

## Original Article

# Pattern of Drug Abuse in Kashmir and the Role of Forensics: An Immediate Need to Act and Introspect

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## ABSTRACT

Illicit manufacture, trafficking and abuse of drugs constitute one of the most significant potent drug problems worldwide having detrimental effects on the users as well as on the society. Addicts consume the substances in such amounts that are neither approved nor advised by the medical professionals. The death-related incidents due to the misuse of the substances have not only created havoc in criminality but are a cause for huge health-related issues. The present study was therefore aimed to address the pattern of drug abuse in the state of Jammu and Kashmir with special idea of forensics which in a decisive way may help the investigators to pursue legal action against individual(s) suspected of drug-related crimes. Forensic analysis of drugs may help in a way where the challenging goal is to determine the identity of the illegal drug for its constituents. It is only by virtue of the results of the analysis that make law enforcement agencies pursue criminal charges against the offenders and accordingly the court to determine appropriate sentencing where the life or liberty of a person is at a stake.

**Keywords:** Drug abuse, Crime, Forensic, Trafficking, Social disintegration, Law enforcement, Identification

## INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse, also known as drug abuse, is a patterned use of a substance (drug) by any of the methods, in which the user consumes it in such amounts that are neither approved nor advised by the medical professionals. Accordingly World Health Organization (WHO) defined substance abuse as a persistent or sporadic use of a drug inconsistent with or unrelated to acceptable medical practices<sup>[1,2,5]</sup>. Today we live in a world where everything is governed by chemicals. Experience of life in moments of pain, pleasure and finally to its survival has been shaped by legal and illegal drugs. Ironically many people live on a daily cocktail of prescribed pharmaceutical preparations, and many more take unprescribed ones at the weekends.

No wonder so many artistic makings make this industry a billion revenue generation machine. The problem has now crossed the national, ethnic, religious and gender lines. The clients of the menace range from the homeless, to white-collar professionals, college students to rural farmers, street children to suburban teenagers. Occasionally, death is mediated by these chemicals where a cause for the same has to be determined for lawful purposes. The trade in illegal drug has created a global black-market economy that had put the public at a greater risk, not just from the substances that are distributed but from the crimes subsequently committed thereafter by all the stake holders which include users, traffickers and manufacturers. These crimes range from burglary, assault, fraud, and serious ones like homicide, abduction and

human trafficking. Therefore, forensic based-studies in cases of like natures are vehemently sought particularly when a huge burden of case pendency lies in the courts of law. With respect to identification of an abused drug regarding its purity or active constituents, such studies are of immense importance keeping in mind the crimes of various natures. Forensic testing of specimens for drugs of abuse has become a useful diagnostic tool in determining recent past drug use as well as an investigative tool to examine long-term history through segmental analysis by identification and quantification of drugs. The usefulness and the importance of analysis of abused drugs depend on the ability to identify and quantify drugs and metabolites in biological fluids and hair that arise from ingestion but not from passive exposure or exogenous application of drugs. In order to call a drug illegal the essentiality lies in its consequences of conquering a subject where addiction, habituation or a marked change in consciousness are its common elements. Other feature of illegal drugs is their limited or no medical use and is accordingly listed in the controlled substances act<sup>[7,8,11,12]</sup>. Forensic analysis of drugs may help the investigators to pursue legal action against individual(s) suspected of drug-related offences where the challenging goal is to determine the identity of the illegal drug for its constituents. It is only by virtue of the results of the analysis that make law enforcement agencies pursue criminal charges against the offenders and accordingly the court to determine appropriate sentencing<sup>[9,10]</sup>.

### **DRUG ABUSE IN KASHMIR**

According to 2011 census, the state of Jammu and Kashmir, a 3 divisional state, had some 12 million inhabitants an estimate that ranks it to position 19 in terms of population density of other Indian states with 5 million Kashmiri inhabitants and the rest Ladhakh and Jammu inhabitants. Geographically, it occupies the northern part, thus forming the northern boundary of the country. The state is spread over an area of about 220,000 km<sup>2</sup> making it the 10th largest state in the country in terms of area<sup>[1,7,8,12,13]</sup>. The problem of drug abuse has set its evil foot on every inch of the growing global scenario with such a firm grasp that no country can escape from it if corrective measures are not taken immediately. As far as a drug is concerned, it is any chemical that changes the way a body works or the way one think, feels or act,

that is, change in the body chemistry. Drugs are used to treat or prevent disease, to reduce pain, to promote sleep, and so on<sup>[13]</sup>. In today's scenario, drug abuse is becoming one of the most potent problems in India as well. Besides, the use of natural drugs, nowadays there is an increasing trend for the use of synthetic and prescription drugs. Accordingly, an illegal drug can be defined as a substance that causes addiction, habituation, or a marked change in consciousness, has limited or no medical use and is listed on one of the five schedules within the USC Controlled Substances Act<sup>[3,8,13]</sup>. These schedules include drugs such as cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines, certain prescription drugs, and marijuana, among many others. Globally, in 2009, UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) estimated that 149 to 272 million people (about 3.3% to 6.1%) of the population aged between 15 and 64 used illicit substances at least once in the preceding year. About half of these numbers is estimated to be the number of current drug users who used the drugs at least once during the past month prior to the date of assessment. While the total number of illicit drug users have increased since the late 1990s, the prevalence rates have remained largely stable, as the number of problem drug users is estimated between 15 and 39 million<sup>[4]</sup>. Drug addiction in youth is increasing day by day in this state having a detrimental impact on the society. A systematic study of the problem of drug addiction in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has revealed that 40% of the youngster population including both boys and girls of the age group between 16 and 25 years fall a prey to drug abuse<sup>[1,7,11,12]</sup>. Drug abuse among youth is high and has thus created unending debate both nationally and internationally. It is increasing day by day and is one of the major challenges, apart from the devastating consequences, for the users as well as social integration of the family and community. A pilot study by a non-governmental organization -Concerned About Universal Social Empowerment (CAUSE) in a sample size of 610 students, revealed shocking results with about 22% graduates, 6% post graduates and over 2% PhD holders are involved in drug addiction. Adolescent drug abuse is and has therefore been one of the major areas of concern in adolescent and young people's behaviour. A major area of concern which the authors came to know through various sources is the involvement of educated youth in drug abuse activities. As far as Kashmir is concerned

with respect to substance abuse, which over the years has touched new grounds and has become an area of concern. Nail polish, ink remover, shoe polish and dozens of such abnormal things are used as the alternative addiction by the drug addicts especially belonging to young age group along with charas that is being smoked in socially accepted and approved centres known as mehfil e peer or *taqyas*. Other substances at the disposal of addicts are brown sugar, sniffers, codeine phosphate, prescription drugs like alprax and many more. Apart from these substances, Jammu based trend for drug abuse is no different. In Jammu, petrol addiction has emerged a new area of concern since past couple of years which has dangerous consequences as it hits the brain directly and the person indulging in its abuse gets seizures (fits) and ultimately commits suicide or may die within a year. Other abused substances that are used in jammu include sedatives and analgesics like Proxymon, boot polish, corex, alcohol, along with thinner fluid that comes with typewriter whitener having hydrocarbons that is poured on the handkerchiefs and subsequently inhaled<sup>[1,7,8,11,12]</sup>. The disintegration of the moral fabric of the society has resulted in chaos and confusion whereby the social values are being ignored giving rise to a fractured society full of evils and deviances. Keeping in mind the fact that destiny of a nation depends upon its healthy, intelligent and upright youth, who are best known as the assets of a nation. The set back of this menace if not taken seriously would therefore be an alarming situation like cancer crippling. Apart from his/her academic carrier destruction, society at a large would fall a prey to their unruly illegal desires that lead them to commit various crimes. So an urgent need arises to cover all the schools, colleges and universities with awareness programmes against drugs of abuse and the consequences there upon. Support for substance abuse education, prevention and treatment must come from all sides including families, community groups, schools, policymakers, and health professionals.

A survey of United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) identified 70,000 drug addicts in Kashmir division alone including 4,000 women. Another survey concluded 65 to 70% students of Kashmir as drug addicts of which around 26% comprise female students. As per Government Psychiatric Disease Hospital (GPDH) statistics, 90% abusers belong to the age group of 17 to

35 years with a lifetime prevalence of drug addiction. The commonly abused drugs include nicotine, codeine phosphate, charas followed by herion, boot polish and sniffers. A distinguishing feature of majority of the addicts was a stealing habit to continue the desire for the abuse. From the literature, it has been noticed that the use of illicit drugs by individuals in particular the youth has possible psychological repercussions in the population and the same is an important public health issue. Alongside the trauma to the society caused by drug abuse, drug intake is found to be related with the occurrence of mental health disorders, in particular psychotic illnesses. Surveys-based research has shown that narcotics & tranquilizers are the most consumed illicit drugs in this population. A survey-based analysis in 2004 conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE), Govt. of India and United Nations on the extent, pattern and trend of drug abuse in India indicated that drug abuse is quite common among males having age between 12 and 60. The study identified Tobacco as the most frequently used substance (55.8%), followed by alcohol (21.4%), cannabis (3.0%), opiates (0.7%) and sedatives (0.1%).

About 15 million persons addicted to alcohol and various kinds of other drugs need urgent attention for their treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration into social mainstream. In India, the five topmost states in descending order in terms of largest illicit drug users are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Bihar, and Kerala. A study conducted in 2013 for substance abuse among college students shows an overall prevalence of substance abuse among male college students to be 37.5% and 19.6% among the female students with 50.5% belonging to adolescent age group and 49.5% belonging to adult age group out of total (65.5% males and 34.5% females).

A study of 2015 made shocking results where it was found that a major cause of mortality among European young people was drug abuse directly by way of overdose or indirectly by drug related diseases. As per the data of European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) for year 2011, some 6,500 overdose deaths occurred. Likewise the first decade of the twenty-first century saw more than 70,000 overdose deaths. However as per the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), a total of 102,000 to 247,000 drug-related deaths in occurred in year 2011 corresponding

roughly to a mortality rate of 22.3 to 54.0 deaths per million populations having 15 to 64 as age group. Globally such a figure represents a mortality of 0.54% to 1.3% [10,11,14].

## TRANSIT ROUTE OF ILLEGAL DRUGS

According to International Bureau of Narcotics (IBN), in India, a narcotics trade of around 5,000 crore INR/annum has been reported while approximately one million people consume heroin, and two million use opium<sup>[12]</sup>. Apart from the home-made illicit drug preparation, it is now strongly held that transit route of drugs of abuse in this part of country is due to the geographical location and conflict zone, of the state that is hemmed in golden triangle (comprising Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and adjoining part of China) and golden crescent (comprising Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan). These areas along with golden quadrangle (comprising Varanasi, Lucknow, Bareilly, Barabanki and Badaawn districts of UP and adjoining parts of Rajasthan, M-P including parts of southern, eastern and north-east zone of India) has become a transit route for illicit utilization as well as transportation to other destinations<sup>[6,7,8]</sup>.

## FORENSIC SIGNIFICANCE

Forensic significance of the research trends in terms of pattern in particular areas may give an idea of screening of a person on the basis of location and commodity of abused drug if being found involved in drug trafficking or abusing of drugs and hence help in narrowing down the field of investigation. The correct identification of area of drug activity may also help in stopping drug trafficking and identify the most commonly available drugs in the region. The chemical analysis of the body fluids or other specimens of the addicts would not only detect the type but also aid in identifying the type of illegal drugs (Forensic Toxicology). In this way, law enforcement agencies can be able to prosecute the offenders of drug activity. Results from the analysis can often serve as the basis for criminal proceedings and help to determine appropriate sentencing for convicted offenders. Apart from this forensic (psychiatry), investigation may also help in proper dissemination of justice. Forensic-based studies which are always crucial in terms of innocence or guilt of an

individual are likely to prove worth in situations where an activity is performed using the objects against the rules and policies of the matter (as by use of steroids enhancing the performance in sports or narcotics to commit a crime).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to a continuous expansion of illicit drug marketing and cultivation of cannabis and poppy in many areas of Kashmir followed by an alarming and unprecedented increase in narcotic trade, some considerations are necessary to be adhered to for the benefit of the society at a large. It has been observed that law enforcement agencies have failed to identify the rising tide of this trade which has not only put the lives of the people to danger but also an increase in heinous crimes. The flow of money captured by way of illicit trade in drugs has added new dimensions to the problems already faced. Besides, this inadequate up-gradation of executives and judicial infrastructure for proper and speedy implementation of anti-smuggling (narcotic provisions law) campaigns has encouraged the continuous increase in narcotics smuggling. India has become vulnerable to this menace due to its vast geographical position at the cross roads of major illicit opiate producing regions which includes significantly the Golden Triangle comprising Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and adjoining part of China and Golden Crescent comprising Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Recently golden quadrangle comprising Varanasi, Lucknow, Bareilly, Barabanki and Badaawn districts of UP and adjoining parts of Rajasthan, M-P including parts of southern, eastern and north-east zone of India has emerged an important part in drug trafficking in India. The need of the hour is to formulate holistic approaches for the effective and sustainable livelihood of the addicts as well as for drug smugglers along with the implementation of already laid strict punishments.

Area identification for the illicit cultivation of poppy or cannabis.

Proper disposal or destruction of the cultivation.

All the schools, colleges and universities must be covered with regard to intensity of drug abuse menace, awareness programmes against drugs of abuse and the consequences there upon.

Support for substance abuse education, prevention and treatment must come from all sides including families, community groups, schools, policymakers, and health professionals.

Holding of seminars, conferences, workshops, essay and debate competition regarding the harmful effects of drugs should be greatly undertaken along with its publicity through mass media and so on.

Establishments of drug awareness, counselling and assistance centres should be greatly emphasised so that community-based services are provided for awareness generating, screening of addicts, counseling to addicts and their families and so on.

Establishments of community-based task force and pressure groups for generation of awareness among the focused group to curb the growing menace.

Establishment of treatment-cum-rehabilitation centres should also be facilitated for providing community-based services or awareness/services for the identification, motivation, counselling, de-addiction, aftercare, punishment and so on.

Comprehensive vocational activity centres across the valley should be established so that addicts to some degrees shall get rid of the menace in sports activities.

There should be a scientifically disposal strategy for used syringes for the effective prevention of epidemic, since increased risk of other diseases like HIV and STD's is most often associated with drug abuse, in particular among injecting drug users, having HIV serological prevalence of 8.71%.

It has been statistically supported that children of drug-abusing parents are strongly vulnerable to the risk of drug abuse for the maladaptive behaviour nature. So it is imperative to counsel the addicts as well as other family members for they have combinations of many risk factors present in their lives.

For law enforcement agencies: A serious and sustained crack down for drug smugglers and peddlers has to be initiated by the police through registration of the cases against them. The legal followings should include both the convention and the attachment of properties.

## **FUTURE STRATEGIES**

Since drug addiction is proving a nuclear catastrophe for the so called conserved society of Jammu and Kashmir, few parameters need further research-based approaches to address the issues logically which are.

Methodological attention to study drug-related violence links and to validate self-reports of victim and offender's casual attributions for the role of drugs in criminal offenses.

Serious and greater attention has to be made for the role of drug use in criminal victimisation.

Retrospective historical analysis of long-term trends in drug use, drug arrests and drug-related crime including recoding of ethnographic databases application of the coding scheme to homicide case files, age/period/cohort analyses, and econometric time-series analyses.

Study for the determination of the causal relationships underlying comorbid drug abuse and mental illness conditions in collaboration with Department of Psychiatry.

Attention for the likelihood of causal linkages between illicit drug use and such white-collar crimes as corruption, fraud and embezzlement.

## **NEED**

Support for substance abuse education, prevention and treatment must come from all sides including families, community groups, schools, policymakers, religious scholars and health professionals. The identification of the illicit preparations is an important area; special support/assistance of the government is therefore necessarily sought at all the stages.

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