

## ***Yasir Ali Khan***

In Pakistan, People who inject drugs (PUD), People Living with HIV (PLHIV) and People with Alternate Sexuality (SOGIESC) face a taboo and high level of stigma and discrimination. Sex work and same-sex relationships are treated as a crime and an offence, drug use is treated as an illegal act in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. As per the UNAIDS HIV estimate report 2016-17<sup>2</sup>, the HIV prevalence among People who use Drugs (PUD) is at 38.4% in Pakistan. As per the Prevention report 2020, the coverage of prevention programmes among people who inject drugs is very low<sup>3</sup>. Sharing of equipment used for injecting drug use (IDU) is a substantial cause of disease burden and a contributor to blood-borne virus transmission. As per 'Pakistan's growing HIV epidemic 2022, HIV transmission via needle sharing among people who inject drugs remains the most common means of transmission<sup>4</sup>.

In this hostile situation, Yasir Ali Khan became a "Resilient Persona" in Pakistan, he is born and brought up in Lahore, Pakistan. Being a leader and change agent on sensitive and challenging issues is associated with stigma and discrimination in most societies and it is much higher in conservative societies. However, Yasir Ali Khan decided to challenge the status quo and emerged as a respected, courageous activist and leader. Yasir holds a Master's degree in Project Management and has vast experience working in Pakistan's social development sector.



Having experienced drug dependence himself and witnessing the ill-treatment of PUD, he came forward and started raising issues of Chem-sex in 2019. As a reformer, he disclosed his identity openly as PLHIV, GBMSM and a member of the chemsex community. He started raising issues and initiated more avenues and work interventions for social justice, to get easy access to basic health services and human rights. Yasir has been working on substance use and Chem-sex issues for over a decade. Yasir is credited with conducting the very first research on chem sex in the country in 2021. This was the first SOGI Inclusion index pilot in Pakistan. This study is also known as a milestone in starting the 'Asia chem-sex Forum' with International chem-sex experts.

*\*Pakistan is suffering badly due to stimulant drug use without any work or support and the usage of stimulants, communities are getting HIV and STDs very fast.*

*\*Our Youth is in a danger zone due to the new Physio-active substances with no awareness and support programs.*

1 [www.aidsdatahub.org](http://www.aidsdatahub.org) based on UNAIDS. (2021). Global AIDS Update 2021. Confronting Inequalities: Lessons for pandemic responses from 40 years of AIDS.

2 <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/pak-snapshot-2022.pdf>

3 <https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/resource/state-hiv-prevention-pakistan-2020.pdf>

4 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(22\)02530-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(22)02530-2)

Yasir has been actively engaged in many policy-making and decision-making initiatives regarding Chem-sex and HIV. He realised the dire need for knowledge sharing, generating evidence and creating awareness.

Yasir also started the first Pakistani community-led network of people who use drugs. He realised that community involvement and engagement are very important, so he initiated a 'chem-sex support group' where the gained live experiences and expertise are discussed and utilised in leading support groups. Currently, he is successfully managing this support group through a digital platform of HIV Buddies and with the help of the organisation HOPE. He is also working part-time with the organisation- Reshape, CIC-Community Interest Company and leading a support group with a large number of chem-sex practitioners, and dependents of substances.

*\*In Pakistan, drugs are prevalent and readily available in every area or city. Drug users are considered just like garbage, living in parks under the open sky without any care or support.*

*\*Every illegal drug availability and usage is widespread in Pakistan in every community and society but our authorise is still in denial.*

To raise awareness among PLHIVs on various issues associated with their daily lives, Yasir initiated a digital platform of HIV buddies and provides support to PLHIV with the help of the organisation- HOPE. He also provides counselling and care support to communities and helps them to move beyond limitations and boundaries and works as a role model in the country, to show that a PLHIV can do anything.

Social network sites and digital platforms are very famous and mostly used everywhere, Yasir is efficiently and profoundly making use of it. He is working on digital outreach using various dating applications. He shares small video messages on Facebook and brief discussions on different digital platforms and links the community to National CBOs for HIV testing, condoms, lubricants, and needle exchange to reduce harm.

Yasir is associated with NAPUD since June 2021 and currently serves as a "Vice Chair" in the Executive Board. Yasir has been recognised as a "Community Hero" for his contribution to the community at the Asia level and received the HERO Award in 2022 for his work, leadership and commitment to the cause of the community.

\*Yasir's quotes or views