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The Relation between Drugs and Crime

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between drugs and crime is both complex and deeply rooted in the socio-economic and psychological fabric of society. This issue is not just prevalent globally but also in India, where it manifests in various forms and affects individuals across different age groups and communities. Substance abuse is not a standalone problem; it impacts not just the individual user but also ripples through families, neighborhoods, and entire societies. Understanding this connection from a human perspective—rather than a purely legal one—is essential if we are to address it meaningfully. This paper aims to explore the social, psychological, economic, and legal dimensions of drug-related crime, using real-life examples and international models to argue for a shift from a punitive to a more rehabilitative approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between drugs and crime has been a concern for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, researchers and communities worldwide. As countries grapple with drug abuse and trafficking, there is growing recognition of the strong and often reciprocal link between drug use and criminal behaviour. This link manifests in many ways – from drug possession and trafficking to drug induced crimes like theft, assault and even homicide. Understanding this relationship is important not only for effective criminal justice responses but also for public health and social intervention strategies.

Drug related crime falls into three categories – crimes committed to get drugs, crimes committed under the influence of drugs and crimes associated with the illegal drug trade. For instance, individuals addicted to substances may resort to theft or robbery to fund their addiction, while others may commit violent acts while under the influence of mind altering substances. In some regions, organized crime syndicates and gangs control large chunks of the drug market leading to a surge in violent crimes related to drug turf wars and smuggling operations. So drugs can be both a direct and indirect cause of criminal activity.

In India the nexus between drugs and crime is particularly worrisome. With increasing cases of drug smuggling across borders and growing consumption of synthetic drugs in urban and semi urban areas, the social fabric of the country is under stress. States like Punjab, Himachal

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Pradesh and parts of the Northeast are notorious for drug related issues not only affecting public health but also contributing to rising crime rates. Despite the existence of laws like the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, enforcement challenges, corruption and lack of rehabilitation infrastructure hinders effective control.

International research also supports the correlation between substance abuse and criminal behaviour. Studies in the US, UK and Australia show that a significant percentage of incarcerated individuals were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence or had a history of substance abuse. These patterns suggest that drug abuse is not just a personal health issue but a societal problem with criminal justice implications.

Tackling the drug crime nexus requires a multi pronged approach. While strict law enforcement is necessary to disrupt drug trafficking networks, there is also a need for holistic strategies that include rehabilitation, education, community involvement and mental health support. The criminal justice system should aim to reduce recidivism by offering alternatives to incarceration for drug offenders like treatment programs and de-addiction centres. This report looks into the drug crime nexus by looking at national and international data, reviewing research and laws and highlights the gaps and suggests solutions.

II. HOW DRUGS AND CRIME INTERSECT

Drug-related crimes fall into two broad categories: crimes that are directly related to the substance itself (such as possession, trafficking, or production), and crimes that are indirectly related (like theft, violence, or vandalism committed to support a drug habit). For instance, a person struggling with addiction might resort to shoplifting, burglary, or even fraud to get the money they need. Some crimes occur under the influence of drugs, which can impair judgment and increase aggression.

It's also important to understand that not every drug user becomes a criminal, and not every crime is committed by someone under the influence. However, the overlap is significant. According to various studies, a large percentage of inmates globally are incarcerated for drug-related offenses—many of them non-violent. This points to a systemic issue where addiction is criminalized rather than treated as a health issue. It's also important to recognize the gender-specific challenges in addiction and crime. Women who use drugs face heightened stigma, often becoming isolated from families and communities. Many suffer abuse or exploitation, and their access to treatment is far more limited than men. Facilities for women-specific rehabilitation, childcare during treatment, and legal protection against gender-based violence are necessary steps to ensure no one is left behind.

Moreover, women often bear the brunt when male family members fall into addiction—dealing with financial burdens, domestic violence, and emotional trauma. Social support systems and legal reforms must consider this burden and provide targeted aid.

III. SOCIO ECONOMIC FACTORS DRIVING DRUG RELATED CRIME

The roots of drug addiction and associated criminal behavior often lie in socio-economic conditions. Poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and homelessness create a fertile ground for substance abuse. In communities where opportunities are scarce, the drug trade may appear as the only viable means of survival. Young people, in particular, are vulnerable. Without access to good education or stable jobs, they may be lured into drug use or become part of the drug distribution chain.

In India, for example, many low-income areas suffer from a lack of basic infrastructure, healthcare, and job opportunities. In such environments, drugs can offer a temporary escape or a false sense of empowerment. This is further compounded by the stigma surrounding addiction, which discourages individuals from seeking help.

IV. PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF DRUGS AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Drugs alter the brain's chemistry, affecting the way people think, feel, and behave. Substances like heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine are known to impair decision-making and reduce impulse control. This makes users more prone to risky behaviors, including criminal acts. Long-term use can also lead to severe mental health disorders such as depression, paranoia, and schizophrenia.

These psychological effects can manifest in violent behavior. For instance, domestic violence, assault, and even homicide have been linked to drug or alcohol use. Moreover, when addiction goes untreated, individuals may experience social isolation and a breakdown of personal relationships, further pushing them toward illegal activities as a means of coping.

V. REAL LIFE SCENARIOS AND EXAMPLES

The Indian state of Punjab serves as a stark example of how drug addiction can ravage a society. Reports have highlighted entire communities, especially among the youth, falling into the trap of addiction. The resultant rise in theft, gang activity, and social decay has become a serious concern. Parents live in fear, schools face declining attendance, and the healthcare system is overwhelmed.

The high-profile Sushant Singh Rajput case brought nationwide attention to the presence of narcotics in India's entertainment industry. This case served as a wake-up call about how

deeply drugs have infiltrated even seemingly glamorous circles.

On the international stage, countries like Mexico have faced extreme violence due to drug cartels. These criminal organizations thrive in areas where governance is weak and poverty is rampant. Conversely, countries like Portugal have taken a radically different approach. By decriminalizing personal drug use and focusing on rehabilitation, Portugal has significantly reduced both drug-related deaths and crime rates.

VI. LEGAL LANDSCAPE IN INDIA

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 forms the cornerstone of India's drug policy. While the intent behind the law is to control the production, distribution, and consumption of drugs, it has faced criticism for being overly punitive. Individuals caught with even small quantities of banned substances can face lengthy prison sentences. This approach often results in the incarceration of non-violent, first-time offenders who would benefit far more from treatment than punishment. The existing legal system tends to lump users and traffickers into the same category, which leads to overcrowded jails and overburdened courts. The lack of adequate rehabilitation centers and support systems means that many addicts exit the prison system unchanged—or worse. Without medical help or psychological counseling, they are likely to relapse and reoffend. India is a diverse country with various beliefs, customs, and values. Any program or policy must be culturally sensitive. Community elders, religious leaders, and respected local figures can be instrumental in spreading awareness and encouraging rehabilitation. Storytelling, arts, music, and cultural events can also be used creatively to destigmatize addiction and promote recovery. Creating a national movement around recovery—one that blends tradition with modern care—can transform the societal narrative around drugs and crime.

VII. TOWARDS A HUMAN CENTRIC APPROACH

Treating addiction as a moral failing does more harm than good. It alienates those who need help and reinforces harmful stereotypes. Addiction is a disease that requires treatment, not judgment. Countries that have adopted harm reduction strategies—such as needle exchange programs, free counseling services, and vocational training—have seen significant improvements in public health and safety. Community-based rehabilitation centers offer a more sustainable alternative to incarceration. These centers provide medical care, emotional support, and life skills training, allowing individuals to rebuild their lives. Employment programs, mental health services, and educational opportunities are also crucial in preventing relapse and promoting long-term recovery. India has a large young population, many of whom

are vulnerable to drug abuse due to peer pressure, academic stress, and unemployment. Schools and colleges must integrate comprehensive drug education into their curricula—not just through lectures, but with engaging workshops, counseling access, and awareness campaigns led by peers and professionals alike. Additionally, youth employment schemes and mental health support must be made robust. Government schemes such as Skill India or Digital India can be strategically linked to recovering youth, offering them a purpose and path forward. Keeping young people engaged, hopeful, and supported is one of the best ways to prevent both drug use and crime. Moreover, law enforcement and judicial authorities need to be trained to differentiate between users and traffickers. Sensitivity and discretion can go a long way in ensuring that justice is both fair and humane.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The link between drugs and crime is not just a matter for police and lawmakers—it's a deeply human issue. Behind every case of addiction is a person dealing with pain, loss, or despair. If we truly want to reduce crime and improve public safety, we must look beyond punishment and invest in healing. Compassion, understanding, and support must become the pillars of our response to addiction. It's time to reform not just our laws, but our mindset. Only then can we hope to break the cycle of drugs and crime and build a society that offers second chances and real hope. A significant barrier to effective intervention in drug-related issues is the social stigma attached to addiction. Many individuals suffering from substance abuse fear being judged or ostracized if they seek help. This stigma extends to families as well, who may hide the problem out of shame. Public awareness campaigns that frame addiction as a medical and psychological condition can go a long way in encouraging early treatment and community support. Schools, workplaces, and local communities should also be engaged in educational programs that teach young people about the dangers of drug use and the value of mental health. The goal should not be to instill fear but to foster understanding and resilience. Peer support groups and anonymous help lines can provide safe spaces for those struggling to speak out and seek help. Progress in addressing drugs and crime should not be measured solely by arrest numbers or drug seizures. True success lies in reducing addiction rates, improving mental health statistics, lowering relapse cases, and ensuring fewer repeat offenders. Regular data collection, transparent reporting, and research-driven policies are crucial. A multi-stakeholder approach, involving healthcare workers, educators, social workers, law enforcement, and civil society, is necessary. Each sector brings its own strengths, and collaboration multiplies the impact.

To truly combat the intertwined challenges of drugs and crime in India, systemic reform is essential. First and foremost, drug policy must be guided by health and human rights principles rather than punishment. This means reforming the NDPS Act to distinguish between users, who need help, and traffickers, who need legal action. Reducing mandatory minimum sentences and introducing alternatives like community service or mandated rehab would be a major step forward.

Secondly, the government must invest heavily in rehabilitation infrastructure. Most cities lack proper detox centers, psychiatric care, and post-rehab support systems. Public-private partnerships could expand access and quality of care. These centers should not only treat addiction but also focus on reintegration through education, skill-building, and job placement.

Thirdly, law enforcement officials should receive training on the psychology of addiction, trauma, and de-escalation techniques. A compassionate police force can become a frontline ally in identifying individuals in need and connecting them with care services rather than immediately resorting to arrest.
