

GIVE DRUG ADDICTS HOPE NOT DESPAIR

Illicit drug use destroys lives and communities, undermines human development and generates crime.

Its use impacts the individual, families and the community. It affects public health, the economy, social well-being and mental illness.



THE UNITED NATIONS TREATIES ON DRUGS

Fortunately, the United Nations has provided global leadership on the illicit drug problem through three comprehensive international drug treaties in 1961, 1971 and 1988.

These treaties established a control system which has been remarkably successful in containing the world's drug problem to a mere 5% annual prevalence. There has been no explosion in illicit drug use because of these treaties.

Additionally, Article 33 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the responsibility of governments to protect children from the use and trafficking of drugs.



REDUCING ILLICIT DRUG USE

Some nations have dramatically reduced drug use and reversed drug epidemics, especially among youth.

They have done so by applying three core principles.



1. PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

The only proven method for reducing and avoiding substance abuse is positive prevention which stops drug use by preventing first drug use. This is done by building upon community and family factors and reducing and eliminating risk factors. If first drug use happens, then positive prevention inhibits regular use.

2. TREATMENT

Drug treatment programs prove that drug use is treatable. It breaks the drug cycle and leads to positive lifestyles. Abstinence based treatment can take numerous forms, from community-based support group sessions to intensive, inpatient professional care. The goal is to restore individual health, dignity and public safety.

The average length for a drug treatment program to begin to be effective is three months. Six to eight months is recommended. Treatment need not be voluntary, as mandatory treatment has proven to be just as successful.

Family support is crucial in helping drug addicts recover. It is important to support measures to strengthen family relationships, nurturing and bonding.



3. ENFORCEMENT

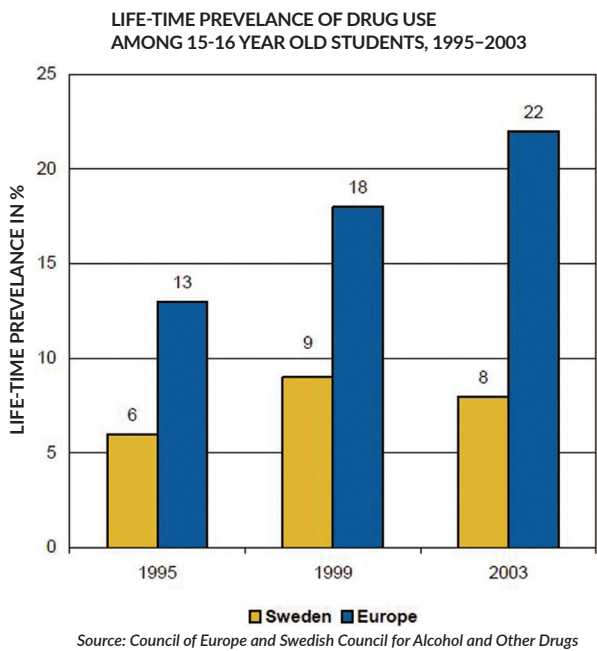
Law enforcement is an important part of the effort to reduce drug use. It increases public safety and reduces the availability of drugs.

An alternative to conviction and a court record, is to allow charges to be suspended if the offender agrees to take treatment and be monitored through regular urinalysis and counselling. Those who complete the program, drug free, receive a suspended sentence or a conditional discharge. Those who fail are required to return to the regular court system for sentencing.

SWEDEN'S DRUG ROLE MODEL

Sweden is a country noted for its liberal views. The country stands out, however, as a model for a more restrictive drug policy. From the 1960's to the 1970's Sweden experienced a large scale problem, which created a drug epidemic. In 1998, Sweden changed its drug policy.

Its policy now includes strong law enforcement and mandatory treatment. Treatment facilities are widely available. As a result of its policy, Sweden has the lowest rate of drug use in Europe.



The illegal drug use among 15-16 year old students in Sweden amounted to 8%, just a third of the European average (22%). The moderate decline recorded in Sweden contrasted the overall upward trend as average life-time prevalence of drug use in Europe rose over the same period from 18% to 22%.

SAY NO TO HARM REDUCTION AND LEGALIZATION POLICIES

Harm reduction is based on the notion that addiction is hard to stop and that individuals will continue to use drugs. Therefore, society should live with the non-medical use of drugs and treat it only as a life style choice.

Harm reduction policies include:

- decriminalizing marijuana;
- reducing and eliminating penalties for drug offenses;
- providing government supervised drug injection sites;
- establishing needle exchange programmes;

These policies assume that the addict is weak, helpless and cannot stop his/her use of drugs. This results in the addict's often terrifying death. It is a callous approach to drug addiction.

Legalization of drugs makes drugs accessible and socially acceptable. It brings drugs into the mainstream and normalizes use. As a result, the consumption of drugs is increased, especially in young people who equate legalization with a lower degree of harm. Since legalization of medical marijuana in Colorado in 2006, consumption has increased – especially by young people by more than 30%. When marijuana was legalized in Colorado for recreational use in 2015, traffic fatalities involving marijuana during the first 6 months of 2015 climbed to 56% higher than in the first 6 months in 2010.

MARIJUANA

There are 162 million consumers of marijuana world-wide in the 15-64 age group.

The high use of marijuana by youth is frequently based on a mistaken belief that there is little risk in using the drug. This is a myth.

The health risk of marijuana use has increased today due to the rising levels of THC (the chemical responsible for most of marijuana's psychological effects). Levels have increased from 1% in the mid 1970's to approximately 8% today.

- There is a 6-8 point decrease in IQ for adolescents who use marijuana from an early age.
- Marijuana impairs concentration and decision-making, reaction time, memory and executive functioning, the ability required to safely operate a vehicle and concentration at school or work.
- There is a strong relationship between marijuana use and anxiety and mood disorders, as well as suicidal tendencies.
- Acute marijuana use can trigger panic attacks and anxiety.
- Marijuana is addictive. When use begins in the teenage years the overall risk of dependence is 17% and for those who progress to daily use, the risk of dependence is as high as 50%.



Donations to REAL Women of Canada toward the cost of preparing this pamphlet would be very much appreciated.

WOMEN BUILDING A BETTER SOCIETY

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