

Alternatives To Drug Prohibition

GLOSSARY OF DRUG POLICY RELATED TERMS

These definitions relate both to terms used in the CUC draft Alternatives to Drug Prohibition Social Responsibility Resolution, and to terms used in discussions arising from those recommendations. They are drawn from the Canadian Senate report "Cannabis: Our Position for a Canadian Public Policy", from the First Unitarian Church of Victoria drug panel of April 8, 2002, and from the Vancouver Unitarian Church congregational meeting of March 9, 2003.

Abuse

Vague term with a variety of meanings depending on the social, medical and legal contexts. Some equate any use of illicit drugs to abuse: for example, the international conventions consider that any use of drugs other than for medical or scientific purposes is abuse. The Diagnosis and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association defines abuse as a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress as defined by one or more of four criteria.

Addiction

General term referring to the concepts of tolerance and dependency. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) addiction is the repeated use of a psychoactive substance to the extent that the user is periodically or chronically intoxicated, shows a compulsion to take the preferred substance, has great difficulty in voluntarily ceasing or modifying substance use, and exhibits determination to obtain the substance by almost any means. Some authors prefer the term addiction to dependence, because the former also refers to the evolutive process preceding dependence.

Alcohol

Alcohol is considered a drug because its main ingredient, ethanol, acts on the brain as a depressant. Tolerance is created with regular use of alcohol and results in more alcohol being needed each time to achieve the same effect. The short-term effects of alcohol include impairment of motor and perceptual skills, gastric stimulation and relaxation of inhibitions. The long-term risks associated with abuse are cirrhosis of the liver, gastrointestinal hemorrhage, hematologic disorders, neurological damage, hepatitis, heart disease, and overdose.

Amphetamine-like "new" drugs

MDA and MDMA. Both synthesized drugs are known as psychedelic amphetamines. They possess psychedelic properties like LSD and have the stimulant properties of amphetamines. MDMA is also known as "Ecstasy" or "Adam".

Cannabis

Three varieties of the cannabis plant exist: cannabis sativa, cannabis indica, and cannabis ruderalis. Cannabis sativa is the most commonly found, growing in almost any soil condition. The cannabis plant has been known in China for about 6000 years. The flowering tops and leaves are used to produce the smoked cannabis. Common terms used to refer to cannabis are pot, marijuana, dope, ganja, hemp. Hashish is produced from the extracted resin. Classified as a psychotropic drug, cannabis is a modulator of the central nervous system.

Cocaine & Crack

Cocaine is one of the most powerful central nervous system stimulants known. It produces heightened alertness, inhibition of appetite, and intense feelings of euphoria and has been widely used in medicine as a local anesthetic. Cocaine is found in the leaves of a South American shrub called the *Erythroxylon coca*. Crack is a form of cocaine that has been chemically altered so that it can be smoked. It looks like small lumps or shavings of soap but has the texture of porcelain. Street terms for cocaine include Snow, Rock, Nose Candy, and Coke.

Decriminalization

Removal of a behaviour or activity from the scope of the criminal justice system. A distinction is usually made between *de jure* decriminalization, which entails an amendment to criminal legislation, and *de facto* decriminalization, which involves an administrative decision not to prosecute acts that nonetheless remain against the law. Decriminalization concerns only criminal legislation, and does not mean that the legal system has no further jurisdiction of any kind in this regard: other, non-criminal, laws may regulate the behaviour or activity that has been decriminalized (civil or regulatory offenses, etc.).

Depenalization

The removal of legal penalties for the possession of drugs for personal use. It differs from decriminalization in that in the latter civil fines are often substituted for criminal charges. Those who can pay fines do so, and those who cannot, often then face criminal charges. Because civil fines are often levied with greater frequency than criminal charges, decriminalization in some jurisdictions has resulted in more criminal charges for possession than before decriminalization, in a two level class based administration of justice.

Dependence

State where the user continues its use of the substance despite significant health, psychological, relational, familial or social problems. Dependence is a complex phenomenon, which may have genetic components. Psychological dependence refers to the psychological symptoms associated with craving and physical dependence to tolerance and the adaptation of the organism to chronic use.

Designer Drugs

Synthetic substances that are prepared by underground chemists to resemble existing potent but legal drugs, usually in the narcotic or amphetamine categories.

Diversion

The substitution of other sanctions for imprisonment, e.g., enforced treatment. In most jurisdictions there is not at present enough treatment space for those who wish it.

Dopamine

Neuromediator involved in the mechanisms of pleasure.

Drug

Generally used to refer to illicit rather than licit substances (such as nicotine, alcohol or medicines). In pharmacology, the term refers to any chemical agent that alters the biochemical or physiological processes of tissues or organisms. In this sense, the term drug refers better to any substance which is principally used for its psychoactive effects.

Gateway (theory)

Theory suggesting a sequential pattern in involvement in drug use from nicotine to alcohol, to cannabis and then "hard" drugs. The theory rests on a statistical association between the use of hard drugs and the fact that these users have generally used cannabis as their first illicit drug. This theory has not been validated by empirical research and is considered outdated.

Habituation

A psychological dependence on a drug, or related activity, to maintain a mental state of satisfaction. Many drugs are both addicting and habituating.

Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies with the goal of meeting drug users "where they're at" to help them reduce any harms associated with their drug use. Because harm reduction demands that interventions and policies designed to serve drug users reflect specific individual and community needs, there is no universal definition of or formula for implementing harm reduction. Perhaps the most controversial harm reduction method is safe injection sites.

Hashish

Resinous extract from the flowering tops of the cannabis plant and transformed into a paste.

Heroin

Narcotic analgesic with pain-killing and addictive properties. Heroin is a semi-synthetic compound made by chemical modification of morphine. Morphine and Codeine are derivatives of opium, which comes from the Asian poppy plant. In the body, heroin rapidly converts back to its chief active metabolite, morphine. Street terms for heroin include Smack, Junk, Horse, and Black Tar. The short-term effects of heroin are pain relief, decreased respiration, constipation, nausea, itching, and sweating. Long-term risks include mood instability, reduced libido, constipation, and overdose.

Illicit

Not permitted, unlawful.

Interdiction

Intercept, prohibition, or banishment; a governmental prohibition of commercial trade, intended to bring about an entire cessation for the time being of all trade.

International Conventions

Various international conventions have been adopted by the international community since 1912, first under the Society of Nations and then under the United Nations, to regulate the possession, use, production, distribution, sale, etc., of various psychotropic substances. Currently, the three main conventions are the 1961 Single Convention, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substance and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic. Canada is a signatory to all three conventions. Subject to countries' national constitutions, these conventions establish a system of regulation where only medical and scientific uses are permitted. This system is based on the prohibition of source plants (coca, opium and cannabis) and the regulation of synthetic chemicals produced by pharmaceutical companies.

Intoxication

Disturbance of the physiological and psychological systems resulting from a substance. Pharmacology generally distinguishes four levels: light, moderate, serious and fatal.

Legalization

Regulatory system allowing the culture, production, marketing, sale and use of substances. Although none currently exist in relation to "street-drugs" (as opposed to alcohol or tobacco which are regulated products), a legalization system could take two forms: without any state control (free markets) and with state controls (regulatory regime).

Licit

Conforming to the requirements of law. Licit drugs include alcohol and nicotine.

LSD

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is the most powerful and well-known of all hallucinogens. LSD is a colourless, tasteless powder that can be found in a capsule or in a pill. Since the powder is extremely water soluble, and easily absorbed, drops of LSD are placed on blotters. LSD and other hallucinogenic drugs produce significant changes in perception, mood, and thought. These very often include visual hallucinations and distortions, where the user is aware that these experiences are not real. Short-term effects of LSD include perceptual distortion, heightened sensory experiences, increased blood pressure, and nausea. Long-term risks include possible flashbacks, tolerance to effects, and some psychological difficulties for a few.

Marijuana

Mexican term originally referring to a cigarette of poor quality. Has now become equivalent for cannabis.

Methadone

A synthetic narcotic drug; an orally effective analgesic similar in action to morphine but with slightly greater potency and longer duration. Used as a replacement for morphine and heroin.

Methamphetamine

A new synthesized form of the well-known drug methamphetamine or "Speed." Methamphetamine produces mainly central nervous system stimulation, reduction of hunger, and an overall feeling of well-being. The term ice is a street name that refers to a form of crystal methamphetamine (actually methylmethamphetamine) which can be smoked. Street terms for methamphetamine include Speed, Crank, Crystal, and Meth, depending on the physical form (crystal vs powder), the geographical area, and the dealer.

Morphine

The chief active ingredient in opium.

Mushrooms & Cacti

Other hallucinogens include mescaline, the naturally-occurring hallucinogen found in the Mexican peyote cactus, as well as other cacti in South America. These hallucinogens have the same effect as LSD, but last for a shorter period of time.

Narcotic

Drugs derived from opium or opium-like compounds, including morphine, heroin, and codeine as well as nonopiate, synthetic narcotics such as methadone, with potent analgesic effects associated with significant alteration of mood and behaviour and with the potential for dependence and tolerance following repeated administration. While highly addictive, they have not been proven themselves to be harmful to health when used in moderate amounts without adulteration. Sometimes used incorrectly to refer to all drugs capable of inducing dependence.

Nicotine

The addictive cancer causing drug in tobacco.

Opiates

Substance derived from the opium poppy. The term opiate excludes synthetic opioids such as heroin and methadone.

Opium

The dried juice of the unripe capsule of the opium poppy.

Overdose

A drug overdose is the accidental or intentional use of a drug or medicine in an amount that is higher than is normally used, and may result in death.

PCP

Phencyclidine (PCP); also known as Angel Dust. It was first invented as a human anesthetic but because of severe side effects its use on humans was discontinued. It was later used for a time in veterinary medicine. In its pure form, the drug is a white crystalline powder that can be snorted or sprinkled on tobacco, parsley flakes, or cannabis and then smoked. In liquid form, it can be injected. Short-term effects include time and space distortion, dissociative state, and the risk of overdose. At high doses it can bring coma and death.

Poly-addicted

Addicted to more than one substance.

Polydrug users

People using one or more drugs in varying combinations.

Prevalence

Total number of people with a disease, illness or condition in a specified period of time.

Prohibition

Historically, the term designates the period of national interdiction of alcohol sales in the United States between 1919 and 1933. By analogy, the term is now used to describe UN and State policies aiming for a drug-free society. Prohibition is based on the interdiction to cultivate, produce, fabricate, sell, possess, use, etc., some substances except for medical and scientific purposes.

Psychoactive substance

Substance which alters mental processes such as thinking or emotions. More neutral than the term "drug" because it does not refer to the legal status of the substance, it is the term we prefer to use.

Psychotropic substance (see also psychoactive)

Much the same as psychoactive substance. More specifically however, the term refers to drugs primarily used in the treatment of mental disorders, such as anxiolytic, sedatives, neuroleptics, etc. More specifically, refers to the substances covered in the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Regulation

Control system specifying the conditions under which the cultivation, production, marketing, prescription, sales, possession or use of a substance are allowed. Regulatory approaches may rest on interdiction (as for illegal drugs) or controlled access (as for medical drugs or alcohol). Our proposal of an exemption regime under the current legislation is a regulatory regime.

Residential Treatment

Drug or alcohol treatment with a room and board or residential component.

Stimulants

Agents that arouse organic activity, strengthen the action of the heart, increase vitality, and promote a sense of well-being; classified according to the parts of the body upon which they chiefly act (i.e., the cardiac and respiratory systems). The principle drugs of abuse in this group are the amphetamines and cocaine. Life-threatening doses produce hyperthermia, convulsions and cardiovascular collapse. The short-term effects of amphetamines include increased heart rate, restlessness, euphoria, irregular breathing, and the risk of convulsions and overdose. Long-term risks include high blood pressure, anxiety, tension, insomnia, skin rash, overdose, and paranoia.

Tetrahydrocannabinol (D9-THC)

Main active component of cannabis, D9-THC is very fat-soluble and has a lengthy half-life. Its psychoactive effects are modulated by other active components in cannabis. In its natural state, cannabis contains between 0.5% to 5% THC. Sophisticated cultivation methods and plant selection, especially female plants, leads to higher levels of THC concentration.

Tolerance

Reduced response of the organisms and increased capacity to support its effects after a more or less lengthy period of use. Tolerance levels are extremely variable between substances, and tolerance to cannabis is believed to be lower than for most other drugs, including tobacco and alcohol.

Toxicity

Characteristic of a substance which induces intoxication, i.e., "poisoning". Many substances, including some common foods, have some level of toxicity. Cannabis presents almost no toxicity and cannot lead to an overdose.