

Six of 10 drug users in SAsia are from India
UN study says women in HIV risk owing to husbands' drug abuse.
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THE FINDINGS of a South Asia sample study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on drugs and HIV reveal a majority 61.3 per cent of drug users in the region are from India. Among these, 71.8 per cent are intravenous drug users, who are at the greatest risk of contracting HIV. This trend is also reflected in the latest World Drug Report of the UNODC, according to which India has the largest number of opiate users in Asia — about three million. Asia itself has more than half the world's opium-using population, a whopping 9.3 million users. The South Asia report, which surveyed a sample 5,800 drug users in India, was aimed at devising ways of designing programmes to combat drug usage. The World Drug Report examined production, seizure and trends of drug usage and trade globally. "The findings are worrying," said a senior official of the South Asia regional UNODC office. "We found that women, especially in India, were at high risk of contracting HIV, because their husbands were drug users and used infected needles. It's not necessarily the high risk population of sex workers and drug users only who are vulnerable

71.8% abusers use intravenous drugs'

Another area of concern is pharmaceutical drugs. Whereas heroin is the most-abused drug across the world, in India, it is the chemical drugs that are gaining popularity. About 43 per cent of intravenous drug users injected a cocktail of drugs. As a sociodemographic profile, 49.8 per cent drug users were in the age group of 21-30 years and 61.5 per cent were employed. India also accounts for low condom usage with only 21.3 per cent of the sample size using them while having casual or non-commercial sex. The figure was slightly higher, at 23 per cent, for commercial sex. About 88.7 per cent of drug users among those surveyed had heard about HIV while 72.7 per cent of them knew condom protects against viruses. An enforcement officer at the UNODC said: "There has been an increasing trend of heroin trafficking by air. In the last year alone, there have been at least eight seizures of heroin from Afghanistan with India as a transit point en route to China. India is a transit point for heroin from Pakistan to China too." With law enforcement being tightened, India has eradicated 7,000 hectares of opium cultivation in the past one year.

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