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Impact of Methamphetamine (Ice) on the Socio-Economic Condition of Addicts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan: A Qualitative Study

Sameer Ul Khaliq Jan	Lecturer, Department of Social Work, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Dir Upper, KP, Pakistan.
Muhammad Ibrar	Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.
Anum Javed	Sapienza University, Rome, Italy.

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Corresponding Author:

Sameer Ul Khaliq Jan
Email: drsamerkjan@gmail.com

Abstract: Methamphetamine is a toxic and powerful drug which is popularly known as 'ice' in Pakistan. The use of ice has increased in the last decade in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan. Objective: The objective of the current qualitative study was to explore the impact of methamphetamine on the social and economic condition of addicts in KP, Pakistan. Method: A total of 14 Anti Narcotic Force and Drug Rehabilitation Centers officials were selected through a purposive sampling technique, in Peshawar, Pakistan. For the collection of data, a self-designed interview guide was used. Results: The study found that the addicts faced multiple social and economic problems which includes social stigma, breakage of social relationships or isolation, selling of own valuables, stealing of valuables and becoming a drug peddler to finance his/her drug habit. Conclusions: The study recommends that the government may aware the public about the toxicity and misconceptions of methamphetamine use and family also may play a significant role in the prevention of methamphetamine use.

Introduction

Substance use is one of the most complex and difficult social problems facing the modern world. Most people especially youngsters are addicted to drugs and most users are found to initiate the use of substances at a relatively early life (Jan, Khan, Asad & Khan, 2021a). After substance abuse begins, the initial experience and the abuser go on to try potentially different toxic drugs. Such behaviour by an individual is disruptive and affects his or her everyday performance, such as decision-making and social responsibilities. Many people are attracted to drugs, especially psychoactive ones, because they can affect their central nervous system, and make them dependent (Jan, Alam & Khan, 2021b).

Methamphetamine (commonly known as 'ice' in Pakistan) is an extremely potent stimulant drug that is widely used around the world. The use of the drug methamphetamine can lead to serious lasting physical and mental consequences (Jan et al; 2021a; Akbari et al., 2021). Because it is an advanced central nervous system and stimulant drug that have the ability to keep people awake for a long time, that's why some people call it a "social drug" and "club drug" (Mehrjerdi, 2013). The toxicity and addiction of methamphetamine can be gauged that, if a person administers it more than once or twice times, he or she is to be expected to become addicted, and once a person becomes hooked on it if he or she stops taking it, the body will go through from psychological and physiological

withdrawal effects (Jan et al., 2020; Darke et al., 2008). It generates the neurotransmitters in the brain i.e. dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine. These chemicals induce feelings of pleasure, excitement and alertness (Courtney & Ray, 2014).

Globally, the growing recognition of methamphetamine, or meth, as a major threat is becoming increasingly evident in the area of drug use. Methamphetamine use has increased intensely in countries in East and South Asia in the last decade (UNODC, 2021).

The World Drug Report (2021), states that only in 2019, across the world, approximately 27 million people have used amphetamine and methamphetamine. This figure resembles 05 percent of adult people. In 2019, around about half of all the users of amphetamine globally (12.7 million) were in Asia (World Drug Report, 2021).

The UNODC (2013) released a report that in 2013, Pakistan, nearly 6.5 million were drug users. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was stated to be most prevalent at 11 percent of the population in the context of drug use, and subsequently Sindh at 6.5 percent. In the province of Balochistan, almost 5 percent of the population uses drugs while in Punjab province

the figure is approximately 4.8 percent (UNODC, 2013).

In Pakistan, in the last few decades, the amount of drug users is increasing like the drug epidemic. The drug culture has been changed from natural drugs to manufactured drugs which are more dangerous. Recently the use of ice has been added to Pakistan's culture, which has created many severe economic and social problems for both the users and society in general (Jan, et al., 2021). The greatest danger confronting Pakistani society on this matter is the failure of the country's agencies tasked with curbing drug use to control the increase in drug use in the community. Consequently, this qualitative study was carried out to explore the impact of methamphetamine (ice) on the socio-economic status of drug users in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan.

Methods

This study was conducted in the district of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The nature of this study is qualitative. Data were collected from 14 selected officials of Anti-Narcotic Force and Drug Rehabilitation Centers (See Table-1).

Table 1

Participants of the Study

S.No.	Participant's Designation	Organization's Name
01	Psychiatrist	Drug Rehabilitation Center, Social Welfare Department, District Peshawar.
02	Psychologist	
03	Psychologist-01	Drug Rehabilitation Department, Lady Reading Hospital, District Peshawar
04	Psychologist-02	
05	Social Medical Officer	Drug Rehabilitation Department, Khyber Teaching Hospital (KTH), Peshawar
06	Program Manager	
07	Manager Children Department (<i>Gulona Kor</i>)	Dost Welfare Foundation (Drug Rehabilitation Center), Peshawar
08	Treatment Manager	

09	Psychologist-01	
10	Psychologist-02	
11	Program Manager	Drug Rehabilitation Center, Al-Khidmat Foundation, Peshawar
12	Project Officer (Drug Demand Reduction)	
13	Assistant Director	Anti-Narcotic Force (ANF), Peshawar
14	Information Technology (IT) Officer	

Source: Field data

A purposeful sampling technique was used and continued the collection of data until the saturation point. The purpose sample is a type of non-probability sampling technique.

Since the nature of the study was qualitative, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews; the researchers obtained everyone's consent before conducting each interview. A mobile tape recorder was used for recording the interviews and told them that it is difficult for the researcher to capture and remember all the discussions. Furthermore, to analyze the data, the recorded interviews audio files were first transcribed into manuscripts, which were then carefully studied and themes and sub-themes developed.

Results

The result of the present study illustrates that; methamphetamine has serious social and economic impacts on addicts. These effects have been categorized into themes and sub-themes.

Theme 1: Social effects

Across the world, drug addiction among youngsters is a serious and complex social problem. Drug addiction not only affects the lives of the addicts but also devastates the families of the addicts. One of the objectives of the current study was to find out the social effects of the use of methamphetamine/ice. The study found multiple social effects of the drug both on the addicts and their families. These effects are described in multiple sub-themes as follows;

(a) Sub-Theme: Social Stigma

In Pakistan, the users of drugs or those who recovering from drug addiction experience stigma related to the use of narcotic drugs such as stereotyping, labelling, discrimination and social exclusion. The social stigma associated with some specific drugs is also seen even in technologically advanced countries. The respondents of the current study reported that both the users of drugs and their families are stigmatized in our society due to methamphetamine use.

Participant number 04:

"The addicts of ice are involved in different anti-social activities such as; robbery, theft, violence in the families and neighborhood etc. As a result, both the addicts and their families face stigma and discrimination."

Participant number 06:

"When someone theft the valuables in the ice addict's neighborhood or relatives, they go straight to the addict's family and demand the stolen things whether it is theft by the addict or not. In such cases, the families of the addicts are stigmatized and taunted every time by their neighbors and relatives."

(b) Sub-Theme: Breakage of Social Relationship or Isolation

Isolation refers to the act of being separated or separated oneself from other people. It can be done for various reasons like medical, social, or psychological. The users of drugs gradually and slowly, go into loneliness and keep themselves

away from their family and society as well. Loneliness is a psychologically disparaging and terrifying experience which may a person faces many serious psychological and physical problems. In such cases, the affected persons mostly keep awake all night as well as create disturbance for their nearby people. In this study, the ice users have the same case they usually come late to home while other family members are asleep as a result they disturb them.

Participant number 09:

"The use of ice causes alertness which the addicts keep them awake. As a result, the addicts mostly stay out of home and back home at midnight which disturbs the whole family. Moreover, when the addicts take ice they become talkativeness and do not listen to others as result, people get bored and they started avoiding them."

Participant number 03:

"Due to the violent behavior of ice addicts, their social relationship with family and relatives get disturbed and they try to avoid them. Similarly, their family and other relatives do not invite them to social activities/functions."

Theme 2: Economic Effects

Methamphetamine or ice also has a serious financial impact on the drug users and their families, as it put away a momentous portion of household income. Often, substance users are unable to keep a regular job because of their poor health condition which may cause various forms of deviant behavior for instance; swindling, robbery and theft to get money for managing their drug administration. The present study has found many economic problems which were faced by the addicts and their families as well. This theme has been divided into further subtopics for better and clearer understanding.

(a) Sub-Theme: Selling of Own Valuables

Drug users not only suffer from physical, mental and social problems but also suffer from financial constraints. Likewise, his family and relatives face anguish in the form of shaming and naming.

The respondents of the current study state that the addicts of ice became financially unbalanced over time due to a lack of interest in work and a loss of trust in their families. When they have no money to buy the drug they start selling his/her valuables such as mobile phones, watches, laptops, vehicles, etc.

Respondent number 01:

"The families of the ice users told us that whenever they refused money from ice addicts, the addicts started selling out their own personal belongings/valuables like a mobile, laptop, watch, and motorbike etc."

Participant number 11 further shared a story of a female ice addict:

"One of my female patients who was a student at a university, was addicted to ice. She sold her 03 Tola (36 grams) golden ornaments, mobile and other valuables to finance her drug habit"

(b) Sub-Theme 2.2: Stealing of Valuables

Drug addiction destroys the life of a person in all aspects, namely mental health, physical health, financial, and social relations with friends, family and relatives. In particular, the habit of stealing under the pressure of drug addiction destroys his self-esteem and self-respect. This theft may be from relatives, neighbors, family, friends, markets, and in some cases, even outright burglary. The respondents of the present study indicated that the prices of ice are relatively high as compared to other drugs. So, the user of ice needs a lot of money to fund his drug habit. If the addicts cannot legally manage their drug habit, then he gets involved in anti-social behavior and steals valuables such as watches, jewellery, mobile phone, laptop etc. from the home and outside.

Respondent number 13:

"If the addicts of ice are financially sound, then they have no financial issues. But if the addicts are financially not strong then they steal valuable things from home, neighbors, and relatives."

Respondent number 08 shared the agony of a father of an ice addict as below;

"A day before my daughter's marriage, my son stole all the jewellery we had managed for the bride. He sold it and didn't return home, even after a week. As a result, you can imagine what kind of shame we had to face in the community. I lost my honor, my valuables and even my son."

(c) Sub-Theme 2.3: Becoming a Drug Peddler

In general, the use of any powerful drug drains the user's financial resources and makes the user vulnerable to crime if drug costs are not managed. In Pakistan, the prices of ice are higher than other drugs. Addicts can't live without ice, and they can do anything they can to fund their ice use. The participants of the present study indicated that ice addicts who were unable to finance his/her ice use became drug peddlers i.e. selling ice to other drug users.

Respondent number 14:

"When the users of ice had no money to buy ice, they engaged in criminal activities. Most of the ice users reported to us that drug dealers offer them to sell drugs for them and in this way, ice users can make money and also finance their drug habit."

Respondent number 05 also recorded that:

"One of my patients who was an addict of ice told me that the person whom I bought ice to become a drug supplier would give me money as well as free ice for use."

Discussion

This study was conducted to explore the social and economic impacts of ice on addicts in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The study finds out the social and economic impacts of ice on the addicts, each of them analyzed and discussed below;

Social Impacts

The present study finds that the use of ice is a serious problem for families, as families of ice addicts lose social status and respect for being part of the ice addict's family. Therefore, such

relatives are ashamed among neighbors and relatives. An empirical conducted study by the researchers Lankenau, Wagner, Bloom, JSanders, Hathazi & Shin (2010) establishes that drug users and their families face a number of social problems and emotional as a result of the use of methamphetamine.

In addition, methamphetamine users are cut off from family and society. They neglected and avoided many important and serious matters and other activities such as; marriage ceremonies etc. Other studies in Australia have reported similar social problems, with frequent users of ice recording a range of social problems related to their ice use. Of these, the most common hostile social outcomes are interpersonal problems and loneliness (McKetin, McLaren, Kelly, Hall, & Hickman, 2005). As a social threat and social interaction, loneliness leads to decreased self-protective behaviors (Jan, Ali, Alam, Niqab, Shakoor, Begum & Khan, 2020; Brecht & Herbeck, 2014). The daily life of drug addicts is different from other family members, as they do not take family responsibilities, and maltreat their family members.

Economic Impacts

Methamphetamine use also has a large financial impact on drug users and their families, as it consumes a significant portion of household income. When ice users cannot buy ice, they first steal valuables things from home, followed by relatives, neighbors and friends. Studies conducted in the United States of America have found that a significant amount of methamphetamine-related crimes can be accredited to the addicts who need to fund their drug habit. They often engage in different impulsive criminal activities to support their addictive behavior, for example; burglary, robbery, purse grabbing, theft etc. (Hobkirk, Watt, Myers, Skinner, & Meade, 2016; Bagheri, Mokri, Khosravi, & Kabir, 2015). For the sake of financing their drug habit, they do crimes to earn money even if they become drug peddlers. Other studies have also found that methamphetamine

users are more involved in drug dealing as compared to other soft drugs because of high prices McKetin et al., 2005). Additionally, the researchers Jan et al., (2021a) and Bashirian, Hidarnia, Allahverdipour, & Hajizadeh, (2012). studied drug sales (often referred to as "drug dealing") as a common source of income among drug users, especially among regular drug users.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the result of the present study finds out that methamphetamine has adverse effects on the social and economic condition of addicts. The addicts faced multiple social and economic problems which include social stigma, breakage of social relationships or isolation, selling of their own valuables, stealing of valuables and becoming drug peddlers to finance his/her drug habit. This study recommends that the general public should be aware of the misconceptions and harmfulness of methamphetamine through community leaders, social media, religious scholars, family heads and seminars in educational institutions use.

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