



RAPID ASSESSMENT SURVEY (RAS) OF DRUG ABUSE IN INDIA

The epidemic of drug abuse and associated health consequences pose a formidable public health problem in India. It is widely acknowledged that drug abuse is a community problem, and that it is multi-dimensional. Thus, a combined and coordinated strategy involving different sectors of the community is needed to effectively address drug prevention and intervention. The major components of the National Survey of Drug Abuse in India were as follows: a National Household Survey, a Drug Abuse Monitoring System and a Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS). Additionally, focused studies on specific populations like women, rural subjects, people living in border towns and prison populations were carried out. For the Rapid Assessment Survey a total of 4,648 drug users were interviewed. (Out of these 371 (8%) were women). It was seen that the drug users studied in these RAS sites were predominantly young males with a significant number of them employed as daily wage earners and an average monthly income of Rs 4,050.

OBJECTIVES:

- Study the pattern and nature of drug abuse among the young and predominantly male drug users.
- Assess the extent and nature of opiate use, in particular injecting drug use. This was the main focus of the survey in the five sites of Delhi, Imphal, Kolkota, Chennai and Mumbai.
- Study the demand for services among drug users in this study as well as the existing treatment interventions available to users.
- Recommend an action plan with intervention strategies.

FINDINGS:

Characteristics of users:

- The mean age of drug users across the fourteen sites was lowest in Shillong (23 years) and highest in Ahmedabad (35 years).
- About 26% of respondents were homeless and high numbers of this category were found in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Delhi and Thiruvananthapuram.
- Approximately equal percentages of respondents were married and unmarried in the sample.
- Overall, about 21% were illiterate and about 29% of all respondents were unemployed.

Drug of Initiation

- Cannabis was the most common first drug followed by alcohol.
- The vast majority began drug use via smoking or inhalation.

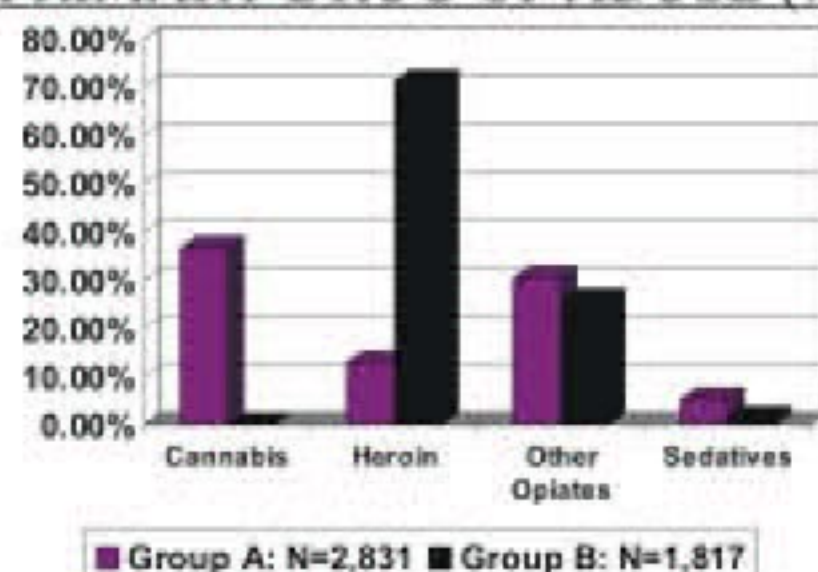
Injecting Drug Use

- Mean age of starting injecting drugs varied between 15 and 28 with Thiruvananthapuram at the low end and Jamshedpur and Kolkata at the higher end.
- The mean number of persons sharing needles was three or more in Amritsar, Delhi, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai.
- Unhygienic methods were predominant in cleaning needles and syringes.
- Syringes were often obtained from pharmacies.
- The non-availability of heroin was responsible for many opiate users switching from non-injecting to injecting modes of administration.

Other findings:

- Tuberculosis, jaundice and ulcers in genitalia were commonly reported.
- The mean age of first sexual activity was around 18 years and condom use was not uniformly prevalent among these drug users.

PRIMARY DRUG OF ABUSE (%)



THE REPORT:

The Rapid Assessment Survey of drug use was conducted in fourteen sites: Amritsar, Jamshedpur, Dimapur, Shillong and Jowai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Thiruvananthapuram, Goa, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Imphal, Kolkota, Chennai and Mumbai. The overall objective was to describe an action plan aimed at reducing drug use and related harms.

- The risk perception of HIV/AIDS was low.
- In some centres, between 40-78% reported taking help from a drug treatment organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Types of interventions:

- Provision of information and knowledge.
- Education.
- Training and skills development.
- Community-based action.
- Regulatory activities.
- Treatment.