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Drug Menace In Mawa Region Of Punjab

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Abstract

Drug menace is a bane to any society. It hinders the growth because the youth become prey to abuse of drugs. They fall in vortex of drug addiction. This paper throws light on the menace of drug abuse in Punjab in general and in Malwa region in particular. Punjab being situated in the border of Pakistan. This paper reveals the role of Pakistan in supply of drugs in the state in general and supply from the border state of Rajasthan in particular. This paper highlights the various causes of drug menace in the state like unemployment, poverty, failure of crop in the state so on and so forth. The paper also suggests some remedies and concludingly it emphasises that proper execution of plans would help in uprooting this menace.

Introduction

Punjab is the land of five rivers and has land with prosperity. It is the land of brave people. The people of Punjab possess rich heritage values. Punjabis were famous for their bravery, rituals, hard work and in almost all types of artistic culture and values. This is the land which fulfils the hunger of entire country i.e. acting as breadbasket of the country. A large part of the population follows Sikhism. Punjab is divided into the three divisions i.e. (i) Majha (ii) Doaba and (iii) Malwa.

Among these regions, Malwa is a region of Punjab south to river Sutlej. The Malwa area constitutes majority of the Punjab region (consisting 11 districts out of 22 districts). This area includes cities like Bathinda, Mansa, Patiala, Mohali, Rupnagar, Ludhiana, Sangrur, Moga, Barnala, Ferozepur, and Fazilka. This area is famous for cotton farming and citrus fruit production. But now this area has become notorious for drug trafficking and drug abuse.

Reasons

Does easy supply lead to addiction, or does the demand result in increased supply? Why did Punjab so easily fall into the drug trap?

Studies point to some striking aspects of Punjab's drug addiction problem. It has a predominant rural context and the users are relatively affluent, unlike in the rest of the country. The drugs used are mostly injectable, which are commonly associated with urban settings.

The intensity and extremity of the addiction too is a unique Punjabi occurrence. Experts explain it in terms of the deep-rooted cultures of consumption and masculinity, the declining growth rates of the rural economy, the influx of migrants, the impact of unemployment on educated rural youth, and the culture of aspiration and expectation, which quickly swerves to depression when things don't fall in place.

Research studies also point to the failure of Punjab's industrial sector to absorb the increasing number of employable youth from rural areas, and the cultural attributes that inhibit educated youth from taking up certain jobs, especially in the farm sector. There's also a clash between unemployment and the culture of aspiration among the many affluent young men in rural Punjab, who are at the centre of the problem. Frustration, boredom and laziness are working behind

this menace.

No one exactly knows the extent of the drug problem in the state; the varied figures that are often quoted are based on sporadic studies and anecdotal instances. When Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi remarked during an election rally in 2012 that 70 per cent of Punjab's youth were under the influence of drugs, the figure may have been question-able, but what was. relevant was the start of a debate. Now that it's taken shape of a political slugfest, the core issue of the huge battle against drugs lost in the war of words.

Punjab Police have tried to shed the image with huge recoveries, busting of drug gangs and sustained crackdowns. But a senior police officer points to the difficulty in letting go of notions: "More drug recoveries show the security agencies are more alert and serious about the issue, but the media and the Opposition say it means an increase in smuggling and higher consumption!"

The Congress claims the drug smuggling went up when the Akalis came to power in 2007 and is still increasing, while the Akalis stress that they were the ones who launched a campaign to "save the youth of the country as Punjab was just a transit point for smuggling and not the main consumer". Both the parties forget how satirist and Aam Aadmi Party MP from Sangrur Bhagwant Mann based his entire election campaign on drugs and won a famous victory.

Smugglers go to great lengths to push packets across the border to Punjab and rely upon Indian couriers to transmit the goods further. In order to get past the obstacle of electrified fences, the modus operandi seems to be to convey drug packets and Pakistani SIM cards across the border through plastic pipelines, or by hurling them across the fence to be picked up by Indian couriers who relay the consignment to couriers waiting for them. Smugglers are also able to take advantage of the meandering course of the Sutlej and Ravi rivers where the border for about 17 kms. A strict penalty of not less than ten years imprisonment is provided for under the NDPS Act has not deterred this well organized network from operating. Cross border drug supply has continued unabated.

However, despite smuggling along the Punjab-Pakistan border being an established fact, it is a red herring so far as the crisis in Punjab is concerned. Most of the smuggled drugs are meant for onward transit rather than consumption within Punjab and in any case are extremely expensive for Punjab's rural youth. Who then is supplying Punjabis their 'bhukki'? The major source of supply seems to be from the opium fields of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. However, smuggling of opium from Rajasthan to Punjab is not uncommon and this unadulterated opium is very popular among the rural youth, so much so that many Rajasthanian drug vendors have opened shop close to the Punjab border.

Laws have not been able to deter either cross border or internal smuggling but the problem is not with the law as much as it is with its ineffective implementation. The consequence is a complete lack of deterrence. A shortage of manpower in various enforcement agencies is also cited as a major problem. Another challenge is that enforcement agencies need to crack down on organised drug cartels and syndicates as well as drug peddlers. For instance, Daulewala, a village of approximately 400 households in Moga has become infamous as the 'drug capital of Punjab'.

It is a matter of fact that there is much less emphasis on drug abuse as a social problem in comparison to how wide spread is the menace actually is. In the recent times, Punjab has witnessed a tremendous rise in substance abuse. The problem has become more complex and alarming in the recent years. This may be attributed to: a) Magnitude of problem has increased many folds b) New Synthetic and more addictive substances have been added to the list of abuse able drugs. c) More and more individuals have shifted from traditional oral/ smoking to injectable drugs use. d) Children

have started abusing dependence producing substances e) the age old social control measures have become ineffective. There is need for regular research in the de-addiction clinics in order to assess the pattern of abuse. It focuses the pattern of substance abuse in the patients who presented to the de-addiction centre situated in rural area in Malwa region of Punjab. It also highlights to find out the reason for starting drug abuse, for continuation of substance abuse and what was the motivation behind seeking treatment now.

The reason by the patients given for seeking treatment was self motivation (66.5%). Many of these patients had realised over the years that their life has now been more of driven by the drugs. They were totally dependent on availability of drugs and at times they had to face embarrassment for this reason. They were not able to go to outside station, until they carry the substance with them. Much of their time was consumed in finding the way to buy the drugs and significant portion of income was spent on that. Some patients were daily wagers and they spent the whole of daily income for this purpose only, mainly in Malwa region of Punjab. This is an important thing to highlight because of easy availability of bhukki in this region because of proximity to. Rajasthan Border.

Remedies

The Government can envisage a skill development, training and placement program which will target unemployed graduates. For the rural and semi-skilled labor, the Government can implement a model of skill-building. Recovering addicts can opt into the program while residing in drug rehabilitation centers so that their special needs can be catered to.

Secondly the Government could establish drug de addiction centers on a needs basis determined through the aforementioned, survey. These should follow statutory procedures for treating drug addicts which are largely based on internationally accepted best practices such as the WHO's Principles of Drug Dependence Treatment.

National Health Mission workers must utilize mental health components to screen for persons who are vulnerable to addiction because of individual circumstances. Follow up of recovering drug addicts could be jointly done by the National Health Mission and the de-addiction Centers.

Panchayati Raj Institutions should be the main backbone for implementation of drug abuse prevention programs in all rural areas. Incentives should be provided for pursuing the goal of drug free villages through awards. The Project for Awareness and Education for Prevention of Drug Abuse & Alcoholism in Punjab is a good example of an out drug abuse drive, it envisaged an inclusive institutional set up right from the village level which could proactively prevent drug addiction as well as help reintegrate recovered addicts. It brought together the government, civil society, youth and Panchayati Raj Institutions to help fight drug abuse and was able to identify serious flaws such as a lack of infrastructure and resources to adequately deal with drug addiction. Unfortunately there was no follow up. Another important step could be to make recovered drug addicts local brand ambassadors of the drug abuse prevention programs.

Schools and colleges in Punjab must have counsellors as part of the school's and college's non teaching faculty. Drug de-addiction centers can train counsellors and teachers in early identification of vulnerable school children as well as children addicted to drugs. Sports has already been made compulsory by the Punjab Government, however, it is important to also provide summer vacation sports camps, or hobby and computer classes for children.

With respect to sources of drug supply, the Government will need to coordinate with other agencies to prevent drug peddling and smuggling. Cross border smuggling is already being tackled and the rising number of seizures by the BSF, Customs and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence suggest that there is a greater alertness on the part of these agencies. However, steps should be taken to incentivize border villages not to indulge in smuggling. Border Area Development Plans taken up so far have been stated to have been unsuccessful due to the lack of participation of stakeholders. Therefore, it is of primary importance that those who reside in these border villages are given a say in the development of the region. So far as the chemist shops are concerned, the Red Cross De-addiction Center has recommended that Senior Medical Officers in the districts be vested with the power Drug Inspectors so that chemists cannot take advantage of a shortage of inspectors. It has also recommended that the sale of drugs be carried out only by prescription as is done in states like Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra. In this regard, the Punjab and Haryana High Court had also suggested setting up an enforcement wing which may be attached to the Drug Inspector's office. The Government of India has recently issued a notification that requires habit forming drugs to be sold only by prescription. However, fake prescriptions without serial numbers are commonly available and hence serial numbers on prescriptions should be made compulsory. Thirdly, there is a requirement for institutionalized coordination between the states of Rajasthan and Punjab to prevent smuggling of opium. A National Drug Demand Reduction Policy once implemented will automatically ensure higher levels of cooperation amongst the states. Finally, there is a requirement to fill vacancies and recruit additional staff in various law enforcement agencies in order to ensure proper implementation of the laws.

Another suggestion to effectively enforce the law against all offenders is to set up a Legislative Committee which is as representative of political parties in the Punjab Legislature as possible and to which an independent statutory body presents reports on the working of the drug and substance abuse programs.

The government, the political parties, the police and the civil society should join hands together to tackle the abuse of drugs from Punjab in general and Malwa region in particular. Police reforms and transparency in funding of political parties must also be taken up on an urgent basis. The drug users should also understand that any agency can't handle the worsened situation of drug abuse in Punjab unless they themselves develop a supportive attitude.

Conclusion:

- The government of Punjab undertake an official survey to ascertain the exact number of drug addicts in the Punjab and their reasons of drug abuse.
- Punjab government must devise a system for spreading awareness among adolescents and youth on how to stay away from drugs.
- Seminars should be organised in school and colleges to highlight the impact of drug abuse.
- Doctors and basic infrastructure be provided to drug de addiction centres.
- Sale of drugs be carried out only by prescription.
- By giving employment to youth drug abuse can be controlled.
- Stringent measures are required to stop the illicit drug trafficking by breaking the nexus between the public, police and politicians.
- Punjab Government must check the supply in any forceful way he can, but focus should be the recipient, the one who is seeking the supply. There is immediate need to break the

entire drug chain.

- Government, police, local administration, paramedical, village panchayat, family, parents NGO and youth organisation come forward to end this menace. Let's make Punjab a drug-free society.

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