



WOMEN and DRUG ABUSE In INDIA

Drug abuse impacts women in two ways. In the first place, drug abuse by male partners and sons creates an enormous emotional, physical and financial burden on the affected women. In the second place, drug abuse by women themselves imposes *per se* even graver problems for women. It is therefore important to evolve strategies to identify women with drug-use-related problems from both the individual and a gender perspectives.

1. THE BURDEN ON WOMEN DUE TO DRUG ABUSE BY FAMILY MEMBERS

- Depleted financial resources.
- Increased emotional stress.
- Domestic violence.
- A risk of transmission or contracting sexually transmitted diseases.
- Sexual relationships may be adversely affected.
- Responses include depression, stress and resentment. The non-drug using partner may also take to drugs for solace.
- This component of the study interviewed 179 women having a male family member currently abusing drugs. It was carried out in 8 centres throughout India: Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Pune and Thiruvanthapuram.
- Two-thirds of the drug abusers in the families were males between the productive ages of 16 to 35 years.
- A large number (55%) had a history of drug abuse since their teens.
- A majority were poly-drug users, the primary drug of abuse was heroin.
- A fifth of the women were illiterate.
- A number of women in the study were forced to part with a large part of their own earnings to support the drug user's habit.
- Women were blamed for being responsible for the drug use in the family member.
- Women faced various health problems and emotional stress.
- Physical violence was reported by 43% of the women and verbal aggression by 50%.
- Awareness and protection against sexually transmitted diseases was low.

2. SUBSTANCE USE AMONG WOMEN AND FEMALE SEX WORKERS:

- This component of the study included 75 women drug abusers enrolled in a snowball sampling technique from three locations: Mumbai, Delhi and Aizawl.
- Half the respondents from Mumbai and Delhi were illiterate.
- A large number of the women were employed (67%), with 45% being involved in commercial sex work.
- 31% of the women were single and 32% were separated or divorced. Most of the women were currently using heroin or brown sugar (88%). Other concomitant drugs of abuse included propoxyphene, alcohol, minor tranquilisers, cough syrups and cannabis. Intravenous drug abuse was reported by 41% of the sample.
- Friends initially introduced drugs to 48% respondents, and 16% were introduced by their husbands or partners.
- The women commonly reported both physical and psychological problems.
- About half the drug abusing women had been exposed to a drug or alcohol abusing family member.
- All the drug abusing women from Mumbai were enrolled in treatment services. A significant number from Aizawl had not sought any treatment.
- In all three cities, some of the specific issues which interfered with treatment included concerns for unattended children, fear of exploitation and fear of withdrawal.

Women and Drug Abuse



The Problem in India



The Report:

The data for this report is taken from the existing literature on the subject of drug abuse and women in India, analyses of gender relations in the country and from three commissioned studies. The studies are "Burden on women due to Drug Abuse by Family Member", "Substance Abuse among Women" and the "Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS)." These are components of the "National Survey on Extent, Pattern and Trends of Drug Abuse in India."

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- An in-depth understanding of some of the issues of exploitation, vulnerability, stigmatization, lack of social supports for women, health and economic security.
- Education about potential risks of exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Support for women.
- Greater sensitivity to women within treatment programmes.