

# The Addiction Industries: Reform Efforts and the Unique Role of Missionaries

BY R W LEWIS

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Frontier People Groups live in the areas of the world heavily impacted by illegal drug industries. Drug use has become epidemic in South Asia, SE Asia and Central Asia including Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Drug use in India is skyrocketing where 89% of drug addicts are educated and 99% are men, but children ages 9–10 are already using tobacco and alcohol, with twelve-year-olds starting on hashish and opium or heroin.<sup>1</sup>

Missionaries have long found that discipling people to Christ was thwarted unless lives were delivered from addictions. With addiction rates so high, any opposition may seem hopeless. It took over 100 years of protest, mostly by evangelical reform groups, to fight the opium/heroin and alcohol epidemics of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We are naïve to think it will take less determination to fight today's epidemics.

Since missionaries do not profit from the drug industries, they can uniquely act to expose harms. Just as medical missionary doctors in China eventually led the way in proving the harm done by the opium industry, so missionaries today can document impacts of drugs, tobacco and alcohol on their communities, and expose the truth to the world.

## Epidemics and Revivals Spark Reform Efforts

David Courtright writes, in *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World*, that five things have provoked drug reform movements: “*Direct harms, social costs, sinful conduct, deviant groups, and anxieties about*

1 [www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/government/drug-problem-the-governments-survey-in-punjab-and-delhi](http://www.mapsofindia.com/my-india/government/drug-problem-the-governments-survey-in-punjab-and-delhi)

*collective future....*<sup>2</sup> He points out that “*direct harm to innocents is the most morally forceful argument against drug use and the one that cuts across all cultures.*<sup>3</sup> Revivals are also a key factor. “*Revivalism...pressed Christians toward social duty...thousands of evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic sought to apply the teachings of the Bible to every arena of life.*<sup>4</sup> Two major awakenings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century pushed forward widespread opposition to the drug industries on three continents: North America, China and India. In all three cases, epidemic use of drugs and/or alcohol were seen as destroyers of families, causes of crime and immorality and leading causes of disease and death.

« Discipling people to Christ was thwarted unless lives were delivered from addictions. »

Tobacco was the glaring exception. Because it was seen as healthful until the mid-1800s, both Catholic and later Protestant missionaries spread tobacco use globally along with secular traders and it was used as currency in some parts of the world.

## Reform Wars in the USA

No country has as extensive a history of the war between reformers and addiction industries as the United States. Although many expressed concerns about tobacco's addictive nature, when it was shown to harm health, revivalist and new health-oriented denominations took

2 Courtwright, David T., *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World*, Harvard University Press, 2002, page 173.

3 Ibid, page 168.

4 Smith, Timothy, *Revivalism and Social Reform, American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, Whitf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2004. P.5

a determined stance, like the Wesleyan Methodists, Baptists, Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists.<sup>5</sup> The cigarette rolling machine (1880) increased daily output by 500 times, and children as young as five became addicted. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) campaigned for laws banning sales of tobacco to minors (under 18-21) and between 1895 and 1921 fifteen states banned cigarette sales entirely.<sup>6</sup> The tobacco industry reacted with heavy lobbying and bribes to have cigarettes included in soldiers' rations in WWI, to have bans overturned and to addict minors by making everything from candy cigarettes to pushing down age limits for legal purchases, knowing 90% of lifetime smokers start before the age of 21.<sup>7</sup> Addiction rates soared again, reaching 41% of adults by the 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Late 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-smoking campaigns have met with some success while the industry pushes nicotine addiction in other forms—gums, e-cigarettes, patches and vaping.

Christians did not oppose alcohol (merely its abuse) until manufactured distilled spirits became ubiquitous and alcoholism became epidemic in England and the US. Women's movements protested alcohol's effects on society and the harm being done to families and children. After pushing for moderate use of distilled liquor proved ineffective at freeing people from alcoholism, "temperance" morphed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into "T-total" abstinence.

## « Between 1895 and 1921 fifteen states banned cigarette sales entirely. »

Education and publication were the key to reform. In the 1880s, the WCTU, supported by the US government, successfully established a national Scientific Temperance Instruction movement to teach the dangers of alcohol in public schools and get children to sign abstinence pledges.<sup>9</sup> Campaigns like these, and thousands of activist local temperance societies, led to a constitutional

5 Hayes, Terrence E., *Tobacco in History and Culture: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p.362; [www.researchgate.net/publication/254644169\\_Missionaries\\_-\\_from\\_Tobacco\\_in\\_Culture\\_and\\_History\\_An\\_Encyclopeda\\_Vol\\_1](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/254644169_Missionaries_-_from_Tobacco_in_Culture_and_History_An_Encyclopeda_Vol_1)  
 6 [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4902755/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4902755/)  
 7 [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4902755/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4902755/)  
 8 [www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/consequences-smoking-exec-summary.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/consequences-smoking-exec-summary.pdf)  
 9 [www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/scientific-temperance-instruction-temperance-teachings/](http://www.alcoholproblemsandsolutions.org/scientific-temperance-instruction-temperance-teachings/) NOTE: Knowledge of alcohol's role in the body was small at the time and both the temperance and anti-prohibition forces promoted "scientific" facts about alcohol that later proved at least partially untrue.

amendment and national Prohibition of all industrial alcohol from 1920-1933.

Contrary to myths propagated by the alcohol industry, Prohibition *successfully* dropped addiction rates from 5% in 1910 to an average of 2.6% during Prohibition, returning to 4.5% by 1950.<sup>10</sup> The alcohol industry had fought back using movies to normalize drinking in homes, house parties and events instead of in saloons. Re-legalization in 1933 killed the temperance movement and the rate of alcoholism increased steadily; by 2017 alcoholism rates in the USA had surged to a shocking 12.7%, according to the *Washington Post*.<sup>11</sup>

By 1923 the USA also set up a Narcotics Division to the U.S. Treasury Department which banned opium and heroin. This ban stuck, because far less Americans were addicted to opium than to alcohol, and alcohol provided significantly more tax income to the government.<sup>12</sup> Marijuana was banned in 1937, but laws have been increasingly overturned since 2000.

To this day *addiction rates are significantly less for illegal drugs than for legal drugs*, with some 14% of Americans addicted to tobacco, 12.7% to alcohol, 10% to pharmaceuticals (painkillers, stimulants, tranquilizers, sedatives, antidepressants), 1.3% to marijuana and only 0.5% to illegal drugs. Most of the non-addicted are non-users.<sup>13</sup>

## Drug Reform Efforts in India

Recognizing harms and social costs, in 1925 Mahatma Gandhi called for banning opium and alcohol in India, and temperance became one of the platforms of the Indian nationalist movement. *"In his call for prohibition Gandhi hoped for support from most Muslims and high caste Hindus but recognized he might face opposition from India's British rulers, who depended heavily on revenues collected*

10 Estimated Alcoholics and Rate of Alcoholism in the United States, 1910-1953, *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 1955.

11 [www.washingtonpost.com/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/) August 11, 2017. One in Eight American Adults is an Alcoholic.

12 Levine, H. G. (1984) The alcohol problem in America: from temperance to alcoholism. *British Journal of Addiction* 79, 109-119.

13 [www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/fast\\_facts/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/index.htm), [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/nationwide-trends), [talbotcampus.com/prescription-drug-abuse-statistics/](http://talbotcampus.com/prescription-drug-abuse-statistics/), [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-addictive), NOTE: These statistics do not factor out non-users, such as the 30% of Americans that do not drink alcohol and another 20% that take less than 7 drinks per year, and 20% more who drink less than ½ a drink per week. This means that the 12.7% of adults addicted to alcohol are actually 42% of the third of adults who drink more than 2.17 drinks per week, (if you assume drinking less than that would not result in alcoholism).

from the production and sale of alcohol.”<sup>14</sup> But in the 1947 Constitution, prohibition goals were delegated to the state governments, implemented in some, but repealed in others due to the government’s need for alcohol tax revenue. Indian women gained their voice and leadership in the temperance movement, spurred on by the World Women’s Christian Temperance Union. In the 1990s, Indian peasant women got alcohol sales banned from worksites in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>15</sup> In 2016 the women of Tamil Nadu, blaming alcohol for domestic abuse, elected a woman who shut down 500 liquor shops her first day in office.<sup>16</sup> Indian states that prohibit alcohol sales have significantly lower male alcoholism and less crimes against women.<sup>17</sup> But are Christian missionaries continuing to help these Indian women in their reform efforts?

**« In 1925 Mahatma Gandhi called for banning opium and alcohol in India. »**

### Drug Reform Efforts in China

In China, anti-opium Christian missionaries had reached every province by 1860. One wrote, “(Opium’s) history is a Christian crime, a Christian shame.”<sup>18</sup> When opium became epidemic in China, missionaries instituted an extensive international literature campaign, while the opium industry fought back with pro-opium arguments. The Chinese, very anxious about their collective future as a nation and global reputation, finally persuaded England in 1906 to join with them in reducing opium production by 10% per year. I believe the missionary fight against opium opened the hearts of the Chinese people to recognize that God was their father, too. However, progress was not fast enough to avoid revolution.

14 Fahey, David M. and Padma Manian, “Poverty and Purification: The Politics of Gandhi’s Campaign for Prohibition” *The Historian* Vol. 67, No. 3 (FALL 2005), p. 489

15 Tschurenkov, Jana and Harald Fischer-Tine, *Indian Anomalies: Drink and Drugs in the Land of Gandhi*, January 2014 page 6-7. [www.researchgate.net/publication/286845276\\_Introduction\\_Indian\\_anomalies-drink\\_and\\_drugs\\_in\\_the\\_Land\\_of\\_gandhi](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/286845276_Introduction_Indian_anomalies-drink_and_drugs_in_the_Land_of_gandhi) Unfortunately, in India drinking alcohol and eating beef is associated with Christianity.

16 Thekaekara, Mari Marcel (25 May 2016). “Why Tamil Nadu’s women want alcohol banned”. *The Guardian*.

17 Thekaekara, Mari Marcel (13 November 2017). “Indian women are pleading for prohibition”. *New Internationalist*.

18 Courtwright, page 182.

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Convinced that opium was poisoning their nation, the Communist Revolution resorted to massive destruction of crops, execution of dealers and compulsory treatment of 10 million addicts under Mao in the 1950s which virtually eradicated production and consumption of opium in China.<sup>19</sup> Replacing their opium crops with tobacco, thought less dangerous at the time, China is approaching 50% of the global tobacco yield, using most of it themselves, killing nearly two million per year but generating \$16 billion in tax revenue for the government at the cost of \$5 billion in health problems.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, there has also been a surge of *synthetic* opioid use in China in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In an ironic reversal of history, China has become the leading producer and distributor of illegal fentanyl-type opioid drugs, killing tens of thousands yearly in the West. Starting May 2019, China has added dozens of fentanyl-related drugs to their narcotic control laws to hopefully cut production, trafficking and smuggling from their country, pledging also to “put an end to international drug mafias and their trafficking networks.”<sup>21</sup>

### Losing the Drug War Among the Frontier People Groups of Central and South Asia

With less coming from India and China, opium growing spread elsewhere. Western military forces unfortunately protected and assisted drug lords, first in S.E. Asia (the “Golden Triangle”) to get their help in the fight against communism, and later to get help against terrorism in Central Asia (the “Golden Crescent”).

Today the Christian tribal peoples of Burma/Myanmar have over 100,000 involved in the anti-opium Pat Jasan movement. “All we wanted is to stop poppy production

19 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_opium\\_in\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_opium_in_China)

20 ([www.money.cnn.com/2014/11/26/news/china-tobacco-cigarettes/index.html](http://www.money.cnn.com/2014/11/26/news/china-tobacco-cigarettes/index.html)).

21 *Beijing Review*, April 11, 2019, page 4.

and drug addiction among young people," said Tang Gun. "We are losing our society and this is why we are campaigning against poppy production.<sup>22</sup> They have helped reduce Burmese production of opium to a fraction of what it was previously.

However, during the same period, Afghanistan's opium production rose from 100 tons annually in the 1970s to 9000 tons by 2015, 93% of the world's opium. In May 2001 the Taliban had managed to eradicate the opium crop in Afghanistan in one year, dropping world production by 75%,<sup>23</sup> but production resurged with US intervention against the Taliban and opium now funds the Taliban.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, addiction in Pakistan increased from near zero in 1979, to 1.3 million in 1989, to 4.3 million in 2004<sup>25</sup> with 80% of Pakistani addicts wanting help but unable to afford it.<sup>26</sup> Neighboring Iran developed the highest per capita opium addiction in the world, affecting three million people.<sup>27</sup> What if believers became the primary helpers in a grassroots effort to rescue these frontier peoples from drugs?

22 <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/1917236/grassroots-activists-myanmar-take-anti-drug-war-own-hands>

23 [www.nytimes.com/2001/05/20/world/taliban-s-ban-on-poppy-a-success-us-aides-say.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/20/world/taliban-s-ban-on-poppy-a-success-us-aides-say.html)

24 [www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/09/how-the-heroin-trade-explains-the-us-uk-failure-in-afghanistan](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/09/how-the-heroin-trade-explains-the-us-uk-failure-in-afghanistan)

25 [www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/09/how-the-heroin-trade-explains-the-us-uk-failure-in-afghanistan](http://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/09/how-the-heroin-trade-explains-the-us-uk-failure-in-afghanistan)

26 [www.unodc.org/documents/pakistan/Survey\\_Report\\_Final\\_2013.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/pakistan/Survey_Report_Final_2013.pdf)

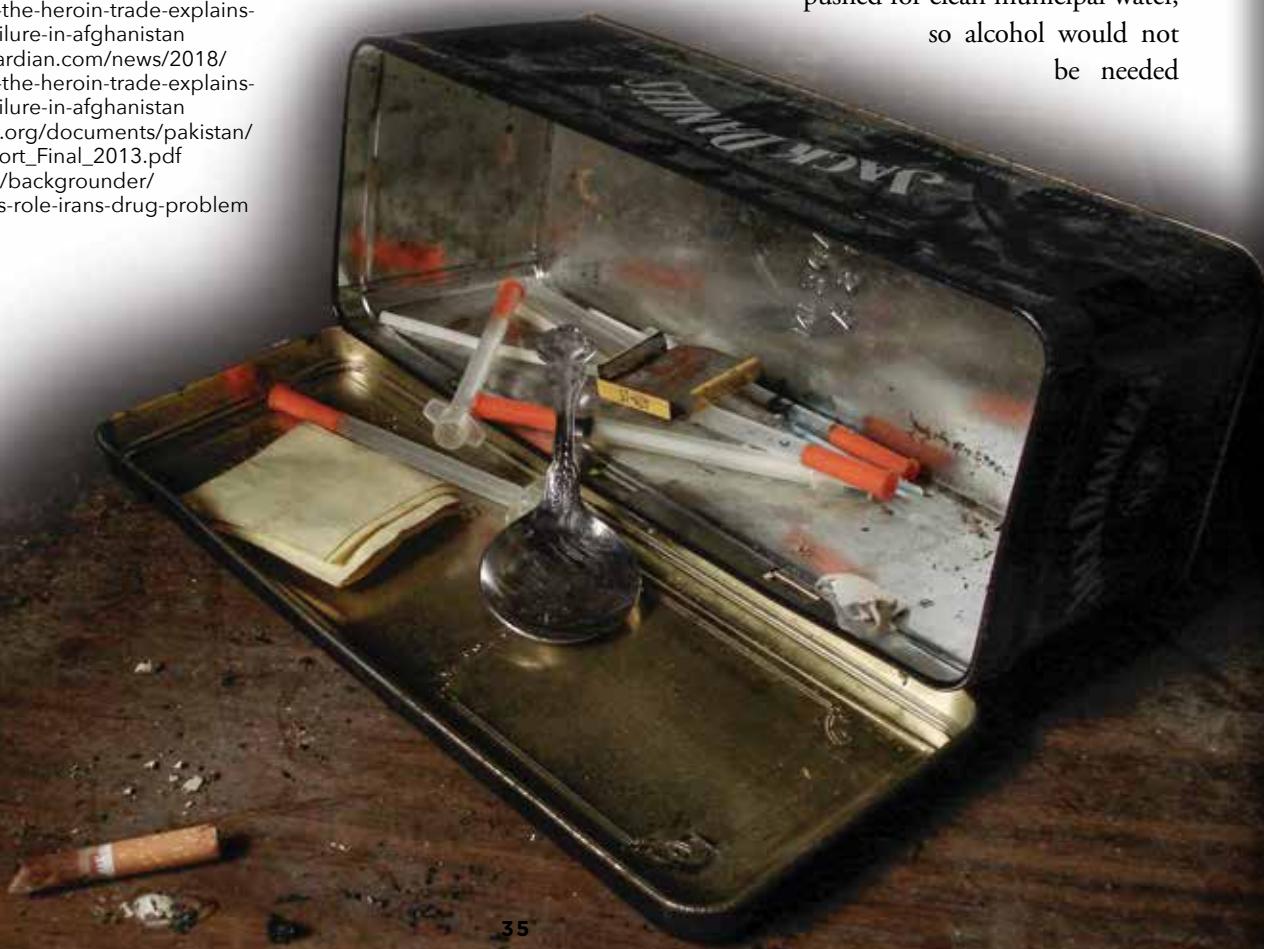
27 [www.cfr.org/backgrounder/afghanistans-role-irans-drug-problem](http://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/afghanistans-role-irans-drug-problem)

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### Providing Alternatives to Drugs

Historically, the primary forces of reform against drugs have been outraged citizens acting collectively while educating and persuading society there is a real problem. Many missionaries, evangelicals and other Christians have globally stood against mind-altering, family-destroying substances, and they are often joined by Muslim, Buddhist and other community leaders. However, unless their efforts against drug industries were met with cooperation by governments, progress in reducing the drug industrial complex was short-lived. So alternative sources of income, and alternatives for social recreation, must also be addressed by reformers.

Early on evangelicals saw the need to provide alternatives to drugs. The 18<sup>th</sup> century revival societies pushed for clean municipal water, so alcohol would not be needed



for water purification. They held large temperance tea parties promoting boiled tea to replace alcohol.<sup>28</sup> The rising manufacture and distribution of new non-alcoholic drinks had an impact, especially as soda fountains, tea and coffee shops provided direct competition to bar "hang-outs."

The YMCA (started in London, 1844) established drug-free temperance youth hostels for youth coming into the cities, complete with housing, Bible studies, sports and healthy entertainment. The need was so great that within just 10 years the YMCA had spread to multiple countries with hundreds of locations. An explosive movement, soon thousands of semi-autonomous YMCA and YWCA (1855) hostels arose in over 100 countries, spreading the gospel, clean living, peace activism and education in moral, social and environmental responsibility. With surges of poor men into the world's cities today, it is unfortunate that the YMCA has largely given up its hostel ministry. The Salvation Army, however, continues its over 130-year global fight to help the poor and addicts with hostels and/or rehab centers in 90 countries, emphasizing abstinence, clean living, and hard work, including a small network of care centers in Pakistan.<sup>29</sup>

### Action Steps

Drug addictions are increasing alarmingly in Frontier People Groups and around the globe, causing not only large numbers of premature deaths, but poverty, abuse and trafficking of women and children and destruction of families. Many closed countries might welcome believers coming to help families escape the addiction trap. What better way to bring the love of Christ into desperate households, like a light on a lampstand?

28 Rappaport, E. (2013). Sacred and Useful Pleasures: The Temperance Tea Party and the Creation of a Sober Consumer Culture in Early Industrial Britain. *Journal of British Studies*, 52(4), 990-1016. doi:10.1017/jbr.2013.121

29 [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin\\_1991-01-01\\_1\\_page004.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1991-01-01_1_page004.html)

Missionaries arousing public outcry has worked in the past. And today missionaries also need to lead the way in helping narco-economies find alternative income crops or industries, revealing net costs to governments of abetting addiction industries, heading off addictions before they begin through educating the young, drug rehabilitation and fighting public acceptance of the inevitability of "recreational" drug addictions. "Compassionate" drug companies push to normalize addictions, providing drugs to addicts or alcohol to alcoholics, and lobby to decriminalize all drugs, which may empty prisons but offers no hope to families.

Helping families should be our primary goal. But fighting the global drug industries is a crucial part of that. Things missionaries have done to help end addiction epidemics before can still be done: publicizing testimonies of former addicts showing harm caused to them and their families; suing companies for false advertising; exposing statistics of the deaths, injuries, poverty, homelessness, abuse and sexual assaults due to drug and alcohol use; picturing child victims of their parents' addictions; boycotting industries; exposing the huge profits being made by industries and governments at the expense of their people, and shaming government officials for their collusion.

**« Closed countries might welcome believers coming to help families escape the addiction trap. »**

What cannot continue is apathy toward the number of families and lives being destroyed by ruthless companies marketing addictive substances and ignoring the resulting deaths as inevitable. Missionaries are uniquely positioned for championing the causes of their people groups and helping to rescue them from destructive forces. 

