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Drug Use in Context

It is important to reiterate the need to view drug use in women within current socio-economic and cultural contexts. The situation of the Indian woman mirrors the challenges and difficulties faced by women all over the world (see box). Lack of knowledge and low status, coupled with low empowerment, continue to be the Achilles' heel for women's development.

of women on one hand, and rapid socio-cultural and economic changes on the other have significantly altered traditional structures and institutions within society. Changes like these are invariably associated with social upheaval, and drug abuse is a known outcome of such change. Clearly, drug abuse impacts women dually – male drug abuse creates an enormous burden on affected women, and drug abuse per se constitutes even more grave problems for women. Deprivation results in

Such social disadvantage and sub-ordination

World's Women 2000:Trends and Statistics (Excerpts)

- Women are generally marrying later but more than a quarter of women aged 15 to 19 are married in 22 countries - all in developing regions. Informal sexual partnerships are common in developed regions and in some countries of the developing regions.
- Births to unmarried women have increased dramatically in developed regions
- Maternal mortality risks are still high in the developing world
- Women now account for almost half of all cases of HIV/AIDS, and in countries with high HIV prevalence, young women are at higher risk of contracting HIV than young men.
- Life expectancy continues to increase for women and men in most developing regions but has decreased dramatically in Southern Africa as a result of AIDS.

Work

- Women now comprise an increasing share of the world's labour force - at least one-third in all regions except in northern Africa and western Asia. Self-employment, part-time and

home-based work have expanded opportunities for women's participation in the labour force but are characterized by lack of security, lack of benefits and low income.

- More women than before are in the labour force throughout their reproductive years, though obstacles to combining family responsibilities with employment persist.

Human Rights and Political Decision-Making

- Physical and sexual abuse affect millions of girls and women worldwide - yet are known to be seriously under-reported.

Education and Communication

- The gender gap in primary and secondary schooling is closing, but women still lag behind men in some countries in Africa and Southern Asia.
- Two-thirds of the world's 876 million illiterates are women, and the number of illiterates is not expected to decrease significantly in the next twenty years.

different outcomes in different situations. According to WHO (1990), deprivation must be viewed as a relative term, and must be applied when a person's socio-economic status is worse than her/his parent's – downward social mobility. In some countries, however, use of particular drugs was seen to represent a form of subjective upward social mobility for those of low socio-economic status.

From another perspective, urban settings appear to be associated with patterns of drug abuse in women mirroring that of men, with

probably higher risk behaviours stemming from unsafe injecting and sexual practices.

Whatever the difference in social status and in patterns of drug use, the financial, social, physical and psychological consequences of drug abuse are tremendous. In the context of the adversities that most Indian women face in terms of illiteracy, low autonomy, and inadequate accessibility to health care, the effect of drug abuse is amplified. In their pivotal role within the family, women are similarly affected when there is drug use by family members.

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