

Substance Use: Attitudes, Policies and Stigma in India

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Disclosure Information

Substance Use: Attitudes, Policies and Stigma in India

“An International Perspective on Stigma and Substance Use Disorders “

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◆ **NO DISCLOSURES**

South Asia (Indian Sub-continent)

- ◆ Home to about a quarter of global population
- ◆ Long history of civilization
- ◆ Rich, diverse culture
- ◆ Heavily influenced by visitors, invaders, colonisers



Evolution of societal attitudes towards substance use in India

Historically

- A 'tolerant' attitude towards psychoactive substances
- Social sanction for use of alcohol, cannabis and opium



Substance use through ages



- ◆ Description of alcohol in ancient scriptures and texts
- ◆ Sculptors and paintings depicting alcohol consumption
- ◆ The tribal communities' brewing and consuming practices – interwoven with culture
 - ◆ Largely low concentration 'brewed' alcohol



- Use of cannabis as recreational and medicinal product (both oral and smoking)
- Ayurveda, the ancient indigenous system of medicine – medical properties of cannabis
- Substantial religious and cultural acceptance
 - Revered plant; offered to Lord Shiva

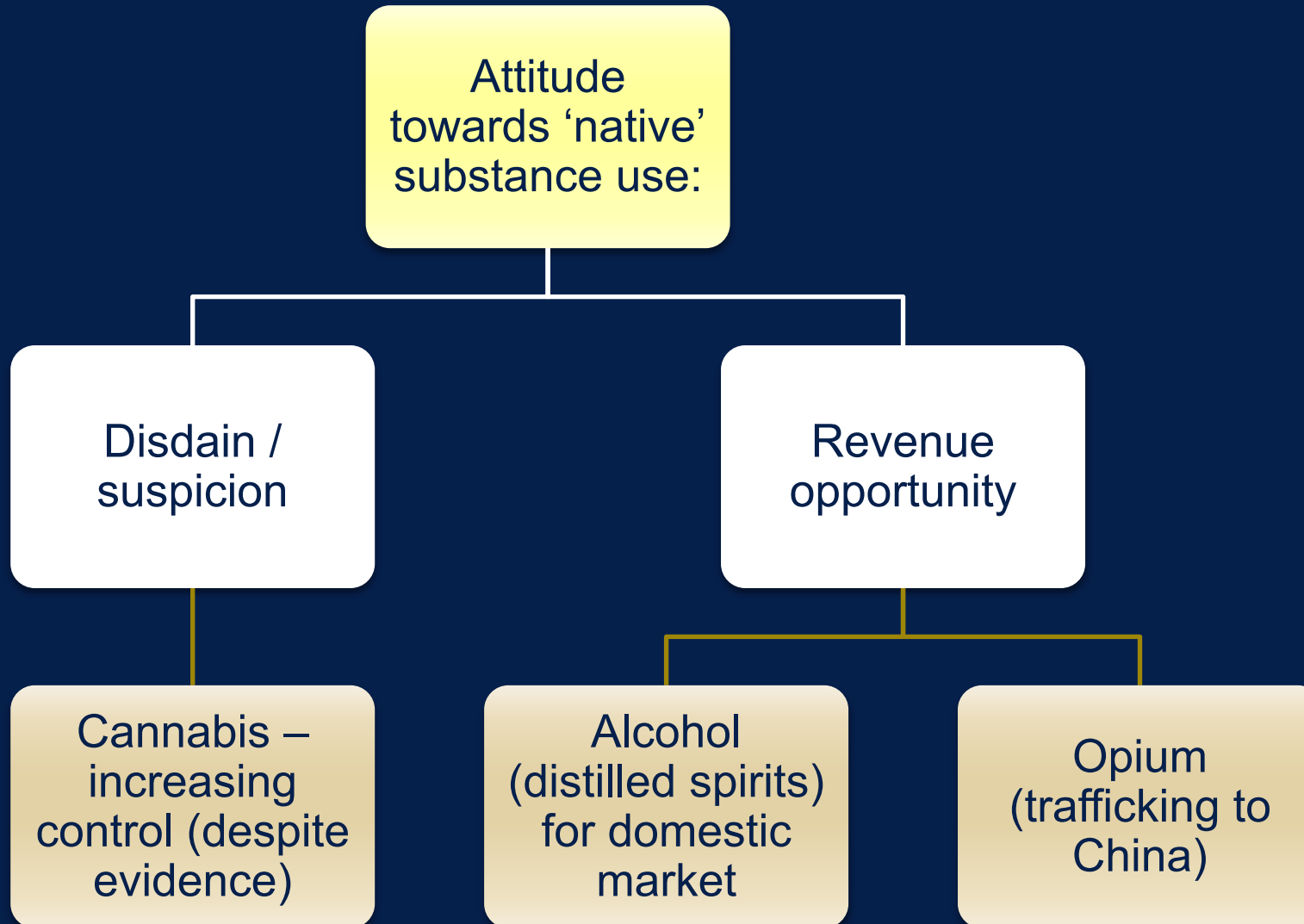


- Long history of cultivation
- Use as a household remedy
- Socially accepted use in some parts of India
- Historically, use by soldiers, warriors and farm workers
 - Largely oral: Opium or poppy husk

However....

- A 'Vice versus Virtue' binary: Pleasure (Substance Use) is a Vice; Abstinence is a Virtue
- Any form of sacrifice of pleasure: Respected
- Adherence to an ideology: eulogized
- Substance use: Undesirable, best avoided, tolerated in certain contexts, but not really a sin or crime

The colonial rule



The colonial 'project'

Cannabis



◆ Native, rustic, unpolished

Alcohol



◆ Sophisticated, modern, polished



Stills from Hindi Movie 'Don'

The current situation

- ◆ Alcohol – subjected to State (sub-national) laws and policies
 - ◆ Complete prohibition in 6 / 36 states / UTs
 - ◆ Current use prevalence ~ 15% (Cf. Global prevalence ~ 50%)
 - ◆ AUD prevalence ~ 5% (Cf. Global prevalence ~ 5%) !
 - ◆ M:F – 17:1

Fewer people consume alcohol; those who do, do so heavily

The current situation

- ◆ Cannabis – bhang (leaves, oral) legal but ‘marijuana’ illegal
 - ◆ Current use prevalence (of illegal cannabis) ~ 1.2% (Cf. Global prevalence ~ 3.9%)
- ◆ Opioids – legal cultivation of opium, highly regulated & restricted
 - ◆ Current use prevalence:
 - ◆ Opium – 0.5%
 - ◆ Heroin – 1.1%

↑ prevalence of more potent and harmful substance (cf. low-potency, lower-harm products like cannabis and

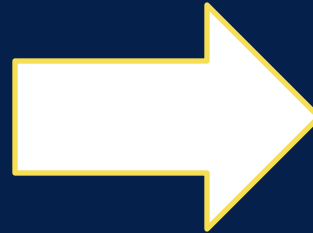
So, how is stigma related to all this?

- ◆ Societal attitudes and Government policies: A bi-directional relationship



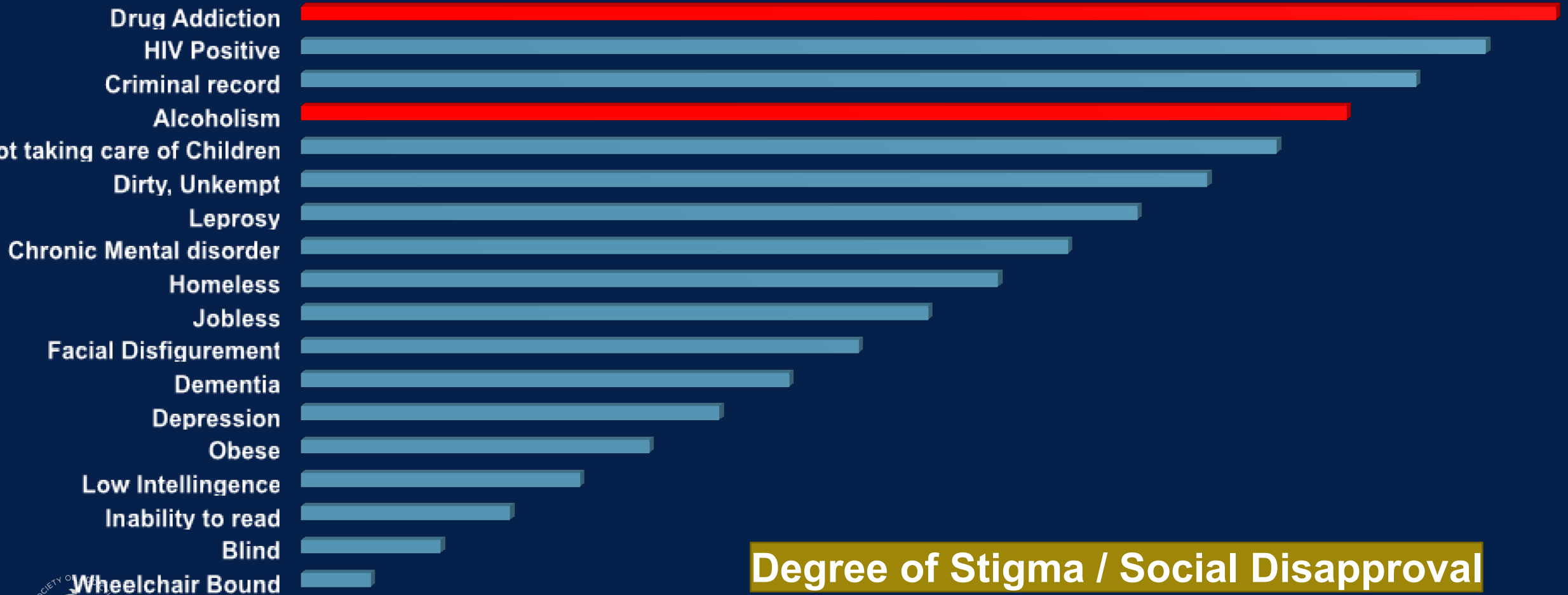
Impact of stigma

- ◆ Erosion of empathy
- ◆ Barrier in:
 - ◆ Providing health and welfare services (Government resource allocation)
 - ◆ Accessing health and welfare services (by PWUD)
- ◆ Irrational drug law enforcement activities
 - ◆ Going after the 'user' rather than the 'trafficker'



Further
compounding
substance use
problems

WHO Study: 18 conditions; 14 countries (including India)



Degree of Stigma / Social Disapproval

Stigma and SUD: Some Indian studies

- ◆ Alcohol Vs Opioid Dependence (n=50 each): Higher perceived stigma in Alcohol dependence group!
 - ◆ True for their family members as well
- ◆ Male Vs Female Opioid Dependence (n=50 each): Higher perceived stigma in Females
 - ◆ Females ↑ pharma opioids; Males ↑ heroin

Conclusion

- ◆ Stigma and discrimination: significant hurdles in Addiction medicine
- ◆ Implications for:
 - ◆ Clinical service provision
 - ◆ Public policy
 - ◆ Law enforcement / criminal justice system
- ◆ Advocacy for just, fair and evidence-informed health policies and systems: duty of addiction medicine professionals

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Kofi Annan ✓
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I believe that drugs have destroyed many lives, but wrong government policies have destroyed many more. KA
[#WorldDrugDay](#)

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Thank you



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