

How to free youth from shackles of drug addiction?



M. Srinivasan, Professor, Department of Criminology, University of Madras. For contact: murugesan.srinivasan2013@gmail.com
R. Arulraj, research scholar, Department of Criminology, University of Madras.

Reports about increasing drug trafficking have, of late, been pouring in from various states including Tamil Nadu. Besides, crimes resulting from drug addiction are also on the rise. In fact, drug addiction is a global problem. For various social and cultural reasons, students and youth become addicted to drugs. What are the solutions to this menace?

Worrying drug addiction

In 2021, one out of 17 people in the 15-64 age group abused drugs, according to the World Drug Report 2023, published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Moreover, the number of drug addicts has leapfrogged from 24 crore in 2011 to 29.6 crore in 2021.

Taking the population growth rate into account, the global drug addiction rate has risen by 23 per cent. That is, 5.8 per cent of the world's population in the 15-64 age group are addicted to drugs.

Cannabis is the most widely used intoxicant in the world with the users accounting for almost 21.9 crore. Next comes amphetamine used by 3.6 crore people and then it is cocaine used by two crore people. About 6 crore people use non-medical opioids. According to the 2021 census, about 1.32 crore people use drugs through injection. The report also points out that drug sale/trafficking has been growing through various forms including the online.

According to the National Survey on Extent, Pattern and Trends of Drug Abuse in India released by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 16 crore people in India use alcohol, 3.1 crore ganja and 2.3 crore opioid. Apart from the addicts who experience physical ill-effects of drug abuse, the people around them or those not related to them also face different types of ill-effects. Statistical data on drug addicts committing crimes is a matter of grave concern.

Status in states

According to the 'Crime in India 2022' report released in December 2023 on drug-related cases registered in 2022, Kerala (26,619) ranks first in drug-related crimes, followed by Maharashtra (13,830), Punjab (12,442) and Uttar Pradesh (11,541). Tamil Nadu (10,385) ranks fifth on this list.

It is important to study the number of drug-related cases in comparison with the population of the respective states. For example, since Uttar Pradesh has a larger population, the number of drug-related cases in the state is, no wonder, high. In terms of crimes for

every one lakh population, Kerala ranks first with a ratio of 74.6, followed by Punjab (40.7), Himachal Pradesh (20.4), Mizoram (19.9) and Arunachal Pradesh (19.7).

As far as cities are concerned, Mumbai ranks first (11,046) in the number of drug-related crimes, followed by Bengaluru (4,027), Cochin (2,751), Indore (1,745) and Kozhikode (1,282).

Meanwhile, in terms of crime incidence rate, Cochin ranks first (129.9), followed by Indore (80.5), Kozhikode (63.1), Mumbai (60) and Bengaluru (47.5). It is remarkable that Tamil Nadu did not figure in the five states with the highest population-crime ratio in 2022. Similarly, Tamil Nadu cities have not been found on the list of five cities with the highest number of registered drug-related cases/crime cases. However, there's no gainsaying that drug-related crimes go on unabated in Tamil Nadu.

Factor behind increasing drug addiction

There are various reasons for increasing drug addiction among students and youth. Changes in family structure in urban areas and lack of attention from parents towards children are the main provocations for the rising addiction. Usually, many people turn drug addicts as a result of their association with fellow students and youths. Parents fail to nip this tendency in the bud. There are several reasons for this. For one, there is lack of awareness among them. Another reason is the apathy of the management/teachers towards the students in schools and colleges. In particular, in most private colleges, the concern shown for students' grades in exams does not reflect much on their virtue and overall well-being. In the modern times many private colleges don't give importance even to activities like sports.

Above all, the ongoing cultural deterioration in society is also the major trigger for drug addiction. In particular, consumer culture misleads students and youth, hardly inspiring them to take part in constructive social activism. Students and youth who contribute to social activities normally do not get addicted to drugs and other bad habits.

How to prevent it?

The state governments and the police department are going the extra mile, taking measure after measure to eliminate drug addiction. However, they alone cannot tackle the menace. Addiction is not just a law-and-order problem; it is a social problem to boot.

A state government can create awareness about drug addiction among the people, taking initiatives through its departments of higher education/school education. Thereby it can reduce drug addiction significantly.

It is a collective responsibility of the society as a whole to protect youth and students. Only if all stake-holders such as parents, teachers, educational institutions, administrative departments, social media, voluntary organizations and so on cooperate fully with the government battling the menace of drug addiction, can we, in the long run, vanquish the monster of intoxication.

Translated by V. Mariappan.