



ISSUE DESCRIPTION



COMMITTEE World Health Organization
ISSUE Tackling the Abuse of Illicit Drugs
SUBMITTED BY Zsófia Kállai, Chair of the World Health Organisation
APPROVED BY Virág Nyisztor, President of the General Assembly

Introduction

The issue of drug abuse extends far back in time including a wide range of chemical substances that are damaging to human-health. This issue has been and is still present in several societies, affecting not only the individuals' health and well-being but their families or even whole communities. In recent decades, there has been emerging interest in and increasing concern about illicit drug abuse that is related in part to a modest increase in drug use and increased demands for legislative changes regarding the use of illicit substances. Previous attempts such as The International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders prepared by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime had been made to assist Member States in advancing and providing treatment for drug use disorders. Despite all former tries however, the issue of illicit substance abuse could not be completely resolved.

Definition of Key Terms

Illicit drug abuse: The use of substances that are illegal to possess as they have no medical applications and can be dangerous to consume

Emotional instability: a tendency to exhibit unpredictable and rapid changes in emotions

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: It is an approach that helps patients identify irrational beliefs and negative thought patterns that may lead to emotional or behavioral issues

Detoxification: Medically assisted detoxication (often referred to as “detox”) allows the patient to rid their body of addictive substances in a safe environment

Most common illicit substances

When discussing the issue of the abuse of illicit drugs and thriving to find suitable solutions in the forum of the World Health Organisation, it may be useful to have some background knowledge about the most used ones of such substances. For further information regarding these drugs, you can refer to the table below.

	Cannabis	Heroin	Cocaine	Hallucinogens	Ecstasy
Definition	Cannabis is a psychoactive drug that comes from the Cannabis plant. It is used for both recreational and entheogenic purposes.	Heroin is one of a group of drugs called opioids. Opioids are substances that act on opioid receptors in the brain.	Cocaine is a stimulant made from processing leaves of the coca plant and usually comes in powder form.	Hallucinogens change the way a person perceives the world, affecting the senses, altering thinking, sense of time and emotions.	Ecstasy is a synthetic substance primarily used for recreational purposes.
Effects	The long-term effects of cannabis on the brain can include an increased risk of addiction. Long-term cannabis use can also harm: memory, concentration, intelligence, and one's ability to think and make decisions.	Some of the long-term effects of heroin include: oral health problems (damaged teeth, swelling of gums), skin problems, extreme constipation, and malnutrition, a weakened immune system, sleep problems and sexual function issue.	Long-term effects: stomach ulcers or damage to the intestines, most common side effects: severe depression, irritability, chest congestion, paranoia, loss of sexual desire, memory lapses, chronic cough, and violent behavior.	Hallucinogenic substances can lead to longer-lasting, recurring, or persistent psychosis.	The most common long-term effects include depression, anxiety, and paranoia. However, the substance has been linked to liver, kidney, and heart problems as well.

General Overview

The use of legal substances for non-medical purposes can have serious consequences regarding health. However, as Illicit drugs refer to highly addictive substances with no medical applications, the abuse of those are even more dangerous. Although in many countries around the world, different laws and regulations had been made to control illicit drug abuse and provide treatment for those involved, the issue is still present, concerning many people.

Causes

Illicit substances are used in different situations and frequencies, and for varying reasons, depending on the individual and their specific point in life. People can move between categories, with one stage not inevitably leading to another, and with no clearly defined start or end stage. However, the most recurrent causes include:

a) Unemployment

Unemployment is a key factor that can lead to illicit substance addiction. Impoverished working-age men are 18% more likely to face joblessness as poverty and unemployment form a harmful cycle. The cycle begins with unemployment heightening one's risk of poverty. Then, once in poverty, job hunting becomes more and more difficult due to economic bias, challenges in earning a college degree, racial bias, and a lack of job infrastructure in low-income areas. This cycle of unemployment-induced stress and anxiety increases the chance of falling into drug addiction. As stress leads to serious mental health problems and other illnesses such as irritable bowel syndrome, the individual might start taking certain medicines or non-medical substances to improve their condition. However, drugs can be highly addictive when taking the wrong amount.

b) Lower economic status

Medical care, sufficient housing and food, proper clothing, safety, and vocational training are all issues that people in lower economic class face. Impoverished communities are more likely to be at risk of addiction as financial instability fosters stress, decreases motivation, leading to addictive behaviors. Furthermore, with the lack of frequent medical examinations, these people face an even greater danger regarding substance abuse, as there is a high possibility for them to have already certain health-issues.

c) Lack of educational opportunities

The lack of educational opportunities especially in poorer countries, combined with other factors -such as a lack of motivation, absent adult role models and few recreational activities compound to create emotional instability in young people that can increase the likelihood of developing some kind of addiction. Furthermore, being that in these countries, proper education on possible dangers and effects of drug addiction is not provided, the younger generation faces the risk of illicit substance abuse and may fail to recognize later health problems and effects of drug dependence.

Impact

Substance use disorders, particularly when untreated, increase morbidity and mortality risks for individuals, can trigger substantial suffering and lead to impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Drug use disorders can result in reduction in productivity, premature mortality, increased health care expenditure, and costs related to criminal justice, social welfare, and other social consequences. About 35 million people are estimated to be affected by drug use disorders (harmful pattern of drug use or drug dependence).

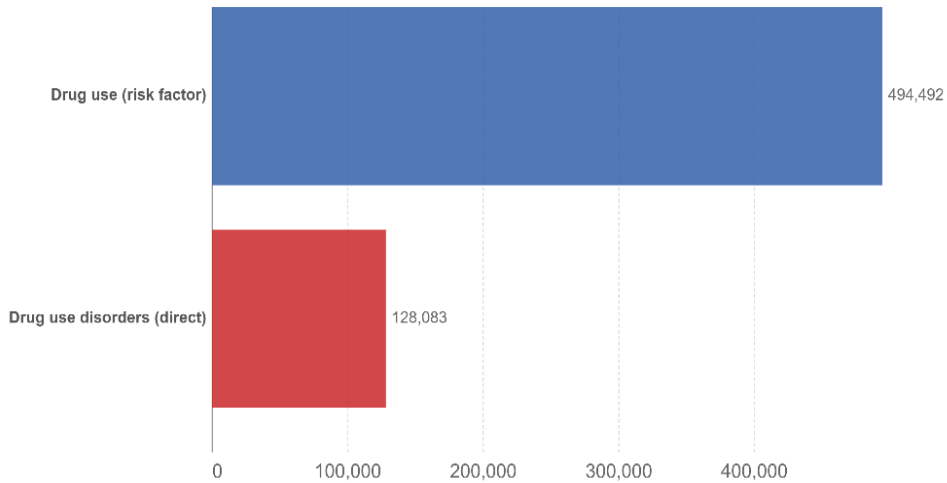
Charts

Number of deaths from illicit drugs, World, 2019



Deaths from drug use are distinguished by two measures:

- direct deaths from drug use disorders (in red). These are deaths which result from illicit drug overdoses.
- indirect deaths (in blue) which result from illicit drug use acting as a risk factor for the development of various diseases and injury.



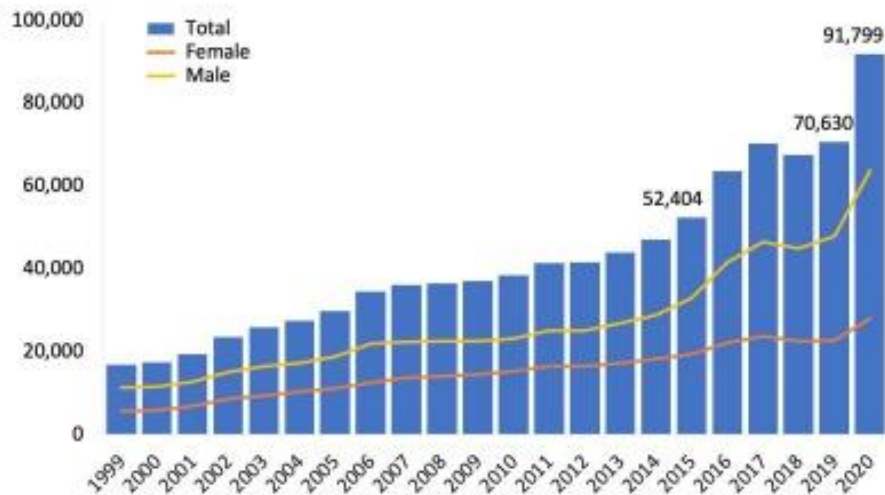
Source: IHME, Global Burden of Disease

OurWorldInData.org/drug-use • CC BY

Note: Illicit drugs are drugs that have been prohibited under international drug control treaties. They include opioids, cocaine, amphetamines and cannabis.

<https://ourworldindata.org/illicit-drug-use>

**Figure 1. National Drug-Involved Overdose Deaths*
Number Among All Ages, by Gender, 1999-2020**



*Includes deaths with underlying causes of unintentional drug poisoning (X40-X44), suicide drug poisoning (X60-X64), homicide drug poisoning (X85), or drug poisoning of undetermined intent (Y10-Y14), as coded in the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2020 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 12/2021.

<https://nida.nih.gov/sites/default/files/images/fig1od2020.jp>

Major parties involved

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime): Established to assist the UN in better addressing a coordinated, comprehensive response to the interrelated issues such as illicit trafficking in and abuse of drugs.

EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction): founded to provide the EU and its Member States with a factual overview of the European drug situation and response and a solid evidence base to support the drugs debate.

UNDOC/WHO: The Joint UNODC-WHO Program on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care is a collaboration between UNODC and WHO to support the development of comprehensive, integrated health-based approaches to drug policies that can reduce demand for illicit substances, relieve suffering and decrease drug-related harm to individuals, families, communities, and societies.

Possible Solutions and Approaches

Despite several policies and previous attempts to solve the issue of illicit drug abuse, there are still many people in need of help. One way of resolving this problem could be by putting health and community safety first. However, it requires a fundamental reorientation of policy priorities and resources, from failed punitive enforcement to proven health and social interventions. In measuring the impact of drug policies and assessing positive outcomes, it is far more important to focus on goals and measures that aim to reduce both the harms that are a direct consequence of drug use, such as fatal overdoses and dependence. Proven prevention, harm reduction, and treatment measures must be scaled up to meet the needs of people who use drugs. For treatment, one possible way could be to use certain medications that help reduce the level of substance in the patient's body. This is beneficial because sometimes substance withdrawal can cause unpleasant or even life-threatening physical symptoms. However, these medications do not treat the underlying behavioral causes of the addiction, therefore they are typically used in combination with other therapies, such as Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy.

Timeline of Events

1961- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs

1971- UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances

1977- The first WHO Model List of Essential Drugs was published.

1988- UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances

1993- EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction) was founded.

1997- UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) was established.

A Previous Attempt to solve the issue

Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs- 1961

This convention defined several substances (including opiates, coca-based products, and cannabis) as narcotic substances. It established a system by which such drugs were ranked according to harm and placed in one of four 'schedules' reflecting their risks and potential medical benefits. It required all countries to outlaw the production, supply, or transportation of those drugs for non-medical or scientific purposes. It also established systems for ensuring the regulated supply of those drugs for medical and scientific purposes.

Useful documents/websites:

Drug addiction and its relationship with poverty:

<https://borgenproject.org/drugaddiction/>

Major countries involved in the issue:

<https://www.michaelshouse.com/blog/5-world-countries-with-the-worst-drug-problems/>

Illicit drug use worldwide:

<https://ourworldindata.org/illicit-drug-use>

Bibliography:

World Health Organization on drug addiction (official website)

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/international-standards-for-the-treatment-of-drug-use-disorders>

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/prisons-and-health/partners/european-monitoring-centre-for-drugs-and-drug-addiction-emcdda>

<https://www.who.int/initiatives/joint-unodc-who-programme-on-drug-dependence-treatment-and-care>

Substance addiction (causes)

<https://adf.org.au/insights/why-do-people-use-alcohol-and-other-drugs/>

<https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/864954>

<https://borgenproject.org/drugaddiction/>

<https://dualdiagnosis.org/drug-addiction/economic-status/>

Global Commission on Drug Policy

<https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/the-five-pathways-to-drug-policies-that-work>

Illicit substances

<https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/illicit-drugs/>

<https://www.rehabguide.co.uk/cocaine-side-effects/>

<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/atods/drugs/types>

WHO- effects of drug addiction

https://www.who.int/health-topics/drugs-psychoactive#tab=tab_2

Problems of drug abuse and dependence

[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-66612-](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-66612-4_1)

[4_1https://www.banyantreatmentcenter.com/2020/12/11/history-of-drug-abuse-massachusetts/](https://www.banyantreatmentcenter.com/2020/12/11/history-of-drug-abuse-massachusetts/)

<https://dualdiagnosis.org/the-history-of-drug-abuse-and-how-its-changed/>

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/illicit-drug-use>

<https://www.arrowhealth.com.au/what-are-the-long-term-effects-of-ecstasy/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/health-effects/effects.html>

<https://www.midwestrecoverycenter.com/rehab-blog/what-are-the-long-term-effects-of-heroin-addiction/>

<https://skywoodrecovery.com/drug-addiction/damaging-long-term-effects-of-hallucinogens/>

<https://vertavahealthmassachusetts.com/blog/unemployment-substance-abuse/>

Treatments for drug addiction

<https://www.webmd.com/connect-to-care/addiction-treatment-recovery/successful-treatments-for-addiction>

<https://www.healthline.com/health/rational-emotive-behavior-therapy>