

Understanding Substance Use through the lens of a former substance user: A case study

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Abstract: Substance use is a global public health crisis or a pandemic like problem. It is not biologically contagious, however socially and psychologically transmissible. The present case study report aimed to find out the perspectives of the former drug user on substance use and the role of the counsellor, family and the community to overcome the problems of substance use in Manipur.

Key Words: Substance use, counsellor, family, community, Manipur

Date of Submission: 06-01-2026

Date of acceptance: 16-01-2026

I. INTRODUCTION

Substance use is a global health crisis. It is not biologically contagious but socially and psychologically transmissible. It disseminates through peer influence, curiosity, experimentation, boredom, and normalization of behaviour or several other factors. When individuals observe friends, family members or admired figures using substances, they may begin to perceive such behaviour as acceptable or even desirable. Repeated exposure to substances reduces perceived risk and increases curiosity among adolescents and young adults. Substance use often spreads within social networks and communities, not through physical contact, but through attitudes, beliefs and learned behaviours. Therefore, the present study is focused on understanding the harmful effect of substance use through the perspective of the former drug user.

II. CASE HISTORY

Shyam (pseudo name) is a 40 years old unmarried man. For the past 6 years, he is serving as a counsellor in one of the rehabilitation centres of Manipur. Earlier, he was a poly drug users (Alcohol, Ganja, SP tablets and Nitrosun10). Shyam expressed that he was brought up in a middle class family along with three siblings. His father was a social worker and his mother was a homemaker. None of the family members use any intoxicant things except him. Shyam said that he started to use these substances when he was about 12 years old because of peer influence and curiosity, but stop consuming it for about 4 years. After that, at the age of 16, he started to consume drugs occasionally for about 10 years. This led to drop out from college. He worked as a salesman which further helps him to consume drugs regularly. Despite belonging to a drug free family, his father's extramarital affairs contributed to his regular substance use. He stayed in various rehabilitation centre and relapse for three (03) times. However, he never involved in any illegal activities for procuring drugs.

Shyam said that while indulging with drugs, his parents and siblings never believed him. Therefore, in order to convince his family members, he tried to depend only on alcohol. Later on, he realised the harmful impact of the substances that he consumed. He even suffered from chronic liver problem, Hepatitis C and weight loss. Shyam expressed that when he reached bottom line he wanted to overcome this perilous path. Therefore, he stayed in one of the rehabilitation centre and also focus on improving his physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well being by his own. After recovery, he completed Graduation and undergoes training programmes to become a counsellor.

Shyam said that the involvement of family members is much crucial for helping the substance users to bring into the mainstream. He shared that as a counsellor, he came across lots of parents who are not supportive in giving treatment of their wards. This makes it difficult for them to carry out their tasks. Lack of acknowledgement or appreciation by the family members degrades the mental and emotional health of the drug users.

Apart from this, the role of the counsellor is also pivotal. The counsellor should be helper and a facilitator. He/ she should have the skills to develop a mutual trust with the substance users. Shyam said that most of the substance users compromise the true worth/ values of life. They feel deprived of the world around them which further hampered their physical, emotional and spiritual well being. This is mainly because of social stigma that exists in today's society.

Shyam mentioned that he came across several drug users who felt discrimination within the friend circles, by the family and community. Therefore, he suggested that public awareness should be given at the grass root level. Every educational institution should appoint a counsellor so that it will help those students in need. Specific classes about the disastrous impact of substance use should be added as a part of the syllabus at high school level, particularly from 8 to 10 standards. This will help the teenagers to develop an insight of substance use. Further, he opined that the grant in aid provided by the government is very less as it hardly covered the total expenditure of each rehabilitation centre of Manipur.

III. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In early the 1980s, the crisis of substance use has been emerged in Manipur. Until now, it has been a critical problem for the state. Although there exists several legal and policy measures viz., Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Act, 1985, Manipur State Policy on Substance Use Disorder, 2019, campaign on 'War on Drugs' (2018) and establishment of several rehabilitation centre, the state is unable to solve this menace. Therefore, there is need for the people of the state to understand the prevailing issues of substance use. The involvement of family members in bringing the drug users to the mainstream is very necessary. Without active participation of the family, although the users were kept in various rehabilitation centres, it won't be meaningful. Different research studies have opined that dysfunctional family environment creates significant impact on the mental health of the drug users. Additionally, minimal support by the community contributes to the cause. Thus, it becomes imperative for both the people and government to address substance use through family and community participation.

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