**Preventing drug use**

[**Ahsan Munir**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/ahsan-munir)

April 26, 2023

Afghanistan, because of one reason or another, is among the major producers of opioids in the world. Afghanistan has been ravaged by wars of not its own making for the last many decades, which have destroyed its infrastructure and economy, and created abject poverty, conditions which result in desperate measures being adopted by people for survival.

Pakistan has a long contiguous, porous border with Afghanistan, which is difficult to control and patrol. Thus, the border is an easy route for the transit of opioids from Afghanistan, through Pakistan to various lucrative drug markets of the world. However, as the drugs flowed through, they also started finding their way into Pakistan. With its huge population, the majority of which is below the poverty line, many started finding solace in these drugs, and thus seeing drug addicts under bridges, on footpaths, in dark alleyways, and in deserted graveyards became a common sight. As the money in drugs grew, local drug kingpins began to emerge who not only transported drugs from Afghanistan to ports of Karachi and Baluchistan but also formed networks for provincial distribution-which also resulted in the morphing of small-time drug peddlers into localized drug dealers.

[Trials to select Sindh basketball team for National Games on May 7](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-May-2023/trials-to-select-sindh-basketball-team-for-national-games-on-may-7)

With the increasing drug menace in society, a federal ministry was created and an anti-narcotics force (ANF) was created under its aegis to manage ground operations such as drug seizures and busting drug networks. However, since drugs are a lucrative ‘business’, the menace continued to grow. The menace has now taken a new turn with the introduction of new party drugs such as ecstasy, and cocaine, which have found acceptance among the higher strata of society. For instance, drug abuse in elite schools and institutions has become prevalent (or pretty much a fashion), which has finally sent the alarm bells ringing in the higher echelons of society.

However, since the drug menace and its associated facilitators were allowed to take origin due to lax laws, they resultantly made inroads to places that matter, thus affecting the efforts of the government to curb the menace through stricter laws and deterring punishments. Encouragingly, the American government has been actively involved the world over in fighting the drug menace, and also proactively cooperates with local anti-narcotics agencies of Pakistan to contain and eradicate the drug menace, which has led to many success stories in recent years.

[Enaam becomes the first Pakistani to finish Top 5 in a Grand Prix](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-May-2023/enaam-becomes-the-first-pakistani-to-finish-top-5-in-a-grand-prix)

However, busting, seizing drug hauls, or arresting a drug lord here or there would not solve the problem in the long term, as Pakistan is just a conduit not an epicentre of opioid production in the world. A multi-pronged strategy is required by the world and especially by the US government in conjunction with our government to curb the drug menace in this region. First, there is a need to engage Afghanistan to give its people and its farmer’s viable options for crops other than opium. The US government can play a vital role in facilitating Afghan farmers for alternative cash crops, along with helping Afghanistan improve its economic and law and order situation. Second, drug lords and their networks may be dismantled in Pakistan through stricter laws, better enforcement and higher conviction rates. Third, Pakistan is a front-line state which is bearing the brunt of opioid production in the neighbouring state and accordingly should be helped, not exorcised, through enabling technologies for agencies working on the ground such as the provision of UAVs for reconnaissance of porous borders, which are used to smuggle narcotics into Pakistan. Thus, such a holistic approach would first help curb drug production in Afghanistan and further squeeze it’s trafficking through Pakistan, which would ultimately help to reduce the supply of narcotics to the world market from this region of the World.