

The Prevalence of Alcohol and Other Substance Abuse in Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Kullu is also known as the “Valley of Gods” and it is situated in the lap of the great Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh. The valley is famous for its temples, magnificent hills and splendid beauty. The hills are covered with pine and deodar forests. Thus, thousands of tourists throng to visit this beautiful valley. The Valley is also renowned for its International fare Dussehra. People from all over the world come to witness this grand union of hundreds of deities. But recently the valley is also in news for rising drug menace. The use of synthetic drugs has become a big concern over the past few years. In past alcohol and cannabis were very common but now the trend has shifted to more lethal synthetic drugs primarily heroin also known as Chitta. It is well known and accepted fact that drug abuse is a social vice that contributes to numerous problems in society at large. It is not only a threat to social peace and harmony but also to social development as well as a big obstacle in county’s progress.

Keywords: Alcohol, Substance Abuse, Kullu Valley

If we see from cultural perspective, the use of alcohol and cannabis or marijuana is quite permitted in this valley. The alcohol is brewed mostly at homes for functions and various other cultural activities and cannabis is also used in various religious rituals. The use of alcohol and cannabis is socially accepted over here. The heavy inflow of tourists from neighboring states and foreign countries have increased the illegal production of cannabis. The cannabis especially the “Malana Cream” of Malana valley is hugely popular across worldwide and is in tremendous demand. The temptation to make easy money has persuaded locals towards illegal production of it. The school and college going students are falling prey to this dangerous habit that is spoiling their overall physical, psychological and social well-being. The Kasol and Malana villages are well known for organizing rave parties or full moon parties where illicit use of drugs is very common and last few years have seen an increase in such parties even in remote areas of the valley. Thus this easy accessibility of cannabis and other illicit drugs is proving fatal especially among youth and has put a huge threat before the administration to curb this evil. Seeing the problem blowing out of proportion, Kullu police has started an initiative “Sehbagita hamari aur apki” to encourage people of kullu to help them in curbing this crime, has resulted in police getting over 150 phone calls regarding complaints of drug trade, drug abuse, cultivation of cannabis and many

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social problems. Police have also launched “Operation street dominance” to keep the criminals and trouble makers out of the streets and keep a watch over them with the help of local residents. Two helpline numbers 8219681600 and 8219681601 have also been launched for this purpose. According to sources the youngsters are not only becoming addicted to cigarettes, gutka, khaini and alcohol but they are also falling prey to capsules, cough syrups, shoe polish, balm, white fluid besides charas, smack, heroin and opium. As per police record, till May 2018, 229 kgs Charas, 4 kgs Opium and 263 kgs Poppy husk was seized across state. Sometimes in short of money to purchase these substances, the addicted youths also indulge in paddling and do not hesitate in going against law to satisfy their urge for drugs. Even though the NDPS Act 1985 has provision of 10 years rigorous imprisonment and a fine upto Rs. 2.00 lac depending upon the quantity and nature of contraband but still the smuggling of illicit drugs is not stopping.

There four de-addiction centers and rehabilitation centers are running in the periphery of Kullu. One in district government hospital and three are being run by NGOs, one in Mohal, one in Bashing and one in Jhidi, district Mandi. These centers are reporting increased number of patients on one hand and higher number of relapse cases on the other hand. Alone in de-addiction centre Regional Hospital kullu itself, total 230 cases of heroin addicts, 194 cases of alcoholics and 55 cases of marijuana addicts were reported in the year 2018. The use of synthetic drugs is being found more common among adolescents and younger age group. The doctors and counselors also report that many of the patients acknowledge of not being aware of the fatal consequences of heroin and unknowingly fall prey to this addictive drug because they had never heard about this drug before consuming it for the first time but having knowledge about substances like alcohol, bhang (cannabis) and all form of tobacco, they never tried them. This shows that even though the government is running so many programs against drug abuse but the impact of these programs does not seem to be very fruitful. It also appears that awareness programs for vulnerable age groups on prevention of drug abuse are not adequate or they are not being implemented properly. The rising number of cases of drug/substance addiction has put a huge threat in front of state government. As far as treatment and prevention is concerned the drug de-addiction centers have been set up in all district hospitals of the state, which are not only providing treatment but also working on prevention of drug abuse. There are various other departments other than Health & Family Welfare Department and Police Department which are working towards eradication of this social evil such as Education Department, Social Justice & Empowerment, women & Child Department, Rural Development Department, Department of Information & Public Relation, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangthan and HP State Legal Aid Authority. All these departments are working against drug abuse menace but now it appears that to get substantial results, all these departments should work in coordination. The rules and regulations need to be stricter and awareness activities should be carried out right from primary level to higher educational institutions. These activities should be more continuous in nature and parents as well as community at large also need to be sensitized about the lethal outcomes of this vice. There can also be a provision of screening for drug abuse among children at schools and colleges, so that early intervention can be provided to them to safeguard them against development of addiction in future. The desirable actions must be taken as soon as possible so that the youth can be saved from spoiling their lives and they can be a productive member of the society as well as a productive citizen of the country at large.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors carefully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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