



## The Problem of Drug Addiction in Vietnam – Implication for the Role of Social Support Workers

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**ABSTRACT:** In Vietnam, addiction treatment has made significant progress in recent years, with a variety of addiction treatment models that are applied based on evidence and effective practices around the world. However, according to a report of the Drug Prevention and Control Agency, Ministry of Public Security, the problem of drug addiction is still quite complicated. Drug addicts are being rejuvenated and addictive substances are also very diverse. Drug addicts today face many problems that require comprehensive medical, psychological, and social support interventions to change awareness and behavior to reduce the harmful effects of drug addiction and reduce illegal drug use. Based on the above situation, this article provides an overview of the problem of drug addiction in Vietnam and discusses the general roles of social support workers in assisting drug addicts to cope with their complex problems.

**KEYWORDS:** Drugs, Drug Addiction Treatment, Role, Social Support Worker.

### INTRODUCTION

According to the World Drug Report, from 2010 to 2019, the number of drug users in the world between the ages of 15 and 64 has continued to increase over the years and shows no sign of decreasing. In the five years from 2010-2015, the number of drug users increased from 226 million to 255 million, an increase of 29 million people (nearly 13%) (UNODC, 2020). The situation of drugs and drug use is complicated. The trafficking, production, and transportation of drugs on a large scale, especially the sale and use of synthetic drugs, has increased rapidly among adolescents. Up to this point, we still have not found a treatment regimen for addiction other than psychotherapy about behavior change education.

In Vietnam, addiction treatment has made significant progress in recent years, with a variety of addiction treatment models that are applied based on evidence and effective practices around the world. According to the view and orientation of the Renovation Project on detoxification (Decision 2596/QĐ-TTg 2013), drug addiction is a chronic disease caused by disorders of the brain, drug addiction treatment (referred to as Addiction treatment) is a long-term process that includes a total of medical, psychological, and social supportive interventions to change cognition and behavior in order to reduce the harmful effects of drug addiction and reduce illegal drugs use (Prime Minister, 2013).

However, according to a report by the Drug Prevention and Control Agency, the Ministry of Public Security, by December 2017, the country had over 222,000 drug addicts with management records (an increase of nearly 12,000 people compared to the same period in 2016). Thus, the situation of drug abuse in Vietnam is still complicated and tends to increase along with the appearance of many new drugs, unsafe forms of drug use that increase the risk of drug abuse and transmission of many social diseases. Most drug addicts have low educational attainment, no vocational training and no stable jobs, often have health problems, economic difficulties, and many do not have the support of their loved and family. There is still a large number of drug addicts in need of treatment who still do not have access to health services and other social support services... due to stigma and discrimination from families and communities with addicts, or the lack of facilities, resources, and professional competence of staff from addiction treatment facilities and service providers, especially the knowledge and skills on counseling and social support for drug addicts. Besides, in our country, drug use and dependence has been and is the main cause of HIV infection, premature death and loss of social function, law violation and is a great burden for drug users themselves, their families and the community. This situation requires more effective and comprehensive professional interventions including Physical - Mental - Social aspects.

### THE CONTEXT OF DRUG ADDICTION IN VIETNAM

Along with the increasing trend of drug in the world, in recent years, drug in Vietnam have tended to increase in both number,



location and composition of addicts. In Vietnam, there are currently no national statistics on illegal drug users. According to a report by the Drug Prevention and Control Agency, Ministry of Public Security, by December 2017, there were over 222,000 drug addicts nationwide with management records (an increase of nearly 12,000 people compared to the same period in 2016). In which, over 67.5% of people are living outside the society; 13.5% of people are in detention centers, 19% of people are in detention camps, detention centers, educational institutions, reformatories. Addicts have also appeared in all social sectors: pupils, students, civil servants, workers... Of the total number of drug addicts: 96% are men, 4% are women, 74% are aged 18-35, 1% are under 18 years old. Commonly used synthetic drugs are Methamphetamine, Estasy, and Ketamine with nicknames such as: rock, ecstasy, queen pill, crazy jade, yaba. According to reports from 21 localities, having statistics, classification, and sent to the Ministry of Public Security in 2017, the number of people using synthetic drugs was 15,447 people (accounting for 46% of drug users). In particular, there are some localities with the rate above 80% such as Tra Vinh 90.7%; Da Nang 86%; Quang Tri 84%... The number of new drug users found to be mainly using synthetic drugs and psychotropic substances. Because this form of drug use requires time, tools and a rather complicated method of use, the subjects who use this type of drug must choose a discreet place to use it. Methamphetamine is used mainly in accommodation establishments, private homes. Estasy, Ketamine is mainly used in business and entertainment establishments such as discos and restaurants because users of this drug must have strong music to provoke, simple forms of use such as: drink directly with alcohol, soft drinks or inhale directly through a straw through the respiratory tract... (Ministry of Public Security, 2017).

The results of the 2017 social survey by the General Statistics Office in 6 provinces and cities also show that: The rate of people using illegal drugs is about 0.66% of the population in the surveyed age group (from 15 years old, up to 64 years old); 8% of first time drug users are under 18 years old, 60% of first time drug users are under 25 years old. According to the General Statistics Office, as of June 2018, the country had 120 detoxification establishments, of which there were 105 public detoxification establishments and 15 people-founded detoxification establishments with 34,620 students. Only in the first 6 months of 2018, there were 6,438 people receiving, counseling and treatment for addiction at facilities. The total number of people being treated for addiction at the facilities is 34,620 practitioners. There are 28 provinces and cities that have developed plans for detoxification at home and in the community under the Project on Renovation of Addiction Work (GSO, 2018). In recent years, the number of cases related to illegal drug users such as theft, robbery, public disorder, suicide, murder... has increased in both number and severity. It causes confusion and frustration in public opinion, affecting social order and safety, and people's lives in many areas of the country; affect the speed of socio-economic development of the country.

## **SOME PROBLEMS DRUG ADDICTS ARE FACING**

### *Negative psychological problems*

Once addicted to drugs, addicts gradually become selfish and lazy. Drugs cause them to gradually become skewed in their views, consciousness and attitudes about work, and their capacity and skills in labor are gradually lost and degraded. Addicted people spend most of their time enjoying the pleasures brought by drug use, and over time, addicts lose their ability to work. In particular, due to the impact of narcotics on the nervous system, addicts have certain psychotic phenomena. Especially when addicts use hallucinogenic drugs (ice). The addict's social functions are impaired. Social relationships with family, relatives are broken, relatives do not trust, chased away. Good friends, old friends also no longer keep in contact, distrust and alienation, surrounded by mostly drug users. Places frequented are places to buy drugs and places to use drugs (Nguyen Trung Hai, 2020). Relationships primarily with addicted friends, being drawn to continue the addiction rather than being got out.

### *Problems with employment and income*

Difficulties in finding work and income are common difficulties of drug addicts. Great influence on the possibility of relapse because there is no job to support themselves, contribute to the family, drug addicts are bored, feel they are worthless, hateful, worth leaving, especially for drug addicts who are stigmatized and discriminated against when looking for a job (Vu Thi Thanh Nhan, 2020). The reason why it is difficult for drug addicts to find a job with a stable income and suitable for their health is because most drug addicts have low educational attainment, no vocational training, or low skills. with the stigma of the community. There are even people who, after drug addiction treatment, get a stable job, but when they are discovered to have been addicted to drugs, they are immediately fired for different reasons. Many employers do not believe that drug addicts can quit drugs; believes that drug addicts are easily infected with HIV, so if they accept drug addicts to work in the organization, their business will affect



others (fear of losing property, fear of being infected with HIV, fear of dragging pulling, enticing others to inject drugs...). For various reasons, employment support activities for addicts after withdrawal still face many difficulties and limitations. Statistics of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (2019) show that the number of drug addicts with stable jobs across the country only accounts for about 20%.

### ***Problems in relationships, communication***

Drug addicts find it difficult to establish social relationships with others due to their inferiority complex and stigma from those around them. Social stigma against drug addicts and their self-stigmatization is a factor that makes it difficult for addicts in all social relationships, from going to a medical facility for health care to seeking medical care, find a job with income and find a life partner, get married. According to the Law on Human Rights: "Discrimination is treating someone badly because of race, disability, sex, or personal characteristics." For people who use drugs, it is difficult to avoid people's stigma against themselves. However, in addition to the stigma from those around them, they also discriminate against themselves. Drug addicts feel frustrated, ashamed, and condemn themselves through their actions. They separate themselves from family, relatives and community, live a closed life, do not like to exchange and share with everyone, including loved ones in the family such as parents, wives and children. They do not believe they can do it, are frustrated by repeated relapses, find it difficult to quit drug addiction. After many failed attempts, when they could not give up drugs, they had low self-esteem and guilt. They think that they are not as smart, competent, and decisive as others; There is always the thought that people don't accept me, despise me, from there they build a wall of separation, separating themselves from their family, relatives and community. They mostly have relationships with people who are just as addicted to drugs as they are. This is also a factor leading to difficulties for them in the process of detoxification and reintegration into the community. Therefore, it is extremely important to get rid of drug addiction, get rid of stigma and self-stigmatization in drug addicts (Nguyen Trung Hai, 2020).

### ***Community integration problem***

One of the major problems that drug addicts face is the difficulty of integrating into the surrounding community (Ha Trong Lien and Hoang Trong Luc, 2019). In fact, due to the bad behaviors that appear in some addicts, they always face stigma and alienation from the community. In addition, the continuous communication about the drug problem also makes a part of the people have an incorrect understanding of the drug problem. They always consider drugs as Evil and need to be avoided. Some cases of crime, theft, and fighting involving drugs also cause people to equate drug addiction with such bad problems. That makes drug addicts after successful detoxification and determined to rebuild their lives, but always encounter barriers and alienation that make it very difficult for them to integrate into the community. The fact that addicts always face stigma limits their access to support services such as: medical services, addiction treatment services, loan policies to support post-treatment people to integrate into the community, difficulties in finding a job, etc.

### ***Policy issues for drug users***

#### ***- Post-treatment support policy has not been specified***

According to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Clause 1, Article 9 of Decree No. 94/2009/ND-CP repeats Clause 2, Article 33 of the Law on Environmental Protection without specifying what specific support "support for vocational training and job search" is. resources to do it. Point a, Clause 3, Article 12 of Decree No. 94/2009/ND-CP stipulates: "Persons after in-patient detoxification receive psychological and social support..." but does not specify what support, who do. The commune-level People's Committees are responsible for organizing vocational training "according to the specific capabilities and conditions of the commune-level People's Committees", but the physical facilities and resources of the commune-level People's Committees are difficult to implement and perform this task. It is very difficult to find a job for the retirees due to the characteristics of production and business activities, so they may be willing to support in cash or in kind, but do not want to accept the post-retirement person to work. Financial support for addicts after vocational training, job search and economic development is still very limited; employers are still afraid of people after drug addiction treatment. The relevant agencies have not done well in vocational guidance and training so that people after detoxification can soon integrate into the community, leading to many difficulties in the implementation process.



- *Inadequacy in making records for sending to detoxification establishments*

According to the provisions of Decree 136/2016/ND-CP, dated September 9, 2016 amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Government's Decree No. 221/2013/ND-CP dated December 30, 2013 stipulating the regime of application of administrative handling measures and sending them to compulsory detoxification establishments, stipulating that subjects applying compulsory drug detoxification measures are drug addicts who must undergo education in communes, wards, townships or no permanent residence. In fact, the application of educational measures in communes, wards and townships for drug addicts is not effective, localities only follow procedures to be eligible to send addicts with stable residence to establishments. compulsory detoxification. In order to apply the administrative handling measure of sending to a compulsory detoxification establishment, the dossier-making agency must first determine the residence status of the addict "with a stable place of residence or without a place of stable residence". However, the guiding documents are not specific on the criteria "often wandering around", "often living", so it is difficult to define, leading to different perceptions, different application and inconsistency.

- *Inequality in drug treatment service delivery*

For voluntary drug detoxification at drug detoxification establishments, non-public forms of voluntary drug detoxification are detailed in Decree No. 147/2003/ND-CP dated December 2, 2003 The Government's regulation on conditions, procedures for licensing and operation management of voluntary drug detoxification establishments, was amended and supplemented in 2011 and 2018 (referred to as Decree No. 147/2003/ ND-CP), there are a number of regulations that make it difficult to develop non-public voluntary drug rehabilitation establishments. For example, the regulations on personnel conditions at Point b, Clause 2, Article 5 "The person in charge of the specialty of the detoxification establishment is a doctor who has been granted a practicing certificate in the field of psychiatry or in the field of treatment, supporting detoxification, having practiced medical examination and treatment for full 36 months or more, including a period of directly doing detoxification work for full 12 months or more", this provision causes difficulties in drug addiction treatment, find a doctor; or regulations on the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs granting and extending licenses for voluntary drug addiction treatment establishments, which prolongs the application period, making it impossible for the school owner to decentralize to the locality; there is no support mechanism for voluntary drug addicts at non-public drug detoxification establishments.

## **DISCUSS THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT WORKERS IN SUPPORTING DRUG ADDICTS**

Treatment of drug addiction is a long-term process, in addition to medical interventions, psychosocial support and interventions are needed. In the work of helping to treat addiction, especially drug addiction, there is a need for professional interventions with the help of social support workers through roles and intervention and support activities such as: counseling, counseling, education, advocacy, connection and resource mobilization...help drug addicts, their families and communities promote their internal and external resources to solve their problems. The Ministry of Health (2019) emphasized that an effective treatment regimen for drug addicts, especially synthetic drugs, requires the participation of all parties, in which the role of social support is emphasized. According to Nguyen Thi Khanh Van and Kevin Mulvey (2021), the role of social support worker will be effective support to help drug addicts cope with the problems in life in a better way.

### ***Role as a communicator and educator***

Drug addicts and their families urgently need knowledge and skills related to addiction treatment, recovery and many other issues that they need to deal with. Capacity building for individuals, families, groups or communities through training, educating the community so that they have understanding, confidence and self-reflection, assessment, analysis, and resource seeking for the problem to be solved. Thus, education is the task of helping addicts and their families change their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors from negative to positive. This is also an important role of the cooperative staff. In other words, a social support worker needs to have full knowledge of drugs, drug addiction treatment and especially need to have information transmission skills.

### ***Role as a counsellor***

After a long time using drugs, addicts will face many problems in life. The decline in health is one of the most noticeable first signs, they gradually lose their immunity, and the functioning of the organs in the body is impaired. The World Health Organization's health agencies all agree that the decline in bodily functions makes addicts unable to work, and also because of their weak health, they hardly participate community activities, social isolation, closed life, lack of interaction with people, even with





family members... Support from social support workers will help them gain confidence and solve their problems better. For example, consultation, access to legal services, detoxification models, access to some basic detoxification methods... In addition, in urgent cases or drug addicts fall into state of panic, anxiety, crisis... the psychological counseling support from the cooperative staff can help them to overcome more easily.

### ***Role as resource mobilizer***

In order to successfully detox, in addition to their own efforts, drug addicts also need support from other resources. Cooperative staff will help them find, access... important resources. Resources here include both material and spiritual resources, legal and ethical... from family, neighbours, community and society. In fact, the mobilization of resources in addition to providing support for drug addicts also creates common awareness, as well as solidarity in the community and neighbors in supporting drug addicts.

### ***Role as an advocate***

Cooperative staff are the defenders of the legal rights of drug addicts, so that they can enjoy their services, policies, and rights, especially in cases where they are denied services or policies that are not accepted. they should have enjoyed.

Drug addicts are also human beings, they have the right and also need to access basic services and need to be assured of their legitimate rights and interests. However, due to various reasons such as discrimination, ignorance and administrative procedures, etc., in many cases, drug addicts are not guaranteed their legitimate rights. That limits their ability to recover as well as to integrate into the community.

### ***Role as service coordinator***

Service coordination is one of the key tasks of cooperatives with drug addicts. Since the goal of a cooperative is to effectively help drug addicts access resources in the community, this depends a lot on the cooperative staff's ability to regulate resources. Therefore, the purpose of resource coordination is to create opportunities for drug addicts to access resources to effectively support addiction treatment. Avoid this overlap and waste of resources. To achieve the set goals, social supporters need to evaluate and analyze the resources of addicts, their families and external resources: resources from organizations and agencies in the community related to treatment support. addiction and recovery after treatment.

### ***Role as enabler***

With the function of support is to improve the capacity of the supported person, so the social support worker has the role of a companion with drug addicts and always creates the most favorable conditions to support the person who is addicted to drugs to solve their problems. In this role, social support workers need to carry out specific activities such as impacting and removing barriers that prevent drug users from accessing addiction treatment and addiction services; mobilize resources to support addicts in terms of health, career, employment...; support drug addicts to participate in addiction treatment and get ahead in life; assist them in handling the administrative procedures they need. For example, when a drug addict has successfully detoxed and has a desire to find a job. But the declaration of documents and papers is quite complicated. At this time, social support staff can work with drug addicts to complete the documents, records, procedures... so that they are eligible to receive jobs.

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be seen that drug addiction treatment is a long-term process, in addition to medical interventions, psychosocial interventions and social support are needed. In the treatment of addiction, especially drug addiction, there is a need for professional interventions with the help of social workers/social support workers through the role to intervene and support activities such as counseling, counseling, education, advocacy, connection and resource mobilization...It, definitely, helps drug addicts, families and communities promote internal and external resources to solve their problem. There is such an effect of effectively intervening, supporting and helping drug addicts to detox and integrate into the community.

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