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Alarming rate of addiction among Afghan women

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Unprecedented levels of drug addiction among Afghan women have raised concerns as the lucrative narcotic industry hurtles onwards.

The Governor of Helmand Gulab Mangal says women comprise of 30 percent of the 70,000 drug addicts in the southern Afghan province, the website for the British state broadcaster BBC reported in its Farsi edition. The percentage amounts to 13,000-14,000 women, he added.

Helmand is currently the source of 57 percent of the opium output in Afghanistan, which produces 90 percent of the world's opium, the Reuters reported in early September. Despite a 33-percent reduction in poppy seed production compared to last year, still 69,833 hectares of poppy fields remain under cultivation in the province.

The news agency said that the amount of opium Afghanistan produces every year far exceeds world demand for illicit opiates derived from the drug, around 5,000 tons. High levels of production over the past few years have caused prices of opium to fall dramatically.

The Afghan official quoted a number of the female addicts as saying that they had developed the habit mainly due to their constant involvement in the cultivation and production of the drug.

One of the women said they had been assigned to collect opium and poppy seeds leading many to become addicted by starting to consume the skins and leaves from the poppies.

Another said her husband, who used to sell and use heroine, got her addicted to the powder as well.

One female, who used to help poppy production in the province's Babaji area, said that many developed the addiction by sucking the poison out of the wounds they received when slitting the opium poppies to extract the juice.

An Afghan parliamentarian representing Helmand, Nasimeh Niazi, has underlined the need for adequate rehabilitation facilities for the addicts.

She said social predicaments, domestic violence, unemployment and the war were some of the main factors contributing to the addiction among women. Niazi insisted that while trying to save the public from the plight, one should attempt to remove the social obstacles.

Incumbent Afghan president, Hamid Karzai has invariably displayed much interest in the Western pursuits in the country.

The United States continues to command some 110,000 American and foreign soldiers there. The troops have so far failed to arrest or eliminate any key militant leader, while many thousands of Afghan civilians have been killed or maimed during clashes and miscalculated attacks by the foreign forces on alleged militant targets.