

Drug addiction

THE number of drug users in the country is on the increase. The Anti-Narcotics Force recently said that there were eight million drug users — a considerable jump from three million in 1993 and four million in 2000. Many drug users, especially addicts, are not only a burden in economic terms, they are often a danger to society as well when they turn to crime in their quest for illegal substances. Their habit sustains and fuels the narco trade. Some governments elsewhere while continuing to battle drug abuse through punishment for the suppliers also treat the problem as a public health issue. This approach stresses demand-reduction initiatives like treatment and rehabilitation, prevention and education.

Unfortunately in Pakistan, treatment and rehabilitation services, usually provided by NGOs, are hampered by uncertain funding. This must be remedied as effective treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts require enhanced resources and the extension of such services

to public hospitals. It is also important that treatment and rehabilitation are available to prisoners — it is estimated that 20 to 40 per cent of the prison population consumes drugs. Awareness, of course, remains key to the prevention of drug abuse in the first place, and, in this respect, it is the youth that must be targeted. Students should know that drugs, besides having adverse moral and economic implications, are hazardous to health. They should be made to understand that experimenting with drugs is likely to lead to abuse and dependence. Counselling in educational institutions should be available to them. Since healthcare, social welfare and education are provincial responsibilities, better coordination at the policy level in the ANF — a federal organisation with regional directorates in the provincial capitals — is necessary. Last but not least, effective drug abuse prevention hinges on the government's political commitment to a sound policy that invests in our youth.