

# Escape From the Curse of Drug

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**T**he curse of drug abuse threatened to consume Shumi, 16, (not a real name) but she was saved in time, unlike hundreds of others in the country whose lives are being ruined by drugs.

The teen is now a recovering drug user who undergoes treatment at the Female Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre of Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) at Iqbal Road, Mohammadpur in the capital. She started doing things she never thought she was capable of doing. She saw a different side in her that she liked very much and

which was not something projected upon her by her family or people back home. She is becoming herself, on her own.

When this writer asks her to share her story, she said, "I feel excited to be asked to share my story and I am wonderfully strong to be able to tell it. Before going into the rehabilitation programme I could not have done this. The shame and embarrassment I felt was huge. I still feel the shame and embarrassment occasionally but I also feel great pride in what I have achieved."

In 2011, Shumi started using drug when she was a student of class-IX. One day one of the school girls came up to her and asked her if she wanted to hang out with them. She became very excited and scared at the same time. She bunked the class and went with them. She saw that they were taking Yaba. This was her first experience with Yaba. She felt very hyper and started behaving rebellious. Ultimately, she got into a lot of trouble at school and lost a year. When her father learnt about the tsunami incident, he arranged her marriage with his eldest daughter's son, twice her age, against her will.

Shumi could not escape the marriage and became a victim of child marriage. However, the marriage didn't last for even one year due to non-cooperation of Shumi. Her humiliated father then got herself divorced from her husband.

Out of frustration, Shumi became totally depended on drug. She took drug as a way to forget her problems. What started out as a social habit, turned into an all consuming need for Yaba. For two years, she lost control of her life. As time passed the sense of pleasure gradually became a terrible burden that threatened her very life. Finally, when the torment became too much, her father got her admitted to the female drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation

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*At the centre, recovering drug addicts learn how to leave the shame of their former lives and become healthy, confident individuals.*

centre in May this year. "I was terrified, but the staff and residents were so caring and welcoming that I hesitantly started my journey of healing and self-discovery" recalls Shumi. "I know that the staff care about me and are concerned about my future."

"I lived in a friendly atmosphere. I learned lots of things during my over two-month stay. I learned such things as anger management, relationship and communication skills and relaxation techniques. I learned to trust and to be trusted; now I have some true friends and a wonderful support network. I feel that through the programme, I have a new chance at life and I have choices'.

Shumi, no doubt, was given a new lease on life at the centre where she remained drug-free for more than two months.

Jahanara, 40, is another housewife staying at the centre for over two months where she says she got a new self. She told that she had become a drug user from her second husband, a habituated drug user. She was forced to remarry by her parents because they did not accept her love marriage with her first husband who was jobless. A child was also born out of the wedlock. Because of stubbornness of parents, Jahanara became addicted to Yaba.

But despite her horrific experience, she considers herself among the lucky ones.

After a residential stay at the AMIC centre for two months, she said: "I would have never imagined a life without Yaba but I now know that it is possible. Here, I have been given a gift it's about believing in ME." She is now excited about the second chance she has been given.

There are too many stories like those of Shumi and Jahanara. Sadly, unlike the two, many do not have a happy ending. Over the last few years the standard of living has plummeted dramatically leaving many struggling to survive. The misery that has resulted provides fertile ground for high-risk lifestyles like drug abuse. Amidst the current social and economic environment, hope is being superseded by an atmosphere of despondency and despair. For many, drugs serve as a solution to their problems.'

An estimated five million people in the country, most of them young people, are drug users. About 8.9 per cent of the injecting drug users (IDU) are bound to be HIV positive (HIV prevalence among IDUs has increased from 1.4 per cent to 4 per cent to 8.9 in a certain area in central Dhaka) and around 83 per cent have Hepatitis C infection, according to Dhaka Ahsania Mission sources. As the number of drug

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users is increasing every day, a humanitarian crisis looms with the growing threat of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS cases are linked to intravenous drug use.

Many female drug users are sex workers and participate in high risk sexual activities. They use a cocktail of drugs. They fall victims to frequent physical abuse and have difficulty in accessing proper facilities and treatment.

Over the past few years the number of newly registered cases has increased to a great extent. Since 1990, DAM is working to prevent drug and HIV/AIDS through its network of several hundred community based branch committees involving youths, students, teachers, NGOs, various clubs and local administration. The network is spread all over the country.

DAM is a pioneer in drug prevention. Nine female drug users are being treated at this centre. Through regular counselling, these women are being given an opportunity to excel in their everyday work and develop the skills needed to overcome their bad habit.

DAM is a member of Switzerland based International Council on Alcohol and Addiction (ICAA) and its president Kazi Rafiqul Alam has been elected a member of the Board of Directors of ICAA.

The younger generation of our society is increasingly indulging in the death trap of drug, said Iqbal Masud, assistant director

and head of Tobacco, Drug, HIV and Primary Healthcare Project of DAM. Considering the alarming situation, DAM undertook its drug prevention programme known as AMIC as back as 1990, he said.

DAM mainly organises adolescents and young adults in the vulnerable areas to keep their community free from abuse and illicit drug trafficking. It also tries to increase social awareness about the consequences of HIV/AIDS. The programme also organises community-based treatment and rehabilitation centres for the recovered addicts.

AMIC is running the centre for treatment and counselling of female drug users including reintegration/rehabilitation of recovering drug users, said Iqbal.

DAM has a plan to build more drug treatment and rehabilitation centres for female drug users in other parts of the country, he revealed.

AMIC female drug treatment centre's philosophy of treatment is based on holistic healing, said Jannatul Ferdous, counselor and trainee clinical psychologist of the centre. Just as addiction affects all aspects of a woman's life, permanent recovery requires a healing of a woman's entire self. For this reason, AMIC's treatment programmes simultaneously strengthen a woman's body, mind and spirit, she informed.

The centre provides alternative therapies and treatment approaches that include



*Creating a warm, friendly atmosphere helps former addicts to start leading normal lives.*





*The centre has been providing new opportunities to female drug users that represent dignity and hope.*

group meetings, Yoga, spiritual counseling and holistic techniques, she said, adding: "Our goal is to assist women in overcoming their addiction and prepare for life after drug rehab and a bright future without drug dependency."

Usually, a counselor uses the tactic of therapeutic journaling in order for the addict to direct their anger at the real culprit, the drugs, she informed.

"Like relationships, many addicts have a love-hate relationship with their drugs. Moments of clarity will come about and the mind races on with the shame and control their addiction holds over them. They realise it is a miserable existence but the pull is so strong that they retreat to using to cover up those feelings and thoughts. Most addicts stay high 24/7 in order to keep the thoughts of remorse and guilt at bay. When they aren't using they occupy their minds by thinking of ways and means to get more. These are the times that can be the most dangerous for an addict. Depending on what phase of addiction they are in they will do almost anything to get the drugs that literally controls their minds. That's why an exercise such as this can be a freeing experience for an addict. And sometimes they realize some resentments and guilt they were harbouring should've been aimed

at the addiction itself."

Drug use and abuse results in a number of medical and health consequences that are different or more severe for women than men, said Tuba Musarrat Ansary, another trainee clinical psychologist and counselor at the centre.

"These can include disruption of the menstrual cycle and reproductive function, a higher risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and decrease in immune function. Social and behavioral consequences include homelessness and high-risk sexual behaviors that put themselves and their families at risk. Legal consequences and rising financial costs can bankrupt women and their dependents."

She said AMIC staffs are educated in gender specific drug addiction treatment factors and incorporate this training into their day-to-day undertakings with patients. This sensitivity to female-specific recovery needs makes AMIC Female Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre an effective drug rehab for women, she said, adding: "The centre provides services to women from all backgrounds and all ages at rates that are affordable."

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