



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

DRUG ABUSE: A GROWING CONCERN IN INDIA

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Abstract: Drug abuse has become a worldwide menace. No part of the world is free from the curse of drug addiction. Drug abuse has emerged as a serious concern, adversely affecting the physical and socio-economic well-being of the country. It has enormous presence on public health across various sections of society. The epidemic of drug abuse in younger generation has assumed alarming dimensions in India. The stress and strain of the modern-day life has rendered the individuals more vulnerable to the problem of substance abuse. Addiction to alcohol/drugs not only affects the individual involved, but also the family and society at large. To effectively address the drug menace, India requires stronger regulations, enhanced laws, and improved coordination among states.

Keywords: Drug, Abuse, India.

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has expressed concern over the rising drug abuse among youth, calling it a generational threat. This concern emerged during a verdict supporting the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) probe into a heroin smuggling case linked to Pakistan. The court emphasized the need for urgent collective action from families, society, and state authorities to address the growing menace of drug abuse. Drug addiction is on the rise, with approximately 100 million people in India affected by various narcotics according to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Punjab recorded the highest number of FIRs under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS) between 2019 and 2021.

According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's recently released report on the "National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use in India" (2019), the magnitude of substance use is 16 crore people (14.6%) between the age of 10 and 75 years are current users of alcohol, and out of them, 5.2% are alcohol dependents. About 3.1 crore individuals (2.8%) are cannabis users, and 72 lakh (0.66%) people suffer from cannabis problems. Overall opioid users 2.06% and nearly 0.55% (60 lakh) require treatment services/health. 1.18 crore (1.08%) are current users of sedatives (non-medical use). 1.7% of children and adolescents are inhalant users as compared to adults of 0.58%. Nearly 18 lakh children need help for inhalant use. It is estimated that about 8.5 lakh people are injecting drugs (PWID – people who inject drugs). The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is implementing National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR). Under the NAPDDR, Nasha Mukta Bharat

Abhiyaan (NMBA) was launched on 15.08.2020 in 272 vulnerable districts identified based on the findings of the first Comprehensive National Survey and inputs from the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). The aim of NMBA is to create awareness about ill effects of substance abuse among the youth, with special focus on higher education institutes, university campuses, schools and reaching out into the community and garnering community involvement and ownership of the Abhiyaan. During the month of August 2022, 100 districts have been added under NMBA. Now, the NMBA is being implemented in 372 districts.

Factors Contributing to Drug Abuse in India

- **Peer Influence:** The desire to fit in with friends and gain social approval often leads to experimentation with drugs, especially in high school and college environments.
- **Academic Stress and Mental Health Issues:** Pressure to excel academically, coupled with high competition, can cause stress, anxiety, and depression. Some youth use drugs as a coping mechanism for managing these pressures.
- **Cultural Norms and Media Influence:** The glamorisation of drug use in media, movies, and music often normalizes substance abuse among young people, making it appear trendy or acceptable. The limited role of state authorities and local governments in addressing drug abuse has contributed to the rise of substance use in India.
- **Socio Economic Factors:** Poverty, unemployment, and limited access to educational and recreational resources increase the likelihood of substance abuse as young people turn to drugs as a form of escape or coping mechanism.
- **Family Environment:** Dysfunctional family dynamics, parental substance abuse, and lack of emotional support often correlate with higher rates of youth drug use. A supportive family environment can mitigate these risks.
- **Legal System Loopholes:** Organized crime syndicates exploit legal system loopholes, such as weak border controls, to smuggle drugs. They often misuse trade routes from Africa and South Asia for drug trafficking purposes. In 2023, the Border Security Force reported a 35% increase in drug seizures along the India-Pakistan border, highlighting the ongoing challenges in controlling illicit drug flows through these routes.
- **Easy Availability:** Easy drug availability, particularly due to smuggling in Punjab, has led to widespread abuse. Around 15.4% of Punjab's population uses narcotics, with over 3 million people affected as per a 2022 study by Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER).
- **Fear of Strict laws:** Strict laws like the NDPS Act can discourage families from disclosing drug abuse due to fear of prosecution, hindering efforts for rehabilitation. This not only prevents individuals from seeking help but also allows the illegal drug supply chain to continue, contributing to the rise of drug abuse in India.

Government Measures to Tackle Drug Abuse in India

Legislative Measures:

- **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985:** It regulates the production, manufacture, and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PITNDPS) Act, 1988: This act governs the legal framework for controlling and preventing drug trafficking and abuse.

Institutional Measures:

- **National Investigation Agency's (NIA):** It is the Central Counter Terrorism Law Enforcement Agency in India. It plays a crucial role in tackling drug trafficking, particularly when it involves national security concerns. It investigates cases with inter-State and international links, including drug smuggling networks tied to terrorism, arms trafficking, and cross-border infiltration. It coordinates with other agencies to disrupt transnational drug trade, seize illicit shipments, and dismantle organized criminal syndicates involved in trafficking.
- **National Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB):** NCB is a nodal drug law enforcement and intelligence agency of India. It coordinates with national and international agencies, and participates in initiatives such as the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD).
- **Other Enforcement Agencies:** The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Customs Department, and various law enforcement agencies work together to curb drug trafficking.

Preventive and Rehabilitation Measures:

- **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR):** The NAPDDR plan focuses on reducing the demand for drugs through awareness campaigns, capacity-building programs, de-addiction, and rehabilitation services.
- **Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan (NMBA):** NMBA was launched to raise awareness about the harmful effects of drugs, especially among school children.
- **NIDAAN and NCORD Portals:** NIDAAN and NCORD Portals are online platforms that maintain detailed databases of drug offenders, supporting law enforcement agencies in tracking drug-related crimes and trends.

Specific Initiatives:

- **Project Sunrise (2016):** Project Sunrise is addressing the rising HIV prevalence among drugs injecting people in the northeastern states.
- **Nasha Mukht Bharat:** Nasha Mukht Bharat is a nationwide campaign focusing on community outreach to prevent drug use and its social consequences.
- **Seizure Information Management System (SIMS):** SIMS portal was developed by the NCB to track drug offenses and offenders through an online database.

De-addiction Centers:

- Institutions like the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC) at AIIMS, and state-run centers offering counseling, medical treatment, and social reintegration for addicts.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening and Reform Existing Laws:** Enhance the implementation of the NDPS and PITNDPS Acts through better training, resources, and modern technology. The NDPS Act needs to be revisited to integrate rehabilitation alongside punitive measures, strengthening enforcement, and improving coordination between local, state and central authorities.
- **Integrated Policy Approach:** The government should develop integrated policies that address the root causes of drug abuse, incorporating health, education, and social welfare sectors. Continued research is necessary to monitor drug trends and the effectiveness of intervention programs, allowing for data-driven policy adjustments.
- **De-addiction Centres and Camps:** Establishing district-level de-addiction centers and organizing rehabilitation camps by government agencies can provide crucial support to affected individuals. Post-care counseling and rehabilitation efforts are essential for long-term recovery and preventing relapses.
- **Education and Awareness:** Schools should include drug education in their curricula, teaching students about the risks and consequences of substance abuse from an early age. Civil society and religious leaders can significantly contribute to preventing drug abuse through awareness programs in schools and communities, promoting healthy choices and engaging role models like athletes and actors.
- **International Cooperation:** Strengthen ties with neighboring countries and international organizations such as UNODC and Interpol for effective information sharing and counter-trafficking measures.
- **Use of Technology:** Utilize AI, Big Data, and drones to track drug trafficking networks and monitor illicit drug cultivation areas. Establish online reporting systems for drug-related activities.

Conclusion

Article 47 of the Constitution calls for the improvement of public health and the prohibition of harmful substances. To effectively address the drug menace, India requires stronger regulations, enhanced laws, and improved coordination among states. Formulating a comprehensive national policy focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and stringent enforcement is essential.

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