

Committee: Youth Assembly Topic 1 (YA1)

Topic: Addressing the issue of illegal drug consumption by teenagers

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Topic Introduction

The illegal drug consumption by teenagers, a worldwide issue that has been around for decades, can lead to said teenagers not developing correctly and causing many problems in their academic and social lives. Puberty is a time when teenagers are curious and try out different things, while some get crushed under peer pressure or anxiety, and that is where the issue of illegal drug consumption by teenagers comes in, as they want to enjoy life fully and become independent and free. A few individual, social and cultural reasons can influence their risk of engaging in drugs and their drug choices, for example, their family's history of drug abuse or the pressure from their friend group. All these factors lead teenagers to believe that drug usage is something worth trying, despite the negative effects on them, both mentally and physically. The misuse of drugs could very well have negative effects, such as organ damage. The long-term use of drugs could also lead to serious liver damage or failure and further stimulants can cause heart attacks under high blood pressure. Overdose could also be a possibility, which, other than the risk of potential death, could result in long-term health complications, such as brain damage. Lastly, misuse of drugs could have a major social effect on teenagers, as drug abuse can strain or break relationships with family and friends, leading to isolation from loved ones and social activities. This could also cause potential financial and legal issues because users might spend all their money or commit crimes like larceny to buy and find drugs. As a result, they can end up struggling with poverty and against the law. To help adolescents avoid these issues, they should be taught by their parents and in school the consequences of using drugs and the importance of making healthy choices. Drugs are used as an escape for many teenagers, and often they are not able to stop by themselves; this is why prevention and intervention are essential.

Definition of key concepts

Substance abuse

“The excessive use, or misuse, of any substance for its intoxicating stimulant, or narcotic effects; the abuse of alcohol or (esp. illegal) drugs.”¹

¹"Substance Abuse, N. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary." *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com/dictionary/substance-abuse_n?tab=factsheet#20110953100.



Drug tolerance

“A condition that occurs when the body gets used to a medicine so that either more medicine is needed or different medicine is needed.”²

Withdrawal

“The syndrome of often painful physical and psychological symptoms that follows discontinuance [quitting] of an addictive drug.”³

Comorbid

“Existing simultaneously with and usually independently of another medical condition.”⁴ Used in the context of a person having multiple medical conditions caused by drug use/adding on to drug use.

Synthetic drugs

“Drug[s] with properties and effects similar to a known hallucinogen or narcotic but having a slightly altered chemical structure, especially such a drug created in order to evade restrictions against illegal substances.”⁵ The drugs are artificially modified (by humans) and are often used in medical settings.

Gateway drugs

“Those that may lead to the use of other types of high-risk addictive drugs.”⁶

Background Information

Rise of Drug Abuse

Since the 1960s, drug use among teenagers has significantly evolved, influenced by various social, cultural, and economic factors. It began with the rise of LSD and a rebellion against traditional norms, which promotes drug use as a means of expanding consciousness. This period led to increased drug scheduling and the establishment of the Controlled Substance Act in 1970 organising drugs based on

² "NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms." *Comprehensive Cancer Information - NCI*, www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/drug-tolerance.

³ "Definition of WITHDRAWAL." *Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Dictionary*, 5 Jan. 2024, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/withdrawal.

⁴ "Definition of COMORBIDITY." *Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Dictionary*, 3 2024, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/comorbidity.

⁵ *New York State Department of Health*, www.health.ny.gov/professionals/narcotic/docs/synthetic_drugs_faq.pdf.

⁶ Callahan, Liam. "What Drugs Are Considered Gateway Drugs? | Gateway Drugs." *San Antonio Recovery Center*, 26 Dec. 2023, www.sanantoniorecoverycenter.com/rehab-blog/what-drugs-are-considered-gateway-drugs/#:~:text=Gateway%20drugs%20are%20those%20that,using%20other%20drugs%20over%20time.



their danger and medical use. Once again tracking back to the 1960s, rise in drug use such as LSD, rebellion against traditional norms, and promotion of drug use as a means of expanding consciousness among teenagers and their peers. Which led to the increase in drug scheduling and set the groundwork for future drug enforcement policies in 1970. Furthermore, a law called the Controlled Substance Act was passed. This law organised drugs into different categories based on how dangerous they were and whether they had medical uses.

In 1980 the rise of crack cocaine addiction in urban areas among youth led to drug addictions and violence among youths. 'Just Say No' campaign (anti-drug). Although this seems to be centred on the United States and the Western world, other regions such as Latin American countries, particularly Colombia, Mexico and Peru, have been significantly impacted by the drug trade due to their roles as major producers and transit points. For instance, Colombia, known for cocaine production, has faced extensive violence and corruption with drug cartels. In Mexico, drug consumption had a profound impact on society due to drug cartels. And in 1990 club drugs became popular in nightclubs, and drug abuse rose. There was a notable rise in the use of prescription medication (painkillers) among teenagers, according to NIDA approximately 16% of high school seniors from the United States misuse prescription drugs at least once in their lifetime. Expanding awareness has taken place in schools and campaign communities. Starting from the 2000s, a mass amount of teenagers began to misuse prescription medications, such as painkillers due to the lack of supplies and discussions on legalising marijuana began to influence how teenagers viewed drugs. By 2010 synthetic drugs became very popular and dangerous and vaping devices became trendy, often used by a large percentage of teenagers. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic led to an increasing amount of drug use due to stress and mental health issues. More attention was given to teenagers who used drugs to educate them on the danger of drug use and help them with any mental health issues. For instance, the U.S. saw a significant rise in opioid overdoses during the pandemic, prompting expanded virtual counselling and support for teenagers. The United Kingdom reported increased alcohol and cannabis use among teenagers, leading to online educational campaigns about drug risks and mental health support.

Over the decades, the patterns of drug use among teenagers have shifted dramatically. From the psychedelic 1960s to the synthetic drug surge in the 2010s, each period has brought new challenges and responses. Addressing teenage drug use requires ongoing education support, and international cooperation to mitigate the complex factors driving this persistent issue.

Impact on teenagers

Physical

Drugs can have profound mental and physical impact on teenagers, often with long-lasting consequences. First their body and their brain get weaker, and many basic organs get damaged from all these substances. Some examples are the body's bones which get weakened and more fragile because they cannot absorb and use calcium to remain strong. Therefore, users can get injured more



easily and not heal as fast or fully from previous injuries. Also, drugs impact the heart and blood of a user and can lead to chronic diseases like high blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia) or even cancer. Moreover, drugs interfere with the proper function of the nerves and the brain of an adolescent addict thus the brain gets slowed down on how it proceeds information and controls the rest of the body. The reaction time gets worse, strength fades away and the person cannot think that fast anymore.⁷

Mental

Drugs also affect the mode and the emotions of an addict. For a short period of time after using drugs they can have positive effects on the mood and emotions of the person but in the long run they have a higher risk than nonusers to cause mental health problems including depression, anxiety, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and very often suicide. Especially considering that the teen body and brain are still developing until the age of 26, consequently using drugs before that as a teenager can have a lot more life lasting effect and a very high risk of mental health issues.

Social

Teen drug use also has many effects on social life and academic performance of teenage users. Studies have shown that teenagers that use drugs often miss school and when they attend their classes they are not focused and do not pay attention to the lesson. Drug addiction can thus lead to very poor grades and memory difficulties⁸ but also very often to communication and social skills problems. Therefore, in these cases it is challenging to find friends and get accepted by peers. It is also common for substance-abusing youth to disengage from sports, hobbies and spend more time on their own, locked in their room or far from home, where parents cannot find them, check on them and communicate with them. All this happens also because the adolescent brain gets addicted to something very easily, a lot more than the adult brain. Overall, drug addicts get marginalised from society and therefore tend to be mostly surrounded by other users, making it difficult for them to integrate back to society.

1960 - 1967	LSD uses rose, challenging traditional norms.
October 27, 1970	Increased drug scheduling establishing future policies.
October 27, 1986	Crack cocaine addiction surged, leading to anti-drug campaigns.

⁷ Bradfordhealth. "Damaged Organs in Drug and Alcohol Abuse - Bradford Healthservices." Bradford Health Services, 13 Apr. 2014, bradfordhealth.com/damaged-organs-i-drug-alcohol/.

⁸ "Teen Drug Use: The Effects: Signs of Drug Abuse." *Green Hill Recovery*, 17 Sept. 2021, greenhillrecovery.com/teen-drug-use/.



1990s	Club drugs and prescription painkillers abuse grew.
November 2012	Prescription medication misuse and marijuana legalisation discussions rose.
2014, 2015	Synthetic drugs and vaping became popular.
December 31, 2019 - 2021	COVID-19 pandemic increased drug use due to excessive stress.

Major countries/ organisations and alliances

Albania

Albania has taken steps to address drug use through education and prevention programs in schools and communities, the government collaborates with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to raise awareness about drug abuse and provides support for rehabilitation and treatment services.

Canada

Canada has implemented a balanced approach combining prevention, education, and harm reduction. Programs such as the Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol, and Drug Survey (CSTADS) gather data to inform policy and intervention strategies. Additionally, the country has introduced mental health support and youth-focused substance use education campaigns.

Morocco

Morocco has initiated prevention and awareness campaigns targeting youth focusing on the dangers of drug use. The country collaborates with international organisations to enhance its drug prevention strategies and provides rehabilitation services to support those struggling with addictions. Education programs in schools and community outreach initiatives are also part of Morocco's efforts to combat teen drug use.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has focused on comprehensive drug education programs in schools, harm reduction strategies, and support services. Programs like FRANK, a government-run drug education service, provide information and advice on drug use. The country has also invested in community-based initiatives and targeted interventions to support at-risk youths.



United States

The United States implemented various educational campaigns, such as the “Just Say No” campaign in the 1980s and the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) program, aimed at educating children and teenagers about the dangers of drug use. More recently, the focus has shifted to prevention and treatment, with initiatives like the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and the expansion of mental health support services.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E)

In 1983, the ‘Drug Abuse Resistance Education’ also known as D.A.R.E. was founded. It aimed to educate youth on the danger and consequences they may face with the usage of any type of drugs, as well as how to resist peer pressure throughout classroom lessons. The organisation also engages parents to support youth in all their activities and events throughout their lives. While this is primarily in the US, it has been also adapted to many other regions such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many other parts of Europe.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Another main alliance that took part in the action to help resist drugs was the ‘National Institute on Drug Abuse’, NIDA, which conducts research and support for drug use as well as developing treatments. Also provided more resources for education as well as awareness of the consumption of drugs for youth.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’ (SAMHSA)

‘Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration’ (SAMHSA) was a major organisation to stop teenage drug usage. The SAMHSA provided funds, treatment, and research projects related to substance abuse or mental health. Resource development was also created with more guidelines, manuals, and training materials.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Lastly, ‘The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’ commonly known as UNODC, helped countries develop and implement international drug control policies and treaties. They also work to combat illicit drug trafficking, crime, and terrorism by promoting international cooperation, providing technical assistance, and implementing drug control and crime prevention strategies worldwide.



Previous attempts to solve the issue

Prescription Monitoring Programs (PMPs)

In the 2000s prescription monitoring programs (PMPs), aimed to track prescription drug dispensing and prevent misuse. These programs managed to reduce 'Doctor shopping', which is the act of getting different prescriptions from different doctors.

"Not Even Once" campaign

The "Not Even Once"⁹ Methamphetamine campaign started the 'Meth Project' to reduce the amount of Methamphetamine use and highlight the danger of it. However, most attempts were unsuccessful or had little to no effect on the issue.

Possible solutions

Education and awareness with school-based programs

Schools and teachers can play a very vital role in preventing students from potential drug abuse because they will be among the first to notice warning signs of drug abuse such as falling grades or regular absences from class. School-based programs should be implemented to educate students on risks of drugs and the consequences on their health. These programs could be organised from the school itself, or experts on the topic from hospitals or mental health facilities could be brought to the school to educate the students.

Community programs or clubs to support teenagers with positive peer influence

Peer pressure is when you do something because you want to feel accepted and valued by your friends. This is often the case in teenagers who try out illicit drugs or alcohol because they don't want to feel left out from their friend group and be cool. Peer pressure can also be positive and to solve such issues community programs or clubs should be established to encourage youth to have a positive influence on those around them and inspire them not to take part in illicit activities. The possibility of an adolescent doing drugs if his friend group is against it is very low because they will have positive peer pressure on him, and he will change his mind so that he fits in.

⁹ "School Projects — #notevenonce®." #notevenonce®, notevenonce.org.au/school-projects.



Policy and regulations

Strict regulations on the selling and advertising of drugs should be enforced by the police so that they don't reach minors and teenagers. Availability should be reduced, and sellers should be monitored. Not only illicit drugs, but also prescription drugs can be dangerous for consumers' health if they are being misused. Therefore, also prescription drug sales should be monitored to keep an eye on the amount that is being used by one person. In case of overdoses, this could also lead to serious health problems.

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