



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-XIII, Issue-IV, July 2025, Page No. 154-164

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Sribhumi, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

DOI: 10.64031/pratidhwanitheecho.vol.13.issue.04W.016



Understanding the Pattern of Drug Abuse and Addiction as a Problem in the Society

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Received: 23.06.2025; Accepted: 04.07.2025; Available online: 31.07.2025

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Abstract

In the beginning of new era, the human population faced with several challenges to survive. The epidemics are the biggest danger to survive, affect millions of people worldwide. The problem of drug addiction is also considered a global epidemic with physiological, psychological, cultural and environmental influences controlling the human behavior. The use of drugs is very old among the human population. Drugs have played an important role in every culture throughout the history. It is used for medical, religious or recreational purposes. This work aims to study the process of evolution of drugs over the period of time in the society and the pattern of drug addiction. It is also an attempt to examine the government policies and programmes along with the community awareness in controlling the drug addiction problem. Historical evidence suggests a long relationship between humanity and drug abuse as a mood altering substance. Drug abuse in India evolved into a national problem since the 1980s. A wide sort of abnormal behavior can result from drug abuse which creates problem in normal functioning in the family, the workplace, and the society. The government of India has introduced a national policy on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS), 1985 with intent to guide various ministries, state governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and reaffirm India's commitment to fight the drug menace holistically.

Keywords: Drugs, Addiction, Substance use disorder, Policies and programs

Introduction:

Drug abuse has grown into a serious global health issue and a major societal concern today. It is considered as a great challenge to social and public health in the world. World Health Organization (WHO) defines drug abuse as a "state of periodic or chronic intoxicant detrimental to the individual and society, produced by repeated consumption of a drug" (Handa, 2001). Drug abuse is the consumption of an illicit drug for pleasure with no proper medical reasons which disrupts a person physically as well as psychologically. High and uncontrollable consumption of illicit drugs can disturb a person ability to function normally in the society. Drug abuse is a complex phenomenon, which has various social, cultural, biological, geographical, historical and economic aspects. It is affecting almost every nation, with different extent and characteristics from region to region. The disease of drug dependence cause certain problems which cost loses in production, economic growth of a nation, crimes, lack of proper utility of resources, transmission of infectious diseases and disturbance in the social order.

The term 'Drugs' includes both legal substances (tobacco, coffee, alcohol) as well as illegal substances (heroin, marijuana, cocaine and others). Some drugs are also used for medical sanctioned context such as tranquilizers, sedative hypnotics or stimulants etc. (Adrian, 2015). The most common mood altering substances that cause dependence come in all shapes, sizes and compositions. Different substance cause different effect on the body. Types of substances are:

- i) **Narcotic drug** such as opium, morphine, heroin, pantopod, methadone, etorphine, pethidine, meperidine
- ii) **Non-narcotic drugs** such as Hallucinogens (LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin), Cannabis (Marijuana, hashish, ganja, charas, and bhang), Organic solvents (depressants, sedatives, and stimulants/cocaine) and alcohol, tobacco, caffeine etc. Narcotics are extremely addictive drugs that are used for getting reliefs from pain and sound sleep. However, they can be abused to give euphoric feelings which can be consumed by inhaling, smoking or injecting.

Table: 1.1. Classification of Substances, Examples and Possible Effects

Sl.no	Classification	Substances	Possible effects
1	Stimulants	Coffee, Caffeine Nicotine, Amphetamine	Increased alertness, excitation, euphoria, increased pulse rate and blood pressure, insomnia, etc.
2	Narcotics	Heroin, Opium, Morphine, Tramadol, Codeine	Euphoria, drowsiness, respiratory depression, constricted pupil, nausea, etc.
3	Cannabis/Relaxants	Marijuana	Relaxed inhibitions, increased appetite, euphoria etc.
4	Depressants	Alcohol, Barbiturate, Tranquilizer, Rohypnol	Disorientation, drunken behavior with or without odor of alcohol, sleepiness, decreased blood pressure.
5	Hallucinogens	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD), Mescaline	Poor perception of time and distance, delusion.
6	Inhalants	Vasodilator, Anesthetic Gases	Intoxication, aggression, disorientation, excitation,

Source: Obiechi, G.O, and Isiguzo, B. C. "Curbing the Menace of Drug Use among Secondary School Students in Nigeria". *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences* 4, no. 1(2016): p56.

Drug addiction leads to immense human sufferings and the illegal production and distribution of drugs have generated crime and violence worldwide. Drug addiction affects both brain and behaviour. It has multifaceted impacts on the individual's physical as well as psychological health. According to the United Nations, the population of the world has reached more than 8 billion. Varied problems and disparities also increase with the increase in population. The stability of societies got in risk with unpredictable results. In addition to other social problems, drug abuse is reaching at the social fabric almost everywhere.

Drug abuse is also considered as one of the most stigmatized behavior in the globe. A wide variety of human rights violation is provoked by the people with drug abuse, especially when the rights of drug users are considered unworthy of respect. This work aims to understand the scenario of drug addiction since the period of history till present day. The paper also tries to analyze its influence among the youths in the Indian society.

In every year the day 26 June is celebrated as International Day against Drug abuse and illicit trafficking. It is an effort initiated by the world community to aware the people on the risk of consuming drugs. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has chosen the theme 'The Evidence is Clear: Invest in Prevention' on 26th June, 2024, to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) focus is on prevention in post-colonial countries especially India, where strict laws are targeting on the supply of substances. It has been the primary approach by the UNODC to control substance abuse in the country.

"With a turnover of around 500 billion dollars, drug trafficking is the third largest business in the world, next to petroleum and arms trade" (Fatima, 2017).

Today, almost every corner of the globe is suffering from the curse of drug trafficking and addiction where the drug addicts are leading a life of misery between life and death (UNICEF, 2002).

Operational Definition:

- Drug: According to National Cancer Institute, "Any substance that is used to prevent, diagnose, treat or relieve symptoms of disease or abnormal condition".
- Drug Addiction: According to National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014, "Drug addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences".
- Substance Abuse: According to the World Health Organization, 2011, "Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances like alcohol and other illicit drugs".

Objective:

- i) The main intent of the paper is to understand the pattern and extent of drug abuse in the society.
- ii) The present work tries to study the different governmental strategies undertaken to reduce the problem of addiction along with the awareness of the society on drug abuse and addiction.

Methodology:

The current study is based on primary source as well as secondary source. The researcher has collected data from various members of the community of drug rehabilitation centres. For the work various secondary sources have been used such as books, journals, newspapers and articles to collect data on the topic of research.

Evolution of Drugs:

The significance to understand the nature of illicit drug abuse and addiction is a matter of million years back.

"The exploration of the evolutions of various drugs and its addiction would provide the better understanding of the process of addiction since evolution, personality, behaviour and drug abuse are interlinked" (Saah, 2005).

Drugs discovery and development has a long history. It started in the early days of human civilization. In the ancient period, human beings used different plants, animals, and mineral substances and realized that some substance produced particular effects.

“People adopted the utilization of various beneficiary plants and minerals for the multiple purposes of healing and also to get the expected results, and passed the knowledge of these “drugs” to their next generations” (Bough, Trammel, 2006).

In the ancient period, drugs were not just used for physical remedies but were also related with religious and spiritual healing.

“Different psychoactive substances have been used by- i) priests in religious ceremonies, ii) for medical purposes and iii) massively as a staple commodity by a large segments of population in a socially approved way” (Crocq, 2007).

Since the period of history, psychoactive substances have been utilized to deal with various societal demands in the areas where they were typically cultivated.

“Native Australians used nicotine 40,000 years ago. Similarly native communities in North and South America consumed nicotine, while khat (herb, includes mild euphoria and excitement) was used in Ethiopia and North Africa. Ecuadorian natives consumed the coca plant 5,000 years ago and Timorese natives used the stimulant Betel Nut (Areca Catechu) 13,000 years ago” (Mutlu, 2024).

Humans have used mind-altering plants since earlier times.

“Early humans discovered that eating some plants gave a feeling of relaxation, happiness, drowsiness, or peace, some gave a feeling of increased energy, alertness, and stamina. And some caused strange sensations, terrifying visions, or a profoundly different awareness” (Gahlinger, 2004).

‘Mead’, an alcoholic drink made from fermented honey, was first used about 8000 BCE, and beer and berry wines were first used about 6000 BCE. Around 5000 BCE, the ancient Sumerians started using opium. Alcohol was used in 3500 BCE in ancient Egypt on the other hand; cannabis (the source of marijuana) was used in ancient China around 3000 BCE. Ancient people in Switzerland ate poppy seeds (the source of opium) in 2500 BCE and Coca leaves (the source of cocaine) have been chewed for thousands of years. Since earlier times, various folk medicines are prepared from different plants and herbs.

Moreover, people in ancient Palestine consumed wine in 350 BCE and ancient Greeks drank poppy juice in 300 BCE. In about the same period, South American tribes used a hallucinogen called *cohoba*, made from mimosa beans. (Durant & Thakker, 2003; Page & Singer, 2010).

“Abnormal patterns of substance use have been described since antiquity, at least since Alexander the Great’s death in 323 BC, precipitated by years of heavy drinking” (Crocq, 2007).

“Historical data on the emergence of alcohol in cultural history points to wine production in China dating back to 7000 B.C” (Dietler, 2010). “Fermented beverages such as wine and beer were prepared by the predominant fruits and cereals available in each geographical region. From the pre-historic period to nearly the Industrial revolution, these fermented beverages were taken not only for their euphoric effects as in modern societies

but also for their antibacterial, analgesic properties and as sources of high energy nutrients making them economically valuable as well" (Patrick, 1970 & Schivelbusch, 2012).

Addiction was a global public health problem during the colonial period, industrial revolution and in international trade. "In the 18th century, the addictive effect of opium was recognized when a large number of Chinese people became addicted to it. In Europe, the working classes were threatened by alcoholism" (Hubner, 1988). The relationship with substance is governed by multiple factors such as culture, society, religion and beliefs, individual psychology (addictive, anxious, antisocial personalities), neurobiology and genetics.

A significant part of the population have been used some addictive drugs on a regular basis that they have been considered it as a staple commodity. Alcohol, nicotine and caffeine being pleasant as the mild psychotropic properties are examples of widely consumed drugs and have shaped our culture as vehicle for social interaction, shaping our urban land scape, fasten the opening of international trade routes. All these substances have a long history, mixed-up with myth, bearing witness to man's preference for psychoactive substances.

Magnitude of the problem:

Global scenario:

Globally, the World Drug Report by United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2022, estimates that "11.2 million people worldwide were injecting drugs. The World Drug Report by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2022 reported that cocaine manufacture was at a record high in 2020, growing 11 per cent from 2019 to 1982 tons". Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, cocaine seizures increased to a record of 1,424 tons in 2020.

The latest report by World Drug Report 2023 launched by United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna on 26 June, 2023 says that "illicit drug supply and the trafficking networks intersecting the global crises and challenging health services". The World Drug Report 2023 also highlights about the social and economic inequalities that are formed by drug challenges.

According to the World Drug Report, 2024, launched by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "the emergence of new synthetic opioids and a record supply and demand of other drugs have compounded the impacts of the world drug problem, leading to a rise in drug use disorders and environmental harms". These new group of synthetic opioids have recently emerged in several high-income countries, resulting in an increase in overdose deaths.

The consumption of drugs has increased moderately over the last decades on the global level. The report released by UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024, Vienna, highlights that, "the estimated number of people who used a drug in the past years continues to grow, reaching 292 million worldwide in 2022". 1 in every 18 people aged between 15-64 worldwide have used drugs and one in eighty one have a drug use disorder. Cannabis is the most widely used drug worldwide (228 million users), followed by opioids (60 million users), amphetamines (30 million users), cocaine (23 million users) and ecstasy (20 million users).

Indian Scenerio:

According to the report, developed by the Magnitude of Substance Use in India, department of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India (2019) an extensive number of people in India use psychoactive substances and the substance abuse prevails in all the population group of the nation. The latest World Drug Report in the year 2023 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has found that “the highest opioid user in India is observed in the Eastern parts of the country. The largest numbers of people with opioid use disorders are found in North-western India (Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana) as well as in some of the central-western states (Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra)” (UNODC, 2023).

India was measured as a country for the transfer of the drugs from ‘Golden Triangle’ (Burma, Laos and Thailand) and ‘Golden Crescent’ (Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan). The ‘Golden Triangle’ and the ‘Golden Crescent’ are distinct geographical point that intersects in Asia facilitate the drug cartels to transport their goods across border. These two points are the world’s most active opium-producing territory. According to the study conducted by All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), cannabis and opioids are the most used and dangerous drug. There were around 23 million opioid users in 2019 and one third of who suffered from drug-related disorders. The use of heroin was the most prevalent of all opioids (AIIMS, 2019).

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched *Nasha Mukti Bharat Abhiyaan* (NMBA) in 272 most vulnerable districts since August 2020 to locate the problem of Drug abuse among youth of India.

Policies and Programmes implemented by the Government:

The Government of India for reducing the problem of substance use disorders or drug addiction is highly immense in nature. According to **World Drug report 2022**, “nearly 209 million people used cannabis and 61 million people used opioids in 2020. Even in India, the rates of cannabis and opioid uses are high. Regardless of this, the availability of treatment is very low” (National Drug Laws, Policies and Programs in India: A Narrative Review by Arpit Parmar).

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1985, Act- prohibits a person from the production/manufacturing/cultivation, possession, sale, purchasing, transport, storage, and or consumption of any narcotic drug or psychotropic substances. Initially the act, *Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*, enacted in 1985, the Act was amended three times in 1988, 2001 and 2014.

According to the *Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act*, “narcotics drugs include coca leaf, cannabis (hemp), opium and poppy straw; and psychotropic substances include any natural or synthetic material or any salt or preparation protected by the *Psychotropic Substances Convention of 1971*”. The penalties under this Act- *Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1985* are severe considering the consequences of drug abuse and its trafficking:-

- i. Violating this act can result in imprisonment ranging from one year to 20 years including fine depending on the crime.
- ii. Under the Act, anyone who abets conspires or attempts to commit an offence attract the same punishment as the offence itself.
- iii. Preparing to commit an offence attracts half the penalty.

- iv. Repeat the offences have one and a half times the penalty and in some cases, the death penalty.

Section 71 of the Act Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1985, contains provisions for setting up of rehabilitation and treatment Centre for drug dependent persons. The construction, operation and maintenance of Drug De-addiction Centre are prioritized to address the increasing incidences of drug abuse & addiction in the society. The Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with disabilities would provide financial assistance to institutions/NGOs for Drug Treatment Centre for outpatient & permanent infrastructure at strategic locations for consultation and rehabilitation while for inpatients it will be provided for running and maintenance of Drug De-addiction Centre.

In India, different department and ministries of government work to tackle the problem of drug use. Three broad approaches are followed to address the issue of substance use- 'supply reduction', 'demand reduction' and 'harm reduction'.

Table: 1.2. An overview of the programs/policies/laws to control drug use in India

Approach	Program/Policy/Law with the Approach
Supply reduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NDPS (National Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) Act, 1985 2. National Policy on NDPS, 2012
Demand Reduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Central Sector Scheme for Prevention of alcoholism and drug abuse 2. DDAP (Drug De-Addiction Program) of India 1988 3. Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 4. Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 5. NAPDDR (National Action Plan on Drug Demand Reduction) 2018 6. Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna 2017-2018 7. National Tele Mental Health Program 2022
Harm Reduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NACP (National AIDS Control Program) 2. National Viral Hepatitis Control Program

Source: Parmar, A., Narasimha, V.L and Nath, S., *National Drug Laws, Policies and Programs in India: A Narrative Review, Indian journal of Psychological Medicines, Vol 46, 2023*

1. The main objective of the NDPS (National Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) Act, 1985 and National Policy on NDPS, 2012 is “to focus on the “supply reduction” sector”. The Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, the Narcotics Control Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India and a variety of other agencies in the Central or State governments mainly works to manage the reduction of easy accessibility and availability of illicit drugs by implementing various drug laws and policies.
2. The “demand reduction” sector, deals in reducing the demand for drugs in the population by policies of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of the addicts (Dhawan, Rao & Ray, 2017). The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJe), Government of India, is ministry for demand reduction and has a “Scheme for Prevention of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse” in place since 1985-86 (MoSJe, 2015). “The scheme of the MoSJe is implemented by the Non-governmental organizations (NGO), which run “Integrated Rehabilitation centre for Addicts” for treatment and the rehabilitation of people with Substance abuse disorder. The Drug

De-addiction Programme (DDAP) initiated in 1988 under the Ministry of health and Family Welfare, Government of India, provided the treatment for substance abuse disorders" (Dhawan, Rao & Ray, 2017).

3. The third is the "harm reduction" sector, which mainly aimed for HIV prevention in people who inject drugs. The harm reduction strategies are implemented by the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) (Parmar, A., Narasimha, V.L and Nath, S., 2023)

The Government of Assam, India, has introduced a new Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the rehabilitation Centers that to be mandate from August 1, 2024. As per the report, the new Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), each rehabilitation Centre must make available a minimum of 25 beds, along with two nurses and two ward boys, a cook and a cleaner and 15 other staff members. In addition, all centers are mandate to have Psychiatrists on duty. The inmates/patients will be admitted to the Centre for treatment only after doctor's grant who also must attend to them within 24 hours. Two doctors must visit the centre each week.

Along with these, the centres must renew every three years, with applications required to be submitted two months in advance and the patients with HIV positive who has a history of drug abuse must receive treatment at Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) centers. Every rehabilitation centres should be staffed with a project coordinator, along with a project assistant and an office assistant, all of whom should be graduated (The Assam Tribune, 23 July, 2024).

These rules will be applied to both government and private rehabilitation centers. Moreover, the report also states that, to open a rehabilitation Centre, one must need to submit a written application to the district commissioner's office. This application will be examined by a state level committee and if approved, the license will be provided to operate the centre. In addition, the report also mentioned that if an inmate dies at a rehabilitation centre, strict action will be taken against the rehabilitation centre. The inmates who stayed at a rehabilitation centre for six months will not be allowed to open their own centre. They will need to spend maximum three years in treatment at a centre before they can start their own (The Sentinel, 23 July, 2024)

It has been found that most of the rehabilitation centres working for drug abuse are now compelled to follow the newly implemented Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) by the government of Assam. The drug rehabilitation centres in the society are now strongly concentrating to refine their centres' structure and management in accordance with the strict Standard Operation Procedures (SOP). The management boards of the drug rehabilitation centres are of the impression that violation of newly implemented Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) might withdraw their registration and license of operating rehabilitation centres in the state.

Community participation on drug abuse prevention:

In the society, the problem of drug abuse is wide spread. The participation of community in the prevention and control of drug abuse should be involved in every stage of planning and implementation of strategies. "The involvement and participation of the community members in the process of preventing of drug use, abuse and addiction is always considered to be effective" (Nguyen et al., 2015). The United Nations Office of Drug and

Crime (UNODC) “recognize consumption of illicit drug as a critical health condition that affects the social, psychological and biological dimensions”. UNODC, 2014 are of the opinion that “instead of addressing illicit drug use as a criminal activity, it should be addressed as a health condition requiring community based treatment. By creating an enabling environment that reduces the diffuseness in the community can also reduce the risk of engaging in recreational drug abuse” (Budambula, V, 2018).

“The drug problem-solving strategy all over the national, provincial and local level shares the same goal of eliminating the drug problems of the country” (Wattanasin, S, 2015). The actions to be adopted by the community members in the society to eradicate the problem of drug addiction, demonstrated in the table 1.3 below.

Table: 1.3. The Actions to be adopted by the Community

Sl.no	Actions
1.	Monitoring and reporting misbehavior of suspected persons living in the community as well as visiting people to the community network group or community leaders; providing useful information regarding the spread of drug.
2.	Providing motivation for participation in brainstorming for solving directions of drug problem and management, utilizing the community committee mechanism, parent meetings and informal talks.
3.	Cooperation with police officials with drug examination at the community checkpoints.
4.	Participating on activities organized by different external organizations like trainings, community landscape improvement, career development training and community events and festivals.

Source: Wattanasin, S. *Community Participation to solve Illegal Drug Problems, Procedia, Social and Behavioural Sciences, Elsevier, 2015*

It is very vital to be aware of the prevention and management of drug abuse and addiction in the community. The strong stigma attached to drug addiction is also resisting an individual to seek help. Stigma related to drug addiction is very common and widespread. The families of addicts’ often hide the addictive nature of the member in the community. As the problem of addiction progresses, it becomes known to the whole community and due to lack of awareness of proper treatment and prevention many times the community instead of referring the addict to the appropriate treatment facilities, the community recommend home remedies and other rituals based on their culture practices to be followed. Therefore, prevention programmes on awareness and knowledge linked with drug addiction as a disease is very necessary in the society.

The participation of community in the prevention and management of drug abuse are very usual nowadays. Organizing different awareness campaigns on drug abuse and addiction in various places like schools and colleges to make students of future generation updated and knowledgeable on consumption of various substances are very commonly found. The strategies of awareness campaigns are to share awareness and knowledge on the pattern and extent of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use as well as their effects on individuals, families and on the community. In addition, the strategies of the campaigns also provide the information on the risk and threats related to the problem of drug addiction. The involvement of drug rehabilitation centers with various voluntary organizations as an active community in setting up to coordinate a range of activities and resources; intending to prevent drug abuse and related harms among young people on the prevention policies, programs and services on drug consumption are noticeable.

Conclusion:

The recent growth in the consumption of drug abuse has emerged as an extraordinary danger to the quality of human being life. The abuse of various psychotropic substances has increased so rapidly in all parts of the globe that leaves a horrible mark in its wake. The consumption of substance not only affects the health and lives of individual but also has adversely affects the social, cultural and political sphere of every country. If the problem of drug addiction is not handled properly then the country will be at risk in losing generations. But unfortunately, the introduction of substances into people's life, holding back the healthy generation and gradually shifting them into a life of misery. Young generation who steadily abuse substances often face a range of problems like academic difficulties such as dropouts, low attendance etc., both mental and physical health problems, poor peer relationships and also involve in juvenile activities. The problem of drug addiction should be identified as a serious social problem. Government agencies and policies are not enough to curb this problem of addiction in the society. Therefore, the awareness and the participation of the community members are very necessary towards the reduction of the drug abuse and addiction as a social problem.

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