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Drug Addiction in Punjab

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Drug Addiction in Punjab

KEY MESSAGES

In recent times, Punjab has witnessed a tremendous rise in substance abuse. Singh (2005)¹ reported high substance abuse in the state of Punjab. It definitely reflects a trend of glaring rise in substance abuse. A recent study by the Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar² suggested that as much as the 70% of young Punjabi men were hooked on drugs or alcohol. While the well-off take heroin, the poor take sedatives or other cheap medicines that are easily available at pharmacies, despite Government efforts to limit access to them.

- Opiates, their derivatives and synthetic opiate drugs are used by 70 per cent of the addicts, followed by a combination of opiate and other sedatives, including morphine.
- Extent of **drug addiction in Punjab is 70 per cent**. Household survey indicates that there is at least one drug addict in the **65 per cent of families in Majha** (Spreads over 4 districts: Gurdaspur, Pathankot, Amritsar and Tarn Taran) and **Doaba** (Covers 4 districts: Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Nawanshahr) and **64 percent families of Malwa** (cover the largest part of Punjab and covers 14 districts: Ferozpur, Faridkot, Fazilka, Bathinda, Barnala, Sangrur, Mansa, Patiala, Mohali, Moga, Muktsar, Ludhiana, Rupnagar and Fatehgarh Sahib).
- Tarn Taran is the most affected rural district and Amritsar is the most affected urban district in Punjab.
- Per head consumption of alcohol is the maximum in Punjab and Tarn Taran district tops the list.
- In border areas, the extent of substance abuse is 70-75 per cent in the age group of 15-25 years and up to 40 per cent in the age group of 35-60 years.
- Over 16 per cent population is addicted to hard drugs.
- Being a border state, with 550-km international border with Pakistan, Punjab “has become a major transit and destination point in international (coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan) drug trafficking”.³

¹ Singh P (2005). “ Farm labour, teenagers worst hit by drug abuse” The Tribune News Services, Chandigarh cited in Kaur and Gulati (2007)Drug Abuse: Trends and Issues International Marketing Conference on Marketing and Society, 8-10 April, 2007, IIMK viewed on 25 June 2009
<http://dspace.iimk.ac.in/bitstream/2259/348/1/387-395.pdf>

² Sandhu RS (2006). "Drug addiction in Punjab: A Sociological Study", Department of Sociology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Viewed on 27 July 2009
<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060701/punjab1.htm>

³ Guideline for the Implementation of the Project Awareness and Education for Prevention of Drug Abuse & Alcoholism in Punjab, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India. <http://www.nyks.org/Drug%20Abuse%20Punjab%20Eng.pdf>

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PART I. INTRODUCTION

According to a survey conducted by the Punjab Government, every 3rd male student in Punjab is hooked to substance abuse (Indian Express, 2009).⁴ Quoting a survey Sharma (2008)⁵ revealed that the consumption of opiates in Punjab is three times the national average reported. The recent study of Institute for Development and Communication shows that substance abuse in Punjab is increasing at an alarming rate and is overtaking traditional intoxicants⁶. Sandhu (2006)⁷ reported that the youth in the villages of Punjab are more vulnerable to addiction.

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (2004) found that opiate abuse accounted for 43% of Indian drug abuse. Drug users are mainly young and predominately male. National Survey (2004) on the extent, pattern and trends of drug abuse in India found that opiates are primary drug abused and 49% of respondent's families had history of drug abuse. Studies on drug addiction indicated that easy availability of drugs (Hans 1986) and irrational exaggeration of effects of drugs (Phadke 1989) has resulted in abrupt rise in drug abuse. Jolly (1976) argued that a society cannot fulfill all aspiration of man thus it results in frustration and drug abuse among youth. Randhawa (1991) remarked that deviant behavior including drug abuse is learned within primary groups particularly peer group and family.⁸

The study conducted by the Institute of Development and Communication (2006, 2011)⁹ revealed that a majority of drug abusers i.e. 70% had rural background and were hooked to drugs and opium which they procured from village chemist.

According to a Punjab Government survey, and as per an affidavit filed by the Government of Punjab and Haryana High Court, 66 per cent of the school-going students in the state consume gutkha or tobacco; every third male and every tenth female student has taken drugs on one pretext or the other and seven out of 10 college-going student's abuse one or the other drug. Punjab alone accounts for roughly over one-fifth of the total recoveries of heroin in the country. The drug traffickers use the cities of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Tarn., Ferozepur, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, Patiala as well as Chandigarh to smuggle the narcotic substances through Punjab.¹⁰

The scale of the problem, if impossible to quantify precisely, is undeniably immense and worrisome. India has one of the world's youngest populations, a factor that is expected to power future economic growth, yet Punjab is already a reminder of the demographic risks of a glut of young people. An overwhelming majority of addicts are between the ages of 15 and 35, according to study conducted by BBC, with many of them unemployed and frustrated by unmet expectations.¹¹

For the Punjab government, the problem is hardly unknown. Private drug treatment centers, some run by quacks, have proliferated across the state, and treatment wards in government hospitals have seen a surge in patients. **Three years ago,**

⁴ <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1474517/>

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/every-third-male-student-in-punjab-drug-addict-hc-told/464048>

⁵ Sharma N (2008). "Region drug abuse statistics way ahead of national average" (<http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Region-drugabuse-statistics-way-ahead-of-national-average/286653/>) Viewed on 25 May, 2009

⁶ <http://www.nyks.org/Drug%20Abuse%20Punjab%20Eng.pdf>

⁷ Sandhu RS (2006). "Drug addiction in Punjab: A Sociological Study", Department of Sociology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Viewed on 27 July 2009 (<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060701/punjab1.htm>).

⁸ <http://www.aygrt.net/publishArticles/325.pdf>

⁹ http://www.idcindia.org/PDF/ann_rpts/Annual_Report_2010-2011.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.bparco.com/every-third-male-student-in-punjab-drug-addict-hc-told>

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11920796>

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a state health official warned in a court affidavit that Punjab risked losing a whole generation to drugs. Roughly 60 percent of all illicit drugs confiscated in India are seized in Punjab.

More than 70 per cent of the 18,000 inmates in various jails across the state are hooked to drugs and a large number of them are suspected to be HIV positive. Drugs like heroin, cocaine and smack are being reportedly smuggled inside jails by peddlers and couriers, by engaging children. These drugs are easily available at ‘friendly kiriyana shops’ and medical stores in the vicinity of jails.¹²

Punjab ranks second in the country for drug abuse. As per several surveys conducted, more than 70 per cent of boys and girls in Punjab abuse drugs. According to psychologist Dr Shiv Sood survey, 62 percent of the boys and girls in the age group of 19-24 years are exposed to drugs. These findings came to light in the state-level function on International Day Against Drug Abuse at Government college for boys.¹³

¹² <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20120211/punjab.htm#1>

¹³ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/punjab-ranks-second-in-drug-abuse/809617>

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PART II: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Indian National Congress

- **Captain Amrinder Singh** on <http://www.captainforcm.com/Issues> (3 Feb, 2011)
- **Ravneet Singh Bittu, MP and then President of the Punjab Youth Congress to sit on indefinite hunger strike from the day Punjab Vidhan sabha begins**
- *Akali dal BJP government cheated the youth of Punjab—Bittu (Sep.24,2011)*¹⁴

He blamed the ruling Akali-BJP Government for its failure to set up an all powerful Drug Prevention Board in the State, in spite of the written promises made by the Chief Minister.

Pulling up the ruling Akali-BJP Government for deceiving the people and reminding the Chief Minister of his obligations to the people of Punjab Ravneet said, though S. Parkash Singh Badal, never tires of praising Shri Narinder Modi for the progress and growth of Gujarat, he forgets that the progress and growth of Punjab where more than 72% of youth are addicted to one or the other form of drugs, is not possible if this menace of drug abuse is not tackled immediately.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Shri Ravneet Singh Bittu, then President Punjab Youth Congress and scores of activists initiated a **Hunger strike to bring the issue of drug abuse in Punjab** to the fore front of collective thinking. The State Government **after 121 hours of the initiation of hunger fast** gave a written assurance that a Drug prevention Board would be in place, within one and half months, but did nothing till date even though more than four and half months have passed.

Bittu demanded immediate formation of a House Committee of Legislatures of all political parties, to enable them discuss and deliberate on the kind of powers to be delegated to the constitutional body such as Drug Prevention Board.

¹⁴ http://www.nriinternet.com/NRIcongressparty/Indian_Leaders/A_Z/B/Ravneet_Bittu/2011/Jan/SEP24.htm (accessed on 13.10.2012)

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Youth Congress members on fast against drug abuse¹⁵

Punjab Youth Congress (PYC) activists Sunday started a hunger strike here against drug abuse, particularly among youth. State Youth Congress president and MP Ravneet Singh Bittu led the first batch of 50 activists.

While Bittu will continue his fast indefinitely, other activists will sit on hunger strike for 24 hours in batches of 50, according to a statement.

Bittu demanded the formation of a drug prevention board to be headed by a retired high court judge to lay down stringent laws to punish drug-peddlers.

He said a committee of the state assembly should monitor the steps taken by the government against drug abuse.

'We will continue the hunger strike till the Punjab government commits to give a time frame to eradicate the use of synthetic drugs from the state,' said Bittu, a grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh.

Bittu, who had walked 1,700 km for 45 days this year against drug abuse and female foeticide, said the Akali Dal-led government in Punjab was indifferent to these social evils.

People's Party of Punjab (PPP)

- People's Party of Punjab (PPP) chief Manpreet Singh Badal said that if Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal and Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal were serious about eradicating drug abuse from the state, "they can begin the task by cleaning their own backyard".¹⁶

Manpreet Singh Badal said: "I come from Badal village and so does the Chief Minister and his deputy. Sukhbir, who also holds the Home portfolio, has been repeating time and again that his government and the police are committed to free the state of the drug menace. Then why does he not start from Badal village itself?" "Everyone, including him and the CM, know the six families, who sell drugs in Badal village. Why is the government or the police not taking any action?" he added.¹⁷

- Arjun Singh Badal son of Manpreet Singh Badal has launched SUBERA on 14th August, 2012 to counter increasing drugs problem in Punjab.

¹⁵ <http://in.news.yahoo.com/youth-congress-members-fast-against-drug-abuse-084448160.html> (accessed on 13.10.2012)

¹⁶ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/manpreet-slams-badals-over-drug-menace/1011109>

¹⁷ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/manpreet-slams-badals-over-drug-menace/1011109>

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SAD (Shiromani Akali Dal)

- **Akali Dal Badal Leader Caught Transporting Heroin**

<http://www.panthic.org/articles/3990>

Nowhere in their manifesto and agenda for development for 2012-2017, did the SAD even mention the issue of drug addiction in Punjab.

In March 2008, a senior member of Shiromani Akali Dal (B) was arrested from the outskirts of the Raja Sansi Airport in Sri Amritsar Sahib with a supply of 22.5 kgs of heroin with an estimated value Rs. 22 Crore in International Markets. **The arrested, Purshotam Lal Sondhi, was the General Secretary of the party's youth wing. He was arrested after the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) received an anonymous tip.**

Punjab is facing a huge problem of drug addiction among the people, especially the youth. Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Singh Badal has asked the central government to effectively check smuggling of narcotics through India-Pakistan border.

- **Akali Kin In Jail Drug Scandal**

The Times of India (March 3, 2010)

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-03-03/chandigarh/28115628_1_akali-leader-kg-opium-central-jail

Two weeks after the Bathinda court sentenced a Faridkot block-level Akali leader to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for smuggling opium, police on Tuesday evening arrested his relative, who had come to meet him in central jail, for possessing 175 narcotic tablets.

According to police, Darshan Singh, who had come to visit Sadhu Singh in jail, was found carrying 175 sedative tablets used by drug-addicts. While Darshan was arrested in a criminal case, the FIR lodged in Civil Lines police station said the pills were "meant for jailed Akali leader Sadhu Singh".

- **Akali Leader Sentenced In NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act) Case**

Times of India Sep 6, 2012

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-09-06/chandigarh/33648895_1_akali-leader-kg-opium-ndps-case

A rebel senior Akali leader has been sentenced to three years imprisonment in an old NDPS case for possessing opium. His accomplice Surjit Singh has been sentenced for one and half years whereas another accused in the case Gurnam Singh has been acquitted. Former forest department chairman Bharpoor Singh Dhanola was booked under NDPS act for possessing more than one kg opium in year 2003.

Bharpoor Singh and companion Surjit Singh were arrested on May 17, 2003 with opium when they were travelling in a car. Taking up the case Barnala additional district and sessions judge BS Sandhu on Thursday sentenced Bharpoor Singh to 3 years imprisonment with fine of Rs. 10,000 and sentenced Surjit Singh for one and half years imprisonment along with fine of Rs. 5,000.

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Bibi Jagir Kaur, Relatives Booked For Buying Voters

Times of India Jan 15, 2012

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-01-15/india/30629305_1_bibi-jagir-kaur-liquor-shop-liquor-contractor

Former Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee chief and an Akali Dal candidate from Bholath, Bibi Jagir Kaur, her daughter Rajneet Kaur, son-in-law Yuvraj Bhupinder Singh and three others were booked for allegedly bribing voters, intimidation and violating prohibitory orders. A vehicle carrying 183 cartons of whisky was seized at Bholath's Talwandi Kooka village in Punjab on Friday night. She rubbished the allegations.

Recently Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal gave approval for setting up a drug de-addiction centre at Bathinda. A decision to this effect was taken by Badal on the recommendation of a team of experts comprising Ajit Avasthi and Debasish Basu, both Professors in the Department of Psychiatry in PGIMER Chandigarh.

Badal agreed to release Rs 25 crore, of which Rs 10 crore would be spent on the upcoming drug de-addiction centres at Amritsar and Patiala, and the remaining Rs 15 crore would be utilised for the 10-bedded drug de-addiction units attached to the 31 district and sub divisional hospitals.

Referring to the proposal mooted by the Health and Family Welfare Minister Madan Mohan Mittal for establishing another drug de-addiction centre in Ludhiana, Badal asked the Health department in consultation with expert group to explore the possibility of setting up this proposed centre.

Badal also asked the Principal Secretary Home to authorise the Jail Superintendents to procure medicines required for drug de-addiction from the prison funds. The expert group has also recommended the creation and strengthening of de-addiction facility in each of the eight central jails.¹⁸

The Punjab government decided to honour the panchayats of "drug-free" villages besides launching a 'Special Anti Drugs Drive' to create awareness about the ill effects of drugs. While announcing this, Rural Development and Panchayat Minister Surjit Singh Rakhra said he had directed the officers of his department to prepare a list of drug free villages. He said 60% of Punjab's population was in rural areas and it was the right time to eliminate the worrying trend.

All the above statements clearly show that SAD does not believe in the adage- "Practice what you preach".

The candidates rarely spoke about drug abuse in the recently held election of 2012. In fact, India's Election Commission said that some political workers were actually giving away drugs to try to buy votes. More than 110 pounds of heroin and hundreds of thousands of bottles of bootleg liquor were seized in raids. During the elections, party workers in some districts distributed coupons that voters could redeem at pharmacies, activists said.¹⁹

"We have encountered the problem of liquor during elections in almost all states," S. Y. Quaraishi, India's chief election commissioner. "But drug abuse is unique only to Punjab. This is really of concern." Punjab's reluctance to treat the drug situation as a full-blown crisis is partly because the state government itself is dependent on revenue from alcohol sales. Roughly 8,000 government liquor stores operate in Punjab, charging a tax on every bottle — an excise that represents one

¹⁸ http://www.punjabnewslines.com/news/Another-de_addiction-centre-in-Bathinda-soon.html (accessed on 13.10.2012)

¹⁹ http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/world/asia/drug-addiction-is-a-growing-problem-in-punjab.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

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of the government's largest sources of revenue. India's comptroller found that liquor consumption per person in Punjab rose 59 percent between 2005 and 2010.²⁰

KEY ISSUES

- **The Consumption Of Liquor Has Increased During SAD Rule!**²¹

In 2009-2010, people of Punjab drank nearly 29 crore bottles of Punjab Made Liquor (PML), Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and beer. This is apart from illicit brew, liquor brought by foreigners, defence sales, and stuff brought in from other states. Punjab has about 2.5 crore people, which equates to around 10 bottles of 750 ml liquor per person a year. The consumption of liquor then rises dramatically for the drinking population.

In 2010 so far, the Special Operations Cell has seized 80 kilos of heroin and smack, 14 kilos of opium, two quintals of poppy husk, and, in a first, 18 kilos of methamphetamine. This is apart from the seizures of the BSF, DRI, Customs, and the Punjab Police. For perspective, the normal rate of seizures is about five to 10 percent of the stuff in transit. In addition, there are thousands of chemists and pharmacies that sell pills at two to three times the official price without prescription. In all, that is a staggering amount of booze and drugs in Punjab. The result: a dramatic increase in admissions into drug and alcohol rehabs.

Forty percent drugs addicts are below 50 years, 15 percent are above 50 years and half are women. For all of them, Punjab has only 89 de-addiction centres, of which only 23 are recognised. In *Tehelka Magazine, Vol 7, Issue 39, Dated October 02, 2010, it was reported that 75 percent of Punjab's youth are addicted to drugs*. If this continues, the story of Punjab will end by 2030," says Ranvinder Singh Sandhu, Professor of Sociology in Guru Nanak Dev University. Sandhu has written the only official study of addiction in Punjab, *Drug Addiction in Punjab: A Sociological Study*.

The International Human Rights Organization (IHRO) expressed its concerns over growing drug addiction across the State and alleged that the Government was not paying any attention to curb this menace.²²

IHRO leaders expressed that the Punjab Government was showing less concern as neither the SAD (Badal) or the Bhartiya Janta Party had done anything in its regards.

DG Gill, the chairperson, held that the Government was merely trying to stop the addiction through police force however this was not working. He said that so far the results are zero. He called upon the Government to "catch the big fish" instead of going after addicted individuals.

Speaking about the recent arrest of Police Cat Sukhwinder, alias Sukhi, DS Gill alleged that it was a shame that even police high officials were involved in this business.

He said that the Government should run special campaigns, especially during elections so drugs are not used to lure voters, which has been a problem even during SGPC elections.

²⁰ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/world/asia/drug-addiction-is-a-growing-problem-in-punjab.html?pagewanted=all>

²¹ http://www.tehelka.com/story_main47.asp?filename=Ne021010Cover_story.asp

²² <http://www.sikhsiyasat.net/2012/10/06/ihro-expresses-concern-over-drug-addiction-in-punjab/>