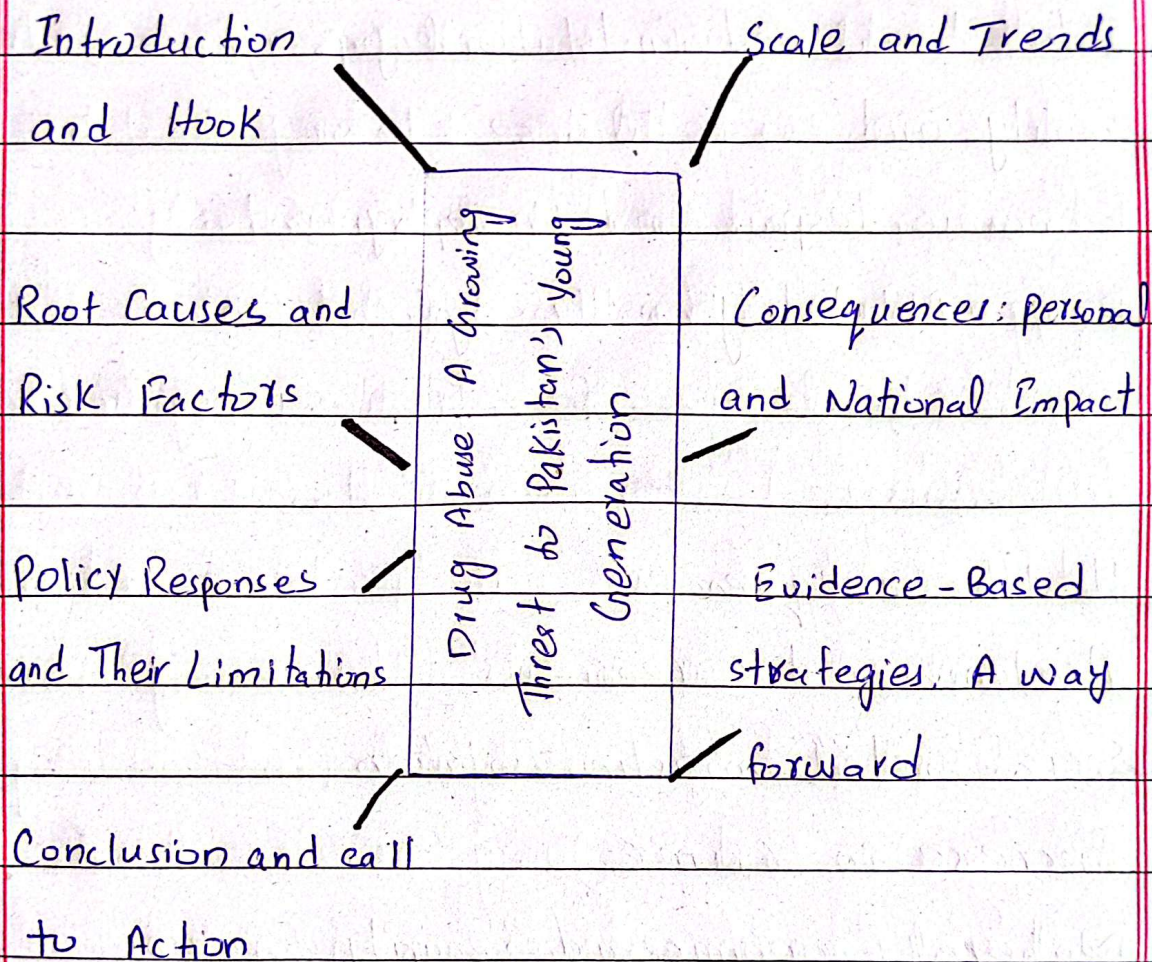


# Drug Abuse: A Growing Threat to Pakistan's young Generation

## Brainstorming



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# THE ESSAY

Day: **M T W T F S**

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_

Every year in Pakistan, an estimated 6.7 Million people - about 6.1% of the population use drugs with youth constituting a deeply worrying proportion. This data is collected by UNODC. This silent epidemic has penetrated campuses, urban neighborhoods and even rural towns, eroding health, education and national productivity.

Drug Abuse, broadly defined as the non-medical use of narcotics, psychedelics, and misused pharmaceuticals. It is not merely a personal problem; it is a complex social threat. This essay offers an explanatory analysis: first outlining the scale and evolving trends, then exploring key causes, consequences, existing policy responses and finally charting evidence based strategies to counter the crisis.

The UNODC Pakistan's National drug use survey 2022-24, jointly conducted with the Ministry of Narcotics Control

and US INL funding, is the most comprehensive data source yet on Pakistan's drug landscape. In 2012-13, the previous survey estimated 6.7 million substance users (excluding Tobacco and alcohol), or 9.1% of adult males and 2.9% of adult females. Synthetic drugs, especially methamphetamine are being used commonly.

Pakistan's strategic proximity to major opium-producing regions makes it both corridor and consumer. Heroin and Charas are most commonly available. ANF data confirms that during late 2023 that seizures of more than 4000 kg of narcotics alone, worth over US \$200 Million were intercepted in multi-operations nationwide.

Youth are disproportionately affected: many begin drug use during their teenage years. Separate studies report that 35.1% of street children in Islamabad

started narcotic use before age 19. Anecdotal evidence from northern areas like skardu indicates chras use among university-age teenagers is common. Campus culture, urban social circles and even office environments in twin cities normalize recreational use.

On Reddit, multiple youth in Islamabad describe drug access near cell centers, shops in Sohni, Barskahu and Andron Pindi; a community user remarks, "it's literally everywhere... because life here is tough... easier to do drugs."

Chronic anxiety, academic stress, trauma, and depression often go undressed. A Reddit doctor highlights that addicts frequently arrive in government hospitals emaciated and suffering co-morbid infections. Most of them lack access to counseling or psychological interventions.

With youth unemployment rates around 11.1% and rising inflation, many young

people face deep frustration. Drugs being cheap and easily accessible, provide temporary escape. In cities lacking recreational or communal spaces, drug use becomes an alternative to boredom.

Drugs flow through porous borders with Afghanistan and KPK, and homemade labs, especially for synthetic drugs emerge in urban zones. Authoritarian parental styles, broken families, and lack of communication make vulnerable youth more prone.

Among street dwelling youth, 37% reported using narcotics, often influenced by peers and survival dynamics.

Addiction devastates vital organs like liver, heart and brain. It dramatically raises the risk of HIV and hepatitis via shared needles.

UNODC and medical literature estimate overdose deaths in Pakistan

number in the hundreds per day.

Addicts often perform poorly academically, drop out of schools and universities, and remain unemployed.

Drug use contributes to crime, theft, gang involvement, and domestic violence. Trafficking syndicates are linked to organized crime and terrorism financing networks. Analysts warn of "narco terrorism", where illicit drug money funds militant and asymmetric groups.

Pakistan reportedly loses over PKR 800 Billion annually due to healthcare costs, lost productivity and law enforcement due to high number of drug addicts. Addictions also divert funds that could support preventive care.

Addiction isolates individuals, breaks family ties, increases divorce and neglect, and diminishes civic participation.

ANF reports during late 2023 seized upwards of 2800kg of narcotics worth over US\$ 207 million in coordinated operations across Pakistan, involving arrests and vehicle impoundments.

Delivery of MATRCs (Model Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centers) across urban centers treated thousands of addicts; however, capacity remains limited.

Rehabilitation centers remain few and most addicts lack access to affordable treatment. Mental health services in educational institutions are virtually nonexistent. Social stigmas prevents many from seeking help.

A way forward to make strategies could include integrating drug awareness modules in schools and universities' curriculum, real life testimonials and myth busting operations. Deployment of counselors in institutions, expanding digital helplines

like UMANO and reducing stigma, via awareness campaigns can also help. Community based desaddiction models have proven effective globally.

Adopt selective technology models; AI led trafficking detection, GPS tracking of high risk offenders, digital forensics and inter-agency coordination. Punjab's adoption model, with every officer adopting a drug user for rehabilitation "Each One Adopt One" can inspire civil-police partnerships.

To sum up the essay, Drug abuse in Pakistan, especially among its youth, is not a passive or passing issue rather it is a national emergency. With atleast 6-7 Million users, rising synthetic drug use and overwhelming pressure on public health and

security, the stakes could not be higher. Yet this crisis is not beyond solution.

Drawing on UN-led data, expert interventions, enforcement success, and civil society participation, Pakistan can craft a robust, scalable response.

Key to success will be integrating education reforms, mental health access, community engagement, rehabilitation expansion and data driven, technology enabled law enforcement. Families, educators, NGOs and the government must act in concert.

As Pakistan's youth form over 60% of the population, safeguarding them from addiction is not optional, it is essential to securing the nation's future and it's possible for sure.