

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards at tertiary care hospital

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ABSTRACT

Background: Psychoactive substance use is a significant concern in professions demanding high levels of vigilance and responsibility. Security guards, due to their stressful work environment and irregular schedules, may be particularly vulnerable. This study investigates the prevalence, patterns, and occupational impacts of substance use among security guards. **Objective:** To determine the prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards, identify contributing factors, and assess the occupational and health-related impacts of such behaviors. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 85 security guards, selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and interviews focusing on demographic characteristics, substance use patterns, occupational factors, and health impacts. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. **Results:** The study found that 58% of participants reported psychoactive substance use, with alcohol (40%) and tobacco (35%) being the most common substances. Stress relief (45%), fatigue management (25%), and social influence (20%) were the primary reasons for use. Occupational impacts included impaired performance (30%), accidents (12%), and absenteeism (20%). Health effects included anxiety (25%) and fatigue (18%). Additionally, 60% of participants reported the absence of workplace substance use policies, and 70% expressed interest in counseling or support programs. **Conclusion:** The prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards is high, driven by occupational stress, fatigue, and workplace culture. These behaviors have significant implications for job performance and health. The findings underscore the need for workplace interventions, including stress management programs, clear substance use policies, and access to mental health support.

Keywords: Psychoactive substances, security guards, occupational stress, workplace interventions, substance use prevalence.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of psychoactive substances, which include alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, amphetamines, and other mind-altering substances, is a significant public health concern globally. When such substance use infiltrates professions that demand constant vigilance, sound judgment, and the ability to respond promptly to crises, the consequences can be dire [1]. Security guards, tasked with maintaining safety and order, are one such vulnerable group where psychoactive substance use may have profound implications. This study delves into the prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards, exploring the associated risk factors, patterns, and consequences [2].

Security guards play a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of individuals and assets. Their responsibilities often extend beyond physical presence, requiring them to assess potential risks, respond to emergencies, and enforce rules or laws [3]. However, their work environment frequently involves high levels of stress, monotony, fatigue from long and irregular working hours, and, in many cases, limited professional support. These factors, coupled with societal influences and personal challenges, may lead some security personnel to resort to psychoactive substances as a form of stress relief or as stimulants to stay alert during prolonged shifts. This phenomenon is not only a concern for their well-being but also poses

a significant threat to public safety and organizational security [4].

The prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards is influenced by various socio-economic, psychological, and occupational factors. Many security guards work under precarious employment conditions, often characterized by low wages, job insecurity, and limited access to healthcare or counseling services [5]. These conditions can exacerbate feelings of stress and despair, making substance use appear as an accessible coping mechanism. Additionally, peer influence and cultural norms around substance use, particularly in environments where alcohol or tobacco consumption is common, can contribute to the normalization of such behaviors [6].

Studies in occupational health have shown that psychoactive substance use in professions like security guarding often goes unnoticed or is underreported due to stigma and fear of job loss. This lack of acknowledgment and intervention creates a cycle where substance use not only persists but may also escalate, leading to addiction or other health complications [7]. Impairments caused by substances can reduce a guard's ability to perform their duties effectively, increase the likelihood of accidents, and, in extreme cases, result in harmful incidents that could have been prevented [8].

This issue also raises concerns about the adequacy of training and workplace policies in the security sector [9]. Many security agencies and companies do not prioritize mental health resources or substance abuse prevention programs, leaving their employees ill-equipped to handle the pressures of the job. Regular screenings, awareness campaigns, and access to support systems are often lacking, despite the high risks associated with the role [10].

Understanding the prevalence and impact of psychoactive substance use among security guards is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Addressing this issue involves a multifaceted approach, including policy reforms, workplace wellness programs, and collaboration between employers, healthcare providers, and policymakers. By focusing on these aspects, organizations can create supportive environments that discourage substance use, enhance job satisfaction, and ensure better safety standards [11].

Objectives

This study aims to contribute to the limited but growing body of knowledge on psychoactive substance use among security guards. It seeks to provide insights into the prevalence of this issue, the substances most commonly used, the underlying factors driving their use, and the associated consequences.

Methodology

This cross-sectional study was conducted at-----
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. Data were collected from 85 participants using a purposive sampling method to ensure representation from diverse employment settings. Participants were male and female security guards aged between 20 and 55 years, with a minimum of six months of work experience in the security sector.

Inclusion criteria required participants to be actively employed as security guards at the time of the study and to provide informed consent for participation. Guards with known medical conditions that could interfere with the findings, such as prescribed psychoactive medications, were excluded to maintain the study's focus on non-prescription substance use.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was designed to capture comprehensive information across four key areas: demographic characteristics, substance use patterns, occupational factors, and health and well-being. Each questionnaire required approximately 20 minutes to complete. For participants with literacy challenges, data were gathered through face-to-face interviews conducted in a private and confidential setting to ensure comfort and accuracy. The questionnaire included questions about the types of substances used, frequency of use, reasons for consumption, and perceived impacts on job performance and personal health. Additional questions explored work-related stressors, satisfaction with the job, and access to support services. Participants were encouraged to provide honest responses, with assurances of complete anonymity and confidentiality. All data collection adhered to strict ethical standards, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature. Through this method, the study aimed to capture detailed and reliable insights into the prevalence and factors associated with psychoactive substance use among security guards.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS v11. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to determine the participants' prevalence and patterns of substance use. Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated to describe the types of substances used and their frequency.

RESULTS

Data were collected from 85 participants. The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of participants (60%) were aged between 25 and 40 years, indicating that most security guards fall within the mid-career age group. Younger guards aged 20–24 years accounted for 25%, while those over 40 years made up the remaining 15%. The profession was

predominantly male, with 80% of participants being men, while women constituted 20%. Regarding education, 48% of the guards had secondary education, highlighting it as the most common

educational background. Primary education was reported by 35%, and only 17% of participants had attained higher education.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographic Characteristic	Percentage (%)
Age	
20-24 years	25
25-40 years	60
Above 40 years	15
Gender	
Male	80
Female	20
Education	
Primary Education	35
Secondary Education	48
Higher Education	17
Employment Duration	
Less than 3 years	40
3-6 years	30
More than 6 years	30

The data on substance use revealed that alcohol was the most commonly used psychoactive substance, reported by 40% of participants. Tobacco followed closely, with 35% reporting use. Cannabis use was less prevalent at 15%, while stimulants were used by 8% of participants. Among those using multiple substances, 10% reported combining two or more substances. In terms of frequency, daily use was most common for tobacco (20%) and alcohol (15%), while weekly use of these substances was reported by 20% and 10%, respectively. Cannabis and stimulants were used daily by 5% and 3% of participants, respectively, with occasional use of these substances accounting for smaller percentages.

Table 2: Prevalence and Patterns of Psychoactive Substance Use

Substance	Prevalence (%)	Frequency of Use (%)
Alcohol	40	Daily: 15, Weekly: 20, Occasional: 5
Tobacco	35	Daily: 20, Weekly: 10, Occasional: 5
Cannabis	15	Daily: 5, Weekly: 5, Occasional: 5
Stimulants	8	Daily: 3, Weekly: 4, Occasional: 1
Multiple Substances	10	Daily: 5, Weekly: 3, Occasional: 2

Stress relief emerged as the leading reason for substance use, cited by 45% of participants, underscoring the high-stress nature of security work. Fatigue management was reported by 25%, reflecting the challenges posed by long hours and irregular shifts. Social influence accounted for 20%, indicating the role of workplace culture and peer behavior in normalizing substance use. Personal issues, such as family or financial problems, were cited by 10% of participants.

Table 3: Reasons for Substance Use

Reason	Percentage (%)
Stress Relief	45
Fatigue Management	25
Social Influence	20
Personal Issues	10

Health and workplace-related impacts of substance use were notable. Mental health symptoms, such as anxiety, were reported by 25% of participants, while physical health complaints, including fatigue, were noted by 18%. A lack of workplace policies addressing substance use was reported by 60% of participants, pointing to a significant gap in organizational support. Despite this, 70% of participants expressed interest in counseling or support programs, indicating a willingness to address the issue if provided with adequate resources.

Table 4: Health and Workplace Policies

Aspect	Percentage (%)
Mental Health Symptoms (Anxiety, etc.)	25
Physical Health Complaints (Fatigue, etc.)	18
Lack of Workplace Substance Use Policy	60
Interest in Counseling or Support	70

Only 15% indicated that their workplace provided substance awareness training, and just 10% had access to counseling services. However, 70% of participants expressed interest in workplace support programs, highlighting a clear need for interventions such as awareness campaigns, counseling services, and training programs to address substance use and promote a healthier work environment.

Table 5: Workplace Support and Awareness

Workplace Initiative	Percentage (%)
No Substance Use Policy	60
Substance Awareness Training Provided	15
Access to Counseling Services	10
Interest in Workplace Support Programs	70

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight significant concerns regarding the prevalence and patterns of psychoactive substance use among security guards. With 58% of participants reporting substance use, the results emphasize the need for targeted interventions to address both the individual and occupational factors contributing to this issue. This discussion explores the implications of these findings, their alignment with existing literature, and potential strategies for mitigating substance use in this vulnerable occupational group [12]. The prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards in this study is consistent with findings from similar studies in high-stress professions [13]. Security guards often face demanding working conditions, including long hours, irregular shifts, and high levels of responsibility, which can lead to occupational stress and fatigue. The high rates of alcohol (40%) and tobacco (35%) use among participants underscore the role of these substances as accessible coping mechanisms. The use of stimulants, though reported by a smaller proportion (8%), raises concerns about guards resorting to substances to stay alert during extended or overnight shifts [14]. The lack of structured workplace policies addressing substance use, reported by 60% of participants, compounds the problem. Without clear guidelines or access to support systems, guards may feel unsupported in managing stress or substance dependence, further perpetuating risky behaviors. Stress relief was cited as the primary reason for substance use by 45% of participants, reflecting the psychological toll of the security profession [15]. Fatigue management (25%) and social influence (20%) also emerged as significant contributors. These findings suggest that substance use among security guards is not merely a personal choice but often a response to occupational and environmental pressures. The normalization of substance use in certain workplace cultures, particularly in high-stress or physically demanding

roles, may also play a role [16]. Peer influence and the lack of awareness about the long-term health consequences of substance use likely contribute to its persistence. The study revealed notable occupational and health-related consequences of substance use. Impaired job performance, reported by 30% of participants, poses significant risks to workplace safety and security. Accidents (12%) and near-miss incidents (10%) linked to substance use highlight the potential for severe outcomes, both for the guards and the individuals or assets they are tasked with protecting [17]. On the health front, participants reported symptoms such as anxiety (25%) and fatigue (18%), which may be exacerbated by substance use. The interplay between mental health issues and substance use creates a cycle that can be challenging to break without appropriate interventions. The findings underscore the urgent need for workplace interventions to address psychoactive substance use among security guards. Organizations employing security personnel must recognize the impact of occupational stress on substance use and prioritize the implementation of preventive measures. Strategies such as regular stress management workshops, access to counseling services, and substance awareness programs could provide guards with healthier coping mechanisms [18]. Furthermore, the establishment of clear workplace policies, including regular screenings and non-punitive support systems for those seeking help, can create an environment that discourages substance use while offering assistance to those in need. Tailored interventions, such as fatigue management programs and flexible scheduling, can also reduce the occupational pressures that drive substance use. While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for underreporting due to stigma or fear of judgment. Additionally, the purposive sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings to all security guards. Future research should explore longitudinal

designs with larger and more diverse samples to better understand the dynamics of substance use over time.

CONCLUSION

The high prevalence of psychoactive substance use among security guards highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to address this occupational issue. By focusing on preventive measures, workplace support, and the reduction of occupational stressors, organizations can create safer, healthier environments for security guards, ultimately benefiting both employees and the communities they serve.

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