

DRUG CONSUMPTION – A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

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Abstract: *Drug consumption and abuse is a group phenomenon and represents, among morbidity and criminality, a serious danger for society, having social, psychological and economic consequences.*

Keywords: *drugs, consumption, consequences, public health, international dimension.*

Rezumat: *Consumul și abuzul de droguri este un fenomen de grup și reprezintă, alături de morbiditate și criminalitate, un pericol grav la adresa societății, cu repercursiuni sociale, psihologice și economice.*

Cuvinte cheie: *droguri, consum, consecințe, sănătate publică, dimensiune mondială*

INTRODUCTION

The explosive increase of the illicit drugs consumption represents a threat to the individuals' fundamental rights. Drugs consumption affects health and the psychic equilibrium and changes the individual's behaviour regarding the social relations.

In consequence, the effects of drugs are:

- direct, acting on the individual who consume such substances;
- indirect, with repercussions on the individual's behaviour in society.

The national and international regulations assign the largest importance to the human being regarding its physical existence. Each person appears as the holder of the absolute right to life and all the other persons have the duty to refrain from committing deeds that may affect this right. Thus, according to the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights (1948): "Any human being has the right to life". The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) provides that: "Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life". According to the Romanian Constitution, "the right to life of every person is guaranteed".

The death of the drug consumers is an alarming phenomenon. This is due either to the effects produced in time by overdoses, or to the infection with HIV virus, as a result of using the same needle by a number of drug-addicts. Even today, the initiation in the consumption of the injectable drugs is made with the group syringe, (2) what brings about the transmission of the disease.

Within this context, it is necessary that the

authorities of all over the world should take measures in order to reduce this phenomenon that endangers the individuals' supreme right. Without guaranteeing the right to life, the other fundamental rights and liberties remain simple wishes, while the indispensable condition of existence is missing.

International dimension. General aspects

Last years' statistics reality emphasizes a stabilization of the drugs phenomenon through its three dimensions: production, traffic and consumption. This aspect is also mentioned in the World Drug Report issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: "For the majority of drugs – cocaine, heroin, cannabis and amphetamine – there are signs of general stability, irrespective if it is about production, traffic or consumption." Despite these positive data, the drugs issue is far from being solved, as the progress made in certain regions are counterbalanced by the negative tendencies observed in other regions.

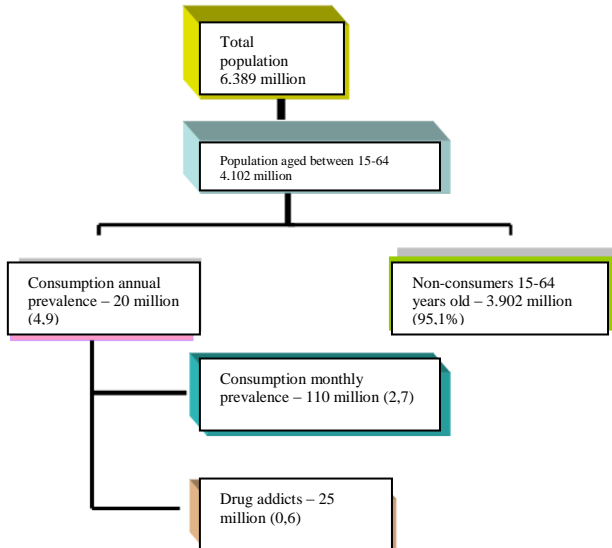
One of the drugs issues is represented by the consumption of such substances, which between 2005 and 2006 recorded similar values as in the previous period of time, of about 20 million persons aged between 15 and 64, who use drugs at least once a year, representing 4,8% of the world population; out of these, 2,7% consume drugs once a month and 0,6 are drugs addicts.

At European level, according to the data supplied by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, through the Annual Report on the drug situation in Europe, there were 34 million drug users in 2005, out of which 23 million were cannabis consumers, 4,5 million were cocaine users, 3 million were ecstasy users, 2 million were amphetamine users and 1,5 million were opiates problematic consumers.

At international level, cannabis remains among the most consumed drugs, although the number of cannabis consumers has slightly decreased, as against the previous period of time, from 162 million to 158,8 million. The same descending trend is also observed in case of amphetamine- type stimulants (ATS), the number of those who use such substances being of 33,5 million, out of which 24,9 million are amphetamine consumers and 8,6 million people are ecstasy consumers. A modest regress is also observed in the case of opiates consumption, with 15,6 million consumers, out of which

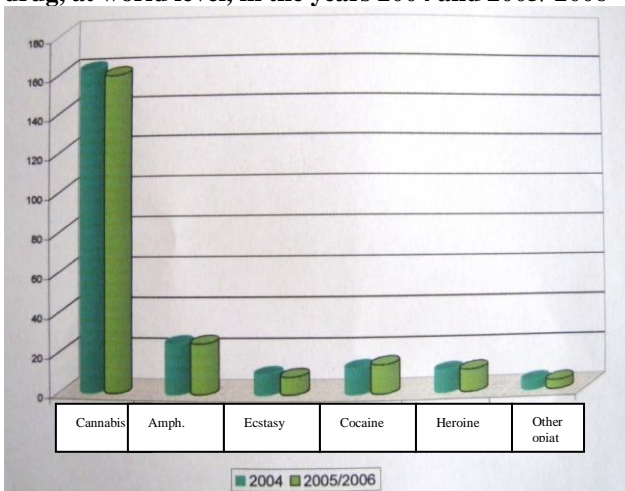
11,1 million are heroin consumers. There is also a slight evolution in the case of cocaine consumption, as against 2004, from 13 million to 14,4 million consumers.

Picture no. 1. Illicit drugs consumption at world level (2005 / 2006)



Source: UNODC, World Drug Report, 2007

Picture no. 2. Consumption distribution per type of drug, at world level, in the years 2004 and 2005/ 2006



Source: UNODC, World Drug Report, 2007

An analysis of the consumption distribution per type of drugs at continental level, according to the treatment requests, emphasizes a predominance of opiates consumption in Europe and Asia, a preponderance of cocaine consumption and cannabis in South and North America. Cannabis consumption brought about the largest number of treatment requests in Africa and Oceania. In the case of amphetamine-type stimulants, the largest number of requests was registered in Asia, followed by Oceania, North America, Africa and Europe.

1. Opium/heroin market

According to the data of the World Drug Report 2007, issued by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, at world level, there is 1,6 million opiates

consumers (0,45 of the population aged between 15-64), out of which 11 million are heroin consumers (70,51% of the number of opiates consumers). Most of the heroin consumers are encountered in Asia – 48,245, while the smallest number is registered in Oceania – 0,27%.

A percentage of 29,30% can be found in Europe, regarding the heroine users.

Table no. 1. Annual prevalence of opiates consumption, 2005

	Opiates consumption		Out of which, heroine consumers
	Number of consumers	% of the population aged between 15 and 64	Number of consumers
EUROPA¹	3 860 000	0,7	3 250 000
Central and Western Europe	1 420 000	0,5	1 370 000
South and Eastern Europe	184 000	0,2	130000
Eastern Europe	2 300 000	1,6	1 750 000
AMERICA²	2 130 000	0,4	1 480 000
North America	1 310 000	0,5	1 245 000
South America	830 000	0,3	230 000
ASIA²	8 480 000	0,3	5 350 000
OCEANIA²	90 000	0,4	30 000
AFRICA³	980 000	0,2	980 000
Global²	15 550 000	0,4	11 090 000

¹Over the global mean, ²Aproximatively the global mean, ³Below the global mean

Source: UNODC, World Drug Report, 2007

2. Cocaine market

At world level, cocaine consumption continues to remain concentrated in North America, followed by Europe and South America. United Nations Office on Drug and Crime estimates that almost 11 million (with almost 6,73% more than in the year 2004), representing 0,3% of the population aged between 15-64 consume cocaine, out of which 6,4 million in North America, 3,9 million in Western and Central Europe, 2,2 million in South America (including Central America and Caribbees), 1,1 million in Africa and 0,3 million in Asia. In 2005, an increase of 18,33% of the cocaine consumption in Central and Western Europe could be observed, while in the rest of the regions, insignificant changes could be registered in this field.

According to the Annual Report on Drug and Crime (2007), issued by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, in 2005, cocaine was

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placed on the second place among the most frequently illegal consumed drugs in the Member States of the Europe. It was estimated that this drug was consumed by more than 12 million Europeans at least once in their life, representing 4% of the total of adults.

Table no. 2. Annual prevalence of cocaine consumption, per continents, 2005

	Cocaine consumption	
	Number of consumers	% of the population aged between 15-64
EUROPA¹	4 056 000	0,75
Central and Western Europe	3 944 000	1,24
South and Eastern Europe	66 000	0,08
Eastern Europe	46 000	0,03
AMERICA¹	8 610 000	1,48
North America	6 363 000	2,19
South America	2 247 000	0,77
ASIA²	329 000	0,01
OCEANIA¹	178 000	0,83
AFRICA²	1 084 000	0,22
Global³	14 257 000	0,34

Source: UNODC, World Drug Report, 2007; ¹Over the global mean; ²Aproximatively the global mean ³Below the global mean

3. Amphetamine-type stimulants market

The group of amphetamine-type stimulants includes: the amphetamines (amphetamines, methamphetamines), ecstasy (MDMA and related substances) and other synthetic stimulants (methcathinones, phentermine, fenetylline etc.).

At world level, according to the statistics data supplied by the United Nations on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), global captures of ATS are dominated by amphetamines.

ATS production continues to be concentrated in North America, East and Southeast Asia, Europe, Oceania and South Africa.

Regarding the global consumption of ATS, between 2005 and 2006, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noticed the fact that the number of consumers has slightly decreased, being of 33,5 million, out of which almost 25 million (or the equivalent of 0,6% of the population between 15 and 64) were amphetamine consumers and 8,6% million were ecstasy users. The number is larger to that of the cocaine and heroine consumers. The decrease of the ATS consumers is mainly due to the decrease of the ecstasy consumers with 1,4 million.

Table no. 3. Estimations of ATS production (tone), 2005 at world level.

Estimation based on	Amphetamines (methamphetamine, amphetamine)		Ecstasy		Total	
	Quantity	Quantity estimation interval	Quantity	Quantity estimation interval	Quantity	Quantity estimation interval
Consumption	308	246-369	125	112-139	433	358-508
Drugs capture	307	282-332	80	66-94	387	348-426
Precursors capture	483	322.690	132	88-189*	615	410-879
Average of all estimations	366	308-438*	113	99-132*	478	417-553*
Rounded estimations	370	310-440*	110	90-130*	480	410-560*

* The intervals are calculated taking into account the statistics errors, as well. Source: UNODC, World Drug Report, 2007

4. Cannabis market

Cannabis is the most frequently illegal consumed drug in the world. Due to the fact that cannabis may be cultivated in very different environments and that it grows naturally in many parts of the world, it is extremely difficult to make realistic estimations of the production at world level. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, cannabis consumption has a larger prevalence in Oceania (15,8%), followed by North America (10,7), Central and Western Europe (7,4%). Ascending trends are also recorded in Africa, especially

in the Central and Western Africa (13,%), as well as in the south regions (8,5%).

CONCLUSIONS

- Although, according to the latest data published in the World Drug Report, issued by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), we do have clues regarding the stabilization of the drugs issue, irrespective of the fact that it is about production, traffic and consumption, the data do not indicate a decrease of this phenomenon, at world level;

- Consumption still represents an alarm signal at world level, having in view the fact that between 2005 and 2006, it registered similar values to those in the previous period of time, that is 200 million consumers, aged between 15-64;
- At world level, the most consumed drug remains cannabis, the latest data regarding the period between 2005 and 2006 indicate 158,8 million cannabis consumers;

Table no. 4. Annual prevalence of cannabis consumption 2003-2005

	Number of consumers	% of the population aged between 15-64
EUROPA¹	30.500.000	5,6
Central and Western Europe	23.400.000	7,4
South and Eastern Europe	1.700.000	2,0
Eastern Europe	5.400.000	3,8
AMERICA¹	37.600.000	6,5
North America	30.900.000	10,7
South America	6.700.000	2,3
ASIA³	49.100.000	1,9
OCEANIA¹	3.400.000	15,8
AFRICA¹	38.200.000	7,7
GLOBAL²	158.800.000	3,8

Source: UNODC, World Drug Report, 2007

¹Above the global average; ²Approximatively the global mean; ³Below the global mean.

- Increases regarding the drugs captures at world level were registered for cocaine (with 29,84% more in 2005, as against the year 2004), opium (with 61,64% more) and amphetamines (118,64% more);
- At world level, there is about 15,6 million opiates consumers, out of which 11 million are heroine consumers. Opiates consumption represent the cause of 60% of the number of the treatment requests in Asia and Europe;
- The world cocaine consumption continues to be focused on North American and South America. In 2005, at world level, there were approximately 14 million cocaine consumers (with 6,73% more, as against 2004), the consumption being focused on North America, Central and Western Europe, South America, Asia and Africa;
- The number of ATS consumers between 2005 and 2006 slightly decreased as against the previous years, being of 25 million people, out of which 25 million were amphetamine consumers and 8,6 million ecstasy users. 55% of the total consumers of ATS at world level, are recorded in Asia, especially in East and Southeast Asia (these regions count 97% of the total consumers of ATS within Asia). Europe also registers stabilization trends, even a descending trend of amphetamine and ecstasy consumption.

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