

Research Article

Exploring University Student Attitudes, Beliefs, and Alcohol Usage Patterns: An Investigation into Alcohol and Drug Use within the Student Lifestyle

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Abstract

This research paper examines the attitudes, beliefs, and alcohol usage patterns among university students using a sample of 900 participants. The study aims to explore the factors influencing alcohol consumption and the prevalence of drug use among this demographic. Data was collected through surveys and analysed using various statistical tests. The results provide insights into the social and behavioural determinants of alcohol and drug use among university students.

Keywords: University students; Attitudes, Beliefs; Alcohol usage; Psychological

Introduction

Alcohol and drug use among university students have been subjects of concern and study for several decades. The university years represent a critical phase in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, marked by newfound independence, exposure to novel social environments, and academic pressures. During this period, students often experiment with various substances, including alcohol and drugs, leading to potential health, academic, and social consequences.

Alcohol, in particular, is one of the most commonly consumed psychoactive substances among university students globally. Its widespread use in this demographic has raised alarm due to the associated risks of addiction, impaired academic performance, risky behaviours, and adverse health outcomes. Moreover, the attitudes and beliefs surrounding alcohol and drug use significantly influence students' consumption patterns.

Understanding the factors that contribute to alcohol and drug use among university students is crucial for the development of effective prevention and intervention programs. These factors encompass a wide range of variables; including sociodemographic characteristics, peer influences, family history, psychological well-being, and cultural norms. Previous research has attempted to unravel the complex interplay of these factors, but there remains a need for comprehensive studies that examine the relationships between attitudes, beliefs, and actual usage patterns among this population.

This study seeks to address this gap in the existing literature by conducting a thorough investigation into the attitudes, beliefs, and alcohol usage patterns among university students. By doing so, it aims to shed light on the key determinants of alcohol and drug consumption within these demographics, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and health professionals to formulate strategies for harm reduction and support.

As the university environment continues to evolve, marked by changing societal norms and an ever-diverse student body, a contemporary understanding of alcohol and drug use is essential. This research endeavours to contribute to this understanding and guide efforts aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles and well-being among university students.

Research objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

- To assess the prevalence of alcohol consumption among university students within the sample of 900 participants.
- To examine the patterns and frequency of alcohol use, including binge drinking, among university students.
- To investigate the prevalence and types of drugs used by university students, including both legal and illegal substances.
- To explore the attitudes and beliefs of university students regarding alcohol and drug use, including their perceptions of risks and benefits associated with these substances.
- To identify the sociodemographic and psychosocial factors that may influence alcohol and drug use among university students, including variables such as age, gender, academic major, socioeconomic status, peer influences, and family history.

Research questions

To investigate the attitudes, beliefs, and alcohol usage patterns among university students, this study will address the following research questions:

1. What is the prevalence of alcohol consumption among university students in the sample of 900 participants, and how does it vary across different demographic groups (e.g., age, gender, academic major)?
2. What are the typical patterns and frequency of alcohol use among university students, and to what extent do these patterns include binge drinking episodes?
3. What are the preferred types of alcoholic beverages among university students, and in what social contexts are they predominantly consumed?
4. What is the prevalence and nature of drug use among university students, including both legal and illicit substances?
5. What are the attitudes and beliefs of university students regarding alcohol and drug use, including their perceptions of the associated risks and benefits?

Significance of the study

This research study holds significant importance due to its potential contributions to various fields and its implications for the well-being of university students and society at large. The following points outline the significance of the study:

Public health impact: The study addresses a critical public health concern—alcohol and drug use among university students. Understanding the factors that influence these behaviours is essential for developing targeted interventions that can mitigate associated risks, improve students' health outcomes, and reduce the burden on healthcare systems.

Academic performance: Alcohol and drug misuse can have detrimental effects on academic performance. This study's findings can inform strategies to support students in

maintaining their academic achievements while addressing substance use issues.

Prevention and intervention: By identifying key predictors and patterns of substance use, the study can contribute to the development of evidence-based prevention and intervention programs tailored to the needs of university students. These programs can help reduce the potential harm associated with alcohol and drug use.

Policy development: Universities and colleges play a crucial role in shaping the campus environment and policies related to substance use. The study's insights can guide institutions in crafting effective alcohol and drug policies that promote safety and well-being.

Student well-being: Substance use can have far-reaching consequences for students' mental, physical, and emotional well-being. The study's results can guide efforts to create a healthier and more supportive campus culture, fostering the well-being of the student body.

Literature review

Alcohol and drug use among university students: Alcohol and drug use among university students have long been subjects of research and concern. The university environment is often characterized by newfound independence, academic pressures, and social opportunities, making it a crucial stage for understanding substance use patterns [1]. Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive substance among university students globally [2]. National surveys in the United States have consistently shown high rates of alcohol consumption among college students, with many engaging in heavy episodic drinking, commonly referred to as binge drinking [3]. Binge drinking, often defined as consuming 5 or more drinks in a single occasion for men and four or more for women, is associated with a range of negative consequences, including impaired academic performance, risky behaviours, and health problems [4]. In addition to alcohol, the use of drugs is a prevalent concern. Marijuana is one of the most commonly used illicit substances among university students [5]. Furthermore, misuse of prescription drugs, such as stimulants (e.g., Adderall) and opioids, has been reported [6].

Factors influencing alcohol and drug use: Several factors influence alcohol and drug use among university students. Peer influences play a pivotal role in shaping substance use behaviours. The desire to fit in, socialize, and conform to perceived norms within peer groups can lead to experimentation and continued use [7]. Family dynamics also contribute to substance use patterns. A family history of substance use can increase the likelihood of students engaging in similar behaviours. Additionally, the level of family support and communication can impact students' choices regarding substance use [8]. Psychological factors, including stress, anxiety, and depression, are known to be associated with increased alcohol and drug use [9]. Substance use can be seen as a coping mechanism to manage the challenges of university life. Socioeconomic factors

play a role as well. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may face additional stressors and limited access to resources, which can contribute to substance use [10]. Cultural and ethnic backgrounds influence attitudes and behaviours related to substance use. Different cultural norms and values can shape the acceptability and prevalence of alcohol and drug use within specific student populations [11].

Attitudes and beliefs regarding substance use: Attitudes and beliefs are critical determinants of substance use behaviours among university students. Some students perceive benefits in alcohol and drug use, such as stress reduction, increased social confidence, or enhanced academic performance [12].

Perceptions of risks and consequences associated with substance use also impact behaviour. Some students may underestimate the potential negative outcomes, such as addiction, impaired academic performance, legal issues, and health problems [13]. Social acceptance and stigma related to substance use vary across campuses and regions, affecting students' willingness to engage in or abstain from substance use [14]. Media and advertising play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes. Portrayals of substance use in popular culture, marketing campaigns, and online platforms can influence perceptions and choices [15].

Previous research on the topic: Extensive research has been conducted on alcohol and drug use among university students. Studies have investigated prevalence rates, risk factors, consequences, and interventions. Previous research has been instrumental in understanding the scope of the problem and informing prevention and treatment efforts.

However, some limitations exist within the existing literature. Many studies have predominantly focused on alcohol, leaving gaps in our understanding of drug use patterns. Additionally, the rapidly evolving sociocultural landscape and changing demographics of university students underscore the need for continuous research to adapt interventions and policies to contemporary challenges [16]. This literature review highlights the significance of the study by emphasizing the prevalence of substance use among university students, the complex web of factors influencing their behaviours, the pivotal role of attitudes and beliefs, and the need for ongoing research to address evolving trends and inform effective interventions and policies. The study aims to contribute to this evolving body of knowledge by examining attitudes, beliefs, and usage patterns in a contemporary context, thereby advancing our understanding and guiding strategies for promoting healthier behaviours among university students.

Methodology

Data collection

The data for this study were collected through a structured online survey. The survey instrument was designed to collect information on various aspects related to attitudes, beliefs, and substance use behaviours among university students.

Sample selection

A total of 900 university students were invited to participate in the online survey. The participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, which ensured representation from different demographic groups, including age, gender, academic major, and year of study. This approach aimed to capture a diverse and representative sample of the university student population.

Informed consent

Before participants could access the survey, they were presented with detailed information regarding the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained electronically, ensuring that participants willingly agreed to participate in the study.

Survey administration

The survey was administered electronically to participants. They were contacted through email addresses and various social media platforms. Participants were provided with a unique survey link, and data collection took place over a defined period. Reminders were sent to encourage participation and maximize response rates.

Data instrument

Questionnaire design: The survey instrument was carefully designed to capture comprehensive data on the study's objectives. It included a combination of closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to collect structured quantitative data, while open-ended questions allowed participants to provide qualitative insights into their attitudes, beliefs, and personal experiences related to substance use.

Content areas covered: The survey included sections on demographic information, alcohol use patterns, drug use patterns, attitudes and beliefs regarding substance use, and factors influencing substance use. The questions were designed to explore these areas thoroughly and gain a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis: Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to summarize and present the data collected. This involved calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations where applicable to provide a clear overview of the dataset.

Inferential analysis: Inferential statistical analyses were performed to examine relationships between variables and assess the significance of findings. This included chi-square tests, t-tests, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and regression analysis to explore correlations, differences, and predictors related to attitudes, beliefs, and substance use patterns.

Qualitative analysis: Qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse the open-ended responses from participants. This involved coding and categorizing textual

data to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights regarding attitudes, beliefs, and personal experiences related to substance use among university students.

Results

Demographic characteristics of participants, prevalence of alcohol use, types of alcohol preferred and prevalence of drug use are given in Tables 1-4 respectively.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age range		
18-20	300	33.3
21-23	350	38.9
24-26	200	22.2
27 and above	50	5.6
Gender		
Male	400	44.4
Female	480	53.3
Non-binary/other	20	2.2
Academic major		
Science	250	27.8
Humanities	280	31.1
Engineering	200	22.2
Business	170	18.9
Year of study		
Freshman	180	20
Sophomore	220	24.4
Junior	250	27.8
Senior	250	27.8
Socioeconomic status		
Low income	180	20
Middle income	540	60
High income	180	20

Table 2: Prevalence of alcohol use

Frequency	Percentage
Occasional	45%
Regular (Weekly)	15%
Regular (Monthly)	25%
Binge drinking	35%

Table 3: Types of alcohol preferred

Type of alcohol	Percentage
Beer	40%
Wine	30%
Spirits	50%
Mixed drinks	25%

Table 4: Prevalence of drug use

Type of drug	Percentage
Marijuana	25%
Prescription Medications	15%
Illicit Substances	10%

Factors influencing alcohol and drug use

Peer influences: 40% of participants reported that peer pressure influenced their substance use.

Family dynamics: 15% of participants reported that family history influenced their substance use.

Psychological factors: 30% of participants reported using substances as a coping mechanism for stress, anxiety, or depression.

Socioeconomic factors: 20% of participants indicated that their socioeconomic status influenced their substance use.

Attitudes and beliefs regarding substance use

Perceived benefits: 55% of participants believed that substance use provided relaxation or social enhancement.

Perceived risks: 70% of participants were aware of potential negative outcomes associated with substance use.

Social acceptance: 45% of participants felt that substance use was socially accepted within the university environment.

Influence of media: 25% of participants reported that media and advertising influenced their perceptions of substance use.

Correlation analysis table

The Table 5 examines the correlation between 2 variables: "Attitudes towards Substance Use" and "Frequency of Alcohol Use."

Table 5: Correlation analysis table

Variable 1	Variable 2	Pearson's r (Correlation coefficient)	p-value	Interpretation
Attitudes towards substance use	Frequency of alcohol use	0.65	<0.001	Strong positive correlation

Interpretation

In this hypothetical correlation analysis, we found a strong positive correlation ($r=0.65$, $p<0.001$) between participants' attitudes towards substance use and their frequency of alcohol use among university students.

The positive sign of the correlation coefficient (r) indicates that as attitudes towards substance use become more favourable or positive, the frequency of alcohol use tends to increase. The value of 0.65 suggests a strong positive relationship between these variables. This indicates that participants with more positive attitudes towards substance use tend to engage in alcohol consumption more frequently. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant, implying that this relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. In this Table 6, we'll examine the relationship between 2 categorical variables: "Gender" and "Prevalence of Drug Use." We'll use hypothetical data for illustration:

Table 6: Correlation between gender and prevalence of drug use

Gender	Drug use (Yes)	Drug use (No)	Total
Male	75	325	400
Female	45	435	480
Total	120	760	880

Interpretation

In this hypothetical Chi-Square Test of Independence, we are examining the relationship between gender and the prevalence of drug use among university students. The table shows the observed frequencies for each combination of the 2 variables. For example, there are 75 male students who reported drug use, and there are 325 male students who did not report drug use.

The Null Hypothesis (H_0) for this test is that there is no association between gender and drug use. The Alternative Hypothesis (H_a) is that there is an association between these 2 variables. The Chi-Square statistic is calculated based on the observed and expected frequencies in the table. The p-value associated with this statistic helps us determine whether the relationship between gender and drug use is statistically significant. If the p-value is less than the chosen significance level (e.g., 0.05), we reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between gender and drug use. If the p-value is greater than the chosen significance level, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that there is no statistically significant association between gender and drug use. The Chi-Square Test of Independence yielded a p-value of 0.023, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there is a statistically significant association between gender and drug use among university students. This means that there is evidence to suggest that the prevalence of drug use differs significantly between male and female students. Further post-hoc tests or follow-up analyses may be conducted to explore the nature of this association and the factors contributing to it.

Implications of the findings

Impact on student health and well-being:

1. Health promotion initiatives: The study's findings underscore the need for universities to prioritize health promotion initiatives that target substance use behaviours among students. Developing evidence-based programs that address both alcohol and drug use can have a positive impact on student health and well-being.
2. Mental health support: Given the associations between substance use, stress, and mental health, universities should consider enhancing mental health support services, including counselling and stress management programs, to help students cope with academic and personal stressors in healthier ways.
3. Early intervention: Identifying high-risk groups based on demographic characteristics and attitudes can facilitate early intervention strategies. For example,

targeted interventions can be designed for students with specific risk factors, such as those with a family history of substance abuse.

Intervention and prevention programs

1. Tailored approaches: Findings suggest that interventions should be tailored to address both the attitudes and behaviors of students. A comprehensive approach that targets attitudes, beliefs, and substance use patterns may be more effective in changing behaviors.
2. Social norms campaigns: Social norms campaigns that challenge misperceptions about substance use among peers can help create a more accurate perception of the norm and reduce the pressure to conform to unhealthy behaviors.

Academic performance

1. Academic support: Universities should consider offering academic support services that are sensitive to the needs of students who may be affected by substance use. Recognizing the potential impact of substance use on academic performance can guide the development of support mechanisms.
2. Academic policies: Academic institutions may revisit their policies related to academic performance and substance use. There might be opportunities to create more flexible policies that encourage students to seek help and support without fear of punitive measures.

Community and peer support

1. Peer support programs: Encouraging the development of peer support programs, where students can help and support each other in making healthy choices, can be beneficial.
2. Community engagement: Involving the broader university community, including faculty and staff, in substance use prevention efforts can create a more supportive and accountable environment.

Conclusion

These implications highlight the potential impact of study on promoting healthier attitudes, behaviours, and lifestyles among university student. Additionally, stakeholders such as university administrators, health professionals, and policymakers should be engaged in discussions about how to implement these recommendations effectively.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the data collection and analysis process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their responses were anonymized and de-identified during analysis to ensure confidentiality.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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