

Familial And Communal Factors Spreading Drug Addiction in Suburban Slum Areas

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Abstract

The emergence of drug use among children and their inclination towards addiction has become an epidemic that has thoroughly seeped into society and now overwhelmingly trickling down to younger generation. The present qualitative and descriptive study was designed to investigate the familial and social reasons that have contributed to the emergence of drug use among children, the type of drugs mostly used by them and the way they access to drugs. The study further explored how the families are being affected due to the presence of an addict in the family. Ten students of Malir University were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed by using an open-ended questionnaire, and the results were drawn through thematic analysis. The results indicate that lack of parents' support & absence of family quality time in which proper care and emotional feelings of the children are not being addressed and they feel neglected and being left out appeared to be the main reasons for children diverting towards different types of drug abuse. Other reasons included lack of understanding about the harmful effects of drug use and their easy accessibility. The study suggested awareness of parents, highlighting the importance of parental care, support, and guidance to develop self-confidence and self-esteem among children to protect them from any danger. Workshops at the community level need to be conducted to provide drug education to parents & the general public about drug types, their negative physical and psychological effects, and how to save the children from this menace. The active participation of civil society and media is also important to work towards drug reduction.

Keywords: Drug Addiction, Familial & Social Reasons, drug abuse, health

Introduction

Physical health is what everyone aspires, as that makes one shine and grow mentally as well as physically. Questions like what the importance of physical health is, how it can be maintained and what healthy activities to be incorporated in one's daily life have not been discussed as an integral part of our lifestyle, nor has it taken place in schools' curriculum. Therefore, remaining healthy is not on our priority list. A worldwide survey on Physical Health Activity was conducted by the World health organization, and it was disclosed that the majority of the people are least bothered about their health and have little focus on healthy physical activities (Guthold, Stevens, Riley, & Bull, 2019).

Being unaware of one's fitness and welfare has conveniently paved the way for Drug abuse. Drugs have become an epidemic that has thoroughly seeped into society and now overwhelmingly trickling down to our younger generation. Malir District is engulfed with numerous problems such as missing clean drinking water, crumbled sewerage system, broken roads, no public transport, shortage of hospitals, lack of maternity homes, and deficiency of teachers in schools, presence of stray dogs. Furthermore, to add to their miseries the use of drugs among the general population and most particularly in school & college children is increasing at an alarming proportion. Smokeless or unburned tobacco such as Paan (betel leaf), Chhalia (betel nut), Guttka (betel nut coated with sweetness), Mawa, Niswar, Zarda Chewig Tobacco (all are locally produced and highly addictive and have injurious harmful effects on health and safety of human beings. Yet people considered it to be mouth fresheners and use it for refreshing breath and mood enhancement. All the form of Chaliya (areca nut) is often mixed with lime and other savouring stuff is genotoxic and leads to chromatic abnormalities and affects the gastrointestinal system. Common public uninformed of its harmful effects, that these drugs lead to various types of cancer and tear the users not only physically and mentally but economically as well, are constantly addicted to it. It has also been detected that user of hard drugs have initiated their association with constant use of soft drugs, which they never considered detrimental to health and still don't (Garg, Chaturvedi, Mishra, & Datta, 2015).

Cigarette packets carry warning labels that have deterred their usage among youth, whereas all other forms of soft tobacco products carry no effective labels which have increased the consumption to great proportion. This emerging Sheesha trend with cannabis (charas) has become very popular among males and females of higher economic stratum and has equally gained momentum in the lower socio-economic class where the younger generation found using it very candidly as well. Now in an environment where consumption of these soft drugs

is considered a social and cultural habit, where a father, mother, brother, uncle or aunt, grandparents, school fellows are inclined towards it and the dependency is increasing day by day, then it is no secret that children are open to this danger unrestricted. In such climate children addicted to soft drugs from a very early age and gradually moved on to hard drugs (like, opium, charas, cocaine, heroin) are very obvious.

Malir District an eastern part of Karachi, Sindh consists of many districts, division & sub-divisions. Furthermore, for a proper understanding of Malir, the area is divided into three towns namely: Malir Town, Bin Qasim Town, Gadap Town. The rural area of Bin Qasim known as Deh Landi comprises of many goths/villages. These small villages are engulfed with numerous problems such as; missing clean drinking water, crumbled sewerage system, broken roads, and no public transport, shortage of hospitals and maternity homes, and deficiency of teachers in schools. Furthermore, to add to their miseries the use of drugs among the general population and most particularly in school & college children is increasing at an alarming proportion. The study was designed to explore the Growing Menace of Drugs in Rural Areas of Malir District, Deh Landi, Karachi (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Objectives

The study was designed to:

- look into the reasons that have contributed to the emergence of drug use among children.
- investigate the type of drugs mostly used by them and the way they access to drugs.
- explore how the families are being affected due to the presence of an addict in the family.

The paper has proposed actions to stop the unaffected ones from falling prey to it and to work towards the rehabilitation of the fallen victims.

Scope of the Study

This research has anticipated awareness programs that will not only educate the general public about drug abuse but will invite the masses to work together to overcome the menace. Further, this paper will highlight the exposure of the youth of the area to this menace, and the findings will pave the way for more research about this danger which is ruining the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and their families.

Literature Review

Drug addiction is a brain disorder in which drug-seeking on illicit drug increase the dependency of the users which deteriorate their physical and mental health conditions and in

turn, leads to harmful consequences not only for the drug addicts but also on their families which in turn affect the community and to the society by and large. As per United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), consumption of heroin in Pakistan on daily basis by population between 15 to 64 years of age is around 800,000 & 44 tons of heroin is consumed on daily basis, and its rate of consumption is greater than other South Asian countries and the country has been noticed as the biggest market for heroin smugglers and dealers (Asghar, 2018).

Youths or the younger generation of any country lead the country towards progression and brighten its future prospectus. Pakistan is the country whose 64% ((UNDP, 2018) of the population comprises of youth; however, it is also a country where 40,000 (Asghar, 2018) drug addicts get increase each year. A drug like Gutka, Mawa, Hashish, Ice, heroin is commonly consumed among children less than 24 years of age. Drugs are available in colleges, universities and even in schools as children of the high-income group have no issue of affordability, whereas low-income groups due to low cost and easy availability & without any check on the drug mafia have been found the main reasons. In Lahore and Islamabad, 50% of educational institutions are facing this problem as one out of every 10 colleges/university student is addicted (Qasim, 2018). UN Office on Drugs and Crime reported that an estimated 6.7 million of the population in Pakistan use drugs and 4 million of these are addicts. Cannabis (charas) and heroin being the most commonly used drugs (Wikipedia). This shows the severity of the problem. Under Pakistani law shop owners cannot legally sell drugs, even cigarettes to individuals below 18 years of age (Masood, Sahar & Khan, 2016) on the contrary, illicit drugs (soft as well as hard) are openly sold by shop owners, street vendors, etc. It has been widely said that drug suppliers tend to find ways to get around the law, but the point is that they can only get around the law when the law is being compromised by the law enforcers.

Journal of the American Dental Association conducted a study and identified that consumption of all these soft drugs leads to oral submucous fibrosis (OSMF) and oral cancer. OSMF is a malignant oral cavity that is not only long-lasting but destructive, as mouth becomes very firm and ultimately jaw movement stops. Asthma, hypertension, distorted speech, enhanced sensitivity to heat, cold and spice, tooth decay is the injurious effect of chewing soft drugs (Garg, Chaturvedi, Mishra, Datta, 2015). Another cause of the growing problem of illicit drugs among children is not discussed at home nor in school. The detailed understanding of drug abuse is missing at all levels. On the government level proposing legislation to test the students for drugs will not prove to be a successful measure in its

deterrence, instead, it will demoralize the children as their privacy will be compromised and will bring insult not only for them but on their families. This will be very tarnishing for their overall well-being and will probably have the opposite consequences. Therefore, proposed Drug testing Act of 2018 for annual testing of students at Islamabad universities & colleges is unlikely to stop the boost (Moiz & Zeb, 2019).

Further, it is not practically possible to have such a kind of huge investment in laboratories for confirmation and reconfirmation on the range of drugs. If legislation has to be designed for curbing drugs abuse, then, first of all, it needs to be recognized as a national problem which is targeting the future of the country and should be included in the school curriculum, which will provide thorough information about different hazardous drugs, its fatal psychological and physical implications and how it will have a distorting effect on their growth and development. Children are walking in the footsteps of their predecessors, who have communicated well to their kith & kin the beneficial & healthy effects of these soft drugs. 40% of the Karachiites use these drugs and it has also been reported that after breast & lung cancer the oral cancer is the third most common type of cancer found in tobacco and pan/gutka chewer (Niaz et al., 2017).

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

Deh Landi, a rural area of Malir district, consists of many goths/villages, and the drug abuse is rampant in these villages. State of affairs of few villages has been considered with the help of students (Pashambay Goth, Saleh Muhammad, Koohi Goth, Greebabad, etc). Name of Goths in Deh Landi: Wali Muhammad Goth & Faqir Goth, Pashambay Goth, Kuda Baksh, Khudad Colony, Nooruddin Bagh (Seth Bagh), Saleh Muhammad Goth, Gareeabad, Koohi Goth, Rehmat Bagh, Agha Bagh, Bait Ullah Goth, JamKanda, Shireen Khan Goth, Pir Sirhindi Goth, and Bin Qasim Town (Subdivision of Malir District): Population Census 2017: 247,141 (<https://www.citypopulation.de/php/pakistan-karachi.php>). Ten Students of Malir University (MU) were selected through purposive sampling. The respondents (the students) have closely observed the prevalence of drug abuse among children, peers, kith & kin in their surroundings. They provided the information that how widespread is the dependence on the soft drug among families and how frequent is the use of hard drugs in the overall community (youth as well as adult). Further articles were searched through search engine 'Google' by using the term 'Drugs', 'Hookah', 'Drug abuse', 'Sheesha', etc. The data was collected with the help of interviews & open-ended questionnaires, and the results were evaluated through thematic analysis.

Research Tool

An open-ended questionnaire was designed as the interview protocol and the factors were assessed behind the extensive use of drug abuse (soft as well as hard) among children through the following research questions.

Research Questions

- What are the reasons that the children in rural areas of Malir district are becoming drug addicts?
- What kinds of drugs are more common among these children?
- How do they get access to drugs? Who provides drugs?
- How the families are being affected due to the presence of an addict in the family?

Results

Based on the research questions the result are drawn and discussed on the following themes.

Theme 1

Reasons for drug addiction among children in rural areas of Malir district

Answer

- Absence of proper supervision due to the defective family system, in which proper care and emotional feelings of the children are not being addressed and they feel neglected and being left out.
- Pressure from friends & peers who do drugs. As being weak and felt abandoned and to avoid mockery children get trapped.
- Easy availability.
- Low costs of drugs.
- Lack of awareness about the consequences of using drugs.
- Myths like drugs make one confident, get one focused, turn on moods, etc.

Theme 2

What kinds of drugs are more common among children?

Answer

- Among soft drugs, Chalia, Supari, Gutka, Mawa, Zarda, cigarettes are commonly used.
- Among hard drugs, Sheesha, Cannabis (Charas or marijuana), Heroin, Cocaine are mostly consumed.

Theme 3

How do they get access to drugs? Who provides drugs?

Answer

- Drugs are openly and freely being sold, street vendors, shopkeepers, and peers who are addicted to drugs.

Theme 4

How the families are being affected due to the presence of an addict in the family?

Answer

- The drug addiction not only destroys the victim but victimizes the whole family as the harmony which is the most important factor for the well-being and development of any person is taken away. Addicts more often get into a fight not only with the family members but with peers as well as with neighbours. They, steal money to fulfill their needs not only from home but also barge into neighbour's houses. Drug users become a stigma or considered one due to which family loses their respect among the community and looking down upon by relatives, neighbours and those in their surroundings. This form of social boycott further shattered them psychologically and drags them into insecurity and hopelessness.
- The economic breakdown comes with drug addiction as male members are commonly the bread earners; their association with drugs brings the family to the edge of starvation. A psychological trauma family suffers with, is they lose the self-esteem and confidence despite the fact they are not the one who is addicted but the presence of an addict drags them into bleakness, and the fear of mockery & insult (which they often face) is a hanging sword which keeps them distracted and disturbed round the clock.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

While discussing the problems of rural areas of Deh Landi with the student, it has been brought to light that drugs of various types are very common among children which have not only kept them away from educational institutions but also given rise to other social problems. Children who get involved in drugs at an early age will develop an addiction as compared to the people who start using it as an adult. The addiction gets started from chewing soft tobaccos & smoking a cigarette and then gradually moves to hashish, and then onwards to Samad bond and Glue, and finally jumping to heroin usage and injecting.

Drug addiction is not an individual issue but has become a national issue, as it leads to the degeneration of the socio-economic character of the individuals, their families, and the nation as a whole. The encouraging attitude of the community towards the utilization of soft drugs has immensely paved the way for hard drug consumption without understanding the damaging effects on their mind and body. This attitude has attracted the young children towards it, considering it favorable to health as that what they have inherited from their predecessors.

Surprisingly every house has a tradition of Hookah snuffing, which is in practice for more than 400 years in the sub-continent region. The pioneer of Hookah Smoking Hakim Abdul Fath, a physician during the time of Emperor Akbar, believed on a perception that the negative effects of the tobacco get reduced when passes through water (Anjum, Ahmed, & Ashfaq, 2007), on the other it the cooling effects of the water prop up the formation of ultrafine (pollutants) particles & sugar derivatives (Science Daily, 2017).

One of the area residents also notified that Hookah smoking among males and females is a family norm and without it, life seemed to be incomplete. One of the students told us that every man and women of particularly Baloch origin use Hookah tobacco and while giving the example she said that once her father asked her mother to leave inhaling Hookah due to risk of children falling victim to it, but she refused categorically, as she feels that leaving the habit will bring digestion problem as well as stress to her. Even every guest is being entertained by offering Hookah tobacco in the rural areas just as tea/coffee being offered to the visitors in other parts of the country, without understanding what depressing effects on health and well-being it brings.

Hookah smoking passes on a higher quantity of injurious chemicals to users, such as nicotine, and generates a large quantity of carbon monoxide, which is produced due to the burning of charcoal to heat the tobacco in the bowl and further lead to addiction of tobacco .Further, heaviness, metabolic syndrome, diabetes and dyslipidaemia (elevated lipids in the blood such as cholesterol, fat, etc) are the few symptoms of Hookah smoking (Soflaei et al, 2018 & Shabbir, A, 2019). Nowadays youth has been targeted with another form of the drug, known as Sheesha, which is a modern form of Hookah Tobacco. A centuries-old tradition mostly found in the Eastern Mediterranean region (Savul, 2017). The tobacco is placed in the tobacco bowl and the smoke passes through water before it is inhaled through the mouthpiece. This addiction is available in many different flavors in a sweetened form and the saga behind it is that is non-addictive with a negligible level of nicotine. This misconception has led to an increase of Sheesha users in great number as for them they have left the

injurious habit of smoking which led to cancer. They are naive enough to understand the fact that longer sessions of Sheesha smoking mean the volume of smoke being inhaled is 100 to 200 times greater than smoking a cigarette and the risk of developing cancer is much higher than before (Savul, 2018).

Another health hazard of Sheesha smoking is the risk of spreading tuberculosis, which is a transmissible disease, and the factor most probably responsible for its increase is the sharing of the single mouthpiece being frequently shared between the users. In Koohi Goth a child as young as 10 years of age is found among Sheesha smokers and it is quite common in teenagers as well as in adolescence (age group falls in the early twenties). The irony is that it has parental approval as Hookah smoking is perceived a family tradition (Yousufzai, 2017).

An added source of drug addiction among children was found to be social media. With the inception of the internet and later on social media children have gained access to other cultures and societies. Most youngsters have started using drugs because they romanticized the west and strived to follow their culture of fun-loving and found different types of drugs the source of joy and delight, while some start using it out of inquisitiveness and for pleasure-seeking.

It has been observed that drug addiction is quite common in low-income groups that reside in slum areas, as due to abject poverty parents cannot afford to send their children to schools. It has also been noticed that most of the families' fathers either busy in making both ends and get back late in the evening and are incapable to meet the family requirements and do not give quality time to family. Whereas mothers are overburdened with household chores and are unable to attend their children which creates a sense of insecurity, lack of warmth, and poor communication within the family itself. All these factors were the main contributors to the prevalence of drug consumption among children. Under these circumstances and in the absence of any proper supervision, the children get manipulated by bad company and are vulnerable to get attracted to different intoxicants drugs and other crimes.

Another factor of children addicted to drugs found to be family troubles that make the child non-communicative and highly disturbed. Parents due to their fights do not give proper attention and care to the children and their emotional and psychological needs are compromised which makes them isolated and distracted. All these have a depressing effect on them and more as they switch to drug abuse for mental peace and relaxation. In these villages mostly joint family system prevails, in which three to four families reside in the same house, and in each mohalla (street/ward of the village) seven houses are located and out of which

three houses are afflicted with drugs abuse. One of the residents appraised that at the backyard of his house narcotics are being openly sold and purchased and even drug addicts are seen lying on the streets under the influence of drugs. Another student of MU informed us that his mother chews Guttka & Mawa all day long, and they also develop the habit as chewing soft drugs were not considered bad.

Now in an environment where consumption of these soft drugs is considered a social and cultural habit, where a father, mother, brother, uncle or aunt, grandparents, school fellows are inclined towards it and the dependency is increasing day by day, then it is no secret that children are open to this danger unrestricted. In such a climate there is a strong possibility that children probably start using these soft drugs at a very early age and then gradually move on to hard drugs like opium, charas, cocaine, heroin, etc. Take an example of Rehri Goth which has become the breeding ground of drug addicts. It is the oldest coastal area of Malir District, Bin Qasim town, where mostly the inhabitants are associated with seafood trade. It has become a center of drugs even though many government and charity schools as well as non-governmental organizations are fully operational and working for area improvement. It is the area where children leave their education without completing it and get involved in narcotics and it has been claimed by drug users that half of the population being dubbed into narcotics (Yousafzai, 2017).

Illegal drugs are available in every corner of the Malir District most commonly on Chai dhabas (tea stalls), dubboo playing areas, Katcha hotels, where children of age b/w 10 to 20, are found in great numbers. The easy availability of drugs in every nook and corner and the network of drug providers, and drug smugglers openly trading these narcotics to area residents give rise to the suspicion that the illicit trade of drugs has thrived under the patronage of the Police. Area residents were of the view that law forcing agencies instead of curbing the menace has become a party to it; otherwise, this illicit trade would not have grown so easily and openly.

Conclusion

A menace which has engulfed the whole world, and which is growing at an alarming pace as each day passes by, which has adverse phycological, behavioral, physical, economic and emotional effects on the fabric of the society, which has propounded negative influences on the lives of the individuals as well as on their families leading towards unimaginable and widespread social problems, need to be declared an epidemic. An epidemic with 247 million drug users worldwide (<https://www.michaelshouse.com/drug-addiction/the-statistics>), and its harmful highest association among young people as well as vulnerabilities to various age

group need prompt attention. Research-based & comprehensive (catering preventive, informative and legislative areas) programs at countrywide and worldwide level, easily adaptable and responsive to regional and cultural norms to be adopted with an absolute commitment (national & global), with proper screening and assessing tools to mitigate this international concern is of absolute requirement.

Recommendations

The study suggested awareness of parents highlighting the importance of parental care, support, and guidance to develop self-confidence and self-esteem among children to protect them from any danger.

The proactive and conducive environment at school also can prevent children from any form of drug abuse. Furthermore, to inculcate drug education in the school curriculum.

Workshops at the community level need to be conducted to provide drug education to parents & the general public about drug types, their negative effects physical and psychological, and how to save the children from this menace.

The active participation of civil society and media is also important to work towards drug reduction.

The study has emphasized to change the attitude of the community towards the consumption of illegal soft drugs by considering it a cultural norm by providing them the knowledge of its serious negative influences.

Last but not least the change of attitude of the general public. The victims of drug abuse not to considered criminals or junkies, instead of as patients who need our sympathy and positive gestures to get out of this curse.

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