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Rahat Shah *

Imran Sabir †

Saba Aslam Khan ‡



Student's Risk Perception and Attitude towards Drug Abuse in Educational Institutions of Pakistan

Abstract: *The current study aimed at exploring the attitude and risk perception of the students towards drug abuse. It was conducted through a quantitative survey technique in the educational institutions [Schools, Colleges and Universities] of four metropolitan cities of Pakistan. The sample size for the survey was 4997 students, using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. The study found that although a majority (79%) of the students has a negative attitude towards the use of drugs, and consider its consumption as risky [poor health, lack of sleep, physical weakness, low academic performance, family conflicts and involvement in crimes], yet every fifth of the students is vulnerable to become a drug addict, as 21 percent of the respondent's regard drug consumption as a risk-free activity. Conclusively, findings of the study, even though limited in the scope, are important to understand adolescent behaviour to ascertain the direction of future public policy on drug abuse in Pakistan.*

Key Words: Risk perception, Attitude, Drug abuse, Students, Pakistan.

Introduction

Consuming drugs for other than medicinal purposes have often been a controversial issue for public policy in many of the modern nation-states, especially in the 'monde occidental'. Proponents of liberalism and the ideologies based on individualism strongly oppose the criminalization of drug consumption and sale, in the presumption of protecting an individual's freedom and democratic rights [Greiff, 1999]. However, those who favour the prohibition, assert its most likely consequence on health and collective morality [Mosher and Yanagisako, 1991]. Whether these scholarly debates produce any effect on national drug policy of a country or not, has also become a matter of choice, depending on varied ideological and moral stances. However, most of the countries around the globe do not favour the drug liberalization, as more than 150 countries, including Pakistan, are in collaboration with UNODC to fight against the criminal usage of drugs.

Pakistan is currently facing a serious issue of drug abuse among its population. The country is losing the fight to control the prevalence of illicit drug use, which is aimed to be drug-free by 2020 under its Drug abuse master plan 2010-14. As per the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report titled "Drug Use in Pakistan 2013", estimated 6.7 illicit drug consumers in Pakistan; out of that, 4.25 million are drug dependents. Whereas on further apportionment, it is clear that a huge number (4 million) of these drug users are cannabis addicts that account 3.6 percent of the total population; intake/smoke intense hashish also regarded as *charas*. Moreover, 1.6 million people use opiates along with 860,000 heroin consumers and 320,000 opium users between the age group 15-64 [UNODC, 2013]. Moreover, HIV positive was reported among 11% of the drug addicts in 2005, whereas the ratio increased to 40 % in 2011 [Quigley, 2014]. The most commonly abused drugs are alcohol, benzodiazepines, amphetamine, cocaine, barbiturates, opioids, MDMA and methaqualone [Zaman et al., 2015]. However, it does not indicate the universality, but the patterns of abusive drugs vary in the cultural context of societies. The epidemiology of abuse of drugs is linked to attitudes, values beliefs prevalent in diverse geographical regions [Emmanuel, Akhtar, and Rahbar, 2003]

Substance abuse can be associated with negative educational outcomes including diminishing interest, poor performance and dropouts [UNESCO, 2017]. The individuals who intake drugs over time develop drug dependence syndrome that is an intense craving of drugs and failure to control the excessive intake of drugs. Such individuals lose interest in those activities which they once valued, and neglect their social life such as education, livelihood, recreation, and family [UNODC, 2017]. There are many biological and social risk factors

* PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: rahat.shah331@gmail.com

† Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡ PhD Scholar, Department of Sociology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

that increase the vulnerability of individuals to develop drug dependency syndrome. The addictive environment of the household is the key factor that increases the likelihood to develop this syndrome. Besides this, marital and economic status also contribute to increase or decrease the tendency. Individuals who remain unmarried or those with lower socioeconomic status are at greater risk [\[Zaman et al., 2015\]](#).

There have been many reverberations in the media about the usage of drugs among the students in educational institutions for the last few years. Recently, an increase is observed in the speculations in print and electronic media that the issue of drug use has plunged into the educational institutions of Pakistan, and there are frequent discussions and reporting on this issue. A number of government officials have also expressed their concerns on the issue of drug abuse in educational institutions after recent reports of media and NGOs on bewildering figures of drug abuse in educational institutions. One such report by South Asia Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI) claimed that 53% of the students in Islamabad's elite schools are drug users, who are mainly consuming hashish, heroin, ecstasy tablets and opium [\[Abbasi, 2016\]](#).

Keeping in view, the media reports about drug abuse in educational institutions of Pakistan and the absence of systematic research on drug abuse among students attracted the attention of academicians to conduct research on this issue. Investigating risk perception and attitude of the students towards drug usage is important to assess the acceptability of youth towards this hazardous behaviour. Risk perception is the individual belief about the possibility of issues in the future [\[Peretti-Watel, 2003\]](#). It has been argued that risk perception and attitude towards drugs has a close association with the actual use of drugs. Attitude and perception could be inhibitors as well as facilitators of substance abuse [\[Lundborg and Lindgren, 2002\]](#).

It is equally important to understand that risk perception and attitude towards drugs differ according to various demographic characteristics such as age and gender [\[Park et al., 2009\]](#). By analysing the attitude and risk perception of drug abuse, actual behaviour and vulnerability of the individuals in drugs involvement can also be predicted [\[Jenks, 1992\]](#). The current study, therefore, attempts to understand how students in the educational institution of Pakistan perceive risks related to drug abuse. And what is their attitude towards drugs use? The point to ponder is that usually it is assumed that people use drugs due to lack of awareness about its consequences. If educated youth is indulged in illicit use of drugs, then shall we assume that they are not well aware of the consequences of their behaviour? Analysing these aspects will also help in drawing specific mechanisms and strategies to protect the vulnerable students from hedonistically luxuriating themselves in drug usage.

Literature Review

Drugs are historically abused in all societies and cultures, for example, residents of ancient Greece used alcohol, Indian in South America used to chew the leaves used in the production of cocaine and Chinese used opium for intoxication [\[Goldberg, 1993\]](#). Researchers have conducted studies in diverse cultural contexts for understanding the role of drugs, such as Australian skinheads associate drinking with British identity [\[Moore, 1994\]](#), and the culture of the pub is considered as an expression of masculinity [\[Mousavi et al., 2014\]](#). Prevalence of illicit drugs is increasing with a rapid speed, and it was estimated that 4–6% of the people in the age group 15 to 64 years were consuming the different illicit drug in 2009. Cannabis, with a prevalence ratio of 3–5% was among the most frequently used drug [\[UNODC, 2011\]](#).

The literature on risk perception of drugs has highlighted different risk factors. There is a strong correlation between risk perception and experiences of drugs [\[Calafat et al., 2008\]](#). Recreational nightlife activities, e.g., clubbing and partying, also has a close relationship with the youth risk perception about drugs. These activities are participated by both drug consumers and non-consumers. The peer group that gathers there plays a key role in changing the perception of non-consumers towards drug abuse. On the other hand, [\[Benthin et al. \(1995\)\]](#) were of the view that the association between risk perception and experiences of consuming drugs works in two ways. Firstly, a person chances of using a specific drug increases when he or she consider that drug as less harmful, and secondly using a certain drug also results in changing perception towards it as less harmful. However, [\[Warner, Krebs, & Fishbein, \(2008\)\]](#) presented some different factors which influence risk perception towards drugs among adolescents. These factors include nativity, family support and acculturation. Adolescents from migrant Hispanic families consider drug abuse more risky behaviour in comparison to Hispanics born in America.

Early research indicates that youth risk perception of drugs is associated with their drug abuse experiences [\[Danseco, Kingery, & Coggeshall, 1999; Calafat et al., 2008\]](#). However, risk perception is not the only indicator, the amount of pleasure and excitement youth associate with drugs also influences their

tendencies towards its abuse ([Duff 2008](#); [Holt & Treloar 2008](#); [Parker & Stanworth 2005](#)). Previous research is criticized for giving much attention to the awareness and unawareness of the risks and had pushed aside the positive expectation and experiences of the youth with regard to substance abuse ([Parker & Stanworth, 2005](#); [Measham et al., 2011](#)). Many scholars pointed out that Youth was interested in drugs due to the pleasure and excitement associated with it and not because of the unawareness of the risks. We have focused on both of these aspects, pleasure-orientation and risk perception in the current study.

Attitude is a person psychological predisposition which is expressed through the confirmation or denial of a particular person, thing or act. Additionally, attitude guides an individual decision about the attainment of goals and seeking environment consistent with his own attitude ([Mousavi et al., 2014](#)). Modifications and changes in a person attitude are considered as strategies to balance with the social environment ([Helkama, Myllyniemi & Liebkind, 2004](#)). A major example is the involvement of the youth in different antisocial activities like violence on the street and drug abuse for getting acceptance from their peers ([Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005](#)). Similarly, drug-addicted youth share their non-harmful drug abuse experiences with their non-addicted peers and influences their attitude towards drug abuse. Exposure to more and more addicted peers increases the possibility of a positive attitude towards drugs and ultimately towards its abuse ([Mousavi et al., 2014](#)). There are some gender variation in exposure to drugs as boys usually have earlier exposure to substance abuse in comparison to girls ([Van Etten & Anthony, 2001](#))

The literature on drug abuse highlights different factors resulting in the usage of drugs among individuals. However, most of the existing research studies are focused on actual use among the youth, and very few studies are available on student's attitude and risk perception regarding substance use ([Gerrard et al., 2002](#)). It has been argued that risk perception indicates future drug abuse ([Brody et al., 1998](#); [Danseco et al., 1999](#)). Understanding the risk perception of the students could help in developing strategies to reduce their likelihood of involvement in substance use. There is also a lack of research studies focusing on a student's attitude and perception of drugs risks in Pakistan. The current study is, therefore, an effort to contribute to the literature through investigating risk perception and attitude of students towards drug abuse in educational institutions of Pakistan.

Methods

The research was conducted through a quantitative survey technique. A quantitative approach is used to measure the attitude, knowledge and perception of individuals regarding a certain phenomenon ([Neuman, 2007](#)). Epistemological foundations of the study are based on positivist principles, which assert that objective reality exists outside the individuals, and it should be discovered through statistical measures and tools ([Bryman, 2016](#)). We collected data from the educational institutes (schools, colleges and universities) of four metropolitan cities of Pakistan i.e. Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar, selected for being most populous among others. The ratio of drug use among students of these four cities was also observed to be the highest in Pakistan, claims a survey report by [UNODC \(2013\)](#). Sampling strategy for the study was multi-stage cluster sampling. At the first stage, the clusters were determined for different types of educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities), based on their geographic dispersion. In the next stage, each cluster was further divided into private and public sectors. In the third phase, the sample was drawn from each cluster of institutions using a stratified proportionate sampling technique. We determined the sample size (n) by the proportion of units in each stratum (H) using the following formula:

$$\sum_{h=1}^H n_h = n.$$

Where H was each stratum of the total population (N), and n_h was the sample size for the stratum.

The Target sample of the current study was 8000 students of public and private institutions. However, due to the accessibility issue and sensitivity of the topic, the team was able to collect data from 6200 respondents. During the second phase, the data was systematically edited, and a number of questionnaires were discarded as they were half-filled and lacked required information. After data editing, 4997 questionnaires were left, which were used as data to draw findings for the present research.

Tool for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The nature of the research design required close-ended responses in order to analyse the attitude and risk perception of the students regarding drug abuse. For the collection of data, questionnaires were distributed among the respondents, as respondents were students of educational institutes; they filled the questionnaires anonymously. However, on-field experiences

altered the aforementioned path. Where it was convenient to enter and collect data from Public universities, relatively challenging situations were faced by the researchers to approach students from private sector whether it was a university, school or college. There were not only security concerns, but also the institutions felt that their credibility was at stake. Hence the researchers had to approach the respondents outside the campus in informal settings. The data had been analysed using IBM Statistics, commonly known as SPSS, which makes the analysis systematic (Bryman, 2016).

Findings

Students Attitude towards Drug Abuse

Table 1 illustrate the attitude of the students towards drugs abuse. Our results show that majority of 70.8% of students do not perceive drug use to be a pleasant experience. While to some (18.6%), drug use seems to be a pleasant experience. We could relate this to study by Duff (2008), who stated that young people who associate excitement and pleasure have higher chances of involvement in substance abuse. The respondents did not agree that a person should try drugs once in a lifetime shown in the results with the 71.6% negative response to the notion. The rest of the results suggest that a young person should try drugs once, but the percentage is low (20.2%) and (8.1%) students had no opinion about it.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Students Attitude towards Drug Abuse

Opinions	Agree		Disagree		Uncertain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Using drugs is a pleasant experience	911	18.6	3476	70.8	523	10.7
A young person should try drugs at least once in a lifetime	988	20.2	3497	71.6	396	8.1
Risks related to drugs are exaggerated	1522	31.9	2619	55	623	13.1
The laws on drugs should be made lenient	813	16.8	3633	75	401	8.3
Drug use is not one of the biggest evils in the country	1119	23.1	3275	67.5	459	9.5
Drugs help people to experience life in full	555	11.4	3784	77.8	523	10.8
Usage of drugs is a personal choice, and the campus should not interfere in it	912	18.8	3502	72.1	446	9.2
The police shouldn't annoy people who try drugs	659	13.5	3818	78.3	397	8.1
Using drugs allows you to be more focused in your life	621	12.8	3579	73.6	662	13.6

In the study, it was inquired if the risks relevant to drug abuse were exaggerated. The results depict that students (55%) are of the view that risks related to drug abuse are not exaggerated; rather, they are real. While a considerable amount of response (31.9%) was in agreement with the exaggeration of risks involved with drug use. It appears that perception of social risks and hazards associated with drug use changes with the actual use of drugs (Peretti-Watel, 2003), despite the fact that alcohol and drug abusers are socially defamed and rejected (Room 2005). The opinion of students about the regulation of drug use in the country has to be restrictive. 75% of the respondents were found against making the laws on drugs lenient. On the other hand, some of them (16.8%) were in favour of making these laws less restrictive. The reason for having restrictive than lenient laws for drug use could be the general reluctance of respondents towards the use of drugs and the risks involved in it. According to Lejčková and Csémy (2005), those adolescents associate high risks with drug users who do not take drugs and reject consuming it. As the amount of substance use increases by the users, his/her attitude towards that specific drug also increases. Whereas the regular drug users' attitude towards drug use were more tolerant.

The results in the above table also suggest that drugs do not help people experience their lives in full, with a significant percentage of 77.8%. A very small proportion of the sample is of the view that drugs are helpful in experiencing their lives in full. This shows a non-supportive attitude of students themselves towards the drug use in Pakistan. It was highlighted in the study of [Holt and Treloar \(2008\)](#) that stated that the key role in making the decision to either uses the specific drug or not is affected by the risk perception related to drugs. The results for student's opinion about the role of campus in regulating the drug use on campus. A significant amount (72.1%) of respondents agree that campus should interfere in the restricting the drug use on campus and it should not be a personal choice while a considerable proportion (18.8%) disagrees with the ones who think campus can interfere. The attitude of respondents so far is not in favour of using drugs independently and having lenient laws as well as the use of drugs once in a lifetime. Similarly, when it comes to police's involvement, 78.3% respondents agreed that police should play their role in restricting the drug use while a small percentage (13.5%) thinks that police should not annoy those who try drugs.

Perceived Social Consequences of Drug Abuse

Table 2 shows the students views regarding social risks attached to drug abuse. They were asked about the role of drug use in academic performance. The results show that 72.2% of students thought that drug use negatively affects academic performance for those who use drugs. However, 20.3% did not think so. About the dropouts which the drug use can cause, respondents, with the percentage 66.9% agreed while 23.4% did not agree with drug use causing school dropouts. [McCrystal \(2007\)](#) stated that drug addiction results in academic failure and [Oikutu, \(2010\)](#) emphasized that drug abuse negatively influence performance in exams contradictory to the student's expectations. While, [Oshodi, Aina, and Onajole \(2010\)](#) asserted that misuse of drug leads to fatigued brain syndrome, which puts forward unsatisfactory academic results and other psycholological problems.

Table 2. Perceived Social Consequences of Drug Abuse

Consequences	Agree		Disagree		Uncertain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Low academic performance	3531	72.2	992	20.3	367	7.5
School dropouts	3244	66.9	1136	23.4	468	9.7
Financial problems	3576	73.7	861	17.7	418	8.6
Family conflicts	3817	78.8	690	14.3	335	6.9
Community conflicts	3666	75.8	785	16.2	386	8
Crime	3764	77.7	738	15.2	342	7.1
Violence	3611	74.5	799	16.5	435	9

There has been found a major correlation between drug use and financial problems in the results. 73.7% of the respondents were of the view that financial difficulties are caused due to the abuse of drugs such as [Plant, Plant, and Mason \(2002\)](#) argued that many people tolerate financial loss from drug use as a price for pleasure from these drugs use. Nonetheless, 17.7% of the respondents were against the causation of the financial issues to be attributed to drug abuse.

The results in table 2 also denote the role of drug abuse in family conflicts. Respondents in the majority (78.8%) believed that drug abuse leads to family conflicts. While some thought that it does not result in family conflicts. The same question about the general consequences of drug abuse in the shape of community conflicts was inquired. The results show that 75.8% of respondents regarded one of the reasons for community conflicts to be drug abuse. The overall response of the students with regard to the social consequences of drug abuse was negative as the students attributed financial issues, family conflict as well as community conflicts originating from drug abuse with a more or less same percentage which was above 70%. According to [Velleman et al., \[1993\]](#) family who has a drug abuser, faces many difficulties due to the problematic behaviours (robbery, instability, dysfunctional relationships, violence and crimes) of the drug abuser such as family violence and conflicts.

Similar to the responses above, the respondents asserted that the crime rate increases due to the abuse of drugs. Crimes and drugs relationship is one of the most tested, approved and reliably achieved relationship ([McBride & Swartz, 1990](#); [Bennett, Holloway, & Farrington, 2006](#); [Chaiken & Chaiken 1982](#)).

Like crime rate, violence is also thought to be occurring due to drug abuse. It was reported by (74.5%) of the participants that drug abuse could result in violent behaviour. We can conclude from the above discussion that most of the students consider drug abuse responsible for the issues like increasing dropouts, low academic performance, financial difficulties, community and family conflicts and the occurrence of violence and crimes. We can predict from these findings a lower percentage of the student's involvement in drug use in comparison to the exaggerated figures shown in the media and Saasi, (2016) survey report. Similarly, according to [Lejckova and Csemy \(2005\)](#), those adolescents associate high risks with drugs who are not involved in drug-related activities while adolescents involved in drug abuse have a positive attitude towards drugs and consider it less harmful.

Perceived Health Consequences of Drug Abuse

Table 3 presents students perception about the health risks involved with drug usage. Majority of the students (55.4%) thought that people who use drugs lose appetite while (28.3%) disagreed and suggested that using drugs does not result in the loss of appetite for the user. Similar to the results suggesting that drug abuse results in loss of appetite, the respondents (59.7%) thought that drug abuse causes sleeplessness as well.

Table 3. Perceived Health Consequences of the Students about Drug Abuse

Health Effects	Agree		Disagree		Uncertain	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Lack of appetite.	2708	55.4	1383	28.3	793	16.2
Lack of sleep.	2893	59.7	1343	27.7	612	12.6
Physical weakness.	3887	80.3	568	11.7	383	7.9
Poor memory and poor judgment.	3518	72.9	795	16.5	515	10.7
Distorted vision or hearing.	2848	59.2	1090	22.7	872	18.1
Altered perceptions.	3667	76	640	13.3	516	10.7
Mentally affected.	3783	78.5	624	12.9	415	8.6
Cancerous disease.	3625	75.3	618	12.8	572	11.9
Contracting HIV/AIDS.	2541	55.4	1131	24.7	914	19.9

The results on the physical weakness resulting from drug abuse were significant, with the percentage of 80.3%. This is the highest percentage making this response the most agreed upon among all other responses analysed before, and it suggests that a considerable number of students has a consensus on the harmfulness on health with this particular health effect. The literature supports the finding as [Fink & Beck \(2005\)](#) highlighted that drugs and alcohol abusers experience and physical discomfort and mild to moderate bodily pain and moderate loss of physical functioning.

About the distorted vision and hearing to be the health defects caused by drug abuse, (59.4%) of the study participants were agreed to this statement. Nevertheless, a non-negligible percentage (22.7%) disagreed with the fact that drug use can have an effect like distortion in hearing in seeing. Also, 18.1% of students were uncertain about it. Similarly, 76% of the students agreed that the use of drugs does result in altered perception. The health effects relevant to the central nervous system like vision, hearing, perceptions and memory have been agreed to be having adversely affected by drug abuse. Previous experimental studies also explored visual impairments, perception deterioration and colour vision impairment among drug abusers [[Kapinaty et al., 1993](#); [Hollien et al., 2001](#)].

Furthermore, the results show that 78.5% of respondents agree with the fact that mental health is affected when drugs are used. Several studies suggest that drug abusers have mostly moderate to severe level of depression [[Corner, 2009](#); [Rupp et al., 2008](#)]. Likewise, using the same syringes by many drug users to take the drug is one of the reasons for causing HIV/AIDS among users. Surprisingly, only 55.4% of the students agreed that using drugs may cause HIV/AIDS. On the other hand, 24.7% respondents disagreed, which is also a notable percentage and which is different from [Goldfrank & Hoffman \(1991\)](#) who concluded that intravenous substance abusers have the greater risk for developing HIV/ AIDS virus.

We found from the above discussion that most of the students consider drug abuse as a health-threatening behaviour and thus we can predict from these findings that students in small but significant numbers would be the actual users of the drugs. Nearly the same views were presented by [Duitsman and Colbry \(1995\)](#), stated that nonusers of drugs tend to consider drug usage as riskier for their health in comparison to users.

Table 4. Cross Tabulation Analysis of Gender and Drugs Risk Perception

Statements	Gender	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
Using drugs is a pleasant experience	Male	744 19.2%	2728 70.6%	394 10.2%
	Female	167 16.0%	648 71.6%	129 12.4%
A young person should try drugs at least once in a lifetime	Male	821 21.3%	2702 70.1%	329 8.5%
	Female	167 16.2%	795 77.3%	67 6.5%
Risks related to drugs are exaggerated	Male	1237 32.9%	1995 53.1%	524 14.0%
	Female	285 28.3%	624 61.9%	99 9.8%
Drugs help people to experience life in full	Male	468 12.2%	2933 76.5%	432 11.3%
	Female	87 8.5%	851 82.7%	91 8.8%
Usage of drugs is a personal choice, and the campus should not interfere in it	Male	762 19.9%	2697 70.5%	368 9.6%
	Female	150 14.5%	805 77.9%	78 7.6%
The police shouldn't annoy people who try drugs	Male	565 14.7%	2944 76.7%	331 8.6%
	Female	94 9.1%	874 84.5%	64 6.4%
Using drugs allows you to be more focused in your life	Male	533 13.9%	2724 71.1%	575 15.0%
	Female	88 8.5%	855 83.0%	87 8.4%

Table 4 is the cross-tabulation analysis of gender and risk perception of the students. Females perceive drugs as riskier in comparison to males [Kauffman, Silver, & Poulin, 1997]. Nearly similar were the findings, as shown in our cross-tabulation. Table 4 illustrates that there is a comparatively positive attitude towards drugs among male students in comparison to female students. When presented a statement "using drugs is a pleasant experience" a majority, 19.1% male respondents showed agreement, while the ratio of female students was only 15.1%. Similarly, only 7.7% of female students were agreed to the statement that drugs usage allows being more focused in life. In comparison, 13.9% of the male students were agreed to the aforementioned statement.

These differences in the attitude towards drugs usage are mediated by social and cultural factors, including parental monitoring and a strong stigma associated with the usage of drugs among females [Svensson, 2003]. The positive/tolerant attitude towards drugs is an indication of higher drug usage ratio among the males (WHO, 2010). These findings are similar to the UNODC [2013] drugs survey report in Pakistan, which found that out of 6.7 million total drug users, 5.2 million are men, and only 1.5 million are women.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study was aimed at understanding student's attitude and risk perception towards drugs in educational institutions of Pakistan. Evidently, the majority of the students do not like drugs and are less likely to indulge in drug consumption. They perceive drug consumption as risky behaviour because of its negative consequences on their health and social life. Previous studies have been criticized for taking only risk awareness and unawareness related to drugs into consideration, while ignoring the positive experiences and expectations that youth attach with it [See, for example, Duff 2008; Holt and Treloar 2008; Measham et al., 2001]. We kept this point in consideration in the current study and found that majority [71%] of the respondents did not confirm to the statements that drug consumption is a pleasurable experience, and one

should try to use drugs to seek pleasure. These findings are too far from confirming to the national media assumptions of astronomical rates of drug abuse among students, based on SASSI (2016) survey, which claimed that nearly 53% of the students in the educational institutions of Islamabad consume drugs. Along with that, previous research also claimed that youth drugs risk perception is associated with their experiences with illegal drugs [See, for example, [Calafat et al., 2008](#); [Danseco et al., 1999](#)]. However, risk perception is not the only indicator of youth drug abuse, excitement and pleasure from the use of drugs are also decisive factors [[Duff, 2008](#); [Holt & Treloar, 2008](#); [Parker & Stanworth, 2005](#)].

When asked about health and social consequences related to drugs, we got nearly the same response. The students were found to be aware of the health and social harms related to drugs. We found that majority of the students were agreed to the statements that drugs usage causes a decrease in academic performance, causes family and community conflicts, may produce lack of appetite and sleep, and can also lead to chronic diseases. It can be assumed that majority of students of the educational institution of metropolitan cities of Pakistan are less likely to be consuming drugs, as stated by [Benthin et al., \(1995\)](#) and [McDonald & Towberman \(1993\)](#) that the association between risk perception of drugs and experiences of drug use works in two ways. Firstly, the chances of a person's use of a specific drug increase when he or she considers that drug as less harmful. Secondly, experiencing a particular drug is likely to change the perception towards that drug as less harmful or non-harmful. We also found this pattern in our data, as students who are drug addicts consider the drug consumption as less risky behaviour, as compared to those who never consumed any of the drugs.

Socio-demographic factors play a significant role in variations in risk perception. For instance, sex of the students plays significant role to determine his/her involvement in this antisocial behaviour. A female student is less likely to get involved in drug consumption as compared to male, as vindicated by our data. Only 10% of female students claimed that they consider the use of drugs as less risky. This could be due to the strong patriarchal socialization factors, where traditional family structure puts more efforts in keeping the female affirmative to the standards of desired behaviour. [Svensson \(2003\)](#) and [Warner et al., \(2008\)](#) were also of the view that males are likely to perceive drugs as less risky in comparison to females. We found statically significant differences with regard to attitude and risk perception of the drugs among male and female students. [Greenberg and Schneider \(1995\)](#) were also of the view that among general public and students, females show more concern for the risks related to drug abuse than the males. Similarly, [Spigner, Hawkins, & Loren \(1993\)](#), highlighted that male students perceive the use of drugs and alcohol as less risky than females. Another study conducted with adolescents and adults ranging from sixteen to sixty-five years found that women consider smoking cigarette as higher risky than the men [[Hampson et al., 2000](#)].

To conclude, majority of the students in educational institutions of Pakistan perceive the usage of different drugs as a risky behaviour for their social, physical and mental wellbeing. Though a significant proportion of population under study considers it risky, yet every fifth of the students is potentially vulnerable to drug consumption due to positive attitude towards drug consumption. There is dire need to focus on socializing policies, not only at institutional levels but also at national level to curtail the proportion of such students in educational institutions. Our study has certain methodological limitations and feasibility constraints. The sample was based on students from educational institutions of metropolitan cities only. However, a future study could focus on collecting data from diverse populations like students from educational institutions in sub urban and rural areas and could compare their attitude and risk perception towards drugs to understand the patterns of risk perception across regions. Likewise, a qualitative study can also investigate the differences in attitudes and individual explanations of the way they construct their perceptions about drugs related behaviours.

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