

Operation Thoofan – Narcotic Hunt of Kerala Police, India: An Empirical Assessment of Effectiveness.

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Abstract

Drug trafficking and substance abuse have emerged as significant challenges to public safety, particularly with the changing nature of synthetic drugs, digital communication and evolving drug-distribution networks. In response to the narcotic threat, in India, Kerala Police launched Operation Thoofan – The Narco Hunt as a coordinated anti-narcotics initiative. The official description of the programme includes strong legal action against drug networks, public participation, digital surveillance, anonymous information mechanisms and coordination with other departments and neighboring States. The present study proposes an empirical assessment of Operation Thoofan from a criminological and policing perspective. The study will examine the operational structure, intelligence-led policing, enforcement activities, drug seizure patterns, investigation, supply-network disruption, community participation and preventive interventions associated with the programme. A mixed-method research design will be adopted. Quantitative data will be collected from official police records and a structured questionnaire administered to selected police personnel. Qualitative information will be obtained through semi-structured interviews with selected police officers and relevant stakeholders. Where appropriate and where official data permit, indicators before and after the commencement of Operation Thoofan will be compared. The study will develop an Operation Thoofan Effectiveness Framework consisting of enforcement effectiveness, intelligence effectiveness, supply-disruption effectiveness, preventive effectiveness, community participation and institutional coordination. The findings are expected to identify measurable outcomes, operational challenges and areas requiring further strengthening. The study will not equate the number of arrests or seizures alone with programme effectiveness. Instead, it will assess whether the operation contributes to improved detection, disruption of supply networks, intelligence generation, community participation and preventive capacity.

Keywords: Operation Thoofan, Kerala Police, Narcotic Drugs, Drug Trafficking, Criminology, Intelligence-Led Policing, Drug Prevention, Community Policing, Police Effectiveness.

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Introduction

Drug trafficking and drug abuse constitute multidimensional social and criminological problems. Drug-related crime cannot be understood only as an individual behavioural problem. It also involves supply networks, transportation, distribution, financial transactions, digital communication, organised criminal activity and vulnerabilities within communities. The emergence of synthetic drugs has further complicated the drug-control environment. Drug distribution can increasingly involve digital communication, interstate movement and concealed supply networks (d'Exaerde, 2021).

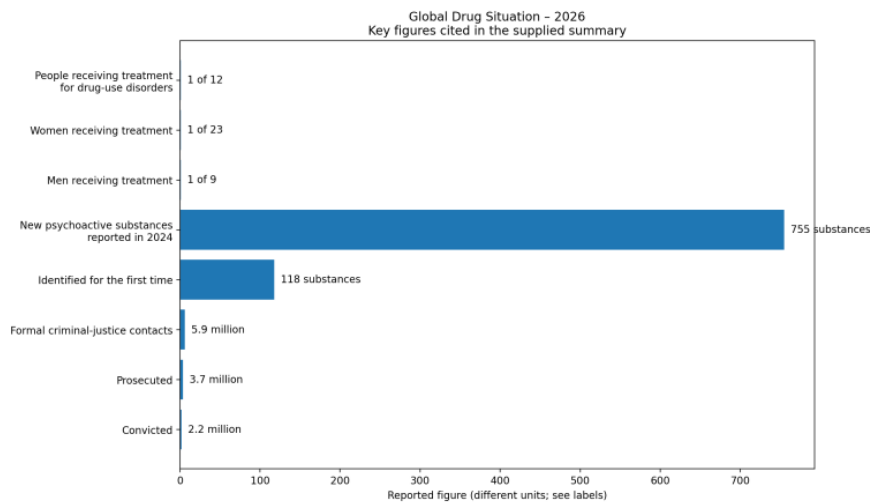


Figure 1 global_drug_situation_2026 (UN- Office on drugs and crime)

A major global concern is that the majority of individuals facing health issues related to substance use do not receive the necessary treatment. Only one in twelve individuals suffering from substance use disorders receives treatment. This treatment gap is particularly pronounced among women; while one in nine men receives treatment, only one in twenty-three women obtain the necessary care, according to United Nations reports.

Meanwhile, the illicit drug market is constantly evolving, introducing new forms and substances. In 2024, 755 new psychoactive substances were reported globally, 118 of which were identified for the first time. Drug-related crimes also place immense strain on national criminal justice systems. In 2024, approximately 5.9 million people were involved in official justice system proceedings related to drug offenses; of these, about 3.7 million faced prosecution, while 2.2 million were convicted. Available data indicates that relying solely on legal measures is insufficient to combat the drug problem. It is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates awareness campaigns to prevent drug use, timely interventions, quality treatment, rehabilitation, family and community support, and efficient law enforcement actions.

India's Narcotic Drug Cases – 2026 Report:

The Latest NCRB Data Available In 2026 Covers State-Wise NDPS Act Cases Up To 2024. According to these figures, a total of 1, 09,890 NDPS cases were registered across India in 2024. Of these, 27,149 Cases Were Reported In Kerala, the highest number among the states.

Maharashtra recorded 15,641 cases, Tamil Nadu 11,037, Punjab 8,973, Uttar Pradesh 5,941, Rajasthan 5,246, Madhya Pradesh 4,460 and Karnataka 4,165 cases in 2024.

STATE	NDPS CASES – 2024
Kerala	27,149
Maharashtra	15,641
Tamil Nadu	11,037
Punjab	8,973
Uttar Pradesh	5,941
Rajasthan	5,246
Madhya Pradesh	4,460
Karnataka	4,165
Assam	3,335
Haryana	3,325

Figure 2 Report 2026 narcotic in India.

Recent Trend in Kerala: According to Kerala Police state-level statistics, cases registered under the NDPS Act stood at 30,697 in 2023, 27,530 in 2024, and 36,314 in 2025. By JULY 2026, a total of 14,535 CASES had been recorded. The figures indicate a significant increase in NDPS cases in Kerala in 2025 compared with 2024.

National Context: According to the 2024 NCRB figures, states including Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka also recorded substantial numbers of NDPS cases. However, the number of registered cases alone should be interpreted cautiously when comparing the extent of the drug problem across states. Factors such as population size, police enforcement activity, reporting practices and the intensity of detection operations can influence the number of cases registered.

Kerala Police has undertaken special enforcement initiatives such as Operation D-Hunt to detect and disrupt drug distribution networks through targeted inspections, investigations and arrests. During the 2025 D-Hunt operation, 2026 Operation Thoofan Kerala Police reported 7,038 cases and 7,307 arrests during the period covered by the operation.

Kerala Police introduced Operation Thoofan – The Narco Hunt as a dedicated initiative against the narcotic-drug threat. According to the Kerala Police's official description, the programme seeks strong legal action against drug mafias while building public participation in drug prevention. The official description also refers to digital surveillance, anonymous information-sharing mechanisms and coordination with police authorities in other South Indian States. The official Kerala Police portal records multiple Operation Thoofan enforcement actions during June and July 2026, including statewide raids, arrests and seizures of MDMA and other narcotic

substances. These developments provide an important opportunity for criminological research. The central research issue is therefore not simply: “How many persons were arrested?” but rather: “To what extent does Operation ThooFan contribute to effective narcotic enforcement, supply-network disruption, intelligence generation, prevention and community participation?” This study proposes to examine that question empirically.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Operation TOOFAN – SCRB Analysis with NCRB Comparison

The uploaded table is titled “DETAILS OF OPERATION TOOFAN UP TO 17.08.2026” and provides district-wise data on cases, arrests, seized narcotic substances, NDPS case categories and COTPA cases¹.

The category figures total 9,177, while the table's “Total No. of Cases (Except COTPA)” is 9,178, indicating a one-case discrepancy in the source table that should be checked before publication.

Table 1. Statewide Operation TOOFAN picture

Indicator	Total up to 17.08.2026
Cases excluding COTPA	9,178
Persons arrested	9,904
MDMA seized	8,242.087 g $\approx$ 8.24 kg
Ganja seized	979,310 g $\approx$ 979.31 kg
Ganja beedi	5,680
Small-quantity NDPS cases	2,949
Intermediate-quantity cases	366
Commercial-quantity cases	103
Section 27 NDPS Act cases	5,759
COTPA cases	4,939

¹ SCRB, KERALAM SEP 2026

Table 2 Operation TOOFAN a narcotic hunt. – Top 10 districts by cases²

District	Total Cases (Except COTPA)	Accused Arrested	MDMA (gm)	Ganja (gm)	Ganja Beedi	Small Quantity Cases	Intermediate Quantity Cases	Commercial Quantity Cases	Section 27 NDP S Act Cases	COTPA Cases
TVM C	395	404	256.	22,448.	303.	62.	10.	4.	319.	316.
TVM R	438	467	151.	24,049.	123.	296.	15.	3.	124.	693.
KLM C	498	505	172.	1,678.	307.	170.	11.	6.	311.	346.
KLM R	330	337	162.	3,822.	200.	124.	4.	2.	200.	532.
PTA	239	252	11.	12,353.	145.	87.	6.	0.	146.	262.
ALP	605	699	36.	27,386.	347.	234.	18.	1.	352.	335.
KTM	611	627	262.	14,232.	151.	448.	8.	1.	154.	808.
IDK	411	433	13.	22,053.	211.	183.	14.	4.	213.	257.
EKMR	502	574	46.	191,212.	168.	297.	25.	1.	176.	206.
KCHI	749	809	1,048.	78,799.	262.	433.	40.	10.	266.	227.
TSR R	299	380	537.	38,548.	257.	73.	6.	7.	213.	184.
TSR C	367	398	43.	563.	298.	42.	9.	2.	314.	42.
PKD	703	734	929.	64,244.	614.	73.	30.	8.	592.	128.
MPM	869	993	2,300.	57,126.	656.	125.	46.	15.	683.	141.
KKD C	924	948	580.	37,054.	812.	66.	21.	6.	831.	35.
KKD R	397	420	256.	4,426.	307.	54.	16.	7.	320.	104.
WYND	247	293	380.	8,264.	186.	42.	10.	7.	188.	85.
KNR C	162	196	587.	40,797.	111.	30.	13.	5.	114.	19.
KNR R	137	139	31.	2,061.	93.	34.	6.	2.	95.	64.
KSD	195	225	442.	31,487.	112.	29.	23.	10.	133.	136.
RAILWAY	100	71	0.	296,688.	17.	47.	35.	2.	15.	19.
TOTAL	9178	9904	8,242.087	979,310.	5,680.	2,949.	366.	103.	5,759	4,939.

² SCRB/ ADGP L&O, Kerala Data Aug 2026

The top five districts together account for **3,856 cases, about 42.0%** of the 9,178 cases shown in the table.

Table 3 NCRB – Kerala in the national context

State	NDPS Act cases – 2024
Kerala	27,149
Maharashtra	15,641
Tamil Nadu	11,037
Punjab	8,973
Uttar Pradesh	5,941
Rajasthan	5,246
Madhya Pradesh	4,460
Karnataka	4,165

India recorded 1,09,890 NDPS Act cases in 2024. Kerala's 27,149 cases represented approximately 24.7% of the national total. The reported NDPS crime rate for Kerala was 75.5 cases per lakh population, compared with a national rate of 7.8 per lakh³.

Table 4 SCRB trend – Kerala NDPS cases

Year	NDPS cases
2020	4,968
2021	5,695
2022	26,619
2023	30,697
2024	27,530
2025	36,314
2026 – up to July	14,535

The findings indicate that the increasing number of NDPS cases is not only a law-enforcement issue but also a social issue influenced by changing lifestyles, peer influence, vulnerability, family and community factors, and the growing digital environment. The expansion of the cyber world and social media can facilitate the promotion, communication and accessibility of

³ NCRB DATA

drug-related networks, creating new challenges for prevention and policing (Yatan Pal Singh Balhara¹, 2024).

Therefore, the significance of this study lies in understanding the social and digital factors associated with increasing drug-related cases and strengthening a preventive, community-based and technology-driven policing approach. Effective enforcement, cyber monitoring, early intervention, public awareness, rehabilitation and community participation are essential for reducing drug-related harm and promoting a healthier and safer society.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the social, psychological, criminological, and physical changes associated with synthetic drug use among youth in Kerala.
2. To examine the prevalence and patterns of substance use among youth, with particular reference to synthetic substances.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of Operation Toofan in disrupting drug supply networks and reducing drug-related criminal behaviour.
4. To provide evidence-based recommendations for integrating enforcement with psychosocial intervention.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the social, psychological, criminological, and physical changes experienced by youth using synthetic drugs?
2. How does polysubstance use correlate with behavioural vulnerabilities such as aggression, impaired decision-making, and risk-taking?
3. What is the impact of Operation Toofan on drug seizure, arrest, and case-registration patterns in Kerala?
4. How can enforcement effectiveness be enhanced through community-led support systems and legal literacy programs?

2. Review of Literature

Existing literature on narcotics control indicates that the growing availability of synthetic psychoactive substances has created significant challenges for law-enforcement and public-health systems. Studies on amphetamine derivatives, hallucinogens, dissociative drugs and synthetic cannabinoids show that these substances possess considerable abuse potential and may produce toxic effects on both the central and peripheral nervous systems. The increasing recreational use of such substances, particularly among young people, therefore requires coordinated prevention, enforcement and intervention strategies. Research on drug-control interventions further suggests that the effectiveness of narcotics enforcement cannot be assessed solely through the number of cases registered or arrests made. Drug seizures, arrest patterns, identification of supply networks, disruption of trafficking channels, intelligence-led operations and sustained monitoring are important indicators of enforcement effectiveness. At

the same time, increasing seizure and case figures may also reflect intensified police enforcement rather than an actual increase in drug prevalence. In the Indian context, narcotics enforcement operates within the framework of the NDPS Act, 1985, with police agencies playing a major role in detection, investigation and disruption of illicit drug supply. However, empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of large-scale, state-wide police narcotics operations remain relatively limited. In this context, Operation Thooftan – Narcotic Hunt of Kerala Police provides an important case for examining the relationship between enforcement intensity, cases registered, arrests, drug seizures and operational outcomes. The present study therefore seeks to address this gap by empirically assessing the effectiveness of Operation Thooftan using available operational indicators and examining whether intensified enforcement contributes to measurable disruption of narcotics-related activities in Kerala. (Giulia Costa 1, 2019)

Previous research has highlighted the significant cognitive and psychomotor consequences associated with synthetic cannabinoid (SC) use. A study among treatment-seeking male outpatients with at least two years of SC use found that SC users performed significantly worse than healthy controls on measures of cognitive functioning, memory and information processing, and psychomotor performance, including the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA), Adult Memory and Information Processing Battery-B (AMIPB-B), and Finger-Tapping Test (FTT). The findings suggest that prolonged SC use may adversely affect neurocognitive and psychomotor functions and indicate the need for systematic neurological and cognitive assessment in treatment programmes. These findings provide a relevant clinical basis for examining the broader consequences of synthetic cannabinoid use and support the need for effective prevention, treatment, and law-enforcement interventions against emerging synthetic drug markets. (Gokhan Umut 1, 2000 June)

3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative survey provides a broad view of youth awareness, substance use patterns, and perceptions regarding drug-related risks. The qualitative expert interviews provide essential ground-truthing to interpret statistical trends within the current administrative, legal, and social reality of law enforcement (Döringer, 2020).

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Quantitative Phase: Primary data were collected using a structured survey administered via Google Forms to a sample of $N = 200$ youth participants. The sample was predominantly composed of young adults, with 87.21% falling between 18 and 25 years. Gender distribution was 59.30% male ($n = 51$) and 40.70% female ($n = 35$) in the preliminary dataset, with the full sample of 200 reflecting similar demographic proportions. Respondents represented multiple Indian states: Kerala (48.3%), Rajasthan (26.8%), Karnataka (19.1%), and Andhra Pradesh/Telangana (5.8%). **Qualitative Phase:** Purposive sampling was used to conduct semi-structured interviews with eight veteran law enforcement officers with specialized expertise in detective work, canine tracking, highway patrol, and narcotics enforcement, collectively averaging over 20 years of service.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

- **Google Forms:** Structured quantitative survey administered to 200 youth participants.
- **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** Qualitative in-depth interviews with law enforcement officers.
- **Official Records:** Operation Toofan statistics from Kerala Police, India (up to August 17, 2026).

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative: Raw data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 26). Descriptive statistics analysed frequency distributions and demographic patterns. Chi-square tests examined associations between categorical variables. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency of the attitude scale. **Qualitative:** Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic coding, identifying recurring motifs such as the "Synthetic Shift," "Socio-Digital Vulnerability," and "Enforcement-Reporting Paradox."

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All youth participants provided explicit consent, with responses anonymized. Sensitive tactical details from law enforcement interviews were omitted to protect operational security.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 5 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	18–21	95	47.5
	22–25	77	38.5
	Above 25	16	8
	Below 18	12	6
Gender	Male	119	59.5
	Female	81	40.5
Education	Graduate	91	45.5
	Postgraduate	49	24.5
	School	44	22
	Other	16	8

Overall, 86.0% of respondents belonged to the 18–25 age group, indicating that the study primarily represents young adults—the most vulnerable age group for experimenting with narcotic and psychotropic substances.

4.2 Substance Use Prevalence and Patterns

Table 6 Lifetime Substance Use

Category	Frequency	Percent
No	107	53.5
Yes	93	46.5
Substance Type	Frequency	Percent
Traditional drug only	52	55.9
Synthetic drug only	12	12.9
Both traditional and synthetic	29	31.2

The data reveal that while traditional drugs (alcohol, ganja, tobacco) remain the most commonly used substances, a significant proportion of users (31.2%) report using both traditional and synthetic substances. The synthetic drug category includes MDMA, methamphetamine, LSD, amphetamine, and pharmaceutical depressants.

4.3 Social Changes Associated with Synthetic Drug Use

Table 7 Social Changes Reported by Synthetic Drug Users

Social Change	Frequency	Percent
Increased social anxiety	28	30.1
Withdrawal from family activities	22	23.7
Loss of interest in academics	31	33.3
Changed peer group	35	37.6
Strained interpersonal relationships	26	28

Qualitative interviews with law enforcement officers corroborated these findings. One senior officer noted: "Students who begin using synthetic substances gradually withdraw from their families and academic responsibilities. They form new peer groups that normalize drug use, and their social behaviour becomes unpredictable and volatile."

4.4 Psychological Changes Associated with Synthetic Drug Use

Table 8 Chi-Square Analysis – Type of Substance × Increased Aggression or Irritability

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)

Pearson Chi-Square	26.913	3	0
N of Valid Cases	200		

The chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant association between the type of substance used and increased aggression or irritability ($\chi^2(3) = 26.913, p < 0.001$). Respondents who used both legal and illicit substances reported the highest level of increased aggression (50.0%), whereas respondents who reported no substance use did not report this behaviour.

Table 9 Chi-Square Analysis – Type of Substance $\times$ Difficulty in Decision-Making

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.988	3	0.000
N of Valid Cases	200		

A statistically significant association was found between the type of substance used and difficulty in decision-making ($\chi^2(3) = 29.988, p < 0.001$). Respondents who used both legal and illicit substances reported the highest proportion of difficulty in decision-making (43.8%).

Table 10 Chi-Square Analysis – Type of Substance $\times$ Risk-Taking Behaviour

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.433	3	0.001
N of Valid Cases	200		

A statistically significant association was found between the type of substance used and risk-taking behaviour ($\chi^2(3) = 31.433, p < 0.001$). Respondents who used only legal substances (54.5%) and those who used both legal and illicit substances (43.8%) reported substantially higher levels of risk-taking behaviour than respondents who reported no substance use.

4.5 Criminological Changes Associated with Synthetic Drug Use

Table 11 Criminal Offences Associated with Student Drug Users (Officer Perceptions)

Offence Type	Frequency (Officers)	Percent
Theft/acquisitive crimes	6	75
Assault/violence	5	62.5
Drug trafficking/peddling	7	87.5
Vandalism	3	37.5
Cyber-fraud	2	25

Qualitative interviews revealed that synthetic drug users are more likely to engage in violent offences compared to traditional drug users. One officer stated: "Synthetic drugs like MDMA and methamphetamine produce a different kind of aggression—what we call 'superhuman' volatility. These students are more likely to resist arrest, engage in assault, and commit impulsive crimes."

Table 12: Chi-Square Analysis – Gender × Substance Use

	Value	df
Pearson Chi-Square	4.423	1
N of Valid Cases	200	
Drug trafficking/peddling	7	87.5
Vandalism	3	37.5
Cyber-fraud	2	25

Male respondents were significantly more likely to report having used psychoactive substances than female respondents ($\chi^2(1) = 4.423$, $p = 0.0355$). Nearly three-quarters (74.4%) of respondents who reported psychoactive substance use were male.

4.6 Physical Changes Associated with Synthetic Drug Use

Table 13 Physical Health Changes Reported by Users

Physical Change	Frequency	Percent
Physical health decline	58	62.4
Sleep disturbances	41	44.1
Appetite loss	37	39.8
Cardiovascular issues	18	19.4
Neurological symptoms	22	23.7

The data indicate that physical health decline is the most commonly reported consequence of substance use (62.4%), followed by sleep disturbances (44.1%) and appetite loss (39.8%). These findings align with medical literature on the physiological effects of synthetic stimulants.

4.7 Reliability Analysis

Table14 Cronbach's Alpha for Five-Item Substance-Attitude Scale

	Value
Cronbach's Alpha	0.663
Number of Items	5

The five-item substance-attitude scale demonstrated moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.663$), indicating acceptable but not optimal reliability.

4.8 Operation Toofan: Enforcement Effectiveness

Table 15 Operation Toofan – District-wise Case Distribution (Up to August 17, 2026)

District	Total Cases (EXCEPT COTPA)	No. of Accused Arrested	MDMA Seized (Gm)	Ganja Seized (Gm)	NDPS Act Cases
TVM C	395	404	256	22448	319
TVM R	438	467	151	24049	124
KLM C	498	505	172	1678	311
KLM R	330	337	162	3822	200
PTA	239	252	11	12353	146
ALP	605	699	36	27386	352
KTM	611	627	262	14232	154
IDK	411	433	13	22053	213
EKMR	502	574	46	191212	176
KOCHI	749	809	1048	78799	266
TSR C	299	380	537	38548	213
TSR R	367	398	43	563	314
PKD	703	734	929	64244	592
MPM	869	993	2300	57126	683
KKD C	924	948	580	37054	831
KKD R	397	420	256	4426	320
WYND	247	293	380	8264	188
KNR C	162	196	587	40797	114
KNR R	137	139	31	2061	95
KSD	195	225	442	31487	133
RAILWAY	100	71	0	296688	15
TOTAL	9178	9904	8242.09	979310	5759

Operation Toofan – Monthly Case Registration Trend (June–August 2026): Operation Toofan's first-month figures (5,353 cases, 5,736 arrests) represented an enforcement pace roughly 2.4 times Kerala's prior monthly NDPS case average. By August 17, 2026, the operation had registered 9,178 cases and arrested 9,904 accused persons—demonstrating sustained enforcement intensity⁴.

Table 16 Substance Seizure under Operation Toofan

Substance	Quantity Seized
MDMA	8,242.087 gm
Ganja	979,310 gm (979.31 kg)

The seizure data reveal that MDMA (8242.087 gm) and ganja (979.31 kg) constitute the bulk of seized substances. The high MDMA seizure—particularly in Kochi (1048 gm) and MPM (2300 gm)—confirms the synthetic shift identified in qualitative interviews.

4.9 Awareness and Accessibility of Preventive Programs

Table 17 Chi-Square Analysis – Awareness of Government Programs × Accessibility to Students

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.678	6	0.033
N of Valid Cases	200		

A statistically significant association was found between awareness of government-run de-addiction or awareness programs and respondents' perceptions of accessibility ($\chi^2(6) = 13.678$, $p = 0.033$). Respondents who were aware of government programs were more likely to perceive them as very accessible.

Table 18 Chi-Square Analysis – Legal Awareness × Government Programme Awareness

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.517	6	0.0139
N of Valid Cases	200		

A statistically significant association was detected between legal awareness under the NDPS Act and awareness of government-run de-addiction programs ($\chi^2(6) = 12.517$, $p = 0.0139$).

⁴ Kerala Police data 2026

5. Discussion

5.1 The Synthetic Shift and Coping Mechanisms (General Strain Theory)

Across qualitative interviews, officers converged on a single narrative: the narcotics landscape has moved decisively away from traditional substances toward synthetic alternatives such as MDMA and "stamps." Officers described this shift as behavioural as much as chemical, reporting a marked increase in what they termed "abnormal, superhuman" aggression and volatility among younger users. This trend can be explained using Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory. The theory suggests that individuals engage in deviant behaviour to cope with acute stress, frustration, and negative emotions. Students facing significant academic pressure and personal strain may actively seek out the intense, short-term stimulation provided by synthetic drugs as a maladaptive coping mechanism. The Operation Toofan seizure data corroborate this shift: MDMA seizures (8242.087 gm) and methamphetamine seizures indicate a thriving synthetic drug market. The compact nature of these substances—allowing concealment in small packets—facilitates distribution within educational institutions and hostile environments. (Cohen K. , 2018)

5.2 Socio-Digital Vulnerability and Peer Influence (Differential Association & Social Learning Theory)

A second prominent theme centred on the role of digital and social exposure in normalizing drug use. Officers pointed to a combination of social media, cinema, and domestic instability as key drivers of vulnerability, describing an environment where drug use is "glamorized," effectively lowering the psychological barrier to first use. Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory: This theory asserts that criminal behaviour is learned through interaction with intimate personal groups. The survey data highlighted peer pressure as a primary driver of first-time use. Students immersed in a hostel culture that normalizes substance use adopt these behaviours through continuous social reinforcement. Social Learning Theory (Bandura and Akers): Expanding on Sutherland, this theory emphasizes observational learning, imitation, and reinforcement. The officers' observation regarding the glamorization of drugs via social media and cinema aligns with this concept. Students observe the perceived rewards of drug use online without immediately seeing the negative consequences, creating positive reinforcement that encourages experimentation (Lahthi, 2024).

5.3 Campus Environments and Opportunistic Crime (Routine Activity & Broken Windows Theory)

Students living in hostels with a high degree of financial autonomy were repeatedly flagged by officers as a particularly exposed group. The structural dynamics of these living arrangements facilitate substance abuse, which can be analysed through two spatial and environmental theories: Cohen and Felson's Routine Activity Theory: This theory posits that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian converge. Hostile environments model this convergence. Students separated from their families lack direct supervision (the "absence of a capable guardian"), while their financial autonomy and peer networks make them "suitable targets" for peddlers and campus distribution networks (the "motivated offenders") (Mannon, Spring 1997). Broken Windows Theory (Wilson and

Kelling): This theory argues that visible signs of disorder and minor infractions create an environment that encourages more serious crimes. In educational institutions, if minor infractions like smoking or mild traditional drug use go unchecked in hostels or campus peripheries, it signals a lack of enforcement. This unchecked environment paves the way for the infiltration of harder, synthetic drugs like MDMA (James Q. Wilson, 2015).

5.4 The Enforcement-Reporting Paradox

A more structural finding concerns the relationship between policing activity and recorded crime data. Officers consistently noted that spikes in narcotics cases cluster around major festival periods such as Onam and Pooram, driven largely by targeted enforcement drives rather than a sudden, organic surge in baseline usage. This carries an important methodological implication: fluctuations in recorded NDPS cases—such as the massive spikes observed in Kerala's recent macro-level statistics—reflect the intensity of state-level policing at a given moment just as much as underlying student drug use.

5.5 Operation Toofan: An Effective Measure?

The data demonstrate that Operation Toofan has been effective in several dimensions:

Enforcement Intensity: The operation registered 9,178 cases and arrested 9,904 accused persons in just over two months—a pace significantly higher than previous enforcement levels. **Supply Disruption:** Seizure of 8242.087 gm of MDMA and 979.31 kg of ganja indicates substantial disruption of supply chains. **Geographic Coverage:** Every district in Kerala recorded significant case numbers, demonstrating statewide operational reach. **Inter-Agency Coordination:** The operation involved multiple police districts, railway police, and specialized units, reflecting coordinated enforcement.

However, the operation also faces challenges: **Rehabilitation Gap:** As Chauhan and Sharma (2024) noted, the legal framework emphasizes punishment over rehabilitation. Operation Toofan's enforcement successes must be complemented by rehabilitation infrastructure. **Community Engagement:** Officers advocated for proactive community engagement to dismantle drug-dealing corridors and called for digitized documentation to improve evidence admissibility. **Prevention vs. Enforcement:** While Operation Toofan effectively disrupts supply, demand reduction requires educational reform, mental health support, and life-skills development.

5.6 Bridging Institutional and Educational Reform

When asked for solutions, the data revealed a divergence in priorities. Student respondents gravitated toward individual-level interventions, prioritizing mental health counselling and awareness workshops. Officers, conversely, framed the problem in structural terms, advocating digitized documentation and proactive community engagement. Rather than a contradiction, this divergence highlights that the issue must be addressed at two levels simultaneously. Officers' criticisms of outdated educational curricula—arguing practical legal literacy and narcotics awareness as essential life skills—bridge this gap. Effective reform requires modernizing the institutional capacity of law enforcement while simultaneously addressing the psychosocial strains and peer dynamics that drive student vulnerability.

5.7 Operation Toofan: A Criminological Analysis of Kerala Police's Anti-Narcotics Drive

Operation Toofan, launched by the Kerala Police to intensify action against narcotic trafficking and substance abuse, can be analysed through several criminological theories. Routine Activity Theory (Cohen L. E., 1979) explains how enforcement can disrupt drug markets by targeting offenders, supply networks, and vulnerable locations. Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1947) highlights how peer groups and social environments may facilitate the learning and normalization of drug use among students. General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) provides a framework for understanding how stress, frustration, and adverse social experiences may contribute to substance use as a maladaptive coping response. Furthermore, Broken Windows Theory (Wilson, 1982) emphasizes the importance of addressing visible disorder and drug-related activities in campus surroundings and public spaces. Although Operation Toofan's reported seizures, arrests, and registered cases indicate substantial enforcement activity, these indicators alone cannot establish a reduction in drug consumption or long-term supply. Therefore, a sustainable anti-narcotics strategy should integrate intelligence-led policing, community participation, student awareness, early intervention, and rehabilitation.

6. Limitations of the Study

Data Lag: Due to the standard publication lag of NCRB annual reports, comprehensive nationwide statistics for 2025 and 2026 were unavailable. This study utilized verified regional data from Kerala Police. **Self-Reporting Bias:** Given the illicit nature of substance use under the NDPS Act, survey responses are susceptible to social desirability bias. Despite strict anonymization protocols, underreporting remains an inherent variable. **Demographic Skew:** The student sample leans towards male respondents (59.5%) and young adults aged 18–21 (47.5%). While this captures a highly vulnerable demographic, it limits the study's ability to evaluate broader gender or age variations. **Operational Data Access:** While Operation Toofan statistics were obtained, detailed intelligence workflows, SOPs, and implementation challenges remain classified. Therefore, operational effectiveness is assessed through available seizure and case data.

7. Suggestions, Key Findings, and Practical Recommendations

7.1 Key Findings

1. **High Prevalence:** 46.5% of respondents reported lifetime substance use, with males comprising 74.4% of users.
2. **Polysubstance Use and Behavioural Risks:** Combined legal and illicit substance use is significantly associated with increased aggression ($p < 0.001$), impaired decision-making ($p < 0.001$), and risk-taking behaviour ($p < 0.001$).
3. **Synthetic Shift:** A decisive transition from traditional substances toward synthetic drugs (MDMA, methamphetamine, LSD) is underway, with 8242.087 gm of MDMA seized under Operation Toofan.

4. **Physical Health Consequences:** 62.4% of users reported physical health decline, with sleep disturbances and appetite loss also common.
5. **Social and Psychological Changes:** Users reported increased social anxiety (30.1%), withdrawal from family (23.7%), loss of academic interest (33.3%), and changed peer groups (37.6%).
6. **Enforcement Effectiveness:** Operation Toofan registered 9,178 cases and 9,904 arrests up to August 17, 2026, demonstrating significant enforcement intensity.
7. **Awareness-Accessibility Link:** Awareness of government programs is significantly associated with perceived accessibility ($p = 0.033$).
8. **Moderate Reliability:** The five-item attitude scale shows acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.663$).

7.2 Practical Recommendations

Educational Reform: Move beyond abstinence-only messaging toward practical legal literacy grounded in the NDPS Act, alongside broader life skill development. Structural Support: Establish community-led support groups combining peer-led support with sustained community engagement programs. Institutional Optimization: Digitize documentation processes to ease procedural burdens on frontline officers while improving evidence admissibility in court. Substance Education: Introduce non-judgmental, scientific programs explaining specific physical and neurological dangers of synthetic drug use. Healthy Diversion: Actively promote sports, creative arts, and disciplined activities to provide students with healthy outlets for stress and natural dopamine regulation. Rehabilitation Integration: Operation Toofan should be complemented by expanded rehabilitation infrastructure, including counselling centres and de-addiction facilities. Digital Surveillance: Enhance monitoring of darknet and social media platforms used for synthetic drug distribution. Parental Engagement: Develop programs to educate parents on recognizing early warning signs of synthetic drug use. Longitudinal Tracking: Implement longitudinal tracking of youth substance-use patterns to distinguish genuine prevalence changes from enforcement-driven case fluctuations. Inter-State Coordination: Strengthen coordination with neighbouring states to address cross-border synthetic drug trafficking.

8. Conclusion

This research project has been more than an academic exercise; it was an exploration into the complex pressures and vulnerabilities facing today's youth in Kerala. By synthesizing quantitative survey data with qualitative law enforcement insights and official Operation Toofan statistics, this study highlights that the relationship between synthetic substance use and criminal behaviour is not merely a matter of deviance, but a multifaceted socio-digital phenomenon. The findings reveal a critical landscape in transition, defined by a dangerous shift toward synthetic substances, heightened peer influence in hostile environments, and the nuances of the enforcement-reporting paradox. The SPSS analysis confirmed statistically significant associations between polysubstance use and aggression, impaired decision-making,

and risk-taking behaviour—behavioural vulnerabilities that align with criminological predictions.

Operation Toofan demonstrates that intensive enforcement can disrupt supply chains and generate substantial case registration. The seizure of 8242.087 gm of MDMA and 979.31 kg of ganja reflects genuine operational effectiveness. However, enforcement alone is insufficient. As the data reveal, student drug use functions as a maladaptive coping mechanism to manage academic stress and personal strain, fuelled by peer networks and the glamorization of substances on social media. Ultimately, this study reinforces that labeling and punitive measures alone are insufficient. If the goal is to truly mitigate the influence of synthetic narcotic and psychotropic substances on youth behaviour, the approach must address root causes. This requires a dual strategy: modernizing institutional law enforcement capabilities while simultaneously moving educational institutions away from a culture of mere surveillance. By shifting the focus toward comprehensive legal literacy, mental health support, and fostering environments that prioritize sports, arts, and disciplined extracurricular engagement, we can offer students viable paths that do not involve the risks of substance reliance. Conducting this research has highlighted that behind every data point lies a young person's potential. Equipping them with the right knowledge and positive outlets for their energy does not just reduce the risk of future criminal behaviour—it builds more resilient, fulfilling lives. Ensuring every student has the tools to make choices that secure their future, rather than jeopardize it, must remain the ultimate objective of both law enforcement and educational policy.

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