

Association for Harm Reduction Education & Research (AHRER)



Core Team Meeting Report

March 2021
New Delhi

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Core Group meeting of Association for Harm reduction Education & Research (AHRER) was convened on 13 March 2021 from 04.00 PM onwards at The Leela Convention Center, New Delhi. A total of 13 guests attended the event, of them 4 were respectively from Chennai, Mumbai, Pune and Indore.

The overall objectives of the meeting were:

- to provide an overview of one successful year with range of services
- to review the previously carried activities
- to explore and discuss the future activities and possible financial support
- to plan strategically the next course of action in 2021

Central points discussed

The Meeting reached to the following line of action for the next year:

- Participation and organization of important event to mark relevant theme such as World Tobacco Day 2021
- Situational Analysis of Tobacco Harm Reduction Services at Drug Use Rehabilitation Centers using google-based Survey tools lead by Prof. Dr. Desai and Prof. Dr. Ambekar in partnership with AHRER
- Disseminating survey results in a meeting on May 29-31st, 2021 in Delhi in co-ordination with Prof. Dr. Desai and Prof. Dr. Ambekar in partnership with AHRER
- Sensitization of Youth at educational institutions
- Panel Discussions and Debates on TV Prof. Dr. Desai and Prof. Dr. Ambekar in partnership with AHRER representative in Mumbai
- AHRER webpage and social media pages will be created and regular updates will be posted.

Background

The Association for Harm Reduction Education and Research is a registered health promotion body established for increasing the public awareness of harms resulting due to various human behaviours associated with tobacco consumption, narcotics, alcohol, and obesity. Several research has shown that gaps exist in perceptions related to the harms associated with the above behaviours and harm reduction science has the potential to reduce the risks of disease and death with significant health improvements at population level.

AHRER

Association for Harm Reduction Education and Research is registered under section 8 (1) of the Companies Act, 2013 [Pursuant to rule 20 the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014 Section 8 Licence Number 11820 Dated: 13 Day of 03, 2020


AHRER is formed in March 2020 by a group of multi-disciplinary medical professionals from diverse specialities sharing a collective common vision for healthy Indians.

AHRER aims to be a unifying platform for engaging multiple stakeholders from policy makers, health practitioners, academics, social and behavioural scientists, representatives of advocacy bodies, NGO's and enabling network building to facilitate knowledge sharing, exchange of ideas and overarching partnerships on the issue of harm reduction education and research strategies.

With constantly evolving public health landscape in India, there is an compelling need for medical professionals to lead the policy discourse embedded with scientific evidence emerging from the country.

The key objectives of AHRER include but not limited to:

- To contribute to the improvement of public health awareness by educating Indian public on health and related domains including familial, social, financial and societal consequences of tobacco consumption, narcotics, alcohol, and obesity.
- To enable and facilitate public discussion through platforms/forums/ on policy measures concerned with harm reduction strategies to tobacco consumption, narcotics, alcohol, and obesity with inclusive participation from multiple stakeholders.
- To generate research evidence through quantitative, qualitative, participatory action research studies to advocate for science/evidence directed harm reduction policies, environments which represent the spectrum of diverse population groups and address multiple issues emerging in the country with huge cultural diversity.
- To collaborate with global network of scientists to engage in innovating harm reduction aids, strategies applicable and centered for specific scenarios in the country.
- To promote and disseminate evidence-based harm reduction science through conduction of international and national level conferences, symposiums, and continuous medical education programs in training institutions of medicine, dental and allied sciences.
- To organize trainings and capacity building workshops for diverse partners of harm reduction science including medical and dental and AYUSH professionals, social and behavioural scientists, NGO's, community volunteers, youth clubs, schools and colleges, workplaces, vulnerable population groups, general public etc.



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 License under section 8 (1) of the Companies Act, 2013
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Meeting Proceedings

Opening Session

Dr. Vikas Jain, delivered the Welcome Address and introduce the idea behind the Core Meeting. In his opening address he thanked all the guests and the founding members, mentors and AVI for the crucial support in establishing AHRER. Dr. Jain also requested the guest to introduce themselves and briefly mention about the work they are engaged.

An overview of AHRER's Journey during Pandemic

In the next session Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha provided a comprehensive account of the activities of AHRER till date. She highlighted the nature and reach of each of the activities, which including monthly virtual meetings, webinars, snapshots of minutes of the meetings etc.

Activities	Number
Monthly Webinar (w.e.f. April 2020-February 2021)	11
Print Media Articles*Dr. Vikas Jain	3
The UNION Rebuttal on LMIC-THR product ban	AHRER Members
Live Stream Panel Discussion*Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha	2
Global Forum of Nicotine Panel Discussion*Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha	2
Research Abstract Selection/Presentation in Conferences*Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha	2

The audience were given an opportunity to understand the year-long profile of activities carried out in virtual domain during pandemic lockdown. The summary of the same was shown as below:

Panel Discussion: **AHRER and Road Ahead**

Panellist: Prof. Dr. Ambekar, Dr. Kiran Melkote, Mr. Raghav Chadha Singh and Mr. Samrat Chowdhery

Moderation: Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha



Before panel discussion was started, Dr. Rajesh Saran joined through zoom call and shared by saying ‘there is a long history of tobacco use in India for several years for several reasons. Now it was brought into lime light because of a full grown industry. It has perpetuated in a systemic way not in only in India but also in other parts of India. WHO and its expert team provides excellent information on technical part however they have no say as far as implementation of policies and program is concerned. There are several examples of harm reduction in our day to day lives, harm reduction should be expanded to all other substances. It will take time for people to accept harm reduction and practice”.

The panel discussion addressed the following areas in an 45-minute discussion contributed by all the panelists:

1. **Building institutional partnerships** : There was majority consensus on
 - i. retaining the focus on tobacco harm reduction (THR) to emphasize the message that harm reduction practice embedded with principles of respect and empathy is welcome and not let the AHRER work be hijacked by an existing organization or a commercial entity for any reason.

- ii. exploring the avenues and converging areas for synergistic cross-overs with the existing drug harm reduction program at national level including, NACO-State AIDS Society IDU Targeted Interventions (IDU TI), for strategic expansion of work and establish partnerships.
 - iii. join hands with institutions working with drugs and alcohol harm reduction and learn from experiences.
2. **Showcasing the work of AHRER:** To design web-portal, with infographics and brief messages about the work of AHRER in impressive messages to be disseminated to multiple stakeholders.
 3. **Private-sector involvement** in association might be difficult to approach directly however try to speak to certain specialists and address their concerns as tobacco use is prevalent across cadres of healthcare providers and speak of research on harm reduction.
 4. **Involvement of TB Society, Psychiatrists, Dentists** and large facilities to get harm reduction messages across can be mutually beneficial as they endorse the principle of harm reduction specific to tobacco use.
 5. **Involvement of family members** in tobacco harm reduction as younger generation is anti-smoking, education professionals and educational institutes by “catching them young”.
 6. **Strengthening credibility of AHRER:** As there is ban on THR research by government institutions however AHRER may be instrumental in sensitization of medical and para-medical professionals on THR etc.
 7. **Misconceptions about addiction science** and substance use, lacking empathy and medical curriculum deficiencies compound the resistance to THR and thus THR can target both general population and also among medical professionals about the work carried out by AHRER.

Action Plan for 2021

Following suggestions appeared during this discussion:

- a. Prof. Dr. Ambekar, Dr. Vikas Jain and Raghav Singh suggested that as a small beginning, AHRER should try to come up with advocated strategies to prevent the first use of tobacco. There is a history to learn that prevention is extremely important therefore these strategies can assist individuals to avoid the first smoke with substantial information. As far as use of psychoactive substance is concerned there has already been plenty of work, strategies and approaches as part of public health measures to provide preventive information and make people aware. There will be millions of people who will not oppose the prevention of the first smoke of tobacco.

- b. Examining presence of tobacco in an individual's life, as per Dr. Prachin Kumar, not all start using tobacco because it helps to improvise their social status, but tobacco plays an important role in life of people or survive in difficult situations. There are people including construction workers, laborers in unorganized sector, people living on the street etc. who may use tobacco to prolong their need for food because they generally do not have money. Therefore, it is crucial to examine factors and social determinants of tobacco use in different settings in India. The value of tobacco in each life may differ. The current legislation does not impose any legal consequences because it is social accepted. It is suggested not to take any moral position on tobacco use instead emphasize on harm associated to tobacco use.
- c. There is a need to advocate to include substance use and harm reduction into the existing curriculum of medical course although it is difficult to convince the important bodies responsible for designing curriculum.
- d. India has a mature harm reduction reflected in national level program to address HIV and HCV among people who inject. This program has made several experimental attempts to try different strategies, therefore, tobacco harm reduction should prevent repeating similar inaccurate work which may stigmatize tobacco users. AHRER should be opened to invite tobacco users as one of the primary stakeholders and engage them in overall technical brief, intervention design and deliverables.

The Panel Discussion was followed by interactive session about the **Action Plan for 2021** and salient points were summarized as below:

#	Theme	Proposed activity	
	World No Tobacco Day 2021 Events	1. Situational Analysis of Tobacco Harm Reduction Services at Drug Use Rehabilitation Centers-Survey (Google Forms)	*Prof. Dr. Desai *Prof. Dr. Ambekar <u>Co-Ordinated by</u> Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha Dr. Kiran Melkote
		2. Participating in a meeting on May 29-31 st , 2021, N. Delhi	*Prof. Dr. Desai *Prof. Dr. Ambekar <u>Co-Ordinated by</u> Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha Dr. Kiran Melkote
	Creating Website and Social Media Presence and posting AHRER content	Creating Website and Social Media Presence and posting AHRER content	
		Sensitization of Youth at educational institutions	<u>Co-Ordinated by</u> Dr. Vikas Jain

		Panel Discussions and Debates on TV	
	Print media writing from AHRER members	Once in a quarter to address elements and components of THR targeting both general public and public health professionals	
	Alliances and partnerships with Harm Reduction organizations in other domains	Exploring joint formal working pathways with Delhi Users Network, Misbah, and Street Children's Network, HIV/NACO, TI-DIC, etc	<u>Co-Ordinated by</u> Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha and Mr. Siddharth Singh

Participants

#	Participants	Affiliation	Place
1.	Mr. Samrat Chowdhery	INNCO	Mumbai
2.	Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha	AHRER-Director	Chennai
3.	Dr. Vikas Jain	AHRER-Founding-Member	Indore
4.	Mr. Dhaval Gogate	AVI	Pune
	Delhi-Local		
5.	Prof. Rajesh Sharan	North-Eastern Hill University AHRER-Executive Board	Delhi
6.	Prof. Dr. Desai	IHBAS, New Delhi/ AHRER-Executive Board	Delhi
7.	Prof. Dr. Ambekar	NDTTC, Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS AHRER-Executive Board	Delhi
8.	Dr. Kiran Melkote	AHRER-Member	Delhi
9.	Mr. Sidharth Singh	Intendent Harm Reduction Consultant	Delhi
10.	Mr. Raghav Chadha Singh	Delhi Drug Users Network	Delhi
11.	Mr. Shabab Alam	Misbah	Delhi
12.	Mr. Mayank Singh	Youth Rise India	Delhi
13.	Dr. Prachin Kumar	Community Health & Social Medicine, JNU	Delhi
	Virtual Participants		
14.	Dr. Harisudan	AHRER-Member	Chennai
15.	Dr. Aravind Manoharan	AHRER-Member	Chennai
16.	Dr. Aaditya Fernando	AHRER-Member	Chennai

Association for Harm Reduction Education & Research (AHRER)

Core Team Meeting

Venue

King George Room, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi
1 CBD, Maharaja Surajmal Road, Near Yamuna Sports Complex, Delhi -110032, India

13 March, 2021 (4 PM IST Onwards)

Program Agenda

Time	Agenda	Speaker
04:00 – 04:30 PM	Arrival and Refreshments	AHRER Team
04:30 – 04:45 PM	Welcome Address	Dr. Vikas Jain Co-Director, AHRER
04:46 – 05:15 PM	An overview of AHRER's journey during Pandemic	Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha Founder- Co-Director, AHRER
05:16 – 05:30 PM	Tea/Coffee Break	
05:31 – 06:30 PM	Panel Discussion Topic: AHRER and Road Ahead Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Prof. Dr. Nimesh Desai▪ Prof. Dr. Atul Ambekar▪ Dr. Kiran Melkote▪ Mr. Samrat Chowdhery	Moderator Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha Founder-Co-Director, AHRER
06:31 – 07:00 PM	Interaction on Panel Topic	Panellists & Participants
07:01 – 08.00 PM	Action Plan for 2021	Group Discussion
08:01 – 08.15 PM	Recap of Action Plan	Dr. Sree T. Sucharitha Founder-Co-Director, AHRER
08:15 – 08.30 PM	Vote of Thanks	Dr. Vikas Jain Co-Director, AHRER