



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND CLINICAL PROFILE OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER PATIENTS ADMITTED AT THE ONLY DRUG DEADDICTION FACILITY IN KASHMIR DURING COVID TIMES: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Background: Substance use has become a major health problem globally. The current COVID times have witnessed a surge of substance use globally, especially among youngsters. Majority of drug deaddiction centers were not functioning or restricted admissions during COVID times, but our institute was one of the very few hospitals in northern India which was fully functional and admitted patients during these tough times.

Method: 172 patients were admitted at our drug deaddiction center over a period of six months and enrolled in the study and their sociodemographic and clinical aspects were assessed.

Results: our study showed that majority of the patients admitted in the hospital were males, belonging to rural areas, self employed, unmarried, with a greater percentage of about 97.09% using heroin and only 5.8% were using pharmaceutical opioids, 79.6% were intravenous drug users and hepatitis C was found in 52.90%, 38.13% had relapsed mostly due to non adherence to naltrexone.

Conclusion: it was found in our study that intravenous opioid use has increased tremendously in young male patients and a major chunk of the patients relapsed due to non adherence to medication.

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Introduction:-

The use of illicit substances remains a concern, globally. Substance use is one of the most important and major contributors to the global burden of disease ⁽¹⁾. In low- and middle-income countries the rate of substance use disorder and their impact on health are increasing day by day, making their impact on susceptible population an important global mental health issue ⁽²⁾. Kashmir has witnessed three decades of turmoil. A large number of studies have shown that there is a high prevalence of mental health issues in populations living in conflict hit areas ^(3,4,5). It has been seen that trauma and mental health disorders have a strong association with substance use ^(6,7).

The world recently witnessed the greatest health catastrophe- the 2019 COVID pandemic. The humankind has been facing various challenges due to the ongoing pandemic ⁽⁸⁾. Prolonged home confinement, unknown nature of illness,

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unemployment has posed major challenges to the present-day human. The economic repercussions have had a major toll on humankind and these are also well reflected on the change in substance using behaviour; shortage of various street drugs, change in purity and upsurge in the price of various drugs just to name a few⁽⁹⁾.

In India, due to nationwide lockdown patients with substance use disorder faced many problems like closure of various drug deaddiction facilities and rehabilitation centres⁽¹⁰⁾.

To the best of our knowledge the drug deaddiction facility at Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences was one of the few centres that remained functional in Northern India during the pandemic, hence we did a study to see if due to the pandemic, the pattern of substance used has evolved.

Aims And Objective:-

To study the various sociodemographic variables of substance use disorder patients.

To study the change in the pattern of substance use disorder.

Material And Methods:-

This is a retrospective study that was conducted at the de addiction facility present at Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences. All the patients admitted in the hospital over a period of six months from February 2020 to July 2020 were enrolled for the study. The sociodemographic profile like age, gender, occupation, qualification, marital status as well as the clinical profile was obtained from the medical records of the hospital.

The patients were admitted to the hospital after proper testing for COVID 19 and all the SOPs were strictly followed during their stay in the hospital, including social distancing, face masks and frequent use of sanitisers.

Results:-

172 patients were enrolled for the study, all the patients were males, with the maximum number of patients falling in the age group of 21-30 years, mostly belonging to rural areas, with a large proportion of patients being students, with a large proportion of patients having attained higher secondary schooling, majority of patients being unmarried, mostly belonging to nuclear families.

Most of the patients admitted were using opioids(97.09%) with only a small percentage using alcohol and cannabis (13.37% and 51.16% respectively). Most of the opioid use disorder patients were using heroin and only 5.88% were using pharmaceutical opioids. The most common route of administration was found out to be intravenous route followed by chasing and only 4.11% were found to be using oral route.

Sharing of paraphernalia was found in 84.70% with most of the patients having positive serology for Hepatitis C or Hepatitis B (52.90% & 2.32%).

History of substance use in the past was found in about 38.13% patients who had relapsed mostly due to non adherence to naltrexone.

Table 1:- Socio demographic profile of the patients

Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender	
Males	172(100%)
Females	0(0%)
Age (in years)	
11-20	29(16.29%)
21-30	110(64.53%)
31-40	30(17.44%)
41-50	3(1.74%)
51-60	0
Background	
Urban	54(31.40%)
Rural	118(68.60%)

Table 1:- Socio demographic profile of the patients

Occupation	
Student	73(42.45%)
Driver	28(16.27%)
Govt. Employee	11(6.39%)
Self-employed	60(34.89%)
Education status	
Illiterate	4(2.32%)
Primary	61(35.46%)
Secondary School	46(26.74%)
Higher Secondary	61(35.48%)
Family Type	
Nuclear	103(59.89%)
Joint	69(40.11%)
Marital status	
unmarried	111(64.55%)
married	61(35.45%)

Table 2:- Pattern of substance use.

Variable	Frequency (%)
Type of substance	
Opioid	170 (97.09)
Pharmaceutical	10 (5.88)
Heroin	160(94.12)
Cannabis	88 (51.16)
Alcohol	23(13.37)
Mode of heroin use	
Oral	7(4.11)
Chasing	28(16.47)
Intravenous	135(79.42)
Sharing of paraphernalia	144(84.70)
Serology	
Hepatitis C	91(52.90)
Hepatitis B	4(2.32)
Treatment status	
Treatment naïve	106(61.62)
Treatment in the past	66(38.31)
OST	14(21.21)
Naltrexone	52(78.79)

Discussion:-

The COVID-19 pandemic and the various SOP measures have affected substance use pattern adversely⁽¹¹⁾. Disruptions in health services and various treatment plans of people who consume substances was seen in many parts of the world⁽¹²⁾. Despite the lockdown and restrictions imposed during the pandemic, the drug trafficking market was by and large unaffected⁽¹³⁾. It was seen worldwide that the various measures implemented to contain the 2019 Pandemic led to social isolation, frustration, boredom, stress and panic in common man. To counter these emotions many people indulged into and relapsed back into drug using behaviour⁽¹⁴⁾.

Substances are known to be used for mood elevations and for self medication of stress and anxiety⁽¹⁵⁾. This negative coping has led to immense increase in substance use in various populations⁽¹⁶⁾. Our study reflects that people belonging to the age group 21-30 years was mostly using substance specifically opioids. Similar to the finding of the study done in pre- COVID times in our region by Yasir et al⁽¹⁷⁾. But the percentage of people affected was significantly higher in our study (64.5) as compared to the study done by Yasir et al (50.5%). This finding would

reflect the frustration and free time this age group experienced due to the confinement in homes and closure of various recreational facilities as this group in the most active and outgoing age group⁽¹⁸⁾.

In our study, rural and urban population constituted 68.60% and 31.40% respectively, which is comparable to study done at our hospital by Bilal et al⁽¹⁹⁾. This is because our hospital is a government hospital which is preferred by rural population as compared to the affluent urban population whomostly visit private facilities due to the stigma associated with substance use disorder⁽²⁰⁾.

The percentage of people who were unmarried outnumbered married people in our study, reason being the age group which contributed the most constituted of young males who were college going students, unlikely to be married.

The closure of various educational institutions and change in the delivery of education services such as online classes led to build up of tension and anxiety in young students. Lack of technical knowledge and excessive screen time spent in view of online classes has fuelled up the anxiety and stress among students⁽²¹⁾. Likewise, people belonging to the economic sector especially the self employed faced huge economic setback due to closure of various business establishments and start ups and it is seen that people with substance use disorder develop increased severity when faced with unemployment or financial crisis⁽²²⁾. This is well reflected in our study as self employed and students constituted the majority of the patients (34.89% and 42.45% respectively) as compared to a study done by Bilal et al⁽¹⁹⁾, in which students and businessmen comprised only 29.73% and 37.84%.

In our study greater proportion of patients belonged to nuclear families 59.89% as compared to joint families (40.11%), similar to findings in a study by Yasir et al⁽¹⁷⁾.

Heroin was the most commonly used opioid(94.12%) compared to pharmaceutical opioids(5.88%). In contrast to a study done by Yasir et al. in which heroin was 84.33% and pharmaceutical opioids was 24.33%. This can be explained by the resilience of the opioid market to various pandemic measures but pharmaceutical opioids were restricted. The cultivation of poppy was badly influenced by COVID 19 preventive but it was seen that just after a few months growth was increased by engaging women and children as well as people rendered jobless due to COVID 19 in poppy cultivation⁽²³⁾. As well as due to the change and new challenges posed due to the pandemic drug trafficking was also revised and the whole system acclimatised to the new trend⁽²⁴⁾.

In our study most common route of administration was intravenous route 79.42% in contrast to study by Nizam et al.⁽²⁵⁾ and Yasir et al. where percentage of intravenous users is 57.91% and 51.53%). This reflects the shortage of resources to procure the substance leading to a switch from oral/chasing to intravenous route as the amount required for the same effect is quite low when opioids are used intravenously⁽²⁶⁾.

The percentage of patients having positive serology was also greater. This could be explained by increase seen in reusing of needles due to lack to procure fresh needles and also increasing frequency of injecting in people with substance using behaviour⁽²⁷⁾.

The percentage of patients who had sought treatment in the past was about 38.31% in comparison to only 13% and 11% of patients in a study done by Nizam et al and Yasir et al. This finding would be due to increased relapse during the pandemic as the various treatment facilities were shut down. Also, dispensing of OST was adversely hit^(28,29).

Conclusion:-

The pandemic has introduced the new normal in today's world and there are a lot of changes associated with it. In our study we saw young population especially students are indulging in substance using behaviour especially opioids. Intravenous use has increased tremendously giving way to sharing of paraphernalia which in turn has led to positive serology.

Conflict of interest:

None.

Financial disclosures:

None.

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