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# Bird's Eye View of Addiction Problem in Pakistan



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**Abstract**

Addiction is a physical and psychological dependence of illicit drugs. Its burden is nearly 5.5 percent worldwide as per estimates of World Health Organization (WHO). Pakistan is a country of 193.2 million people and among them 8.9 million are drug users according to the United Nation. The drugs such as heroin and cannabis could be accessed easily in Pakistan and most of them come from Afghanistan which shares 75% of the world's heroin. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the provinces of Pakistan where 11% of the total population hooked on drugs mainly cannabis. The school based educational and awareness interventions could have long lasting impact to accomplish the dream of drug free Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Addiction; Pakistan; Drug users; Cannabis

**Introduction**

Addiction is a physical and psychological dependence of illicit drugs. The addicts use such type of drugs despite of their catastrophic effects on their body. Being a brain disorder, there are certain functional changes in numerous brain areas which are meant for self-control, reward and stress attributed by addiction [1]. Different risk factors that could trigger this disorder include; violent behavior during childhood [2-3] lack of supervision by parents [4], accessibility of drugs in institutes like schools, pitiable social skills [5-6] drug experimentation [7] and poverty [8]. This disease burden is nearly 5.5 percent worldwide as per estimates of World Health Organization (WHO) [9].

**Current Scenario in Pakistan**

Pakistan is a country of 193.2 million people and among them 8.9 million are drug users according to the United Nation. The drugs such as heroin and cannabis can be accessed easily in Pakistan and most of them come from Afghanistan which shares 75% of the world's heroin [10]. It is thought that such illicit drugs trade in Pakistan is nearly \$2 billion every year [11]. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the province of Pakistan where 11% of the total population hooked on drugs mainly cannabis [11]. In Baluchistan nearly, 280,000 people were drug users in 2013 [12]. In terms of number of drug users, Punjab is at the top position [13]. It is surprising that some 800,000 Pakistani people having age in between 15 to 64 years are regularly using heroin as reported by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [14]. The number of people who inject such drugs for addiction

purpose is more than 12,5000 [15]. This number is continuously increasing every year as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Prevalence of injectable drug users (IDUs).

Year	IDUs
1990's	In between 2 to 8% opioid users
2000	15 percent (60,000)
2006	29 percent (125,000)

**Reasons of Drug Addiction in Pakistan**

Poverty, lack of education about drugs, lack of jobs, economic frustration, peer's pressure, parent's negligence, stress, accessibility of drugs at low price and rapidly changing social norms are the major contributing factors towards addiction problem in Pakistan [16].

**Drugs of Choice Among Addicts in Pakistan**

The most frequent drugs which are being used in addicts in Pakistan are Hashish which is also called as cannabis (4-03 million [3-6%]), Opiates (1-02 million [0-9%]), heroin (813 000 [0-7%]) and painkillers (1-69 million [1-5%]). The sharing of syringes is a common practice among drug users (70%) who inject opiates [17].

**Solutions**

The drug abuse control master plan 2010-14 intended to make drug free Pakistan by 2020 which seems an unrealistic approach. The rate of relapse is 90% among treated addicts which is possibly

due to the unacceptability and lack of support of the family members and community [17]. There is a dire need to involve non-government bodies to provide psychological guidance and support to addicts, their families and community to cut down the probability of relapse. There are numerous awareness campaigns which have been initiated by the government but the number of drug users is still increasing at an alarming rate. The school based educational and awareness interventions could have long lasting impact to reduce the number of drug users in Pakistan [18].

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