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SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF DRUG ABUSE¹

AUTHORED BY - SAPNA RAJMANI

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, drug abuse is gaining serious concern across the globe. The problem of illicit use of drugs contributes in increasing national as well as international tension. If we see today then no part of world is free from the menace of drug abuse. Drug abusing enormously impact the physical and socio-economic well-being of the country. The stressful and fascinating modern life led individual more vulnerable to the drug abuse which affects their physical as well as mental status. A person who is addicted to alcohol or other drugs, not only effects his body physic but also effects his/her family as well as society at large and thus, leads to disease prone society. According to a survey conduct by United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2018, younger people stand more addicted towards drugs than older people. A report released by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE) in 2019, about 8.5 lakh people are injecting drugs and 1.18 crore are current users of sedatives out of which nearly 18 lakhs are children. Protecting child from widespread drug abuse is one of the biggest policy challenges being witnessed by India continuously. Numerous reports whether being disclosed by official or private agencies, the concern about the increasing use of drug by children has been pointed out time to time. There are various implications of drug abuse, it drastically effects the family, health, work as well as environment. This paper deals with the social implication of drug abuse on various institutions of life. Further, an elaborative analysis of illicit use of drugs by peddlers along with the possible challenges faced by the government and mechanisms to control the situation.

Keywords - Drug abuse, illicit, sedatives, UNODC, vulnerable, socio- economic.

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INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse is a serious social and public health problem in India, causing many problems for people on an individual, family, and community level. India faces challenges related to substance misuse, encompassing prescription medication, alcohol, and illicit drugs, due to its heterogeneous population, rich cultural heritage, and intricate socio-economic structure. India's struggle with drug abuse is not new, but its dimensions have evolved over time, influenced by factors such as globalization, urbanization, economic disparities, and changing social norms. While traditional substances like opium and cannabis have historical roots in Indian culture and rituals, the proliferation of synthetic drugs and pharmaceutical opioids has added layers of complexity to the issue. The history of Indian culture and rituals includes the use of traditional narcotics like opium and cannabis, but the situation has become more complex due to the widespread use of synthetic drugs and pharmaceutical opioids.

The scope of drug abuse in India encompasses a wide range of substances, including heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, synthetic opioids, cannabis, prescription medications, and alcohol. These substances are consumed through various routes, including ingestion, inhalation, injection, and topical application, leading to diverse patterns of addiction, dependence, and associated health risks. The impact of drug abuse extends beyond individual users, affecting families, communities, and society at large. Substance abuse contributes to a range of social problems, including crime, violence, unemployment, poverty, and compromised public health. Moreover, it exacerbates existing challenges such as mental health disorders, HIV/AIDS transmission, and child welfare issues, placing additional strain on already burdened healthcare and social support systems.²

The issue of drug abuse in India is complex and multifaceted, requiring a concerted effort from government agencies, civil society organizations, healthcare providers, communities, and individuals. By addressing the underlying socio-economic, cultural, and policy factors driving substance abuse, India can mitigate the adverse effects of drug abuse and promote the well-being of its citizens.

² NIDA. "Understanding Drug Use and Addiction DrugFacts." National Institute on Drug Abuse, 6 Jun. 2018, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction> Accessed 30 Mar. 2024.

What is Social Implication of Drug Abuse?

The social implications of drug abuse encompass a wide range of consequences that extend beyond the individual user to impact families, communities, and society at large. These implications manifest in various ways and affect social cohesion, public health, economic productivity, and overall well-being. Drug abuse not only affects individuals physically and mentally but also carries profound social implications that ripple through families, communities, and society as a whole. The social consequences of drug abuse extend far beyond the individual user, impacting relationships, economic productivity, public safety, and the overall fabric of society. The social implications of drug abuse encompass a wide range of issues, including interpersonal conflicts, criminal activity, economic strain, and stigmatization. Substance abuse creates a cycle of dependency and dysfunction that undermines social cohesion, erodes trust, and perpetuates a cycle of poverty and marginalization. The social implications of drug abuse require a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach that encompasses prevention, early intervention, treatment, harm reduction, and community support initiatives.³

The social implications of drug abuse are far-reaching and multifaceted, affecting individuals, families, communities, and society at large. Addressing these implications requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying factors driving substance abuse, promotes public awareness and education, enhances access to treatment and support services, and fosters community engagement and collaboration. By addressing the social dimensions of drug abuse, society can mitigate its adverse effects and build healthier, more resilient communities where individuals can thrive.

Research Questions

1. What are the possible social implications of drug abuse?
2. How does the stigma associated with drug abuse impact individuals' willingness to seek treatment?
3. What are the socio-economic factors that contribute to the prevalence of drug abuse within specific communities?
4. How do family dynamics influence an individual's susceptibility to drug abuse?

³ THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF DRUG ABUSE, This study was originally prepared by UNDCP as a position paper for the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995), https://www.unodc.org/pdf/technical_series_1995-03-01_1.pdf

5. What are the health consequences which individual has face on becoming a drug addict?

Research Methodology

The doctrinal research has been carried out in the present study, and various online books, journals and other online library resources have been utilized. Secondary data has been used for carrying out the present study, it is further important to highlight here that no primary data has been used in the present study.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR DRUG ABUSE

Several factors contribute to the prevalence of drug abuse in India, including:

Drug abuse is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multitude of factors spanning biological, psychological, social, and environmental domains. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies. Here are some key factors responsible for drug abuse:

1. Biological Factors:

In genetic predisposition, individuals with a family history of substance abuse may have a higher vulnerability to addiction due to genetic factors influencing brain chemistry and response to drugs. In case of neurochemical imbalances, Variations in brain chemistry, including neurotransmitter systems involved in reward and pleasure pathways, can increase susceptibility to substance dependence.⁴

2. Psychological Factors:

Mental health disorders: Co-occurring conditions such as depression, anxiety, trauma, or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder may contribute to substance abuse as individuals self-medicate to alleviate symptoms. Stress and coping mechanisms: Stressful life events, trauma, or chronic stress can drive individuals to seek relief through substance use as a maladaptive coping mechanism.⁵

3. Social Factors:

Peer influence: Social networks and peer pressure play a significant role in shaping attitudes and

⁴ Jason Varin, "7 Factors that Contribute to Drug Addiction", (Mar.30,2024,11;40), <https://beginningstreatment.com/7-factors-that-contribute-to-drug-addiction/>

⁵ *Id*

behaviors related to substance use, especially during adolescence and young adulthood.

Family environment: Dysfunctional family dynamics, parental substance abuse, neglect, or lack of parental supervision can contribute to early exposure to drugs and modeling of addictive behaviors. Socioeconomic factors: Poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education, and economic disparities can increase the risk of substance abuse as individuals may turn to drugs as a means of escapism or to cope with socio-economic stressors.⁶

4. Environmental Factors:

The easy availability of drugs through illicit markets, pharmacies, or social networks increases the likelihood of experimentation and regular use. Cultural norms and media influence: Cultural attitudes towards substance use, glamorization of drug use in media, and normalization of alcohol consumption can shape perceptions and behaviors related to substance abuse. Further, Drug laws, enforcement policies, and regulatory frameworks influence the availability, distribution, and consumption patterns of substances within a society.

5. Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences:

Early exposure to trauma, neglect, abuse, or adverse childhood experiences can disrupt healthy development and increase the risk of substance abuse later in life as individuals may use drugs to cope with unresolved trauma or emotional pain.

6. Individual Factors:

Certain personality traits such as impulsivity, sensation-seeking, low self-esteem, or sensation-seeking behavior may predispose individuals to engage in risky behaviors, including substance abuse. Early initiation of drug use during adolescence increases the likelihood of developing substance use disorders later in life due to the heightened vulnerability of the developing brain. Addressing drug abuse effectively requires a comprehensive understanding of these interconnected factors and implementing strategies that target prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery support tailored to the diverse needs of individuals and communities.

⁶ Whitesell M, Bachand A, Peel J, Brown M. Familial, social, and individual factors contributing to risk for adolescent substance use. *J Addict.* 2013;2013:579310. doi: 10.1155/2013/579310. Epub 2013 Mar 20. PMID: 24826363; PMCID: PMC4008086.

Other factors responsible for drug abuse are listed below:

- Socio-economic disparities and lack of opportunities, particularly among marginalized communities.
- Accessibility and affordability of illicit substances due to porous borders, inadequate law enforcement, and weak regulatory mechanisms.
- Cultural acceptance and normalization of substance use in certain contexts, coupled with limited awareness of the risks.
- Influence of peer pressure, media, and social dynamics, especially among vulnerable populations such as youth and urban dwellers.
- Inadequate prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services, exacerbated by stigma, discrimination, and resource constraints.

In order of response of addressing drug abuse in India requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that combines prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and policy interventions. Efforts should focus on:

- Strengthening law enforcement and border control measures to curb illicit drug trafficking.
- Enhancing public awareness and education campaigns to promote drug prevention and healthy lifestyles.
- Expanding access to evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation services for individuals struggling with substance use disorders.
- Implementing harm reduction strategies such as needle exchange programs and opioid substitution therapy to minimize health risks among drug users.
- Formulating and enforcing policies that regulate the production, distribution, and sale of controlled substances while balancing public health and law enforcement objectives.

SOCIAL IMPLICATION OF DRUG ABUSE

FAMILY DISRUPTION

Family constitutes a basic unit of the society. In every family the harmony is being maintained by its family members. And if anyone of the family members becomes drug abuser then such person disturbs the entire family harmony. It not only effects the physical well-being of the consumer but has drastic impact upon the life style, behavior, up-bringing of the children and financial stability of the family. The money being wasted on the consumption of the drugs can be

put to better use. There are various problems created by a drug abuser where the nation has to pay heavy price in terms of workforce and economic point of view. There are numerous cases of family violence i.e. domestic violence arising out from the families of such drug abusers. Maximum cases of domestic violence reported involving accused as a drug abuser. These criminal attitude towards the family breaks down the bonds between the family members.

The problem becomes more serious when the drug abuser is the youngest member of the family. Parents of such abuser suffers a lot. Parents find it difficult to face their child who behaves abnormally under the stimulating effect of drugs.⁷The younger family member got addicted to drugs because of the elders consuming the same and wrongly assume that drug abuse is accepted behavior. This creates situation of stress in a family which resulted in the lost of focus and failure in discharging normal functions of life. Due to non-stop use of addictive drugs which creates lots of financial burden on the bread winner of the family, fails to satisfy the basic needs of other inmates which eventually led into debt traps.

PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS

Health is crucial for everyone, it is an important indicator of healthy family. To enjoy the life a healthy body plays an utmost role. Hence everybody is required to take care of his/ her own body. A drug abuser suffers from physical and mental illness. The food habits of drug abusers are not at all acceptable. They are often weak and their immunity condition or ability to fight diseases are low. These drug abusers are addicted towards substances in a manner that they cannot detach themselves from using it and the continuous use of such substances destroys brain cells and leads to other physical problems. The use of such substances has harmful effect on the health of drug abusers. Such kinds of drugs have critical impact on the mental ability of a drug abuser, it resulted in loss of thinking capabilities due to which abusers always reacted in an unacceptable manner and their behavior also differentiate them from other normal persons who is not under the influence of such substances.

There are several public health problems created due to illicit drug abuse, one of them is suicide. Suicide comes out to be tragic issue which affects family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and communities at the same time. According to a report of National Survey on Drug use and Health,

⁷ Dennis C. Daley, "Family and social aspects of substance use disorders and treatment", Journal of Food and Drug Analysis, Volume 21, Issue 4, Supplement, December 2013, Pages S73-S76.

an annual average of 9.5 million population of USA aged group of 18yrs or above are more prone towards having suicidal thoughts under the influence of illicit substances. Further, the change of getting infectious diseases with the use of injections of drugs accounts for 1 in 10 of cases of HIV.⁸ The use of illicit drugs while driving motor vehicle can cause major road accidents, as a drugged driving puts the driver, passengers and other who share the road at risk. It has been reported that in 2016, almost 12 million people, reported driving under the influence of illicit drug like marijuana. Some time people standing nearby the person smoking can also get affected by inhaling smoke involuntarily which is called passive smoking by the person standing nearby the person who is actually doing smoking and can have serious health issues and increases the risks of heart disease and lung cancer in people who have never smoked.⁹ In order to treat such addicted drug abusers there is need to opt different types of medications to be used at different stages of their treatment. National Institute on Drug Abuse has highlighted some behavioral therapies in order to treat drug addiction such as contingency management, motivational enhancement therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, family therapy etc.

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Community challenges in dealing with drug abuse are multifaceted and complex, often requiring coordinated efforts from various stakeholders including government agencies, healthcare providers, law enforcement, educators, community leaders, and non-profit organizations. There are various challenges which may include:

1. **Stigma and Discrimination:** The stigma surrounding drug addiction frequently causes people to be marginalized and subjected to discrimination. This stigma may discourage people from asking for assistance and may obstruct community initiatives to successfully address the issue. It eventually led to attempt or commit suicide in several cases, due to societal discrimination drug abusers isolate themselves from their own family, friends and other people, making it difficult for abusers to get over the substance use disorder.
2. **Limited Access to Treatment and Support Services:** The drug abusers often find it difficult to detach themselves from substance use disorder. Also, addiction support services and treatment related to drug abuse are underfunded in many places. This includes a lack of

⁸ .NIDA. 2022, March 22. Addiction and Health. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/addiction-health> on 2024, March 30.

⁹National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (US) Office on Smoking and Health. The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US); 2014. PMID: 24455788.

access to cheap treatment programs, therapy, and drugs for opioid addiction, like buprenorphine or methadone. The fewer providers, working for treatment of drug abusers often have lack of resources and shortage of trained staffs, reducing their availability to provide services.¹⁰

3. **Lack of Awareness and Education:** There can be a dearth of knowledge in the community on the nature of addiction and the choices for treatment. It is essential for prevention and early intervention to inform the public about the dangers of drug abuse, the telltale indications of addiction, and the resources that are out there.
4. **Availability of Drugs:** Drug abuse is more common in regions where drugs are easily accessible, whether through illicit drug markets or improper use of prescription pharmaceuticals. It is crucial to make efforts to lessen drug availability through legislation and law enforcement. The easier accessibility to drugs especially to young age drug abusers is increasing at alarming rate, and due to lack of proper restriction over the supply of illicit drugs it has become very difficult to control drug abuse, distributed over wide geographic areas.
5. **Poverty and Socio-economic Factors:** There is a common correlation between drug usage and socioeconomic issues such as unemployment, poverty, and low education. Prolong-term drug misuse prevention can be achieved by addressing these underlying concerns through job training initiatives, poverty alleviation programs, and educational access.
6. **Mental Health Challenges:** Substance addiction and mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) often co-occur. For people with multiple disorders, communities may find it difficult to offer sufficient mental health services and support. Rural areas lack in providing mental health treatment services as in comparison to urban areas. Drug abusers who resides in rural area often lack the proper treatment required and which eventually leads to certain misfortune.¹¹
7. **Community Safety Concerns:** Drug misuse has been linked to increased rates of crime, violence, and other safety issues in local areas. Collaboration between law enforcement, community organizations, and local citizens is necessary to combat drug-related criminality.
8. **Lack of Coordination and Collaboration:** Collaboration amongst different sectors, such as healthcare, law enforcement, education, and social services, is necessary to effectively

¹⁰ Rural Health Information Hub, "Barriers to preventing and treating substance use disorder in rural communities", (Mar.30,2024, 11:09), <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/substance-abuse/1/barriers>

¹¹ *Id.*

address drug usage. However, due to large organisational divisions, funding limitations, and differing priorities, coordinating efforts among these stakeholders can be difficult.

9. **Prevention Strategies:** It might be difficult to put into practice effective preventive measures to deter drug use among young people and other vulnerable populations. It may be difficult for communities to create and carry out evidence-based preventative initiatives that are tailored to the individual needs of their community.
10. **Long-term Recovery Support:** Sustaining people in long-term addiction treatment necessitates continuous access to resources like housing, help finding work, peer support groups, and continuing care services. Relapse and recidivism may result from communities' inability to provide these supports due to a lack of funding.

In order to overcome these obstacles, a thorough and all-encompassing strategy that includes local, regional, and national stakeholder collaboration, resource allocation, legislative reforms, and community participation is needed.

CONCLUSION

Drug misuse has significant and wide-ranging societal repercussions that impact people individually, within families, in communities, and across society. Drug misuse presents a range of social, economic, and cultural issues in addition to health-related ones. The complexity of the issue is exacerbated by socioeconomic considerations, lack of awareness, treatment access restrictions, and stigma.

A multifaceted strategy involving cooperation between several stakeholders, such as government agencies, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, educators, community leaders, and non-profit organizations, is needed to address the societal ramifications of drug usage. It is imperative to focus on lowering stigma, expanding treatment and support service accessibility, addressing socioeconomic disparities, boosting prevention tactics, and raising awareness.

Communities may promote healthier surroundings, assist individuals in their recovery, lessen crime and violence, and eventually enhance the general resilience and well-being of society by addressing the social ramifications of drug misuse. We cannot effectively address the social ramifications of drug usage and create better, more resilient communities for future generations unless we work together with compassion and understanding.