

**Editorial**

# Addiction of Non-Smoking Tobacco and Vapes in Youngs

**Mohsin Masud Jan**

Editor

Pakistanis suffering from drug addiction nor about the effectiveness of the treatment offered by these facilities. However, there is no doubting the fact that drug addiction is a significant problem among our youth.

The introduction of vape has made nicotine intake easier. It can be carried in a pocket or a bag.

The drug landscape in Pakistan changed during the 1980s. The jihad against the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in Afghanistan facilitated the availability of heroin and Kalashnikov in Pakistan. The USSR disintegrated in the end but the use of Pakistan as a route to smuggle heroin from Afghanistan to the rest of the world continued for at least another decade. Hard drugs are still available in Pakistan. Some of these are produced in Afghanistan.

According to a recent study, increased availability of drugs, peer pressure, and performance in examinations (grades pressure) are some of the major factors contributing to the prevalence of drugs among the youth in Pakistan.

In 2018, the statement from a cabinet minister that 75 percent of students in Islamabad's educational institutes were taking drugs raised much concern. The educational institutes were quick to deny that claim. That statement aside, Pakistan Social Sciences Review recently published a study on the causes of drug abuse among university students in Pakistan. It estimated that 7.6 million people in Pakistan were drug addicts. According to this study, 78 percent of these were male and 22 percent female. It is estimated that the number is increasing at approximately 40,000 a year. That study, too, has been challenged and many have said that the number of drug addicts was over-reported.

The recent discussion about Covid-19 in Pakistan ignores a potential link between socio-economic and societal stresses induced during these unusual times and the use of drugs. The year 2021 report issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) explains the Covid impact and drug trafficking on the global level.

The global sale of drugs has increased almost fourfold since 2017, from \$80 million to \$315 million. The report also says the impact of Covid resulted in an expansion of the drug economy through larger shipments, use of private jets, use of sea cargo and contactless delivery of drugs to the end-users. The report says that if the patterns continue, 43 percent of the population of low-income countries could be at the risk of drug use by 2030.

Numbers aside, the mere fact that the general prevalence of drugs has increased in countries like Pakistan is worrisome. It seems like checks starting from the family, societal and institutional levels are missing. As a nation we have entered a self-denial mode, not accepting that our youth are being lured to narcotics.

Drug abuse is now taking a heavy toll on the youth in all socio-economic backgrounds. They are leaving old-fashioned heroin and hashish for the new substances, such as ice and some liquid narcotics that they may mix in their vapes. "The use of vapes among the youth is considered a status symbol.

Teachers (of all grades) can play an effective role in keeping their campuses drug-free by arranging awareness campaigns and weekend camps with certified public and private health experts to inform the young about the hazards of drugs. Moreover, parents should give their consent for their children be randomly tested to check whether they have been taking drugs. This can be done through hair follicle screening or urine tests for drugs.

However, one cannot leave this entirely to the teachers; parents and family members too must play their role. They need to support their children in a way that they don't resort to drugs to escape from their worries and tensions. Moreover, parents should keep in mind that not all behavioural changes are associated with puberty. As parents, we should talk with the child instead of shaming them over any mental and physical inability to perform. As a society, we try to avoid talking about depression and stress that our children face. This makes them vulnerable to the use of drugs that are common among their peers and now available through home delivery.

Instead of giving correct answers to the wrong questions, we need to ask the right questions and find their answers. Identifying the root cause of anxiety, depression and tension among youth is necessary. Parents should be vigilant, and the behaviour of the children should be discussed at parent-teacher meetings.

Finally, the sale and availability of non-smoking tobacco and vapes, etc., should be regulated just like the sheesha centres in Pakistan. Moreover, trained psychologists/ psychiatrists should be appointed at all colleges and universities. They can provide informed and reliable support to the youth to get rid of drugs.