



## Rise of Alcoholism among women in India

Parvana Bhat

Ph.D Scholar, Department of Strategic and Regional Studies (DSRS), University of Jammu, Email: [bhatparvana1@gmail.com](mailto:bhatparvana1@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Substance abuse among women, is a growing concern in India especially Alcoholism. Some recent studies revealed that alcohol, tobacco, and sedatives are drugs that are commonly abused by women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Alcohol and drug abuse, which is once considered the male phenomenon only in the last few decades, attention has shifted to females and poses many problems not only on the individual user, but also involves the whole family as well as the community. With the passage of time, the use of illegal drugs has spread to every part of the globe, no nation remains untouched to the devastating problems caused by drug abuse. The present paper highlights the problem of substance abuse among women in India, who are traditionally considered to have some kind of immunity to drug abuse, are now recognized as also being vulnerable to drug abuse and its related problems. Patterns of using these substances vary from one country to another. Present study also depicts males playing major role in commercializing drugs illegally in Indian markets, on the other side women as drug dealers are becoming more common. Women involve themselves in illegal drug cultivation, processing which indicates women are not only the abuser of drugs but also playing role of drug dealers in many situations. Women who themselves consume drugs are involved in the production and/or distribution of drugs. Social stigmas are also attached more with these drug abusing women than their male counterparts because their activities are regarded by society as deviance of not accepting the societal values and neglecting the traditional expectations of the roles of wife, mother and family nurturer. Use of illegal drugs has exploded into the globe like a wave. Permeating into nearly every cultural and social class, there are no nation in the world that doesn't struggle with drug abuse on the societal level and where involvements of women are increasing day by day. To effectively address this social problem in India, public policy must take into account the nature, extent of the problem and the context in which it occurs.

**Keywords:**Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, women abusers, Social and Psychological Disorders.

### Introduction

Use of alcohol is a worldwide problem resulting in millions of deaths, including thousands of young lives lost. It is not only a causal factor in many diseases, but also a precursor to injury and violence. Furthermore, its negative impacts can spread throughout a community or a country, and beyond, by influencing levels and

patterns of alcohol consumption across borders.<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol and tobacco are the products which are in demand globally and experienced a rapid increase in consumption. The fastest growth has been seen in developing countries in the Asian subcontinent, where consumption of pure Alcohol has increased by over 50% between 1980 and 2000. Although the consumption of Alcohol has been fallen since 1980 in most developed countries, but it has risen steadily in developing countries, disturbingly so in India. The pattern of drinking in India has been changed from occasional to ritualistic then to social use. Today, people consume Alcohol just to get drunk. Rising level of Alcoholism has raised the health related problems and other social consequences.<sup>2</sup> With more than half of all alcohol drinkers in India falling into the criteria for hazardous drinking, the country, which has seen a rapid proliferation of city bars and nightclubs in recent years, is fast shedding its inhibitions about alcohol as a lifestyle choice. This alarming situation has emerged a new fear of an undocumented rise in alcohol abuse not only among poorer classes but also in sections of society that were previously considered dry. The health minister has recognized the scale of the problem and has called for a policy that will regulate sales and the pricing of drink. Many experts say that although this move is welcome it may not be enough to curb the harmful effects of the rise in alcohol consumption in society.

#### **Changing trend in Alcohol Drinking**

Some studies show a rapid change in patterns and trends of alcohol use in India. Chief among them who start taking alcohol at a younger age. The percentage of the drinking population aged less than 21 years has increased from 2% to more than 14% in the past 15 years, according to studies in the southern state of Kerala by Alcohol and Drugs Information Centre India, a non-governmental organization (NGO). Alarmingly, the study found that the “average age of initiation” had dropped from 19 years to 13 years in the past two decades. The shifting composition of Indian drinkers has seen a rise in the number of Indian women drinking regularly and heavily. One recent study in the southern state of Karnataka found young women consumed similar amounts of alcohol to young men on any typical drinking occasion. To frame a particular scheme the policy makers faces many challenges because two thirds of the alcohol in India is unrecorded because it is either illicit local home brew or has been smuggled into the country. Employers in poor, marginalized communities sometimes pay wages in alcohol rather than cash, according to world health organization (WHO) the hazards of spurious liquor can be fatal, with frequent reports of death, disability, and hospitalization resulting from its consumption across the country.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Women and Drug abuse**

*According to the UN's report on Women and Drug Abuse in India.*

“Like many other societies, India is undergoing transition. Changing roles, increased stress, and alterations in lifestyle bring with them newer problems, including drug abuse. Although the problem of drug abuse among women is being increasingly recognized, this phenomenon and related problems do not usually show up in official drug statistics. This is partly due to the limited number of women drug users and the

largely subordinate position of women users in the drug subculture. However, women are likely to suffer greater consequences than men due to drug abuse.”

Drug using women are looked down upon and stigmatized beyond what most male drug abusers ever have to face. As one author put it, “Their activities are regarded by society as ‘double deviance’ as deviance from both accepted social codes of behavior and from traditional expectations of the roles of wife, mother and family nurturer” (Fagan, 1994).

#### **Deaddiction centres more for men less for women**

It is unfortunate that a vast majority of the Deaddiction centres revolve around male addicts. The result is tragic women often discover themselves hesitant to attend Deaddiction centres. Divyyaa Baja, the founder of “Miracle Foundation” (the first Indian Deaddiction centre solely for women) recalls when a friend of hers had an addiction problem. My friend’s father went all the way to Hyderabad looking for a suitable Deaddiction centre. But he was not comfortable admitting his daughter to a facility filled with men and just a couple of women cooped up in a room.” Consequentially she sought counsel at St. John’s Hospital then a month later, she started abusing drugs again. This kind of examples shows the condition of Deaddiction centres which are more for men less for women. Divyyaa recognizes this by saying, “In an all-women centre, run by women, the addicts feel more comfortable and trusting, which is a big step towards recovery.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **New delhi and Female drinkers**

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), in 2005-2006 and 2015-2016, the percentage of men and women who consumed alcohol in India and the percentage of the male population in Delhi who consumed alcohol have reduced. However, the percentage of women in Delhi who consumed alcohol has gone up from 0.4% of the female population in 2005-2006, to 0.7% in 2015-2016. Other states like Chandigarh, Goa, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh have also seen a rise in women drinkers, and in some of these states the proportion is higher than that of Delhi.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Women involvement in Production and Distribution of drugs.**

Though males tend to dominate the economic aspect of drug abuse, women drug dealers are becoming more commonplace. Women involve themselves in:

- Illegal drug cultivation
- Illegal drug processing, and
- Illegal drug dealing.

Women drug couriers are often intimidated into dealing drugs. Their economic status often arouses the initial desire.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Caste and Class dynamics of Substance abuse among women in India**

In India there are few castes which evidence about women substance abuse. Caste such as Rajput, a woman is considered as a good Rajput women and an adoring wife when she accepts the “Manwar” at wedding and rituals. “Manwar” is raising a toast by new married couples. In Rajasthan Banchadda caste includes: Gujar, Mali, Karmawat, Singhawat etc. These all caste prefers taking alcohol, chew betel leaves and tobacco, smoke bidi and cigarettes. Women taking all these substances and found

common among them, women belonging to many other castes today consume alcohol, but disguise it. Substance abuse and alcohol drinking in India is also symbolises class and status dynamics. The higher class women openly take the alcohol and some amount of opium and lighter drugs. They considered it as fashionable, sign of freedom and independence whereas; middle class women are restricted and bound by norms of not consuming alcohol. Nevertheless, still it has been seen that many women do not want to label themselves as a spoil sport and they want to match and explore themselves with the other higher groups. So, they keep aside their fear of social taboo and hesitation and try to drink liquor at parties and pubs. Whereas, the lower socioeconomic status women are seen usually smoking bidi, chewing Tobacco, drinking alcohol (pauva) at work place as well as at home openly.

In the case of western world, women drinking liquor and practicing substance abuse is commonly found. It is common in their lifestyle and culture. Cases of addiction and substance abuse in countries like America, Australia, Europe, and Thailand are high and one of the most destructive psychiatric disorders were also found among the people over there.

#### **Culture and Alcohol in India**

India is a vast sub-continent and the drinking habit varies place to place. It is therefore impossible to describe a single drinking culture for the whole of India. Some researches indicates people who live in the south western state of Kerala are the heaviest drinkers. Other areas of the continent where people tend to drink relatively heavily include Haryana and Punjab but at the same time, there are many states in India where hardly any drinking culture to speak of and taking further step by banning alcohol completely. In recent years there has been a noticeable rise in the number of urban males who claim to use alcohol as a means to relax but still it is the poor who lives in rural area are the highest consumers of alcohol. It is believed that as little as 5% of alcohol consumers are female although this figure is higher in some states.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Psychological factors and consequences**

Psychological factors are the leading risk factors of rising substance abuse among women. Women with a history of sexual assault reported the lifespan preference of substance abuse to be four times greater in women than men. Another survey of women who had experienced sexual violation, recorded substance as an encounter strategy for the resultant posttraumatic stress disorder. And similarly, feeling of guilt and alienation among the women is also one of the major causes as well as the effect of addicted behaviour as because of this addiction females are somehow being alienated from her spouse, children and family and friends. Women abusers who are pursuing medication have found identical results with co-morbid depressive disorders, adjustment disorder, somatoform disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder and bipolar affective disorder. National survey recorded certain psychological complication such as sleep problems, depression, anxiety, fatal attempts and regret feelings as some of the reason for substance abuse in women in India. Snoopiness and ease of stress or somatic pains are also evidenced as essential factors in a few researches. From these studies, one thing is cleared women in India not only face physical problems but also facing psychological risks with combination of

disorders.<sup>8</sup> Evidence shows that not only in India alcohol in general has more negative than positive effects on a person's health. Over the period 1992-2002, 14,223 people died in Ireland from conditions related to alcohol consumption alcohol-related cancers, alcohol dependency, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, acute alcohol conditions and suicide associated with alcohol consumption (Department of Health & Children, 2004b).<sup>9</sup>

### **Inappropriate treatment of women**

Generally women are not given any treatment for substance addiction and are neglected by family and society. A woman is a pillar of every house and Nation on earth without her existence all things seem next to impossible. Therefore it is very important as well as it is a responsibility to pay attention on Treatment of women addictions so that, women may get proper aids to her problems. Records from Indian Deaddiction centers of Delhi, Jodhpur, and Lucknow between 1989 and 1991 found one to three per cent of medication and care seekers to be female. Also, an inquiry of entire substance abuse cases recorded at the Deaddiction centre at Chandigarh from 1978 and 2008 reported that out of 6608 only 0.5 per cent were women. This may not imply the low incidences of women alcohol abusers, rather, may imply that women alcohol abusers are not seeking help of Deaddiction centres may be due to their wish to keep their problem under curtain and not making it public.<sup>10</sup> Many people are leaving India in order to seek treatment for their alcoholism abroad. The most respected alcohol and drug abuse treatment facility in Asia is DARA Rehab.<sup>11</sup>

### **Relational model**

Social perception of women who use alcohol can be understood within the context of relational model. Society expects a woman to a wife, a mother, caretaker, sexual partner, and nurturer, and when she deviates from these prescribed roles, she tends to face stigma and discrimination. Thus, alcohol use in women is linked with sexual misconduct, promiscuity, and neglect of children and significant others, a set of conditions that cause stigma and social discrimination. We generally seen family attitude was harsh or indifferent to them, and domestic violence was frequently reported. Moreover, factors like poor education status, lack of job, young age at work, early marriage, and lack of social support increased defenselessness to such females.

### **Health consequences**

Women tend to develop alcohol liver disease with comparatively shorter duration and less amount of alcohol consumption than men, more women dies from cirrhosis than men. Many problems are associated by taking alcohol and substance abuse few are highlighted below:

- Menstrual Disturbance
- Harmonal imbalances
- Infertility
- Risk of breast cancer

Women drug users were found to develop more severe pneumonia, rupture of lungs and tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis, HIV, and other adverse effects of AIDS. Women's studies in the National Survey found several physical complications like

sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), abscess, TB, irregular menstrual cycles, amenorrhea, and medical termination of pregnancy.<sup>12</sup>The role of alcohol and substance use disorders in the spread of STDs has been highlighted by the AIDS epidemic. Alcohol consumption in heterosexual women was associated with less condom use and other high-risk sexual behaviors, posing additional risk of getting infected. In Indian studies too, women drug users are reported to engage in unsafe practices more frequently. Moreover, while many women indulge in sex to sustain their alcohol and drug use habits, studies from sex-workers report that many of the female sex workers use alcohol and substances before sexual activity.<sup>13</sup>

### **Role of Education in awareness campaigns**

*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”*

**Nelson Mandela**

Educating the people about drugs, alcohol, its consequences, prevention and treatment facilities, providing awareness generation focusing both on the urban and rural areas is the need of the hour. The study of drug addiction and alcoholism should be introduced in the schools and colleges. Educational awareness can play a vital role in eradicating drugs and alcohol from the society. Seminars, workshops, campaigns should be organized by making people aware about the consequences of drug and Alcohol use.<sup>14</sup>

### **Proper Policy should be framed**

Growing problem of Alcohol and Substance abuse is a matter of concern for everyone and should be addressed across the globe. Particularly in India, there is a need to conduct proper scientific and systematic researches and tackle all the factors and problems which have mentioned in this paper. This paper is an attempt to highlight all the relevant issues, including social, physical, mental and emotional outcomes of alcohol abuse, behavior characteristics of females with substance abuse and its complications, and their medical treatment in Deaddiction centers, lack of facilities, societal pressure. If these issues are not timely addressed then human kind will face severe consequences.<sup>15</sup>Although the Indian constitution includes the prohibition of alcohol among its directive principles, alcohol policy is devolved to individual states as is the levying of taxes on it. Since most states derive around a fifth of their revenue from alcohol taxation the second largest source after sales tax they are generally ambivalent towards stemming its flow. Moreover, there is a long history in India of a powerful alcohol lobby with industry figures influencing the political process, both in the form of party donations and as representatives. But experts argue that Indian society is losing considerably more than it gains. “Because of the political expediency surrounding prohibition, what is not being looked at is demand reduction strategies”, says Vivek Benegal, one of the authors and assistant professor of psychiatry at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS).<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Alcohol abuse which is once considered a male phenomenon but in the last few years attention has been shifted towards females. Women of every section are found to be a part of addiction and the cases has been increased in India with each passing year. A woman as an addict or substance abuser has to face hazardous consequences and

stigmas of society as compared to men. Family Support and care is not been provided to her and she faces immense mental and physical trauma. All these stigmas and discrimination drag women's into a vicious circle of risky locations, unhealthy sexual practices and there are higher chances of losing one's own respect and identity. In society when such women want to come forward for the treatment of their problems they have to faced many hurdles like gender-discrimination, household responsibilities etc. In simple words, if you are ill and don't get a proper treatment, medication, care then what kind of future that person possess. Present situation demands proper treatment and counteractive action to consider these burning issues with proper policies and women Deaddiction centers should be encouraged with combination of counseling sessions, family care with therapies, Behavioral therapies, and unbiased culture frameworks are essential to address the issues of alcoholism and substance abuse. It is the responsibility of our society to give the women a hope and direction for life with safe and healthy way of living with dignity and respect.

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