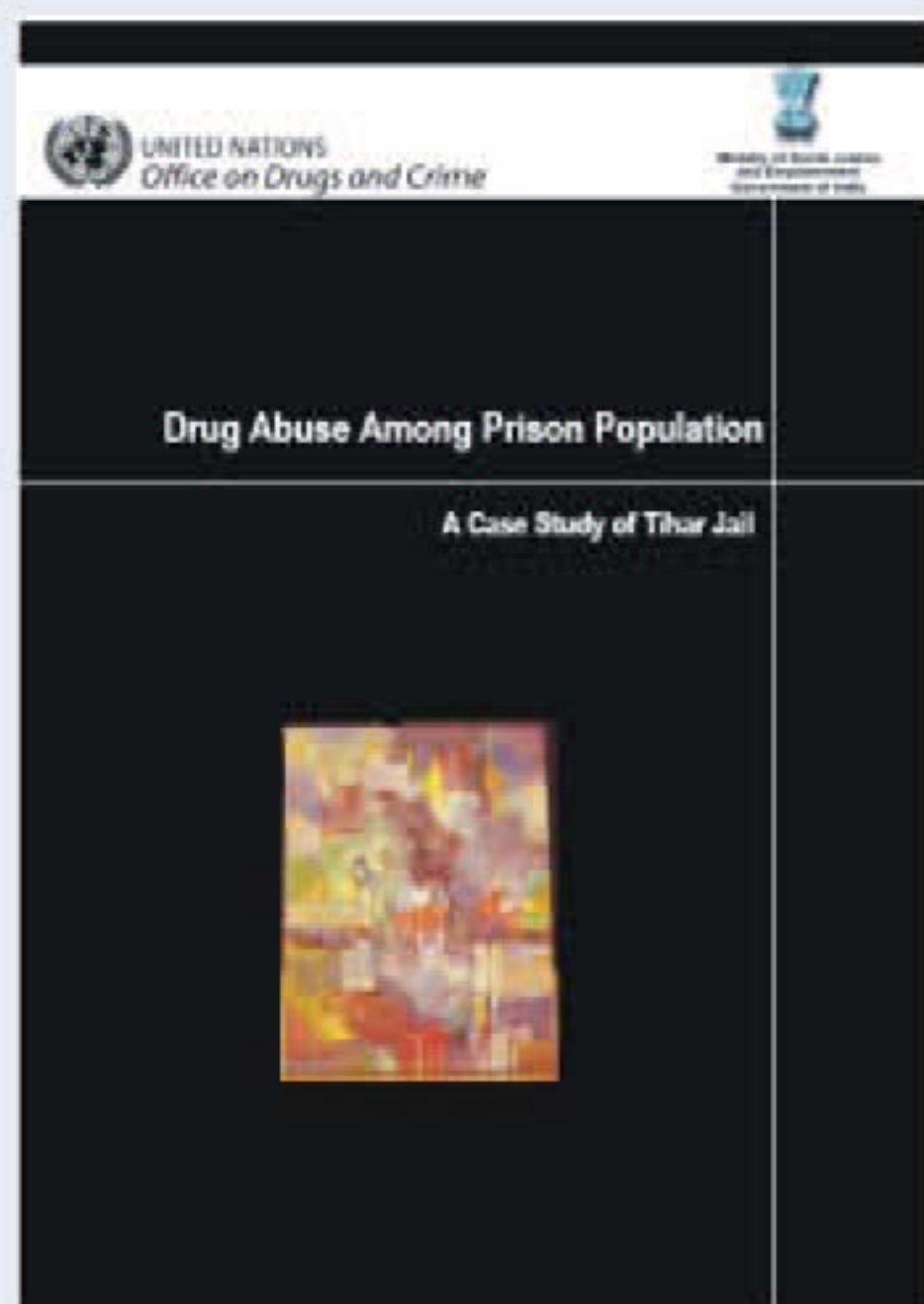




DRUG ABUSE AMONG PRISON POPULATIONS

Data on substance abuse among prison populations in India is virtually absent, although it is widely believed that a significant percentage of the country's prison population may be abusing or addicted to one or more drugs. This report was one of the focused thematic studies conducted as part of the National Drug Abuse Survey of India which was released in 2004. It was designed to document the extent and pattern of drug abuse among prisoners in a large prison in India. In this study, the information was collected using a standardised format. The data is presented for 6,800 individuals who were interviewed by An Association for Scientific Research on the Addictions (AASRA), a NGO treatment centre working in Tihar Jail, the largest prison in South Asia, during the four years (1997-2000). The jail provides de-addiction and rehabilitation facilities within its premises. The data items covered were: demography, treatment services and pattern of drug use.



FINDINGS

Tihar Jail has a population of about 11,000 prisoners, 85% of whom are not convicted but under judicial custody or under police remand. 8% of all new admissions are drug dependent.

- 30-35% of the sample was within the age group 21-25 years.
- 47-50% were illiterate.
- 40-44% were unmarried.
- 8-25% left school because of drug use.
- 5-8% were unemployed.
- 20-39% did not report any prior treatment contact.
- 76-82% reported heroin as the primary drug of abuse.
- Heroin was the most often inhaled (chased).

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY AGE OF FIRST USE, 2000 (N=5,554)



- 0.3-4.9% were injecting drug users (IDU).
- 57-75% reported drug abuse of five years and longer.
- 41-65% reported severe dysfunction due to drug abuse.
- 18-49% reported at least one previous arrest.
- About 17% of drug abusers had been arrested under various sections of The Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act.
- 13% had been accused under section 27 of the Act, which pertains to possession of small quantities of drugs.

The following parameters remained stable during the four years of the study: age, religion, marital status, illiteracy, employment/occupation, primary drug of abuse (heroin), frequency of use of primary drug, and age of initiation. Although, changes were noted in the following parameters.

- IDU declined to 0.8% (2000) from 4.9% (1997).
- Duration of drug abuse declined to 40.9% (2000) from 64.6% (1999).
- Severe dysfunction due to drug use declined to 40.9% (2000) from 64.6% (1999).
- Previous arrests (single or more) increased to 47.9% (2000) from 17.5% (1999).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue data collection in prisons. The instrument used in this study was designed for data collection among general populations in treatment care settings. Parameters dealing with initial treatment modality (detoxification) were therefore redundant for monitoring a population recruited a therapeutic rehabilitation community. A specific instrument may have to be designed for drug users in prisons.
- **Set up more detoxification and rehabilitation centres in prisons in India.**
- **Extend treatment options under Section 39 of the NDPS Act** (The option to seek treatment for drug dependence in treatment centres outside prison) to those accused under Section 27 more than once in a lifetime as available under section 64-A of the Act.