

Prevalence of Hypnotic Drug Use among University Students in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The consumption of hypnotics by university students has become a rising issue in connection to problems such as sleeping troubles, academic pressures, and addiction behavior issues. Nonetheless, the data on this issue for the Middle East countries, especially Saudi Arabia, is limited. To determine the prevalence of hypnotic drug consumption by university students residing in Saudi Arabia, and to measure its connection with symptoms of addiction along with academic and cognitive outcomes. A cross-sectional study was conducted among undergraduate university students in Saudi Arabia from October to December 2025. A total of 298 eligible students completed the questionnaire and were included in the final analysis, comprising 73 medical students and 225 non-medical students. Data were collected using an anonymous structured online questionnaire developed for this study. The questionnaire comprised four sections covering demographic and clinical characteristics, patterns of hypnotic drug use (prescribed and non-prescribed), self-reported cognitive and academic changes over the preceding 12 months, and an assessment of hypnotic-related substance use disorder adapted from the 11 DSM-5 diagnostic criteria, with severity categorized as mild, moderate, or severe. Content validity was confirmed through expert panel review, and face validity and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$) were established through a pilot study. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27, utilizing descriptive statistics, comparison testing, and multivariate linear regression. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. The inclusion criteria for the study were undergraduate university students in Saudi Arabia, including both medical and non-medical students, who were above 18 years of age, currently registered at their universities during the study period, and willing to participate by providing electronic informed consent. Hypnotic medications were defined as medications used for sleep induction and maintenance, excluding melatonin. The exclusion criteria included non-university students, postgraduate students, and participants who refused to provide consent or did not complete the questionnaire. The study involved a total number of 298 respondents, comprising 73 medical and 225 non-medical students. The consumption of hypnotic drugs was reported in both categories of respondents, but there was no statistically significant difference in the degree of hypnotic substance abuse disorder between the two groups of respondents ($p > 0.05$). There were also no differences in any of the academic and cognitive performances. However, some percentage of the respondents reported difficulties in concentration and memory. In the multivariate regression analysis, marital status ($B = 0.460$, $p = 0.044$) and change in college attendance ($B = 0.575$, $p = 0.037$) were significant independent predictors of severity, and other demographic factors were not significant. Hypnotic drug use is common among university students in Saudi Arabia and is linked with cognitive and functional problems without any apparent difference in their academic performance. This study highlights the need for interventions to foster good behavior among university students.

Keywords: hypnotic drugs, university students, addiction, sleep, academic performance, Saudi Arabia

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