






Patterns of Substance Abuse Among Young Males in Hargeisa of Somaliland: A Mixed-Method Exploration

Mohamed Omer Aden^{1,2}, Abul Hasan BakiBillah^{1*}, Salamat Khandker¹

¹ Department of Public Health, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Daffodil International University (DIU), Daffodil Smart City, Birulia, Savar, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh

² Department of Public Health, Daffodil International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

* Corresponding author email address: ah.bakibillah71@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This mixed method study was designed to explore substance abuse in Hargeisa. Total 300 participants were interviewed for quantitative data and 50 respondents were in-depth interviewed for qualitative data. The findings indicate that Khat is the most commonly used substance at a rate of 45%. Moreover, 48% of respondents reported using other drugs such as tobacco, prescription medications (e.g., opioids, benzodiazepines), stimulants like Adderall or Ritalin, and cocaine. Furthermore, participants aged between 19-21 years old constituted 41% of the sample. This age group present a distinct characteristic indicating variations in substance preferences. Respondents of non-formal education group (43%) showed higher contribution to substance abuse compared to those with high school education (39%), whereas university level individuals accounted for only 18%. This study also found a higher percent of substance abuse among unemployed group suggesting a potential correlation between joblessness and substance misuse. In-depth interview reveals that participants' perspectives were shaped by various cultural influences, including views on masculinity and societal norms. Recognizing this diversity is crucial for tailored interventions. Additionally, participants emphasized both the advantages and disadvantages of substance use. Some regarded substances as a way to reduce stress, boredom, or social anxiety during difficult times such as economic crisis, political instability and wide range of unemployment. However, they also acknowledged significant drawbacks such as adverse health effects, financial troubles, and strained relationships.

Keywords: Substance Abuse, Male, Hargeisa, Mixed Method Study

1. Introduction

Substance abuse among young people is a chronic condition characterized by the compulsive use of drugs, even in the face of harmful consequences with individuals having trouble in controlling their drug-seeking behavior. While initially a voluntary choice for most youths, prolonged drug use can lead to changes in the brain that impair self-control and make it challenging to resist strong urges to continue using drugs. These neurological alterations can be long lasting, explaining why addiction is considered a recurring disease – individuals recovering from substance use disorders are at higher risk of relapse even after extended periods without drug consumption (1).

Substance abuse is a global issue that can have detrimental effects on both individuals and society. The improper use of drugs not only has negative impacts on one's physical health but also affects their cognitive, behavioral, and psychological well-being (2)..

Substance abuse is a prevalent issue among the youth in Somaliland. According to recent research conducted by the Somaliland Ministry of Health, a significant number (60%) of young people between the ages 15-24 years engage in khat use, which is a widely accessible and socially accepted stimulant drug. Additionally, alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis are commonly misused substances among the youth in Somaliland. (3).

The issue of substance abuse among young people is a widespread public health problem with negative effects on their well-being. It requires further investigation and intervention in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The global consumption of psychoactive substances among young people poses a significant challenge, as indicated by the World Drug Report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. To address this issue, a comprehensive study in Hargeisa is essential to understand the factors contributing to substance abuse among young people and develop appropriate interventions (4).

Limited research has been conducted in Hargeisa, Somaliland regarding substance abuse among young people. Existing studies primarily focus on broader societal and economic issues, neglecting to explore the unique struggles experienced by youth. Substance abuse can include various psychoactive substances such as khat, tobacco, alcohol, Cannabis, and other drugs. Khat consumption is particularly

prevalent in Somaliland and adds a distinctive element to the issue of substance abuse (4).

Given the limited research on youth development in Somaliland, this study aims to investigate the impact of drug abuse on youth development specifically in Hargeisa.

The objective of this research is to determine the health risks associated with substance abuse among the young people in Hargeisa, Somaliland.

2. Methods and Materials:

2.1. Study Design

The study will utilize a triangulation design that integrates qualitative and quantitative research methods and measurements. This approach appeared appropriate as it provided the researcher with the chance to explore the factors affecting drug and health risks associated with substance abuse among young people in Hargeisa.

The descriptive survey design enables the collection of information about existing phenomena without manipulating variables.

2.2. Study Area

The study area is Hargeisa, the main city of the Maroodi Jeex province in Somaliland. Hargeisa covers an area of 140 square kilometers (50 square miles) with a population density of about 1,600 people per square kilometer (3,000 per square mile). With a total population of 1,127,000, Hargeisa is among the most densely populated cities in Somaliland. Notably, there are approximately 698,740 individuals aged between 6 and 29 years old which holds particular relevance for this study.

2.3. Target Population

The research focuses on understanding the experiences and difficulties faced by young people aged 15 to 24 in Hargeisa, Somaliland, an area with a population density of around 1,600 individuals per square kilometer and a total population of 1,127,000. This age group is important for studying social and health-related trends such as substance abuse patterns and socio-economic aspects affecting youth in this urban environment.

2.4. Sampling Strategy

The research study's participant group was selected using a random sampling method to ensure representation. The sample size of 350 participants was determined using the following formula:

$$n = Z^2PQ/D^2$$

where n denotes the sample size, Z represents the Z -score associated with the specified confidence level, P is the estimated proportion of the population, Q is the complement of the estimated population proportion, and D stands for margin of error.

Therefore, $n = 384$

The study aimed for a sample size of 384 participants but 300 participants took part in quantitative analysis using surveys, while the remaining 50 participants were chosen for qualitative interviews, facilitating a thorough exploration of substance abuse behaviors within given constraints.

2.5. Data Collection Method

A questionnaire will be used to collect research data through random sampling method at cafeterias, parks, teashops, and Khat centers. Participants will be given a comprehensive introduction to the study and its objectives. The questionnaire content will be explained clearly, and participants will be encouraged to respond honestly.

2.6. Data Analysis

The data was verified, processed, and analyzed using the SPSS system. Frequency and percentage tables were generated for different variables of interest. The findings were organized into tabular form with frequencies and percentages calculated for each variable under investigation, and then interpreted and presented in table format alongside their respective frequencies and percentages to present the study findings in a clear manner.

2.7. Ethical Consideration

The researcher will ensure the privacy of respondents when entering their personal space and conducting interviews. The researcher will ensure the highest level of confidentiality for the participants, and their data will be utilized solely for the research's objectives. Participants will receive information that they have the option to take part and

also be made aware of their right to withdraw. Participants will be asked for their consent after being fully informed about the purpose, possible risks, and advantages of the study. They will also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

3. Findings and Results

3.1. Sex of the Study Participants

This research is specifically centered on male participants in order to gain a thorough understanding of substance abuse trends among young males in Hargeisa. This deliberate choice is based on the acknowledgment that male individuals demonstrate significant involvement in substance use behaviors within this particular demographic. Focusing on this specific gender group allows us to uncover detailed insights into the varieties, frequency, and reasons behind substance abuse among young males, providing valuable information for tailored interventions and support services.

3.2. Age distribution

About 41%, of the participants, fell within the age range of 19-21, while 30% were in the 22-24 age group. Those aged 15-18 accounted for 29% of the respondents. Notably, individuals in the 15-18 age category constituted 29% of the sample and displayed unique patterns that may suggest reduced prevalence or specific substance preferences.

Participants in the 19-21 age category, constituting at 41%, display notable characteristics that could suggest variations in substance preferences or a heightened incidence rate. Moreover, those aged 22-24 make up a substantial portion 30% of the sample, revealing unique patterns of substance use and emphasizing factors to be mindful of for this older age bracket. These particular findings by age underscore the importance of tailoring interventions to different developmental stages, acknowledging the diversity in substance use among young individuals in Hargeisa.

3.3. Educational Level of the Respondents

39% of the total participants finished their high school where 18% completed their university or college degree. Although, 43% of the participants classified as 'Non-formal

education', representing non-formal education and contributing to a diverse range of educational backgrounds included in our research. This indicates a wide range of educational paths beyond traditional routes. This diversity emphasizes the significance of acknowledging different educational backgrounds when examining substance use.

3.4. Employment Status Analysis

The information regarding the employment situation of the participants is outlined as follows: A considerable portion of the participants 22% are enrolled as students, emphasizing the necessity for tailored interventions that take into account prevalent factors in educational settings. Approximately 30% of individuals in the employed segment are currently working, underscoring the significance of comprehending substance use patterns within professional

environments. Although, 46% are categorized as without employment, suggesting a possible link between joblessness and substance misuse. More research is necessary to comprehend the societal and economic influences that play a role in this association.

Frequency Khat Consumption among Youth in Hargeisa:

The table shows that 47% respondents reported rarely use of Khat, falling into this category. Another significant group, comprising 44% of the participants, admitted to using Khat occasionally, indicating a moderate level of consumption. A smaller proportion 9% reported regular use, indicating habitual consumption of Khat on a consistent basis.

However, the table 5.7 shows that large number of participants 48% reported that they do not use Khat, alcohol or cannabis, but instead they use other substances including tobacco, prescription medications such as opioids and benzodiazepines, stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin.

Table 1

Frequency Khat Consumption among Youth in Hargeisa

Khat Consumption	Frequency	Percent
Rarely	141	47%
Occasionally	132	44%
Regularly	27	9%
Total	300	100%

3.5. Frequency of Alcohol Consumption

Table 5 shows that only a small percentage of participants, specifically 2%, admitted to consuming alcohol. This low prevalence is due to the strict restrictions

and high cost of alcohol in Somaliland. With a sample size of 300 participants, it can be concluded that alcohol consumption within this group is relatively minimal. Therefore, its influence on their behaviors and attitudes may be limited based on the data presented.

Table 2

Frequency Khat Consumption among Youth in Hargeisa

Substance Abuse	Frequency	Percent
Khat	135	45%
Alcohol	6	2%
Cannabis	15	5%
Other drugs	144	48%
Total	300	100%

3.6. Frequency of Cannabis consumption

The data in table 5 shows that only 15 individuals out of the surveyed youth reported using cannabis, which represents just 5% of the total sample. This indicates a relatively low incidence of cannabis use within this specific age group and demographic. It can be inferred from these findings that cannabis usage is not widespread among the surveyed youth population, suggesting limited influence on their behaviors and attitudes. The study's results also indicate that other drugs, including tobacco, prescription medications such as opioids and benzodiazepines, stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin are more common among young people compared to alcohol and cannabis use. Furthermore, based on multiple sources, it appears evident that Khat

consumption has a lower prevalence rate at 45% among young individuals in this study population.

3.7. The motivation for substance abuse among the youth in Hargeisa

The table 6 illustrates the factors that motivate young people to engage in substance abuse. Among the specific factors mentioned that, peer pressure, curiosity, socializing and stress relief are the main factors that motivated them to use substance. 31% of the participants identified peer influence as the main reason for their substance use, while 30% stated that they used substances to cope with stress caused by economic challenges, political instability, and joblessness. Furthermore, 24.3% admitted to trying out substances due to curiosity, and 14.7% pointed to community socializing as a factor in their substance use.

Table 3

The motivation for substance abuse among the youth in Hargeisa

Motivations	Frequency	Percent
Peer pressure	93	31%
Stress relief	90	30%
Curiosity	73	24.3%
Socializing	44	14.7%
Total	300	100.0

3.8. Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative study focuses on observations gathered from in-depth interviews with 50 participants within the research group. These interviews aimed to explore complex perspectives, experiences, and root causes related to drug abuse among adolescent males in Hargeisa. The qualitative data provides detailed accounts and contextual understanding to complement the numerical results.

Attitudes of Participants Regarding Substance Use

In-depth interviews uncovered a range of perspectives on substance use among the individuals. Some conveyed firm disapproval, attributing their abstinence to religious or moral convictions, while others held a more lenient stance and saw substance use as a customary social practice. Culture played a significant role, with attitudes towards substance use being closely linked to ideas about masculinity, peer approval, and

societal norms. Recognizing these varied viewpoints is essential for developing interventions that align with the beliefs and principles of the specific audience.

Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages Related to Substance Use

Participants expressed various advantages and disadvantages associated with substance use. Some saw substances as a way to temporarily relieve stress, boredom, or social anxiety, using them during challenging times. However, participants also acknowledged significant drawbacks such as adverse health effects, financial troubles, and strained relationships. Exploring these perspectives aids in comprehending the complex motivations behind substance use behaviors and underscores the importance of comprehensive interventions that address underlying psychosocial needs.

3.9. Political Instability

Political turmoil significantly affects various aspects of society, particularly the youth in Hargeisa. This instability has adverse effects on education quality, job prospects, and contributes to economic crises in the region. Disruptions to educational institutions may lead to decreased learning resources and a decline in education standards for young people.

Additionally, political unrest often leads to limited employment opportunities, worsening youth unemployment rates and financial insecurity. As a result, the economic decline heightens stress and uncertainties among the youth population and could potentially increase substance abuse. The government's ineffective response exacerbates the grim future prospects for Hargeisa's youth; comprehensive strategies are urgently needed to alleviate these impacts on education, employment, and economic stability. Nevertheless, it is essential for government authorities and stakeholders to take action in order to effectively resolve the situation.

Influencing Factors on the Initiation and Maintenance of Substance Use Behaviors Interviews revealed a variety of factors that impact the start and continuation of substance use among participants. 31% of Participants identified that Peer pressure is a significant driver with social circles frequently providing access to substances and creating an environment where use is seen as normal. Family dynamics, economic crisis, unemployment, and community norms also had important influences on individuals' likelihood to experiment with and become dependent on substances. Recognizing these interconnected factors can help identify ways in which substance use begins and continues, leading to more effective prevention and intervention approaches specifically designed for the distinctive circumstances of youth in Hargeisa.

4. Discussion

The study focused on the substance use behaviors of youth in Hargeisa, with a particular emphasis on young males. The age breakdown revealed that most participants were between 19 and 21 years old, highlighting a critical stage for the prevalence of substance use behaviors. Moreover, the study included individuals as young as 15,

underscoring the importance of early intervention initiatives targeted at adolescents. Additionally, there was diversity in the educational backgrounds of participants, suggesting that substance use affects various segments of the youth population rather than being confined to specific educational levels.

The examination of employment status uncovered intriguing connections with substance use patterns. Despite a significant number of respondents being without work, suggesting a potential correlation between unemployment and substance abuse, there is a need for additional research to comprehend the socio-economic factors influencing this association. Moreover, the limited occurrence of alcohol consumption among young people in the survey indicates cultural or environmental influences that discourage its usage, emphasizing the necessity for interventions customized to Hargeisa's distinct socio-cultural setting.

Khat has become the substance second most frequently used substances by participants, highlighting its cultural importance in the community, even though; there are some other substance as well. It's widespread use indicates its established role in social and leisure activities, emphasizing the requirement for interventions that are sensitive to cultural considerations and able to address the intricate relationship between cultural norms, societal pressures, and substance use behaviors. Additionally, the qualitative analysis offered a more profound understanding of participants' attitudes towards substance use, uncovering a range of perspectives influenced by cultural, religious, and social factors. In Hargeisa City, young people's consumption of Khat is influenced by a variety of factors including cultural, economic, political instability, wide range of unemployment and social aspects. Understanding these factors is crucial for creating precise interventions and policies that take into account the unique patterns of Khat use among the youth.

Chewing khat is frequently a collective practice that encourages social ties and interaction. It is a traditional custom during group gatherings, enabling people to engage, exchange anecdotes, and establish connections. Khat is at times included in rituals and festivities. It is involvement in cultural occasions represents welcoming gestures and mutual participation, cementing its role in communal festivities. Khat consumption is deeply intertwined with

social customs among young people, acting as a way to strengthen relationships and create a feeling of companionship and mutual experiences within friend groups. Youth frequently include Khat in celebratory occasions and festivals. Its presence during cultural and religious celebrations demonstrates its function in enriching social engagements. The understanding of how socio-economic factors affect youth substance use in Hargeisa requires a thorough investigation into the impact of economic status, job prospects, education, family dynamics, and community resources on attitudes and behaviors related to substance use. This research seeks to explore how young people view and comprehend these socio-economic influences while considering cultural norms and contextual dynamics. Recognizing these perspectives can help develop customized interventions and policies designed to tackle substance abuse issues among youth by acknowledging the intersecting identities and intricate interconnections of socio-economic elements within the community.

Participants highlighted the importance of engaging local communities in preventative measures. In relation to the youth in Hargeisa, this underscores the need for tailored community initiatives, youth clubs, and interactive platforms to foster a sense of belonging and deter substance abuse. The young people in Hargeisa have suggested implementing culturally relevant educational programs. These efforts could include raising awareness through schools, workshops addressing specific challenges faced by Hargeisa's youth, and peer-led activities aimed at increasing understanding of substance abuse risks.

Acknowledging the value of mental health support, individuals stressed the need for easily accessible counseling services. Specifically concerning Hargeisa's youthful population, there is an emphasis on integrating mental health resources into established community centers and educational institutions that cater to youth development. The potential effectiveness of proposed preventive measures may differ depending on the available infrastructure and resources in Hargeisa. Strengthening local collaborations and forming partnerships with community leaders, schools, and healthcare providers could improve feasibility. It is important to comprehend the cultural intricacies and principles of the young people in Hargeisa in order to assess the possible effects of preventive actions. Key figures within

the community, influencers, and educators can have a significant influence by supporting and intensifying these preventative initiatives.

Participants displayed different levels of awareness concerning the support services that were accessible to them. While some were knowledgeable about the available programs, others had only a limited understanding. Engage in community outreach programs to effectively disseminate information about available support services and resources to all members of the community. Utilize various digital platforms such as websites, social media networks, and mobile apps to effectively connect with the younger demographic. Engage in interactive content creation and targeted advertising to enhance engagement. Foster partnerships with nearby organizations and academic institutions to improve exposure. Participants had a variety of experiences with support services; some had actively sought assistance, while others had not taken advantage of the resources that were available to them. The fear of being judged and facing stigmatization by society when seeking assistance is a common concern for many people. Limited understanding of the services on offer led to them being underused. Geographical or logistical obstacles that individuals may encounter when seeking access to support services in their local area.

4.1. *Limitation of the study*

The study on substance use behavior among youth in Hargeisa has limitations that should be recognized. Firstly, the research focused primarily on male participants, potentially limiting the applicability of the findings to the wider youth population. Secondly, relying on self-reported data could lead to response bias as participants might underestimate or exaggerate substance use behaviors due to social pressures or memory issues. Additionally, using a cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships and capture changes over time.

Furthermore, while offering valuable insights, the qualitative component of the study included a relatively small sample size of 50 participants and may not fully represent diverse perspectives within the community. Finally, focusing solely on Hargeisa geographically may limit generalizability to other regions with different socio-cultural contexts. These limitations emphasize caution when

interpreting results and indicate areas for future research to address gaps in understanding and methodology. Vast majority, which is significant of young participants in Hargeisa, are firm in their belief that religion strongly influences substance abuse patterns. This widespread agreement emphasizes the importance of religious values within Hargeisa's cultural context.

4.2. *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Based on the extensive analysis of data and qualitative insights collected from research on substance abuse among young men in Hargeisa, several significant findings have surfaced. The study indicates a prevalent pattern of substance use among males across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and employment statuses. Khat stands out as the most widely used substance, followed by occasional alcohol and cannabis consumption. However, a notable proportion of participants also acknowledged using other drugs, including tobacco, prescription medications such as opioids and benzodiazepines, stimulants like Adderall and Ritalin indicating diverse preferences for substances within the community. The examination of reasons for substance abuse highlights the impact of peer pressure, stress relief, curiosity, and social interaction. Importantly, political instability worsens the situation by negatively affecting education quality, job prospects, and contributing to economic crises among youth in Hargeisa. Complementing these challenges, the study underscores personalized interventions that address various influences on substance use behaviors such as social dynamics, economic considerations, and societal norms. Identifying and tackling these factors, government and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to alleviate substance abuse and support the well-being of young individuals in Hargeisa significantly. Comprehensively campaign to address mental health stigma and encourage more young people and adolescents to seek support without fear of judgment or discrimination. Increase efforts to extend aid and allocate resources to distant or underprivileged regions, enhancing the accessibility of support services so that help reaches those who need it most. Develop educational initiatives for young people about available support services and their benefits, aiming to increase knowledge and encourage usage.

Authors' Contributions

A. H. B. B., M. O. A., and S. K. collaborated to explore the patterns of substance abuse among young males in Hargeisa, Somaliland. A. H. B. B. spearheaded the project, overseeing the study design and integration of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. He was primarily responsible for the quantitative data analysis, interpreting the statistical results and correlating them with established theories of substance abuse. M. O. A. focused on the qualitative aspects, conducting in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to uncover underlying sociocultural factors influencing substance use. His expertise in qualitative research significantly enriched the interpretation of personal narratives and societal impacts described by the participants. S. K. contributed to the literature review, focusing on comparative studies of substance abuse patterns in similar contexts and demographic groups. She also assisted in drafting the manuscript, ensuring that the findings were clearly presented and supported by both the qualitative and quantitative data collected.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines for research with human subjects as outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

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