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Drug Addiction: A review of challenges and solutions

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the current situation of drug addiction in Pakistan generally and specifically in Balochistan. The intensity of this problem is evidenced by the presence of more than 8 million addicts in the country. Being a social problem of Pakistan drug addiction has already grabbed the attention of government and law enforcement agencies. With this realization government enacted policies to address all addiction related issues. This paper uncovers the challenges faced by the government while dealing with the drug menace. Practicable solutions are also identified in the light of reasons and effects of drug addiction.

Keywords. Drug addiction, policies, effects, Balochistan.

Introduction

Drug addiction is one of the alarming social problems of Pakistan which is rapidly affecting large number of its population. The Control of Narcotic substances Act defines addiction in the Guzzatte of Pakistan 1997 as 'Addict means a person physically or mentally dependent on any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance or a person who habitually uses narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances'. Currently number of drug addicts in Pakistan is more than 8 million (Express Tribune, 2017) while 700 people die every day due to drug-related complications (Qasim 2016; Raheem 2018). Drugs are available in different forms across the country, such as Cocaine, Hashish, Heroin, Opium, Cannabis, and Crystal. Most of the drug addicts are between the ages of 25 to 39 (United Nation office on Drug and Crimes UNODC, 2013). Despite of its dangerous effects and consequences, the addicts are increasing devastatingly with the rate of 40,000 per year (Express Tribune 2017; Ministry of Narcotics Control 2009). Qasim (2017) gave the figures that 'more than three million Pakistanis between the ages of 15 and 64 use heroin regularly and

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there are almost five million Cannabis users addicted to Charas'. Similarly UNODC (2013) reported that Cannabis users are 3.6 per cent of the population. Men and women of different ages use them though women users are comparatively less due to their low and confined mobility.

Situation analyses of drug addiction in Balochistan

Pakistan shares its borders from Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtun Khuwa with Afghanistan, who is contributing near 70% of drugs in the world which is grown near the borders of Pakistan (UNODC 2008, p. 21; Qasim 2017). This has kept Pakistan in a very delicate position in a way that according to UNODC '40% of drugs produced in Afghanistan are routed through Pakistan' (UNODC 2013, p. 2; Niazi, Zaman and Ikram 2009). Thus, the territory of Pakistan is not only used for international smuggling of drugs but it is also one of the regions of its high consumption. According to the World Drug Report 2000 of the United Nations Drug Control Programme, Pakistan is one of the countries which is highly affected by narcotics abuse in the world.

In different areas of Balochistan heroin, opium, cocaine and crystal are mostly consumed by the addicts. Addicts are found on foot paths, under the parked trucks, behind the walls or in any dark corner. Drug is being sold openly without any fear of law and order (Raheem, 2018). In similar vein Baloch (2015) further reported that Satellite Town, Saryab Road and Quetta suburbs are some common areas where purchase of heroin is not only easy but also very cheap. Balochistan is the highest consumer of opiate as 1.6 per cent of the population uses either heroin, opium, or both (UNODC 2013, p. 7). The source of income to these opioid users varies, for some they get money from family and friends while some involved in begging, stealing, drug or blood selling etc. (UNODC, 2013).

Drug abuse and Government policies

Pakistan being a transit route for drug smuggling from Afghanistan to other parts of the world held biggest responsibility to tackle this menace. Government of Pakistan is well cognizant with the fact that this situation does not only tarnishing the image of country worldwide but also it is lethal for its own citizens. Hence, eradication of drug is one of the priority areas of concern for the government and to this end government persistently keeps an eye on all illicit drug related activities while sharing information with the concerned departments (Niazi, Zaman and Ikram, 2009).

Pakistan is the signatory of three international drug control treaties. The Single convention on Narcotic Drug 1961, The Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971 and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988 and thus bound to take all possible and appropriate measures to limit and control all forms of drug trade and trafficking, and also ensure the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of general public (UNODC, 2013).

Government has enunciated the Antinarcotic policy 2010 to deal with the present situation of drugs in the country. 'It aims to re-energize existing national drug law enforcement institutions, build the Anti Narcotics Force capacity, develop an effective coordination and control mechanism, and mobilize the people of Pakistan especially youth and institutions to ensure their active participation in eradicating drugs' (Ministry of Narcotics Control 2010, p. 2). It comprehensively addresses the three main areas of drugs such as Demand Reduction, Supply Reduction and International Cooperation. To reduce supply and demand, the government intends to strengthen the law enforcement agencies to shatter the drug trafficking and to eliminate poppy cultivation especially in KPK and Balochistan areas by provision of alternate crops. This policy has also emphasized on the significance of educating general public as well as young generation about its harmful effects. With regard to international cooperation, Pakistan eagerly works parallel to international agencies by sharing and exchanging related information about drugs. (Ministry of Narcotics control 2010).

Another step by Government of Pakistan to curtail the drug issues was the establishment of special Narcotics Courts during 2000-2001 which deals drug cases under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997. This law was enacted to explain all forms of drugs in detailed. It also devised the punishment for cultivation, possession, import or export, trafficking or financing the trafficking of narcotic drugs (Government of Pakistan 1997). With the fact that these courts have been performing well since their inception yet their efficiency is still low. It means that their proceedings are same as of Pakistan's overall judicial system (civil and criminal courts) where misleading evidences, involvement of influential people, complicated and lengthy proceedings along with absence of witnesses not only prolong the court decision but also minimizes its effectiveness (Niazi, Zaman and Ikram, 2009). This is further explained by Baloch (2017) in his interview from Advocate Abdul Salam Umrani, President Kalat Bar Association who stated that "Whenever, the alleged suppliers are brought to court, they are punished according to the 9(A), 9(B) and 9(C) law of Control of Narcotics Substance Acts.(see for details The Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997)" And then he further mentioned one of the reasons of dealers escaping from punishment as "Most of the drug dealers use teenaged boys for supplying and whenever they are

arrested they cannot be imprisoned under juvenile justice system ordinance, therefore, the chief actors remain unpunished.”

As an advocate he uncovered the way of drug dealers and also pointed out the weakness of law and order system. He asserted that dealers use the innocence of young boys in supplying drugs as they know well that these boys cannot provide any significant information about them to the police thus they would easily escape. Another reason of choosing young boys for dealing is that being young they would hardly be caught by police. This gives us an idea that government or related law enforcement agencies should also modify their strategies and general believes while following the drug dealers.

Keeping in view the complications attached to the issue of drug addiction, government is facing several challenges to deal with this.

Challenges to the government

The role of government in controlling this multifaceted menace of drug is quite challenging as it requires a holistic approach to prohibit its cultivation, production, packaging and transportation. It is a matter of great concern for government that drug issues fluctuate continuously. Government achieved a poppy free status in 2000-2001 by dealing iron handedly with the poppy cultivation which includes destroying poppy plants/crops. However, as this was not a onetime activity therefore during 2003 Poppy were again cultivated in Balochistan, KPK and FATA. With regard to Balochistan, government has been efficiently destroying it annually. Whereas in case of FATA the ratio of cultivated poppy was less compared to the previous high production yet it alarms the authorities that it could be high over time. Most of the cultivation in KPK and FATA were dropped by 61% during 2006. The scenario in Balochistan during 2007 showed a remarkable decline of opium poppy cultivation to only 424 ha which were 3,067 ha. in 2004 (UNODC 2008, p. 8). Despite of taking strenuous steps in drug eradication government cannot control its cultivation because the challenge is to restrain the inhabitants of KPK and FATA from cultivating and harvesting poppy being high cash crop and grown illegally behind the walls.

Since Pakistan becomes the prime alliance in war against terrorism it has been the victim of several terrorist attacks which has inevitably affects the government and its policies. A big number of law enforcement agencies are busy with counter terrorism operation on the border of Pakistan- Afghanistan which leads to the lack of security officers (UNODC 2008, p. 8). Furthermore due to this operation their attention is diverted from those involved in trade of narcotics which has given them more space to expand their supply networks within or across the country. The outcome of this is the increase in narcotics

trade and use in the country as it is substantiated by Swanstrom (2007) who argued that terrorism and antiterrorism activities paved the way for the narcotic trade. Expanding narcotics business is also believed to generate funds by the groups to support terrorist's activities in the country.

Government is also very concerned with an increase rate of HIV in Pakistan. Besides other reasons of spreading HIV infection one of the notable reasons is the increase in number of injecting drug users (IDUs). The use of infected syringes brings every user as well as their intimate partners at the risk of receiving HIV infection ([Bergenstrom](#) et al. 2015). According to UNODC (2008, p. 15) the number of IDUs has increased from 15 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2006. In similar vein the National AIDS control programme (2013, p. 12) reported increase in HIV infection among IDUs from 10.8% in 2005 to 37.8% in 2011. Besides getting infection of HIV, addicts are also prone to many other physical illnesses such as malnutrition, cardiac problems, hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis and psychological ailments such as loss of confidence and self-control, anxiety, disappointment and allusion of suicide (Qasim, 2016).

Government has established an agency, Anti-narcotic force with an aim to deal with drug control, organizing and managing the treatment programs for addicts (Niazi, Zaman and Ikram, 2009). Despite of its various efforts the agency is not much successful in controlling and confining the drugs trafficking. One of the reasons is that ANF is responsible to perform strict surveillance on all the possible routes of drug trafficking. The officials of ANF are present at airports and seaports for 24 hours while on other entry points of border ANF deployed their staff on receiving any information from intelligence agencies. To keep an eye on each movement on across the border is difficult for ANF on account of large area, as Pakistan shared its 2,500 km borders with Afghanistan while 900 km with Iran (UNODC 2008: 27). Furthermore, this also requires huge financial, technical and human resources to get on time and reliable information regarding any drug related activity. Therefore, the cooperation and coordination of other related law enforcement agencies with ANF is inevitable to increase its capacity for curbing the drug trade (UNODC, 2008).

Another important challenge in a way to tackle this issue is the integrated web of influential people whose direct and indirect involvement in drug dealing has seriously weakens the state policies and systems to control. This web is not complete until the involvement of corrupt police who for the sake of earning some pennies become predator rather guardian. As mentioned by Ahmadzee (2015) the drug dealers bribe their facilitators who provide safe passage for drug dealing and trafficking. He further argued that if any official take bold step against those black sheeps then he has to face transfer to other far flung

areas or put his life under threat. Consequently, the high officials, drug mafia and police conspired together minimizes the effectiveness of state endeavors against drugs.

Keeping in view the challenges, it is also imperative to look upon those various factors responsible for the high demand and supply of drugs in Pakistan.

Overview of the factors contributing in increasing drug addition

There are intermingled social problems which contribute equally in increasing rate of drug addicts in Pakistan, such as poverty, unemployment and illiteracy.

Poverty is considered as one of the main reasons of drug addiction. Most of the country's population is living under the poverty line. High numbers of people are unemployed or underemployed due to illiteracy, less job opportunities and culture of nepotism. This develops a feeling of anxiety and frustration among the individuals which eventually lead them towards the use of drugs. These observations are similar with the study of Niazi, Zaman and Ikram (2009) who acknowledges the direct relationship between drug abuse and poverty.

Lack of awareness and information

The lack of awareness about the harmful effects of drugs is another reason. Our syllabus does not enlighten the students with the necessary information about the drug abuse, its prevention and treatment. However, it is a call of time that our kids must know about the harmful effects of drugs and also the ways by which every year our diamonds are becoming ashes. Having no clear idea of drug abuse, sometimes people started using its any form with an idea of enjoyment but gradually they became habitual of it (Zafar, 2013). Especially the young generation is more prone to become victim of addiction because of bad company, exposure to new environment, lack of guidance and proper information, stress and weakness to face conflicts. It is substantiated by the result of study conducted by Malik et al. (2012), inability to control the social issues/ conflict is one of the major causes of addiction. In similar vein, sometimes drug is offered in such a manner that people cannot resist its temptation. For example, the Sheesha lounges where a person can easily have the 'Water pipe' in which tobacco or crystal with different flavors are used. This has become fashion now and regardless of age and gender we find many people especially elite class enjoying Sheesha openly. Additionally, people also use drugs with an assumption of being more focused or obtaining the feeling of being relaxed from worries (Niaz et al.2005)

Media role

The media in portraying the high society using drugs/drinks as status symbol fascinates young generation is playing a negative role. Smoking or drinking is shown as the identity mark of heroes and successful person in films, and dramas which negatively affects the immature generation. Therefore, the ban on the advertisement of tobacco by government could not bring desired results in the demand reduction of drugs as perceived.

Family life

The changing trends in family life are another significant factor due to which especially the new generation is becoming the victim of drug abuse. Previously, grandparents and parents were more aware with the activities of their children as they used to hold a strong control over their children's routine. Certainly, they were well known to their friends and class fellows. This trend is now diminishing as parents are busy in their routine (Zafar, 2013). Thus, rather spending quality time with children, they have provided them with computers, laptops, tablets and iPhones which they are using without any proper guidance or control. This in turn has weakened the bonding between parents and children, consequently increasing the children exposure to bad company leads to drug addiction. For example a study conducted in Karachi revealed that drug abusers were not having positive relationship with their parents (Niaz et al. 2005).

Lack of treatment for drug addicts

Drug addiction being a social problem grasps the attention of public as well as private organizations to establish drug treatment centers for the addicts. The availability of properly functioning centers is vital in curbing the menace of drug addiction. Statistics declared that only 30,000 addicts get access to treatment every year (Asghar 2018). There are several reasons behind this small number of addicts seeking treatment. Foremost is the existing medical facilities in Pakistan are not fulfilling the need of high number of addicts as reported by Qasim (2016) 'near 4.25 million drug dependent need professional treatment while the available structure has only 1990 beds for drug treatment and can cater to less than 30,000 drug users a year'. Furthermore, majority of the people are not able to afford the charges of this treatment (UNODC 2013; Asghar 2018). Additionally, such centers are facing issues like insecurity; lack of trained medical staff and less financial budget which decreases their efficiency from expanding their services to high number of addicts (Zafar, 2013).

Social reintegration of drug addicts

It is vital to reintegrate a recovered person in their previous social setting which includes their family, close friends or job place. This is imperative because social acceptance will be helpful in preventing them to be relapsed. The relapse cases are hard to treat again as they have already lost their hopes to live better life thus this disappointment leads them to nowhere but death.

Addiction comes with a stigma not for an individual but also for the family. The close relatives tend to break ties with the family of addicts not only this but within the family siblings also limit their contacts with addicts. On the other hand professional colleagues also terminate their links with them. Infact, the stigma of being useless is attached with the addicts that bring nothing but loneliness to them. Therefore, it is always emphasized that after treatment it is significant for their survival that they must be accepted and treated normally by the family or relatives or if they has a job then from their colleagues. This also depicts in the slogan of all centers for addicts that hate drug, not human.

Effects of addiction on family (especially women)

The effects of drug addiction are multi layered, complex and integrated in a way that one links to the other. One man addiction turns into family destruction. As an individual he loses his identity and integrity in the society while his family loses their social position. The family members of an addict pay the cost of his addiction throughout their lives in different ways. They face taunt, tease, social isolation and stigma. If that addict involve in some criminal activity then his family has to endure law proceedings, bearing the costs too as we know that addicts are usually involved in stealing, snatching or hurting someone for the sake of money (Ahmadzee, 2015).

Women being socially weak and dependent on men suffer more severally. If an addict happens to be her husband then she suffers socially and financially more than any other family member on account of her dependency on her husband's relatives for her and children's needs who usually refuses to take their responsibility. As a result women and children develop emotional issues and have to perform even odd jobs to earn their bread and butter. On other hand if she is addict's sister or daughter then their chances to get marry diminishes because of the stigma of addiction attached to them (Ali and Sadiq, 2011; Rifat Sadiq, n.d).

Since drug addiction is one of the major social problems of Pakistan thus it requires the practicable solutions.

Solutions

The understanding of the reasons of drug addiction can be quite helpful in controlling this issue. First of all, steps should be taken in decreasing its demand by providing job opportunities, skill based trainings and framing recreational activities for general public (Zafar, 2013).

Initiating general awareness campaign about the consequences of drug addiction can play a vital role in suppressing its demand. The mass awareness should be done involving all forms of media such as electronic, print and social media with a purpose of disseminating information. This information should focus on the prevention techniques, treatment methods and rehabilitation ways so that people may know that addiction is curable. This information would play positive role in transforming general people attitude towards addicts and would enable them to behave responsibly by helping addicts in any possible way.

The pivotal role of electronic media is significant to bring this issue in limelight and have discussions on it. Dramas or films should highlight the issues of drugs in Pakistan and the way it is gradually weakening our roots. The steps taken by the Government to ban tobacco publicity on television screens is appreciable but it will be more effective when it is coupled with playing small ads about the harmful effects of drugs.

The educational institutions such as schools, college universities and tuition centers can work as a biggest platform to address this issue as these institutes provide lifelong learning to the young generation. For this, administration of these institutes must give short briefings about drug abuse to every new class enrolled. Additionally, a short component about the narcotics should be added in regular syllabus for the knowledge of children. In this regard, parents must be also informed about all possible ways of addiction and specially symptoms of addicts so that they must take timely and appropriate measures to cure and safeguard their children.

Similarly the religious clerks should mention drug addiction with relation to Islam in their Friday sermons (Ministry of Narcotics control 2010). The religious clerks enjoy loads of respect on account of their close link with religion and therefore general public pay special attention to them.

The role of law enforcement agencies is inevitable and holistic while dealing with drug mafia. They are the ones who are primarily responsible to break the chain of supply and demand by taking vigilant actions to control this hazard from spreading. Second, they have to chase and caught the drug dealers and bring them to the court for legal proceedings where strict punishments will promote preventive environment. Overall a drug free society is dependent on

the rule of law and on the transparent role of law enforcement agencies if exercise the authority delegated to them by law. The states dealing with this crime iron handedly have been successful in controlling this issue, for example Saudi Arabia executes anyone convicted in drug trafficking, is better off.

Additionally these agencies should extend their cooperation and coordination with each other and with other organizations whose line of work is same for information sharing and seeking technical support. Similarly, the government through rigorous checks should ensure that concerned department properly destroys the drugs they confiscated. Furthermore, police have to work efficiently on town and city level without being influenced by any influential person. To increase their efficiency (Haider Ali n.d, p 27) has suggested the establishment of 'special cell in police department like Antinarcotic force in order to combat drug abuse problems'.

To make Pakistan a drug Free State a comprehensive health policy is also required which must address this issue on priority as it deals with other diseases, such as TB, HIV, Hepatitis, etc. To meet this end each government hospital should have one 'Narcotic cure unit' to provide free consultation and instant necessary guidance to addict or their family. Compared to formal rehabilitation/ drop in centers, the access of general public to government hospitals is easy on account of their availability in most of the areas. Furthermore, being government hospital the patient (addicts) may seek free advice or get some concession on his treatment. The idea is to provide maximum medical support to addicts residing in rural areas as their access to private rehabilitation centers is barely possible.

The treatment and rehabilitation centers for drug addicts should be fully equipped with necessary equipment and with trained medical staff having expertise in dealing addicts. The staff should include a doctor, psychologist, and a counselor who works with the patient as well as with their families. (Zafar 2013). Counseling with family is very significant in decreasing the relapse rate of addicts as it can save a patient from becoming the victim of social stigma. Therefore, only creating awareness about the effects of narcotics is not sufficient until it includes the tool of counseling. The counseling process should include all the stake holders such as individual (addict), family, friends and relatives to make the home and surrounding a healthy place. Moreover, these centers must maintain their records which may include their patient's history along with their treatment methods for future reference. This record will provide technical knowledge and assistance to newly appointed staff who may devise new effective strategy to treat the addicts. This data will also help in research and mitigating strategies to combat with this issue.

Besides, being a citizen of Pakistan we individually are obliged to play our role as well in making Pakistan a drug free society. To this end, it is necessary that on an individual basis we should join our hands together against this evil and show zero tolerance towards any form of drugs. For this, small town vigilance committees should be organized on self-help basis at local level that monitors any action of drug dealing, suspicious activities or strangers and strictly react to stop it to keep the neighborhood clean. They can also prohibit the shop owners by keeping any form of drug, tobacco and even Gutka. At least, shop owners should be directed not to provide cigarettes to the children under the age of 18 years. In similar vein, we should standup against tobacco consumption in public places as it is also not allowed by the government. By taking such small steps on individual level we can save ourselves and our future generation from this menace.

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