

Drug Problems

Objectives

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

1. Emphasize the significant rise in awareness, access to, and abuse of illicit drugs over the past 30 years, indicating a growing global concern.
2. Identify the populations most at risk for substance abuse, particularly focusing on age groups essential for productive work and vulnerable groups such as street children and youth misusing various substances.
3. Provide statistics on substance-related deaths and years of life lost due to drug dependence, illustrating the severe health impacts and societal costs associated with drug abuse.
4. Convey that existing data on drug-related issues is incomplete and likely underestimates the true extent of the problems related to addiction, suggesting a need for more comprehensive research and reporting.

1- Drug abuse problems: losing ground

Over the past three decades, there has been a significant rise in awareness of illegal drugs, their availability, and the associated abuse. While there are considerable gaps in data, reports from both official and unofficial sources indicate an increase in the misuse of major addictive substances. Findings from the United Nations, expert observations, and studies related to crime, education, employment, and health, all highlight serious issues in both developing and developed nations. Although comprehensive data quantifying these problems is lacking; there is a consensus that the most vulnerable populations are those in the age group most essential for the workforce. Additionally, other demographics, such as street children in developing countries and youth in various regions who abuse volatile solvents, thinners, and marijuana is also affected by substance misuse.

According to reports from the United Nations and various other sources, there has been a rise in drug abuse and its detrimental effects across many regions globally. It is estimated that nearly 5 million deaths each year are attributed to alcohol and tobacco (2, p. v), while injecting drug users account for approximately 200,000 annual fatalities (3, p. 4). In 1990, the estimated years of life lost due to disability from drug dependence were 39.3 million for males and 13.3 million for females worldwide (4, p. 219). Comprehensive global estimates of the overall burden from drug-related illnesses, lost productivity, and the expenses associated with other related conditions are currently unavailable. Given that numerous drug-related issues were not included in this summary, it is evident that the statistics provided for mortality, morbidity, disability, or impairment are not only incomplete but also likely underestimate the true impact of addiction disorders.

The patterns of drug abuse vary significantly across different countries, encompassing a range of substances, demographics of users, environments, and effects. A significant issue is the use of drugs in regions that cultivate opium/heroin, coca/cocaine,

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and cannabis. This issue can also be framed as a transition in drug consumption from developed nations to developing ones. When those who produce these drugs are also habitual users, they create a lasting market for their products; their own drug use is closely linked to ongoing illicit production. This scenario is currently observed in Pakistan, various Latin American countries, and other regions globally. The cycle of compulsive or regular use ensures that production continues, leading these producers to become victims of their own "success."

The production and illegal trafficking of opium/heroin, coca/cocaine, and cannabis are reported to be exceedingly high, whether based on official figures or the assessments of independent experts. Since 1989, estimates of opium production have ranged from 3,000 to 4,000 tonnes annually. In contrast, coca leaf, which is cultivated in fewer countries than opium, has seen an increase since 1988, rising from just under 295,000 tonnes to slightly more than 330,000 tonnes. Although these figures do not provide exact totals for global production, they do reflect the scale of worldwide supply, which is a crucial first step in analyzing the supply-demand relationship. This scale should be viewed in relation to commodities that may not have large volumes but possess extremely high value and unit costs. Both opium and coca are produced in developing nations where favorable growing conditions, isolation from law enforcement, and inexpensive labor are prevalent. The control of precursors and chemicals necessary for the production of illegal drugs has become increasingly challenging due to greater mobility of people, more porous borders, and diminished government authority in many regions. The exceptionally high profit margins allow for the hiring of new couriers, financing of insurgent groups, securing political protection, and providing financial backing to terrorists. The realm of illegal drug trafficking is brutal and fiercely competitive, with marginal and incompetent dealers often eliminated by rival gangs or law enforcement actions.

In conclusion, the illegal supply and demand for drugs have escalated, resulting in significant profits for a select few while offering only modest earnings to others. The rise in health issues and deaths, along with related challenges in families,

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education, and employment due to drug abuse, is widespread. Efforts to prevent and manage drug abuse are inadequate, and the foundation of knowledge supporting these efforts is even less robust. Although there is a chance that this troubling situation could improve, it is more probable that it will worsen.

2- Lack of productive employment and impact on the workplace

The workplace is an integral component of the community, mirroring both its advantages and challenges. Approximately 30 percent of the global workforce is not engaged in productive employment, while young individuals are entering the job market at a pace that exceeds job creation, leading to a growing number of unemployed individuals and their associated issues. Substance abuse is commonly found among the same age groups that lack productive employment, heightening the susceptibility of this demographic to various social problems.

Substance abuse poses significant challenges for employers who face competitive demands to boost productivity. Concurrently, these employers need to address important human resource matters to remain operational. Recent studies and reports indicate that illegal drugs, along with alcohol and tobacco, lead to considerable issues in the workplace. Additionally, the misuse of prescription medications—legal drugs used irresponsibly or yielding unforeseen consequences—has become a major concern for employers, employees, and business representatives.

Tasks that demand advanced judgment, continuous focus, immediate recall, and precise motor skills can be easily affected by drug use. Safety-sensitive jobs and involve direct responsibility for the well-being of others are especially at risk for drug-related impairment. Both illegal and legal substances can slow reaction times, impair fine motor abilities, and alter mood. Stimulants like cocaine can lead to compulsive behavior, negatively impacting both work and family life. Individuals

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who abuse drugs tend to have higher rates of absenteeism, workplace accidents, medical claims, and decreased productivity compared to non-users. The significant costs associated with drug abuse can be mitigated through thorough pre-employment evaluations, effective on-the-job supervision, regular prevention initiatives, and timely interventions when necessary.

3- Implications of rural and urban poverty

While both rural and urban poor individuals share the common challenge of constantly seeking the necessities of life, their involvement with drug issues differs significantly. Rural poverty is primarily linked to the supply of illegal drugs, whereas urban poverty is more associated with both the distribution and demand for these substances. In rural areas, illicit crop cultivation offers farmers a chance to earn more than they would from legal crops, despite the risks involved. The extensive shadow economy fueled by illegal drug profits has woven drugs and drug money into the very fabric of society, creating a level of dependence among various social and economic sectors on this relatively new source of income. Consequently, the social implications of drugs extend far beyond what is captured in statistics related to production, consumption, or their effects.

Individuals with low incomes frequently allocate their funds towards substances like drugs, alcohol, or tobacco rather than essentials such as food, clothing, and housing. The occasional use of addictive substances can escalate into habitual or compulsive consumption, which not only increases demand but also secures a market for suppliers. When suppliers themselves become regular or compulsive users, altering the patterns of illicit growth and supply-demand becomes increasingly challenging. In situations of poverty, the immediate gain from risky

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ventures may be seen as more appealing than the prospect of stable, albeit delayed, income with lower risk. It is crucial for development programs to analyze the economic motivations of farmers and peasants rather than rely on theoretical assumptions or superficial impressions about their behaviors. Providing a reliable assurance of a modest income over an extended period from legal crops could be enough to encourage farmers to engage in alternative development initiatives.

The urban poor lack the same opportunities for crop production that the impoverished in isolated rural areas have. However, those living in cities face a greater risk of various forms of exploitation and are more likely to engage in jobs within the illegal distribution network. There are more negative role models and chances to earn illicit income among the urban poor compared to their rural counterparts.

1- Marginalization

Drug abuse can be perceived differently across various sociocultural contexts, ranging from normative to marginal, deviant, or criminal behavior. The processes of marginalization affect not only individuals but also the actions of governments and communities. A significant number of people are moving from rural poverty to urban slums, leading to the emergence of shanty towns plagued by severe issues related to housing, health, and education. Young individuals, in particular, are at a heightened risk of drug abuse, especially involving inexpensive solvents, volatile substances, and marijuana. Drug subcultures can quickly form, imparting drug-related youth practices. Those labeled as drug abusers often face challenges in reintegrating into the broader community. A common issue is the indifference or denial regarding the struggles of individuals with substance abuse disorders, whether this attitude comes from individuals, communities, or governments. Addressing the challenge of avoiding stereotypes and stigma associated with drug problems is complex. A constructive approach could involve distinguishing between drug-using behavior and

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the individual condemning the illegal actions while recognizing the person's potential for positive change.

In the isolated regions of developing nations, there may be no governing body to uphold the rule of law. Instead, local tribal, religious, ethnic, or other groups might exert control over an area with little regard for national policies. In numerous countries, social and political institutions seem to be in a more fragile state now compared to previous decades. In severe instances, these institutions appear to be under threat, having lost both legitimacy and stability. When governments become disconnected from their citizens and lose control over economic activities, civil society suffers. This environment of civil discontent, violence, terrorism, and corruption fosters conditions that are conducive to the cultivation, production, and misuse of illicit drugs, and this relationship can be reciprocal.

There are numerous connections between drugs, delinquency, and crime. In certain instances, the misuse of drugs can result in criminal activity, while in other situations, criminal behavior may occur before drug use. The wider consequences of drug abuse and crime can heighten social tensions and other forms of deviance, placing extra strain on institutions like families. Crimes associated with drugs and terrorism contribute to societal instability and overwhelm law enforcement, judicial systems, and correctional facilities. When drug-related issues reach a significant scale, they can marginalize not only governments and institutions but also individuals. In severe cases, these challenges may give rise to parallel governments, where drug lords wield substantial personal and financial influence.

2- Future challenges

Drug abuse, lacking a singular cause or straightforward solution, continues to rise in various parts of the globe, accompanied by numerous associated issues. The consequences of drug misuse are particularly severe in certain areas of both developing

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and developed nations, manifesting in forms such as illness, accidents, fatalities, crime, decreased productivity, and other significant challenges. When not properly regulated, drug abuse hinders both human and social progress and is intertwined with persistent issues like disease, poverty, unemployment, and violence. The prevalence of illicit drug use and its associated problems varies greatly from one country to another, characterized by several factors: drug sales tend to be highly lucrative and the products are easily marketed. Additionally, these substances have profound effects on the brain and behavior, impacting a wide array of human activities.

Advancements in drug abuse prevention rely on multiple factors. Firstly, our approaches to addressing drug-related issues must prioritize the individuals, communities, and institutions involved. People should be viewed as the core of the issue and the starting point for any solutions. This concept will manifest differently in rural versus urban settings and will also be shaped by socioeconomic factors. Secondly, alternative development strategies in rural regions must be tailored to the specific conditions of the target areas, which will vary among different communities. Thirdly, similar to rural contexts, urban drug challenges require a personalized evaluation and response that leverage local strengths. For both urban and rural initiatives to be successful, they must be supported by various mechanisms and involve long-term planning. Effectiveness in both contexts hinges on local community backing and alignment with public policy. The profits generated from illegal drug trafficking are staggering, surpassing the scale of significant international development initiatives.

In 1991, member countries of OECD provided \$55.5 billion for official development assistance (4, p. 274). Profits from the illicit drug traffic in cocaine, heroin and cannabis have been estimated at \$85 billion by the OECD Financial Action Task Force (5, p. 6). This estimated amount of laundered money is larger than the GNP of three-fourths of the world's economics.

The concentration of drug-related wealth among a select few individuals is as significant as the amount itself. Moreover, those who gain wealth from illegal drugs,

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regardless of how they utilize their money, are not held accountable to the public. The accumulation of vast amounts of money outside official governmental and economic frameworks poses a threat to the stability of governments, economic institutions, and civil society. Additionally, the illegal activities that generate this wealth incur substantial social costs related to governance, healthcare, crime prevention, and the integrity of public institutions and officials. Regardless of whether the social costs associated with drug abuse and its consequences outweigh any advantages of illicit funds, fundamental principles of social justice dictate that such funds should not be equated with money earned through legitimate means. By any measure, these illicit funds cannot simply be viewed as another instance of wealth redistribution through an unregulated, alternative market.

AIDS has significantly altered the dynamics and consequences of drug abuse. Within the realm of illegal drugs, the HIV virus is primarily transmitted in two ways: through the sharing of contaminated needles or syringes, and through the extensive travel of infected injecting drug users. While heterosexual transmission remains the leading cause of AIDS in numerous countries, the practice of drug injection is prevalent, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where there are high numbers of seropositive injectors. Recent studies indicate that in cities like Bangkok and Edinburgh, as well as in the Indian state of Manipur, the prevalence of HIV among drug users has surged from 0 to 40 percent in less than two years. Individuals aged 15 to 45 are often the most affected by AIDS, with a significant number of deaths occurring among skilled workers in Africa. This situation is creating a rising population of young orphans and dependent older relatives who will face severe social and economic challenges.