

### **Working Indian men getting hooked to drugs**

NEW DELHI: Over 85 percent of Indian drug users are literate and about two-thirds of these are working professionals, a new survey by the UN said on Wednesday wiping out theories that illiterate and poor are broadly hooked to narcotics.

The rapid situation and response assessment (RSRA) survey of drugs and HIV in India by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that half of the drug users are in the age group of 21 to 30 years.

The study found that of the 5,800 drug users surveyed, nearly 94 percent were male and 61.5 percent were employed. Just 220 (3.8 percent) were homeless.

Many drug users are currently using alcohol (80 percent), cannabis (76 percent), injectible buprenorphine, a pharmaceutical drug (76 percent), heroin by injecting (76 percent), heroin by smoking (70 percent) and propoxyphene (64 percent), the study found.

“Many drug users were initiated to alcohol and cannabis before the age of 18 years, and the age of onset of opioids like opium, heroin and propoxyphene and buprenorphine was after 20 years,” the study unveiled.

Of the total people surveyed, 73 percent used drugs always or at times in a group. Changing drug using groups was common and was reported by at least 52 percent.

“It’s a myth that only illiterates are hooked to drugs. At least we did not find the trend in the survey,” M. Suresh Kumar, lead author of the report, told IANS.

Kumar said the drug abusers have at least two sexual partners and this along with their drug dependence increases their chance of getting HIV/AIDS.

The study, which was released before the International Day Against Drug Abuse June 26, said 18 percent of the drug users confessed to indulging in anal sex with a male partner. Many of them were involved with casual and commercial sex partners.

He, however, said that the HIV awareness among a majority of drug users are high but they are not concerned about the risk perception. “During interaction with commercial sex workers, these drug users use condoms only in 23 percent of the cases.”

Ashita Mittal, senior programme officer in the UNODC (South Asia), said drug use among youngsters was increasing across the country.

“This heightens the spread of HIV/AIDS. And it’s no more restricted to urban cities. Small cities in Punjab and Haryana have started facing the problem as well,” Mittal said.