

**EMPOWER HER AGAINST NARCOTICS: NDPS ACT ENFORCEMENT,
REGIONAL CHALLENGES IN SOUTH GUJARAT, AND THE ADVANCEMENT
OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN INDIA**

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Abstract

India's Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985 constitutes the backbone of the country's anti-narcotics legal framework. While the Act is widely recognized for its stringent penal provisions and strong enforcement orientation, its socio-legal impact—particularly on women—has received limited scholarly attention. This article examines India's anti-narcotics strategy through a dual lens: enforcement of the NDPS Act and the advancement of women's rights and empowerment. Focusing on South Gujarat, a strategically significant coastal and transit region for illicit drug trafficking, the study highlights how narcotics crime disproportionately affects women as victims, caregivers, undertrial prisoners, and community stakeholders.

The article adopts a theoretical, literature-based approach to analyse the NDPS Act's legal framework, enforcement architecture, and regional challenges in South Gujarat, while simultaneously assessing the role of women in prevention, rehabilitation, enforcement support, and rights protection. Despite record drug seizures and intensified enforcement in Gujarat, low conviction rates, procedural delays, and limited rehabilitative mechanisms continue to undermine effectiveness. The study argues that integrating women-centric approaches—through legal safeguards, community participation, and empowerment-oriented rehabilitation—can strengthen India's anti-narcotics strategy. It concludes that enforcement under the NDPS Act must be complemented by gender-sensitive reforms to ensure both effective narcotics control and the protection of women's rights.

Keywords: NDPS Act, Anti-narcotics enforcement, South Gujarat, Women empowerment, Drug trafficking, Gender justice.

Introduction

India's approach to narcotics control has traditionally been enforcement-centric, rooted in strict prohibition and punitive legal measures under the NDPS Act, 1985. Amendments in 1989, 2001 and 2014 further reinforced stringent penalties, non-bailable offences, and enhanced investigative powers. While these measures aim to deter trafficking and consumption, scholars argue that the framework insufficiently addresses social dimensions of drug control, particularly the gendered impact of narcotics crimes.

Women occupy a complex position within India's narcotics landscape. They are affected as family members of substance users, as vulnerable participants coerced into trafficking networks, as undertrial prisoners under strict NDPS provisions, and increasingly as frontline actors in awareness, rehabilitation, and enforcement support. Recognizing women not merely as passive victims but as empowered stakeholders aligns India's anti-narcotics strategy with constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity.

South Gujarat presents a critical regional context for this analysis. Its long coastline, major ports such as Surat and Hazira, and proximity to international maritime routes make it a key transit hub for narcotics. Simultaneously, emerging local consumption trends and socio-economic vulnerabilities place women and families at heightened risk. This article therefore integrates NDPS enforcement analysis with the theme of women's rights and empowerment, arguing that sustainable narcotics control requires gender-sensitive legal and policy responses.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the legal framework and enforcement mechanisms of the NDPS Act with reference to South Gujarat.
2. To examine regional challenges in narcotics control and prosecution under the NDPS Act.

3. To assess the gendered impact of narcotics offences and NDPS enforcement on women.
4. To explore the role of women's empowerment in prevention, rehabilitation, and community-based anti-narcotics strategies.

Research Significance

This study contributes to existing literature by integrating anti-narcotics enforcement with women's rights discourse. By focusing on South Gujarat, it highlights how regional trafficking dynamics intersect with social realities affecting women. The findings are relevant for policymakers, enforcement agencies, legal scholars, and civil society organisations seeking to align narcotics control with gender justice, rehabilitation, and community empowerment.

Research Methodology

This theoretical article is based entirely on a comprehensive review of existing literature and official reports. Sources include statutory documents (NDPS Act), government data (NCRB, PIB releases), academic analyses, legal commentary, and news reports. No new primary data were collected. The study synthesizes these materials to assess the legal framework and enforcement context. Analysis proceeds qualitatively by linking key themes in the literature (e.g. legal provisions, enforcement initiatives, case studies in Gujarat) to the stated objectives.

Review of Literature

NDPS Act and Anti-Narcotics Enforcement

Scholarly literature on India's narcotics control framework largely focuses on the stringent and punitive nature of the NDPS Act. Ratanlal and Dhirajlal's *Law of Crimes* highlight that the NDPS Act departs significantly from ordinary criminal jurisprudence by introducing reverse burden clauses, mandatory minimum sentences, and strict bail provisions, thereby prioritizing deterrence over reformatory justice. Kumar (2021) argues that while such

stringency reflects India's international treaty obligations, it has also resulted in procedural rigidity and prolonged incarceration of undertrial prisoners.

Judicial commentary has critically examined NDPS enforcement practices. In *Tofan Singh v. State of Tamil Nadu* (2020), the Supreme Court emphasized constitutional safeguards by declaring confessional statements made to NDPS officers inadmissible, reshaping investigative practices nationwide. Chatterji and Sadhu (2024) observe that although the judgment strengthened due process, it simultaneously exposed investigative weaknesses, contributing to lower conviction rates in several states, including Gujarat.

Criminological studies draw on deterrence theory and rational choice theory to justify strict penalties under the NDPS Act, arguing that severe punishment discourages organised trafficking networks. However, sociological scholars contest this assumption, noting that drug markets adapt rapidly to enforcement pressures (Aravind & Nair, 2023). Empirical research suggests that enforcement-heavy models succeed in seizures but fail to address demand-side drivers such as addiction, poverty, and social marginalization.

Women, Drug Abuse, and Gendered Impact

Feminist legal scholars highlight that narcotics control laws disproportionately affect women, particularly those from economically weaker backgrounds. Thakur and Thikkavarapu (2022) argue that women are often peripheral offenders, coerced into courier roles or implicated due to association with male family members. Strict non-bailable provisions under the NDPS Act exacerbate their vulnerability, leading to prolonged detention, family disruption, and social stigma.

Public health and sociological studies emphasise women's dual role as both victims and agents of change. Bhad and Brar (2025) note that substance abuse within families places a disproportionate emotional and caregiving burden on women, while simultaneously positioning them as key actors in prevention and rehabilitation. International literature on harm reduction supports community-based, women-led interventions as more effective in reducing relapse and improving social reintegration.

Regional Studies: South Gujarat and Coastal Trafficking

Regional scholarship identifies Gujarat's coastline as a critical transit corridor for international drug trafficking. Chauhan (2025) and Aravind & Nair (2023) document how maritime routes facilitate large-scale consignments destined for northern India. Despite record seizures, Gujarat's relatively low conviction rates indicate enforcement and prosecutorial challenges. Legal analysts argue that regional enforcement must be complemented by social interventions, particularly targeting women and youth in vulnerable coastal communities.

Research Gap

The existing literature extensively analyses the NDPS Act's legal strictness and enforcement challenges but rarely integrates women's rights and empowerment within anti-narcotics discourse. There is a clear gap in region-specific, gender-sensitive legal analysis that examines how empowering women can enhance narcotics prevention, rehabilitation, and enforcement outcomes. This study seeks to bridge that gap by linking NDPS Act enforcement in South Gujarat with the advancement of women's rights in India.

Women, Narcotics, and the NDPS Act: A Gendered Perspective

Women are uniquely affected by narcotics offences and NDPS enforcement. Studies indicate that many women accused under the NDPS Act are first-time or peripheral offenders, often acting under coercion or economic compulsion. Strict bail provisions, reverse burden of proof, and prolonged trials disproportionately impact women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities.

At the same time, women play a crucial role in narcotics prevention and rehabilitation. Community-based awareness programmes, self-help groups, and NGO-led de-addiction initiatives increasingly rely on women as educators, counsellors, and social mobilisers. Empowering women through legal awareness, economic opportunities, and institutional support strengthens community resilience against drug abuse.

“To conceptualize the role of women as active stakeholders in India's anti-narcotics strategy, the following model illustrates how women-centric interventions can strengthen NDPS enforcement outcomes.”

“Women Empowerment–Centric Anti-Narcotics Model”**South Gujarat: Enforcement Challenges and Women’s Vulnerability**

South Gujarat’s status as a transit region exposes local communities to spill-over risks, including increased availability of synthetic drugs. Women in coastal and urban-industrial areas face heightened vulnerabilities linked to family disruption, health risks, and economic instability arising from narcotics crime. While enforcement agencies have intensified seizures and coastal surveillance, limited attention has been paid to women-centric rehabilitation and rights protection mechanisms.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis reveals that while NDPS enforcement in South Gujarat has strengthened operationally, it remains procedurally rigid and socially limited. Women continue to face indirect and direct consequences of narcotics crime without adequate legal or rehabilitative safeguards. Integrating women’s empowerment into anti-narcotics strategy enhances both enforcement legitimacy and long-term effectiveness.

National enforcement initiatives demonstrate both adaptation and limitations. The establishment of NCORD and the rollout of digital intelligence-sharing mechanisms have enhanced coordination among central and state agencies (Press Information Bureau, 2025). The 2025 creation of specialized Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) units in Gujarat

represents a significant expansion of on-ground enforcement capacity (IANS, 2025). Reports indicate that these units employ both “top-down” and “bottom-up” intelligence approaches, targeting organized networks while simultaneously strengthening local-level policing (IANS, 2025). With staffing expanded from 34 to 211 officers, Gujarat’s enforcement capacity has grown considerably; however, the region’s extensive coastline continues to pose persistent operational challenges. Scholars such as Aravind and Nair (2023) emphasize that maritime trafficking routes are highly fluid and technologically advanced, making traditional patrol-centric strategies insufficient. Moreov

The South Gujarat case study underscores region-specific complexities. A substantial proportion of narcotics seized in Gujarat are destined for Punjab, reinforcing the state’s function as a national transit corridor (Chauhan, 2025). Simultaneously, growing local drug use—particularly synthetic substances like mephedrone—suggests emerging demand-side issues within the state (Chauhan, 2025). Experts warn that if high-value consignments continue entering Gujarat, the risk of domestic spillover and market formation will intensify. While state agencies such as the ATS maintain strong working relationships with central bodies like the NCB and Coast Guard (NDTV, 2025; Chauhan, 2025), smaller-scale local distribution and consumption cases may not receive proportionate enforcement attention. Analyses from regional reporting stress the need for sustained coastal surveillance and integrated intelligence fusion among police, anti-terror units, and maritime forces (IANS, 2025; Chauhan, 2025).

Procedural inefficiencies continue to impede effective outcomes. NDPS investigations often involve long timelines due to forensic requirements, witness availability, and procedural complexity. High-profile cases illustrate these challenges—for instance, the prosecution of eight Pakistani nationals arrested in 2015 for smuggling 232 kilograms of heroin off the Gujarat coast concluded only in 2025, with the court imposing the maximum 20-year sentence (NDTV, 2025). Such decade-long delays highlight systemic bottlenecks and raise concerns about judicial efficiency and proportionality. Literature underscores that extended trial durations weaken deterrence, burden courts, and delay relief for affected communities.

Stakeholder perspectives reveal additional systemic concerns. Legal analysts and advocates note that the NDPS Act’s non-bailable structure and harsh mandatory minima contribute to

court congestion, prolonged pre-trial detention, and limited differentiation between minor users and major traffickers (Nyaaya, 2022; Kumar, 2021). Civil society groups, including Thakur and Thikkavarapu (2022), argue that India's drug policy remains overwhelmingly enforcement-centric, with inadequate attention to treatment, harm reduction, and rehabilitation. Public health experts warn that insufficient harm-reduction measures—such as needle-exchange services and substitution therapy—can undermine enforcement by perpetuating addiction and facilitating illicit demand.

In synthesis, the literature indicates that India's anti-narcotics strategy is both powerful and constrained: while the NDPS Act provides robust tools to combat trafficking, systemic inefficiencies, procedural burdens, and regional vulnerabilities dilute its impact. In South Gujarat, enforcement agencies have strengthened operations—evident in major seizures and new task-force structures—yet the region's strategic position, evolving trafficking routes, and rising local demand continue to challenge existing approaches. Enhancing effectiveness will likely require a dual focus on legal-procedural reforms to improve conviction rates and fairness, and on operational enhancements such as increased personnel, advanced surveillance technologies, and deeper inter-agency intelligence coordination (IANS, 2025; Kumar, 2021).

Conclusion

India's anti-narcotics strategy under the NDPS Act demonstrates strong legal resolve but limited social integration. The South Gujarat experience underscores the need for a balanced approach that combines enforcement with empowerment. Recognizing women as rights-holders and strategic partners in narcotics control is essential. Gender-sensitive reforms, community participation, and rehabilitative justice can transform India's narcotics policy from a purely punitive model into a holistic and sustainable framework.

India's NDPS-centric anti-drug regime is anchored in stringent laws and an expanding enforcement architecture, signaling the country's strong commitment to combating narcotics. However, the overall outcomes reveal a mixed picture. While stringent penalties, multi-agency coordination, and intensified surveillance have significantly strengthened detection and seizure capacities, these measures have not translated equally into efficient prosecutions or timely judicial outcomes. The South Gujarat experience reflects this imbalance clearly:

despite aggressive coastal operations and enhanced policing efforts, the region continues to face persistent trafficking routes and rising local drug use.

The broader analysis indicates that India's current approach is more effective at intercepting narcotics than at ensuring due process, rehabilitation, or long-term containment of drug networks. Procedural complexity, heavy reliance on strict evidentiary standards, and limited differentiation between major traffickers and minor offenders weaken the system's overall impact. At the same time, emerging challenges—such as synthetic drugs and technologically sophisticated trafficking networks—demand faster institutional adaptation

Suggestions

1. Introduce gender-sensitive bail and sentencing guidelines under the NDPS Act.
2. Strengthen women-led community awareness and de-addiction programmes in South Gujarat.
3. Expand legal aid and rehabilitation services for women affected by narcotics offences.
4. Integrate women's empowerment policies with national anti-narcotics strategies.

Limitations

The study is based on secondary sources and does not include empirical fieldwork. Findings may therefore be limited in generalizability beyond South Gujarat

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