SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG PRISONERS IN INDIAN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES: AN EMPIRICAL SURVEY AT MODEL CENTRAL JAIL, KANDA, SHIMLA

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Abstract

This research study investigates substance abuse among inmates in Indian correctional facilities, conducted at Model Central Jail, Kanda, Shimla, involving 200 prisoners. Descriptive statistics reveal a distinguished prevalence of substance use, with alcohol, cannabis, and heroin being the primary substances abused. Socio-demographic factors such as age, education level, and criminal history show significant associations with substance use patterns. Chi-square analysis further elucidates the relationships between these factors and substance use, highlighting the influence of age, education, and criminal background. The findings underscore the necessity of Government and Non-Government Organizations for interventions to address substance use disorders among incarcerated individuals in Indian prisons, with implications for public health and rehabilitation efforts.

Keywords: Substance Use, Convicted Prisoners, Indian Correctional Facilities, Prevalence, Patterns, Correlates, Empirical Survey, Model Central Jail, Kanda, Shimla.

1. INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse among prisoners presents significant challenges to correctional systems worldwide, contributing to a myriad of health, social, and criminal justice issues. In India, the prevalence of substance use within the prison population is a growing concern among inmates charged under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Substance abuse in correctional facilities not only exacerbates existing health problems but also hinders rehabilitation efforts and increases the risk of recidivism upon release. Previous studies have documented the widespread nature of substance use among inmates, indicating a need for targeted interventions. For instance, research has shown varying prevalence rates of substance use among prisoners, with alcohol, cannabis, heroin, and prescription opioids being the most commonly abused substances (Pradhan et al., 2017; Gupta et al., 2016). These studies also highlight significant associations between substance use and socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, education level, and criminal history (Pradhan et al., 2017; Jindal & Singh, 2018).

Despite the existing literature, there is limited research focusing specifically on convicted prisoners in Indian correctional facilities, particularly those charged under

the NDPS Act. To address this gap, our study combines a review of existing empirical research with an empirical survey conducted at Model Central Jail, Kanda, Shimla. This survey included 200 prisoners, with charges ranging from NDPS Act violations to other offences.

2. PREVALENCE AND PATTERNS OF SUBSTANCE USE

Substance use among inmates in Indian prisons, including Himachal Pradesh, shows significant regional variations and presents unique challenges (ICMR, 2019). Detailed statistics from the Himachal Pradesh Prison Department reveal that substance abuse is a major issue, with approximately 40% of the prison population linked to drug cases (HPPD, 2020; Sharma, 2023). This trend reflects the growing spread of the deadly menace in the hill state, with a high number of arrests and the courts' tough stance on granting bail.

Studies indicate that substance abuse among prisoners in Himachal Pradesh is influenced by various socio-demographic factors such as age, education, and employment status. For instance, younger inmates and those with lower educational levels are more prone to substance use (Sharma & Kaur, 2018; Sengupta et al., 2015). Additionally, socio-economic and environmental factors specific to Himachal Pradesh contribute to the high rates of substance abuse (Chandel & Sharma, 2016).

- **Health Implications**

The health consequences of substance abuse among prisoners are profound, affecting both physical and mental health. Substance abuse exacerbates existing health issues and leads to new health problems, including psychiatric disorders (Thakur & Lal, 2019; Rawat & Kumar, 2016). Studies focusing on psychiatric morbidity among substance abusers in Himachal Pradesh highlight the co-occurrence of mental health disorders, necessitating integrated treatment approaches (Nagpal & Sharma, 2019).

The publication by the World Health Organization outlines the health challenges faced by prisoners, emphasizing the need for effective intervention strategies to address substance abuse and mental health issues (WHO, 2014). These challenges are particularly relevant in Himachal Pradesh, where overcrowded prisons further complicate the delivery of healthcare services (Sharma, 2023).

- **Socio-Demographic Factors**

Research highlights the role of socio-demographic factors in substance abuse among prisoners. For example, studies have shown that urban populations in Himachal Pradesh exhibit specific patterns of drug abuse that are reflective of broader socio-economic trends (Sengupta et al., 2015). Similarly, studies focusing on adolescents and rural populations in Himachal Pradesh provide insights into the variations in substance abuse across different demographic groups (Kumar & Kumar, 2019; Singh & Sharma, 2017).

This study investigates the role of socio-economic factors in substance abuse, specifically focusing on Himachal Pradesh, which can provide valuable context for understanding the drivers of substance abuse among prisoners in the region (Jindal & Singh, 2018). While focusing on the elderly population, another study examines the pattern of substance abuse in Himachal Pradesh, providing unique perspectives that

may contribute to understanding substance abuse among older prisoners (Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2018).

- **Intervention Strategies**

Existing de-addiction programs in Himachal Pradesh prisons have shown limited effectiveness, prompting calls for improvement. Evaluations of these programs suggest that comprehensive approaches, integrating psychological support and vocational training, are necessary to address the root causes of substance abuse (Sood & Chauhan, 2018). The National Institute of Social Defence's report reviews various treatment programs implemented in Indian prisons, including those in Himachal Pradesh, highlighting best practices and areas for improvement (NISD, 2019).

This research explores the prevalence and patterns of substance use among prison inmates in specific regions, offering relevant data applicable to understanding substance abuse in Himachal Pradesh prisons (Pradhan et al., 2017). Although conducted in Central India, a study provides valuable insights into substance abuse among jail inmates, offering comparative data and perspectives that can enhance the understanding of similar issues in Himachal Pradesh prisons (Gupta et al., 2016).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focuses on empirical studies related to substance abuse in the prison population, with a particular emphasis on the following areas:

- Prevalence of Substance Abuse in Prisons: Studies indicate high rates of substance abuse among prisoners compared to the general population. For instance, Fazel et al. (2017) found that the prevalence of substance use disorders among prisoners is significantly higher, often exceeding 50% in some regions.

- Factors Contributing to Substance Abuse: Risk factors include pre-incarceration substance use, mental health issues, peer influence within prisons, and inadequate access to treatment. Studies by Wolff et al. (2014) and Swartz et al. (2011) highlight the role of mental health disorders and social environments in exacerbating substance abuse.

- Impact on Health and Behaviour: Substance abuse leads to a range of negative outcomes, including physical health problems, exacerbation of mental health issues, and increased incidences of violence and disciplinary infractions within prisons. Research by Perry et al. (2018) and Binswanger et al. (2012) supports these findings.

- Intervention and Treatment Programs: Effective interventions include comprehensive treatment programs combining detoxification, psychological counselling, and aftercare. Programs reviewed by Chandler et al. (2009) and Mitchell et al. (2012) demonstrate varying degrees of success, often hindered by resource constraints and implementation challenges.

- Comparative studies from other regions in India provide valuable insights into substance abuse among jail inmates. For instance, research conducted in Central India and Punjab offers comparative data to enhance understanding of substance abuse issues in Himachal Pradesh (Gupta et al., 2016; Sharma & Singh, 2018;

Sachdeva & Kaur, 2018). These studies underscore the importance of tailoring intervention strategies to different prison populations' specific needs and contexts.

- Focusing on the tribal population, a study explores substance abuse patterns in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, offering insights into the unique socio-cultural factors influencing substance use in the region (Rai & Sharma, 2017). Another study investigates the psycho-social factors contributing to substance abuse among adolescents in Shimla district, Himachal Pradesh, offering insights into preventive strategies targeting youth (Chandel & Thakur, 2017).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Learning Theory guides the study, which posits that individuals learn behaviour through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. This theory, developed by Albert Bandura, suggests that behaviours, including substance use, are acquired through observing others, particularly within one's social environment. In the context of substance use among prisoners, Social Learning Theory provides a framework for understanding how inmates may develop and maintain substance use behaviours through interactions within the correctional setting. According to Social Learning Theory, the following key components influence substance use behaviour:

- Observational Learning: Inmates may observe and imitate the substance use behaviours of their peers. The likelihood of observing such behaviours is high within the prison environment, where close and constant interaction with other inmates occurs (Bandura, 1977).

- Reinforcement: The immediate effects of substance use, such as relief from stress or escape from the harsh realities of incarceration, can serve as powerful reinforcers. Positive reinforcement, such as social approval from peers who also use substances, further encourages continued use (Bandura, 1977).

- Cognitive Processes: Beliefs and attitudes towards substance use, shaped by the prison subculture and prior experiences, play a critical role. Inmates who perceive substance use as a normative or acceptable behaviour are more likely to engage in it (Bandura, 1977).

- Environmental Factors: The prison environment itself, characterized by stress, limited access to coping resources, and exposure to a subculture that may normalize substance use, contributes to the initiation and maintenance of substance use behaviours (Bandura, 1977).

Empirical studies support the applicability of Social Learning Theory to substance use in correctional settings. For example, research has found that younger inmates, who are more impressionable and likely to be influenced by peers, report higher rates of substance use (Pradhan et al., 2017). Similarly, the prison environment's role in reinforcing substance use behaviours has been highlighted in several studies (Gupta et al., 2016; Jindal & Singh, 2018).

By applying Social Learning Theory, this study seeks to understand the complex interplay of individual and environmental factors that contribute to substance use among convicted prisoners. This theoretical framework informs the development of targeted interventions that address individual behaviours and the broader social and environmental context within correctional facilities.

5. METHODOLOGY

- **Study Design**

This study employs a cross-sectional design to investigate the prevalence, patterns, and correlates of substance use among convicted prisoners in Indian correctional facilities. The study combines a review of existing empirical research with an empirical survey conducted at Model Central Jail, Kanda, Shimla.

- **Study Setting and Participants**

The empirical survey was conducted at Model Central Jail, Kanda, Shimla. The sample consisted of 200 prisoners, including both undertrial and convicted prisoners, with charges ranging from NDPS Act violations to other offences.

- **Data Collection**

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews with participants. The questionnaire included sections on socio-demographic characteristics, substance use history, types of substances used, frequency and duration of use, and associated risk factors. The survey was conducted over three months, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the inmate population at the facility.

- **Variables**

The study examined the following variables:

➢ **Dependent Variable:**

Substance Use: Measured as a dichotomous variable indicating whether the participant reported using any substances (yes/no).

➢ **Independent Variables:**

❖ Age: Categorized into age groups (e.g., 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46 and above).

❖ Gender: Male or Female.

❖ Education Level: Categorized as no formal education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education.

❖ Marital Status: Categorized as unmarried, married, divorced, or widowed.

❖ Criminal History: Including the type of offence (NDPS Act violations v. other offences) and history of prior convictions.

❖ History of Substance Abuse Treatment: Measured as a dichotomous variable (yes/no).

❖ Duration of Incarceration: Measured in months or years.

❖ Frequency of Substance Use: Categorized as never, occasionally, regularly, and frequently.

❖ Type of Substance Used: Including categories such as alcohol, cannabis, heroin, prescription opioids, and multiple substances.

❖ Psychiatric History: Presence of any diagnosed psychiatric disorders (yes/no).

❖ Peer Influence: Measured as a dichotomous variable indicating whether the participant reported peer influence as a factor in substance use (yes/no).

❖ Family History of Substance Use: Measured as a dichotomous variable indicating whether the participant has a family history of substance use (yes/no).

❖ Employment Status Before Incarceration: Categorized as employed, unemployed, or student.

❖ Income Level Before Incarceration: Categorized as low, medium, or high.

- **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample and the prevalence of substance use. Chi-square tests examined associations between substance use and the independent variables. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- **Descriptive Statistics**

  ➢ Socio-Demographic Characteristics: The sample comprised 200 prisoners from Model Central Jail, Kanda (Shimla). The demographic breakdown is as follows:

  ➢ Age: The majority of the participants were between 26-35 years old (40%), followed by 18-25 years (25%), 36-45 years (20%), and 46 and above (15%).

  ➢ Gender: Predominantly male (90%), with a smaller female representation (10%).

  ➢ Education Level: 20% had no formal education, 30% had primary education, 35% had secondary education, and 15% had higher education.

  ➢ Marital Status: 50% were unmarried, 40% married, 5% divorced, and 5% widowed.

  ➢ Criminal History: 60% were convicted under the NDPS Act, while 40% were charged with other offences.

  ➢ History of Substance Abuse Treatment: 30% reported a history of substance abuse treatment.

- **Prevalence and Patterns of Substance Use**

  ➢ Substance Use: 70% of the participants reported substance use.

  ➢ Type of Substance Used: Among users, alcohol (40%), cannabis (35%), heroin (15%), prescription opioids (5%), and multiple substances (5%) were reported.

  ➢ Frequency of Substance Use: 20% used substances occasionally, 30% regularly, and 20% frequently.

  ➢ Peer Influence: 50% of substance users indicated peer influence as a factor in their substance use.

  ➢ Family History of Substance Use: 40% of users had a family history of substance use.

  ➢ Psychiatric History: 20% had a diagnosed psychiatric disorder.

- **Chi-Square Analysis**

  ➢ Substance Use by Age: There was a significant association between age and substance use (χ^2 = 10.34, $p < 0.05$). Younger inmates (18-35 years) reported higher rates of substance use compared to older inmates (36 and above).

  ➢ Substance Use by Gender: No significant association was found between gender and substance use (χ^2 = 1.23, $p > 0.05$), indicating similar prevalence rates between male and female inmates.

  ➢ Substance Use by Education Level: Education level was significantly associated with substance use (χ^2 = 8.56, $p < 0.05$). Inmates with lower education levels (no formal education and primary education) reported higher rates of substance use.

  ➢ Substance Use by Marital Status: Marital status was not significantly associated with substance use (χ^2 = 3.14, $p > 0.05$).

  ➢ Substance Use by Type of Offense: A significant association was found between the type of offence and substance use (χ^2 = 12.47, $p < 0.05$). Inmates convicted under the NDPS Act reported higher rates of substance use.

  ➢ Substance Use by History of Substance Abuse Treatment: There was a significant association between history of substance abuse treatment and current substance use (χ^2 = 15.62, $p < 0.05$). Inmates with a history of treatment were more likely to report current substance use.

- **Discussion**

The findings from this study underscore the significant issue of substance use among prisoners in Indian correctional facilities. The high prevalence of substance uses among inmates, particularly those convicted under the NDPS Act, highlights the need for targeted interventions. The significant associations between substance use and factors such as age, education level, type of offence, and history of substance abuse treatment are consistent with previous research findings (Pradhan et al., 2017; Gupta et al., 2016).

➢ **Age and Substance Use:**

Younger inmates are more susceptible to substance use, likely due to greater peer influence and higher levels of risk-taking behaviour. This aligns with the Social Learning Theory, which posits that behaviours are learned through observation and imitation within one's social environment (Bandura, 1977).

➢ **Education and Substance Use:**

Lower education levels were associated with higher substance use. This may be attributed to a lack of awareness about the harmful effects of substances and limited access to alternative coping mechanisms.

➢ **Type of Offense and Substance Use:**

Inmates convicted under the NDPS Act exhibited higher rates of substance use, likely reflecting their pre-incarceration involvement in drug-related activities. This suggests a need for specialized rehabilitation programs tailored to the needs of this subgroup.

➢ **History of Substance Abuse Treatment:**

The association between a history of treatment and current substance use indicates potential gaps in the effectiveness of previous interventions. This highlights the need for continuous and comprehensive substance abuse treatment programs within correctional facilities.

Overall, the findings suggest that a complex interplay of individual and environmental factors influences substance use among prisoners. Interventions should be multifaceted, addressing the individual behaviours and the broader social and environmental context within correctional facilities.

7. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed to address substance use among prisoners:

- **Enhanced Screening and Assessment**: Implement comprehensive screening and assessment procedures to identify inmates with substance use issues upon entry. Regularly monitor and evaluate substance use behaviours throughout the incarceration period.

- **Clinical Legal Education**: Enhancing clinical legal education involves integrating substance abuse cases into law school clinics, providing practical experience. Collaborations with prisons and rehabilitation centers allow direct legal assistance to inmates, preparing students with expertise in substance abuse laws and rehabilitation (Rahul, S. K. et. al. 2023; Yadav, R. K. et. al. 2023).

- **Awareness programmes through technological advancements:** Utilizing technology for awareness includes developing digital resources like interactive courses and podcasts to educate inmates and the public. Social media counters misinformation, reaching vulnerable populations effectively. Mobile apps offer accessible information and support services, ensuring comprehensive approaches to addressing substance abuse in prisons (Kumar, M. et. al, 2024).

- **Targeted Rehabilitation Programs**: Develop and implement targeted substance abuse rehabilitation programs tailored to the needs of younger inmates and those with lower education levels. Include educational components that raise awareness about the risks of substance use and provide training in alternative coping strategies.

- **Specialized Interventions for NDPS Act Offenders**: Design specialized intervention programs for inmates convicted under the NDPS Act, focusing on reducing recidivism and promoting long-term recovery. Provide vocational training and employment support to facilitate successful reintegration into society.

- **Peer Support and Mentoring**: Establish peer support groups and mentoring programs within the prison to provide positive role models and reduce the influence of substance-using peers. Engage former inmates who have successfully overcome substance use issues to act as mentors.

- **Continuous and Integrated Treatment**: Ensure continuity of care by integrating prison-based substance abuse treatment programs with community-based services

post-release. Develop aftercare plans that include follow-up support and monitoring to prevent relapse.

- **Mental Health Services:** Expand access to mental health services within the prison to address co-occurring psychiatric disorders that may contribute to substance use. Provide training for prison staff to recognize and manage substance use and mental health issues.

- **Family Involvement**: Involve families in rehabilitation to provide additional support and encourage a supportive home environment upon release. Offer family counselling and education programs to address substance use issues collectively.

By implementing these suggestions, correctional facilities can create a more supportive and rehabilitative environment that addresses the root causes of substance use and promotes healthier outcomes for inmates.

8. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the critical issue of substance usage among prisoners in Indian correctional facilities, with a specific focus on inmates at Model Central Jail, Kanda, Shimla. The findings indicate a high prevalence of substance use among this population, particularly among younger inmates, those with lower education levels, and individuals convicted under the NDPS Act. The significant association between substance use and a history of substance abuse treatment suggests potential shortcomings in existing rehabilitation programs. The application of Social Learning Theory helps to understand how environmental factors and peer influences within the prison setting contribute to substance use behaviours. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions that consider inmates' socio-demographic and criminological profiles.

No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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