

Substance Use Disorder Among Research Scholars in India: evidence from a Survey of Three Indian Universities

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Background

- Substance use is a significant public health concern and is considered one of the riskiest behaviours among young students
- Despite strong indications of substance use among students, certain groups of students remain unexplored for their substance use patterns and correlates
- One of such groups is young research scholars pursuing higher studies
- Ph.D. scholars go through various transition phases, a substantial amount of stress and psychological pressures, and several other social and financial burdens during their research period
- May increase the likelihood of substance use as well as can affect their patterns of using intoxicants in a significant manner

Objectives

- A plethora of research articles is available on substance use among college/university students, the population of doctoral students is relatively unexplored for their patterns and correlates of using intoxicants
- This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring this phenomenon among research scholars of selected universities

Methods and Materials

Data

- 530 respondents were selected from three universities of India, namely- Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Jawahar Lal Nehru University (JNU)

Methods

- Bi-variate cross tabulations and Chi square test
- Penalized logistic regression analysis

Measures

- Average frequency of usage of Alcohol, Smoking and Smokeless Tobacco
- Dichotomized in “Non-users” vs “Users”

Results

Figure 1: Frequency of substance use among research scholars for three selected universities, 2018-19

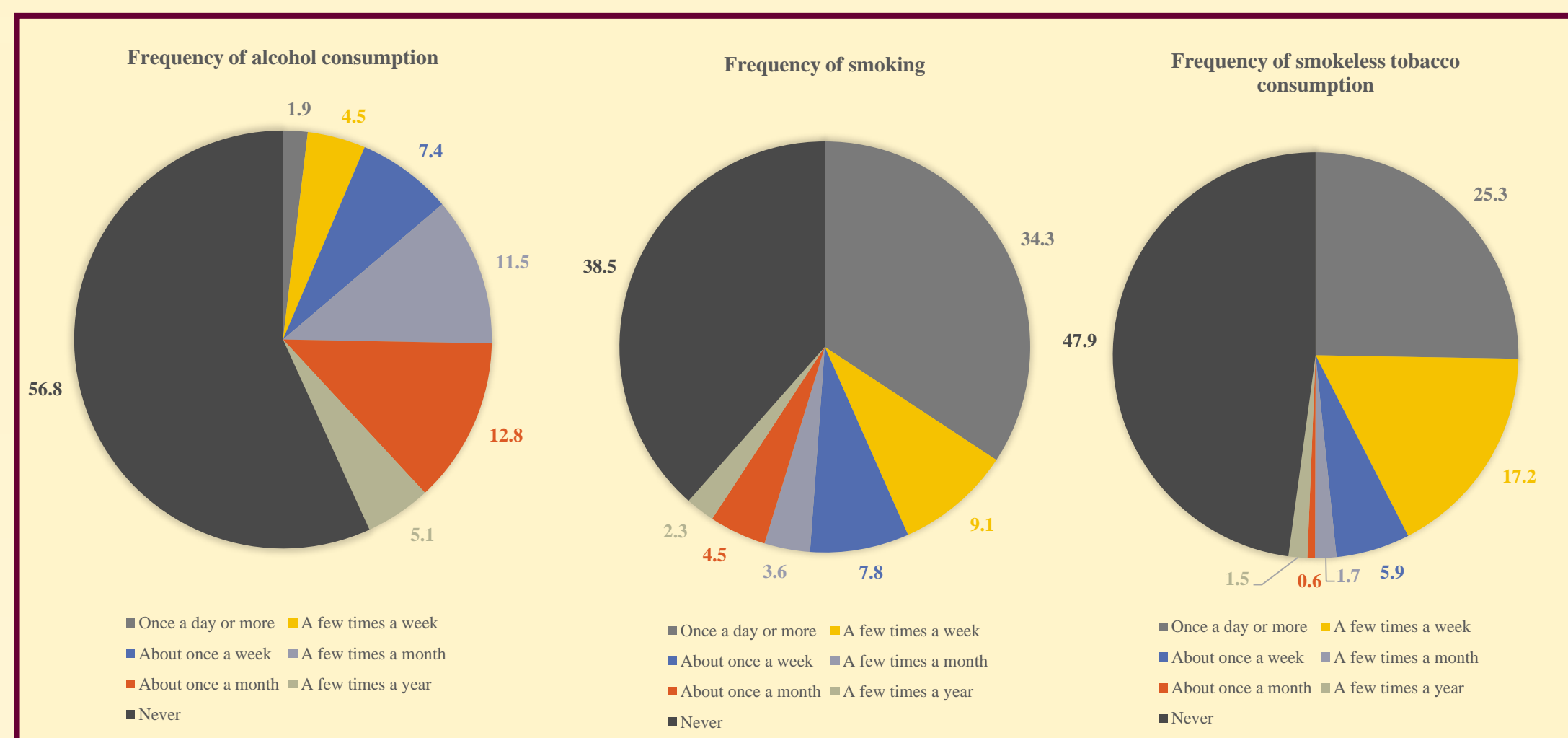


Figure 2: Levels and Patterns of substance use by university affiliation for three selected universities, 2018-19

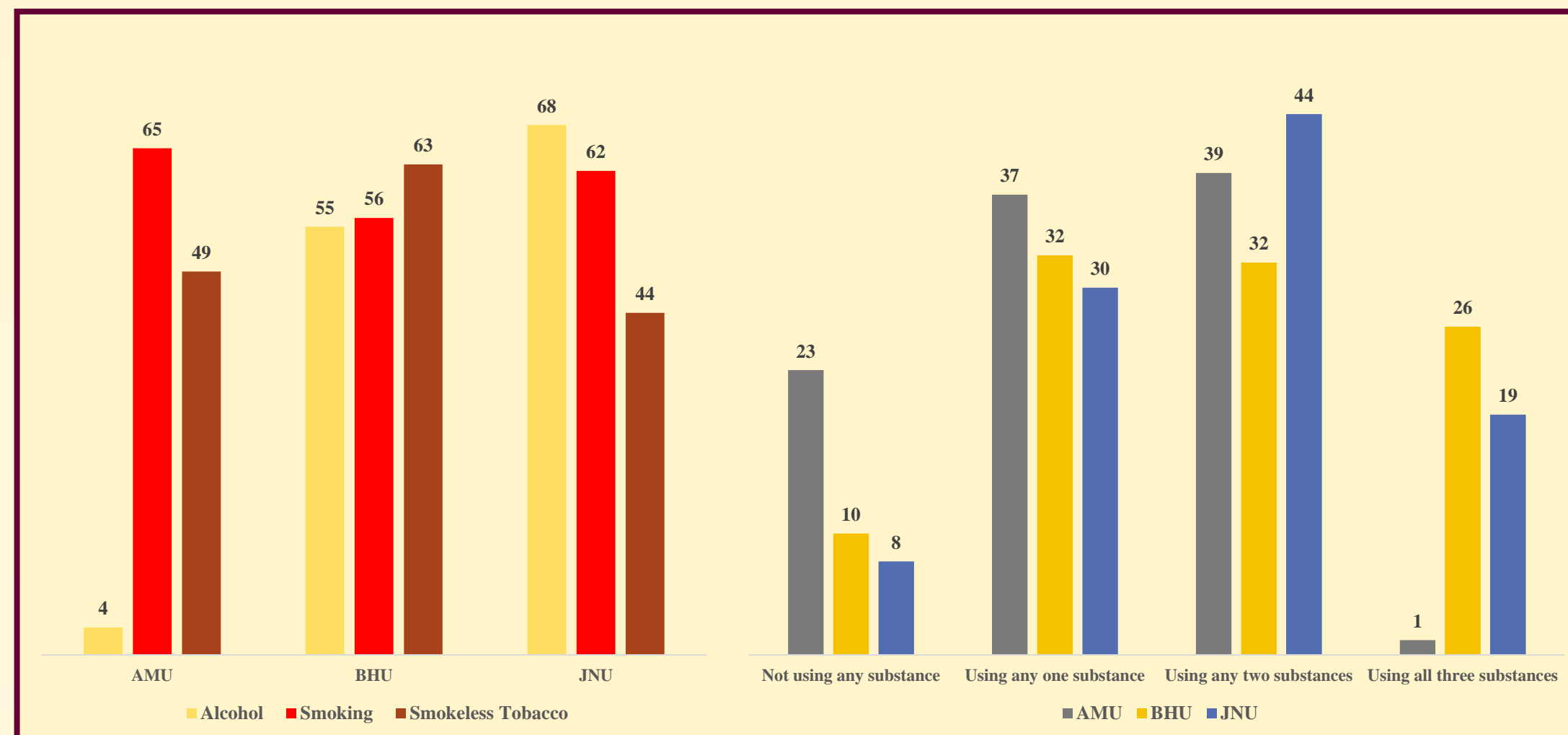
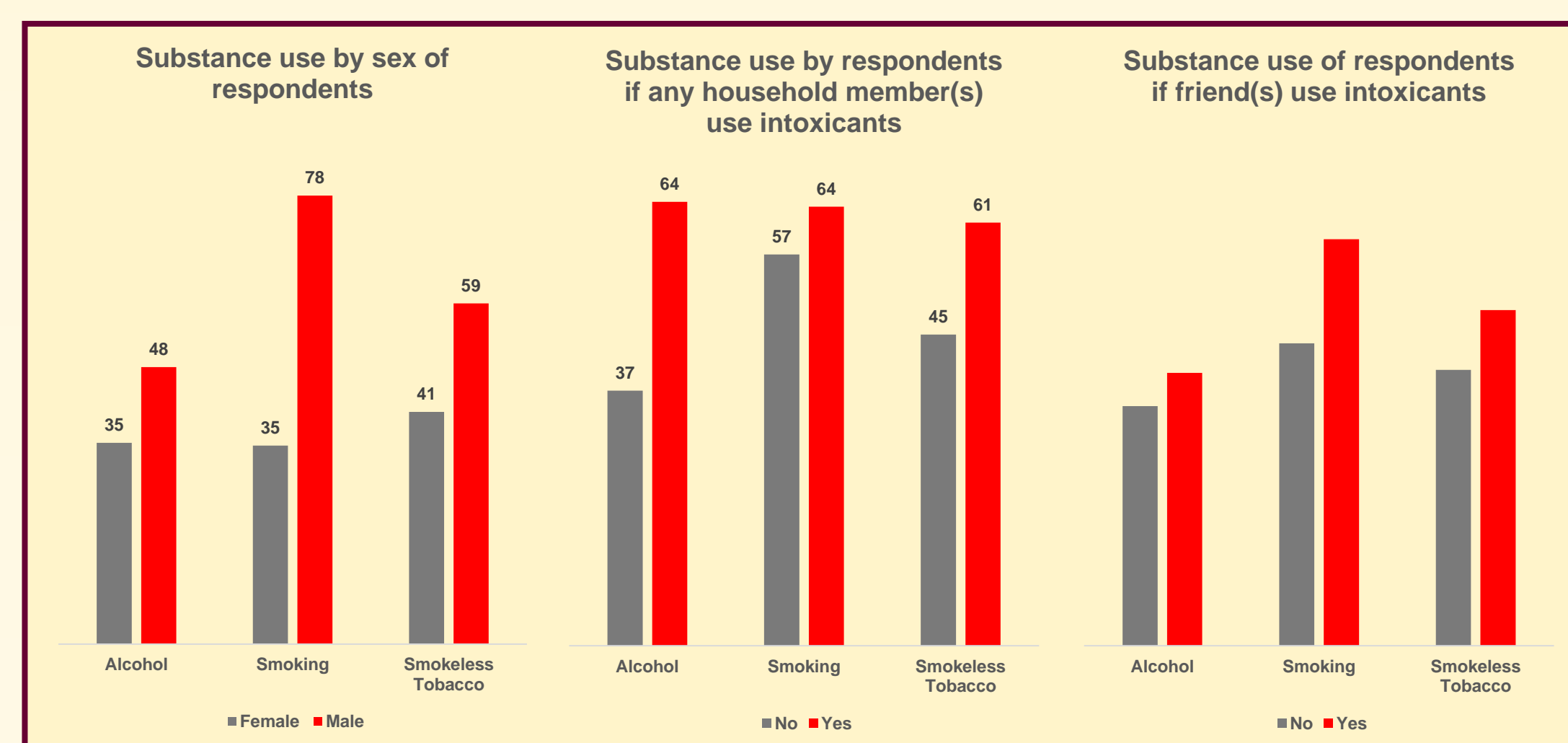


Figure 3: Substance use among respondents by selected background characteristics for three selected universities, 2018-19



Results

Table 1: Penalized logistic regression analysis of substance use socio-economic, demographic and academic characteristics of doctoral students, 2018-19

Background characteristics	Adjusted odds ratios (95% CI)		
	Alcohol	Smoking	Smokeless tobacco
Sex			
Female@	1	1	1
Male	9.47***(4.79-18.74)	11.38***(6.47-20.00)	2.03***(1.25-3.31)
Religion			
Hindu@	1	1	1
Muslim	0.01***(0.00-0.03)	0.27***(0.10-0.76)	6.24***(1.96-19.91)
Others	0.97 (0.36-2.58)	1.14 (0.51-2.54)	0.60 (0.29-1.25)
Household member(s) use alcohol/smoking/smokeless tobacco			
No@	1	1	1
Yes	0.61 (0.32-1.16)	1.17 (0.75-1.83)	1.58** (1.05-2.38)
Any substance use among friends			
No@	1	1	1
Yes	1.91** (1.01-3.64)	1.30 (0.81-2.08)	0.91 (0.58-1.40)
University affiliated with			
Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)@	1	1	1
Banaras Hindu University (BHU)	1.36 (0.25-7.28)	0.33** (0.11-0.98)	14.06*** (4.05-48.74)
Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)	6.62** (1.24-35.34)	0.51 (0.18-1.48)	4.53*** (1.40-14.60)
Perceive PhD as overburden			
Yes@	1	1	1
No	0.97 (0.52-1.81)	1.83*** (1.14-2.92)	0.88 (0.58-1.34)
Worried about future			
Yes@	1	1	1
No	1.00 (0.57-1.76)	1.60** (1.03-2.49)	0.66** (0.44-0.98)

() confidence interval in parenthesis; @ Reference category; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Table 2: Percent distribution of scholars by reason for using substances for three selected universities, 2018-19

Reason for using substance	Alcohol		Smoking		Smokeless tobacco	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
In friends' company	45	19.7	57	17.6	42	15.2
To deal with stress/anxiety/pain	23	10.0	58	17.9	67	24.3
Habit	67	29.3	132	40.7	117	42.4
Pleasure/fun	66	28.8	47	14.5	39	14.1
Socializing/social interaction	19	8.3	15	4.6	4	1.5
Others	9	3.9	15	4.6	7	2.5
Total	229	100	324	100	276	100

Summary

- More than 60 percent researchers smoke, while half of the scholars use smokeless tobacco and more than 30 percent of doctoral students consume alcohol
- Muslim scholars are least in alcohol consumption, while students from Hindu and other religions are largely indulged in the alcohol consumption
- Multivariate analysis showed sex, religion, father's death, substance use by peers, university affiliation, living outside the campus premises and years of enrolment emerged as the significant predictors of alcohol consumption

Summary

- Sex, religion, university affiliation, living inside/outside the campus premises, perception of PhD as burden and being worried about the future were significant predictors of smoking among research scholars
- Results from logistic regression showed that age, sex, religion, smokeless tobacco consumption by household member(s), university affiliation, reception of fellowship and being worried about future were significant covariates for smokeless tobacco consumption among research scholars
- The major reasons for alcohol consumption as reported by scholars were: 'habit' (29.3%) and 'pleasure/fun' (28.8%). For smoking as well as smokeless tobacco consumption the main reason reported by scholars was 'habit' (40.7% & 42.4% respectively)

Conclusions

- The study explored the substance use behaviours among research scholars in India documenting findings for an under researched area
- Sex, religion, parent(s) death, monthly average income, academic work satisfaction, stress related to career and job, were the major correlates of substance use among scholars
- The findings suggest an intervention for this section of scholars to understand and prevent them from being substance use addict
- Healthy practices, university level health promotion programs should be promoted at the university level
- Policies and programs related to substance use must be strengthened by focusing on young populations (teenagers, young adults), because most of the students start using these substances at young ages