

13th Marjorie Miranda and Valentine Richard Miranda

Memorial Lecture

Organized by the Department Of Social Work (UG)

**Theme:" Status of Drug Abuse in Meghalaya: Emphasis on
Female Injecting Drug Users**

The 13th Marjorie Miranda and Valentine Richard Miranda Memorial Lecture was held on the 8th of May, 2023 at the College Auditorium from 11 am onwards. This lecture was organized by the Department of Social Work (UG) every alternate year to celebrate the lives of our Former principal, Br. E. V Miranda parents.

The programme started with the welcoming speech from the Head of the Department, Ms. Audrey D. Dohling of Social Work Department (UG) who welcomed our guest and spoke about the inception of the Department and the reason of having such a programme. She welcomed guests who were present and invited like the Resource person Ms. Iohun Dhar, Dr (Mrs) B. W. Nongbri, Dean of St. Edmund's College, the College Principal Br. Simon Coelho, the Vice Principals Sir Monotosh Chakraborti (Administration) and Dr. KP Pallavi Malhan (Academics) the teaching and non teaching staffs of the college and also the students who were present for the programme.

After the welcome speech it was followed by the Lightning of the candle in memory of (L) Marjorie Miranda and (L) Valentine Richard Miranda by the Dean of the College and the HOD of Social work Department. It was then followed by an Invocation from Sr. Nilu Suting of BSW 6th Semester and a song by Ms. Aidamesha Wankhar of the 6th Semester BSW.

The theme of the programme was on *“Status of Drug abuse in Meghalaya: Emphasis on Female Injecting Drug Users”*. The Resource person was Ms. Iohun Dhar, Project Manager of Voluntary Health Association of Meghalaya (VHAM). She had completed her MSW from Martin Luther Christian University in the year 2012 and was the recipient of the Academic Excellence Award. She's also currently

associated with Lady Keane College, Shillong as a counselor for the past seven years.

Her role and responsibilities in both VHAM and as a college counselor are-

Management of projects, Documentation and referrals, focus on projects related to women and drug use, planning and reporting of activities as a Project Manager in VHAM. As a counsellor she assess students academic progress and potential, provide students with materials related to career of their choice, develop and monitor them with counselling programs. The resource person is also an Entrepreneur in Leads Ark which is an online "Organic Lead Generation Training Course".

She participated in field based projects on the Emphasis on Female Injecting Drug Users and she also talks about why Women are the Vulnerable Group in our society and how Women end up into Drugs which is based on one's self issues and also some Facts about HIV/AIDS.

Br. E. V Miranda speech (the former principal of the College)-

A video recording of the former Principal of St. Edmund's college, Br.E.V Miranda was shared in the beginning of the programme where he first of all thanked the Social work Department (UG) for having this 13th Memorial Lecture as it has been held once every alternate year and how this Department has been very close and dear to him as it was first started in Edmund's during his tenure here as a Principal of the college. He also thanked the department for organizing it again and also welcomed the resource person and our Principal In Charge and Vice Principal's of both the Academics and Administration and also the Dean of the college. Br. E. V Miranda mentioned that over the years these 13 lectures has really helped the students especially from the social work field to understand the various aspects of life and the various social problems in the society and how to develop their skills in the field and also how it help teachers to cope with the advance learning in classroom and also to teach their students through field exposure as well.

Lastly, he congratulated the Department on the release of News Letter and the Department Magazine and encouraged the department to stay productive with their work and activities and to come up with brighter innovative activities that will aid

both the students and teachers in developing knowledge - practical based education.

Br. Simon C. speech (Principal of the college) -

The principal first and foremost thanked the Department on organising this 13th Memorial Lecture on behalf of our former principal parent's on which he gladly thanked the department for inviting the former principal (in absence) to attend the programme which was held at the college auditorium. The principal also thanked the department on the song and activity they have arranged and most importantly how he encouraged the students of College to be free from fear and fight any obstacles that lay in front of them. The Principal really motivated the students to learn better and gain knowledge from any real life experiences they come across which helps them to build a useful, productive learning in which later on they can apply in any field they have an interest to work with.

The principal also welcomed the Resource person on which he said that the programme theme on today's programme can really help the students to know more about Drugs and Drug users in our society and what we can do to help them be accepted in our society and not to discriminate them and what ways we can help them to fight addiction.

And lastly, he thanked the Department once again and congratulated the Department on their release of the Newsletter and the Department magazine.

Speech by the Resource person (Mrs.Iohun Dhar)-

After the principal had delivered his speech, the Resource person Mrs. Iohun Dhar who is the Program Manager of the Voluntary Health Associations of Meghalaya (VHAM) took the floor and introduced the participants to the theme of the program which is on “Status of Drug Abuse in Meghalaya: Emphasis on Female Injecting Drug User.”

She began by busting the Myths or Misconceptions about HIV. This was done through an interactive session whereby questions were asked by the resource person to the participants through which facts/answers to the questions were provided by her. The questions are as follows:

Myth 1: HIV is transmitted by being around people who are HIV-positive.

Busted: HIV cannot be transmitted by being around infected people.

A casual contact with an HIV-infected person is perfectly safe. HIV cannot survive outside open surfaces; hence, sharing a living space, bathroom, food and utensils will not spread the virus. So much so that even the saliva of the infected person does not put you at risk. However, sharing of razors and toothbrushes that could be in direct contact with the infected person's blood might put one at risk. It is important to remember that HIV can be contracted only through infected bodily fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal fluid, breast milk and nothing else.

Myth 2: Mosquitoes can spread HIV.

Busted: HIV cannot be spread by mosquitoes or other insects.

Although mosquitoes are carriers for serious diseases like dengue and malaria, they do not transmit HIV. The nature of HIV is such that it binds with the T cells in the human body and starts to replicate. Mosquitoes do not have T cells, hence the virus is unable to replicate itself. This causes the HIV to break down completely, get digested and destroyed in the mosquito's gut. Therefore, bites from mosquitoes or insects cannot infect you with HIV.

Myth 3: With HIV, your life is over.

Busted: Your life is far from over.

Until a few decades ago, not much medical research was carried out on this disease. Also, because of lack of awareness about the disease and the social stigma associated with it, not many would come forward for treatment. Therefore, the death rate was high. But now, although there is no treatment to cure the disease, there are medications to help those affected, to lead a longer and healthier life. The Antiretroviral (ART) treatments can, especially, slow down the damage caused by the HIV infection. Antiretroviral therapy is the use of a combination of antiviral drugs for the treatment of HIV infection. Usually, a combination of 3 to 4 drugs is used to treat HIV. Though these drugs won't cure the disease, they control it to such an extent that a person infected with HIV can lead a normal life without any complications.

Myth 4: HIV-infected women cannot bear children.

Busted: HIV-infected women can bear children.

With advanced treatments and appropriate medical support, the risk of mothers passing on the virus to their unborn children is very rare now. When planning pregnancy, one should seek professional advice from a doctor, and discuss their situation and explore options for pregnancy. Further, many fertility clinics are open to 'serodiscordant' couples (one person has HIV and the other doesn't) and help women with a safe pregnancy. An HIV-infected woman can not only bear a child but also a healthy HIV-negative child. After delivery, the child should undergo treatment with antiretroviral drugs for six weeks which increases the possibility of the child being safe from HIV.

She further explained that a recent study revealed that Females are more vulnerable to drug abuse than males. Often, their reasons for trying drugs are tied to the stress and pressures experienced in this transitional period. Sometimes, the causes of drug use in young women are rooted much deeper.

The study proved that the reasons for early drug use among females are very noticeable in young women and widely different than the causes of drug abuse among young men. The study also showed that females, on average, actually become dependent faster and suffer the consequences of drugs sooner than males. Furthermore, she emphasized on the following seven factors which are the leading causes of drug abuse in girls and young women:

1. Depression and Mental Illnesses

Depression in adolescent girls is not uncommon. These girls are likelier than boys to consider and attempt suicide. Substance abuse and mental illnesses such as depression often go hand-in-hand. Young women who are depressed and suicidal often self-medicate with drugs, increasing their risk of drug addiction.

2. History of Trauma

Among all adolescents in drug treatment, nearly twice as many girls as boys report sexual or physical abuse in their lifetime. Girls who have been physically or sexually abused are also twice more likely to smoke, drink, and use drugs than those who were not abused in childhood.

3. Stress and Inability to Cope

While males tend to externalize their stress with aggression and delinquency, females have a tendency to internalize their reactions to stress. In most cases of severe stress, young women become depressed and withdrawn. Young women report their inability to cope with stress as the main reason for using drugs. Stressful life events may include a death or illness in family or friends, parental divorce, changes in school or relationships, and moving from home to home.

4. Low Self-Esteem

Low self-confidence frequently accompanies the teenage years. This is especially true among girls. Body-image and social image are often top priorities for high school girls who want to fit in. They associate weight loss with beauty and popularity. They associate drinking, drug use, and smoking with being trendy, and cool. They believe that drugs are the answer to their problems.

Teenage girls with low self-confidence are twice as likely as those with higher self-confidence to report drug use. Not only are high school girls more than double, are likely to diet and engage in unhealthy weight-related behaviors than boys, but they are also more likely to use drugs or alcohol to try to control their weight.

5. Social Pressures

One study found that many teenage girls initiate drug use to fit in with their peers. Another study of 11 to 13-year old girls revealed that the most “popular” girls believe they are under more pressure to smoke, drink, and try drugs. According to the report, the more friends a girl has who smoke, drink, or use drugs; the likelier she is to do so herself. If five of her close friends drink alcohol, she is over seven times likelier to drink.

6. Lack of Parent-Child Communication

One of the greatest things a parent can do to prevent their daughter’s drug use is simply to communicate. If they believe their teenager is at risk of using drugs, they must talk to her about the consequences of drug abuse and her options, teach their child how to say no and they must educate her about the risks of substance abuse.

She also further explained on the effects of drugs on an individual by stating that, drugs have different effects depending on the drug itself, the user and their surroundings. Drugs don’t just affect the physical body and health; they can also

affect one's mental health as well. Some will make a person feel more awake, alert and energetic. Others will give a calm, relaxed feeling. Some drugs alter the perceptions and can cause hallucinations. Others may make a person feel numb. Long-term use and larger doses have negative effects that can seriously harm one's health, even cause death, including disease risks from sharing needles, and permanent damage to the brain and other organs.

HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY

Harm reduction is a program that VHAM is running. Since we cannot eradicate drug use, a harm reduction strategy was initiated by the organisation where addicts are given new syringes whenever they inject (so as to reduce needle sharing and curb the spread of HIV).

The objective of harm reduction strategy is to reduce the spread of HIV, AIDS from the high risk group. Also to minimize the strength of infections among the high risk groups. Sex workers, transgenders, female and male injecting drug users, migrant, labourers, all these include in the harm reduction strategy.

Traditional strategies of combating drug use have brought in failure for which some of these practices are as follows:

-They used to chain the drug users in the olden days and since it did not help with withdrawal so it failed.

-In Nagaland, cages were made to put the drug users in these cages, again this method didn't help with withdrawal so, it failed.

It's not just about addiction, it is about the disease and it kills. Drug users despite knowing that sharing of syringes, they might get infected with HIV they still do it. It's because of the stigma and discrimination that they are not accepted by the society, especially for women.

One of the philosophy of harm reduction strategy is to encourage drug users to progress towards reduction.

The aim of harm reduction is to keep drug users alive, well and productive until treatment works. This organization have had a lot of women who have been

cleared from drug used and have got back to their family. The success story of this organization is about 5/10. The clients are now much more productive.

WHY HARM REDUCTION FOR DRUG USERS

- Drug used culture of sharing injecting.
- Low level of help seeking behaviour.
- High risked behaviour is in common place.
- Risk of transmission for IDUs is very high.
- Knowledge of HIV and to reduce HIV is inadequate.

MULTIPLE STRATEGIES:

- Informing IDUs of the risks.
- Opioid Substitution Therapy.
- Outreach program and pure education.
- Reaching out to the unreached target population/ unidentified drug users.
- Gives counseling
- Testing HIV through based screening test.

Needle exchange programme (to not inject, but if you do, don't share, but if you share do clean it first). Hepatitis B is very high among the high risk group. And to cure, this treatment is very costly. That is why this program is conducted.

Drug users change from chasing to injecting because if they chase they need more amount of drugs rather than injecting.

OPIOID SUBSTITUTION THERAPY (For the ones who is ready to give up heroin) Doctors sometimes prescribe opioid medications to manage pain. The benefits are, it:

- Reduced overdose mortality
- Discontinued or reduced incidence of injecting

- Reduced risks of HIV and Hepatitis
- Improved physical and mental health (with competent treatment).

Mrs. Iohun Dhar, Program Manager, VHAM ended the session by some of the drug users' statements. After the session there were a question and answer round where one of the student asked question about anxiety.

The Department also released the Department Newsletter '*The Catalyst*' and the Department Magazine '*Weaving Change*' in the presence of the Vice Principal of Academics Prof. M. Chakravorty, Dr. Mrs. B. W. Nongbri who is the Dean of College, Head of Social Work Department and other members of the Department.

Lastly, the programme concluded with a short Vote of Thanks by Murchana Bordoloi (BSW 6th semester).

After the song a speech a video recording by Br. E.V. Miranda was shown to the guest as he could not be there in person due to his other commitments.