PREVENTION OF PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCE USE

A Selected Review of What Works in the Area of Prevention



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FOREWORD

Globally, psychoactive substance use is a major public health and social concern. With changes in lifestyle, the erosion of powers of censure that have existed in traditional societies, and an increased acceptance of such substances it is clear that their use is growing. In recent decades, most countries, particularly those in the developing world, are facing unprecedented social and health problems among its populations. This places individuals, families and communities at a greater vulnerability to psychoactive substance use, in particular children, adolescents and the youth. In recognition of the problems psychoactive substance use poses on the user, tremendous efforts have been made by many institutions globally including the World Health Organization (WHO). In order to support these efforts WHO commissioned the present work so as to document the evidence for interventions in the area of psychoactive substance use prevention. The availability of the compiled information is a major step forward towards contributing to a growing body of evidence, which consequently should help in the development of programmes that are evidence based.

On behalf of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence, I am pleased to present this publication based on a selected review of what works in the area of prevention of psychoactive substance use. The review was accomplished as a collaborative effort between the National Drug Research Institute (Perth, Australia) and the World Health Organization, Geneva. The review set out to determine what evidence exists for the efficacy of preventive interventions in five circumscribed areas; regulation of physical and economic availability of alcohol, regulation of physical and economic availability of illicit psychoactive substances, the use of the mass media, community-based initiatives and the use of school based education

The review is selective, rather than exhaustive, but still serves to highlight some broad findings around the selected areas. Overall what comes out clearly is that though evidence exist, for the effectiveness of many interventions, much more systematic research is necessary in a variety of settings. Through this review it has also been acknowledged that little information exists in developing countries in terms of evaluation and research. However, this work marks the foundation of evidence on what works on the part of WHO through the currently available and accessible sources and is a stepping stone for the development of culturally appropriate, practical and meaningful interventions.

It is my conviction that dissemination of research findings can motivate service providers in health and other social sectors to understand its meaningfulness and carry out local research that can ultimately prepare them for prevention programming and to select strategies that effectively address the needs and problems of young people.

I hope this review will serve its purpose and will be of use to policy makers, programme implementers, researchers, specifically in developing countries.

Lastly, I would like to thank the government of Japan for funding this project, the National Drug Research Institute, Australia, in particular, Dr David Hawks, Ms Katie Scott, Ms Nyanda McBride, Professor Tim Stockwell and Mr Paul Jones for carrying out this review on behalf of the World Health Organization. I also would like to thank my colleagues at the World Health Organization, Geneva, Mrs Mwansa Nkowane for providing technical inputs and editing of this summary report, Ms Mylene Schreiber and Ms Rosemary Westermeyer for their administrative assistance.

Dr Shekhar Saxena Coordinator, Mental Health Evidence and Research (MER) Department of Mental Health and Substance dependence (MSD)

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David Hawks, Katie Scott and Nyanda McBride National Drug Research Institute, Perth, Western Australia, Australia



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A SELECTED REVIEW OF WHAT WORKS IN THE AREA OF PREVENTION

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