

# Channelling Peer and Community Support for Drug Reduction in Arunachal Pradesh: Preventive and Promotive Resolutions

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## Abstract

Building a strong support system [1] is crucial for individuals battling addiction which primarily includes family, friends, and the community. Peer groups in particular provide empathy, motivation, and companionship [2]. The community support consists of groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and offers a safe space for individuals to share their experiences and receive guidance [3]. This article has explored and provided insights into the importance of a robust support network in the recovery process essential for long-term sobriety.

The study concentrates on the individual drug trysts and shared experiences of four drug addicts who are receiving rehabilitation in various state centers. Through direct observation, experiential learning, and a thorough review of the body of literature, the primary data collected was strengthened. The goals are to research the role of support systems in overcoming drug addiction and offer suggestions for reducing drug use. Supported by the data findings, this study emphasizes the importance of recognizing early signs of drug abuse and dependency in family members, considering the socialization process, and implementing awareness programs in educational as well as community institutions. Community-based services, such as drop-in centers and rehabilitation centers, can prove to be effective in preventing drug abuse and promoting healthy life choices.

**Keywords:** Arunachal Pradesh, Community Support, Drug Reduction, Narcotics Anonymous, Peer Support

## 1. Introduction

Peer and community support play a crucial role in tackling and decreasing drug abuse. With their assistance, a supportive atmosphere can be fostered, helping individuals struggling with substance abuse by providing guidance and motivation. By focusing on this kind of support system, we can actively contribute to combating drug addiction and its detrimental consequences. Utilizing peer support programs is one effective method to harness this valuable support. In these programs, individuals who have triumphed over addiction are connected with those who are presently undergoing the recovery process. Peers serve as an asset as they possess personal experience with the challenges associated with addiction

and can provide vital support, understanding, and motivation [4]. By sharing their own stories and offering guidance, they can inspire others to persevere on their journey towards recovery.

Support groups can be established by communities to provide a safe and secure environment for individuals struggling with drug abuse. These groups foster a sense of compassion, comprehension, and camaraderie among members, allowing them to openly share their personal experiences, challenges, and accomplishments [4]. By creating these spaces, communities can construct a supportive network that aids in recovery, personal growth, and the establishment of meaningful connections. Simultaneously, community organizations could collaborate with healthcare professionals, treatment facilities, and government organizations to develop educational and awareness campaigns along with support groups [5]. These initiatives aim to enhance drug prevention strategies, raise awareness about the adverse consequences of drug abuse, and provide information on available resources. Through these campaigns, the emphasis is placed on working together as a community to reduce drug abuse by educating individuals about the impact of addiction and offering potential solutions.

Furthermore, community-driven events such as workshops and seminars have the potential to initiate conversations on drug addiction and harm reduction. By inviting experts, individuals in recovery, and community leaders to share their knowledge and viewpoints, a better understanding and awareness can be promoted among participants. Through open communication and educational initiatives, communities can empower individuals to make informed choices regarding substance abuse. Maximizing the effectiveness of peer and community support requires active engagement and collaboration with a diverse range of individuals and groups. This includes the participation of schools, businesses, law enforcement agencies, hospitals, and civic leaders [6]. By working collectively, these stakeholders can effectively tackle the multifaceted challenges associated with drug addiction. Through coordination, resource sharing, and the implementation of evidence-based approaches [7], they can make a significant impact in addressing this issue.

To summarize, it can be understood that effectively tackling drug addiction and reducing its occurrence hinges on harnessing peer and community assistance. By implementing initiatives such as peer support programs, support groups, awareness campaigns, and leveraging technology, we can create an environment that fosters understanding, empathy, and support. By working together, we can facilitate the recovery process, empower individuals, and contribute to the reduction of drug abuse within our society.

## 2. Methodology

To gain insights into the significance of peer and community support in battling drug addiction, a case study approach has been employed. Primary data has been gathered through numerous sessions with four respondents who are currently receiving treatment in different rehab centers. Observations have been made in their interaction with their peer groups and different members of their community. Major queries included their knowledge about peer support groups and community services, how have they come to access these services, how significant is the roles of these groups in their recovery and what changes could be made to make these support systems more effective. Additionally, a thorough review of existing publications and empirical evidence was conducted to supplement the primary data. The selection of the clients was made based on two criterions viz.:

- a) Dependents who were part of some sort of peer support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA).
- b) Researcher's accessibility to the client.

Clarity and accuracy have been ensured by making these notes available to the clients for their review and satisfaction. The treatment and case work [8] of the clients are still ongoing and only select data from the interview transcripts have been included in the study at hand.

### 3. Research Objectives

1. To explore the significance of peer and community support systems in overcoming the problem of drug addiction in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To recommend preventive and promotive ways through which drug use can be minimized.

### 4. Client Profile

(All names in this study have been changed to protect the anonymity of the respondents)

#### Case I

To find out what was causing Tama, a 25-year-old man from Arunachal Pradesh, to spend so much time alone, withdraw from social situations, and have a severe lack of verbal communication, his uncle, Akhup recommended that he see a psychiatrist. His substance use was blamed for his biopsychosocial instability. The client's biopsychosocial functioning revealed poor personal hygiene, a lack of awareness of his surroundings, and a disregard for social obligations like studying, paying attention to elders, helping others, and taking care of cousins. Exam failure, school abandonment, diminished social support, taunting by onlookers, wound marks on the face and body, and a lack of life skill development were just a few of the biopsychosocial effects. Tama studied till 9<sup>th</sup> standard in a mission school in the Papum Pare District, as he failed in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard owing to the growing problems.

He liked to keep to himself and wrote in a lovely cursive style. Due to the use of opioids, the client has been given a provisional diagnosis of F11, or otherwise known as 'Mental and Behavioural Disorder due to use of opioid'. His father's passing, a family history of mental illness, and a difficultly handled case of unrequited love all played major roles in the gradual onset. Tama's propensity to maintain her distance kept her from receiving social support. He had a severe dependence on both physical and psychological substances, which affected his social skills. Under peer pressure, he tattooed his own neck while avoiding family members under the pretext of hiding the smell or effects of substance on his eyes and skin.

As a result of declining grades, he was forced to leave school. He was unable to manage his personal hygiene due to the severity of the disorder, which increased hostility from those around him.

#### Case II

Mezar, a 49-year-old man, was arrested for drug trafficking in accordance with the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985. His antisocial behavior, lack of social responsibility, living as a trans person, and deviant lifestyle were the cause of his biopsychosocial instability. He exhibits signs of substance use disorder, poor hygiene, cancer brought on by injecting drugs, and lack of interest in social activities. After the death of his wife, mother, and parents, and the marriage of his daughter, he was left to live alone. He has been given a provisional diagnosis of depression and Hepatitis-C. Due to the client's extreme physical and psychological dependence, it was difficult for him to maintain healthy family and social ties and to function socially. He has finished detoxification and is continuing with his regular activities at the treatment facility.

Mezar participates in a NA group, which includes meditation practice and sessions on addiction. The client expressed that he feels honored and grateful to be a part of such a supportive community as the group

offers encouragement and support to newcomers. Being a part of the group gives one a great sense of pride and satisfaction, and it has helped him on his road to recovery. His ideas for improvement included having a committed expert offer the client's family additional learning opportunities and guidance.

### Case III

Temin is a 23-year-old male and due to his increasingly antisocial behaviors, a rehab facility was recommended to him by his father. His signs included a lack of social interaction, physical withdrawal, apathy, and bad hygiene. His biopsychosocial effects included a decline in academic performance, social isolation, and failure to maintain social relationships. Temin grew up in a household with a businesswoman mother and a contractor father. Poor social functioning, a lack of motivation, marital problems, and deteriorating physical health were all consequences of the intravenous drug abuse (IVDA) condition known as hepatitis-C. He received appropriate care and opportunities for development at the rehab facility, which aided in his recovery.

Through interventional strategies like motivational therapy, counseling, group therapy, meditation, indoor and outdoor games, dance & singing, and spiritual sessions, the researcher aimed to aid Temin in recovering from substance use disorder (SUD). Initially, the client battled feelings of guilt and shame, which resulted in anxiety and depression. However, since his admission 8 months ago, he has been leading a sober life.

Temin joined one peer support group on June 28, 2021. He shares himself with the group in an effort to overcome his negative thoughts, feelings, and emotions. His recovery is aided by the group by identifying his weaknesses and offering solidarity to the problems associated with drug recovery.

### Case IV

Goku, a 20-year-old man with a history of substance abuse, was referred to a rehab facility as a result of his compulsive behavior of stealing money from his house. His biopsychosocial instability caused him to be uninterested in social activities, perform poorly in school, and have poor mental health. His symptoms included a lack of interest in social activities, trouble sustaining relationships, poor hygiene, Hepatitis-C, and a debt of 1 lakh INR incurred during the purchase of drugs. His mother who worked as a government employee was the only one to support the needs of the family. Hepatitis-C and depression were provisionally diagnosed in him and his severe physical and psychological dependence had a negative impact on his physical health, family ties, and social interactions.

The researcher tried to make the client understand the value of education, way of life, and personal contribution to society. The client was able to change his life, and he is now doing better in school and has been sober for the past four months. The client has been a part of the peer support group since June 2023 and is aware of it. He is appreciative and proud of the acceptance he has received from the group members, and he thinks it is assisting his healing. He believes that the group support could be made more effective by implementing more drug awareness campaigns, talking openly about one's own drug use, and encouraging more addicts to seek treatment.

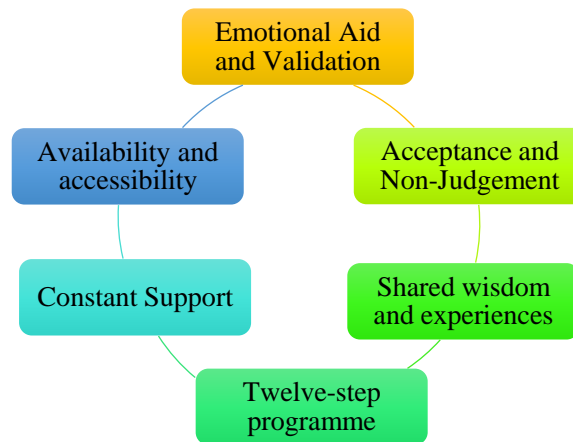
## 5. Results and Discussion

### A Network of Helping Hands

All the clients are members of Narcotics Anonymous groups in their respective regions. Some have joined since the last two years while, one is new and only two months have passed. They got to know about this

type of support group through word of mouth, social media and via their rehabilitation counselors. They shared that while family and professional support have been meaningful for them, the peer support group has had the most influence when it comes to motivation and being understood. They accept that addiction is something they have no control over and it is a herculean task to manage their own emotions and urges. The feeling of guilt, shame and being stigmatized from the society has tremendous effect on their psychological as well as social health. So, in times of despair, these groups offer great relief through continuous support, motivation, and compassion when they get to communicate with fellow recovering persons who have navigated themselves through this deep water. In these peer groups they keep sessions for open communication, revising the 12-steps of Narcotics Anonymous, meditation, recreation, and other addiction-focused activities to help overcome their struggles. The clients shared that they feel honored and grateful to be part of such a supportive community and added that it has been instrumental in their recovery journey.

The clients shared that in order to enrich their experiences they must be honest and respectful towards other members and the support provided to them must be carried forward in the society where many are still under the grip of this common enemy. Older members of these groups are already rendering this service to their communities by being proactively engaged with people whom they identify to be in the risk of drug abuse and they counsel these people on the ill effects and their own life journey. Clients also expressed their interest in joining the workforce upon recovery and make continued effort to live a drug free and financially sound life.



**Figure 1:** Benefits of Peer and Community Support

Peer support brings together people who have faced comparable struggles with drug addiction. Members benefit from this environment's promotion of empathy, comprehension, and a sense of community. People find solace in knowing they are not alone in their struggle for recovery by sharing their own experiences and struggles. They offer a nonjudgmental setting where people can feel accepted and understood. This acceptance is essential because it supports people in overcoming feelings of shame and guilt and enables them to concentrate on their recovery without worrying about stigma or judgment.

Members benefitting from these types of groups are urged to draw on one another's experiences. Getting advice from people who have successfully recovered from addiction can help people come up with effective recovery plans, deal with cravings, and overcome obstacles. A person's resolve to maintain sobriety can be bolstered by learning from various viewpoints, which can also support their general wellbeing.



Peer Group such as Narcotics Anonymous adheres to the Twelve Steps, which describe a methodical strategy for obtaining and sustaining sobriety. These steps offer a structure for developing personally, reflecting on oneself, and accepting accountability for one's deeds. By focusing on their spiritual, emotional, and behavioral transformation, people who are actively participating in the steps can become more powerful. NA meetings are regularly scheduled and they offer constant assistance throughout the healing process. Meetings can be attended whenever it is convenient for the participants, which supports the maintenance of routine and structure in their lives. Maintaining motivation, avoiding relapse, and promoting long-term recovery all depend on this ongoing support. Peer and community support services are accessible to a wide range of people as they are available in numerous locations, both in-person and online. People are more likely to find support that matches their preferences and needs thanks to this accessibility.

## 6. Recommendation

### a) Preventive and Promotive Initiatives

In order to prioritize community awareness and social responsibility, particularly in tackling the issue of drug addiction, it is crucial to engage in activities that promote consciousness within the community. Educated and concerned individuals should step forward to lead and coordinate programs that primarily target the youth and other important members of the community. In order to combat drug addiction, it is important for the community to implement a ban on drug-related activities through regular patrols and harsh penalties for those who violate the ban. Furthermore, the community should establish a policy that protects the identity of whistleblowers, thereby promoting a safe environment for individuals to come forward and help fight against drug addiction.

### b) Drop-in-Centres (DIC)

With the purpose of supporting individuals struggling with drug dependency and desiring to make positive changes, it is essential for communities to establish Drop-in-Centers. These centers provide a space where recovering addicts can gather and bond with one another, as well as connect with people in society who share similar values. These venues serve as a platform for individuals to openly share their experiences, free from criticism or anxiety. In certain instances, these centers serve as a sheltering shield for individuals seeking transformation, offering them a sanctuary away from drug dealers and other harmful elements within society that may tempt them to revert to a negative path.

### c) Establishment of Rehabilitation Centres

Aside from drop-in centers, it is important to establish formal rehabilitation facilities within the community. Rehabilitation is widely recognized as the most effective means for individuals struggling with drug dependency to undergo a genuine transformation and improve their lives. The findings from this study indicate that while other supportive factors have played a significant role in their journey towards recovery, it is only through admission to a rehabilitation facility that they have found a genuine sense of comfort and solace. In these establishments, individuals' overall well-being is prioritized through a comprehensive approach. They utilize various therapeutic techniques such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET), along with activities like yoga, meditation, and recreational pursuits. These methods aim to enhance individuals' physical, psychological, and spiritual health, while also helping them recognize their importance as meaningful contributors to society.

#### d) Destigmatization

Although there is abundant research and evidence supporting addiction as a disease, society has not fully embraced the notion that drug dependents lack significant control over their situation. It is important to acknowledge that the initial use and misuse of drugs often stems from choices driven by curiosity or peer pressure. However, it is crucial to recognize that once an individual is deemed dependent or addicted, they have already contracted a disease. In the case of someone battling cancer or another illness, they receive support and care from those around them as they go through the healing process. However, when it comes to drug addiction, the understanding and compassion seem to be lacking. Society tends to look down upon and treat those struggling with addiction harshly, which unfortunately leads to more negative outcomes, as indicated by the data from this study. In order to address the problem effectively, society needs to recognize that stigmatizing a family member who is an addict will not lead to any solutions. Instead, it is important for them to show understanding and support, encouraging the addict to seek professional assistance.

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