

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Frequency of University Students' Use of Addictive Substances and Attitudes Toward Addictive Substances

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Main Points

- University students need guidance and counseling to recognize substances and learn about their harms.
- Students should be well informed about the harms, problems and health risks of addictive substances.
- It is of great importance to carry out education and awareness-raising activities for the prevention of substance use.
- In order to prevent or minimize substance use and addiction, it is necessary to provide a healthy family environment in all aspects, to be a good role model for children, to provide sufficient love and discipline within the family, and to closely monitor the individual's environment.

Abstract

This study aims to assess the level of knowledge, frequency of use, and attitudes toward addictive substances among university students. This descriptive study was conducted between December 2020 and May 2021. The sample of the research consists of 531 students who volunteered to participate in the research via "Google forms." The statistical significance of the data was evaluated at the $p .05$ level. To analyze the data, percentage, mean, one-way analysis of variance, cross-tabulations, and Kruskal – Wallis test were used. In terms of students' knowledge about addictive substances, it was found that 34.7% of students knew about marijuana, and 30.3% knew about heroin. It was found that 46.4% of students who tried to use substances for the first time were volatile, and 39.3% of them used marijuana. A statistically significant difference was found between the presence of students in an environment where addictive substances were used and their absence in terms of substance use tendency ($p < .05$). A more significant difference was found between the presence and absence of substance users in the family concerning substance use ($p < .05$). It was recommended to conduct awareness and education activities in family, friends, and universities in order to prevent substance use and addiction.

Keywords: Addictive substances, attitude, university students

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Introduction

The use of addictive substances is becoming a visibly increasing public health problem in our country and worldwide (Görgülü, 2017). The number of substance users increases, and the average age decreases (Mavili, 2017). It is predicted that this addiction can become a lifelong process, especially when substance use begins in adolescence and young

adulthood (Karaçam & Totan, 2014). According to the World Health Organization, substance addiction is defined as "a behavior in which a psychoactive substance used is valued significantly higher than other pursuits and objects that the person previously valued" (Karakas & Ersögütçü, 2016; Yoldaş & Demircioğlu, 2020). If we analyze the literature, addiction is the state of being integrated into a substance or situation and not being separated from

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that substance or situation. In other words, the person enters into a false sense of well-being with this false attachment and therefore begins to think that they cannot continue the rest of their life by going into abstinence when this substance is not present. Most substance users start out thinking that nothing will happen once they take the substance. However, most of the time, they become addicted without realizing it.

Along with the increasing curiosity of young people, the attempt to try substance use is increasing in this direction (Süngü, 2014). According to the World Substance Use Reports published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 29.5 million people worldwide were addicted to substances in 2016, exceeding 31 million in 2018. The number of drug users increased from 250 million to 275 million (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016, 2018). In our country, on the other hand, when the current research findings of the Turkish Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction were examined, it was found that the number of people who died due to drug use increased from 590 to 941 from 2015 to 2017. This report reported the age range of 15 – 34 years as the highest risk period for substance addiction (65%). The average age of first substance use was 19.5 years (TUBİM, 2019). Concerning students studying at university, this coincides with the adolescent phase, where most students are at this age. The university period is when there are many problems, such as leaving home and family environment, adapting to a new environment, applying for a job, and being unsure if I will find a job at the end of school and the confusion of adolescence (Yiğitoğlu et al., 2019). Too many problems, an excess of unrealistic expectations, and insufficient social support prevent young people from making correct assessments and lead to some problems. Excessive anxiety and stress due to these problems are believed to increase smoking, alcohol, and drug use among university students (Koca & Oğuzöncül, 2015; Turhan et al., 2011). Since substance addiction is a serious preventable public health cause and adolescents and young adults are particularly at risk, determining the variables that influence university students' tendency to use addictive substances will contribute to the development of prevention programs (Dayı, 2013; Dayı et al., 2015).

This study aims to assess the level of knowledge, frequency of use, and attitudes toward addictive substances among university students. In addition, it aims to investigate whether students' attitudes toward addictive substances differ according to individual variables. Nowadays, the study has become a significant public health problem and is one of the problems that negatively affect society. It is believed that this study will contribute to the needed data on the prevalence of addictive substances. It is anticipated that the study will contribute to the substance addiction control studies conducted for university adolescents in the average age group. The study's problem statement consists of the following questions: How frequently are addictive substances used by Şırnak University students and whether they differ according to individual variables and determine students' attitudes toward addictive substances? In order to investigate the mentioned problem in more detail, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Do university students' attitudes toward addictive substances differ according to their sociodemographic data?

2. Do university students' attitudes toward addictive substances differ according to the faculty or university they are enrolled in?
3. Do university students' attitudes toward addictive substances differ according to whether or not they are in a substance-using environment?
4. Do university students' attitudes toward addictive substances differ depending on whether or not there are drug users in the students' families?
5. What is the student's level of knowledge about addictive substances, the first substance they tried, and the reasons for their use?

Methods

This research was conducted in a descriptive design to investigate the relationship between university students' frequency of addictive substance use and their attitude toward addictive substances. The research was conducted using "Google Forms," an online questionnaire, with students attending university between December 2020 and May 2021. The research universe was the students of 1 university ($S = 3876$). As a result of the power analysis conducted in calculating the sample size with alpha (α) = 0.05 and power ($1 - \beta$) = 0.90, it was concluded that 350 subjects were sufficient to represent the sample. Since the study was conducted online, the number of participants consisted of 531 students, which increased the reliability of the study. In the first part of the study, an introductory form was completed with 10 questions that included sociodemographic information about the students (age, gender, field they studied, income status, union of mother and father, family structure, place of residence before study, place of residence during study, educational status of parents) and 8 questions about addictive substances and their use (students know about addictive substances, where they can be obtained, the reasons for using addictive substances, the environment of addictive substance users, the fact that there are addictive substance users in the family, the type of addictive substance they tried for the first time, the reasons for trying addictive substances), a total of 18 questions. The second part used the scale on attitude towards addictive substances.

Ethics committee approval was obtained. Approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Rectorate of Şırnak College (number 74546226-730.08.03, dated 14/07/2020). Written informed consent was obtained from the participants in the study.

Addictive Substances Attitudes Scale, Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Individuals Using Addictive Substance Scale: The Addictive Substances Attitudes Scale developed by Tansel (2006) was used to determine university students' attitudes toward addictive substances. The measurement tool is a Likert scale and consists of 23 items. Responses to the items on the scale are scored from 1 to 5. The rating is "1 = I fully agree," "2 = I agree," "3 = I am undecided," "4 = I disagree," and "5 = I disagree at all."

The scale consists of a 5-factor structure that explains 53.32% of the total variance. The first subfactor was named for the state of bilateral relations, the second subfactor for personality structures, the third subfactor for the state of social relations, the

Table 1.
Comparison of Students' Descriptive Characteristics and Attitudes to Addictive Substances Mean Scores (N = 531)

Identifying Features	N	%	($\bar{X} \pm SS$)	t and p values
Age				
17 – 20	256	49.3	4.06 ± 0.54	F = 1.148
21 – 25	229	43.8	4.00 ± 0.61	p = .318
26 – 39	36	6.9	3.95 ± 0.74	
Gender				
Male	336	64.2	4.02 ± 0.66	t = -.214
Female	187	35.8	4.05 ± 0.52	p = .83
Parents				
Live together	474	90.0	4.04 ± 0.57	KW = 0.561
Live separately	16	3.0	4.01 ± 0.49	p = .755
Other	37	7.0	3.98 ± 0.58	
Family structure				
Core family	387	74.2	4.05 ± 0.56	KW = 3.732
Broad family	96	18.3	4.02 ± 0.62	p = .292
Split family	32	6.1	3.95 ± 0.52	
Other	7	1.3	3.65 ± 0.79	
Mostly resided				
Metropolitan	37	7.0	3.90 ± 0.79	
City/town	402	76.6	4.07 ± 0.56	F = 0.963
Country	86	16.4	4.03 ± 0.54	p = .382
Residing				
With family	270	52.8	4.07 ± 0.54	
Dormitory	178	34.7	3.97 ± 0.61	KW = 3.41
With relatives	47	9.4	3.98 ± 0.66	p = .182
With friends	16	3.1	3.95 ± 0.49	
Mothers education level				
Not literate	282	53.9	4.01 ± 0.60	
Primary school	167	31.9	4.08 ± 0.56	KW = 3.59
Middle school	46	9.2	3.94 ± 0.58	p = .309
High school and above	26	5.0	4.06 ± 0.71	
Fathers education level				
Not literate	72	13.7	4.09 ± 0.48	
Primary school	217	41.4	4.04 ± 0.63	F = 0.535
Middle school	107	20.4	4.00 ± 0.58	p = .658
High school and more	128	24.4	3.99 ± 0.58	
Income status perception				
Good	30	5.7	3.94 ± 0.76	F = 1.092
Middle	406	76.7	4.02 ± 0.56	p = .336
Bad	93	17.6	4.10 ± 0.57	

fourth subfactor for social perspectives, and the fifth subfactor for relations with family and social environment. The Cronbach's alpha value for the entire scale was .88. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient expressing the measurement reliability of the applications performed on this scale is .79.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 21 (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) was used to analyze the research data. Percentages, means, one-way analysis of variance, cross-tabulations, and Kruskal – Wallis test were used to analyze the data. The statistical significance of the data was evaluated at the $p < .05$ level.

Results

The study presents the sociodemographic distribution of the university students participating in the study according to age, gender, parents' marital or separation status, family structure, longest residence, place of residence, parents' educational level, and income status (Table 1). The mean age of the students participating in the study was 21.19 ± 2.89 (minimum 17, maximum 39). Regarding the age status of the students participating in the study, it is observed that 49.3% of the students are in the age group 17 – 20 years, 43.8% are in the age group 21 – 25 years, and 6.9% are in the age group 26 – 39 years.

As far as the gender of the students participating in the study is concerned, 64.2% were female and 35.8% were male. Regarding the marital status of the students who participated in the study, it was found that 90.0% of them live with their parents, 3.0% live separately, and 7.0% live in other places. Looking at the family structure, it was found that 74.2% of the students live in the elementary family structure, 18.3% in the extended family structure, 6.1% in the broken family structure, and 1.3% in the other.

Regarding the place where the students participating in the study lived for the longest time before the study, it was found that 76.6% of the students lived in a city/district before the study, 16.4% lived in a village/town before the study, and 7.0% lived in a metropolis/large city.

As for their environment during their university life, 52.8% of the students lived with their families, 34.7% lived in a dormitory, 9.4% lived with their relatives, and 3.1% lived with their friends.

Regarding the educational status of the mothers of the university students, it was found that the mothers of 53.9% of the students who participated in the study were illiterate, 31.9% had completed primary school, and 9.2% had completed secondary school, and 5.0% had completed high school or higher.

Comparing the educational status of the students' fathers, it can be seen that 41.4% of the students whose fathers participated in the study were primary school graduates, 24.4% had a secondary school diploma or higher, 20.4% had a secondary school diploma, and 13.7% were not illiterate.

In terms of the income status of the students, it shows that 76.7% of the students who participated in the study had a middle income, 17.6% had a low income, and 5.7% had a good income.

When comparing the demographic data of the students who participated in the study and the mean of those who use addictive substances, there was no statistically significant difference between age, gender, maternal and paternal union, family structure, longest place of residence, place of residence, parents' educational level, and income status ($p > .05$).

As shown in Table 2, there was no significant difference when comparing the mean scores between students in the department they were studying and individuals who used addictive substances ($p > .05$). A statistically significant difference was found between the presence of students in an environment where addictive substances were used and their absence in terms of substance use tendency ($p < .05$). A more significant difference was found between the presence and absence of substance users in the family concerning substance tendency ($p < .05$).

Table 3 includes students' substance use. Regarding the knowledge of the students involved in the study about addictive substances, it was found that 34.7% of the students knew about marijuana, 30.3% about heroin, 23.6% about cocaine, 6.6% about volatile substances, and 4.7% about ecstasy. When the students involved in the study were asked where they obtained their addictive substances, it was found that 35.9% obtained from street dealers, 34.7% obtained from friends, 23.2% obtained from bars and discos, and 6.2% obtained from relatives.

When the reasons for consuming addictive substances by the students included in the study were examined, it was found that

Table 2.
Comparison of the Number, Mean Scores, and Significance Values with the Department of Students and the Individuals Using Addictive Substances

Features	N	($X \pm SS$)	t and p values
Department			
Vocational School of Health Services	240	4.03 \pm 0.54	
Faculty of Economics and Adm. Sciences	76	4.00 \pm 0.53	KW = 12.623
Şırnak Vocational School	75	4.23 \pm 0.48	$p = .082$
Faculty of Fine Arts	45	4.04 \pm 0.62	
Faculty of Theology	33	3.92 \pm 0.62	
High School of Physical Education/Sports	25	3.93 \pm 0.82	
Faculty of Engineering	16	3.85 \pm 0.78	
High School of Tourism and Hospitality	15	3.96 \pm 0.59	
Places where AS are used			
Not present	462	4.08 \pm 0.54	$t = -5.181$
Present	66	3.68 \pm 0.76	$p = .00$
Use of AS in family			
Nobody uses	509	4.04 \pm 0.57	$t = 3.648$
Somebody uses	18	3.53 \pm 0.75	$p = .00$

Note: AS = Addictive substances.

31.5% of the students consumed for curiosity, 28.6% for ambition, 28.4% for friends and acquaintances, 4.3% for parents, 4.1% for relatives, and 2.8% out of 35 students consumed for fun and pleasure.

In terms of the addictive substance tried for the first time by the students included in the study, it was found that 46.4% of the students tried volatile substances, 39.3% tried marijuana, 7.1% tried cocaine, 3.6% tried heroin, and 3.6% tried ecstasy. In table 3, only students who started using substances for the first time responded.

When looking at the reasons for which students participating in the study tried addictive substances, it was found that 30.6% of students started using out of curiosity, 30.6% for fun and pleasure, 22.2% because of friends and acquaintances, 13.9% as

Table 3.
Students' Knowledge Levels on Substance Use

Information Level	N	%
AS that the students are informed of	477	83.7
Marijuana	404	34.7
Heroin	352	30.3
Cocaine	275	23.6
Volatile substance	77	6.6
Ecstasy	55	4.7
Where AS are obtained from	504	88.4
Street sellers	363	35.9
Circle of friends	350	34.7
Bars and discos	234	23.2
Relatives	63	6.2
Reasons for using AS	518	90.9
Interest	400	31.5
Aspiration	367	28.6
Friend, acquaintances	361	28.4
Mother – father	54	4.3
Relative	52	4.1
Fun, pleasure	35	2.8
AS tried for the first time	25	4.4
Volatile substances	13	46.4
Marijuana	11	39.3
Cocaine	2	7.1
Heroin	1	3.6
Ecstasy	1	3.6
Reasons for trying AS	27	4.7
Interest	11	30.6
Fun, please	11	30.6
Friends, acquaintances	8	22.2
Aspiration	5	13.9
Mother – father	1	2.8

aspirants, and 2.8% because of parents. In this table, both the level of knowledge about substance use and the students who started substance use for the first time were answered (Table 3).

Discussion

Drug use is increasing day by day in the world and in our country and continues to threaten our future with negative consequences. The decreasing age of substance use and concurrent substance use also draw university students into this danger. Therefore, prevention and public health education studies are becoming more critical in combating addiction (Bayır, 2019). When considering the level of knowledge about addictive substances among the students included in the study, it was found that 34.7% of the students were aware of cannabis. Addictive substances that were tried for the first time were identified as 46.4% volatile substances and 39.3% cannabis. According to the World Drug Report 2017, published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, it was found that 3.8% of adults aged 15 – 64 used cannabis in 2015 (Parliament, 2018). According to the European Drug Report (2021), approximately 1.8% of adults aged 15 – 64 reported using cannabis. The Tubim (2019) report found that 85.6% of 5198 people who reported using drugs had started using cannabis. It is believed that they used cannabis at the university where this research was conducted, having first tried volatile substances due to their sociocultural and economic structure.

When comparing the sociodemographic characteristics of the students, such as age, gender, married or separated parents, family structure, longest residence, place of residence, educational level of parents, and income status, there was no statistically significant difference between them in terms of the mean scores of the attitude scale toward people who use addictive substances ($p > .05$) (Table 1). In the study conducted with students from Eskişehir Osmangazi University, no statistically significant difference was found between where they lived for the longest time before university and substance use (Dayı, 2013; Dayı et al., 2015). In Yetiz's (2019) study, when evaluating the association between age group and income level, no statistically significant difference was found in the number of substance types used, the reason for starting substance use, family awareness of substance use, and study outcomes (Yetiz, 2019). In studies with similar results, this situation was caused by differences in culture, life-style, and income status.

In this study, no significant difference was found when comparing the mean scores between the students of the department in which they study and the individuals who use addictive substances ($p > .05$) (Table 2). A more statistically significant difference was found among students who were in an environment where addictive substances were used than those who were not in an environment where addictive substances were used ($p < .05$) (Table 2). In a study conducted with students at Mersin and Batman University, it was found that students who are in an addictive environment have more positive attitudes toward people who use addictive substances than students who are not in an addictive environment (Ant, 2018; Tansel, 2006). The presence of substance users in the families of the students was found to be more significant than the percentage of those who did not

use substances in their families ($p < .05$) (Table 2). In another study, it was found that substance use was more common among those whose close relatives reported substance use ($p < .05$) (Koca & Oğuzöncül, 2015; Öztaş & et al., 2018; Turhan & et al., 2011). It can be concluded that they have developed positive attitudes toward people who use addictive substances during their years of study because they have people around them become friends with people who use drugs. They are in an environment where these substances are used. Being in an environment where substances are used can develop a tolerance for the people who use the substances and the substances used. However, the thought of substance use may become acceptable to the individual.

When considering the level of knowledge about addictive substances of the students involved in the study, it was found that 34.7% of the students knew about marijuana, and 30.3% knew about heroin. In terms of the addictive substance tried for the first time, it was found that 46.4% of the students started with volatile substances and 39.3% with marijuana (Table 3). According to the Turkish National Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drugs Addiction, 85.6% of the 5198 people who reported using drugs used cannabis for the first time, and 5.3% used heroin (TUBİM, 2019). In a study conducted at a university in the United States, cannabis was the most commonly used illicit drug in a lifetime at 53.3% (Pearson et al., 2016). In a study conducted at a university in Iran, it was found that 5.2% of the most commonly used substance after cigarettes and alcohol was cannabis (Haydari et al., 2015). It is believed that the differences between countries are due to the different socio-cultural structures. In a study conducted on students of Kırıkkale University, the first substances tried for life were marijuana, volatile substances, ecstasy, cocaine, amphetamine, and heroin, respectively (Ulukoca et al., 2013). In the research conducted by Pamukkale University medical faculty students, it was stated that 80% of the drugs that individuals try were marijuana (Mavili, 2017). In the study conducted with students of İnönü University, it was found that 54.5% of individuals who use drugs use marijuana (Koca & Oğuzöncül, 2015). In other studies, 251 (95.4%) out of 263 substance users were found to use marijuana, and in another study, 111 (79.3%) people were found to use marijuana (Ateş & Tarık, 2020; Yetiz, 2019). In another study, it was found that 62.5% of the people who tried it for the first time rarely smelled the substance, and 50% of them consumed the volatile substance out of curiosity (Gökçen, 2015). This study found that the substance tried for the first time was primarily volatile, followed by marijuana. It was assumed that the economic conditions of the society might lead to volatile substances rather than marijuana. The participants have high knowledge about marijuana use among addictive substances from the data obtained.

When asked where the students participating in the study may obtain the addictive substances, 35.9% responded from street dealers and 34.7% from their friends (Table 3). According to the Turkish National Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drugs Addiction, it was found that 71.9% of drugs were first obtained from friends or friends' circle. In another study, the influence of friends was cited as the reason for starting drug use in 78.7% (Yetiz, 2019). As a result of the study, it was found that the most used way to obtain the substance was through street dealers and

friends. Considering that people get information about drugs from friends, it becomes clear how vital the social circle is.

In examining the reasons for substance use among the students included in the study, it was found that 31.5% of the students were curious, 28.6% were aspirants, and 28.4% were used because of friends or acquaintances. When looking at the reasons why the students who participated in the study tried addictive substances, it was found that 30.6% of the students started using out of curiosity, 30.6% for fun and pleasure, and 22.2% because of friends (Table 3). In a study in which participants were evaluated for the initial reasons that led them to use drugs, it was found that 60.7% of participants started using drugs out of curiosity and 75.7% because of their friends (Ateş & Tarık, 2020). In his study, Tansel (2006) concludes that students' attitudes toward addictive substances show significant differences between the factors "curiosity," "enthusiasm," and "friend" among the reasons for their use. It is stated that the first step in the process of drug addiction is the behavior of curiosity and trying.

Looking at the students' level of knowledge included in the study about the reasons for trying addictive substances, it was found that 30.6% of the students started of curiosity, 30.6% for fun and pleasure, and 22.2% among friends (Table 3). In a study conducted with health care students in Saudi Arabia, it was found that 41.7% of them took substances in order not to refuse their friends' offers and 40.8% for pleasure (Vajid et al., 2022). In a study conducted with students from Ethiopia's Mekelle University, 86% of the reasons for using psychoactive substances stated that they use them for entertainment/recreation (Tesama et al., 2017). In these countries, encouraging substance use behaviors were employed by friends and recreational drugs. In line with these results, curiosity and entertainment/pleasure rank first among the reasons for starting to use addictive substances.

In the study, significant differences were found in students' attitudes toward people who used addictive substances depending on whether or not they were in an environment where substances were used and whether or not they used addictive substances in their family. For this reason, being in places where substances are used or having a family member who uses substances is an essential factor in changing students' attitudes toward addictive substances and the people who use them. Being in environments where these substances are used leads to increased tolerance. Over time, substance use that began through trial and error becomes approved and accepted.

It was found that among the addictive substances, the students knew the most about the use of cannabis, and the addictive substance that was tried for the first time was the volatile substance. If we look at how substance use is mediated, street vendors and friends are effective. According to the results of this study, students tried the addictive substance mainly out of curiosity and among friends.

In examining the research findings, college students need guidance and counseling regarding their attitudes toward individuals who use addictive substances and their attitudes and behaviors toward addictive substances to recognize these substances and learn about their harms. It is a risky time for college students

to get involved in a new environment and social life, contact with addictive substances, and even use them. During this time, students should be very well educated about the harms of addictive substances, the problems, and how much they threaten their health. It is crucial to conduct training and awareness activities to prevent substance use. University students should be made aware of and trained in preventing addictive substance use, which is increasing day by day negatively.

In order to prevent or minimize substance use and addiction, it can be suggested to provide a healthy family environment in every way possible, be a good role model for their children, provide sufficient love and discipline within the family, closely monitor the individual's circle of friends, discourage their children befriend with substance-prone individuals. Parents should be mindful of what their children spend their money on. From the general to the specific, it can be said that measures such as educating parents about substance use and addiction throughout society, psychological support for young people, health programs for schoolchildren, and legal restrictions on access to drugs can all be effective at any time.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

One of the limitations of our study is that only college students participated in this study. Therefore, generalizations cannot be made for other cultural and socioeconomic samples. Another limitation is that the lack of direct questions about alcohol and cigarettes in the questionnaire limits the scope of the results. The study results may be useful for research if supported by structured interviews and rehabilitation studies applied in the field. It may be advisable to design cross-cultural studies or research for treating and preventing addiction for future research.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethical committee approval was received from the Ethics Committee of Rectorate of Şırnak College (approval no: 74546226-730.08.03, dated 14/07/2020).

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants who participated in this study.

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