

PREVALENCE OF DRUG ABUSE IN PAKISTAN; AN OVERVIEW OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM'S RESPONSE TO DRUG TRAFFICKERS IN PUNJAB

Executive Summary

The global number of drug users has been on the rise, increasing from 240 million in 2011 to 296 million in 2021 (WDR, 2023). This growth is paralleled by an expansion in the global drug economy. For example, in 2008, the value of heroin trafficked through Iran and Central Asian states was estimated at \$33 billion, while the value of cocaine trafficked to North America and the European Union during the same period was estimated at \$88 billion (UNODC, 2008). Governments worldwide are grappling with various challenges, including the expanding drug markets in terms of both harm and scope, the use of social media platforms for illicit drug transactions, and the localized manufacturing of cheap and easily accessible synthetic drugs (WDR, 2023).

Pakistan's location near Afghanistan, the world's largest producer of illicit opium, makes it susceptible to various drug-related challenges (UNODC Pakistan, 2008). According to the UNODC Report (2013), approximately 6.7 million people in Pakistan had used some form of controlled substance, including prescription drugs, in 2012. In addition to drug prevalence, Pakistan faces a significant challenge in prosecuting drug traffickers, a concern particularly highlighted by law enforcement agencies such as the Police. The investigation and prosecution aspects of the criminal justice system often fail to secure convictions against traffickers in court, leading to the release of offenders who frequently return to drug trafficking.

There is a growing urgency for officers in investigation, prosecution, and the judiciary in Pakistan to be exclusively dedicated to handling illicit drug-related cases. These officers should be accredited by global investigation certification institutions to align the standards of the country's criminal justice system with international norms for prosecuting drug trafficking cases. Establishing specialized courts staffed with certified investigating officers, prosecutors, and judges will enhance the effectiveness of these institutions in combating the escalating threat of drug trafficking and prosecuting offenders.

Research Overview

The purpose of this policy brief, apart from advocating separate investigation, prosecution, and adjudicating officers, is to debunk the misnomer that the low conviction rates in illicit drug trafficking cases are entirely due to poor investigation of cases by Police. To enhance the state's response to drug trafficking, all three components of the criminal justice system require fundamental improvement, particularly in the processes of evidence collection, presentation in court, and subsequent adjudication. Until these aspects align with established standards, the conviction rate is likely to remain unacceptably low. Research focusing on conviction rates is crucial, as it provides an objective measure of the effectiveness of a criminal justice system. This metric quantitatively assesses the rate at which individuals presented before a court of law are ultimately convicted.

Research Overview

To assess the state's response to illicit drug trafficking in Punjab, data on criminal case registration and corresponding conviction rates was obtained from the Office of the Additional Inspector General of Police, Investigation, Punjab. The Control of Narcotics Substances Act (1997) provides the legal framework for handling narcotics-related cases in Punjab. In 2022, there were 12,892 cases registered under the CNSA (1997) in Punjab, with a total of 13,946 accused individuals. Of these, 2,080 were convicted. In 2023, the number of cases registered rose to 16,839, involving 16,403 accused individuals, but only 437 were convicted. This translates to a conviction rate of 16% in 2022 and 2% in 2023, indicating significant deficiencies in the investigation and prosecution processes. These flaws benefit the accused, allowing them to evade the consequences typically associated with drug trafficking.

Cases Registered Under CNSA (1997) In Punjab

Table I

Year	Registered Cases	Cancelled	Challan	U/Inv.	Accused Involved	Accused Arrested	Accused Convicted
2023	16839	3	16804	32	18037	16403	437
2022	12892	3	12871	18	13946	11256	2080

To gain insight into the situation in major cities across Punjab, data on cases registered under the CNSA (1997) was examined for Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, and Multan. The already low conviction rates in these cities further declined in 2023 compared to 2022. The conviction rates dropped from 8% to less than 1% in Lahore, 16% to less than 1% in Gujranwala, 17% to 3.5% in Rawalpindi, 8% to 2.5% in Faisalabad, and 3% to 1% in Multan.

These low conviction rates indicate deficiencies in the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication stages of drug-related cases, prompting a discussion on the need for meaningful state interventions in all three stages.

Cases Registered Under CNSA (1997) Across Major Cities in Punjab

Table II

Districts	Year	Reg. Cases	Canc.	Challan	U/Inv.	Accused Involved	Accused Arrested	Accused Convicted
Lahore	2023	4137	2	4127	8	4365	3572	28
	2022	2336	0	2323	13	2506	1974	189
Gujranwala	2023	809	0	805	4	844	808	5
	2022	710	0	710	0	746	626	113
Rawalpindi	2023	1216	1	1204	11	1316	1216	43
	2022	646	0	646	0	692	565	110
Faisalabad	2023	833	0	831	2	976	871	20
	2022	745	0	744	1	851	755	58
Multan	2023	312	0	311	1	356	293	3
	2022	309	0	309	0	336	317	9

Conclusion

The Government of Punjab has implemented corrective measures to enhance the quality of investigations, particularly in drug trafficking cases. Specialized investigation officers and prosecutors have been appointed for handling these cases. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives can be further enhanced by ensuring that investigation officers, prosecutors, and judges receive training and certification from globally accredited institutions. Such training would not only improve their skills but also align their practices with international standards, ultimately leading to more effective prosecution of drug trafficking cases.

Policy Recommendations

- Establishing specialized courts dedicated to trying drug trafficking cases, staffed exclusively by internationally trained investigation officers, prosecutors, and judges, could significantly improve the efficacy of the trial process.
- Standardizing the collection of evidence, its presentation in court, and the adjudication process according to international benchmarks would bring uniformity to trial procedures.
- Provide training and certification for investigation officers, prosecutors, and judges in collaboration with the Bureau of INL (US Department of State) and UNODC to enhance their skills and align practices with global standards.

- Implement community-based awareness programs to educate the public about the dangers of drug use and the importance of prevention.
- Introduce prevention programs in schools to educate students about the risks of drug use and promote healthy lifestyles.
- Improve access to rehabilitation services for individuals struggling with drug addiction to support their recovery and prevent relapse.
- Provide support to law enforcement agencies in their efforts to combat drug trafficking through training, resources, and collaboration with international partners.
- Encourage research and data collection on drug use patterns and trends to inform policy development and implementation.

REFERENCES

Me, A., Niaz, K. and Shelton, J. (2013) Drug Use In Pakistan. Pakistan: UNODC

National Initiative Against Organized Crime Pakistan. (2019) Drug Trafficking in Pakistan. Pakistan: NIOC.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2008) Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan. Pakistan: UNODC.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2008) Drug Trafficking. Available at:

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html> (Accessed: 04 May 2024).

Waly, G. (2023) World Drug Report. Vienna, Austria: UNODC.

