

THE MYSTIFICATION OF DRUG ABUSE AS A COPING MECHANISM FOR BURN OUT STRESS

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Received : 21 May 2025

Revised : 29 May 2025

Accepted : 18 June 2025

Published : 13 July 2025

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.54443/morfai.v5i6.3419>

Link Publish : <https://radjapublika.com/index.php/MORFAI/article/view/3419>

Abstract

This study investigates the phenomenon of the mystification of substance abuse—including narcotics, psychotropics, and other addictive substances as a maladaptive coping strategy for work-related stress among office employees. High workloads, psychosocial pressures, and insufficient workplace support contribute to chronic stress, prompting individuals to seek immediate relief through substance use. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three former Drug users, a psychologist, and an inpatient supervisor at the National Narcotics Board (BNN) Rehabilitation Center in Lido, Indonesia. The findings reveal that drug use is not solely driven by recreational motives, but rather functions as a dysfunctional coping mechanism, often rationalized as a means to enhance productivity or alleviate fatigue. Both internal factors, such as emotional exhaustion, and external factors, including workplace demands and social influences, interact in shaping substance use behaviors. The study underscores the need for comprehensive employment policies promoting work-life balance, accessible psychological support services, and preventive education on the risks of substance abuse within occupational settings.

Keywords: *Burn Out, Drug Mystification, Drug Abuse, Coping Mechanism, Strain*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary life, work has become an integral part of daily routines, particularly for office employees. As job demands continue to intensify on a daily basis, employees are frequently confronted with workload-related pressures, whether in achieving performance targets or meeting tight deadlines for task completion. In carrying out their work, staff activities during working hours can be observed through direct activities, indirect activities, and other activities such as personal tasks and unproductive activities (Septiari, 2015). A company must perform well in order to generate profits. Achieving optimal performance is a desired goal. Conversely, a decline in performance can have a negative impact on the company. One of the factors that influences employee performance is job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a crucial factor in achieving optimal work outcomes. When employees feel satisfied in completing their tasks, they are more likely to make optimal efforts to carry out their duties using their full abilities (Wijaya, 2018). Undeniably, everyone in a company will face job-related pressure. An excessive workload not only affects the mental and physical health of employees but also impacts work productivity, which in turn can affect job performance. Severe and prolonged work-related stress can challenge a person's ability to stay mentally stable in their daily activities, eventually leading them to seek instant ways to relieve stress—one of which may be the use of illegal substances such as drug. Burn Out is a psychological process or a state of tension that affects an individual's physical, mental, and emotional condition, and is intended to help a person survive and adapt to their environment. Every office worker experiences various types of stress that can interfere with their job performance. It can be said that burn out may arise when job demands are not balanced with the individual's ability to meet those demands, resulting in different levels of stress (Rajak, 2023).

The biggest indicator that causes work stress among office employees is performance demands. Performance refers to the results or achievements obtained by each employee in carrying out their responsibilities and completing their tasks. According to Wibowo (2010), performance is defined as the outcome of work as well as the process by which the work is performed. Performance is essentially the same as work results; it refers to the output of work and the process by which the work is carried out (Kurniati, 2012). Performance can also reflect how effectively an organization utilizes its employees to demonstrate their ability to achieve the company's expected targets. Good performance indicates the effectiveness and efficiency of an office worker, while poor performance can signal the

need for training, evaluation, and may even result in termination. Therefore, high pressure in the work environment can lead employees to experience stress and depression. As a result, work-related stress among office workers has become a common occurrence due to the nature of their jobs, which are often high-pressure and monotonous. According to the latest data from the Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2024, employees in Indonesia actually experience the lowest levels of work-related stress compared to other Southeast Asian countries, at only 16%. However, in terms of anger and burn out, Indonesia ranks fourth (Halimah, 2024). This indicates that emotional regulation in response to work stress is poor in Southeast Asia, leading many workers to cope with their emotions by consuming illicit substances such as drugs. Heavy workloads assigned by superiors are often the reason office workers continue working beyond normal hours, reducing their time for rest, and ultimately worsening the balance between work and personal life. The high workload, combined with additional tasks outside of their primary job responsibilities, often increases the burden and leads to a decline in performance (Dirdjo, 2021). The workload combined with the pressure experienced by office workers in Indonesia leads to a significant level of stress. Work-related stress in the workplace can increase the risk of both mental and physical health disorders, which may affect individual performance and overall well-being (Hanyani, 2023). In such situations, unmanaged and untreated initial stress can worsen into chronic stress. Excessive stress can raise the risk of mental health issues, leading to anxiety and depression. In an attempt to relieve or eliminate stress, some individuals tend to seek instant escapes, one of which is through the use of illicit substances such as drugs.

Drug refers to drugs or substances that are harmful. These substances can originate from natural sources such as plants, or be synthetically and semi-synthetically produced. They can cause a decrease in consciousness and may lead to addiction or dependency. Drugs are considered dangerous drugs or substances, especially when misused or used without medical supervision (Yunisa, 2023). Drug abuse can harm health due to the dependency it causes. In addition, regular use of narcotics will cause the body to require increasingly higher doses. Drugs have negative effects that impact both the body physically and psychologically. Physical dependence can lead to intense pain during withdrawal (known as “sakaw”) (Adam, 2012). Substance abuse also affects the likelihood of relapse. The longer a person abuses drugs, the more likely they are to develop addiction or dependency. The higher the dose and the longer the usage, the more severe and painful the withdrawal symptoms become. These symptoms often lead to relapse, as users cannot endure the pain caused by withdrawal and tend to use the substance again—often at a higher dose (tolerance)—in an attempt to return to their “normal” state, since the same dose no longer has an effect (Joewana, 2006). The mechanism of drugs in the body is closely related to the central nervous system of the brain. Drugs use triggers an excessive release of dopamine. Almost all types of drugs activate a system in the brain that regulates feelings of pleasure, commonly known as the reward system, by increasing the availability of dopamine in the brain. If a user continues to use drugs repeatedly, the brain will adapt to the elevated levels of dopamine (Suliandri, 2020). In the mechanism of drugs as a stress suppressant consumed by office workers, it creates temporary effects that are often misinterpreted as stress relief. Drug use can trigger an excessive release of dopamine in the brain. As dopamine levels increase, users may feel happy and relaxed, when in fact this is only a temporary psychological relief. With the increased amount of dopamine in the brain, almost all types of drugs can activate the brain’s reward system, which regulates feelings of pleasure (Jamal, 2024). The feeling of pleasure produced by drugs may appear to be an instant solution for reducing work-related stress. Narcotics work by dulling emotional sensations and physical pain. These effects can help users avoid feelings of fear and anxiety associated with heavy workloads. Drug substances, such as those found in morphine or commonly referred to as marijuana, can produce a relaxing effect that makes users feel more at ease, allowing them to temporarily cope with intense work pressure.

Drug Use Among Office Workers

The misuse of drugs among office workers has become increasingly common in recent years. The rising number of reported drug abuse cases across various job sectors, particularly among office employees, highlights this growing issue. Initially used as a way to cope with stress and enhance concentration at work, drug use, which is illegal in Indonesia—has serious long-term consequences, both mentally and physically. This phenomenon affects not only the individuals involved but also the overall work environment. Drug abuse in the workplace can increase the risk of workplace accidents, reduce productivity, and create a negative work atmosphere. Moreover, many workers caught in drug misuse often face legal and social stigma, further worsening their life situations. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the relationship between workload and drug abuse as a misguided form of stress relief in the work.

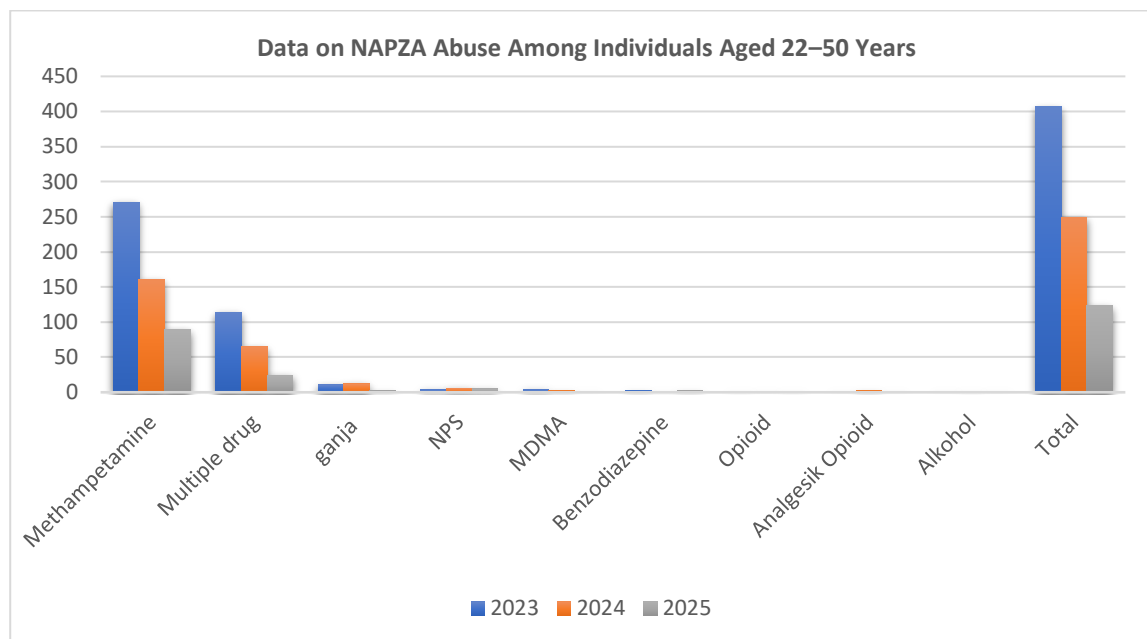


Diagram 1 Data on Drug Abuse Among Individuals Aged 22–50 Years

(Source: Lido Rehabilitation Center, Nationa Narcotics Agency,2025)

Based on the data obtained from the Lido National Narcotics Agency Rehabilitation Center, the table above shows the number of drug abuse cases among workers aged 22–50, a vulnerable age group. The data reflects the prevalence of drug abuse, which remains a significant issue in the workplace. The high rate of substance abuse among workers highlights the need to address the risk factors contributing to this behavior. This situation emphasizes the importance of implementing preventive and promotive interventions to support the creation of a healthy, safe, and productive work environment

METHOD

Data collection techniques are the methods that must be used by researchers to obtain the necessary information, such as facts and analyses relevant to the study. Data collection is a crucial step in any research. With the right technique, accurate and relevant data can be obtained to answer research questions or test hypotheses (Rangkuti, 2024). Data collection is carried out using both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data collection is a technique used to gather information that supports the research being conducted. The secondary sources used in this study include online books, websites, scientific journals, articles, and other sources considered relevant to the research. This is necessary to complement the data and information obtained, ensuring the authenticity and accuracy of the research can be accounted for. Primary data refers to information obtained directly from original and trusted sources. In conducting this data collection technique, the researcher carried out direct visits and observations, including a series of interviews with five key informants: three patients who abused drug as a way to relieve work-related stress, a psychologist from the National Rehabilitation Center, and the Inpatient Supervisor at the Lido National Narcotics Agency Rehabilitation Center. The interviews were then continued with the three patients who misused drug due to burn out stres. In conducting this research, the researcher used a qualitative approach. According to Subandi (2011), the main sources of data in qualitative research are words and actions, while additional data may include photographs, recordings, and other written works. The qualitative research method is applied to examine objects in their natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. Data collection is carried out using various techniques such as observation, interviews, and documentation, which are often combined. Data analysis is conducted inductively, focusing on a deep understanding of the meaning behind the phenomena rather than on generalizing the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Drug Abuse from a Psychological Perspective. The researcher interviewed Valen, a psychologist at the National Narcotics Agency Rehabilitation Center, aged 38, who has been working in the field since 2012 and has encountered numerous clients who abuse Drug, particularly among workers. The interview with the psychologist revealed that Drug abuse among employees is strongly related to high work pressure, especially due to excessively long working hours. The source explained that many workers use stimulant substances such as methamphetamine as a way to maintain physical endurance and concentration when facing heavy workloads. Some of them work up to 12 hours a day with very limited rest, making drug use seem like a shortcut to maintaining work performance. This finding is supported by research from Kun et al. (2023), which shows that exposure to excessive workload and psychological pressure in the workplace increases individuals' tendency to consume psychoactive substances in order to maintain productivity. This is also in line with Agnew's General Strain Theory, which suggests that prolonged stress in the workplace constitutes a form of strain that can trigger maladaptive behaviors, including substance abuse. Meanwhile, Merton's structural functionalism theory explains that a mismatch between expected goals (such as high productivity) and the available legal means (such as time and resources) can lead individuals to take deviant paths—such as using drugs as a tool to meet work demands. Therefore, drug abuse in the workplace does not merely reflect personal failure but also indicates systemic failure in creating a psychologically and socially healthy work environment.

This highlights the need for more systematic interventions in the form of fair labor policies, rational working hours, and the provision of mental health support services for workers. Excessive working hours can significantly increase the likelihood of individuals turning to narcotics and addictive substances. This statement also revealed that many patients working in environments with long working hours believe that the use of narcotics and addictive substances helps them enhance their performance. This aligns with findings from the journal "Work Addiction and Stimulant Use: Latent Profile Analysis in a Representative Population Study," which states that individuals experiencing work addiction tend to consume stimulants as a way to maintain their productivity levels. In carrying out her duties, the psychologist also applies communication approaches tailored to the patient's age and educational background. Communication is one of the most essential and fundamental skills a psychologist must master in their approach to interacting with rehabilitation patients. Ms. Vallen applies an appropriate communication approach tailored to each individual. Communication itself can be therapeutic—for example, by reducing the patient's anxiety and providing a sense of comfort (Street, 2009). An interview with a source with a psychology background revealed that the abuse of narcotics and addictive substances among workers is closely related to heavy workloads, particularly due to excessive working hours and limited rest time. The source stated that most workers endure up to 12-hour workdays with only one hour of rest, leading them to rely on stimulant substances such as methamphetamine as a quick way to maintain energy and focus during work. As a professional, the source emphasized the importance of applying appropriate communication approaches in the patient support process. She adapts her communication style based on the patient's age and educational level to ensure that the interaction is more effective and easily understood. The main challenge lies in instilling the understanding that using substances to enhance work performance is a misguided decision. Overall, drug abuse in the workplace is not solely caused by personal factors, but also by the pressure and imbalance within the work system itself. Therefore, in addition to rehabilitation, there must be fair labor policies and adequate psychological support to create a healthier and more humane work environment.

Camouflage of Certain Motivations

Camouflage refers to an effort or method used to conceal something or make it appear different from its actual condition, with the goal of preventing it from being easily recognized. In the context of drug use under the pretext of work-related stress, an office employee might consume stimulants due to mental exhaustion or a heavy workload. However, they may hide the true reason by claiming that the substance is used to enhance work effectiveness or improve concentration. In reality, the underlying motivation is to escape or avoid stress. This is supported by a study published in the journal titled "Initiation Patterns and Transitions Among Adults Using Stimulant Drugs", which explains that the use of stimulants—often claimed to be for enhancing work performance—is frequently a way to conceal underlying psychological stress or unspoken mental health issues. In this context, stimulants are substances or drugs that stimulate the central nervous system, making a person more alert, focused, energetic, and seemingly able to work more effectively. This finding aligns with statements from the three interviewees, who claimed they felt more energetic and focused when using drug. Examples of stimulants include caffeine, prescription medications such as amphetamines, and other substances that help temporarily increase alertness and reduce fatigue. Thus, in this case, stimulants refer to substances used to enhance performance or concentration, although their use is often closely linked to unexpressed psychological pressure. Stimulants are used not only for medical reasons, but also for non-medical purposes such as boosting focus or energy at work—often masking deeper psychological issues (Black, 2023). Drug abuse among office employees should not always be

THE MYSTIFICATION OF DRUG ABUSE AS A COPING MECHANISM FOR BURN OUT STRESS

Headia Auzani Auzar Lambertus and Lucky Nurhadiyanto

viewed as deviant behavior driven by malicious intent or criminal motives. In many cases, the use of addictive substances emerges under misleading functional narratives, such as the belief that these substances can “improve concentration,” “boost energy,” or “speed up task completion.” This is evidenced by admissions from rehabilitation patients to psychologists, in which they expressed the belief that consuming drug would enhance their productivity. Such narratives serve as a means of disguising the true motivation—where individuals attempt to psychologically and socially justify their behavior as a form of adaptation to work-related pressure. Interviews with several office workers revealed that some of them associate drug use with improved performance. They did not explicitly state that substance use was related to stress or an inability to manage their workload; instead, they perceived it as part of a strategy to work more effectively.

This reflects a fundamental misunderstanding: seemingly reasonable justifications obscure the root problem—emotional exhaustion and psychosocial pressure caused by an overly demanding work system. Individuals often fail to realize that their actions are actually a form of escape from mental stress, which they frame as an effort to boost productivity. This situation is further reinforced by workplace cultures that normalize overtime and measure productivity solely by output, without considering employees’ mental and physical well-being. As a result, individuals under immense pressure feel compelled to meet these standards—even if it means resorting to unhealthy methods such as using drug. Thus, drug abuse in the workplace is not merely an individual issue, but also a reflection of structural problems that generate intense pressure. The true motivation is often hidden behind rational and socially acceptable explanations.

The Assumption of Achieving Motivation

In carrying out their work, individuals typically have specific goals or achievements in mind, such as salary increases, promotions, career stability, or even simply gaining recognition from colleagues or superiors. In general, various objectives—whether material or psychological—play a crucial role in shaping a person’s motivation and behavior in the workplace. When clear goals are defined, individuals can direct their efforts and energy more effectively, and they are more likely to experience satisfaction and happiness when those goals are successfully achieved. However, in reality, an individual may resort to using drug due to the pressure and stress experienced while trying to achieve various life goals, such as career success, social recognition, or financial stability. In such situations, drug use is often seen as a temporary means to cope with emotional burdens and mental strain that are difficult to manage in a healthy way. According to the strain theory proposed by Agnew (1992), individuals who experience pressure resulting from failure or obstacles in achieving their goals are more likely to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms as a form of escape. Substance abuse, including drug, becomes one such maladaptive response used to alleviate feelings of frustration and stress. For example, someone who fails to get a promotion or recognition at work may use substances to reduce the anxiety and depression they experience.

The study titled “Chronic Stress, Drug Use, and Vulnerability to Addiction” published in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* also explains that prolonged stress increases an individual’s risk of using substances as an ineffective coping mechanism. These substances offer short-term effects such as feelings of pleasure, relaxation, or increased energy, leading individuals to believe that drug use may help them achieve their goals more easily. However, substance use can ultimately worsen psychological conditions over the long term and lead to dependence that is difficult to overcome. This is supported by the testimony of interviewee “Z,” who admitted having tried various stress-coping strategies, such as playing football, yet still returned to using drug. Another interviewee, identified as “I,” admitted to having stopped using drug but relapsed after reconnecting with friends who use it. Furthermore, another study titled “Drinking to Regulate Positive and Negative Emotions: A Motivational Model of Alcohol Use” published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* states that the motivation to use substances as an escape from stress or personal issues is a major factor driving drug abuse. When individuals feel a loss of control over job pressure or unachieved goals, they are more vulnerable to seeking quick relief through substance use. Therefore, drug use as a form of escape is not only triggered by external pressure related to goals, but also by internal psychological mechanisms aimed at reducing emotional tension and pain caused by failure or uncertainty in achieving those goals.

The Mystification of Drug Abuse Due to Burn Out Stress

Mystification is a process that conceals the true reality and makes something wrong appear to be right. In the context of drug abuse caused by work-related stress, mystification occurs when an individual attempts to redirect their stress by using drug, even though they are aware that its effects are only temporary. In this study, the researcher interviewed three individuals who used drug as a response to burn out stress, as well as a psychologist from the National Rehabilitation Center and the Inpatient Supervisor at the same institution. Findings on the Mystification of drug Abuse Among Office Workers The study revealed a form of mystification in the abuse of drug among office

THE MYSTIFICATION OF DRUG ABUSE AS A COPING MECHANISM FOR BURN OUT STRES

Headia Auzani Auzani Lambertus and Lucky Nurhadiyanto

workers. Employees often experience pressure from multiple sources whether from colleagues, supervisors, or additional stress and problems at home which leads some individuals to seek instant relief through the use of drug, perceived as a quick and effective way to reduce their stress. Based on interviews with three individuals who used drug due to work-related stress, all of them stated that drug was their “savior” during times of workplace pressure. Stress caused by workload pressure arises when a person is faced with tasks that exceed their capabilities, carry significant responsibility, involve high targets, and exist within a competitive work environment—conditions that lead workers to feel overwhelmed. As a result, they tend to seek an escape or temporary relief by consuming drug. Additionally, users often perceive drug as a substance that can enhance productivity, which reinforces its use as a quick and convenient solution to manage job stress. However, drug functions by manipulating neurotransmitters in the brain, which can slowly lead to long-term and even permanent damage to brain function.

In the findings, methamphetamine (commonly known as “crystal meth”) was identified as the most commonly used type of drug among individuals experiencing work-related stress. Other substances, such as cocaine and methamphetamine, are known to trigger excessive dopamine production in the brain, which causes users to feel extremely happy and euphoric while under the influence. However, once the effects wear off, users often experience anxiety and even depression. This cycle contributes to addiction and makes it difficult for users to stop consuming drug. Individuals who use drug to relieve stress from workload pressure report feeling relaxed and believe that consuming these substances helps them stay calm when facing work-related challenges. In many cases, drug is also used as a way to cope with fatigue. With overwhelming workloads and frequent overtime, workers often become physically and mentally exhausted. Certain types of drug are believed to relieve fatigue, although this relief is only temporary. Continuous drug use can lead to dependence. Addicted users often feel that they cannot function or be confident without consuming the substance. Over time, they also become dissatisfied with previous doses, leading to increased consumption as their tolerance builds.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher revealed that significant forms of strain can trigger drug abuse among office workers. Job pressure, interpersonal conflict, and career dissatisfaction can generate intense negative emotions, such as frustration, anxiety, and depression. If these emotions are not properly managed, they can increase a person’s vulnerability to using drug as a coping mechanism. Additionally, individual factors—such as a lack of social support and poor coping skills—can further worsen the effects of stress and contribute to maladaptive behaviors like substance abuse. This study aims to explore the phenomenon of the mystification of drug abuse among office workers. Based on data analysis obtained through surveys and in-depth interviews, it was found that work-related stress represents a significant form of strain that can trigger drug abuse behavior among office employees. Burn out stres arises from various factors, including excessive workloads, high job demands, and tight deadlines, all of which increase psychological pressure. These factors are consistent with the concept of strain in General Strain Theory (GST), which suggests that individuals experiencing high levels of social pressure are more likely to seek ways to cope with feelings of frustration—one of which may manifest in deviant behaviors such as drug abuse. The phenomenon of mystification occurs when office workers rationalize the use of drug as a legitimate coping mechanism. Several justifications identified include: Normalization of drug Use: Consuming alcohol or drugs is perceived as part of the workplace culture. Escaping Stress: drug is used to manage mental and emotional exhaustion resulting from work. This process creates a cycle in which job stress drives drug use, and drug use further deteriorates working conditions and the mental health of employees. Moreover, negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and frustration act as mediators in the relationship between burn out stres and drug abuse. A lack of social support in the workplace further exacerbates the impact of stress, as individuals may feel isolated and without the resources to cope with pressure in a constructive way.

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