

UN reports reveal global growth of drug abuse

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Two recent reports by the United Nations Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP) provide an insight into the global spread of drug abuse. "Global Illicit Drug Trends" was compiled from questionnaires sent to national governments requesting information on drug seizures by police and customs officials. "The Drug Nexus in Africa" was drawn out of information forwarded by drug control agencies in 10 African states. In the language of statistics, they provide an overview of the scale and depth of drug use internationally. The African report in particular sheds some light on the social, economic and political origins of drug taking.

"Global Illicit Drug Trends" points out that the illicit drug trade is a complex and massive global industry, with markets in every country of the world. The growth in world commerce and the explosion in global finance markets have made it much easier for the drug cartels to move their money around and obscure the source of the immense profits being made by the criminal syndicates controlling the trade.

Illegal drugs account for \$400 billion of world trade, making it larger than the global iron and steel industries. The 1997 "World Drug Report" noted that there were at least 141 million drug abusers globally, including 8 million heroin addicts, 30 million amphetamine users and 13 million cocaine users.

The two new reports provide more data. In 1986, world opium production was around 2,000 tonnes. By 1994 this had trebled to over 6,000 tonnes and in 1997 stood at 5,000 tonnes. Seizures of heroin follow a similar pattern, with 1,000 tonnes seized in 1984, rising to 3,000 in 1995. Ninety percent of the world's opium is grown in Afghanistan and Burma (called Myanmar by its military government). In 1998, 63,700 hectares were devoted to growing opium in Afghanistan alone. New areas are continually entering production. Iran and the central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union contain much prime growing land.

Many of the world's opiate addicts can be found close to these producing areas, where half of all opium is consumed. In some producing areas in Iran, 4 to 6 percent of the population are opium addicts. The country has an estimated 1.2 million opiate addicts, including 150,000 using heroin. In the producing areas of Laos and Thailand the addiction rate is as high as 10 percent. Fully 80 percent of the heroin consumed in Europe comes via the Balkans. Of opium from South East Asia, up to 50 percent is sent to China.

In 1986, two countries reported an increase in heroin abuse, 21 did so in 1996. While use has supposedly stabilised in Western Europe, apart from the UK, Ireland and the Nordic states, increases

in addiction were noted in the Confederation of Independent States, Eastern Europe and countries on the Balkan route, as well as in the producing areas. Pakistan, where opium use was negligible in the early 80s, now has 2 million addicts. One million heroin addicts are registered in India, and unofficially there are as many as five million. China now has 540,000 registered addicts, up from 150,000 in 1991.

In the United States and Canada, where in 1991 there were 360,000 heroin abusers, there are now 600,000. In the UK, Ireland, Denmark and Italy 2 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds have used heroin.

Worldwide, 11 percent of AIDS cases are estimated to be due to drug users injecting with dirty needles—particularly heroin addicts. Countries reporting a rise in injection between 1996 and 1998 noted a 37 percent increase in HIV infection.

Use and production of cocaine has also increased. World production is centred on Latin America: Colombia (56 percent), Peru (28 percent) and Bolivia (16 percent). Together, these countries produce nearly 180,000 tonnes of coca leaf. In 1998, eradication programmes destroyed 98,630 hectares of coca leaf crops, up from 3,446 hectares in 1986. About 420 tonnes of coca leaf are needed for one tonne of cocaine. Processing is done in the countries of origin. The street price of cocaine averages \$110 a gram. Most Latin American cocaine is sent to the US, although some reaches Europe. Six percent of American young people have used cocaine, or its "crack" variant; in the Bahamas it is 6.4 percent, and 4.5 percent in Kenya. Many people in the growing areas use raw coca leaf itself, or other unrefined products.

In 1985, 400 laboratories were detected making drugs such as amphetamines and ecstasy. By 1997, 1,600 labs had been found. Most were in Western Europe and the US. Twenty percent of world drug seizures were in Britain, 15 percent in the US, 14 percent in Thailand and 11 percent in China. Total world seizures rose from 600 million doses in 1987 to 1,100 million in 1997.

The UK tops the list in the consumption of speed (amphetamine) and ecstasy, with 3 percent of the entire population having used them. Next highest is Spain (with 1.7 percent) and Guatemala (1.5 percent). Some 8.3 percent of all young people in the UK have used these drugs. Only Ireland (9 percent) tops this figure.

By far the most ubiquitous drug is cannabis. It is estimated that over 140 million people regularly use cannabis worldwide. Amongst young adults, usage is far higher—37 percent in the UK for example. Thirty-eight countries reported an increase in

cannabis use.

"The African Drug Nexus" shows that the increased prevalence of drug abuse is a clear indicator of the drastic social and psychological damage produced by deepening poverty, social upheaval and civil war.

The report was compiled from questionnaires sent to various drug agencies in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Comments from both the UNDCP and the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London were also included. The countries surveyed are amongst the poorest in the world. Ethiopia has a per capita GDP of \$450, Mozambique \$810, Nigeria \$1220, Cameroon \$2,110, South Africa \$5,030.

The report establishes that poor people use the most drugs. Unemployed people make up a large proportion of cannabis users. Of 553 drug users arrested in Ethiopia between 1993 and 1997, 50 percent were unemployed. In all 10 countries, the urban population has increased at a higher rate than urban employment. Annual labour force growth averages 2.5 percent and employers are wholly unable to absorb this. The traditional large employers in transport and nationalised industries are being privatised and downsized. In Senegal, 100,000 young people enter the job market every year, but the "formal" sector can only generate 5,000 jobs a year. Many more women are looking for work, while their employment opportunities stagnate.

Africa has huge youth populations—in Côte d'Ivoire more than half the entire population is under 18—and there is a growth in the numbers of "street children". There are 12,000 street children in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, alone. Amongst street children, qaat (a leaf that it chewed for stimulant effect), cannabis and solvent abuse is the norm. Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is estimated to have 10,000 street children. Some children support whole families by scavenging.

Many workers use cannabis—particularly those doing demanding or dangerous work. Staving off hunger is seen as a major attribute of cannabis in Mozambique. Many use cannabis simply to cope with the general social pressure, while others use drugs to dull the impact of the horrors they have experienced. Thirty percent of the 1.7 million refugees who returned to Mozambique after the civil war had been tortured and 77 percent of child refugees returning had witnessed a murder.

As well as smoking cannabis, a bewildering array of substances are used—from traditional cannabis infusions and hallucinogenics administered by faith healers, to mandrax and beer mixes, petrol and solvent inhalation, misuse of prescription medicines, and crack cocaine.

In Kenya, chewing qaat is culturally acceptable. It causes insomnia, so users need other drugs like cannabis to get to sleep. A survey of young Kenyans suggested that 63 percent regularly used drugs.

Qaat is also widely used in Ethiopia. Fully 82 percent of Addis Ababa street children use some sort of drugs in a country with just one drug rehabilitation unit. Forty-three percent of mental patients are qaat addicts.

In South Africa, cannabis use is widespread. The consumption of crack cocaine has increased from zero percent of all drug use in

1995 to 8 percent in 1996, to 35 percent in 1998. Cape Town Counselling Centre noted that two-thirds of those seeking help were under 30. Seventy percent of addicts started using drugs in their teens. Causes for widespread use were listed as: absent fathers; drug-dependent parents; deterioration of the school system and social uncertainty.

The many urban slum areas of poverty, tension, crime, overcrowding and lack of privacy create a fertile environment for the illegal drugs industry. Many turn to drug dealing and other areas of "informal trade". The black economy is the fastest growing area of the Ghanaian economy. Sixty percent of Senegalese GDP is "informal", employing 700,000 people, 45 percent of whom live in the capital city Dakar.

South Africa is a major growing area. Isolated highland areas accounted for as much as 80,000 acres under cannabis production in 1987. Throughout West Africa, farmers are given seed as well as paid to set land aside for cannabis. They are prepared to risk prison for high yields—\$520 an acre.

The fall in the world price of basic commodities has encouraged this shift to drug production. Côte d'Ivoire is the world's leading cocoa bean producer. In the 1990s, cocoa accounts for 50 percent of GDP, and 4.8 million people, 40 percent of the population, depend on it for their livelihoods. Between 1988 and 1992 price of cocoa fell by 50 percent: the country's credit system collapsed, and planters' revenues fell by 60 percent. Two-thirds of farmers interviewed said they started growing cannabis after the cocoa price collapse. Now, 0.1 acre devoted to cannabis can yield the same as 30 to 40 acres devoted to cocoa.

Qaat production is now crucial to the Ethiopian economy, ranking third after coffee. This tendency has developed in the last three or four years. An Ethiopian newspaper warned that if the government implemented its proposed crackdown on the trade, then it should be prepared for major famine relief.

"Global Illicit Drug Trends" and "The Drug Nexus in Africa", can be downloaded from the United Nations International Drug Control Programme web site in pdf format: <http://www.undcp.org>



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