

A Study of Pattern of Opioid Users in a Southern District of Punjab State, India

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Abstract: Introduction: Drug dependence is significant problem in Punjab, most drug dependant people use opioids. The widespread drug abuse in India can be attributed to the easy availability of drugs. Only one out of six drug users have access to treatment globally. Women in particular appear to face barriers to treatment. **Material and method:** Patients with minimum age of 18 years, who had urine positive test for opioids and dependant on opioids as per ICD-10 criteria were taken into the study. Socio- demographic details were collected. Symptoms of Opium withdrawal were assessed using Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS). Presence or absence of any psychological illness was screened using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28). **Results :** In this study majority of participants were in age group of 26-50years,40%were educated till primary school and 31.5% were educated till higher primary school,56% were farmers, majority were using opioid for more than 5 years ,reason for opioid use was for doing heavy work, Bhukki and Afeem were most commonly used opioid and consuming orally was common mode of using it, majority of participants were treated and had family history of opioid use, Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale(COWS) showed mild withdrawal in 87% and moderate in 13%, General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) showed positive psychological symptoms in 74.5% of the sample. **Conclusion:** This study shows that young adults and farmers are more prone to opioid addiction to relieve pain after heavy work. Epidemic of opioid addiction can be quelled by treatment with medication along with counseling.

Key words: Opioid, Bhukki, Afeem, Addiction.

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I. Introduction

The opium trade yielded enormous profits to the British imperialists during the nineteenth century. India emerged as a fertile ground for the cultivation of poppy and manufacturing of opium under British monopoly during the colonial period. opium production was subjected to state monopoly during the colonial period and in independent India for different reasons. On the other hand opium smuggling, as a breach of state monopoly, remained widespread during the colonial period¹.

Recently an unprecedented wave of drug abuse has extended its tentacles across North India. Two states Punjab and Rajasthan appear to be worst hit, with the fears of losing a “whole generation of youngsters” to the menace of Opioid drug abuse. The widespread drug abuse in India can be attributed to the easy availability of drugs which young people consume for 'recreational' purposes².

Only one out of six drug users have access to treatment globally. Women in particular appear to face barriers to treatment³. An unacceptable number of drug users worldwide continue to lose their lives prematurely, with an estimated 1,87,100 drug-related deaths in 2013. People have wrong perception about rehabilitation of drug abusers thinking that it has a quick and simple remedy.

At present two kinds of drugs are used for treatment in Punjab. Opiate drugs, which are derived from opium plus synthetic, and pharmaceutical drugs which fall under the category of psychoactive substance abuse. The most effective treatment is the Opiate Substitution Therapy (OST) which has been endorsed by WHO (the World Health Organisation), the United Nations and by the Indian Psychiatric Society⁴. In this background of drug menace, the present study was conducted to study the characteristic features of opioid users.

II. Materials and Methods

Study Design: Cross sectional observational study

Study location: The study was conducted in a government registered psychiatric de-addiction centre in Patiala, Punjab. The patients catered to OPD basis treatment

Study Duration: 3 months

Sampe Size: 200 Patients

Subjects and selection method: The total number of subjects to be included in the study was limited to 200. The first 200 opioid users (over a period of 3 months) who fulfilled the inclusion and exclusion criteria and provided an informed consent were included. The convenient sampling method was used.

Inclusion Criteria:

- 1) A minimum age of 18 years;
- 2) Who had urine positive test for opioids;
- 3) Dependence on opioids as per ICD-10 criteria.

Diagnosis of substance dependence was made by the Psychiatrist.

Subjects were excluded if they did not meet the inclusion criteria or if they currently had presence of major psychiatric illness or physical illness due to which subject was unable to cooperate for interview.

Procedure Methodology

Patients were initially subjected to screening test by urine opioid test and those with positive test were taken into the study. Socio- demographic details was collected. Symptoms of Opium withdrawal were assessed using Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS). Presence or absence of any psychological illness was screened using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28).

Statistical analysis:

All analyses were undertaken using the SPSS for Windows statistical package (SPSS version 11.0). The descriptive variables such as mean, median, standard deviations and 95% confidence intervals were obtained. The difference between the means was calculated by using `t` test.

III. Result

Table No.1: Shows the demographic details of the sample. In the present study it was found that 47.5% were aged between 26 to 50 years. About 40% of the sample has primary education. About 56% of the samples were farmers and 20% were drivers. About 60% have used opium for more than 5 years. About 36% consumed it to relieve pain and to do heavy work. 11% consumed it due to peer pressure. about 92% consumed it orally and about 7% used it in injectable form. About 83% had a past history of treatment for de addiction. About 69% had a family history of opium use. At the time of presentation to the outpatient clinic about 87% had mild withdrawal symptoms as assessed by COWS scale. About 75% had psychological symptoms as assessed by GHQ.

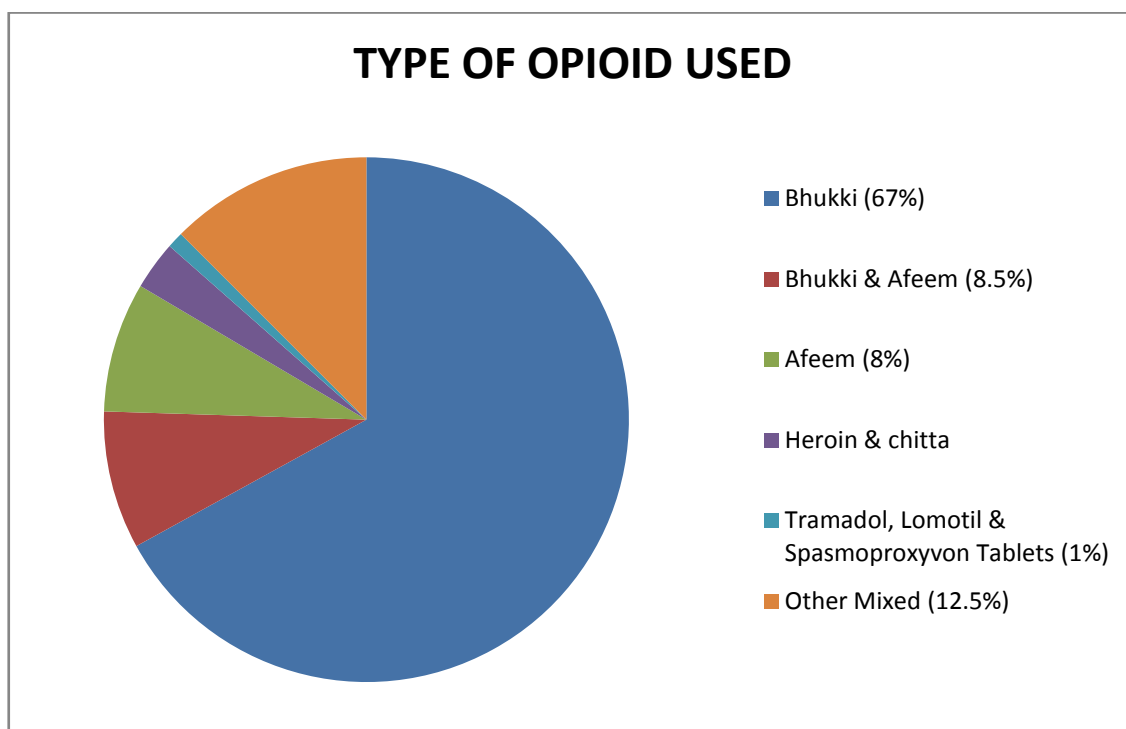
Table No.1: shows demographic details of the sample

Sl.No	Particulars		Percentage (%)
1	Age (in years)	18-25	11.5
		26-50	47.5
		51-65	37
		66-80	4
2	Education	Illiterate	19
		1-7 std	40
		7-10 std	31.5
		PUC and above	9.5
3	Occupation	Farmers	56
		Drivers	20
		Businessman	11
		Students	9.5
		others	4.5

4	Duration of use	<5 years	37
		5-10 years	36
		>10years	27
5	Reason for usage	For doing heavy work	36
		For pains and work	28
		Recreation Purpose	25
		Peer Pressure	11
6	Mode of usage	Oral	92
		Sniffing	2
		IV Use	7
		tablets	1
7	Past H/O Treatment	Yes	82.5
		No	17.5
8	Family H/O Opium use	Yes	68.5
		No	31.5
9	COWS Withdrawal	Mild	87
		Moderate	13
10	GHQ	Positive Psychological symptoms	74.5
		Negative Psychological symptoms	25.5

Figure 1: Shows the type of Opioid usage

The below figure shows the type of opium used by the sample. About 67% used in the form of Bhukki. About 8% used as Afeem and about 8.5% used both Bhukki & Afeem depending on the availability. About 3% used Heroin and CHitta. Tramadol, Lomotil & Spasmoproxyvon tablets was used by 1%. About 12.5% used a mixture of substance.



IV. Discussion

The present study comprised predominantly of middle aged and elderly males between the ages of 25 to 65 years. Although initiation to drug use usually occurs during adolescence, the adolescent drug users are seldom seen in various treatment centres⁵.

All the study subjects were males as only the initial 200 subjects were included and no female were there in the initial attendees of the OPD, which could be because of the barriers faced by women in a male dominant society.

UNDOC World Drug Report 2015 also states that Women in particular appear to face barriers to treatment — while one out of three drug users globally are woman and one out of five drug users in treatment are woman³.

The Punjab study showed that addicts are found both in rural and urban parts of the state. Among the men aged between 18 and 35 years, four in 100 are opioid dependent; while 15 in 100 could be opioid users². However in the present study 70% of the sample hailed from rural areas.

Most of the sample consisted of married males about 85%. About half of the sample had studied till high school, 10% had studied PUC or above and 19% were illiterate. Half of them were farmers and 20% were drivers, 11% were businessman and students formed another 10% of the sample.

The indigenously grown, less cost and easily available form of opium that is Bhukki was used by about 67% people which might be because the population catered were mostly from the rural background, where it is easily grown. Afeem was used by about 8%, and a combination of Afeem and Bhukki by 8.5%, depending on the availability and the financial constraints. 3% of the people used Heroin or Chitta, these were predominantly members of the younger generation, out of whom 7% used it in injectable form. 1% used tablet forms of opium in the form of Tramadol, Lomotil or Spasmaproxyvon tablets which were available locally. 34% of the sample also used Alcohol and Tablet Alprazolam, which is also available easily.

A Rapid Situation and Response Assesment (RSRA) among 5800 males revealed 76% currently injecting Buprenorphine. As the number of subjects were less and also predominantly from rural areas the present study could be having lower injectable users^{6,12}.

About 36% of the sample had used opioids for 5-10 years, and 27% of the sample used it for more than 10 years, and 37% were using it in last 5 years.

The reason for opioid usage in about 40% people was for doing heavy work as they would feel energised after consuming opium, which could be one of the reason why people coming from other north Indian states to Punjab for manual labour also get addicted to opium. Avasthi et al found that the most common reason to start usage to be fun followed by curiosity⁷.

A quarter of them especially the older people used it to relieve pain. This was in concordance with the results found by Young et al and Li-Tzy Wu et al about the non-prescribed usage of pain relievers in United States. Another quarter used it for recreation purpose and sexual pleasure, which could lead to high risk behaviour.

Family history of opium usage was present in 70%. More than 80% of the users had tried quitting or attended a de addiction program before.

About 87% of the people had mild withdrawal, 13% had moderate withdrawal scores on COWS rating while attending the OPD. About 75% people had screened positive for psychological symptoms, especially on the pain domains when screened by GHQ-28. As the authors next step in the management of these subjects is treating these subjects with Opioid substitution therapy (OST), which has demonstrated better retention rates than other existing treatment strategies and helps to improve the individual's functioning as well as his/her quality of life^{4,10}.

V. Conclusion

It is astonishing how widespread is the problem of opioid abuse across the state, from villages in the lush green countryside to bustling towns and cities, young men huddle together in cemeteries, abandoned buildings or plain fields, smoking, snorting or shooting up¹¹. It is high time these drug users are treated and brought into the mainstream before we lose a “whole generation of youth” to Opioid drug menace.

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