

## Tackling drug and substance abuse in Himachal

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### Abstract

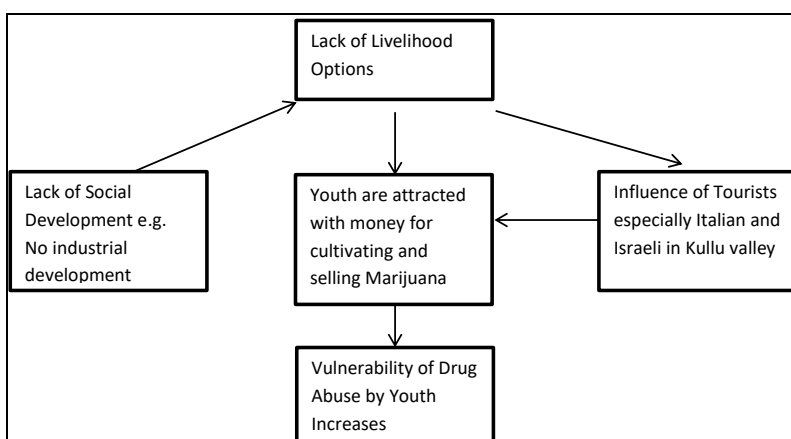
Drug abuse is a global health concern that affects individuals, families, and communities. Himachal Pradesh, a state in northern India, has witnessed a significant rise in drug abuse cases in recent years. This abstract explores various strategies and interventions implemented to tackle drug abuse in Himachal Pradesh. The primary objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of the key initiatives, policies, and programs implemented to address the issue, along with their impact. The abstract delves into the various strategies employed to combat drug abuse in Himachal Pradesh. It includes an analysis of preventive measures such as awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community-based initiatives aimed at sensitizing the public about the risks associated with drug abuse. Additionally, the abstract highlights the role of law enforcement agencies in cracking down on drug peddlers and dismantling drug trafficking networks. The abstract also discusses the significance of treatment and rehabilitation facilities in Himachal Pradesh. It examines the availability and accessibility of detoxification centers, counseling services, and rehabilitation programs for individuals grappling with drug addiction. Furthermore, the abstract explores the integration of traditional healing practices and alternative therapies as complementary approaches to address drug abuse in the region.

**Keywords:** Drug abuse, Himachal Pradesh, strategies, interventions, initiatives, policies, programs, impact

### Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is a hill state situated in the lap of Himalayas. Known for its biodiversity and beauty, it is ranked third on the charts of HDI. State claims to have initiated number of schemes for the welfare of people but impact of these “Public Welfare Schemes” have never been studied. Privatization has touched the state in a unique fashion. Number of private colleges, have mushroomed in the state. There are statistical evidences (YES, Survey 2009) that students studying in government as well as private institutions are using drugs. There is rise in drug abuse incidents especially among school students since young

adults are an easy target for Drug Lords. This easy availability of drugs is a cause of school students falling prey to drugs. This health issue is impacting Himachal in a big way especially youth and will cost heavily to the state. The incidence of drug abuse among children and adolescents is higher than the general population. This is mainly because young age is a time for experimentation and identity formation. In developed countries drug abuse among youth is generally associated with particular youth subcultures and lifestyles (Mitra, 2006) [12]. This causes an acceptance by members of the subcultures of drugs and their use (Charles *et al.*, 1999) [5].



### Magnitude

In India an NGO\* survey revealed that 63.6 % of patients coming in for treatment were introduced to drugs at a young age i.e. below 15 years. According to another report 13.1% of the people involved in drug and substance abuse in India, are below 20 years. Heroin, Opium, Alcohol, Cannabis and Propoxyphene are the five most common drugs being abused by children in India. A survey shows that of all

alcohol, cannabis and opium users 21%, 3% and 0.1% are below the age of eighteen\*\*.

\*Bachpan Bachao Aandolan, \*\*www.childline.org

In a study conducted by Youth Enlightening the Society (YES) in 2008-09 more than 43.1% students between the age group of 11-19 years were using one or other form of drugs in Simla. This study rocked Himachal Pradesh Vidhan

*Sabha for two consecutive Monsoon Sessions and Himchal High Court took a suo moto cognizance over the report.*

Ten to fifteen years back smoking was considered as a Gateway to the world of Drugs but this has changed over the years. Today there is no particular Gateway drug. YES's study highlighted that students started either with inhalants, alcohol, marijuana or tobacco. Interestingly, Himachal has a patriarchal society where, women are discriminated at every level. But girls are catching up fast with their counterparts in drugs consumption. Study showed 24% girls were using one or other form of drug as compared to 54% boys. *Hence it is important to know why Drug Abuse is becoming an Epidemic.* Factors like unemployment and lack of interest by government in providing alternate crop options are contributing to it.

### **Political**

#### **Effectiveness of current approaches**

National drug policies have traditionally been guided by the principle of deterrence. Belief, that tough law enforcement and severe sanctions against people who grow and use drugs will reduce drug production and its use. Programmes for drug prevention have been based on the same principle of deterrence which assumes that people who use drugs will stop consuming drugs if they are told about the negative effects of use and the penalties they risk by using them. In United States of America Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) has been in place since 1983. This intervention model has helped in saving young school kids from getting into the clutches of drugs (Botvin *et al.*, 2003)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Desire for fast money has attracted Himachal youth largely. The inflow of tourists from Italy, Israel and other nations for drugs in Himachal has been the main contributor for luring the youth. Successive governments promised "Development" but youth who had no option for livelihood turned to the trade of drugs. This has at times proved disastrous for them as they are caught by police and charged for trafficking. There were statements at the time of elections by senior leaders of the state, advocating for legalisation of marijuana. A PIL has been filed in the High Court of Himachal Pradesh to legalise marijuana by a local advocate. Government has been unable to put a strong argument in the court which proves that there is weak political will to tackle drug issue. YES has at times raised the issue of strong policy at different forums. "Blue Ribbon" campaign was initiated by the organization in year 2009 but lack of support and funding proved deterrent.

### **Economic**

#### **Socio-Economic Status**

Himachal is predominantly a rural state with very few townships. 24% of the state's population is below poverty line. Schedule Caste (SC) population proportion is 25% of the total SC population of India (Census of India, 2011). Majority of villagers' are small farmers with very less land holding. People with low socio economic status are also the ones who have no means of livelihood. Therefore, they tend to get attracted towards making easy money by cultivating marijuana. These villagers are attracted by big drug dealers to either grow cannabis or traffic the same to places like Delhi, Mumbai and Goa. Young boys fall prey to lucrative looking offers. Since, there are no employment generating options local youth have no choice than to agree to such offers for few hundred rupees. Government should have started programs through which such youth could find employment.

### **Economic Burden**

People who are arrested by police with charges of trafficking under NDPS Act spend years behind bars. The slow trial system is a factor responsible for the same. This causes the family of accused to suffer from huge economic burden. People who are already from low socio economic status suffer the most. The burden of lawyer and travel is huge. Cost of all this falls on the families. More over there is lack of data from the state in every aspect, be it about the youth falling prey to drugs or ones falling prey to unemployment leading to trafficking.

### **Social**

There is another dimension to drug consumption; a complete power chain is associated with it. Himachal and India *per se* has a society where religion is considered as role model by many. Since, sadhus take marijuana many school students try to imitate them. This is due to norms and beliefs prevalent in our Himachal's society (Molley, 2001) (Charles, *et al.*, 1999)<sup>[5]</sup>.

Tourists from across the globe come to Himachal also have an influence on the young minds. Earlier fakirs, sadhus and some among the male population indulged in charas. Today tourists and local youth use it as a cool drug and also for the want of acceptance by peers. Images propagated by drug users show some residue of the hippie culture of the 1960s. The perception of charas as an in-drug or cool thing has more to do with the western outlook than with anything Indian. The recital of Shiva's name by foreigners and Indian youth while inhaling charas is only a naive imitation of the Indian Sadhu, for whom cannabis is the drug of Shiva. Certain rules govern the way the sadhus consume the drug, which are absent when common folk consume cannabis (Molley, 2001).

Cafes in Kullu and other places in HP are interesting spots. They are the ideal joints for dealers to strike their deals and for smokers to use in peace along with a cup of coffee or snacks. The clients in the cafe are of both sexes and belong to different age groups. It is not uncommon to find sadhus sitting and sharing the drug with others. While the foreigners and local people are more open about their use, the non-local Indians are more cautious. These cafes are a clear reflection of the success of globalisation. Remote places in India such as the Kullu valley can run cafes on the lines of coffee shops of Amsterdam. Enjoying cannabis at the coffee shop is different from the rural Indian scenario where cannabis is shared with sadhus outside a temple.

### **Discussion**

There are very limited studies with respect to Himachal which high light the issue of Drug and Substance Abuse. An in-depth study is required to be undertaken to determine role of government programs and required interventions. Himachal Government has made smoking in public places an offence under COTPA from 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2010, and defaulters are fined. Government describes this as a big step but then there are people who smoke freely in offices and other places. This prohibition is limited to urban and district headquarters only. Men smoke in rooms making young children and women passive smokers. People are required to be educated about ill effects of second hand smoke.

## Way Forward

### Social Response

YES Buds were the groups formed in schools by YES. Students from seventh standard onwards were part of it. Students were engaged in different cultural and sports activities. Discussions were held with students enabling them to open up and speak out what disturbed them. In these sessions students opened up telling the route of drug supply and other sensitive inputs. These inputs not only helped YES to fight against the menace. The most important thing that came up during these discussions was lack of playing fields. This proved to be a vital finding where students were not able to exert their energy and took to drugs for recreation.

### Conclusion

Drug and Substance Abuse is not a rural or urban phenomenon. It is spreading at an alarming rate irrespective of caste, class, region and gender. Policy makers need to look into every aspect of protecting people. Time bound upstream interventions need to be used. Proper support and financial help to those suffering from this menace can reduce the economic burden and decrease mental stress through which families have to go.

Rapid Industrialization and Mushrooming of Educational institutions need to be checked. Along with it innovative ways of involving students in different sports and cultural activities need to be initiated. Strengthen this by bringing in key factors contributing to drug abuse and the need to have a multi-pronged approach by adopting preventive methods and promoting awareness programs. Interventions for identifying and treating young people without making it a stigma for the family needs to be adopted. Government and implementing agencies have to bring in timely livelihood options and policies which will help people come out of this vicious and intoxicating circle of drugs. There is an urgent need to start a dedicated 24x7 helpline and a Rehabilitation centre in Shimla. Primary concern of Rehab should be of strengthening social structure which comprises of family, friends and neighbourhood. While secondary should be the biomedical approach of detox and medication. These steps need to be taken at earliest otherwise situation will go out of hand.

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