

Drug Abuse: Uncovering the Burden in Rural Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Drug abuse is a global phenomenon, affecting almost every country, but its extent and characteristics differ from region to region. India too is caught in this vicious circle of drug abuse, and the numbers of drug addicts are increasing day by day. The bane of drug abuse in Punjab has acquired the proportions of a pestilence that has shaken the entire society in the state. It is observed that in Punjab “drug abuse” is a raging epidemic, especially among the young.

Introduction

Drug abuse is a global phenomenon, affecting almost every country, but its extent and characteristics differ from region to region. Illicit drug abuse not only affects the health and lives of individuals but also undermines the political, social, and cultural foundation of all countries. Problems of drug dependence produce dramatic costs to all societies in terms of lost productivity, crime, transmission of infectious diseases, social and family disorder, and excessive utilization of health care. The picture is grim if the world statistics on the drugs scenario is taken into account. With a turnover of around \$500 billion, it is the third largest business in the world, next to petroleum and arms trade. About 190 million people all over the world consume one drug or the other. Drug addiction causes immense human distress, and the illegal production and distribution of drugs have spawned crime and violence worldwide. Today, there is no part of the world that is free from the curse of drug trafficking and drug addiction. Millions of drug addicts, all over the world, are leading miserable lives, torn between life and death.[1]

India too is caught in this vicious circle of drug abuse, and the numbers of drug addicts are increasing day by day. The epidemic of substance abuse in young generation has assumed alarming dimensions in India. Changing cultural values, increasing economic stress, and dwindling supportive bonds are leading to initiation into substance use. According to a UN report, 1 million heroin addicts are registered in India, and unofficially, there are as many as 5 million.[2]

Cannabis, heroin, opium, and hashish are the most commonly used drugs in India after alcohol and tobacco. However, some evidence indicates that there is an increasing prevalence of methamphetamine as well.[3] Drug users are mainly young and predominately male. A National Survey (2004) on the extent, pattern, and trends of drug abuse in India found that opiates are primary drug abused and 49% of respondent's families had a history of drug abuse.[4] The study conducted by the Institute of Development and Communication revealed that a majority of drug abusers, i.e., 70% had rural background and were hooked to drugs and opium which they procured from village chemists.[5]

The National Household Survey of Drug Use in the country is the first systematic effort to document the nationwide prevalence of drug use. Alcohol (21.4%) was the primary substance used (apart from tobacco), followed by cannabis (3.0%) and opioids (0.7%). The Drug Abuse Monitoring System, which evaluated the primary substance of abuse in inpatient treatment centres, found that the major substances were alcohol (43.9%), opioids (26%), and cannabis (11.6%).[4]

The bane of drug abuse in Punjab has acquired the proportions of a pestilence that has shaken the entire society in the state. It is observed that in Punjab “drug abuse” is a raging epidemic, especially among the young. According to a survey, 66% of the school going students in the state consume “gutka” or tobacco; every third male and every tenth female student have taken to drugs on one pretext or another and seven out of ten college-going students are into drug abuse.[8] the extent of drug addiction in Punjab is alarming. Near border areas the rate of heroin abuse among 15-25 year old is as high as 75% the percentage is 73 % in the rural areas throughout the region. A department of social security development of women and children suggested that as many as 67% of rural households in Punjab will have at least one drug addict in the family. There is at least one death due to drug overdose each week in the region.

METHODOLOGY:

A research is an indispensable and innovative tool in leading society to progress and advancement. Without a systematic research, there would have been no or little progress, no progress can be made by trial and error method but a scientific research and only those who are equipped with the related knowledge can conduct research. Research is a valuable only when it brings an enlightenment of human spirits, intellectuals force and the moral fibre of those who search for the advantage of knowledge. Research is a purposive, scientific and pointed deliberation. It's necessary to adopt and evaluate a systematic plan and procedure to collect essential data. It's very essential to collect factual material,

relevant data, unknown and untapped so far adequate in quantity and quality to save it from becoming a heap of jump led ideas gathered from here and there.

Objective of the study:

1. To study the age group of drug addicts in rural Punjab.
2. To study the educational level of drug users.
3. To find out the reason for using drugs.

Date base /source

In order to achieve the objective of the study, the literature scan was followed and relevant information was collected from secondary source

Types of drugs being abused in Punjab:

The recreational drugs that users in Punjab are most likely to use, include:

- Bhuki is similar to a type of wild grass that can be found throughout Punjab. It is possible to get a mild intoxicating effect from Bhuki and its considered a gateway drug because it encourage young people to being experimenting.
- Heroin addiction is getting the most attention in the media. It is believe that this narcotic is flooding from Afghanistan via Pakistan.
- Many brands of toothpaste in the region contain nicotine. There are reported of people consuming excessive amount of toothpaste because it is relatively cheap way to experience nicotine high.

Discussion

There appears to be a number of reasons for why Punjab is currently in the midst of a drug epidemic such as rampaging unemployment, easy and cheap availability of heroin, and the location of Punjab means that most of the drugs will pass through this area on its way to India.[8]

With most drug users being in the productive age group of 15–25 years, the loss in terms of human potential is incalculable. The damage to the physical, psychological, moral, and intellectual growth of the youth is very high. Adolescent drug abuse is one of the major areas of concern in adolescent and young people's behaviour. The most common substance abused was alcohol (41.8%), followed by tobacco (21.3%). Various Indian studies have shown that alcohol and tobacco are the most abused substance.[11,15,16,17,18] The important finding of these studies is that alcohol was the most common substance used (60%–98%). Epidemiological surveys[13,14] also revealed that 20%–40% of

subjects above 15 years are current users of alcohol and 10% of them are regular or excessive users. Varma *et al.*[15] found that rates of current use of alcohol in Punjab were 45.9% in Jalandhar and 27.7% in Chandigarh whereas it was 28.1% in rural areas of Punjab.[16] A high prevalence of heroin abusers was also noted (20.8%) as compared to previous reports.[19,20] The increasing consumption of nacrodrugs, especially heroin, in Punjab is basically an off-shoot of the inflow of Afghan heroin through Pakistan.[8] In a study by Singh *et al.*[21] in a De-addiction Center of Amritsar, Punjab, a total number of 10,568 patients were screened for urine toxicology. Out of 10,568 enrolled patients, 9815 (92.87%) patients were found patients for morphine, and out of 9815 morphine addict patients, 5785 (54.74%) patients were abusing heroin in one or the other form. Such high prevalence of heroin abuse can be attributed to its easy availability, steady supply across the border mainly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a thriving smuggler-police-politician nexus which is hampering enforcement action. The numbers of people starting to use heroin have been steadily rising since 2007.[22]

Prevalence of heroin addiction was reported as 0.2% in the National Household Survey[4] in India (2000–2001) and as 10.74% in a study done in De-addiction Centers in New Delhi.[19] While comparing these findings with our study, it is apparent that there is a significant change in the pattern of drug use. Heroin is a costly drug; its increasing use has also resulted in rise of economic crimes such as snatching, robbery, and theft.[23] Increase heroin use through IV route can also increase the incidences of HIV, hepatitis B and C, thus burdening the health-care system further.

Education level has been found to have an impact on the risk of drug or alcohol abuse. One particular study from 2004 in Copenhagen included over 30,000 men and women aged 20–93 and measured schooling level, smoking, and alcohol use. This study found that those with the lowest level of schooling were most frequently heavy smokers and heavy drinkers.[21] A National Survey by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2002) found that 29% of the drug abusers were illiterates and a significant number of them came from lower strata.[24] We suspect that there could be some under-reporting by the abusers who can be considered as the limitation of the study. However, it gives definitive clues regarding pattern of drug use in rural Punjab. More multicentre studies are required to compare data and to generalize for the whole state.

Conclusion:

The problem of drug abuse in the youth of Punjab is a matter of serious concern as every third individual is hooked to drugs other than alcohol and tobacco. Some commentators in Punjab are blaming the green revolution which has led to food surplus. This has meant that young people have been overindulged with nothing to do as there is not the same urgency to till the land. Heroin is easily available throughout the region and it is relatively cheap. There is growing affluence in the region and this may also be encouraging people to experiment with these substances. Some of those living in the

region fear that it may be a form of narco – terrorism and those groups in bordering countries are deliberately trying to turn the youth of Punjab into addicts. The location of Punjab means that most of the heroin will pass through this area on its way to India.

Recommendations:

Government should plan to increase the number of de-addiction and rehabilitation centres with recreational facilities for these addicts. Various nongovernment organizations and non-profit organizations can be involved to initiate vocational training and other employment programs for unemployed addicts. Appropriate linkages between health workers, community leaders, religious leaders, and teachers for planning prevention and rehabilitation activities for drug abuse should be established. Periodic outreach awareness camps for antidrug abuse activities in the community and government schools should be undertaken.

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