
Publication: Times Of India Delhi; Date:2007 Jun 26; Section:Times City; Page Number 5

INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE

Ex-addicts recount nightmares

Kamayani Singh | TNN

New Delhi: Twenty-six-year old Ajay Pandey still breaks into a cold sweat when he hears someone utter "brown-sugar" — two words that he couldn't live without just two years ago. What started as a casual evening with friends in college experimenting with drugs, soon turned into a lethal addiction.

Broke, ashamed to face his family and friends and after several attempts to quit "brown sugar", Pandey came to Delhi from Lucknow to seek help. He got himself admitted to a rehab centre in Mahipalpur. Today, he works for the same de-addiction centre he once recovered at to help drug addicts win the greatest battle of their life. Pandey is not alone. Virendra Singh, a lawyer by profession and tailor Mohammad Shahid had similar tales to tell and on the occasion of International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking and they came together at a programme organised by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on Monday to share their experience.

A survey done by UNODC showed that most of the drug addicts were men with women constituting only eight percent.

Further, 26 percent were found to be homeless, 21 percent were illiterate and 29 percent were unemployed. However, a look at different people who came for UNODC programme on Monday evening showed that drug-abuse in Delhi cuts across masses and classes.

"Drug abuse is one of the biggest threats to public health in India. It is hard to even know how many drug addicts are there in India," says Prateek Kumar, a project co-ordinator at UNODC.

Shahid was addicted to cocaine for 20 years and still fears a relapse. Virendra Singh says he still feels tempted when he thinks of brown sugar but is trying to restart his legal practice. They both admit that the weeks they spent in rehab were perhaps the worst of their life "The first few days without the drug were horrible. You constantly feel anxious, get terrible body ache, you can't sleep, can't eat, eyes and nose water constantly...it was the worst experience of my life," adds Singh.

Kumar says that pharma-abuse is assuming enormous proportions in India. Besides, use of "soft drugs" (sniffing glue, naphthalene balls, petrol etc.) known as toluene volatile drug abuse, is rampant among street children.

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