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Impact on Women due to Drug Abuse in the Family

Drug abuse wreaks serious damage to individual lives and thus the very fabric of society. It also inflicts a heavy social and economic cost on nations. No country, especially in South Asia, can afford to bear the social cost of this 'menace' (UNDCP, ROSA, 1998). Specific health, social and economic consequences vary, depending upon the segment of the affected population. For instance, disadvantaged populations like those living in urban slums and migrants from rural areas are likely to face more severe consequences.

that a user spends between Rs 35 and Rs 95 a day on the substance of choice (Prashanth, 1993). Dependence also has an impact on an addict's employment, and leads to losses due to missed work. These costs naturally erode the net earnings of the household and thus adversely impact living conditions and, often, subsistence.

Social and Psychological Impact on the Family

While the family situation is sometimes held responsible for perpetuating drug use (Machado, 1994), the repercussions on the family are tremendous. Within the family, it is women, the mother and/or the wife, who suffer the greatest and most direct impact of drug use by a family member.

Families may initially tolerate the use of socially and culturally accepted intoxicants by its members, but frown on addiction (Nahar, 1994, Sharma et. al., 1995). With progression of the abuse, a common response is to shield the drug user from the consequences, at the cost of great distress to family members. This response may be due to cultural and

social constraints, the family's own understanding of drug addiction, the addict's behaviour, relationship problems, as well as the economic burden faced by the family.

Domestic Violence

A report of UNDCP (1994) on women and drug abuse focused attention on the alarming

Costs of Drug Abuse to Families

Visible Costs

- Drainage of personal and household resources
- Loss in income due to reduced productivity, disability or incarceration
- Costs of treatment

Intangible Costs

- Emotional distress
- Domestic violence
- Health problems
- Family disruption
- Child neglect

Economic Costs of Drug Abuse

There are tremendous economic costs associated with drugs. Benegal et al. (2000) have estimated costs associated with alcohol abuse, and similar assessments on the use of drugs have been done. For example, on average, drug abusers spend about Rs 500 (US \$11) per week on drugs. A study in Delhi estimated

'That Helpless Feeling'

Parents or relatives of drug addicts compound the problem by hiding the fact that one of their kin has fallen prey. There is a sense of acute embarrassment, shame and even guilt that a member of their family has gone 'astray'. Usually, no mention is made to friends or others till the situation has gone completely out of hand. Society is also responsible for such a defensive reaction. As a parent of a drug addict told me: "Rather than being judgemental, what we wanted from our circle of friends was sympathy and the message that they were there to help. We rarely got it and we felt totally isolated."

(Chengappa, 1998, in SASSRR, page 87)

indirect consequences of drug abuse, including domestic violence, on women. This correlation is now well recognised. The association between domestic violence and drug use is well known. A study from South America found that 97 percent of domestic violence involved an intoxicated male (Hsu, 1992). Eighty-seven percent of addicts being treated in a de-addiction centre run by police in Delhi reported having been violent with family members (Shankardass, 1998).

Marital Discord

Marital discord and family breakdown are some other serious consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. Enhanced economic burden, domestic violence, shifts in roles and responsibilities, and socially unacceptable behaviour such as extra-marital relationships, all lead to disharmony within the family. Death of the user or separation, especially within impoverished families, can force dependants and family members into various kinds of exploitative situations. In extreme cases, this includes children taking to the streets, and women

getting involved in the sex trade.

Health Problems

The additional stress of coping with drug abuse within the family may produce physical and psychological distress and trigger drug or alcohol use in the woman. Some women may engage in prostitution to support their partner's drug habit, and are thus at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Women in developing countries may be further disadvantaged by lacking

access to information and education about drug and sex related diseases. The inability to negotiate safe sex is also an important affiliated risk. For women the risk of HIV infection during unprotected sex is 2 to 4 times to that of men. Globally women now account for 43 percent of total estimated population living with AIDS. In India there is evidence to suggest that the rates of infection in women are increasing since the mid-1990s (UNAIDS,

Drug Addict held for Stabbing Wife

Narender Singh, 38, stabbed his wife Kamlesh to death because she refused to give him money for smack. They had been married for 20 years and had 2 sons, Manish, 18, and Sumit, 14. Kamlesh worked as a domestic helper and Narender lived off her earnings. On Dec 31, he asked her for money for smack and when she refused, he caught her by the hair and stabbed her three times on her neck with a *rapi* (leather cutting instrument). They live in Swatantra Nagar in Narela Industrial Area of northwest Delhi. Narender was arrested on the charge of murder.
- Excerpted from *The Hindu*, 2 January, 2001

2000). Agarwal and his colleagues in their study (1999) from Manipur reported that the HIV prevalence among injecting drug using commercial sex workers (CSW) was 9.4 times higher than that of non IDU CSWs.

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