

A STUDY ON IMPRISONED FEMALE DRUG OFFENDERS

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Female drug offenders are a poorly studied group whose numbers appear to be increasing. 1987 prison statistics show that narcotic drug offenders constitute the second largest category of women prison inmates (30%) as

compared to (2%) in 1983. In this study carried out in 1988 a sample of 29 women prison inmates arrested for heroin associated offenders were identified and interviewed in an attempt to gain some insight into this phenomenon. Two inmates were from the Kandy Remand Prison and the rest from Welikada at Colombo.

The sample could be divided into two categories, namely 'users' (16) and 'non-users' (13). Among the user category, whose age ranged from 16-35 years, prostitution, peddling and use of drug was prevalent and there were single, married, separated or widowed individuals. The non-users whose age ranged from 23-50 years all claimed to be married. Of the sample the majority were Buddhist while 4 were Muslims, 2 Hindu and 1 Christian.

Most users had unstable family backgrounds and the entire sample were generally from poor, large families. The majority of both categories had no formal education. The rest had little formal education probably due to their poor economic situation. Users were mostly labourers prior to their addiction but subsequently obtained their main income through prostitution. Non-users had no permanent source of income although few claimed to peddling drugs.

The users all claimed to have been introduced to drugs through friends and close associates. This group included those who tried it for leisure, curiosity or as claimed in one case accidentally. All got used to drugs after 1983 and have since been using them regularly.

All the users had previously tried other intoxicants like alcohol and all smoke tobacco. All the users and most of the non-users were released in December 1988. Follow-up showed that the users had once again resumed their consumption of heroin.