

1. INTRODUCTION

In the UNODCCP (2001a) report entitled “Global Illicit Drug Trends” it was noted that assessing the extent of drug abuse is difficult as it involves measuring the size of a hidden population. The margins of error can be considerable and tend to multiply as a scale of estimation is raised. Detailed information from Asia is available from only a few countries. The available qualitative information only allows guesstimates. For many countries trend data on abuse reflect 'perceptions' by the authorities. Thus the data should be treated with caution and should not be taken at face value.

Population surveys based on national probability sampling, also called National Household Surveys (NHS), provide information on the proportion of lifetime and current users of each substance. NHS, however, does not provide the most comprehensive picture. It reflects the overall level of drug use and lists commonly abused substances among general population in the country as a whole. Data from NHS needs to be supplemented by information on “hard to reach” groups and marginalised populations. Thus, local studies, studies on special sub-groups viz. street addicts, women, prisoners, mentally ill persons, youth, etc., need to be carried out.

Finally, the above data should be supplemented by data on persons seeking treatment. These would reflect the treatment demand and would sharpen the focus on issues regarding intervention. Thus the information should be collected using different research methodologies and different perspectives. Cross-checking, triangulation and multiple indicators would possibly provide the most accurate picture.

Thus, a comprehensive picture of a country can only be obtained through multiple data sources using multiple methodologies, as has been carried out in the current survey. Each element supplements another. UNODCCP (2000) recommended that information gained from general population surveys should be supplemented by special studies utilising ethnographic methods.

The magnitude, development and dynamics of drug abuse at the national level have not been well researched in India. This deficiency of data is due to a lack of resources on the one hand, and the sheer size and diversity of the country on the other. This “National Survey on Extent, Pattern and Trends of Drug Abuse in India” (henceforth 'National Survey') attempts to minimise the potential error of any single technique and uses different

methodologies to project the data for the country as a whole. While data on a region or a specific site is made available, the focus of the report is on the nation as a whole. Finally, the report presents both quantitative and qualitative information.

The results of this National Survey will, hopefully, provide a framework to

planners and policy makers to examine the current infrastructure, the means of intervention and suggest modifications to deal with the problem of drug abuse. The study also forms a national baseline for later assessments of drug abuse problems. This will help to pinpoint trends over the years.