



'Its smell intrigued me'

Children 6-10-02 Nakson

NASIR IQBAL says that social injustice, lack of proper opportunities to work and unstable childhood trigger the habit of glue and petrol sniffing, which is commonly found among run-away children doing odd jobs



children's activities. A survey revealed that 300 kids start smoking everyday. Some 17 years back in Pakistan, there were only 5000 drug addicts. In 1994, the figure raised to three million and now, including the smokers, the number of addicts in Pakistan is around 20 million. Laksmi

addict or the community where they live comprises of addicts, then there are chances that the children will become drug addicts.

A majority of children found washing cars, begging, working at the stalls and in cinemas take some form of drugs. The little money that they earn, goes into buying the glue solution or petrol. The children working in the workshop or as a car washer, dip a cloth into the petrol tank of a car and begin sniffing. Some children sniff the glue and some chew it. They put the glue on a cloth and sniff it or they pour it in a shopping bag and hold it towards their face. After inhaling for some time, they start feeling dizzy and light headed. They feel elated after smelling these things, it also distorts their senses. The intentional use of physical force or intentional omission by a parent or guardian of a child makes him frustrated and can ruin his future.

Child addiction is relatively a common problem in the world including Pakistan. A child becomes an addict more often when his parents are under severe stress as a result of economic or social pressure. Under such circumstances, attention of the parents is diverted and they do not take notice of their

they are not into glue and petrol sniffing. I have not come across a single such case." Dr. Bhatti opined that the above mentioned drugs have hazardous effects and their continuous use can lead to death. Inhaling smell by covering face causes displacement of oxygen in the nervous system, causing breathing to cease. The constant use of these sniffing items has serious long-term and irreversible health problems, including the loss of hearing, damaging of brain and deficiency of oxygen in blood. It also damages liver, kidney, spleen, gallbladder, bone marrow and can cause blindness. The children also sniff glue as it makes them warm in the cold weather.

Once I saw a boy who was sniffing the empty tins of the puncture solution. I met another boy named Ashfaq who told me that he belonged to a village and had come to Lahore for earning a living. Having no shelter, he began to live at Darbar. A newly-made friend introduced Ashfaq to this sniffing habit. Another boy Sohail said that he used to work in a factory where glue was used in making products. "Its smell intrigued me and I became addicted to it," he said. Saeed said that he used to earn Rs 30 to 40 and spend them on glue. These run-away children spend their days sniffing in order to suppress their hunger and memories of their loved ones.

A lawyer Sohail Farooq Tarar said, "In Pakistan, it is not a problem at a higher level and only a small portion of the population comprises addicts. The responsibility goes to parents and the society. Parents due to certain reasons ignore their children and do not take interest in their upbringing. Such an indifferent attitude results in causing frustration in the children."

Despite what the above mentioned individuals have said, petrol sniffing exists in the society and it will not go away with a mere blink of an eye. With no law enforcing agencies handling this issue, it is bound to grow out of proportion sooner or later when we shall be facing another dilemma staring in our eyes. Hope we would not be helpless again! Children are the future of a society. They need proper upbringing, peaceful home environment and equal rights. The concerned authorities must take concrete steps to eliminate this alarming trend in our society. In this regard, media and law enforcement agencies can play a strong role. The social welfare and anti-narcotics forces should join hands to fight this social menace. ■

Chowk, Railway Station, Ghari Shah, Misri Shah, Data Darbar, Naseerabad, Badami Bagh, Lyton Road, Bilal Ganj and areas having workshops, one can see a lot of sniffers. Normally, the children sniff glue in a group. In Lahore, the sniffers employed in shoe and leather factories, where the use of glue is necessary, make the children addicts. The leather factories prefer to employ children, because they charge less than adults and give the same output. The children also prefer to work in these factories because of the availability of smelling substances. Dr. Riaz Ahmed Bhatti said, "Various kind of drugs, commonly used include narcotic such as heroin and opium, methadone, cough syrup with coding and Nuskhas alcohol. Some sedatives including valium, Ativan and sleeping pills are available easily, without prescription from all stores. But the smelling of glue and petrol is relatively a new addiction, especially in children as such cases were not referred to me. I think in Pakistan, this problem is at a low level. There may have been some exceptional cases, otherwise this problem has not been reported at a higher level. Alcohol and smoking is the problem of the elite class and

For the past couple of decades, there has been an alarming increase in the number of drug addicts of various hues. It has become an international problem and many organisations have joined hands to deal with this social menace, but there seems no end to it because a lot of innovations in addiction are being made with every passing day. Sniffing – of petrol, glue, Kerosene oil, mentholene etc., – though not a recent phenomenon of our society, is on the rise among children (between 10-15 years) and the young of the poor definitely. Most of them are labouring in workshops or run-away children doing odd jobs of various natures at relatively 'dubious' places.

A number of factors can be attributed to sniffing, which are both social and psychological. In many cases, initially considered as an innocuous exercise makes the campaigner indulge in this act for the rest of his life. Peer pressure can also trigger this habit. It starts from taking the lighter form of drugs and then gradually, it turns into the hard ones. Unfortunately, the use of drugs is common in all age groups, especially in children. There are various types of drugs that they take.

The commonest ones are glue and petrol sniffing. Almost three years back it was unheard of. It has been observed that run-away children or who are leading an unsatisfactory life indulge in this habit. It has become a serious problem. It is increasing at an alarming rate in the major cities of Pakistan, especially in Lahore. Unhappy family background, disturbed childhood rearing, economic and financial restraints, absence of resources, easy availability of addictive substances, psychosocial conditions, injustice, discrimination and exploitation are the basic factors which make a child vulnerable to drug usage. These factors are making the lives of children bitter and miserable. The poor are the worst target of this oppression. Among others, the school drop-outs and working children are more prone to this habit. If any of the parents is an