



Policy Action Against Drug Abuse

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This editorial is based on the article **Should the NDPS Act be amended?** which was published in The Hindu on 29/10/2021. It talks about the issues related to drug abuse in India and suggests a way forward.

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has proposed certain changes to some provisions of the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985**. The recommendations have assumed importance in the backdrop of some high-profile drug cases including the recent arrest of Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan.

One of the recommendations of the Ministry is to **decriminalise the possession of narcotic drugs in smaller quantities** for personal purposes. Another suggestion is that persons using drugs in smaller quantities be treated as victims.

However, there is a need to understand the underlying reasons for widespread drug abuse in India and then take comprehensive actions.

Causes of Drug Addiction in India

- **Socioeconomic Status:** Low income, unemployment, income inequality, lower educational levels, limited opportunities for advancement and lack of health services.
- **Social Capital:** Low social support and reduced community involvement.
- **Environmental Events:** Natural disasters, war, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation and migration.
- **Social change which are** associated with changes in income, urbanization and environmental degradation.
- **Stress Buster:** Sometimes students tend to get into drugs because of their studies or work pressure. Also, students coming from other states find it difficult to cope up in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi.

It is generally seen that an unemployed youth, out of frustration, ends up in taking drugs.

- **Peer pressure** and other psychological factors can cause teens to engage in risky behaviours, leading to substance abuse.
 - Youth can get attracted to the glamour attached to drug taking.
 - Sometimes also, out of fun or in order to experiment, a youth ends up in taking drugs.
- **Suffering and deprivation:** People in the lower income group who cannot have an adequate amount of food, take drugs to sleep or relax.
- **Flaws in the legal system:**
 - The cause behind drug menace is the drug cartels, crime syndicates and ultimately the ISI which is the biggest supplier of drugs.
 - Rave parties have been reported in the country where intake of narcotic substances is observed.
 - These parties are orchestrated by the drug syndicates who have their own vested interests.
 - Social media plays an important role in organising these parties.
 - The police have not been able to control such parties.
 - **Smuggling of drugs** through the states like Punjab, Assam and Uttar Pradesh which share the border with neighbouring countries.
 - Normal food products like noodles, pan masala and gutka laced with drugs are sold to school and college students.
 - The African as well as the Southasian route being misused to bring drugs into the country.

Impacts of Drug Addiction

- Higher risk of unintentional injuries, accidents, **domestic violence incidents**, medical problems, and death.
- Economic potential gets wasted as the youth is indulged in drug abuse and **demographic dividend** suffers.
- Affects relationships with family, friends creating emotional and social problems
- Increases financial burden due to diversion of funding and resources to other areas such as police patrolling and rehabilitation centres.
- Drug abuse seriously affects our health, security, peace and development.
 - Increase in diseases like **Hepatitis B** and **C**, **Tuberculosis**
- Drug dependence, low self esteem, hopelessness can lead to criminal action and even suicidal tendencies.

Challenges to Curb the Drug Menace

- **Legally Available Drugs:** Such as **tobacco** is a huge problem which is usually seen as a gateway drug which children take just to experiment with.
- **Lack of Availability of Rehabilitation Centres:** There is a lack of rehabilitation centres. Also, NGOs operating de-addiction centres in the country, have failed to provide the required kind of treatment and therapy.

- **Smuggling of Drugs:** Smuggling of drugs through the states like Punjab, Assam and Uttar Pradesh which share the border with neighbouring countries.
- **Lack of availability of rehabilitation centres** in the country is a big issue. Also, NGOs operating de-addiction centres in the country, have failed to provide the required kind of treatment and therapy.

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act

- India is a **signatory to the UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs 1961**, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988 which prescribe various forms of control aimed to achieve the dual objective of limiting the use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes as well as preventing the abuse of the same.
- The administrative and legislative setup in the field of Narcotics has been put in place in the country in accordance with the spirit of the UN Conventions. The basic legislative instrument of the Government of India in this regard is the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.
- The Act provides stringent provisions for the control and regulation of operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- It also provides for forfeiture of property derived from, or used in, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- It also provides for death penalty in some cases where a person is a repeat offender.

Way Forward

- **Scientific evidence-based treatment** needs to be made available for people with Substance use disorders – at an adequate scale.
- **Evidence-based substance use prevention programmes** are needed to protect the young people.
 - Prevention programmes must address the risk and protective factors aimed at not just preventing substance use but ensuring that young people grow and stay healthy into adulthood, enabling them to realize their potential and become productive members of their community and society
- A **conducive legal and policy environment** is needed to help control drug problems.
 - It is important that laws and policies are aimed at providing health and welfare services to people affected by substance use rather than subjecting them to the criminal justice system.
 - There needs to be efficient coordination between the drug supply control sector as well as the entities involved in drug demand reduction and harm reduction.

- The approach of **generating and utilizing scientific evidence** must continue. Every piece of the data would serve to incrementally inform evidence-based policies and programmes to protect and promote the health and welfare of Indian society

Conclusion

The action plan aims at addiction-free India by countering the growing menace especially across colleges and universities. However, there is a need to design a more targeted campaign against drugs and substance abuse.

Addiction should not be seen as a character flaw, but as an ailment that any other person could be struggling with. Therefore, the stigma associated with drug taking needs to be reduced through social awareness and voluntary processes like medical help by psychologists, as well as strong support from family.

Drishti Mains Question

Problem of drug abuse can be solved with holistic reform action. Suggest some measures to tackle the issue of drug abuse.