employs a correlational cross-sectional research design to explore the relationship between substance use and suicidal tendencies among male students at Sindh University. This design allows for the identification of associations between variables at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the prevalence and patterns of substance use and suicidal tendencies

### **Population and sampling**

*Target Population:* Male students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs at Sindh University.

*Sample Size:* A sample size of 50 participants was determined using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error to ensure sufficient statistical power.

*Sampling Technique:* To ensure representation across various faculties and academic years, we employed a stratified random sampling method. This method minimizes bias and ensures the diversity of the student population.

*Inclusion Criteria:*

- Male students aged 18 and above.

- Students currently enrolled in any academic program at Sindh University.

## Data Collection Instruments

*Demographic Questionnaire:* The researcher-designed instrument collected data on age, academic level, socioeconomic status, and parental education.

*Siddiqui Shah Depression Scale (SSDS):*<sup>14</sup> A culturally adapted self-report measure to assess depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies among the Pakistani population. Each of 36 items is scored on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = Not at all to 3 = Extremely). Validity: Construct reliability and internal consistency were high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91).

*The Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10)*<sup>15</sup> is a standardized tool that assesses the severity of substance use, excluding alcohol and tobacco. The test consists of 10 yes/no questions that inquire about the effects of drug use during the past year. Reliability: It had high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92).

## Procedure

Recruitment of participants took place throughout the campuses, in different classrooms and departments. Before collecting their data, all participants provided written informed consent. Unique participant codes were assigned in order to ensure anonymity, and data were stored securely to ensure confidentiality. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw themselves from the study at any stage without incident.

The instruments were administered in private, controlled settings to encourage honest responses. Clear instructions and provisions were made on how to fill in the questionnaires, and participants were allowed to ask for help if they found it challenging.

## Ethical Approval

The study followed ethical guidelines as laid down by the Ethics Review Committee of Sindh University. We also provided contact information for mental health resources and counseling services to participants who reported feeling severely depressed or suicidal.

## Results

The results of the study are presented here after analysis of the data using SPSS. Demographics, Correlation and T-test were administered and tables are shown below.

## Substance Use and Suicidal Tendencies among Male Students of University

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>	Below 18	2	4.0
	18–20	21	42.0
	21–23	25	50.0
	Above 23	2	4.0
<b>Academic Year</b>	First Year	25	50.0
	Final Year	25	50.0
<b>Drug Use Experience</b>	Yes	36	72.0
	No	14	28.0

The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1. The majority of the participants (50%) were aged 21–23 years, with 50% enrolled in Bachelor of Science (BS) first year and 50% in final year programs. Additionally, 72% of participants reported having tried drugs at least once.

**Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between Substance Use and Suicidal Tendencies**

Variable	Substance Use (DAST-10)	Suicidal Tendencies (SSDS)
Substance Use	1.00	.427**
Suicidal Tendencies	.427**	1.00

**Note.**  $p < .01$ .

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between substance use (measured by DAST-10 scores) and suicidal tendencies (measured by SSDS scores). The results revealed a significant positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .427$ ,  $p < .01$ . This indicates that higher levels of substance use are associated with increased suicidal tendencies.

**Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test for Suicidal Tendencies (SSDS)**

Group	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Substance Users	23.50	5.23	1.96	48	.056
Non-Users	20.87	4.75			

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare SSDS scores between substance users and non-users. The results indicated no statistically significant difference in suicidal tendencies between the two groups, although the difference approached significance,  $t(48) = 1.96, p = .056$ .

Although the difference is not statistically significant, substance users displayed higher mean SSDS scores compared to non-users, suggesting a trend worth exploring in future research.

**Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test for Academic Year in Suicidal Tendencies (SSDS)**

Academic Year	Mean	SD	t	df	p
First Year	20.90	4.80	-2.12	48	.040
Final Year	24.10	5.30			

An independent samples t-test were performed to assess differences between academic years in suicidal tendencies. The results revealed that male students of final year exhibited significantly higher SSDS scores compared to first year students,  $t(48) = -2.12, p < .05$ .

Final students reported significantly higher suicidal tendencies, which could be attributed to increased academic pressure and life responsibilities.

### Summary of Findings

- A significant positive correlation ( $r = .427, p < .01$ ) was observed between substance use and suicidal tendencies, supporting Hypothesis 1.
- No significant difference in suicidal tendencies was found between substance users and non-users, though the trend suggests higher scores for users ( $p = .056$ ).
- Final year students exhibited significantly higher suicidal tendencies than first year students ( $p = .040$ ).

## **Substance Use and Suicidal Tendencies among Male Students of University**

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These findings underscore the critical relationship between substance use, academic year, and mental health, highlighting the need for targeted interventions within university settings.

### **Discussion**

This study was done to investigate the connection between the substance use and suicidal tendencies among male students of University. The results indicated important patterns and associations consistent with prior research findings and offer important insights into these interrelated problems.

Results showed the positive correlation of substance use with suicidal tendencies ( $r = .427$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This finding is aligned with previous studies that have shown that substance abuse can be very harmful to mental health. For example, according to Gauthier, exacerbated substance use sensitizes impulsivity and emotional instability, which are highly predictive of suicidal behavior.<sup>3</sup> Lamis and Malone also demonstrated that individuals using drugs and alcohol are more likely to have suicidal ideation because of the drugs and alcohol's effects on judgment and coping functions.<sup>2</sup>

These findings are similar to those of Shah, who studied drug use among students at Pakistani universities and found that peer pressure and academic stress often play a role.<sup>7</sup> Both of these factors are exacerbated in places with few mental health resources. In line with global studies,<sup>13</sup> the mediating role of depression in substance abuse and suicidal tendencies also presents a cyclical nature of the two.

It was found that male final year students have significantly higher suicidal tendencies compared to first year students ( $p < .05$ ). According to Farooq, the academic and life pressures found in older students explain higher mental health vulnerabilities.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, cultural norms in South Asia around how masculine and successful an individual is expected to be may discourage older students from getting help and increase their risk for depression and suicidal ideation.<sup>6</sup>

There was no statistically significant difference in suicidal tendencies between substance users and nonusers ( $p = .056$ ); however, substance users did seem to score higher. Its finding also confirms already established research such as Chuadry,<sup>4</sup> which stated that substance use frequently serves as a means of coping with psychological stressors. Nevertheless, the near-significant result implies that further research with larger samples might be able to capture this relationship.

### **Implications**

This study has important implications for universities, policymakers, and mental health practitioners. Universities urgently need to implement early screening and intervention programs to identify at-risk students. For one, setting up on-campus counseling centers and peer support groups would diminish the stigma around mental health problems and convince

more students to get help. To encourage people, we should organize awareness campaigns and regular workshops on mental well-being alongside these efforts.

There is also a critical role for policymakers to fill with regard to addressing substance use on university campuses. Within academic institutions, introducing educational campaigns can facilitate creating an environment supportive of mental health and substance-related problems. To control drugs and, by extension, substance abuse, universities, law enforcement, and community groups need to work together to limit the availability of drugs near campuses and make sure that substance abuse policies are followed.

The findings indicate that substance abuse and suicide are both problems for mental health practitioners to consider, and the findings stress the importance of designing interventions that specifically target both problems. To address unique challenges Pakistani male university students face, gender- and culturally sensitive strategies are to be a priority.

## Conclusion

This study shows a strong relationship between substance use and the suicidal tendencies of male students at Sindh University and emphasizes the need for focused interventions. The results indicate that substance use is a key risk factor for mental health problems and that it increases depression and suicidal ideation. Older students are even more vulnerable because of the pressure in academics and society.

By observing practices in the UK, universities and policymakers can tailor measures to address gaps in the mental health support system, raise awareness about the issue, and prevent mental health disorders. These findings should be built on in future research with larger, more diverse populations and with regard to the longitudinal impact of substance use on mental health.

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