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Social defense and globalization: A public health tool to safeguard the modern society

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ABSTRACT

In the modern era, the policymakers and public health personnel should not only prepare themselves for combating infectious and lifestyle disorders, but should also be well-equipped to deal with the social diseases. The concept of social defense is still in the early days, and it is a comprehensive system developed to defend the society against criminality not merely by treating and defending the offended, but also by creating an enabling environment in the community, which is conducive for a healthy and wholesome growth of human life. Social defense measures can be utilized to counter many social problems, and it essentially deals with the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency, eradication of child labor, prevention of human trafficking, welfare of prisoners, elimination of prostitution, control of alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling and suicides, etc. To conclude, the social defense concept is an emerging public health area which embraces the entire gamut of prophylactic, curative and rehabilitative services for safeguarding the entire community from the antisocial or criminal behavior of humans.

KEY WORDS: Alcoholism, child labor, juvenile delinquency, prison, social defense, trafficking

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, the policymakers and public health personnel should not only prepare themselves for combating infectious and lifestyle disorders, but should also be well-equipped to deal with the social diseases [1]. A disease is categorized as a social problem, provided it has an extensive behavioral element in their causation, affects a large geographical population, has an adverse effect on the health indicators such as morbidity, mortality, and associated disability, results in social stigma, discrimination or ostracism, precipitates an unfavorable and deleterious impact on the quality of life of not only the victim, but also on the members of the family, influences mostly the individuals from the economically productive age-group and thus disrupts the economic growth of the society or the nation, threatens the growth and development of the young children, and if the proposed remedial measures are beyond the reach of those who need them the most [1,2].

The concept of social defense is still in the early days, and it is a comprehensive system developed to defend the society against criminality not merely by treating and defending the offended (viz. with the help of eliminating the etiological factor, or changing the behavior through education/individual and group counseling/motivation, encouraging community involvement,

and legislative measures), but also by creating an enabling environment in the community, which is conducive for a healthy and wholesome growth of human life [2]. Social defense measures can be utilized to counter many social problems, and it essentially deals with the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency, eradication of child labor, prevention of human trafficking, welfare of prisoners, elimination of prostitution, control of alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling and suicides, etc. [1,2].

Juvenile Delinquency

A juvenile delinquent is a person who is typically under the age of 18 and commits an act that otherwise would have been charged as a crime if they were an adult [1,3]. Recent trends suggest that the incidence of juvenile crime is on the rise around the world [3,4]. In fact, a national level report has suggested that the incidence of juvenile delinquency in India alone has increased by 10.5% in 2011 over a period of 1 year [4]. To counter the problem of juvenile delinquency, a range of measures such as conducting counseling sessions for teaching them the art of rearing a child/significance of family internal dynamics, advocating education of the child, ensuring social and financial security of the family, prompt implementation of the corrective measure in response to the etiology/risk factor identified, promoting recreational and youth development activities, and

involving all the stakeholders such as local communities, self-help groups and non-governmental organizations, have been proposed to significantly reduce the burden of the social menace [3-6].

Child Labor

Child labor refers to all sorts of economic activities performed by persons <15 years of age, irrespective of their vocational condition, besides home duties in the parent's house [7]. The World Health Organization has revealed that around 250 million children are occupied in different forms of child labor, of which more than 100 million are compelled to indulge in hazardous work [8]. Owing to the heterogeneous nature of the potential risk factors, an integrated approach with global commitment is the need of the hour. Apart from the need of a comprehensive policy, the strategy is to ensure a sustained political will, provide free and compulsory primary education, educate parents about the aftermaths of child labor on the growth and evolution of the child, encourage social responsibility, facilitate time-bound objectives to inculcate a sense of ownership among the health professionals, and incorporate non-governmental organizations to identify and assist the government in rescuing children working in hazardous locations [9-11].

Human Trafficking

The International Labor Organization has estimated that almost 21 million people are trafficked and coerced to work as labor globally [12]. However, the projected estimate is far from reality, owing to the illegal nature of the crime, wide gamut of trafficking affairs, and assumption of variable definition for trafficking by different nations [12]. The health care workforce enrolled in government/private sectors has a key role in limiting physical, psychological and sexual exploitation of the trafficked victim. Prevention of international trafficking essentially requires continuous coordination among the political leaders of different nations, so that reintegration of the victims can smoothly occur [13,14]. In addition, there is an indispensable need to increase the level of awareness of the community about trafficking, rigorous punishment to the offenders, extension of health care assistance to the victims, and sensitization of the outreach workers to recognize and provide sensitive/safe services to the trafficked persons [14-16].

Prisoners

Globally, in excess of 10 million, people are held in penal institutions and despite that not enough importance has been given to the health care and social needs of the inmates of a prison [17]. A large number of prisoners are prone for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, sexually transmitted diseases, assault, physical and sexual violence, infectious disease, skin disease, mental illnesses, etc. [18]. As prisoners are a high-risk and a vulnerable group of the human society, the regulatory bodies should arrange for periodic medical examination, and arrange counseling sessions to sensitize the prisoners to refrain from high-risk practices [19]. In addition, strategies such as advocating health promotion measures,

encouraging community participation, and arranging recreational activities within the premises of the prison can be implemented to minimize the incidence of prison-induced diseases [18-20].

Elimination of Prostitution

Although the exact extent of prostitution is difficult to estimate, but definitely these commercial sex workers represent an endangered constituent of the society. These workers are not only exposed to the risk of acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, but also very much prone for physical assault from their customers, substance abuse – drugs/alcohol, repetitive episodes of mental trauma and social discrimination [21,22]. Furthermore, they do not avail the services of the health center because of the discrimination (poor health seeking behavior) and thus remain untreated for most of the common diseases. Their problem gets further compounded because of the ineffective enforcement of the legislative measures, which have been formulated to improve their place in the society [21,23].

Control of Alcoholism and Drug Addiction

A recent document released by the United Nation has revealed that about 5% of the global population had ingested an illegal drug in the year 2010 [24]. Furthermore, it is estimated that abuse of alcohol and heroin/cocaine/other drugs account for 2.5 and 0.2 million deaths, respectively every year [24]. In addition, to the associated mortality, substance abuse is also responsible for resulting in significant morbidity and burdening of the health care delivery system [24,25]. Realizing the overall burden on the society, there is a need to implement an extensive policy to address all issues related to substance abuse, to create awareness about the aftermaths through mass media campaigns and school-based health promotion activities, to involve the pharmacists in the control measures, and conduction of large-scale community-based study to assess the role of drugs in the causation of the disease [25-27].

Suicides

Suicide is being accounted as one of the top 10 causes of death and disability in the United states and also results in direct and indirect medical expenditure [28,29]. Like other social problems, there is an urgent need to educate parents about the upbringing of the child and creation of a healthy environment in the society so that children and adults grows and develop uninhibited. In addition, all the medical officers, including those from the primary level of health care should be sensitized to identify the warning signs at the earliest and refer them to the appropriate level of health care for treatment [28,29].

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the social defense concept is an emerging public health area, which embraces the entire gamut of prophylactic, curative, and rehabilitative services for safeguarding the entire community from the antisocial or criminal behavior of humans.

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