

## EXPLORING THE EPIDEMIC OF DRUG ADDICTION IN KASHMIR: UNDERSTANDING ITS ROOT CAUSES

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### Abstract

Drug addiction, a complex and deeply entrenched issue, has emerged as a global challenge transcending borders and affecting diverse communities. This paper delves into the multifaceted nature of drug addiction, exploring its physiological, psychological, and social dimensions. From the initial allure to the devastating consequences, it examines the factors that drive individuals towards substance abuse and the subsequent impact on their health, relationships, and society at large. Through this exploration, the paper sheds light on the importance of comprehensive prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation strategies, as well as the need for empathy and understanding in addressing this pressing concern. Ultimately, it advocates for a collective effort to break the cycle of addiction and provide pathways to recovery and healing.

**Keywords:** *Drug addiction, Drug abuse, Youth, Socio-economic, Psychological factor, Combat.*

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### Introduction

In the contemporary world, we confront an array of challenges such as poverty, corruption, underdevelopment, and unemployment. These issues collectively give rise to a burgeoning predicament: the rapid expansion of drug addiction. Over time, the spectrum of drugs available has increased dramatically, encompassing substances like Narcotic Analgesics, Morphine, Opium, Heroin, Brown Sugar, Pethidine, Stimulants like Cocaine and Amphetamines, Depressants including Alcohol, Barbiturates, Diazepam, as well as Hallucinogens like LSD, Mescaline, Phencyclidine, Psilocybin, and Cannabis variants like Ganja, Charas, and Hash Oil, which are now frequently misused. When considering global statistics on drug-related matters, the industry boasts a staggering turnover of \$500 billion, ranking it as the third largest global enterprise after petroleum and arms trading. Approximately 190 million people worldwide consume various forms of drugs (Carballo and Nerukar, 2001). India, too, finds itself entrapped in the vicious cycle of drug abuse, with the number of individuals falling victim to addiction increasing steadily. According to a report by Drugs (2004), India has one million registered heroin addicts, with unofficial estimates suggesting the figure could be as high as five million.

Geographical proximity has wielded a significant influence on matters related to drug production, cultivation, trafficking, and the propagation of substance abuse on a global scale. The area known as the Golden Triangle, spanning the expansive territories of Southeast Asia, encompasses the rugged mountainous zones of Northern Laos, Eastern Burma, and Thailand, serving as a prolific source of Opium production. The involvement with Opiates isn't solely driven by economic incentives and societal acceptance within the hill communities of this region; the Opium trade also fuels armed conflicts, with drugs bartered for military weaponry and ammunition. Similarly, the contiguous stretch of land comprising Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, recognized as the Golden Crescent, assumes a pivotal role in drug trade, influenced by apparent political and economic motivations. Over the past 25 years, the global illicit drug industry has expanded to a point where its annual revenues approach nearly \$300 billion, surpassing even the retail value of the worldwide oil trade. The World Health Organization (WHO) underscored in a report that drug usage is progressively becoming a concern in both developed and developing nations. Notably, alongside the United States, countries like Japan and Sweden are grappling with substantial waves of amphetamine abuse.

As per the 2008 World Drug Report by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, approximately 208 million individuals, which accounts for nearly 5% of the global population aged 15 to 64, engage in the

consumption of illegal drugs. Among these, 162 million individuals misuse cannabis (marijuana or hashish), rendering it the most widespread prohibited substance. Subsequently, there are instances of abuse with amphetamine type stimulants, opiates, and cocaine. Notably, 35 million individuals employ amphetamine type stimulants, while 16 million are opiate users, and 13 million resort to cocaine.

Within Europe, recent surveys targeting individuals aged 15 to 16 reveal a variance in cannabis use, ranging from below 10% to over 40%. Particularly high rates are reported by Czech Republic teens at 44%, followed by Ireland at 39%, the UK at 38%, and France at 38%. In Spain and the United Kingdom, cocaine consumption among the 15 to 16 age group stands at 4% to 6%. The prevalence of cocaine use among young people has experienced an uptick in Denmark, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, Norway, and France.

### **Drug abuse in Kashmir**

A study funded by the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) reveals that there exist 70,000 individuals grappling with drug addiction exclusively in the Kashmir division, with 4,000 of them being women. Recent research underscores that among the students in Kashmir, 65 to 70% are ensnared in drug addiction, encompassing gateway substances, and approximately 26% of female students are affected. According to statistics from the Government Psychiatric Disease Hospital (GPDH), a staggering 90% of those who abuse substances fall within the age bracket of 17 to 35 years, having experienced drug addiction at some point in their lives. The allure of Kashmir to tourists and migrant laborers further amplifies the prevalence of diverse drug usage among addicts. The ready availability and lack of parental oversight contribute to the common usage of gateway drugs like cigarettes, Paan, and Gutka among young males aged 12 to 15 years.

### **Causes of drug addiction in Kashmir**

Drug addiction has become a concerning and complex issue in the region of Kashmir. This problem has its roots in a combination of socio-economic, political, and psychological factors. The ongoing conflict, lack of economic opportunities, and limited access to quality education and healthcare have contributed to the vulnerability of the population to drug abuse. The region's proximity to major drug-producing countries further exacerbates the problem.

The allure of escapism from the harsh realities of life in a conflict-ridden environment often drives individuals towards substance abuse. The availability of drugs, including heroin, cannabis, and prescription medications, has created a vicious cycle of addiction that affects people from various age groups and backgrounds. The lack of awareness about the dangers of drug abuse and limited addiction treatment facilities worsen the situation. Furthermore, the disruption of traditional societal structures and values due to the conflict has led to a breakdown in community support systems. This has left many individuals isolated, making them more susceptible to falling into the clutches of addiction. The psychological trauma caused by the conflict can also contribute to self-medication through drugs, as people attempt to cope with their emotional pain.

### **Combating Drug Addiction in Kashmir**

The issue of drug addiction in the picturesque region of Kashmir has gained significant attention. The tranquil beauty of the valley has unfortunately been marred by the devastating impact of drug abuse, affecting individuals, families, and communities alike. However, amidst this challenging situation, there has been a growing realization of the need for collective action to break the chains of addiction and restore hope for a better tomorrow.

The efforts to combat drug addiction in Kashmir reflect a multi-faceted approach that encompasses healthcare, education, social support, and community involvement. Various stakeholders, including governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, medical professionals, and local communities, have united their efforts to address this complex issue.

**Awareness and Education:** Initiatives have been launched to increase awareness about the dangers of drug abuse among both young people and adults. Schools, colleges, and community centers have become platforms for spreading knowledge about the physical, psychological, and social consequences of addiction. Educational campaigns emphasize the importance of making informed choices and seeking help when needed.

**Preventive Measures:** To prevent the initiation of drug use, efforts have focused on creating safe spaces for recreation and skill development for the youth. Sports, arts, and cultural activities offer healthy alternatives that keep the young minds engaged and less inclined towards substance abuse.

**Counseling and Treatment:** Establishing accessible and affordable counseling and treatment centers has been a priority. These centers not only provide professional help to individuals struggling with addiction but also offer support to families coping with the challenges of having addicted members.

**Community Support:** The close-knit nature of Kashmiri society plays a crucial role in the efforts to combat drug addiction. Community-driven interventions involve elders, religious leaders, and local influencers who contribute to destigmatizing addiction and encourage affected individuals to seek help without fear of social exclusion.

**Law Enforcement and Rehabilitation:** Authorities have been working to disrupt the supply chains of illicit substances while also focusing on rehabilitating individuals who have fallen victim to addiction. This dual approach aims to curtail the availability of drugs and offer a chance for recovery and reintegration.

**Long-Term Solutions:** Recognizing that breaking the cycle of addiction requires a sustained effort; initiatives have been launched to improve economic opportunities, education, and overall quality of life. By addressing the underlying factors that contribute to addiction, these efforts aim to create an environment where individuals are less vulnerable to turning to substances for solace.

### Conclusion

The issue of drug addiction in Kashmir presents a intricate network of challenges necessitating urgent attention. Socio-economic limitations, the trauma induced by conflict, and disrupted social frameworks have collectively contributed to a troubling upsurge in substance abuse. Insufficient awareness, restricted entry to high-quality treatment facilities, and the susceptibility of young individuals to gateway drugs all exacerbate the gravity of the situation. Dealing with this crisis demands a comprehensive strategy involving awareness drives, improved mental health services, community involvement, and economic prospects. Drug addiction in Kashmir is a deeply rooted problem that is intricately linked to the region's socio-economic challenges and the ongoing conflict. Tackling this issue requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses the various contributing factors and offers support, education, and rehabilitation for those affected by addiction. Moreover, there is a need to focus on restoring social support systems and addressing the fundamental triggers of addiction. Only through a united and thorough endeavor can Kashmir envision overcoming the menace of drug addiction, thus paving the path toward a more prosperous and healthier future.

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