

## CELL BIOLOGY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

### REPORT: **HEROIN ADDICTION**

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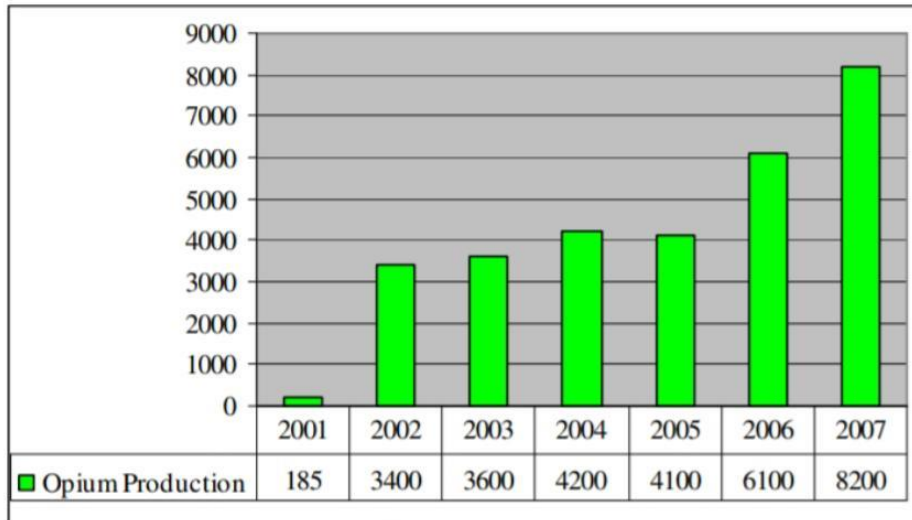
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‘Pakistan, a country already tormented by regional insurgencies, is fighting a losing battle against a different kind of foe: Heroin addiction. It is estimated that 44 tons of processed heroin is smoked or injected in Pakistan each year which is two or three times higher than in the U.S. An additional 110 tons of Afghani heroin is trafficked through Pakistan each year on its way to international drug markets. ***“Pakistan’s illegal drug trade is believed to generate \$2 billion a year [making] Pakistan the most heroin-addicted country, per capita, in the world”***, wrote David Browne in a recent expose for *‘The Telegraph’*.’

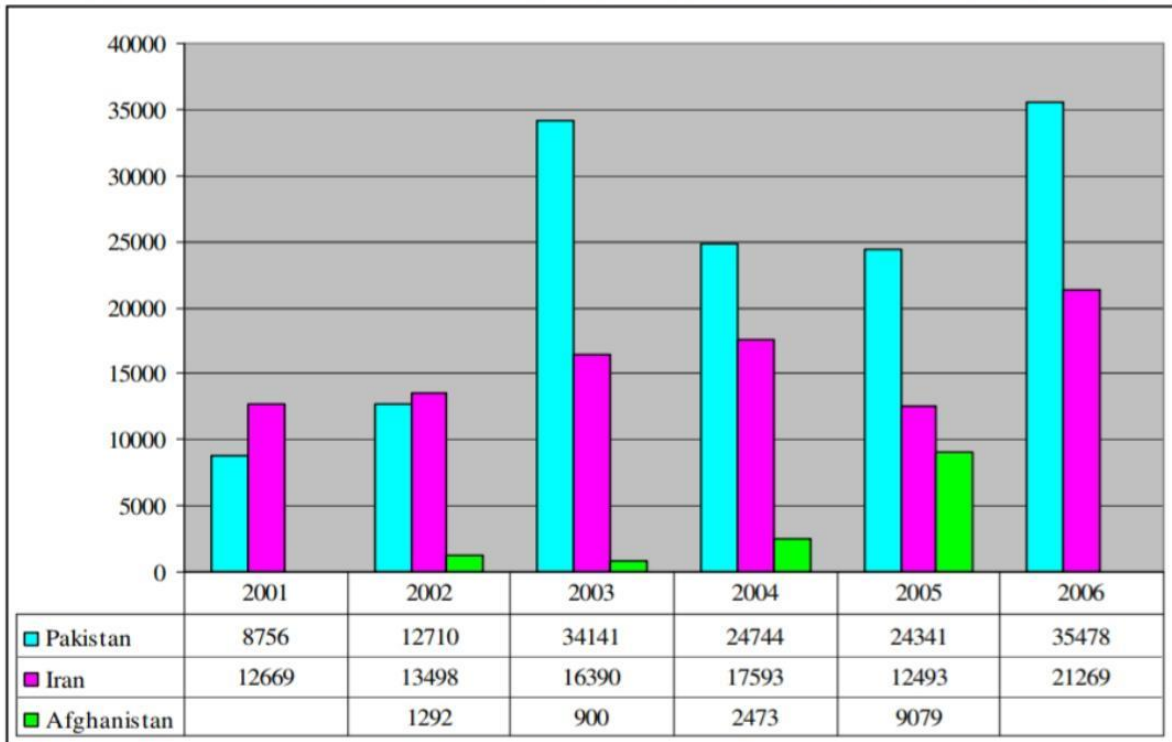
According to the report by United Nations, Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan in April 2008, Pakistan makes the bulk of heroin seizures in the region; and with the increase in the production of heroin in the Afghanistan, the heroin seizures in Pakistan have broadly kept its pace. Figure 2 and Figure 3 demonstrate the link between opium production in Afghanistan and heroin base seizures in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan:

**Figure 2: Potential Opium Production (metric tonnes) in Afghanistan 2001-2007**



Source: 2007 Afghanistan Opium Poppy Survey

**Figure 3: Heroin/Morphine Base Seizures (kg), Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan 2001-2006**



Source: UNODC World Drug Report 2007

In Pakistan, as per the section 52 and section 53 of Control of Narcotic Substances Act 1997 (CNSA), the responsibility for the registration and rehabilitation of any drug addict, including heroin addict, falls within the purview of the Provincial Government. However, to provide quality treatment and meet the growing deficiency of treatment facilities and a reliable rehabilitation centers provision, Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has taken initiations. It has set up three Model Addicts Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre (MATRC) in Pakistan's major cities of Islamabad, Quetta, Peshawar, Sukkur and Karachi. In Karachi, MATRC is set up at Benazir Shaheed Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Hospital. With the objective and vision of providing reliable detoxification and rehabilitation facility to drug addicts and minimize the risk of relapse and re-integration of the recovering addicts in the society, ANF MARTC follows the effective treatment methodology that ensures the addicts are enabled to be self-reliant and can get back to the society as the valuable part of the societal machinery. Their 2-months treatment generally includes:

1. Detoxification
2. Primary Rehab
3. Secondary Rehab
4. Job placement

The post treatment includes follow up checkups and systematic evaluation to avoid falling back to the lifestyle of drug addiction.

The number of patients treated at Benazir Shaheed Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Hospital, Model Addicts Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre (MATRC) - Karachi, in 2018 (year wise) and first half of 2019 (month wise) is shown below:

<b>MONTH (2019)</b>	<b>PATIENTS TREATED</b>
January	77
February	67
March	64
April	71
May	63
June	62
July	68

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>PATIENTS TREATED</b>
2019	472
2018	704

When interviewed during the field research, one of the doctors at Benazir Shaheed ANF hospital in Karachi, Dr. Aaila, the most common causes of people starting heroin addiction she has noticed throughout her profession; she highlighted that peer pressure (mental pressure from the gathering of friends who have been addicts of heroin), stress due to broken relationships or financial problems including being unemployed or collapsing of business and most importantly the curiosity in the most young people are most common reasons leading people to start taking heroin and hence slowly developing addiction. She said that they get around 200 new cases of heroin addiction every week at Benazir Shaheed ANF hospital, but due to the capacity limit of only 105 patients, they cannot admit every heroin addicted patient. They usually choose to admit the severe cases and filter the cases based on other medical and financial factors (i.e. if they can afford paid treatment, they are sent to other hospitals/rehabilitation centers). For example, in case of known TB, Cardiac issue, HBs, Ag, Physical disability, severe surgical issue and patients with psychotic problems (including Schizophrenia, major depression, suicidal tendencies, and mentally retarded) are referred to other hospitals like PIMS or BBH, Rawalpindi before

admitting here. She added that in Pakistan, unlike other countries, they cannot use the substitution therapy of prescribing opioids (synthetic drug used as medicine), due to religious barriers and because of the difficulty in controlling the supply, as the black markets for drugs in Pakistan is at its peak. Describing the process of treatment and rehabilitation they offer at Benazir Shaheed ANF hospital, she said since almost 90% of the patients here have underlying mental illness, so they have psychiatric evaluation first, followed by prescribing medicines for withdrawals, regular checkups and educating them about how drug usage has destroyed their lives and encouraging them to leave this lifestyle behind. They have the morning session for all the patients where they have lectures from motivational speakers educating them, encouraging them and, helping them and guiding them for the life after their treatment when they get back to their former lives.

At Benazir Shaheed ANF hospital, the patients (male and female) are from different family backgrounds with the ages ranging from a 9-years-old to 45-years-old. There are different wards for female patients, males and children; that too dividing into three more wards based on the stages of rehabilitation treatment mentioned earlier. The first ward is for the new admits, second is for the ones receiving primary rehab and the last one is for the patients at the end of their treatment.

Interviewing the patients with the average ages of 33.3 years, they all appreciated the morning session mentioning how it is an important part of their treatment, and it gives them hope and a will to leave heroin and get back to the society. Most of the patients told that they started taking heroin between the ages of 18 to 25. Along with heroin, they used to take different drugs (hash, crystal(meth) etc.) including consuming alcohol. The three patients giving interview were at the last stages of their treatment, told us that all three of them thought of getting treatment on their

own will either due to the pain they were suffering from or as they saw their families suffering from their addictive habit, and they all were completely satisfied with the treatment at the hospitals.

The major problem is the relapse of drug abuse by these patients even after the treatment. One of the reasons is that these patients usually get back to the same addicted group of friends and fall back into it. Another major reason is the rejection from the families that patients face as they get back to their families after treatment. The family and society in general treats them as plague and criminals, and usually doesn't give them any chance to start fresh. This usually leads them to get back to the heroin. Moreover, families often leave their underage children at the hospital without any contact. They have nowhere to go and have no support system necessary for a sober life. The Benazir Shaheed ANF hospital have to keep those minors till they get 18, limiting the capacity of the hospital even more.

The government need to upgrade the existing strategy of arresting heroin users and giving short rehabilitation of detoxification only to avoid them falling back into the same lifestyle. There should be long term rehabilitation centers ensuring proper treatment and should spread awareness in the society to be a support system for these patients. ***“Awareness programs should be done on rehabilitation centers and also to reduce the stigma, because people think of addiction as criminal issue rather than a medical one, and they need to realize that these people are mentally ill and are suffering”***; said Dr. Aaila. She added further that patients should get proper psychiatric sessions as often they find the issue isn't drug abuse but some underlying mental illness. Government should also control drug trafficking and should aware people that **“DRUG ADDICTS ARE VICTIMS, NOT CRIMINALS.”**

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