

HANDLING THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE IN YOUNG VICTIMS: A POLICE-VICTIM INTERFACE

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Abstract

Drug abuse among young individuals poses significant psycho-social challenges to societies worldwide. This abstract explores the role of police intervention in handling the issue of drug abuse in young victims.

Emphasising the significance of a holistic approach, it underscores the need to integrate law enforcement actions with prevention, treatment, and community assistance. The prevalence of drug abuse among young individuals presents substantial psychological, social, and legal hurdles, underscoring the requirement for comprehensive strategies to intervene effectively and foster a well-being-focused way of life.

With the constantly evolving studies regarding the psychology of victims and victimology, recent researchers have initiated attempts at shifting the view of victims of drug abuse from a perspective of criminalisation to that of those who require rehabilitation, treatment, and reintegration into society. Rehabilitation and treatment of victims of drug abuse can also help in the "demand reduction" of substances among vulnerable youth with the assistance of law enforcement interventions.

This research paper is aimed at highlighting a shift in the perspective of law enforcement agencies and focuses on the need to view drug addicts as victims and not as criminals. Drug abuse is a harmful phenomenon that can create havoc in the lives of children and youth, causing adverse effects on their social as well as psychological well-being. It is important that the police and other law enforcement agencies, being first responders at a crime scene, explore and understand suitable strategies that allow them to deal effectively with the vulnerable population. An appropriate psycho-education will also facilitate proper rehabilitation and treatment for the victims and help them overcome their shortcomings to be respectably reintegrated into the community. Law enforcement agencies play an essential role in handling the menace of drug abuse among children and the youth. This paper suggests a suitable and effective Rehabilitation model with a police-victim interface, prioritising treatment over punishment.

Keywords: Drug Abuse, Youth, Police Intervention Strategies, Rehabilitation Model, Healthy Lifestyle, Community Reintegration, Recovery, Rehabilitation and Treatment, Law Enforcement Agencies, Psycho-Socio-Legal Perspective.

INTRODUCTION

World Health Organization (WHO) defines Drug Abuse as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.

Addiction is a severe kind of substance abuse in which a person becomes compelled to use a substance, continues to do so despite negative effects, and shows a willingness to use practically any methods necessary to do so.

Contrarily, a drug user is both a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. Since these crimes have no victims, they are known as victimless crimes. Here, the victim of drug misuse experiences both primary victimisations in the form of drug addiction, health decline, and physical harm to oneself, as well as secondary victimisation in the form of stigmatisation by the judicial system, the medical community, family, community, and society. There has been much research on the impacts of drug abuse and addiction, and many therapies for the problem of drug abuse have been tackled from a health and medical perspective.

Youth, children, and adolescent drug use and trafficking are surging dramatically, significantly impacting the national economy and health. Limiting it is the top priority for both the State and society. It is no secret that narcotics have ensnared defenceless kids, teens, young adults, and women in their dreadful tentacles. The typical age of drug use, which is as young as nine to ten years, indicates the horrifying scope that this threat has attained. According to recent empirical surveys, approximately 7 crore people in India take drugs, of whom 17% are addicts. The illegal growing of the plants used to make narcotics and other substances is a significant concern.

Most people are generally ignorant of the negative implications of such cultivation. Even though numerous government and non-governmental organisations attempt to eradicate drug misuse and trafficking, they lack coordination. Different 109 officials' and agencies' solitary efforts have not yielded the expected outcomes. The

victims of drug usage have little notion of how to approach the problems of treatment and rehabilitation-because there is a dearth of information on field interventions for the problem of drug usage. The published studies are issue-based, and only a few deal with intervention methods.

Drug abuse and drug addicts are frequently seen as people needing medical treatment, but Boyum and Klieman (1995) found a strong connection between drug abuse and criminal activity. Drug addicts commit about 40% of crimes to buy and use more drugs (Rajkumar & French, 1997). As a result, the criminal justice system takes an active role in drug addiction prevention and drug abuser treatment. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), the government agency in charge of drug prevention and control in the nation, has been tasked with organising awareness campaigns and training police personnel on demand reduction. Due to their investigation of NDPS cases, the state police are also held accountable for the problem of drug misuse.

The focal point of this paper is to draw attention to the detrimental impacts of criminalising individuals who use drugs and to advocate for a shift in perspective from a purely legal framework to a more holistic approach that also considers sociological and medical viewpoints in addressing the challenges posed by drug usage.

CAUSES OF INDIA'S GROWING DRUG MENACE

- India is located in the Golden Triangle, which includes Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos, and the Golden Crescent, which includes Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. These two regions are the world's two major producers of opium.
- School and college students frequently start using drugs as a result of peer pressure and under the pretence that they are stress relievers because of the intense exam pressure.
- Drug trafficking across borders, law enforcement agency negligence (such as drug use at rave parties), corruption in the policing system, etc., are a few instances of poor law enforcement.
- Traditional social control mechanisms have loosened due to factors like industrialisation, urbanisation, and migration, making people more susceptible to the stresses and strains of modern life.
- Financial difficulties and social neglect increase the susceptibility of falling victim to the drug menace. It has been seen that persons who are under severe financial stress or are unemployed, particularly the young, are much more likely to use drugs.
- Teenagers who do not receive enough affection and attention from their families, friends, or romantic partners frequently feel abandoned and turn to drugs to help them cope.

DANGERS OF INDIA'S GROWING DRUG MENACE

- Drug use poses immense dangers to the abuser. A drug addict may experience various health issues like kidney damage, cardiovascular diseases, and liver failure. The psychological impacts are also vast, including insomnia, depression, paranoia, anxiety, mood swings, hallucinations, memory loss, etc.
- Along with the severe impact on people, it can also have far-reaching social impacts by affecting families and communities. It contributes to increased crime rates, strained healthcare systems, and economic burdens. It can also exacerbate social unrest and fuel conflicts.
- Drug abuse has been associated with increased aggressive attitudes and tendencies. A large fraction of violent crimes are committed under the influence of drugs, and desperate individuals may resort to criminal behaviour to support their addiction or acquire drugs. This leads to an overall increase in crime rates.
- The sharing of syringes among drug users can spread blood-borne diseases such as AIDS and hepatitis. Diseases like tuberculosis, bacterial and fungal infections, and sexually transmitted infections can also be transmitted due to the risky behaviours associated with drug use, such as unsafe sexual practices or sharing drug paraphernalia.
- The illicit drug trade also serves as a significant funding source for terrorists and extremist groups, posing a threat to India's national security and sovereignty. Profits from drug sales enable these groups to finance their activities, including arms acquisition, recruitment, and operational logistics. Combating drug trafficking becomes crucial in preventing the flow of funds that can be used to support terrorist actions.
- As drug use damages people's mental, physical, and emotional capabilities, it wastes India's demographic dividends and has a detrimental overall impact on the country's economy.

VICTIMOLOGICAL PROFILE OF A DRUG ADDICT

There are several effects and complications associated with substance misuse. Drug addiction affects not just the individuals experiencing this condition but also their families and the community. As stated above, the abuser must be recognised as a drug-dependent individual needing assistance and not a morally-deprived criminal. This enables the drug user to be seen as a victim who is treatable rather than an offender. The layers of stigma that an addict experiences across different stages that result in the victimisation of the abuser are illustrated below.

Victims Facing Loss of Health

Drug abuse is harmful not only because of the substance taken but also because of how it is consumed. An individual suffers harm depending on the substance taken and how it is ingested (Jones, 2011). Different methods, including oral consumption, intravenous, snorting (via the respiratory tract), and smoking, can give substances to the body. These drugs cause various physiological and psychological effects when they enter the body. These adjustments cause people to become dependent on drugs and develop an addiction. Frequent and severe abuse can result in serious health issues that are frequently deadly to people's lives (NIDA, 2014).

Daily consumables like paint thinner, buttons, pen whitener, Iodex, and other products are used as alternatives to drugs like heroin and cocaine, especially by those who lack the financial means to buy the more common substances. These lead to addiction in young people at the same rate as any other synthetic chemical in reliance. The transmission of HIV through drug addiction that occurs intravenously is a significant health risk. Sexual contact, infected blood (such as during blood transfusions), mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, and using contaminated syringes and injection supplies are all ways the virus is transferred.

Victims Facing Economic Loss

The families of drug users experience significant economic instability due to their addiction.

This is caused by diverting funds for essentials and family goods into drugs and overspending. The abuser often leaves the job and the workplace after he or she is fully engaged in the conduct. Because of their excessive substance usage, people perform poorly at work, which lowers their earnings. Due to their actions at work, the person can also lose their job. This impacts the family's financial stability and forces a family member to turn to alternative sources of income. The abuser is likelier to commit theft, burglary, or other crimes to obtain more drugs.

Victims Facing Community Loss

Families falling apart in a neighbourhood signifies the loss of a social life, disrupting society. The family's relationships have weakened due to society's ongoing social and economic patterns of change. This causes family members to lose their sense of community (Jones, 2011). Youth in society who have lost family affection turn to peer groups and engage in behaviours that are bad for them and the community. Peer influence, often significant during adolescence, may occasionally outweigh parental impact (Jones, 2011).

Drug Abuse Victims and the Criminal Justice System

The NDPS Act of 1985, still in effect in India, treats drug users as criminals by classifying their offence as one against themselves. To stop the illegal creation, manufacturing, storage, supply, and consumption of chemicals that are prohibited by law, the NDPS Act of 1985 was created. This law forbids using any narcotic or psychoactive substance for anything other than medical needs (NDPS, 1985).

The offender is granted immunity from prosecution under Section 64A of the NDPS Act if they voluntarily consent to receive addiction treatment from a hospital or other facility approved by the government. However, this is hardly known or practised (NDPS, 1985).

Any law's execution depends on the police, who uphold the law. The introduction of various drug addiction prevention models requires that the police modify their perspective of drug users so that they are seen as victims rather than offenders because it is the responsibility of the police to protect the rights of society's citizens.

Rehabilitation with a Police-Victim Interface

It is important to understand the psychological state and well-being of individuals who are victims of drug abuse. Numerous studies and discussions about psychological approaches to treating drug abuse have occurred over the years (Wanigaratne et al., 2005). These methods vary according to the theoretical model they are based on. However, they all use the interaction between the therapist and the victim to prompt changes in the victim's behaviour (for instance, drug use) and other relevant elements like cognition and emotion. In the case of criminal offences involving drug abuse, police officers are the first responders responsible for interacting with and educating victims about the harmful effects of drug abuse and guiding them toward a healthier coping mechanism and treatment. A healthier alternative to punishment can be brought about if authorities are psycho-educated about the need to shift the focus of drug usage problems from a medico-legal approach to a psychosociological approach.

The efforts to assist and educate police officers about the psychological effects of drug abuse attempt to better help those victims affected by drugs and provide them with alternatives such as rehabilitation and community reintegration. In the context of the drug abuse problem, it is well known that it is a problem that cannot be solved overnight. Because drug abuse victims have various needs, it is unlikely that any agency can offer all the services required to break the cycle of drug abuse. In order to address the growing problem of addiction in the city, this initiative aims to unite the many stakeholders from the government, civic society, academic institutions, and the community on a single platform to start a conversation and develop a sustainable referral model of rehabilitation.

Police-Victim Interface Rehabilitation Model

Drug users already go through a lot when apprehended and put on trial in court for drug abuse and related offences. It would be much easier for them if they knew that along with their family and friends, even the law enforcement agencies were on their side and working to get them to get help instead of believing they were against them and punishing them.

Overconsumption of drugs can lead to tolerance and dependency, a habit whose lack can bring about adverse physiological effects. Drug use can affect one's mental state and impair bodily processes, sometimes endangering both the user's health and that of others. Many of these effects are subtle and slow, and it is often too late before the abuser realises his victimhood. Drug usage should not be unrecognised because it can harm many people.

In many circumstances, victims of drug abuse can also be subjected to various other crimes, such as sexual assault. Such offences can be gender-neutral, and both men and women can be subjected to exploitation under the influence as the administration of drugs can lead to loss of sense and judgment and can be fatal to their lives. In such cases, police officers as first responders should be more vigilant and empathetic towards the victims. They should consider providing a thorough medical check-up for the victims with the help of a trained medical professional and also allow interaction with a mental healthcare professional to deal with any psychologically adverse effects of such traumatic experiences such as self-blame, guilt, shame, flashbacks and in severe cases, post-traumatic stress disorder.

The medico-socio-legal approach on behalf of all police officers handling victims of drug abuse can be implemented in four phases:

Phase 1	Police referral of direct cases from the police station with the assistance of a psychologist/counsellor/social worker. Frequent home visits for evaluation, pre-counselling, and documentation should be completed before referring the victim to a de-addiction centre within the government, civic society, academic institutions and the community. This can help initiate a detoxification period and reduce their dependence on professional assistance and interference.
Phase 2	In the case of sexual assault victims under the influence, the first responding police officers should provide immediate medical assistance for a thorough check-up in the presence of a female psychologist/counsellor/social worker. This can emotionally ease and pacify the victim to allow medical contact or assistance.
Phase 3	Consistent follow-ups and reporting to consulting police stations regularly can help the authorities analyse the progress and effectiveness of the rehabilitation program. Further, with the help of professionals, the victims can be enrolled in various support groups after detoxification.
Phase 4	It is essential to engage the victims in productive vocational activities. This is essential in developing their self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation to continue the detoxification phase for longer. This will also help recovered victims find suitable employment, enabling a respectable reintegration back into the community.
Phase 5	The last phase of this proposed model includes awareness and psycho-education for the community members that will allow a holistic approach to the reintegration of the victims of drug abuse after treatment and recovery. The professionals should conduct regular follow-ups to prevent relapse and work towards building support networks for victims of drug abuse in the community.

CONCLUSION

While the rational choice theory explains drug abuse as an individual's rational decision to use drugs despite being aware of the consequences, the psychodynamic approach places all the blame for drug abuse and addiction on the individual. It is clear that explanations for drug abuse and addiction have evolved, moving from focusing on an individual's personality (psychodynamic theories) to focusing on their decisions (rational choice theories). They are included in liberal theories, which contend that an individual abuses drugs not only out of his or her own free will but also as a result of social circumstances and situations.

The gradual but steady increase in the reports of drug abuse cases in Indian states has become a matter of grave concern across all gender and age groups. It has become imperative that the cause behind such developments be determined to curb the widespread effects across the country.

Before it is too late, substantial measures must be taken to halt the drug threat's spread. In the Indian context, legalising drugs is a long-term process, but strategies to reduce demand for drugs can be prioritised. If implemented, additional intervention strategies and models, such as the one the authors mention in the paper that views the drug-dependent person as a victim rather than an offender, can reduce the demand for drugs and have a general impact on the problem of drug addiction.

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