



UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



DRUGS AND AGE

Drugs and associated issues among
young people and older people

WORLD ∞
DRUG
REPORT 2014

4

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PREFACE

Both the range of drugs and drug markets are expanding and diversifying as never before. The findings of this year's *World Drug Report* make clear that the international community needs to step up its responses to cope with these challenges.

We are facing a potential supply-driven expansion of drug markets, with production of opium and manufacture of cocaine at the highest levels ever recorded. Markets for cocaine and methamphetamine are extending beyond their usual regions and, while drug trafficking online using the darknet continues to represent only a fraction of drug trafficking as a whole, it continues to grow rapidly, despite successes in shutting down popular trading platforms.

Non-medical use of prescription drugs has reached epidemic proportions in parts of the world. The opioid crisis in North America is rightly getting attention, and the international community has taken action. In March 2018, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs scheduled six analogues of fentanyl, including carfentanil, which are contributing to the deadly toll. This builds on the decision by the Commission at its sixtieth session, in 2017, to place two precursor chemicals used in the manufacture of fentanyl and an analogue under international control.

However, as this *World Drug Report* shows, the problems go far beyond the headlines. We need to raise the alarm about addiction to tramadol, rates of which are soaring in parts of Africa. Non-medical use of this opioid painkiller, which is not under international control, is also expanding in Asia. The impact on vulnerable populations is cause for serious concern, putting pressure on already strained health-care systems.

At the same time, more new psychoactive substances are being synthesized and more are available than ever, with increasing reports of associated harm and fatalities.

Drug treatment and health services continue to fall short: the number of people suffering from drug use disorders who are receiving treatment has remained low, just one in six. Some 450,000 people died in 2015 as a result of drug use. Of those deaths, 167,750 were a direct result of drug use disorders, in most cases involving opioids.

These threats to health and well-being, as well as to security, safety and sustainable development, demand an urgent response.

The outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016 contains more than 100 recommendations on promoting evidence-based prevention, care and other measures to address both supply and demand.

We need to do more to advance this consensus, increasing support to countries that need it most and improving international cooperation and law enforcement capacities to dismantle organized criminal groups and stop drug trafficking.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continues to work closely with its United Nations partners to assist countries in implementing the recommendations contained in the outcome document of the special session, in line with the international drug control conventions, human rights instruments and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In close cooperation with the World Health Organization, we are supporting the implementation of the *International Standards on Drug Use Prevention* and the international standards for the treatment of drug use disorders, as well as the guidelines on treatment and care for people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system.

The World Drug Report 2018 highlights the importance of gender- and age-sensitive drug policies, exploring the particular needs and challenges of women and young people. Moreover, it looks into

increased drug use among older people, a development requiring specific treatment and care.

UNODC is also working on the ground to promote balanced, comprehensive approaches. The Office has further enhanced its integrated support to Afghanistan and neighbouring regions to tackle record levels of opiate production and related security risks. We are supporting the Government of Colombia and the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) through alternative development to provide licit livelihoods free from coca cultivation.

Furthermore, our Office continues to support efforts to improve the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing misuse and diversion – a critical challenge if we want to help countries in Africa and other regions come to grips with the tramadol crisis.

Next year, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs will host a high-level ministerial segment on the 2019 target date of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem. Preparations are under way. I urge the international community to take this opportunity to reinforce cooperation and agree upon effective solutions.



Yury Fedotov
Executive Director
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



CONTENTS

BOOKLET 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY — CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

BOOKLET 2 GLOBAL OVERVIEW OF DRUG DEMAND AND SUPPLY
Latest trends, cross-cutting issues

BOOKLET 3 ANALYSIS OF DRUG MARKETS
Opioids, cocaine, cannabis, synthetic drugs

BOOKLET 4 DRUGS AND AGE
Drugs and associated issues among young people and older people

PREFACE..... 1

EXPLANATORY NOTES 5

KEY FINDINGS..... 6

INTRODUCTION..... 9

A. DRUG USE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND OLDER PEOPLE 11

 Trends in age demographics.....11

 Extent of drug use is higher among young people than among older people11

B. DRUGS AND YOUNG PEOPLE..... 15

 Patterns of drug use among young people16

 Pathways to substance use disorders.....22

 Young people and the supply chain40

C. DRUGS AND OLDER PEOPLE 46

 Changes in the extent of drug use among older people47

 What factors might lie behind the increase in the extent of drug use?49

 Drug treatment among older people who use drugs52

 Drug-related deaths among older people who use drugs.....54

GLOSSARY.....57

REGIONAL GROUPINGS.....59

BOOKLET 5 WOMEN AND DRUGS
Drug use, drug supply and their consequences

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EXPLANATORY NOTES

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. A dotted line represents approximately the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Disputed boundaries (China/India) are represented by cross-hatch owing to the difficulty of showing sufficient detail.

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in the *World Drug Report* do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Countries and areas are referred to by the names that were in official use at the time the relevant data were collected.

All references to Kosovo in the *World Drug Report*, if any, should be understood to be in compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Since there is some scientific and legal ambiguity about the distinctions between “drug use”, “drug misuse” and “drug abuse”, the neutral terms “drug use” and “drug consumption” are used in the *World Drug Report*. The term “misuse” is used only to denote the non-medical use of prescription drugs.

All uses of the word “drug” in the *World Drug Report* refer to substances controlled under the international drug control conventions.

All analysis contained in the *World Drug Report* is based on the official data submitted by Member States to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime through the annual report questionnaire unless indicated otherwise.

The data on population used in the *World Drug Report* are taken from: *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision* (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division).

References to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

References to tons are to metric tons, unless otherwise stated.

The following abbreviations have been used in the present booklet:

- EMCDDA** European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
- LSD** Lysergic acid diethylamide
- GHB** *gamma*-Hydroxybutyric acid
- MDMA** 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine
- UNICEF** United Nations Children’s Fund
- WHO** World Health Organization
- UNODC** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- INCB** International Narcotics Control Board
- Europol** European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation



KEY FINDINGS

Drug use and associated health consequences are highest among young people

Surveys on drug use among the general population show that the extent of drug use among young people remains higher than that among older people, although there are some exceptions associated with the traditional use of drugs such as opium or khat. Most research suggests that early (12–14 years old) to late (15–17 years old) adolescence is a critical risk period for the initiation of substance use and that substance use may peak among young people aged 18–25 years.

Cannabis is a common drug of choice for young people

There is evidence from Western countries that the perceived easy availability of cannabis, coupled with perceptions of a low risk of harm, makes the drug among the most common substances whose use is initiated in adolescence. Cannabis is often used in conjunction with other substances and the use of other drugs is typically preceded by cannabis use.

Two extreme typologies of drug use among young people: club drugs in nightlife settings; and inhalants among street children

Drug use among young people differs from country to country and depends on the social and economic

settings ranging from college bars and house parties to concerts. The use of such substances is reportedly much higher among young people. Among young people living on the street, the most commonly used drugs are likely to be inhalants, which can include paint thinner, petrol, paint, correction fluid and glue.

Many street children are exposed to physical and sexual abuse, and substance use is part of their coping mechanism in the harsh environment they are exposed to on the streets. The substances they use are frequently selected for their low price, legal and widespread availability and ability to rapidly induce a sense of euphoria.

Young people's path to harmful use of substances is complex

The path from initiation to harmful use of substances among young people is influenced by factors that are often out of their control. Factors at the personal level (including behavioural and mental health, neurological developments and gene variations resulting from social influences), the micro level (parental and family functioning, schools and peer influences) and the macro level (socioeconomic and physical environment) can render adolescents vulnerable to substance use. These factors vary between individuals and not all young people are equally vulnerable to substance use. No factor alone

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