



**Exploring Perspectives of People in Recovery:
Peer Support Group for Drug
Rehabilitation within the Maldivian
Context**

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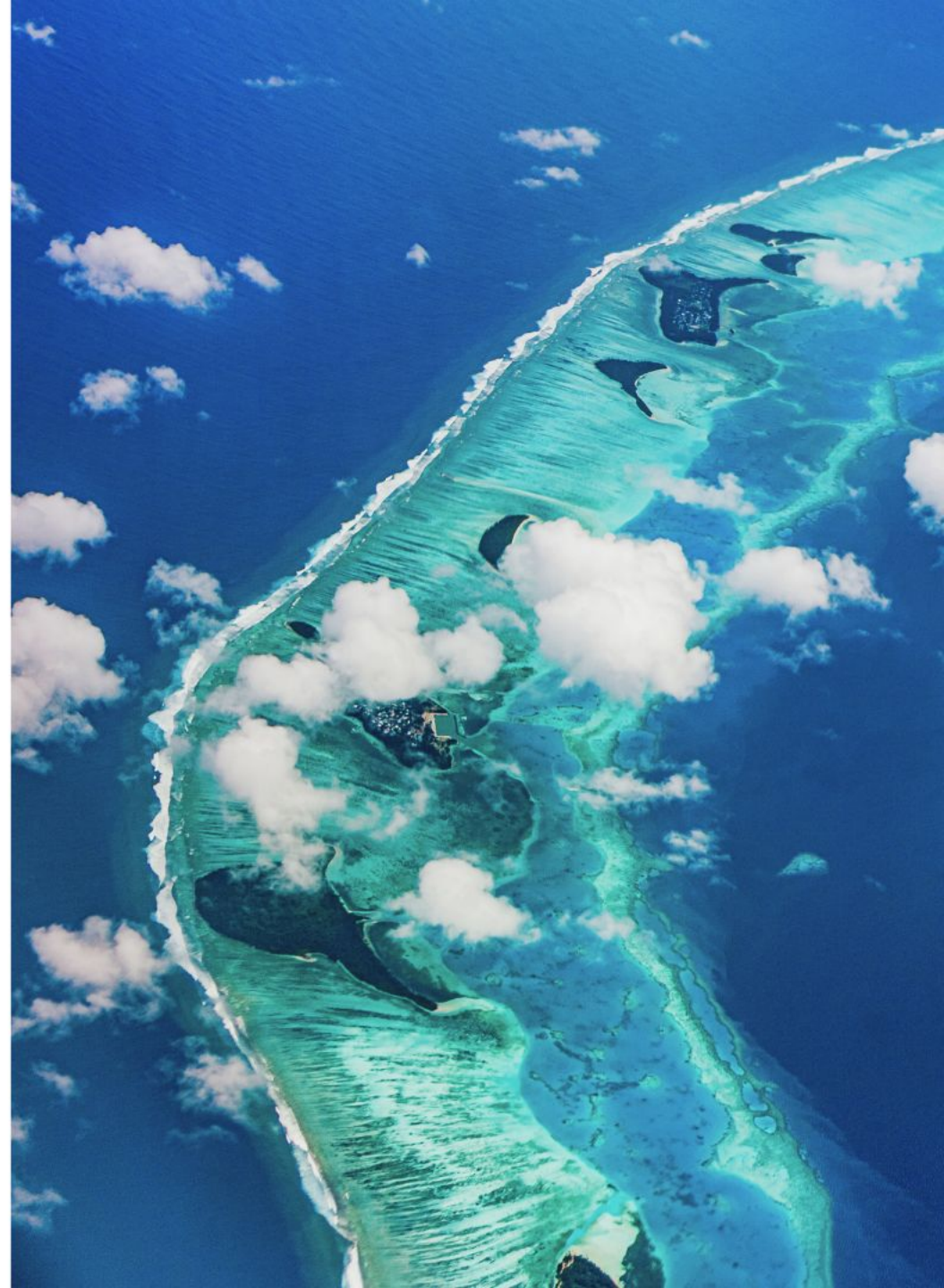
Introduction

Drug use rates have increased significantly in recent years.
(Situational Analysis of Drugs in the Maldives, 2021).

- Reported cases in 2020 - **106** (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2023)
- Reported cases in 2023 - **1122** (Maldives Police Services, 2023)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to develop peer support groups (PSGs) as part of their rehabilitation approaches.

Research objective: Document how PSGs are conducted and experiences of those involved in PSGs in the Maldives.



Literature

History of drug use in the Maldives

- Coincided with the development of tourism.
- Drug use rose dramatically in the early 90's
- High unemployment rates and a lack of educational opportunities

Implementation of drug legislation in Maldives

- First legislative Act of the Maldives in 1977
- Establishment of the National Drug Agency and Drug Court
- Mandated rehabilitation programs by the Drug Court

Evidence for PSGs as a treatment approach

- Mutual understanding and encouragement
- Sense of community and reduced isolation
- Increased engagement and better outcomes
- Adaptable and versatile

Method

Qualitative approach

- Semi structured interviews
 - Face to face and online interviews
 - Conducted in Dhivehi and English
- 1 facilitator and 1 participant from 2 NGOs based in Maldives
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Facilitator: Maldivian national, 18 and above, trained to conduct PSGs, have conducted atleast 5 sessions
 - Participant: Maldivian national, have attended a PSG in the last 6 months

Data collection period: December - June 2024

NGO Characteristics

NGO A	NGO B
Located in Greater Male' region	Located in South of Maldives

Findings

Conducting PSGs

- Free to attend
- Preserving anonymity
- Session structure
- Facilitators role
- Incorporating feedback

*“So one of the things is that **support groups are free.** You don’t need funding for it. **You just need motivated people.** And that is how it has been going on for a long (long) time”*

*“I believe it is **my responsibility to check up on the client and the stakeholders, make sure they get in contact and monitor them on the changes** that are happening to the client on a regular basis.”*

Findings

Participation in PSGs

- Lack of new participants and their consistency
- Barriers to participation
- Supporting participation
- Positive outcomes from participating

*“People still don't understand what addiction is. Still it's very difficult for people to believe, even people who are currently suffering from drug use disorders. It's very hard for them to even believe that it's a **chronic condition**. That relapse is a possibility, and that you need support groups.”*

*“The support groups even gave me **purpose** and helped me **overwrite my old routines**. I was **punctual and dressed well** to attend the sessions and it made me feel good and I learnt a lot.”*

Findings

Resource mobilization for PSGs and its challenges

- Government assistance
- Limited resources
- Visions for mobilizing resources

*“The groups are not being held currently at the standard we want to hold which is in line with how it is run in more developed countries in the world. **A dedicated space should be allocated to people like us** where we can recover from this disease without any obstacles in our way.”*

External pressures in running a PSG

- High drug use and easy accessibility
- Political pressure and influence of drug trade
- Lack of awareness regarding PSGs
- Stigma regarding drug addiction

*“Most of the counselors and other staff who are working in treatment, they have no idea of what peer support is. And because no private sector is allowed to have treatment. The only people who are going to treatment are going to the government centers. **And they are not much aware of support groups and their role in long term recovery.**”*

Findings

Improving PSGs in Maldives

- Need for support groups and further its development
- More drug rehabilitation services
- Consider input from PSGs

*“**Not everyone has to form an NGO** and do the same work to our capacity but hopefully they can set up their own support groups that focus on helping the individuals in their communities and **this idea will spread all over the Maldives.**”*

*“**Research-based decisions** need to be taken, it is important that **our input** is given as this will help in the long run.”*

Discussion and Conclusion

- PSGs are very promising for recovery
- Inconsistent meetings due to limited resources
- Govt/healthcare not aware of importance
- PSGs currently running very independently

Recomendations:

- More awareness on PSGs
- Integrate with government rehabilitation services and healthcare
- Capacity building to run PSGs
- Need for drug rehabilitation policy

Limitations

- Purposive sampling
- Difficulty finding participants due to stigma

Plans for future study

- Including more PSGs
- Documentary analysis
- Session observations

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