Covid-19 & Drug Abuse

Why in news?

During the Covid-19 crisis, more people use drugs and more illicit drugs are available than ever.

Why is there an increase in drug usage?

- The **economic downturn** caused by the pandemic may drive more people to substance abuse.
- It may also leave them vulnerable to involvement in drug trafficking and related crime.
- Vulnerable and marginalised groups, youth, women and the poor have been harmed the most.

- All over the world, the risks and consequences of drug are worsening.
- This worsening is due to **poverty**, **limited opportunities** for education and jobs, **stigma** and **social exclusion**.
- These factors, in turn, deepen inequalities.

What are the affected segments?

- More people use drugs in developed countries than in developing ones.
- Wealthier segments of society have a higher prevalence of drug use.
- However, socially and economically disadvantaged people are more likely to develop drug use disorders.
- Adolescents and young adults account for the largest share of users.

How much accessibility do people have for treatment?

- According to the World Drug Report 2020, only one out of eight people who need drug-related treatment receive it.
- One out of three drug users is a woman.
- However, women represent only one out of five people in treatment.
- People in prison settings, minorities, immigrants and displaced people face barriers to treatment due to discrimination and stigma.
- More than 80% of the world's population are deprived of access to controlled drugs for pain relief and other essential medical uses.
- These people mostly live in low- income and middle-income countries.

What needs to be done?

- Now facing the gravest socio-economic crisis, governments should not ignore the dangers illicit drugs pose to public health and safety.
- **Drug strategies** addressing the country-level and regional-level challenges are needed.
- **Investment** is needed in evidence-based prevention, treatment and other services for drug use disorders, HIV and other infections.
- Health-centred, rights-based and gender-responsive approaches to drug use and related diseases deliver better public health outcomes.
- **International cooperation** is needed,
    1. To increase access to controlled drugs for medical purposes as well as preventing diversion and abuse.
    2. To strengthen law enforcement action to dismantle the transnational organised crime networks.

Source: The Hindu

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