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# The Role of Class in Narcotics and Addiction

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## ABSTRACT

*Drug addiction is a major social problem across the globe, but the extent of its impact differs with the Socio-Economic Status (SES). This paper focuses on how class affects rates of addiction, treatment, and culture. People from low-income families are more likely to be affected by addiction due to financial hardships, lack of education and limited employment opportunities. Such problems make them reach for drugs to help them cope. On the other hand, the higher income individuals have easier time seeking for mental health care and other forms of support and hence they do not turn to drugs.*

*The issue of access to treatment also shows the clear division between the rich and the poor. Rich people can seek for private rehabilitation centres and quality health care while the poor are left with long waiting times in overworked public systems. This lack of easy access to care simply maintains the cycle of addiction in the impoverished population. Other social factors also play a role in the situation, and these are also influenced by class; lower class addicts are viewed as criminals or ethically wrong while upper class addicts are viewed more sympathetically. The prevalence of addiction is highly skewed among lower SES groups in India. Geographical inequalities exacerbate the situation as drug-trafficking peddlers focus on woeful neighbourhoods. Besides, the justice system portrays themselves as tougher on low-income families and the elite easily escape judgments through legal allocations.*

*Thus, issues surrounding addiction must be acknowledged concerning class-based disparities. Equally crucial measures encompass improving access to treatment along with social and economic inequalities in different statuses which are harmful stereotypes and hence make equal access to recovery possible through equally ameliorated policies and systems supporting the same.*

**Keywords:** *Drug Addiction, Socio-Economic Status (SES), Treatment Disparities, Class-Based Inequalities.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Drug addiction is a global epidemic that affects individuals and societies on many levels. Even

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though it is well known that addiction is a public health issue, it is important to understand that addiction does not affect everyone in the same way. A significant determinant of an individual's treatment accessibility and susceptibility to addiction is their socioeconomic status. This study examines the impact of income disparities on the prevalence of substance abuse, access to treatment, and public perception of addicts. It particularly emphasizes the role of socioeconomic status in drug and addiction concerns.

## **II. ADDICTION PREVALENCE AND SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES**

People of all classes can become addicted, and it doesn't matter what gender you are. Still, it's clear that social class and the number of addictions are linked. People from lower social groups often have to deal with more problems, like uncertain funds, limited access to good schools, and few job opportunities. Stress like these can make some people turn to drugs to deal, which can lead to addiction. Drug dealers may also be more common in places where people don't make a lot of money, which makes it easy to get drugs. Rich people, on the other hand, might be able to deal with worry better by going to mental health centers, which might make them less likely to use drugs. They may also be a part of a group that works to stop drug use. Class plays a big role in how addiction has grown because of the difference in the number of users based on social class.

### **(A) Treatment Access**

Class differences can also be seen in how easy it is to get help for addiction. People from higher social classes often have easier access to health care, which includes programs that help addiction. They can go to private treatment centers, talk to doctors, and get drugs that help people get better. That being said, people from lower social groups may find it tough to pay for good care. Publicly funded drug treatment programs may be too full and not have enough money, which means there are long wait times and limited access. Also, differences in social class may make the shame surrounding addiction even worse. People from lower financial backgrounds may feel ashamed and be less likely to seek therapy because of how their culture is seen. It is harder for people from lower social groups to break the circle of addiction because they can't get the right help.

### **(B) Stereotypes and Perceptions in Society**

Stereotypes and cultural views play a part in the relationship between class and drugs and addiction. Those from lower socioeconomic origins are often subjected to greater levels of criminalization and stigma than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The likelihood of their recovery and reintegration into society may be impacted by this social prejudice.

Negative perceptions about lower-class addicts are reinforced by the media, which often depicts them as dangerous or morally reprehensible.

Also, the way the criminal justice system deals with addiction is affected by class in a big way. People with more money may get lighter terms or be sent to treatment programs, while people with less money are more likely to face harsh punishments that will only make them more addicted and more likely to go to jail.

### **III. SOCIAL CLASS'S IMPACT ON INDIA'S ADDICTION TO NARCOTICS**

The extant body of literature pertaining to the intricate nexus between social class and narcotics addiction in India offers invaluable elucidation on this multifaceted matter. Pertinent discoveries include:

According to the findings presented in the scholarly publication titled "Addiction" (1989), specifically on pages 1305-1318 ("Socioeconomic Status and Drug Use Among Adolescents," 1989), it was discovered that individuals hailing from lower socioeconomic strata exhibit a greater vulnerability to engage in drug usage and develop addictive behaviors when compared to their counterparts with elevated socioeconomic standing.

The "Handbook of Social Status Correlates," (Gusfield & Hardy, 2013), underlines the importance of social class in drug use and addiction. It is duly noted that individuals hailing from lower socioeconomic strata exhibit a higher propensity to partake in said behaviors.

The book "New Horizons in Health-Promoting Technologies: From Development to Implementation" (Miller & Toomey, 2016). investigates the influence of health-promoting technology. One must duly note that a chapter within the aforementioned book effectively highlights the pervasive nature of drug utilization and addiction within marginalized communities that are constrained by limited socioeconomic means.

A chapter in the book "Equity, Social Determinants, and Public Health Programmes" (Stuckler & Marmot, 2018), argues that social inequalities, particularly class divisions, have a substantial role in drug use and addiction.

#### **(A) India's Statistics on Addiction**

Pursuant to the findings of a report published in 2018 (National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre [NDDTC], 2018), it has been ascertained that the approximate prevalence of substance use disorders within the borders of India stands at 2.4%. This distressing statistic has a profound impact on a staggering number of approximately 27 million individuals. It is worth noting that the aforementioned prevalence exhibits a greater manifestation among the male demographic

as opposed to the female demographic, and further, it is particularly accentuated among individuals hailing from lower socioeconomic strata.

According to the available data, the breakdown by socioeconomic status is as follows:

It is evident that the proportion of individuals with a low socioeconomic status stands at a rate of 3.5%.

It can be stated that the middle socioeconomic status, as defined by the relevant criteria, accounts for approximately 2.8% of the population.

It has been determined that individuals with a high socioeconomic status account for a mere 1.4% of the population.

#### **IV. REAL LIFE EXPERIENCES - FROM INTERVIEWS**

##### **(A) Social Class and the Availability of Narcotics**

Talking with those from worse socioeconomic situations reveals how different people's access to drugs is. Since drug traffickers often target places with low economic status, drugs are frequently easier to acquire in those neighborhoods. One respondent, Jane, spoke of her upbringing in a tiny South Indian village where drug use was rampant and there were financial difficulties. Her town's citizens have few leisure options and a poor economic outlook, so many resort to drugs as an escape. According to these interviews, those with higher incomes may afford to buy drugs from preferred vendors, which lowers their chance of running afoul of the law (Ausubel, 1980).

##### **(B) How the Elite Will Avoid Being Caught Despite Dealing with Narcotics**

Interviews with drug dealers illuminate the differences in treatment between the upper classes and the poorer classes. Numerous interviewees attested to the fact that the affluent are less likely to be apprehended since they often possess the means to hire attorneys, keep a low profile, and take advantage of legal loopholes. Moreover, they often have easier access to covert drug suppliers and have the financial means to hire a top-notch legal team should they run afoul of the law. The idea that class is a major factor in deciding the repercussions of engaging in the drug trade is supported by the disparity in the criminal justice system.

##### **(C) Administration of NCRB**

It is necessary to be aware of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in order to comprehend the function that class plays in drug usage and addiction. Data on drug-related crime is among the statistics on crime in India that are compiled and distributed by the NCRB.

We may use this data to better understand the frequency of drug-related crimes in various socioeconomic and geographic situations. The NCRB data also emphasizes the influence of class on drug-related outcomes, which often mirrors the differences in legal treatment and penalties faced by individuals from various socioeconomic backgrounds. People from lower socioeconomic origins are more likely than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to be arrested and found guilty of drug-related offenses, according to NCRB statistics for 2021, for instance. Additionally, the data demonstrates that those with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be sentenced to heavier terms for offenses involving drugs. This research reveals that the criminal justice system in India does not treat individuals fairly, and that persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be penalized for drug use and addiction.

#### **(D) Class Disparities with Regard to Drugs**

Respondents repeatedly highlighted how their experiences with drugs differed significantly depending on their class. Because there are fewer economic prospects and more drug traffickers in their neighborhoods, people from lower socioeconomic origins are more likely to get addicted. The elite, on the other hand, may take drugs recreationally with no repercussions. These differences in class lead to different paths for addiction and rehabilitation (Hill, 1962).

#### **(E) Dissimilarities Between the Causes of Elite and Lower Class Addiction to Them**

Interviewees from a range of backgrounds emphasized the disparities in the causes of drug addiction between members of the upper and lower strata. While it may begin as a leisure pastime for the wealthy, it may also serve as a coping mechanism for individuals in lower social strata as they deal with the stresses of poverty and social hardship. So, the reasons why people become addicted are closely connected to their social and economic surroundings. This shows how important class is in the addiction process.

#### **(F) De-Addiction and Class-Based Access to It**

Class differences are also seen in access to de-addiction programs. Financial limitations and insufficient support networks sometimes make it difficult for people from lower socioeconomic groups to enroll in high-quality rehabilitation programs. On the other hand, exclusive, upscale rehabilitation centers are within the reach of the wealthy. An individual's prospects of recovery may be considerably impacted by this disparity in treatment accessibility.

#### **(G) Geographical Barriers**

Geographical differences exacerbate the impact of class on drug use and addiction. The lack of access to addiction treatment centers and drugs in rural locations disproportionately affects

people from lower socioeconomic groups. To the other hand, cities might have bigger networks for drug supply and care, which could be good for people who can afford it.

In conclusion, these real-life experiences and the data from interviews underscore the undeniable role of class in narcotics and addiction. Accessibility, the legal ramifications of engagement, the causes of addiction, access to treatment, and even the geographic distribution of drug-related difficulties are all impacted by this ubiquitous effect. In order to create more equitable policies and support systems that address the complexity of addiction, it is imperative to acknowledge these class-based discrepancies.

## **V. ANALYSIS**

Class distinctions and substance abuse are complex topics that are impacted by an abundance of economic, social, and public health variables. The notion of class, often characterized by an individual's financial earnings, socioeconomic standing, level of education, and professional endeavors, clearly impacts their vulnerability to addiction and its associated consequences.

### **(A) Literature comparing addiction in the lower, middle, and upper classes**

Based on the existing body of research, it is apparent that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have a greater likelihood of developing substance use disorders when compared to those from middle or upper socioeconomic backgrounds. There are several plausible factors that could contribute to this situation, some of which may include the following, although not exhaustively:

Given the current state of affairs, it is indisputable that individuals originating from lower socioeconomic classes are disproportionately vulnerable to a greater number of risk factors. The risk factors mentioned include, but are not restricted to, the dangers associated with destitution, unstable housing conditions, lack of social support, and increased susceptibility to violent acts. The risk factors mentioned above possess the capacity to increase an individual's vulnerability to addiction.

In relation to the issue of restricted resource accessibility, it is important to recognize that individuals originating from lower socioeconomic strata may face a scarcity of opportunities to obtain quality education, secure gainful employment, and obtain adequate healthcare services. This situation has the potential to worsen the difficulties that individuals encounter when attempting to abstain from substance misuse and when they need to seek help for the advent of addiction. In relation to the issue of stigma and discrimination surrounding addiction, it is important to acknowledge that individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances

are generally more prone to experiencing such forms of treatment. The aforementioned conditions may pose significant obstacles for individuals seeking assistance and striving to maintain a stable and rehabilitative lifestyle. It is crucial to recognize that individuals originating from lower socioeconomic classes demonstrate an increased likelihood of developing substance use disorders. Nevertheless, it is imperative to emphasize that addiction has the potential to affect individuals of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Individuals originating from the middle and upper socioeconomic classes may face unique challenges concerning addiction, which may include difficulties in accessing high-quality treatment alternatives and navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system.

### **(B) Implications for prevention and treatment**

It is imperative to comprehend the correlation between socioeconomic status and addiction in order to facilitate efficacious measures for prevention and treatment. In order to effectively mitigate the occurrence of addiction, it is imperative that prevention endeavors prioritize the resolution of underlying factors that contribute to its development, namely poverty, unemployment, and limited availability of educational and healthcare resources. It is imperative that treatment programs be meticulously customized to accommodate the unique needs of individuals hailing from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, while simultaneously ensuring that said programs are readily accessible and financially feasible for all individuals without discrimination. In schools, for example, incorporating school-based intervention programs can bridge the gap in access to treatment by providing early education and resources to at-risk youth, especially in underserved communities (Council on School Health & Committee on Substance Abuse, 2007). Empowering teachers with the tools and training to educate students on the dangers of drug use can be a highly effective preventive measure (Handrianto et al., 2020).

The intricate nature of the correlation between socioeconomic class and substance dependency is undeniable. Through a comprehensive examination of the various factors that contribute to addiction and a thorough analysis of the unique challenges encountered by individuals hailing from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, it is possible to formulate and implement enhanced strategies for the prevention and treatment of said addiction.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The role of class in drugs and addiction is an established fact that has a huge influence on addiction prevalence, treatment availability, and cultural attitudes of addicts. Economic gaps make those in lower socioeconomic strata more vulnerable to addiction, limit their access to adequate treatment, and expose them to harsher public judgments. The role of class in addiction



must be addressed in order to build more fair and effective measures to battle this public health epidemic which involve lowering socioeconomic gaps, expanding access to treatment, and addressing social preconceptions that perpetuate the cycle of addiction for persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. To build a more equitable and effective response to addiction, a holistic strategy that acknowledges and treats class-related problems is required.

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