

Local Councils Against Drugs

1st Annual Conference

2014

Swieqi Local Council

Date: Friday, 21st November 2014

Venue: Radisson St. Julian's / Radisson Golden Sands

Main Topic: Can Drugs Lead to Poverty?

Proposal

Can Drugs Lead to Poverty?

- When it comes to drug addiction, one of the most common stereotypes people have is that those belonging to marginalized sections of the society are more affected by it. There is no denying the fact that people living in poverty are more likely to experiment with drugs. However, the opposite also holds true. People who abuse drugs are more likely to be poor. Also, we all know that even people in high positions in society are affected by this problem.
- Firstly, drugs, especially the hard drugs such as cocaine and heroin, don't come cheap. People usually have to shell out a large amount of money to purchase a small quantity of these drugs. Often, people lack the means to purchase these drugs. An addicted person may resort to anti-social behavior such as stealing money to purchase drugs. Drug addicts may also indulge in other anti-social activities to meet their requirements. This starts a vicious cycle that destroys the life of a person. People with drug abuse spend a large amount of money to sustain their habits. They may end up selling all their assets to purchase drugs.
- Secondly, drug addiction damages the physical and mental health of a person. The productivity of the person goes down. People who abuse drugs may end up

losing their jobs. As the dependence on the drugs increase, people find it hard to manage a full time job. Drug addiction also has a severe negative effect on job performance of individuals. As drugs take control of their lives, they may lose their job, home, family and friends. Consuming drugs and spending money on them can push people into extreme poverty and may completely ruin their lives.

- Thirdly, drug addiction makes people prone to physical illnesses. Drug abuse weakens the immune system of the body and jeopardizes the well-being of a person. The medical expenses of a person may increase. This may lead to financial instability and push people into poverty.

The Family and Social Stability

Fast-paced social, economic and technological changes present a challenge to the stability and influence of the family. The family is often viewed as the basic source of strength, providing nurturance and support for its individual members as well as ensuring stability and generational continuity for the community and culture. In reality, the family is far more complex. At least I see four conceptual views of the family.

- First, it may be seen as protecting and sustaining both strong and weak members, helping them to deal with stress and pathology while nurturing younger and more vulnerable members
- Secondly, the family may be a source of tension, problems and pathology, influencing weaker members in harmful ways, including destructive drug or alcohol use.
- Thirdly, it may be viewed as a mechanism for family members to interact with broader social and community groups, such as peer groups, schools, work colleagues and supervisors and persons associated with religious institutions.
- Fourthly, the family may be seen as an important point of intervention - a natural organizational unit for transferring and building social and community values

Rapid social, economic and technological change may, under certain circumstances, weaken the sense of family and reduce the sense of belonging to other people, groups and places. Stability of relationships, environment and expectations is a powerful force in helping people manage their lives, especially important for children and young adults. In some societies, the classical problem of balancing discipline and control of children with nurturing support to encourage their exploration, understanding of the world and

self-realization may be complicated by substance abuse problems as well as a wide range of other conditions. Families can have a powerful influence on shaping the attitudes, values and behavior of children, **but how do they compare with peers in terms of influence on drug taking?**

Prevention of drug problems can employ knowledge about family dynamics to address personal and social concerns of family members that otherwise would lead to drug abuse, both with respect to dysfunctional as well as intact families. In this regard, it is important to avoid assuming for example that **parents are invariably responsible for the problems experienced by their children or that substance users can be blamed for all the problems experienced by the families in which they live**

Family factors that may lead to or intensify drug use are thought to include prolonged or traumatic parental absence, harsh discipline, failure to communicate on an emotional level, chaotic or disturbed members and parental use of drugs, which provides a negative role model for children. **But this is not always the case.** Lack of household stability, income or employment for a parent may increase stress on the family and its vulnerability, pushing marginal individuals to find "solutions" or solace in alcohol or drugs. Single-parent families may have increased difficulties, with the single parent being forced to function beyond his or her ability.

Health

Health problems impair family life and productive employment, diminish the quality of life and may threaten survival. **How can we tackle this to avoid other drugs related problems? (Dept of health)**

Education

Education is the principal means of preventing drug abuse. In addition to educational institutions, other settings are important for the contributions they make to learning and socialization. Home, workplace and religious institutions, to name three examples, are settings for the education of young and old alike. Most officials support the full integration of drug abuse education into mainstream institutions, whether public and private, religious or secular. An issue, often unstated, is whether, to have real impact on the drug problem, society or the individual should be the initial target for change. Seeking the root causes focuses on the social conditions that lead persons to engage in drug abuse. Slow and indirect education is often seen as producing its results only over the long run, involving parents, and making gradual social changes to reduce experimentation, occasional or regular drug use. The short-term approach (to control

the supply of drugs) and the long-term demand reduction approach by education are two ends of a continuum which are often placed in opposition to each other. In reality, both are essential parts of a comprehensive view of prevention of drug abuse. **(Dept of Education)**

Crime

Countries vary in the way they define crime. In the drug abuse field, however, a common conceptual structure is provided by international drug treaties. Several of the treaties have obligations which require penal provisions in national law for illicit traffic offences. Requirements concerning illicit demand are more complicated. Countries implement both supply and demand obligations in enormously varied ways. Crime and drugs may be related in several ways, none of them simple. First, illicit production, manufacture, distribution or possession of drugs may constitute a crime. Secondly, drugs may increase the likelihood of other, non-drug crimes occurring. Thirdly, drugs may be used to make money, with subsequent money-laundering. And fourthly, drugs may be closely linked to other major problems, such as the illegal use of guns, various forms of violence and terrorism. Whether illicit drug use should be considered a crime, a disease, a social disorder or some mixture of these is debated in many countries. Often, public policy is ambivalent about the nature of addiction, with social attitudes towards drug abuse reflecting uncertainty about what causes abuse and who is ultimately responsible. **(Comm od Police)**

Work and employment

Work status includes more than being either employed or unemployed. Also to be considered are the rate of underemployment and the extent of work in the informal sector. What is perceived as an employment problem also varies according to the views of society. For example, if youth have low status in a particular culture, the fact that they are disproportionately unemployed, not to mention underemployed, (ppl using drugs) may be of little interest to decision makers. If a society places youth in a marginal status until some distant adulthood, it is even more difficult for young people who have been associated with drugs to obtain productive employment. These adverse effects on youth may also appear for female youth, who in some cultures do not normally have prospects for occupational roles outside the home.

Drug effects seen in the workplace depend partly on the Performance requirements of the job. Tasks that require higher level judgement, constant attention, immediate memory and fine motor skills are more easily disrupted by drugs than physical labour. Cocaine, at low doses, may enhance performance on simple tasks as long as the takers do not overestimate what they can do and do not take risks beyond their capacity to perform. Repeated use of cocaine, crack or related substances quickly leads to

compulsive use, dependence and problems on and off the job. In spite of all these qualifications, it is clear that drug problems reduce job attendance and impair performance.

- **Do alcohol and drug abusers cost the workplace more than non-users?**
- **Are drugs causing problems for young people to reach their goals in the employment sector and to fulfill their dreams? (Sedqa)**

For Discussion... Panel and Planery Sezzion

Social Effects of an Addiction - Drug Addiction

We know about the physical and psychological effects of an addiction but what about the social effects?

In many ways this can be more harmful than the other two put together.

Drug addiction doesn't just affect the addict: it has a far reaching effect which encompasses family, friends, employers, healthcare professionals and society as a whole.

If you are addicted to alcohol, nicotine, drugs or even caffeine then the effects of this can negatively impact upon the following:

- Marriage/Relationships
- Home/family life
- Education
- Employment
- Health and wellbeing
- Personality
- Financial issues

- Law and order

Marriage/relationships

If you have a situation in which one half of a couple is an addict then this can cause untold hardship for the other half. The person who is addicted may have changed from a previously easy going personality to one who is prone to mood swings, violent outbursts, secrecy and other forms of extreme behaviour.

This is difficult for their partner to deal with and is even worse if there are children involved. It is both distressing and confusing for children to see one parent (or even both parents) exhibit signs of their addiction.

The person who is suffering from an addiction may be in financial difficulties which the other person is unaware of. Combine this with their irrational behaviour, paranoia and in several cases, criminal behaviour and you have a recipe for marital breakdown. In many cases the addict resorts to violence in desperation for their next 'fix'. If he/she is craving a drink, cigarette or a particular drug but is unable to satisfy that craving - either due to a lack of money or prevented from doing so by their partner then violence is often the result.

The sad fact is that these actions are often committed by someone who is not a violent person by nature but is driven by their need for this substance. Their addiction is their main priority in life and that's all that matters to them.

Someone in the grip of an addiction can become selfish, self-centred and oblivious to other peoples concerns. Things such as paying the mortgage and bills or other day to day issues of running a home are no longer important to them.

This often leads to a breakdown in the marriage or relationship which causes financial hardship and distress. The other half of the relationship is left to cope on his/her own which is even more difficult if there are children.

What can happen is that other members of the family closes ranks and exclude the person with the addiction. This is mainly done to protect the family from other consequences of his/her behaviour but also as a means of presenting a united front to the rest of society.

Home/family

On the subject of home/family life, there is also the possibility that the rest of the family may feel embarrassed or ashamed at this behaviour. They are bothered by what others might think and are unsure as to what to do for the best.

If you are suffering from an addiction then you will probably find that your family is concerned but maybe needs you to realise that you have a problem and are prepared to face up to it.

It may seem as if your family has pushed you out but it could also be the case that they see this as a form of 'tough love' in which they are giving you time to reflect upon yourself and your addiction. This is done with the hope that you will seek treatment for your addiction. They will provide support and help as well but you need to take that first step.

Education

If a child or young person is suffering from an addiction then this will impact upon their schooling, relationships with other children and their home life. One such effect of this is truanting from school.

This can happen if the child is addicted or if they have a parent who is an addict and neglects to care for them.

It is hard for a child or young person to resist the temptation of alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. A desire to be part of the gang or to try 'forbidden fruit' as a means of growing up can very quickly lead to addiction. Addiction tends to occur much more quickly in a young person than in an adult.

The problem is that they can be hooked from just the first time they try a substance.

If you are a parent who suspects that your child has developed an addiction then look out for signs of anti-social or erratic behaviour; unexplained absences from school; reports from the school of theft or violent behaviour from your child or that he/she has been caught drug dealing on school premises.

Their concentration will be poor and motivation will have dropped. They may be spending inordinate amounts of time in their room or on the other hand, be staying out most of the night and with people that you don't know.

For more information on this visit our young people and addictions section. It is equally hard if your parent or parents are the ones with an addiction. They are likely to be so concerned with seeing to their own needs that yours are forgotten about. For them it is all about their addiction whether that is alcohol, cigarettes or drugs.

Your needs are superseded by their addiction. They are controlled by their addiction and will do anything to feed it which can include criminal behaviour.

Employment

Employers are affected if any of their employees develops an addiction. The employee concerned may have changed from a smart, punctual and efficient worker to someone who is late for work, has neglected their appearance and personal hygiene and is displaying erratic or unacceptable levels of behaviour.

They may have started to go absent for no good reason, not completed their duties or stolen from colleagues and/or the company.

This results in that employee losing their job which then impacts upon their home and family life. Loss of their job means a reduction in income - especially if he/she is the main breadwinner, and puts a strain on the relationship. It can then lead to marriage/relationship breakdown and/or divorce.

It can be difficult if you suspect that one of your colleagues has become addicted and even more difficult if you work in a highly stressful job in which excessive drinking and/or drug taking is part of the company culture. If many of the team enjoy going to bars and clubs after work or it is part of the job, e.g. entertaining clients then how do you know when social use of a substance or having a few drinks with colleagues has become an addiction?

Health and wellbeing

A most obvious effect of drug addiction is that on physical health.

There are some substances such as alcohol or caffeine which is fine on an occasional basis or in moderate amounts but it is when they become a regular habit that damage to your health occurs.

A couple of cigarettes in a day can also be harmful. You may think that you are a very light smoker and that this won't cause a problem but nicotine is a powerful stimulant and damage starts early on.

Learn more about the effects of smoking in our types of addictions section. Drugs such as heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, poppers, ecstasy are dangerous in any amount and should be avoided. There is no such thing as a safe, moderate amount of crack cocaine or heroin.

Apart from the long term effects on health there is also the fact that an addiction can be fatal. Alcohol, cigarettes and drugs can kill either as a result of an overdose, suicide, an accident or from the physical damage caused by these substances.

Other side effects include an increase in the number of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and birth defects as a result of the mother's addiction.

(The health risks of drug addiction can be discussed on an individual basis here)

Personality

Addiction affects someone's personality and behaviour in a variety of ways although this very much depends upon the type of substance used and the amount; their psychological make up before the addiction and physical health and their lifestyle.

Some substances have a greater effect than others upon mental health, for example, heroin is stronger than nicotine and will have a bigger impact upon the brain.

Added to that is the fact that all of us are different in regard to our psychological make up which means that no two people are affected in the same way. So, one person may experience a greater level of 'damage' than another person using the same substance, mainly due to their brain chemistry.

So what does an addiction do to someone's mental health and behaviour?

The most obvious sign is the fact that they behave in ways which are totally out of character. They may become secretive or deliberately offensive; self-harm; lie, cheat or steal; or place their need for their addiction above their family and friends.

Other examples including paranoia, restlessness, low self-esteem or a lack of trust in themselves and anyone else. On the other hand they may behave in an arrogant and uncaring manner as if only their needs matter and no-one else's.

As the addiction worsens they may start to withdraw from their family and friends or spend time with people who you don't know. The highs and low of their addiction can lead to anxiety and depression

The chemistry of the brain is affected by addiction, for example, taking crystal meth, amphetamines, cannabis, ecstasy and excessive alcohol use. These have the power to change certain structures of a person's brain which have a dramatic affect upon that person's personality.

Financial issues

The costs of an addiction not only affect the sufferer but can also encompass family, friends and society as a whole. There are the costs of policing, drug addiction help lines, support groups and rehab clinics. Indirectly there is lost revenue in the form of tax and national insurance contributions each time an addict loses their job or is unable to work. This means a drop in revenue for the Treasury and an increase in welfare benefits, e.g. unemployment benefit.

This may sound extreme but if you multiply all of this by the number of drug addicts in the UK then it all adds up to a hefty drain on the country's purse strings.

On a smaller scale there is the financial damage to family or friends as the addict will resort to theft or other criminal means in order to fund their habit.

Law and order

People who are addicted very often turn to crime as a means of paying for their addiction. This can involve stealing or fraud to obtain the funds necessary to bankroll their addiction. This can start with stealing from one's partner, family or friends but can spread to include their employer or several organisations.

Another aspect is that of the cost of maintaining a police force that have to deal with the after-effects of addiction. One such example and one that we hear a great deal about in the media is that of 'binge drinking'.

People who have developed an addiction to alcohol very often engage in drunken, anti-social behaviour, usually in town and city centres up and down the country. The police have the job of dealing with fights or semi-conscious people lying in the street which is due to the effects of excessive alcohol consumption.

The majority of crime committed in the UK is usually drug-related. Burglary, muggings, robberies etc are all ways of funding an addiction and the more serious the addiction the greater the chance of these being accompanied by violence. There are people who are so desperate to have a 'fix' or are completely controlled by their addiction that will do anything to service this. If this means using violence then they will do so.

In this case their needs have overtaken any thoughts of rational or civilised behaviour. They are not thinking of anyone else but themselves as they are consumed by their addiction.