

# 'Horrorifying implications' with drug abuse

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Age 16, Grade 11

The controversial issue of drug use and dependence has become a centre of growing concern around the world. The mere thought of man's advanced civilization becoming subservient to addictive chemicals has horrifying implications.

Drugs are defined as "chemical substances that bring about physical or behavioral changes." Drug abuse is the harmful use of a drug at dosage levels that produce hazardous consequences.

Drugs can be considered a threat when they pose risks to the physical, mental or social well-being of the user. Like a growing cancer, illicit drug abuse has escalated into a moral menace that threatens the health and safety of society.

The potential health and safety risks presented by excessive or irresponsible drug use have been overshadowed by society's glamorous and appealing attitudes toward them.

During 1981, in Canada, a total of \$137.4 million was spent on the advertisement of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine products. The attitudes that these ads foster toward the use of legal drugs affect society's view about all drugs.

In fact, society's drug dependence has become so prevalent, that in any two day period, one in two Canadians (over 15) takes some kind of medical or narcotic drug.

The most popular illegal drug in Canada is Cannabis, which accounts for "91.2 percent of all illegal drug use." A 1984 survey estimated that two million Canadians admitted to using cannabis. A 1987 survey indicated that 700,000 Canadians experimented with cocaine. Furthermore, reasons such as curiosity, emo-

tional, social and peer pressure have triggered a rising rate in illicit drug use.

Mind-altering drugs interfere with judgment, muscle coordination, attention span and the ability to concentrate and process information. Many drugs can cause irreversible damage if taken for long periods of time or in large amounts.

"Users are at risk both from the possible adverse physical effects of drug use and from the harmful individual consequences of criminalization."

Drug use can result in psychological dependence of body tissues on the continued presence of a drug, and withdrawal symptoms will develop when the drug is discontinued.

Drug tolerance results with the development of body resistance to the effects of a drug so that larger doses are needed to produce the original effect. The combination of dependence and tolerance constitutes addiction.

There are several important factors which affect a person's reaction to any drug that alters mood or behavior. Such factors include the kind of drug, the amount of drug taken, and the way it is administered "which determines how quickly the drug reaches the brain."

Drugs have varied effects on different people. As a result, some users often become more talkative and outgoing, while others experience periods of quietness and reflection as perception of time and space changes.

Immediate physical effects include impaired balance, rapid heartbeat and the dilation of pupils accompanied by restlessness and excitement, depending on the type of drug.

Some users may demonstrate harmful conduct such as aggressive and hostile behavior. In

addition, confusion and anxiety can distort all senses of reason and logic similar to intoxication.

"Researchers report that individuals who show high doses of narcotics regularly stop being contributing members of the family and community and may become very secretive and isolated."

Chronic users seem no longer to care about themselves or their surroundings. They may also show decreased ambition and loss of interest in the future. In many cases the drug can result in permanent personality changes.

Consequently, users experience a loss of energy which results in impaired work or school performance. The drug can also interfere with relationships and strain family ties. Furthermore, heavy financial burdens that accompany recurrent drug use can be almost as lethal as the drug itself. Likewise, populations with a high rate of drug use encounter increased crime and traffic accidents.

In Canada, the main body of

drug legislation is contained in two federal statutes: The Narcotic Control Act and The Food and Drug Act. "In 1985 drug offences amounted to 57,205. This figure represents nine percent of the total major offences that year and illustrates the severity of the issue."

The Narcotic Control Act deals specifically with addictive narcotics and prohibits the use of such drugs as heroin, marijuana, hashish, cocaine and opium. Offences are divided into several categories. The offence of possession basically requires that the accused knowingly retained the drug and had some measure of control over it.

This includes having the drug in some other place or in another person's custody or in the custody of a group. Possession is a hybrid offence that has a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment.

"The offence of trafficking includes manufacturing, selling, transporting and distributing an illegal narcotic." This offence is

indictable and has a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. A similar charge is possession for the purpose of trafficking, which results from having more of a drug than would seem normal for personal use. It is an indictable offence punishable by life imprisonment.

The offence of importing and exporting is the transportation of drugs in any quantity across the Canadian border. A criminal conviction can result in imprisonment of seven years to life.

"The unauthorized growing of narcotics for personal use or trafficking constitutes the indictable offence of cultivation, which is subject to a maximum sentence of seven years incarceration."

Prescription shopping or double doctoring is a summary conviction that involves obtaining a prescription from more than one practitioner and concealing the fact that one is doing so. It is punishable by up to six months imprisonment.


Certainly, the short-term euphoric pleasure of drugs is no match for the destructive consequences they harbor. In one major sense, the current drug controversy represents a failure on the part of the justice system to enforce its laws.

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