



# Drug Abuse In Himachal Pradesh: Its Patterns, Challenges And Preventive Measures

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**Abstract:** Drug abuse in Himachal Pradesh is a growing social and health crisis, fueled by factors like peer pressure, unemployment, and easy drug accessibility, particularly affecting youth with substances like chitta and cannabis derivatives. With 27% of youth involved in substance abuse, the problem jeopardizes public health, families, and social stability. Illicit cultivation of cannabis and opium persists in many districts, with trafficking networks involving local and foreign actors. Enforcement challenges include limited manpower, poor coordination, and evolving trafficking methods, while rehabilitation facilities remain inadequate relative to need. The state has enacted stringent laws and policies, including the 2025 Drugs and Controlled Substances Bill and Organized Crimes Bill, enhancing penalties and rehabilitation efforts. Preventive strategies focus on comprehensive surveys, integrated multi-agency coordination, community awareness campaigns, economic alternatives for cultivators, and expanded rehabilitation infrastructure. The crisis demands a multi-pronged, evidence-based approach integrating law enforcement with health-oriented interventions, stakeholder engagement, data-driven policy making, and societal attitude change to provide a healthier future for Himachal Pradesh's citizens.

**Keywords:** Drug abuse, Himachal Pradesh, rehabilitation, synthetic drugs.

## 1.Introduction

Drug abuse is an emerging social and health crisis in Himachal Pradesh, a region otherwise known for its scenic landscapes and cultural richness. Beneath its peaceful image lies a growing issue of substance misuse, worsened by factors such as peer influence, emotional distress, unemployment, and easy access to illegal drugs through hidden supply networks. The widespread use of substances like chitta has intensified the problem, affecting individuals and communities across the state. Drug addiction not only harms personal health but also disrupts families, workplaces, and society at large. Addressing this crisis requires a broad, integrated approach that combines prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Public awareness campaigns, school-based education, and peer support initiatives can help prevent drug use, while evidence-based treatment options such as counseling, therapy, and medication-assisted care are crucial for recovery. Collaboration among healthcare professionals, social workers, and local organizations is essential in building strong support systems. Moreover, changing negative societal attitudes toward addiction by reducing stigma and promoting empathy is key to successful rehabilitation. With collective effort, policy support, and community involvement, Himachal Pradesh can work toward becoming more resilient against the threat of drug abuse and provide a healthier future for its citizens.[1]

## 2.Socio Demographic profile of Drug users:

The UNODC World Drug Report 2024 and other recent data highlight a rising drug abuse crisis both globally and in India. Worldwide, drug use has increased by 20% over the past decade, reaching 292 million users in 2022, with cannabis, opioids, amphetamines, cocaine, and ecstasy being the most prevalent substances. In India, approximately 100 million people are affected by drug addiction. The most commonly used substances include alcohol (14.6% of the population), cannabis (2.8%), opioids (2.06%), sedatives (1.08%), and inhalants, which notably affect 1.7% of children and adolescents. The

majority of opioid users in India are concentrated in states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Maharashtra.[2] The drug menace in Himachal Pradesh is escalating rapidly, with government reports indicating that 27% of the youth are involved in drug abuse, and 35% of these users consume synthetic drugs such as chitta and cannabis derivatives. The rising drug infiltration, especially heroin (chitta), is linked to the state's proximity to Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, and Chandigarh. Popular substances include chitta (heroin), cannabis derivatives (charas, ganja) and major tourist hotspots like Kullu, Manali, Kasol are primarily affected. [3] The research conducted in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh examined substance abuse among 500 students aged 12 to 25 years. The study found that tobacco, alcohol, and inhalants were the most commonly used substances, showing a moderate level of prevalence among youth. [4]

### **3. Patterns of Drug abuse:**

About 27% of the youth in Himachal Pradesh are involved in drug abuse, mirroring the severe drug crisis in neighboring Punjab. In just three months, authorities registered 274 narcotic-related cases and arrested 320 individuals. Law enforcement seized 230 kilograms of charas from drug dealers during this period. Young people in the state are not only consuming alcohol, cigarettes, gutka, and khaini but are also increasingly falling prey to harmful substances such as capsules, bam, shoe polish, cough syrups, white fluid, charas, smack, heroin, and opium. This escalating drug problem poses a grave social and health threat to the youth in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is confronting a severe drug problem, with approximately 27% of its youth engaging in substance abuse. Similar to neighboring Punjab, the state faces a significant challenge from narcotics. Within three months, police registered 274 narcotics-related cases and arrested 320 individuals. Authorities also seized 230 kilograms of charas from drug dealers. The youth are not only abusing alcohol, cigarettes, gutka, and khaini but are increasingly falling victim to more dangerous substances such as capsules, bam, shoe polish, cough syrups, white fluid, charas, smack, heroin, and opium. This growing drug crisis poses a serious threat to the health and safety of Himachal Pradesh's younger population. [5]

### **4. Factors contributing to substance abuse:**

The study found that 60% of the patients were dependent on drugs, with 44% addicted to heroin and 11% to alcohol. Moreover, 60% reported having a family history of substance dependency. Psychological conditions like depression and anxiety were commonly associated, along with social and environmental influences such as peer pressure and coping strategies including avoidance and denial. [6] The research conducted across Himachal Pradesh and four other northwestern Indian states reveals that economic factors play a significant role in drug addiction. Individuals from poorer backgrounds often resort to selling drugs to cover their daily costs, while those from wealthier families access funds easily, sometimes through emotional manipulation. Unemployment and economic instability, coupled with easy availability of money, have contributed to a sharp increase in substance abuse and drug addiction in these regions. Peer pressure, family environment, cultural norms, poverty, and economic challenges are key contributors to drug addiction in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, and Jammu & Kashmir. Media coverage of rising drug abuse among youth in these states shapes public attitudes and influences policy responses aimed at controlling and eliminating drug addiction. [7]

Socio-economic factors significantly influence drug addiction in Himachal Pradesh. Unemployment and poverty drive some individuals toward substance abuse or drug trafficking as a means to earn money quickly. Meanwhile, areas with economic prosperity, such as those benefiting from the apple economy, attract drug peddlers, and individuals from wealthier families have easier access to funds to support drug use. Economic instability and low-paying jobs contribute to stress, fostering substance abuse. Rapid urbanization and adoption of modern lifestyles, often glamorized by media, encourage use of alcohol and tobacco.

On the personal and social side, peer pressure is a major influence, especially among youth, who may experiment to fit in. Curiosity about drugs and their effects also plays a role. Family factors such as lack of parental supervision, unresolved conflicts, and substance use within the family increase risks. Mental health challenges like stress and depression can lead to self-medication through drugs. Additionally, limited awareness about the dangers of drugs—especially synthetic heroin—coupled with social acceptance of certain substances normalizes their use.

Geographically, Himachal Pradesh's border with drug-prone regions like Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir facilitates drug trafficking and infiltration. Ease of access to drugs, including availability near schools despite legal restrictions, worsens the problem. Illegal cultivation of cannabis and opium in areas such as Kullu and Manali, combined with powerful drug networks, ensures a steady drug supply. The shift toward

synthetic drugs like chitta has intensified the crisis due to their high addictiveness and profitability. Tourist hotspots like Kullu and Shimla are also drug-use centers, with cafes and public spots serving as distribution points. [8]

**5.Social and Economic Impact:** Drug abuse damages personal health, causes family breakdowns, and leads to higher crime rates. It contributes to increasing school dropouts, academic failures, petty thefts, and various socio-economic problems that affect entire communities. Additionally, the potential profits from the illegal drug trade pose a significant challenge, especially in rural areas. [9]

#### **6.Drug Trafficking and Local Production:**

Foreign nationals of various backgrounds have established themselves in drug-prone regions of Himachal Pradesh, engaging in activities like drug trafficking and illegal cannabis cultivation. Notably, areas such as Malana and Kasol in Parvati Valley are notorious for these operations. The locally produced hashish, known internationally as 'Malana Cream,' has gained global recognition in illicit drug markets. Some foreigners have expanded their operations by opening hotels and restaurants that draw both domestic and international tourists. Events like full moon rave parties, where the consumption of drugs and alcohol is common, are widespread and widely accepted. Additionally, professional interstate drug trafficking networks have emerged. According to Shri Bilal Ahmad, Director of the Society for Promotion of Youth & Masses (SPYM), while drug trafficking and addiction are rampant in Himachal Pradesh, reliable data on the extent of the problem is lacking. [10] Cannabis cultivation and trafficking are widespread issues in Himachal Pradesh, with illegal cultivation prevalent in remote districts such as Kullu, Mandi, Shimla, Sirmour, Chamba, and Kangra. The Malana valley, located in Kullu district, is internationally renowned for producing a premium charas called "Malana Cream," which commands high prices in global markets. Many local farmers resort to illicit cannabis cultivation due to poverty and lack of alternative livelihoods. The trade is controlled by local mafias, sometimes collaborating with foreign nationals, and smuggled to other states and abroad. Himachal Pradesh faces a severe drug crisis, with a substantial portion of its youth involved in substance abuse. A recent and troubling trend is the shift towards synthetic drugs like "chitta," although cannabis derivatives remain a significant problem. [11] Despite strict laws like the NDPS Act, drug trafficking and smuggling in India continue to grow, particularly in Himachal Pradesh. The study emphasizes that enforcing such laws without considering local socio-economic and cultural contexts is ineffective. Many locals rely on cultivating drug crops because of persistent underdevelopment and limited income alternatives. [12]

#### **7.Challenges in Prevention and Law enforcement:**

Limited awareness about drug issues and prevailing social stigma hamper effective prevention and treatment efforts in Himachal Pradesh. Law enforcement struggles with challenges such as insufficient dedicated personnel, inadequate training, and poor coordination among agencies. Meanwhile, drug trafficking methods and syndicates rapidly evolve, often staying ahead of traditional policing and enforcement capabilities. [13]

Himachal Pradesh faces significant challenges in combating drug abuse due to its geographical location bordering states like Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, making it vulnerable to drug inflows and smuggling. Drug trafficking groups have adapted with sophisticated methods, including using social media and contactless transactions, complicating law enforcement efforts. The shift towards synthetic drugs like "chitta" poses greater difficulties compared to traditional cannabis. Illegal cultivation of cannabis, especially in regions like Kullu Valley, and the diversion of pharmaceutical drugs further exacerbate the problem. Additionally, issues like corruption and inadequate coordination among agencies weaken anti-drug efforts. On the prevention side, social stigma and denial hinder effective treatment, while rehabilitation facilities lack resources and specialized support. Youth remain highly vulnerable, necessitating targeted preventive programs. The absence of comprehensive data and punitive approaches instead of healthcare-oriented treatment further challenge progress. Addressing these issues demands a coordinated strategy combining strict law enforcement with community-based prevention and rehabilitation initiatives. [14]

#### **8.Government policies and Legislative response:**

The Himachal Pradesh Drugs and Controlled Substances (Prevention, De-Addiction, and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2025, was introduced to address the growing drug menace in the state through stringent legal measures and enhanced rehabilitation efforts. The legislation mandates the establishment of de-addiction and rehabilitation centers offering detoxification, counseling, skill development, and vocational training. It includes the creation of a state fund dedicated to financing rehabilitation, prevention, and livelihood

support for recovered addicts. [15] Additionally, the Himachal Pradesh Organized Crimes (Prevention and Control) Bill, 2025 expands the definition of organized crime to include drug trafficking and prescribes severe penalties, including death or life imprisonment for crimes causing death. The state has implemented special task forces and set up rehabilitation centers offering detoxification, counseling, skill development, and vocational training. Awareness campaigns involving schools and community groups aim to educate the public about drug dangers. Enhanced policing measures include mandatory dope testing in recruitment, increased vigilance on pharmaceutical companies, stricter border monitoring, and financial investigations targeting drug traffickers. Coordination with neighboring states through the Inter-State Drug Secretariat facilitates intelligence sharing and joint action, reflecting the government's zero-tolerance policy toward drug abuse. [16] Himachal Pradesh has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against drug abuse, emphasizing strict enforcement and rehabilitation. The government has introduced mandatory drug testing for police recruitment, taken action against drug-involved officials, and enhanced vigilance on pharmaceutical companies. Significant seizures of drug-related properties have been made, and integrated rehabilitation centers are operational with plans to expand statewide. Extensive awareness campaigns involve schools, local bodies, and community organizations to educate the public about drug dangers. Collaboration with neighboring states and coordinated efforts reflect the state's commitment to combat drug trafficking and addiction comprehensively. [17] Apart from above, The Narcotic **Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985** imposes strict penalties for drug offenses based on the quantity involved, ranging from rigorous imprisonment of six months to 20 years, along with fines from ₹10,000 to ₹2 lakhs. Repeat offenders face enhanced punishments, including up to one-and-a-half times the original penalty, and in some cases, the death sentence. The Act covers offenses such as cultivation without license, trafficking, possession, sale, and consumption of narcotics and psychotropic substances. The Narcotics Control Bureau was established under this act to combat drug trafficking. [18]

### **9. Community and Educational Initiatives :**

There is a network of de-addiction and rehabilitation centers across the state, but gaps remain in access, quality, and capacity. Experts call for improvement in training health professionals, expanded services, and multi-level treatment facilities (primary, secondary, tertiary). The findings emphasize an urgent need for focused interventions tailored to the unique challenges faced by the affected population. To develop effective policies and programs for combating substance abuse in Himachal Pradesh, it is essential to conduct regular surveys, engage stakeholders actively, and implement strategies based on accurate data. [19]

### **10. Rehabilitation and Treatment Facility:**

Himachal Pradesh currently has five main government-run de-addiction centers located in the districts of Hamirpur, Kangra, Kullu, Shimla, and Una. In addition, several Integrated Rehabilitation Centres for Addicts (IRCA) operate across the state, with efforts underway to expand rehabilitation facilities to all district headquarters. The government has also prioritized establishing a state-level drug de-addiction and rehabilitation center in Kotla Barog, Sirmour district. Besides government centers, many NGOs and private organizations run numerous smaller rehabilitation facilities offering services like detoxification, counseling, and vocational training throughout the state. Despite these efforts, the existing rehabilitation infrastructure remains limited relative to the scale of the drug abuse problem in Himachal Pradesh, prompting ongoing initiatives to enhance capacity and accessibility. [20]

### **11. Preventive Strategies and Recommendations:**

The preventive strategies recommended for Himachal Pradesh's drug problem include conducting comprehensive surveys to map the patterns of substance abuse accurately. It emphasizes integrated coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and local communities for effective interventions. Economic development efforts aimed at providing alternative livelihoods for those involved in illicit cultivation are also advocated. Awareness campaigns, both aggressive and assimilative, are urged to educate the public about drug dangers. Additionally, there is a call for expanding and enhancing rehabilitation facilities and treatment protocols to support recovery and reintegration. [21]

**12. Conclusions:** The drug problem in Himachal Pradesh demands a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that integrates robust law enforcement with health and community-focused initiatives. Key to success is the ongoing engagement of stakeholders, the use of accurate data for informed decision-making, and the willingness to develop innovative policies. This multi-faceted strategy is crucial for effectively reducing drug abuse and its associated social harms across the region.

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