

Breaking the Barriers of Society: Reading in Between the Lines - Things that have Changed in India with the Outbreak of a Pandemic

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Abstract: *The outbreak of novel Coronavirus has thrown many challenges upon mankind. In due course of emerging victorious in this battle, simultaneously there have been some positives to look out for. With the nationwide lockdown extended till 3rd May 2020, the whole country has come to a standstill. This has broken the chain of extensive drug abuse in many parts of the country. Cigarette smoking, pan masala, gutka, betel nut chewing and various forms of drug abuse has stopped. People do not have access to these items, and it is come as good news for the government. This research highlights the positives ripples it has caused across India.*

Keywords: Psychoactive, substance abuse, lockdown, crime

1. Introduction

Before assessing the current situation, it is essential to discuss certain things related to psychoactive substances and common terms related to it.

Substance abuse refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs [1]. Psychoactive substances are substances that, when taken in or administered into one's system, affect mental processes [2]. Psychoactive substance use can lead to dependence syndrome- a cluster of behavioral, cognitive and psychological phenomena that develop after repeated substance use, and that typically include a strong desire to take the drug, difficulties in controlling its use, persisting in its use despite harmful consequences, a high priority is given to drug use than to other activities and obligations, increased intolerance and sometimes a physical withdrawal state [1]. Substances of abuse include alcohol, opiates, cocaine, amphetamines, hallucinogens, prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse [2].

Alcohol:

Alcohol is an intoxicating agent found in **beer, wine and liquor**. It is produced by the fermentation of yeasts, sugar and starch. Fourteen grams or 0.6 fluid ounces of pure alcohol equals “**one drink**” [3]. Consumption of alcohol in small amounts in the form of Red wine is good for the heart. Anything that is taken or consumed in excess will lead to unwanted problems.

Cigarette smoking

A cigarette is a thin film of psychoactive materials, generally finely cut tobacco rolled in paper for smoking. “**Puff**” is a term that is commonly associated with smoking. A Puff refers to a small amount of air or smoke that is blown out. Smoking causes several health issues like reduced lung capacity, gradual deterioration of muscles, deterioration in taste buds and bad oral hygiene.

Marijuana, Heroin, Cocaine & amphetamines

These are drugs that are sold illegally in India at

astonishingly high prices.

Anabolic Steroids

Anabolic steroids are synthetic, or human-made, variations of the male sex hormone testosterone. The proper term for these compounds is anabolic-androgenic steroids. "Anabolic" refers to muscle building, and "androgenic" refers to increased male sex characteristics. Some common names for anabolic steroids are Gear, Juice, Roids, and Stackers [3]. These are misused by athletes, bodybuilders and weightlifters commonly, in order to have an unfair advantage in terms of performance enhancement. They have serious long-term health hazards.

2. Lockdown Statistics

The sale of alcohol, cigarettes and other psychoactive substances stopped when the lockdown was announced in India. This has had positive ripples across the country. They are as follows:

- a) When an individual stops smoking, he is bound to have health benefits. His lung capacity will improve gradually. This is important as the Covid virus affects the lungs, and smokers are more prone to attack.
- b) Also, the money that is being spent in buying these items is cut down. This is essential for the poor. They can use this money to buy essential commodities.
- c) When a person is forced to stop such bad practices, it is bound to reap positive results. He will develop a sense of control and mental strength. He is forced to lead a lifestyle without taking these harmful substances. This will prove to be beneficial in the long run.
- d) Extensive consumption of alcohol or other drugs will lead to a state of mental drowsiness, and the person is not in control of the actions he might be doing. This can prove to be costly. Over the long run, this will lead to decreased immunity and other added health hazards. It is an opportunity for people to stop these bad habits, introspect and change their priorities. To enjoy momentary pleasures, it is not good to put themselves and many people who are dependent on them. As the health effects of drugs are not felt instantly, people are ignorant. In the long run, it proves

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to be costly.

e) Drug abuse is one of the main reasons for crimes like rape and deaths. However, with people forced to stay indoors, crime rates have reduced drastically across India.

The overall registration of criminal cases in **Odisha** has dropped drastically in police stations. Thanks to the lockdown in the wake of the deadly COVID-19 outbreak. Crimes like rapes, thefts and burglaries have nosedived just a week after the lockdown began. While earlier nearly 332 criminal cases were registered in a day in Odisha, the number has drastically dropped to nearly 150 cases per day [5].

In the national capital **Delhi**, from March 22nd to April 12th, the number of cases registered under section 376 of the Indian Penal Code stood at 23, as opposed to 139 in 2019, during the same time period leading to a decline of 83.4% [6].

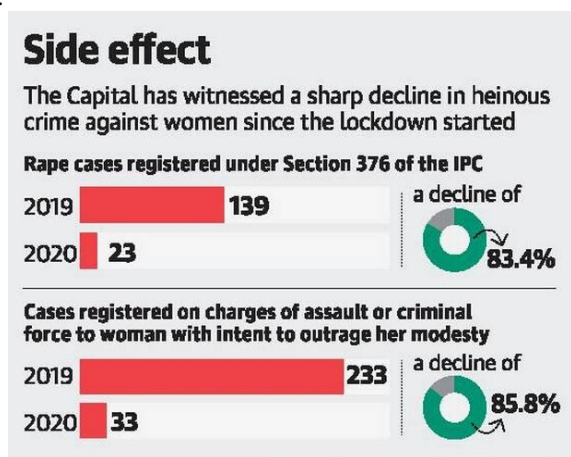


Figure 1: Decline in heinous crime against women during the lockdown [6].

From March 15th to March 31st, crime of all categories reduced substantially. Molestation of women reduced from 144 to 72, robberies from 109 to 53, extortion cases from 13 to 3, and theft from 1982 to 1243 [6].

Total rape cases reported by year

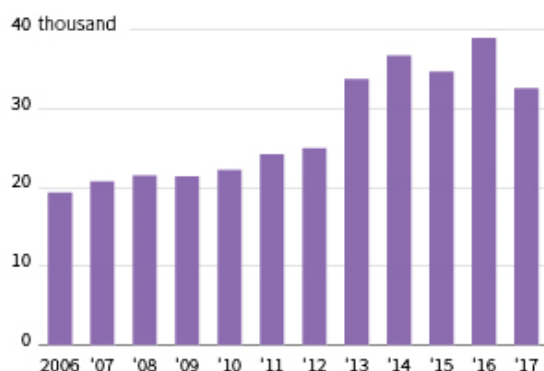


Figure 2: Year wise statistics of the reported rape cases in India [7]

The number of crimes against women have reduced thanks to the Lockdown.

Crime cases saw a dip amid curfew in **Ludhiana (Punjab)** on 8th April. The number of crime cases in the city has seen a

sharp dip ever since the curfew was imposed to control the coronavirus outbreak. No rape cases were reported and the number of burglaries, snatching and robbery cases have been low [8].

Substance abusers have been unable to access drugs. In states like Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, many people have been approaching private rehabilitation centres [9]. This is the first step in the right direction. The government is doing its best to help people with this issue.

The number of drug addicts with withdrawal symptoms visiting at the government-run **Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT)** centers in Punjab has gone up considerably due to non-availability of drugs in the wake of the lockdown imposed to stop the spread of the coronavirus. In Bathinda district, 151 new addicts got themselves registered with the OOAT Centers since the lockdown began. In Amritsar and Tarn Taran districts too, there was a surge in the number of patients coming to clinics. To control the craving in the absence of drugs, addicts are forced to take medicines [9].

As many as 15,754 new substance addicts have started treatment at government-run 198 outpatient opioid-assisted treatment (OOAT) clinics, and 106 private deaddiction centres. Of these, 8,091 are registered at OOAT clinics and 7,663 in private, taking the overall tally addicts undergoing treatment to 4.15 lakh [10].

3. Conclusion

The National Lockdown has come as a blessing in disguise. It has helped reduce substance abuse in India. The substance abuse in the state of Punjab itself is considered to be an epidemic. It cannot be said that substance abuse will stop completely after the lockdown. Nonetheless, this is the first step towards that direction. The lockdown has also helped reduce crime across the country. Once the lockdown is lifted and the situation comes to normalcy, will the crime rate and substance abuse reduce? Only time will tell.

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