



## Classrooms Under Threat: A Teacher's Account of Drug Abuse in J&K

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### Abstract

*This paper presents a ground-level perspective on the growing issue of drug abuse among students in Jammu and Kashmir. Based on the author's long experience as a teacher, it highlights the changing classroom environment, early warning signs, and the emotional and behavioural impact on youth. The paper explores key causes such as peer pressure, stress, curiosity, and increasing accessibility of substances. It also examines the wider impact on families, schools, and society. Emphasis is placed on the importance of early detection, open communication, and the role of schools and parents in prevention. The paper further reflects on ongoing initiatives like the "Nasha Mukh Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyaan" and stresses the need for a collective, consistent response. The study concludes that awareness, empathy, and timely intervention are essential to protect the future of young individuals.*

**Keywords:** families, schools, and society.

### When the Classroom Falls Silent

There was a time—not very long ago—when the loudest sound in my classroom was laughter. The easy chatter between lessons, arguments over group work, the restless energy before exams—these were the rhythms of an ordinary school day. If a student was quiet, it meant something simple: shyness, fatigue, or a passing mood.

### Today, silence carries a different weight.

It is the silence of a student sitting at the back, eyes fixed not on the blackboard but somewhere far beyond it. It is unfinished notebooks, sudden absences, unpredictable mood swings, and a distance that no question seems able to cross. As a teacher in Jammu & Kashmir, I have witnessed a shift—quiet on the surface, but deeply unsettling underneath. Something has changed in our classrooms, and it is not always visible or openly discussed. Drug abuse has begun to enter spaces we once believed were protected—our schools, our playgrounds, our



communities. It does not arrive with noise or warning. It slips in quietly, often unnoticed until the consequences become too serious to ignore. This is no longer just a social concern. It is an educational crisis unfolding in real time.

### **A Changing Landscape**

Jammu & Kashmir has always been known for its beauty, its culture, and above all, the resilience of its people. For generations, schools here have stood as spaces of hope—places where young minds could imagine futures beyond limitation. But the landscape our students are growing up in today is far more complex than before. With the rapid spread of social media and digital access, young people are exposed to a world that moves faster than their ability to process it. Along with opportunity has come vulnerability. One of the most troubling changes is the increasing exposure of students to drugs. What once felt like a distant problem—confined to larger cities or different regions—has moved closer. It has crossed boundaries of geography, class, and age. Teachers are often the first to sense this shift—not because we are trained to detect it, but because we know our students. We notice the small changes before anyone else does. And those changes are becoming more frequent, more difficult to dismiss.

### **The Signs We Cannot Ignore**

Drug abuse rarely begins with dramatic transformation. It begins quietly. A student who once participated actively begins to withdraw. Homework remains incomplete. Concentration fades. There are sudden emotional shifts—irritability, isolation, or unexplained anger. Physical changes follow: constant fatigue, red or unfocused eyes, neglect of personal appearance, noticeable weight fluctuations. But more than anything, there is a change that is harder to describe and impossible to measure—emotional absence. The student is there, but not fully present. As teachers, we try to bridge that gap. We ask, we encourage, we wait. Sometimes a student speaks. More often, they do not. And by the time clarity arrives, the situation is rarely at its beginning.

### **Understanding the Causes**

There is no single explanation for why a young person turns to drugs. It is never one reason—it is an intersection of pressures. Peer influence remains powerful. The need to belong, especially during adolescence, can override judgment. Stress is another major factor. Academic expectations, family pressures, and personal struggles can become overwhelming. Without healthy coping mechanisms, some students turn to harmful alternatives. Curiosity also plays its part. When something is presented as thrilling, rebellious, or “normal,” it attracts young minds still learning consequences. Accessibility has made the situation worse. The easier it becomes to obtain harmful substances, the harder it becomes to prevent their use and then there is silence. In many households and communities, conversations about drugs are avoided. Stigma replaces dialogue. Denial replaces awareness. By the time the issue is acknowledged, it is often already deeply rooted.

### **Impact Beyond the Individual**

The damage caused by drug abuse does not remain confined to one student. In classrooms, it disrupts learning environments. Teachers find themselves balancing roles they were never



formally trained for—educator, counselor, and sometimes crisis manager. At home, families struggle to understand what is happening. Confusion often turns into frustration, and frustration into helplessness. Across communities, the consequences accumulate—lost potential, broken trust, and long-term social strain. For a region like Jammu & Kashmir, where strength has always come from resilience, this is a challenge that strikes at the very foundation of the future—its youth.

### **A Response Taking Shape**

Addressing this crisis requires more than isolated efforts. The recent 100-day “Nasha Mukta Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyaan,” led by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, signals a serious attempt to confront the issue. By adopting a “Whole of Society” approach, it acknowledges an important truth: this is not only a law enforcement problem—it is a collective responsibility. Strong measures against traffickers send a necessary message. But enforcement alone cannot solve what is, at its core, a human and social issue. Real change depends on participation—from institutions, families, and individuals alike.

### **Schools as the First Line of Défense**

Schools cannot fight this battle alone, but they are undeniably at the front line. Education must now go beyond textbooks. Awareness programs should be integrated into the curriculum—not as occasional lectures, but as continuous, honest conversations. Students need facts, not fear. They need understanding, not lectures. At the same time, schools must strengthen counseling systems. Teachers should receive basic training to identify warning signs and respond appropriately, without judgment or panic. Most importantly, classrooms must remain safe spaces—where students feel heard, not judged.

### **Parents: The Missing Link**

No effort can succeed without the involvement of families. Open, consistent communication at home can act as a powerful preventive tool. When children feel understood, they are more likely to speak before problems escalate. Awareness among parents is equally critical. Recognizing behavioural changes early and responding with support rather than anger can change outcomes significantly. This is not about blame. It is about presence.

### **Students as Part of the Solution**

Young people are not just at risk—they are also part of the solution. Peer influence, which often contributes to the problem, can also become a force for good. Student-led awareness initiatives, support groups, and open discussions can reshape narratives within schools. Students must understand one essential truth: asking for help is not weakness. It is awareness. It is courage.

### **From Awareness to Action**

The path forward demands consistency, not temporary attention. Policies must continue. Awareness must deepen. Conversations must become normal, not uncomfortable. A drug-free Jammu & Kashmir is not an abstract goal. It is a necessary one. And it begins with small, consistent actions—within classrooms, within homes, within communities.



## A Teacher's Hope

Despite everything, hope remains. Every day, there are students who show resilience, determination, and clarity. There are young minds still choosing discipline over distraction, purpose over pressure. The presence of drugs is a serious challenge—but it does not define our identity. What defines us is our response. As teachers, we will continue to stand in our classrooms—not only to teach, but to guide, to listen, and to protect. Because behind every desk sits a future. And every future is worth saving.

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