Prevention of Substance Abuse

Topic Background
The World Health Organization describes ‘substance abuse’ as the “harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs”.\(^1\) The longer one uses a psychoactive substance, the more likely they are to become dependent. This ultimately causes the person to adapt behavior that makes them have a strong desire and addiction for the drugs, with great difficulties in controlling their usage. Therefore, they will continue to abuse the drug, regardless of the dangerous effects the drugs might have.\(^2\) This poses a series of serious problems.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated in the 2015 World Drug Report that there are a total of “246 million people, or 1 out of 20 people between the ages of 15 and 64 years” that used an illegal drug in 2013.\(^3\)

In 2012, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found about 23.1 million people 12 and older, in the United States alone, required treatment for substance abuse. SAMHSA found that substance use disorders, along with mental disorders that cause people to utilize these drugs, would be one of the main causes of disabilities worldwide by 2020. Abusing drugs and alcohol also leads to numerous physical diseases, including heart diseases.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the UNODC found that drugs such as cocaine are causing the most harm. Beyond the physical impacts, drug trade and trafficking directly lead to violence.

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and instability. In the Group of Latin American and Carribean States (GRULAC) There was an estimated 1,590,000 people that have been involved with injecting drugs in some capacity.\textsuperscript{4} The use of injected drugs leads to high cases of HIV and other diseases.

Within Afghanistan, drug abuse has been a prevalent issue that has been exacerbated by their recent history of war. Drug abuse has increased as a result of the traumas associated with conflict. In addition, the wide availability of cheap drugs contributes to Afghanistan’s problem, with about 8% of the population, or about one million Afghans, using illegal drugs.\textsuperscript{5}

Afghanistan’s problem has spread beyond its borders. The large scale of the drug supply, particularly opioids, has spread to many new markets around Europe. In addition, for Afghans, the limited access drug treatments make it difficult to prevent or stop abusers. Coupled with the growing drug market, the lack of drug treatment for those who need it will cause substance abuse to continue to be a problem.

If the problem is not addressed, the number of deaths, such as the 3.3 million deaths caused by alcohol each year, will continue to grow and the entire international community.\textsuperscript{6}

**Past Actions**

The Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims to “Ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all at all ages”. Specifically, Target 5 aims to “strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and the harmful use of alcohol”. The target also aims to increase access to pharmaceuticals on a “sustainable basis”. In short, the goal is to ensure people have access to drugs that are important for their well being, while doing so on a level that can be maintained properly and controlled. Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon discussed the need to “Think Health, Not Drugs” at the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, emphasizing that combating illicit drugs “must go hand-in-hand” with the MDGs, the predecessor to the SDGs.\textsuperscript{7} Furthermore, he discusses the dangerous health effects drug abuse creates, including the spread of HIV in correspondence with heroin use. Ban Ki-Moon laments that we must break the “vicious circle” of drug abusers acquiring substances through the growing


illicit drug trade, highlighting drug growing regions. Moreover, current Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has framed the issue not only a policy goal but a personal goal as well.

The UNODC, the main UN organization dealing with substance abuse and drug crimes, was established in 1997, acting as a part of the UN Development Group. Their work revolves around combating illicit drug trafficking, researching various governments’ involvement in preventing substance abuse, providing treatment and care towards those affected, and numerous other drug-related issues around the world.

The UNODC established family skills training programs, called Project GLO-K01 for developing countries. The goal of GLO-K01 was to provide family training sessions for parents and children on preventing substance abuse, training them how to be more attentive towards school and work achievements rather than paths that can lead to drug abuse. The project has been established in Central Asia, Latin America, and Southeast Europe, with reports on their statuses being updated and written by UNODC on their progress. Through the UNODC Youth Initiative program, the UNODC works with schools and active youth in their communities to be involved in drug use prevention around the world, allowing them to provide insight on how to help their peers steer away from drug abuse. These discussions, called Youth Forums, have been initiated in countries such as Pakistan, where students work with policy makers on drug prevention strategies.

The Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs (VNGOC) is a large NGO partnered with the UNODC fighting drug-related issues and acts as a connection with the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the UNODC. The VNGOC has branches and partners all over the world. Created in 1983, they’ve provided strategic plans for communities to adopt to prevent substance abuse and increase treatment plans. Strategic plans like the “Beyond 2008 Initiative”. VNGOC focuses on civil society, allowing them to provide thoughts on the UN General Assembly Special Session on illicit drugs. They have used their research to write three resolutions on using the NGO community and civil society to fight drug abuse.

Possible Solutions
UNODC reported in their 2015 World Drug Report how, although drug use around the world has been stable, access to treatment is still a major challenge, with only one out of six drug users

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8 “Goals, targets, and indicators.” Millennium Project. http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm#goal8
having access. As such, an important focus for UNODC regarding the Post-2015 Development Agenda centers on long-term goals and strategies to prevent substance abuse and to acquire treatment for those impacted now. Three main sub-issues for the UNODC are: accessibility to treatment, drug trafficking prevention, and education on drug dependence.\(^\text{12}\)

Finding treatment is a preeminent problem in low-income communities due to finances and general accessibility. The programs and projects set forth by NGOs and the UN on treatment needs to expand. It is important to consider whether current treatment programs are effective as well as safe (or not). The UNDP reported in their 2015 report on “Addressing the Development Dimensions of Drug Policy” that there were more than 235,000 people forced, without their consent or due process, to be in drug detention centers within East and Southeast Asia. The report states that these centers were under the “guise of treatment or rehabilitation,” but included numerous human rights violations including forced labor, physical, psychological, sexual violence, and lack of proper medical attention. Therefore, more research on current treatment centers and their effectiveness, as well as closing them down if needed, must be done.

The illegal drug market has been growing worldwide as well, with opium production being at 7,554 tons in 2014 with the increasing cultivation in Afghanistan. The smuggling and trafficking of drugs such as Afghan heroin must be prevented, as its increased distribution has led to more access in regions where these drugs can be cheaply sold. Furthermore, poverty exacerbates the problem because people turn to drugs for economic purposes. In order to address this sub-issue, delegates must look at the root causes of poverty, and provide alternative, safe methods for farmers to acquire income. Steps to prevent cultivation of drugs can lead to preventing drug trafficking and access.\(^\text{13}\)

UNODC’s Executive Director Yury Fedotov stated the lack of education for substance abusers is another serious, and perhaps the most serious, issue. He stated that there needs to be more promotion of health and the spread of education on how drug dependence can lead to serious physical conditions, like diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, or mental disorders that require long-term treatment. Delegates should find methods to educate people on the consequences of substance abuse, letting them understand the dire consequences of proceeding down a path of illicit drug usage.

Delegates must understand the need to develop strong solutions that revolve not just around increasing treatment, but getting down to the root causes of why substance abuse is so prevalent in our world. Solutions should combat drug access and tackle how to help drug abusers.

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Further Research
- UNODC Drug Use Analysis
- UNODC Post 2015 Development Agenda
- UNDP MDG Goals
- Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs

Worksheet Questions
1. How does the World Health Organization define substance abuse?
2. Which Sustainable Development Goal tackles the issue of substance abuse directly?
3. Which UN organization is the main branch of the UN dealing with substance abuse and drug crime?
4. This country is the largest global producer of heroin.
5. Substance abuse has directly led to the spread of which infectious disease in sub-Saharan Africa?