

GLIMPSE ON HARM REDUCTION IN PAKISTAN

“I see harm reduction as a way of engaging people as part of that path to recovery.” ~Paul R. Ehrlich

The term Harm Reduction for a layman refers to how can one keep individuals safe, perhaps the preservation of life is the greatest value to live by. Technically Harm Reduction in regard to drug addiction states different strategies, programs and practices that targets to minimize the adversarial effects of drugs, be it legal or illegal, on health, social and economic forum. It doesn't necessarily involves reducing drug consumption. It's about reducing the risks that implicate with human being while jeopardizing their lives in the hands of harmful consequences after taking their drug of choice.

Harm reduction safeties those individuals who use drugs as they and their families along with the community is affected by it. Pakistan is a country where one is confined with limited amount of resources to provide any bit of assistance to reduce harm attached with psychoactive drugs. Most often drug control is confused by harm reduction. Obviously both are to work against this menace by taking a different route. Dreadfully all those who suffer fall into the hands of serve consequences. The rate of harm attached with drugs is relatively accreting day by day.

Sometime from now, the biggest harm that we believed in Pakistan or anywhere in world for that matter, was thought to be due to injecting drug use. IDU played a vital role in spreading HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and other severe chronic ailments. As for now, with the introduction of multiple adverse types of psychoactive drugs by means of novel paraphernalia modes are becoming extremely alarming. Not to forget the excessive quality of usage and the risky consequences.

Quoting a survey in a city of Pakistan, “The HIV infection is rapidly increasing among IDUs in Karachi and has reached 9% in 2004-5 indicating that the country has progressed from nascent to concentrated level of HIV epidemic. Findings of 2nd generation surveillance in 2004-5 also indicate 104/395 (26.3%) IDUs HIV positive in the city.”

In particular to other drugs like sedatives use and drinking alcohol, there are several incidents on DWIs and over dosage. Needless to mention the amount of the drug usage that is consumed by the youth of the nation. To reduce the harm specifically with alcohol we need to address issues like drinking age, legal driving limits, designated drivers, liquor store analysis, significant other training, and safety glassware and manufacturers. These approaches would reduce harm associated with poor health, aggressive behavior, collisions, injuries and death. Though drinking in Pakistan is completely against the law, still it is profusely practiced.

In a developing country like Pakistan, due to diminutive literacy rate, the policies made for harm reduction should to be feasible, effective, practical, anodyne and cost-effective. Harm reduction needs to be tailored based on the strongest evidence available. Most harm reduction approaches round the world are inexpensive, easy to implement and have a high impact on individual and community health. Like the ones used for legal tobacco, policies like high taxes, bans on advertising, graphics on packaging, and minimum age to purchase, nicotine replacement, medications to support quitting, and protection from environmental smoke are most common. So this thoughtful strategy is good enough for areas that lack resources, and eventually provides maximum benefit with low-cost/high-impact interventions are preferred over high-cost/low-impact interventions.

Drug Addiction is an issue in every community, including ours that brings with it mass destruction whose impact is left on generations after generations. We believe for those who suffer with addiction, a chronic condition prone to relapse, harm reduction approaches can reduce the risk of overdose, poisoning, burns, mental health problems, dental problems, malnutrition, violence, homelessness, social isolation, and a myriad of other issues.

Harm reduction is a compassionate approach that treats the addict like a real and equal person, and reduces costs to our health, justice, and social services systems. It's our basic human right that we all deserve that kind of compassion in this world. Let's hope that society will engage in a discussion about Harm reduction and question the mainstream thinking about alcoholism and drug addiction.

Dr. Tallat Habib

Addiction Treatment Specialist

Nishan Rehab International (Pvt) Ltd,

Islamabad, Pakistan