

EMERGING HEALTH ISSUES AMONG NARCOTIC ADDICTS - A Survey Study



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ABSTRACT

Narcotic addiction is a recent phenomenon in Asian countries. In Sri Lanka, Heroin, cannabis, opium and intoxicants like liquor are among the mostly used narcotics and have been increasing over the last decade. Currently, over two hundred fifty thousand people of Sri Lanka are addicted to drugs. By using those drugs, people are affected with various mental, physical, and social difficulties. The research work has undertaken the task to find out health issues that are prevailing among drug addicts. The study used primary data drawn from a purposive sample of hundred people who were drug addicts belonging to both genders. The research is adopted as a descriptive cross sectional study through an interviewer-administered questionnaire. The data revealed that youth and the middle aged people were most vulnerable to drug addiction. Physical disorders inflicting the drug addicts were high blood pressure, gastritis, bronchial asthma, skin diseases and majority were affected with neurological disorders.. Furthermore, mental disorders suffered by the drug addicts were anxiety, depression, impairment of memory power and Phobia etc. In addition, the main causative factors that drove people to take drugs were the influence caused by friends, easy availability of drugs, the urge to forget worries, for entertainment, and to increase creative instincts etc. With a view to minimize the menace of drug addiction, an awareness program targeting the youth and middle aged people informing the various social and physical disorders associated with drugs is being initiated through rehabilitation centers across the island .

Keywords :

Drug Addiction,
Physical and Mental Disorders,
Causes,
Narcotics

I. INTRODUCTION

Consuming liquor, smoking and usage of other narcotics are harmful to the human body. By using these narcotics, people are afflicted with physical and mental diseases which cause various social problems. The research conducted by the world Health Organization reveals that throughout the world, during a span of one year, five million people die by smoking while 1.8 million people die by consuming narcotics. In addition, more than 13 million people worldwide use opium¹.

Recent studies have shown that heroin abuse has spread in Asia, both socially and geographically, involving countries like India & Sri Lanka². Further, heroin addiction is a current phenomenon in Sri Lanka. A record reveals that 70 percent of the employed population has heroin addiction and it has interfered with their ability to work³.

Regarding the narcotic drugs usage in Sri Lankan society, it could be stated that Drugs include liquor (legally not licensed), tobacco, drugs containing opium, ganja (cannabis), heroin and other intoxicating drugs that are widely used. The drug problem has created a social and economical instability in Sri Lanka and last year, 79,378 suspects were arrested for drug related offences⁴. It has been found out that usage of drugs in criminal activities in Sri Lanka by drug addicts is a major causative factor for the rapid increase in criminal acts⁵.

With the rise in drug abuse, people in the society face numerous hardships such as being victims to criminal activities, vehicle accidents, poverty, collapsing of family establishments as well as physical and mental disabilities⁶.

A survey conducted in the year 2003 about drug addicts seeking treatment at various centers (Western, Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Acupuncture, Rehabilitation centers and others) reveal that a total number of four thousand six hundred and seventy two persons sought treatment⁷.

In view of the above, research has been focused to identify causative factors for narcotic addiction and find out physical and mental health issues among drug addicts.

II. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study population consists of one hundred (100) narcotic addicts of both sexes aged of 15years and above were selected under the purposive sampling method. This survey study utilized descriptive, longitudinal, cross sectional data and respondents received at Ayurveda hospitals, rehabilitation centers, wellikada prison while, and some respondents were from local community. Data has been collected through interviewer-administered questionnaire pertaining to the physical and mental health using Hutchison’s clinical methods⁸. Both descriptive and univariate analysis are employed. The respondents received areas are given in the table - 1.

| Sl.No | Locations | Number of Males | Number of Females |
|--------------|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Ayurveda Hospitals (Borella, Meegoda, Kuruneagala, Anuradhapura) | 34 | - |
| 2 | Center for Treatment of drugs and rehabilitation Seth Sevana, Koswatta. | 08 | - |
| 3 | State prevention Home Meth Sevana, Gangodawila | - | 21 |
| 4 | Welikada Prison (women Section) | - | 17 |
| 5 | Local areas (Wellampitiya, Rajagiriya & Negombo) | 13 | 07 |
| Total | | 55 | 45 |

III. OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

In the present study a total number of hundred drug addicts were enrolled of which fifty five were male while, forty five were female. Maximum number of drug addicts i.e.44% belonged to the age group of 20- 39 years and a majority of them were labourers (60%) and 55% were belonged to low socio economic group. Highest number of drug addicts (70%) found with both non - schooling and primary educational backgrounds and maximum were found from Colombo district. Different types of narcotics used by drug addicts are given below (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Distribution of Narcotics used by drug addicts (N=100)

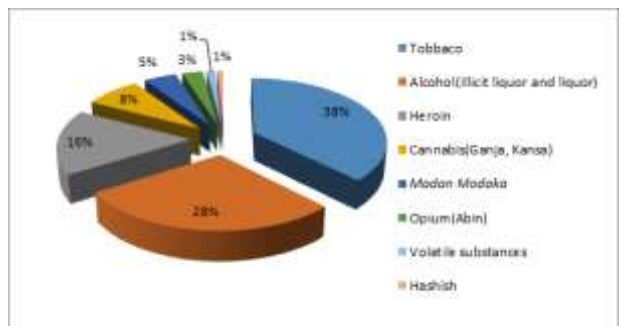


Table: 2 – Distribution of Narcotics used by drug addicts

| Sl. No | Type of Narcotic | Number of persons used | Prevalence % |
|--------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Tobacco | 91 | 91 |
| 2 | Alcohol (Illicit liquor and liquor) | 69 | 69 |
| 3 | Heroin | 40 | 40 |
| 4 | Cannabis (Ganja, Kansa) | 19 | 19 |
| 5 | Madan Modaka | 11 | 11 |
| 6 | Opium (Abin) | 07 | 7 |
| 7 | Volatile substances | 03 | 3 |
| 8 | Hashish | 02 | 2 |

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of drug addicts detected by districts

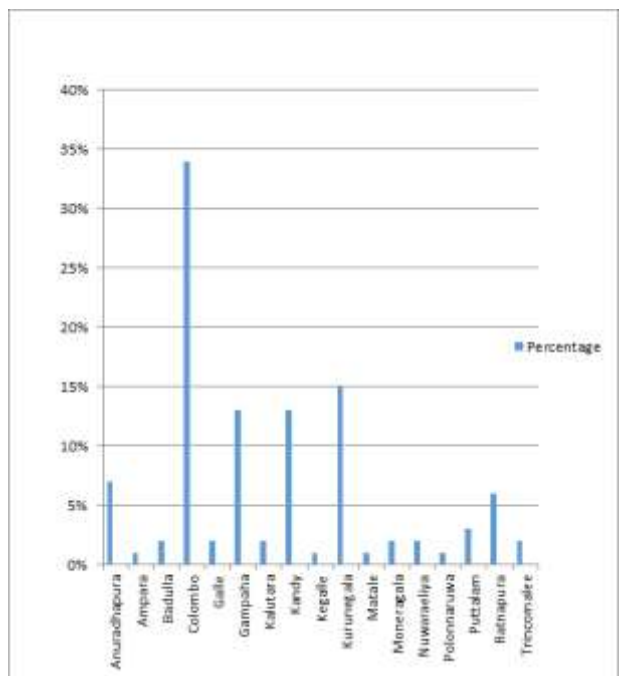


Table :2 Percentage distribution of drug addicts detected by districts (N=100)

| Districts Name | No of drug addicts | Percentage |
|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| Anuradhapura | 07 | 07% |
| Ampara | 01 | 01% |
| Badulla | 02 | 02% |
| Colombo | 34 | 34% |
| Galle | 02 | 02% |
| Gampaha | 13 | 13% |
| Kalutara | 02 | 02% |
| Kandy | 13 | 13% |
| Kegalle | 01 | 01% |
| Kurunegala | 15 | 15% |
| Matale | 01 | 01% |
| Moneragala | 02 | 02% |
| Nuwaraeliya | 02 | 02% |
| Polonnaruwa | 01 | 01% |
| Puttalam | 03 | 03% |
| Ratnapura | 06 | 06% |
| Trincomalee | 02 | 02% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Table: 3- Distribution of Somatic disorders in system wise among drug addicts (N=100)

| Disorders in Nervous System | Number of person | Prevalence % |
|---|------------------|--------------|
| Headache | 82 | 82 |
| Tremors | 48 | 48 |
| Difficulty in walking | 21 | 21 |
| Paralysis | 17 | 17 |
| Speech difficulties | 16 | 16 |
| Neuropathy | 11 | 11 |
| Visual disorders | 02 | 02 |
| Epilepsy | 01 | 01 |
| Disorders in Respiratory System | | |
| Cough | 76 | 76 |
| Bronchial Asthma | 55 | 55 |
| Dyspnoea | 06 | 06 |
| Bronchitis | 01 | 01 |
| Disorders in Cardio vascular System | | |
| High blood pressure | 21 | 21 |
| Chest pain | 14 | 14 |
| Dyspnoea | 03 | 03 |
| Palpitation | 02 | 02 |
| Disorders in Gastro intestinal System | | |
| Gastritis | 39 | 39 |
| Constipation | 16 | 16 |
| Vomiting | 15 | 15 |
| Flatulence | 08 | 08 |
| Anorexia | 08 | 08 |
| Cirrhosis | 02 | 02 |
| Skin Disorders | | |
| Dermatitis | 17 | 17 |
| Eczema | 16 | 16 |
| Ring worm | 04 | 04 |
| Psoriasis | 02 | 02 |
| Cellulitis | 01 | 01 |
| Genitourinary System (Male & Female) | | |
| Dysuria | 21 | 21 |
| Menstrual disorders(N=45) | 14 | 31.2 |
| Premature ejaculation(N=55) | 10 | 18.2 |
| Sexual Impotency (N=55) | 09 | 16.4 |
| Vaginal discharge (N=45) | 07 | 15.6 |
| Swelling of the testicals(N=55) | 05 | 9.1 |

Figure 3: Prevalence of somatic disorders in system wise among drug addicts (N=100)

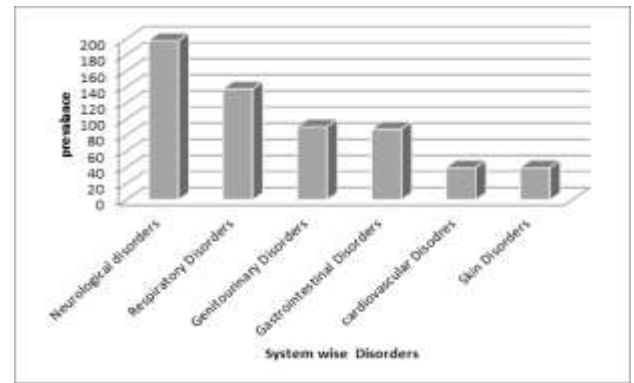


Table 4: Distribution of Psychic disorders among drug addicts (N=100)

| Psychic disorders | Number of person | Prevalence % |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Depression | 84 | 84 |
| Anxiety | 34 | 34 |
| Fear and Phobias | 22 | 22 |
| Memory impairment | 17 | 17 |
| Delusion | 02 | 02 |

Table 5: Distribution of the withdrawal symptoms among addicts (N=100)

| Withdrawal Symptoms | Number of person | Percentage |
|---------------------|------------------|------------|
| Sleeping disorders | 69 | 69 |
| Yawning | 62 | 62 |
| Tremors | 61 | 61 |
| Muscular cramps | 60 | 60 |
| Excessive sweating | 37 | 37 |
| Anxiety | 23 | 23 |
| Nausea | 06 | 06 |

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of withdrawal symptoms among addicts (N=100)

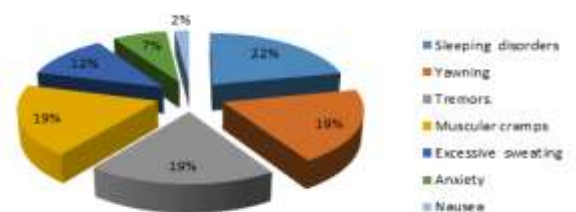


Table 6: Distribution of Causative Factors for Drug Addiction (N=100)

| Causative factor | Number of Person | Percentage |
|--|------------------|------------|
| Due to influence of friends | 80 | 80% |
| Easy availability without obstacles | 77 | 77% |
| For entertainment | 58 | 58% |
| Erasing away the feeling of loneliness | 45 | 45% |
| Increasing creative ability | 43 | 43% |
| Forgetting problems | 35 | 35% |
| Building up self confidence | 31 | 31% |
| Showing bravery | 31 | 31% |
| For socialization | 11 | 11% |
| To extinguish worries | 10 | 10% |
| Inclination to experiment | 07 | 07% |
| Inclination just to taste | 06 | 06% |
| For pleasure | 04 | 04% |
| Protecting from being cold | 03 | 03% |
| Imitating | 02 | 02% |

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IV. DISCUSSION

Whilst analyzing the data pertaining to the drug addicts, who had taken to the use of narcotics, a majority of them (34%) belong to the Colombo district (Figure 2). Number of people who had been arrested for drugs related offences from the western province is on a high rise since the year 2003. Due to this reason it can be assumed that an increased usage of drugs is taking place in Colombo district which is in the western province. According to the revelation of official statistics, youth from Colombo are at a high risk to get in contact with drugs rather than village youth⁹.

Looking at the monthly income of those people that most of them were low income earners and 60% of them were laborers. Considering the educational qualifications of these persons, 14% of them were un-educated, whilst 34% had studied up to the 5th grade. Those who had studied up to G.C.E. Ordinary Level, Advance Level and University Level constituted 18%. From this information it could be presumed that mostly, people with very low income and very little education show an inclination towards taking to narcotics and become drug addicts. When analyzing the data, it is found that a large number of youth and middle aged people (69%) have become addicted to use drugs. Among the narcotics that people smoking cigarettes were at a 91%, whilst 69% consumed liquor and 40% used heroin (Table- 2). Results revealed that mostly one person had used several kinds of drugs.

It is evident that majority people were suffering from central nervous system related disorders like paralysis, speech difficulties, difficulty in walking, neuropathy, headache, visual disorders etc (Figure 3). Also they were afflicted with respiratory system related diseases like Coughing 76%, Bronchial Asthma 55% (Table-3). When considering the drugs used, 91% had smoked cigarettes. Because of this there is a possibility for the above mentioned diseases to increase.

Gastritis depicted a higher rate (39%) among the Gastro intestinal system related diseases. Furthermore, High Blood Pressure was at 98% when cardio vascular system was studied. Such a situation could appear due to consuming of liquor and smoking cigarettes (Table -3).

It was possible to observe Dermatitis at 17% and Eczema at 16%, when diseases associated with skin problems were studied. Due to smoking that arteries become thin in the body and get less blood supply to the feet. This causes ulcers and eczema to appear in the feet. It is reported that menstrual disorders are at 31.2% in women who are addicted to drugs (Table -3). It is found that using of a drug called Heroin is a special cause for this ailment.

When analyzing the mental status of those people, 84% of them were suffered from mental depression, whilst state of "Anxiety" is 34%. Fears and phobias were at 22% and 17% suffered from impairment of memory power (Table -4). Consuming opium and taking cannabis and liquor cause depression in the central nervous system and due to these mental sicknesses could occur. When studying the withdrawal symptoms on abstaining from using drugs that majority 69% suffered a state of sleeplessness and 62% were subjected to yawning. Further, 61% experienced tremors, 60% suffered muscular cramps and excessive sweating occurred in 37% of the people (Table -5). Pertaining to the causative factors that majority of drug addicts used narcotics due to companion, easy accessibility, and avoid alone etc. (Table -6).

V. CONCLUSION

Majority of the people addicted to using drugs were low income earners and individuals who had little access to education. Mostly, youth and people of middle age were addicted to consumption of drugs and city youths are at risk rather than village youths.

Main causative factors that drive people for drug addiction are influence of peers and easy availability of drugs in the surrounding environment. Moreover, people consume narcotics with the intention of forgetting problems, to avoid being lonely and for entertainment purposes. It is evident that neurological disorders were most prevalent among drug addicts. Further, hemiplegia, gastritis, high blood pressure, bronchial asthma, eczema, dermatitis, menstrual disorders, peripheral neuropathy, speech disorders and walking difficulties were found as physical health issues. Also, anxiety, depression, phobias, impairment of memory power are some mental health issues among them. Hence, drug addiction has a significant impact on the physical and the mental health of the people as well as the socioeconomic condition of the country.

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