

Substance Abuse And Prisoners' Voting Rights In India: A Study Of Correctional Facilities

¹Deepika Thakur, ²Dr. Shobha Gulati

Research Scholar
Department of Laws
Lovely Professional University
Jalandhar, Punjab, India
E-mail: thakurdeepika53@gmail.com
ORCID ID 0000-0002-9000-8262

1. CO-AUTHOR
Associate Professor
Department of Laws
Lovely Professional University
Jalandhar, Punjab, India
E-mail: gulatishobha@gmail.com
ORCID ID 0000-0003-4035-1481

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Abstract

This empirical study examined the relationship between substance abuse and the voting rights of prisoners in Punjab, addressing a significant gap in the state's legal and societal frameworks. Conducted across the Amritsar and Jalandhar districts, the research involved a sample of 200 prisoners, with structured questionnaires used to collect data on demographics, substance abuse, and awareness of voting rights. Statistical analyses, including Chi-square tests, revealed significant associations between substance abuse and prisoners' awareness of voting rights. The findings suggested that addressing substance abuse could improve prisoners' understanding and exercise of their voting rights. These insights had important implications for policy reforms aimed at enhancing rehabilitation and civic participation among incarcerated individuals in Punjab. The study contributed valuable empirical evidence to the ongoing discourse on substance abuse and prisoners' voting rights in India's correctional system.

Keywords: *Substance abuse, Voting rights, Prisoners, Punjab, Correctional facilities, Empirical investigation, Criminal justice, Civic engagement, Rehabilitation, Policy formulation*

Introduction

Substance abuse and alcohol consumption have long been recognized as significant contributors to criminal behavior, often culminating in incarceration. This association highlights the intersection of

public health, criminal justice, and societal challenges. In the context of imprisonment, the denial of voting rights to prisoners further raises critical questions about the principles of democracy, equality, and human rights. These issues are particularly pertinent in India, where a substantial proportion of the prison population grapples with substance abuse and related disorders, exacerbating their vulnerability within the criminal justice system. Substance addiction, often termed a "victimless crime," implicates the addict as the primary victim, suffering the physical, psychological, and social consequences of the addiction (Kun, P., & Murty, V. N. 1979). Such individuals frequently end up within the correctional system, where their disenfranchisement underscores systemic challenges in recognizing and addressing their dual status as offenders and individuals in need of rehabilitation. The link between substance abuse, including alcoholism, and violent or criminal behavior is well-documented through police reports and prison statistics, which consistently reveal a correlation between substance-induced impairments and criminal activity. Recent trends have shown a rise in substance-related offenses, reflecting broader societal issues such as economic disparity, inadequate access to mental health resources, and ineffective rehabilitation mechanisms (Seliger, R. (1950). This paper undertakes a comprehensive investigation into these complex dynamics, focusing on the relationship between substance abuse and the voting rights of incarcerated individuals in Punjab, (India). The analysis draws upon empirical data to uncover patterns and associations, offering insights into the broader implications for policymaking, rehabilitation, and democratic inclusion. By addressing the intertwined issues of substance abuse and disenfranchisement, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on justice reform and the rehabilitation of prisoners as active, rights-bearing members of society.

Theoretical Framework

Drug addiction presents a growing concern across all economies, including our nation, regardless of their developmental status. It manifests as a condition where individuals find it challenging to resist the consumption of substances due to the pleasure they provide. Amidst the pressures and stresses of daily life, many individuals turn to drugs as a means of coping, seeking relief through the release of dopamine that induces a sense of contentment (Akula et al., 2024). However, the detrimental health effects of drug use are undeniable. While substance addiction is a prevalent issue, its implications are particularly worrisome within the prison population. According to the Prison Statistics India 2021 report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a significant proportion of convicts and undertrials are incarcerated for offenses related to liquor and narcotic drugs (NCRB, 2021). Overcrowding in Indian prisons exacerbates this issue, creating an environment conducive to drug consumption. It is imperative to educate prisoners about the consequences of drug addiction, considering the substantial impact their rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society hold. Consequently, there arises a pressing need for the treatment of drug and alcohol addiction within the prison system (Rehman & Dhiman, 2022). By providing adequate treatment during incarceration, the likelihood of recidivism among addicts can be mitigated. In addition to addressing substance addiction, the issue of prisoners' voting rights requires urgent attention within India's correctional system. The denial of voting rights to incarcerated individuals effectively excludes them from participating in the democratic process, raising critical concerns about equality and citizenship (Rehman et al., 2023). While many nations have progressively reformed laws to extend voting rights to prisoners, India maintains a complete disenfranchisement policy for those in custody, as outlined in Section 62(5) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 (RPA). This legal stance overlooks the rehabilitative

potential of voting rights, which can serve as a tool for civic engagement and social reintegration. Empowering prisoners to exercise their voting rights not only affirms their status as citizens but also fosters a sense of accountability and inclusion within the democratic fabric of the nation. To address these intertwined challenges, prison management should establish detoxification centers, collaborate with NGOs to provide comprehensive support beyond incarceration, and consider implementing mechanisms that allow eligible prisoners to participate in the electoral process. The introduction of voting rights alongside addiction treatment can enhance prisoners' rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and align the correctional system with constitutional and human rights principles.

International Conventions on Voting Rights and Case Studies

International conventions and case studies provide crucial insights into the ongoing debate surrounding prisoners' voting rights. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) recognize the right to vote as a fundamental human right that should extend to all individuals, including those incarcerated, with reasonable restrictions (Nagpal et al., 2024). While certain countries have granted prisoners the right to vote, others have implemented restrictions, reflecting diverse approaches based on cultural, political, and legal frameworks (Girish & Siddharth, 2021). Several case studies from various countries highlight the complexities of enfranchising prisoners and the impact of legal rulings on shaping national policies regarding prisoners' voting rights:

United Kingdom (*Hirst v. United Kingdom*, 2005)

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that while governments have the authority to limit prisoners' voting rights, a blanket prohibition without individual evaluation is unjustifiable. The court's ruling prompted the UK government to seek legislative changes to address prisoner enfranchisement more effectively.

Austria (*Frodl v. Austria*, 2010)

The ECHR upheld Austria's blanket ban on prisoners' voting rights, stating that the European Convention does not mandate that member states grant voting rights to prisoners. The court emphasized the "margin of appreciation" allowed to states, thereby acknowledging that each country can determine its own policies regarding prisoners' enfranchisement.

New Zealand (*Taylor v. Attorney-General*, 2015)

In this case, the court acknowledged that prisoners retain certain rights even while incarcerated, but it also upheld the restriction on voting rights. The court argued that such limitations were justifiable, given the nature of the incarceration and the need to protect the integrity of the electoral process.

Canada (*Sauve v. Canada Chief Electoral Officer*, 2002)

The Canadian Supreme Court ruled that the blanket ban on prisoners' voting rights in federal elections violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court declared that prisoners serving sentences of less than two years must be allowed to vote, marking a significant step toward recognizing the voting rights of incarcerated individuals.

South Africa (*Minister of Home Affairs v. NICRO*, 2005)

The Constitutional Court of South Africa declared the disenfranchisement of prisoners unconstitutional, citing it as a violation of their right to participate in the political process. This ruling led to legislative reforms allowing prisoners to vote in national elections, reinforcing the country's commitment to democratic inclusivity.

Australia (*Roach v. Electoral Commissioner*, 2007)

The High Court of Australia upheld the restriction of voting rights for prisoners convicted of serious offenses, but it allowed prisoners serving sentences of less than three years to vote. This decision highlighted the court's balancing act between public safety concerns and the recognition of fundamental democratic rights.

United States (*Richardson v. Ramirez*, 1974)

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld state laws that disenfranchise individuals convicted of felonies, including those incarcerated. The court held that felony disenfranchisement did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution, as it was explicitly permitted by the Constitution. This case illustrates the broad discretion afforded to states in the U.S. regarding prisoner disenfranchisement.

United Kingdom (*Greens and MT v. United Kingdom*, 2010)

The ECHR again addressed the issue of prisoners' voting rights in the UK, upholding the blanket ban on enfranchisement. The court ruled that the restriction was proportionate and within the scope of the state's discretion, underscoring the ongoing tension between state interests and individual rights.

These case studies demonstrate the diverse legal approaches to prisoners' voting rights across various jurisdictions. While some countries, like Canada and South Africa, have embraced reforms to allow prisoners to vote, others, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, maintain restrictions, citing concerns about public safety, rehabilitation, and the seriousness of offenses. The legal landscape surrounding prisoners' voting rights is continuously evolving, as societies strive to balance the protection of democratic principles with considerations of justice, rehabilitation, and societal order. The international perspective on this issue reflects the broader global debate on the intersection of human rights, criminal justice, and democratic governance.

Methodology

This empirical investigation examined the relationship between substance abuse and voting rights among prisoners in Punjab, focusing on the districts of Amritsar and Jalandhar. A cross-sectional study design was employed to address gaps in the legal and societal framework related to incarcerated individuals' substance abuse and voting rights. The study aimed to gather comprehensive data on the prevalence of substance abuse and the awareness of voting rights among prisoners. A sample of 200 prisoners, consisting of 100 individuals from each district, was selected using a convenience sampling technique. Structured questionnaires were administered to collect data on the prisoners' demographics, substance abuse history, and awareness of voting rights. The questionnaires also explored potential associations between substance abuse and voting rights, which were crucial for understanding the underlying factors affecting prisoners' participation in democratic processes. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the demographic data and the prevalence of substance abuse and voting rights awareness. Inferential statistics, such as cross-tabulations and Chi-square tests, were employed to analyze the relationships between substance abuse and voting rights, with a significance level set at 0.05. This methodology allowed for the identification of significant associations between substance abuse and prisoners' awareness of and ability to exercise their voting rights. By combining quantitative data with structured questionnaires, the study provided valuable insights into the complexities of substance abuse and voting rights among incarcerated individuals. The findings highlight the need for targeted policy interventions to address substance abuse within correctional facilities, thereby fostering greater awareness and exercise of voting rights among prisoners in Punjab. This study contributes empirical evidence to the fields of criminal justice, public health, and human rights, offering valuable insights

for policymakers and practitioners working to improve rehabilitation and civic engagement in India's correctional system.

Table: 1 Shows the collected data on undertrial prisoners obtained from various districts across Punjab.

DISTRICTS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amritsar	100	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Jalandhar	100	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Table: 2 Shows the number of participants, categorized by gender, who took part in the survey within each district.

GENDER

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	183	91.5	91.5	91.5
	Female	17	8.5	8.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Table: 3 Illustrates the age groups of the Participants

AGE

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-25	32	16.0	16.0	16.0
	26-35	52	26.0	26.0	42.0
	36-45	44	22.0	22.0	64.0
	46-55	38	19.0	19.0	83.0
	55 And above	34	17.0	17.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Table: 4 Shows the qualifications of each participant, distinguishing between males and females, who took part in the survey.

QUALIFICATION

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 10 th	93	46.5	46.5	46.5
	10 th to 12 th	42	21.0	21.0	67.5
	12 th to Graduation	44	22.0	22.0	89.5
	Graduation or above	21	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Table: 5 Shows the duration of a Prisoner's Incarceration.

SENTENCE TERM

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 Year	52	26.0	26.0	26.0
	1- 5 Years	46	23.0	23.0	49.0
	6-10 Years	32	16.0	16.0	65.0
	11-15 Years	28	14.0	14.0	79.0
	More than 15 Years	42	21.0	21.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Age * Have you ever suffered from substance abuse while incarcerated?

		Have you ever suffered from substance abuse while incarcerated?		Total
		Yes	No	
Age	18-25	26	6	32
	26-35	35	16	51

	36-45	25	19	44
	46-55	18	20	38
	55 And above	23	12	3
Total		127	73	200

Figure:1

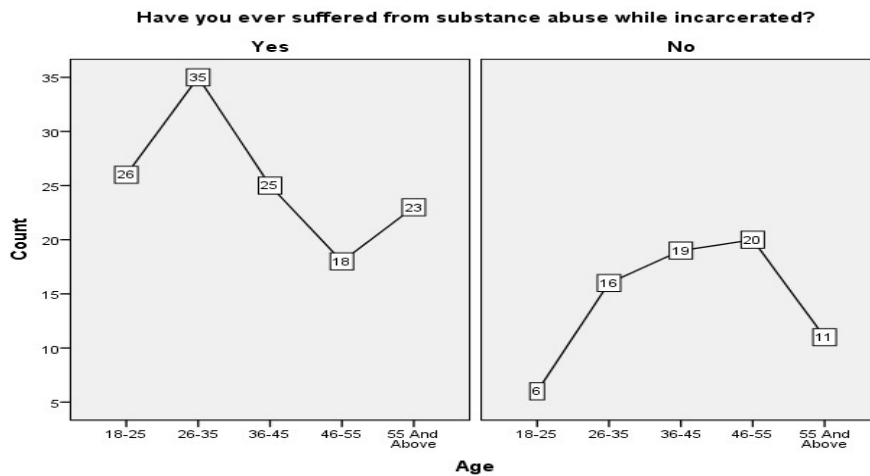


Table 8: Age * Are you aware of your voting rights as a prisoner in Punjab

		Are you aware of your voting rights as a prisoner in Punjab		Total
		Yes	No	
Age	18-25	19	13	32
	26-35	39	13	52
	36-45	36	8	44
	46-55	26	12	38
	55 And above	26	8	34
Total		146	54	200

Figure 2:

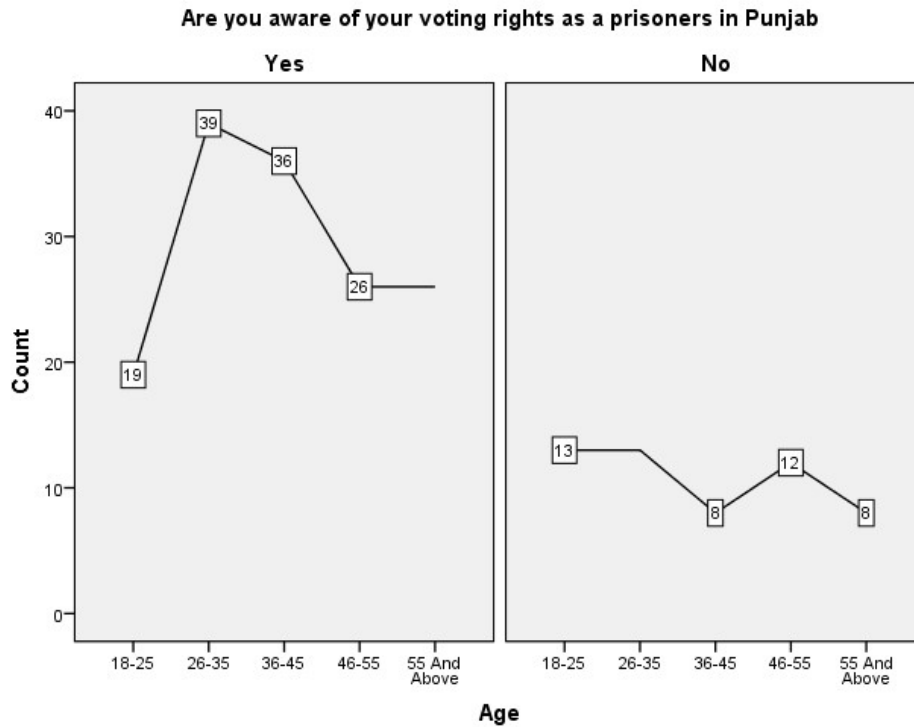
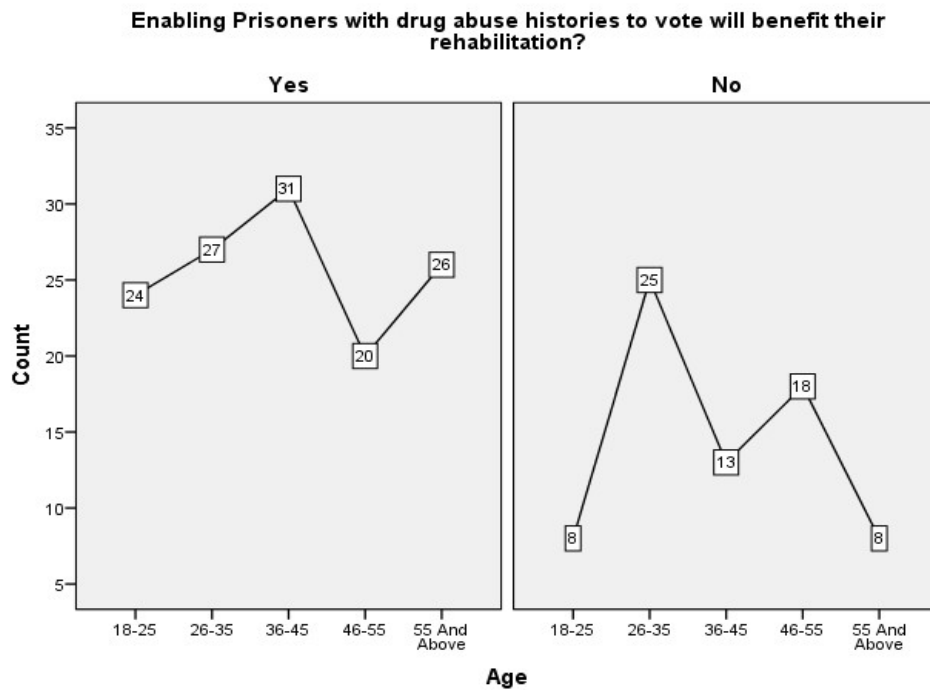


Table 10: Age * Enabling Prisoners with drug abuse histories to vote will benefit their rehabilitation?

		Enabling Prisoners with drug abuse histories to vote will benefit their rehabilitation.		Total
		Yes	No	
Age	18-25	24	8	32
	26-35	27	25	52
	36-45	31	13	44
	46-55	20	18	38
	55 And above	26	8	34
Total		128	72	200

Figure 3:



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the empirical study provide significant insights into the relationship between substance abuse, voting rights, and incarceration among undertrial prisoners across two districts in Punjab—Amritsar and Jalandhar. The analysis is based on data collected from a sample of 200 undertrial prisoners, with a balanced representation from both districts.

Demographic Overview

District Distribution:

Table 1 shows that the sample was equally distributed between Amritsar and Jalandhar, with 100 participants from each district, representing 50% of the total sample. This ensures a fair representation of prisoners from these two districts in Punjab.

Gender Distribution:

As indicated in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were male (91.5%), with only 8.5% of the sample being female. This gender imbalance is reflective of the general composition of incarcerated individuals in India, where male prisoners significantly outnumber female prisoners.

Age Distribution:

The participants were spread across various age groups, with the largest proportion falling between the ages of 26 and 35 (26%). The age group of 18-25 years accounted for 16%, while the 36-45 age group comprised 22% of the sample. Older age groups, such as 46-55 years (19%) and 55 and above (17%), also represented a significant portion of the sample. This age diversity is essential for understanding the varying experiences of substance abuse and awareness of voting rights across different stages of life.

Educational Background:

Table 4 reveals that a significant proportion of the participants had low educational qualifications. Nearly 47% had not completed the 10th grade, while 21% had completed 10th to 12th grade, and only 22% had completed their 12th grade to graduation. This highlights the educational challenges faced by incarcerated individuals, which may also affect their awareness and understanding of their rights

Substance Abuse Among Undertrial Prisoners

Prevalence of Substance Abuse by Age:

According to Table 6, a significant number of undertrial prisoners reported suffering from substance abuse during their incarceration. The highest prevalence of substance abuse was found in the age group of 26-35 years, with 35 participants (out of 51) reporting substance abuse. In contrast, the age group of 55 and above had the lowest prevalence, with only 23 prisoners out of 34 reporting substance abuse. These findings suggest that younger prisoners, particularly those between 26-35 years, are more prone to substance abuse issues, which could be exacerbated by the stressful environment of incarceration.

Awareness of Voting Rights

Voting Rights Awareness by Age:

Table 8 illustrates that the majority of prisoners were aware of their voting rights, with 146 participants (73%) reporting that they knew about their voting rights. However, awareness was more pronounced among prisoners in the 26-35 (39 out of 52) and 36-45 (36 out of 44) age groups. Younger prisoners (18-25 years) showed a lower level of awareness, with only 19 out of 32 reporting knowledge of their voting rights. This suggests that age may play a role in how well prisoners understand their legal rights, including their right to vote, indicating the need for targeted education programs.

The Role of Voting Rights in Rehabilitation

Impact of Voting Rights on Rehabilitation:

Table 10 explores prisoners' perceptions of the role of voting rights in their rehabilitation, especially for those with a history of substance abuse. The majority of prisoners (128 out of 200) agreed that enabling prisoners with drug abuse histories to vote could benefit their rehabilitation. This view was particularly prominent among prisoners in the 36-45 age group, with 31 participants affirming the positive impact of voting rights on their rehabilitation. These findings suggest that prisoners recognize the importance of civic engagement in their rehabilitation process and believe that voting rights could serve as a means to reintegrate into society.

Discussion

The findings from this study underscore the critical intersection of substance abuse, voting rights, and the broader challenges of rehabilitation in the Indian prison system. The high prevalence of substance abuse, particularly among younger undertrial prisoners, highlights a significant barrier to rehabilitation, which could further hinder their awareness of and ability to exercise voting rights. This suggests that addressing substance abuse within correctional facilities is crucial to promoting rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Moreover, while there is a relatively high level of awareness of voting rights, the variation in awareness across age groups indicates that targeted educational programs are necessary to ensure that all prisoners, regardless of age, fully understand their rights. The positive association between the exercise of voting rights and the rehabilitation process emphasizes the potential of civic engagement as a rehabilitative tool. The study's results point to the need for comprehensive interventions to address substance abuse within prisons and to ensure that prisoners are informed about and empowered to

exercise their voting rights. Targeted rehabilitation programs, educational campaigns about voting rights, and legal reforms that support prisoners' democratic participation are necessary steps toward creating a more rehabilitative and inclusive prison system in Punjab. These findings contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on prison reform, substance abuse, and the enhancement of prisoners' rights in India.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRISONERS' SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND VOTING RIGHTS

The relationship between substance abuse among prisoners and voting rights is an important yet complex issue that can be addressed through various approaches:

- **Rehabilitation Programs:** Implement substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation programs within correctional facilities. These programs can help individuals overcome addiction, reduce recidivism rates, and promote responsible citizenship, including awareness of voting rights.
- **Civic Education:** Offer civic education and awareness programs to inmates, including information on their voting rights and the importance of participating in the democratic process. This can be integrated into existing educational initiatives or conducted through specialized workshops.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocate for policy changes that support the voting rights of individuals with a history of incarceration and substance abuse. This may involve lobbying for legislative reforms to remove barriers to voting and increase access to voter registration and education programs.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Establish peer support groups within correctional facilities where individuals can discuss their experiences with substance abuse and learn about their voting rights from their peers. Peer-led interventions are effective in promoting behavior change and fostering a sense of community among inmates.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Collaborations between correctional institutions, community organizations, and government agencies to address both substance abuse and civic engagement among prisoners. By working together, stakeholders can leverage resources and expertise to develop comprehensive programs that address the multifaceted needs of incarcerated individuals.
- **Post-Release Support:** Provide support and resources to individuals upon their release from prison to help them reintegrate into society and exercise their voting rights. This may include access to substance abuse treatment programs, job training and placement services, and assistance with voter registration and participation.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Conduct research to assess the impact of substance abuse treatment programs and civic education initiatives on voting rights awareness and participation among former prisoners. By evaluating program outcomes, policymakers and practitioners can identify effective strategies and make informed decisions about resource allocation and programmatic improvements.

Overall, addressing substance abuse among prisoners and promoting their voting rights requires a multifaceted approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of these issues and seeks to empower individuals to make positive changes in their lives and communities.

SUGGESTIONS

- **Enhancing Substance Abuse Treatment Programs:** Implementing comprehensive substance abuse treatment programs within correctional facilities can help address the underlying issues contributing to drug dependency among prisoners. These programs should incorporate evidence-based interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and medication-assisted treatment, tailored to the needs of incarcerated individuals.
- **Promoting Education and Awareness:** Increasing awareness about voting rights among undertrial prisoners is crucial for fostering civic engagement and empowering individuals to exercise their democratic rights. Educational initiatives within correctional facilities, including voter registration drives and informational sessions, can help raise awareness about voting processes and eligibility criteria.
- **Strengthening Reintegration Support:** Providing support services to facilitate the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into society is essential for reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful rehabilitation. This may include access to employment opportunities, housing assistance, and community-based support networks to help individuals rebuild their lives post-release.
- **Collaborating with Community Partners:** Collaborating with community organizations, government agencies, and civil society groups can enhance the effectiveness of intervention efforts and promote holistic approaches to prisoner rehabilitation. By leveraging existing resources and expertise, policymakers can develop comprehensive strategies that address the multifaceted needs of incarcerated individuals.
- **Addressing Structural Barriers:** Addressing structural barriers to voting rights, such as restrictive voter registration laws and disenfranchisement policies, is essential for promoting inclusivity and equity in the electoral process. Advocating for legislative reforms and legal protections to ensure the voting rights of all citizens, including incarcerated individuals, can help uphold democratic principles and promote social justice.
- **Promoting Research and Evaluation:** Continued research and evaluation of substance abuse treatment programs, voter education initiatives, and prisoner rehabilitation efforts are essential for informing evidence-based policy and practice. Investing in rigorous evaluation studies and data collection efforts can help identify effective strategies, assess program outcomes, and guide future interventions in this area.
- **Promoting Trauma-Informed Care:** Recognizing the role of trauma in substance abuse and criminal behavior is essential for providing compassionate and effective care to incarcerated individuals. Implementing trauma-informed approaches within correctional facilities, such as trauma-focused therapy and trauma-sensitive programming, can help address underlying trauma and support healing and recovery.
- **Investing in Prevention and Early Intervention:** Investing in prevention and early intervention efforts is critical for addressing substance abuse and reducing its impact on individuals, families, and communities. By targeting risk factors such as poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization, policymakers can implement targeted interventions aimed at preventing substance abuse and promoting positive outcomes for vulnerable populations.

- **Promoting Social Equity and Justice:** Promoting social equity and justice requires addressing underlying disparities and structural inequalities that contribute to substance abuse and incarceration. This may include initiatives to address poverty, improve access to healthcare and social services, and promote community development and economic opportunity in underserved areas. By addressing root causes and promoting social justice, policymakers can create conditions that support individual well-being and community thriving.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has examined the complex relationship between substance abuse, voting rights, and the incarceration system, with a specific focus on the state of Punjab, including the districts of Amritsar and Jalandhar. Through an empirical study involving 200 undertrial prisoners, significant insights were gained into the prevalence of substance abuse among incarcerated individuals and their awareness of voting rights.

The findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to address substance abuse within correctional facilities and to promote civic engagement among undertrial prisoners. By implementing evidence-based treatment programs, raising awareness about voting rights, and strengthening reintegration support services, policymakers can help break the cycle of addiction and incarceration while empowering individuals to actively participate in the democratic process. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of collaboration among stakeholders—government agencies, community organizations, and advocacy groups in developing holistic strategies for prisoner rehabilitation and social reintegration. Through dialogue, research, and investment in prevention and early intervention, policymakers can work towards a more equitable and just society. Addressing substance abuse and promoting voting rights among undertrial prisoners is not only a matter of public health and social justice but also a fundamental aspect of upholding democratic values and ensuring the well-being of all members of society. By implementing evidence-based interventions and supporting prisoners in their journey toward recovery, rehabilitation, and active citizenship, we can foster a future where individuals are allowed to thrive, participate in democracy, and contribute to society.

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