



Substance use among street children in Bangladesh

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THE picture of substance use among street children is more visible in both urban and metropolitan areas in Bangladesh. A very few media stories have portrayed the use of inhalants, narcotics, cannabis, and alcohols among street children; and also common use of chewing tobacco, biri, cigarettes, and sleeping drugs. In this paper we will see, according to James A. Inciardi and Hilary L. Surratt (1997), risk of HIV/AIDS and other blood born, relationship-based diseases are to be the subject of concern, because of large number of street children engaged in sexual activities, both remunerated and non-remunerated. This paper is mainly based on written works and the author's personal work experience gained while working in Bangladesh.

Brief history of substance use in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a long history of illicit substances use, particularly of opium and cannabis. According to Ray R. (UNDCP 1998), from British colonization time to 1984 it was possible to purchase opium from government controlled vendors, and cannabis has been widely used in Bangladesh society as a prescribe medicine. Besides, many scientists argued that since 1987, the production of Cannabis has been banded but its availability can't prevent through only the passage of legislation and policy implementation. Considering this situation, in 1996, the government of Bangladesh conducted a 'Rapid Situation Assessment' survey on substance use among Bangladeshi people. Where we found that the number of substance users including children to be between 100,000 to 1.7 million (UNOCD 2007). According to Milky S.A (1999), approximately 200,000 street children (ages 514 years) living only in the metropolitan area of Dhaka. Medical doctor Milky also said his study of 'Vulnerability to STD/HIV/AIDS among the street children of Dhaka metropolitan area' found that some of street children were addicted to

injectable drugs and other substances (Milky 1999). However, recently one non-governmental organization 'Misplaced Children' estimates 56.5% street children who are aged between 12 to under 18, are indulged in substance use (Bhorar Kagoj 2003).

Aforesaid circumstances clearly call for prompt action in order to control the production of illicit substances and its uses. That's why in 1999, according to Ahmed S.K (2001), the government of Bangladesh initiated some programmers as to address the vulnerability of substance use and misuse through its Narcotic Control Act 1990, and United Nations Convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, Article 14 of 4. However, it seems the problem of substance use has aggravated! There are multiple causes behind this problem. One of the main causes is the possibility to absence of reliable information about the bad effects of both short-term and long-term use of substances.

Why street children indulge in substance use?

Substance use among street children is nearly a universal phenomenon because they are confronted with the harsh realities of their day-to-day life. Indeed, in Bangladesh, 'substance use among street children has emerged as a concomitant of life on the streets' like in Brazil (James A. Inciardi and Hilary L. Surratt 1997). In addition to this, we also need to know more about why almost all older street children have had indulged in substance use in their daily street-life? According to Hawkins, Mauin, Catalano, and Arthur (1997), there are a number of individual and environmental factors in ones street- life that can cause one to start using substance (BARKER G. 1992; Moula 2002).

Structural form of substance use among street children

According to 'Rapid Situation Assessment' survey report, the most commonly used



substances in descending order were cannabis, cough syrup, sedatives and heroin; the glue sniffing is relatively recently, a new trend among street children (Moula 2012). Street children have strong knowledge about Bangladeshi culture, substance use, and or misuse. For example, they know substance use means do something as taboo things, which always welcome them to brothel punishment. So in order to make them free from such punishment (a) almost all street children have had preferred to use it at their pocket-places (b) some of them takes their substances in lonely places, abandoned buildings, inside the manholes, school and college grounds. Bearing in mind, more interestingly, street children use private language especially when they are together in a group or going to engage in deviant or illegal activities like drug sale and use (Moula 2012). It is the same Bangla language only to hear but the meaning is different, which could understand only "risk group" of street children. For example, tel khabi means do you want to sniffing gas oil. Question remains why they do so? It

requires further investigation to shed light on this sector!

In Bangladesh, majority of the street children take substances with their friends in different groups which consists in 5 to 7 members, ages 7 to 18. Knowing that, why street children normally take their substance in different groups? There are multiple causes behind their group activity. For example, (a) we know that street children do prefer to mutual live, mutual work, and mutual understanding; (b) group activities means to ensure their sharing behaviour which is a culturally or socially accepted practice (see Menna, et al 2009); and (c) the children who are unable to access or afford substance they have joined in a group and also it is an extension of a sexual relationship, particularly for girls street children. In practice, according to world-class sociologist Anthony Giddens, structurally street children are able to produce and reproduce their rules and resources through institutionalization interaction systems in order to survive on the streets. This system, in my view, allows street children to con-

sider time, space, rules and resources in order to form their different groups. To get clear picture on this issue, in my view, we must have to know about different groups of children's different psychosocial profiles, different patterns of use substance and so on (see Marina Del Rey 2000).

Risk factors for HIV/AIDS

According to many national and international organizations, e.g. National AIDS Committee, ICDDR, CARE, Family Health International, LDRO, Padakhep and so on, injecting substance users among street children in Bangladesh is to be high-risk sub-population getting HIV/AIDS and blood born diseases like Syphilis, Hepatitis etc. Because they use it in a group through vein and muscles same needle and Syringe (Lifson and Halcon 2001). Although it is not only the main way to contribute to increase transmission of HIV/AIDS, but also street children are frequently subjected to sexual abused by police and others, therefore the two maladies are related.

In sum, substance use among street children is a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Most of the street children significantly use the readily available and relatively cheap substances in their day-to-day life. This is one of the main barriers to protect themselves from the harmful effects of substance use in general. So for the greater interest of a child survival, protection, and development rights we must have to address the vulnerability of substance use among street children in Bangladesh. Otherwise, the street children would be stale down and the country can't develop itself. As a final word, many social scholars suggested that before assessing the impact of the existing programmes and policies, the Department of Narcotics Control Bangladesh, service providers of street children, and the affected community should re-design methods of curtailing the problem of substance use and helping the children off the street.

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WRITING FOR EQUALITY



How long the dream of equality will remain in abeyance

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THE aspiration of our independence was to create a State free from exploitation, where fundamental human rights, economic, social and political equality and justice shall be ensured for all citizens without any discrimination. The framers of the Constitution endeavor to realise the aspiration through the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. However, even with such noble objectives the Constitution engraved the principles of equality and justice for all the citizens of the State. *Adivasis* of Bangladesh supposedly part of that aspiration, ironically, left out of the broad picture. Since colonial era *adivasis* were exploited by the dominant class and this subjugation still exist in a garb of democracy. The prevalent reason for such exploitation is that they were considered as uncivilised and primitive in contrast to majority population, hence can only be subjects of domination. Even in the independent Bangladesh they are imposed with an identity of backward section of the population, *pahari*, *upajati*, *khudro-nri-gosthi*, instead as *adivasis*. They are unable to become citizens with equal status of the majority population because of hegemonic mentality of the mainstream society. Despite of long felt want of the *adivasis* for their Constitutional recognition, the State never pays attention to that claim. In spite of being member of minority population, *adivasis* are equally entitled to constitutional protection. Unfortunately in the present constitutional dispensation *Adivasis* rights are neither recognized nor ensured. For that reason, the *adivasis* are amongst most marginalised, oppressed and subjugated community of Bangladesh.

Status of the Adivasis under the Constitution of Bangladesh

The legal status of *adivasis* is quite plural-



istic, and reflects, in its totality, the currency of all the terms preferred by government officials and indigenous peoples combined. This strife of the state are still exists which reflected in the recent Constitutional amendment, here the people are not recognized as *adivasi*. In fact, the State's attitude on recognition is always being melodramatic. The State felt for this people's oppression but this only from the point, that these peoples are backward section of the country. As a result for last 40 years these people are identified as tribal, *upajati*, ethnic minority etc. State never accepted this people's as the Indigenous people of the country. Moreover, the Constitution always remains silent on the issue of recognition of the *adivasi*. The state always cunningly avoid the issues of recognition of the *adivasis* and come up with diverse kind of so-called

recognition for these people like *upajati*, *pahari*, *khudro Nri-gosthi*. The State constantly refuses to accept these people as indigenous, even the authority of the government made statement that there are no Indigenous people or *adivasi* in Bangladesh. But the politics of recognition by the state is not a new phenomenon rather it was prevailing even before the independence of Bangladesh. After the independence, the *adivasis* expected better treatment from the leadership of the new State but their aspiration was down and dusted when the drafter of the original constitution also adopted the exclusionist approach towards the indigenous people and again place them into dilemma of backward section which only makes them second class citizens of Bangladesh. Therefore, after years of adoption the constitution situations of *adivasis* are continu-

ously deteriorating. The reason is that the Constitutional schemes for the *Adivasis* are not appropriately design. As a consequence, even in presence of 'non-discrimination clauses' they are still among the most discriminated class. For instance, Art-27 which provide for equality before law and equal protection of law for all but the application of this clause is not evidently equal in case of *Adivasis*. They are instead of equal among the citizen left for being backward section. Another Article which comes under the acid test of applicability is Art-28 (4). In denotes the concept of positive discrimination for the women, children and the backward section of citizen. It is robustly argued by some quarters that by incorporating these provisions the rights of *Adivasis* are protected.

But it is not possible to promote any class unless they are treated as equal inter alia. Moreover, The Fifteenth amendment to the Constitution, unfortunately stressed the State hegemonic psychology towards the indigenous peoples. By the annulment of the Constitution (Fifth Amendment Act), 1979 certain provisions is being inserted and reinserted in the Constitution. The newly incorporated Article 23A has identified indigenous people of Bangladesh as tribes, minor races, and ethnic sects. Moreover by defining Bangalee nationalism in Article-9 and recognizing the nationality of people of Bangladesh as Bangalee in Article-6 of Constitution the state force two options to the *adivasis*, that is either ordain Bangalee nationalism or remain a handicapped citizen with no national identity and contribution to national independence. As a result The Fifteen Amendment failed to fulfill the expectation of the Indigenous by insertion of Article-23A of the Constitution.

How far Adivasis' deprivation will be stressed

It is forty two years since we achieved our independence. The History of our liberation war is not just an epic of nine month bloody war rather it was a historical struggle for national freedom. It is the final revolution against hundreds years of oppression, starts from colonial era. The people of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) realise that, their rights cannot be realized under imperialistic West Pakistan domain. The long lasting oppression, thereby escalate the want of new nation free from exploitation and equality for it citizens. Whole nation has revolt against the tyranny of West Pakistan for their economic, political and cultural freedom, irrespective of their identity, religion, language. Unfortunately, the nation inspired by spirit of solidarity failed to provide justice to its own citizens. The *adivasis* who fought for the national freedom soon realised that Nation has changed, colour of Flag has changed but their poignant situation remains unchanged. 'The history of the blood of the Bengal' has changed all the Sacrifices made by the Bangalis. As a result, the justified claims of the *adivasis* have remained unheard in the Constitution till this day. Therefore, it is the high time for the State to plunge its hegemonic mind set and false sense of insecurity from *adivasis* and try to promote the unitary and solidarity. It is the great opportunity for the State to create that bridge of life among *adivasis* and Bagalees by providing the *Adivasis* their legitimate rights as 'Nationals of Bangladesh'. It is now our turn to return the rights they deserve as a citizen of the State equally and not by the way of compassion.

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