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Part Two: Social Implications of Drug Abuse

Lecture 3: Education

Objectives

By the end of this lecture, the students should be able to know the following:

1. Role of Education in Drug Abuse Prevention: Students will understand the significance of education and the contributions of various institutions in preventing drug abuse.
2. Short-term vs. Long-term Strategies: Students will analyze the balance between short-term measures and long-term strategies for effective drug abuse prevention.
3. Adolescence and Drug Use: Students will explore how developmental changes during adolescence influence drug use behaviors.
4. Cultural Perspectives on Drug Use: Students will discuss the impact of cultural attitudes and stigma on perceptions of drug use and prevention strategies.
5. Adapting Educational Approaches: Students will learn to tailor drug abuse prevention education to diverse contexts, especially in areas with limited educational access.

Education

Education serves as the primary method for preventing drug abuse. Besides educational institutions, various other environments play a crucial role in fostering learning and social interaction. For instance, homes, workplaces, and religious organizations are all vital settings for educating individuals of all ages. Most authorities advocate for the complete incorporation of drug abuse education within both public and private institutions, regardless of their religious or secular nature.

A frequently unaddressed question is whether societal or individual change should be the initial focus to effectively tackle the drug issue. Addressing root causes emphasizes the social factors that drive individuals to abuse drugs. Education is often perceived as a slow and indirect method, yielding results over an extended period by involving parents and gradually altering social norms to decrease experimentation and both occasional and regular drug use. The immediate strategy of controlling drug supply and the long-term strategy of demand reduction through education represent two ends of a spectrum that are often viewed as opposing forces. In truth, both approaches are vital components of a holistic strategy for preventing drug abuse.

To evaluate and understand human development, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has created a measurement known as the Human Development Index(HDI).

This index (1, p. 10 and p. 104) incorporates real purchasing power, health, and education metrics to offer a more comprehensive view of human advancement than what was previously provided through income comparisons. HDI primarily assesses individuals' capacity to lead long and healthy lives, highlighting the significance of education in both human and social development while guiding health planning efforts. By targeting specific groups, preventive health education aims to achieve two objectives: to prevent drug abuse and to foster human development (2, p. 9).

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Adolescence is a period marked by significant transformations in the normal developmental process. In various cultures, it is described by one observer as "a phase for cultivating a person's sense of self-identity, which entails distancing from parental influences and values while forming new social connections, values, and ideals." As young individuals separate from their parents, they seek to establish other meaningful relationships. However, the peers they choose to associate with can sometimes lead them to adopt drug use as part of their social interactions. Unfortunately, rather than enhancing social connections and self-identity, drug use may lead to apathy and emotional detachment, making it difficult for young people to form social bonds and resulting in increased emotional and social isolation (3, p. 1470).

While numerous officials express concern regarding drug abuse, some tend to downplay the associated risks (4, p. 18). The term "drugs" often evokes thoughts of illness, sometimes even a sense of shame, although this is less prevalent for alcohol and tobacco compared to other substances. This may explain why certain officials downplay the dangers linked to drug use. Attitudes toward individuals with health or social issues can vary significantly across different cultures.

In certain nations, only a small percentage of children attend school, and those who do may only remain for a few years. In such contexts, it is essential to tailor health education strategies for drug abuse prevention, especially for rural youth. Adaptive methods may involve creative out-of-school initiatives that align with community values and norms. When school attendance is low or family structures are less cohesive, it becomes necessary to modify educational interventions for both formal and informal settings.

Numerous authors have examined the effects of cannabis, the most commonly used illegal drug (5, p. 191 and p. 201). A particular study that consolidates this research suggests that both chronic and acute cannabis use can lead to a focus on the present moment, short-term memory impairment, and other cognitive deficits,

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as well as diminished sensory and perceptual tracking abilities. Additionally, it can negatively affect the emotional and social development of children and adolescents, along with their academic performance. The extent of these impairments is proportional to the amount of cannabis consumed, assuming all other factors remain constant. Another commentator (3, p. 1470) has summarized the potential effects of various drugs, stating that "drugs can hinder cognitive processes, making it challenging for young people to establish a coherent set of values and ideals. This decline in cognitive efficiency also results in poor academic outcomes and a subsequent drop in self-esteem, which can destabilize an individual's sense of identity." Drugs can become a central focus for individuals, misleading them into believing that these substances offer solutions to problems that actually require non-drug interventions. Both youth and adults may resort to drugs as a means of coping with issues that cannot be effectively addressed through such substances.

Educational strategies regarding drug awareness can be categorized into three main types: (a) the selected educational method (which can be direct, alternative, or indirect and selective); (b) the specific audience being addressed; and (c) the nature of the activities and instructional materials employed. Depending on the audience, a direct approach focused on substances may be implemented. While it is less common, it is also possible to target the environment of the individuals involved. Additionally, educational initiatives can be led by various figures such as adults, teachers, specialized educators, youth leaders, parents, or peers (4, pp. 28-29).

Funding for general youth education, which is often relatively limited, tends to lag behind other sectors. UNESCO reports that "public expenditure in education has continued to stagnate in most countries, accounting for about 3 percent of GNP for the developing countries of Asia as a whole" (4, p. 5). It remains unclear how drug abuse education fits into the broader national funding priorities. Additionally, there is a lack of data regarding the funding allocated to drug abuse education in relation to other educational initiatives. The costs of programs aimed

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at educating different target groups can vary significantly, ranging from minimal expenses for activities that utilize volunteer time or free resources from sponsors, to high costs for advanced mass media programs. A cost-effectiveness approach can help identify the most appropriate responses to drug abuse. Unfortunately, information on the costs and outcomes of various drug abuse education interventions is often unavailable. In the absence of such data, alternative educational strategies may be evaluated based on their costs and other criteria to assess their appropriateness for program implementation.

Mass media have been utilized in a variety of campaigns and programs. Nonetheless, the goals of these mass communication initiatives have frequently been vague and lacking in specific outcome objectives. They operate under the premise that it is possible to influence people's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in a favorable way. Various mediums such as television, radio, newspapers, posters, and brochures can reach a wide audience. However, the overall impact of these media on different target groups across various countries has not been thoroughly assessed. There are instances of research evaluating the effectiveness of mass media initiatives. Recently, specialized communication strategies have been analyzed for their potential to decrease drug demand and encourage alternative development. The remarkable success of child immunization campaigns in developing nations may offer valuable insights for addressing drug abuse issues. The potential application of similar methods to drug abuse education has been a topic of discussion. Qualitative audience research and focus groups have been suggested as ways to gain a deeper understanding of the common underlying factors contributing to drug abuse in different populations. More research is necessary to explore the influence of mass media on attitudes and behaviors across diverse social and cultural settings.

References for further reading & Notes

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2. UNESCO, "Prevention of drug abuse through education and information: An interdisciplinary responsibility within the context of human development", Paris, 1993.
3. K. E. Thomas, "Drugs and human development", in *The International Encyclopedia of education* Research and Studies, vol. 3, T. Husen and T. Postlethwaite, eds. (Oxford, Pergamon Press).
4. UNESCO, "Education for development: responding to new challenges" (ED- 93/CONF.202/LD. 12).
5. LaMond Tullis, *Handbook of Research on the Illicit Drug Traffic: Socioeconomic and Political Consequences* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1991).
6. Patricia Bandy and Patricia A. President, "Recent literature on drug abuse prevention and mass media: Focusing on youth, parents, women and the elderly", *Journal of Drug Education*, 1983.
7. Colin Fraser, "Communication and social mobilization for drug abuse control - What Prospects?" Paper for presentation to the senior management of UNDCP@ Vienna, 16 March 1994.

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