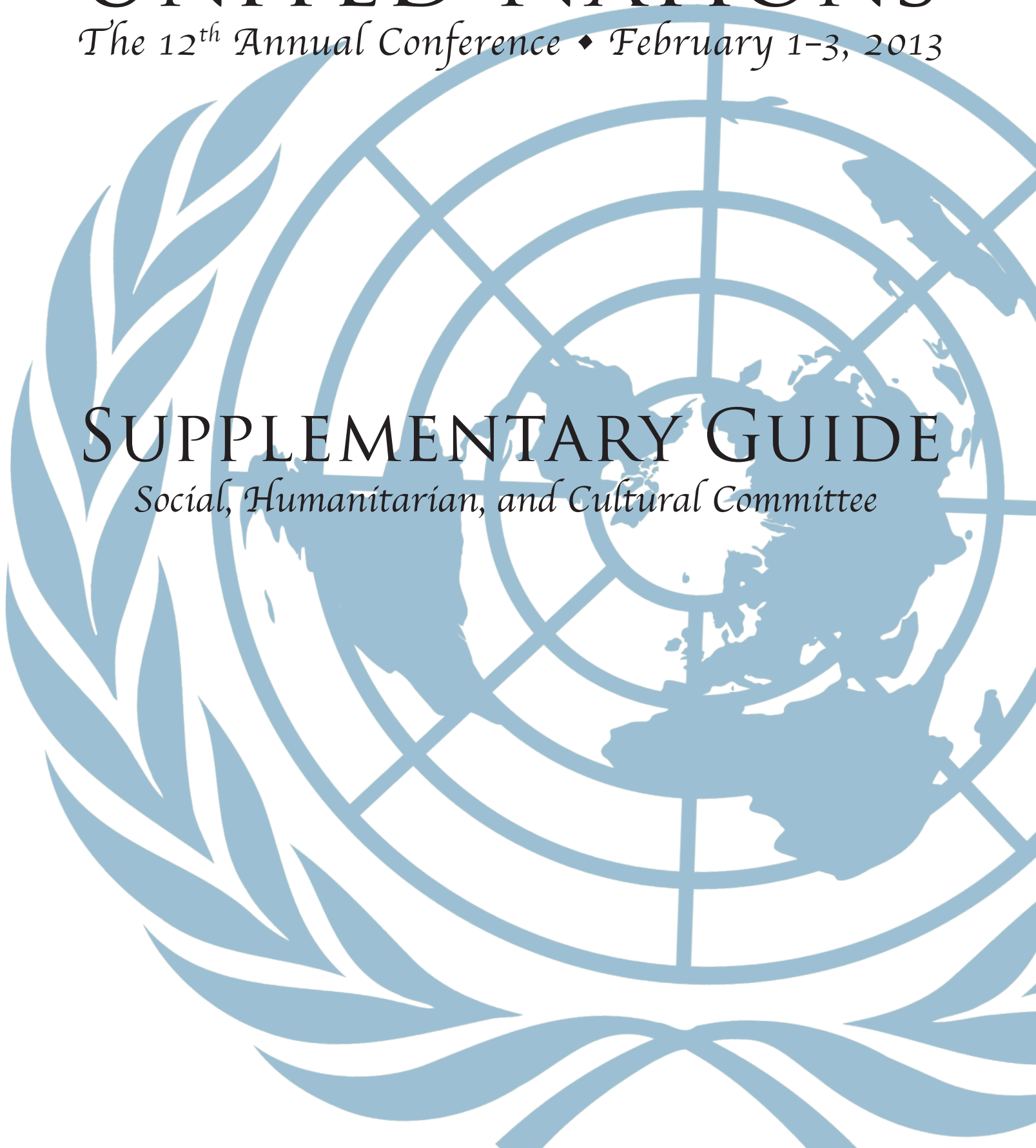


# VANCOUVER MODEL UNITED NATIONS

*The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference • February 1-3, 2013*

## SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDE

*Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee*



# Key Issues Associated with Drug Trafficking

Before delving into the momentous discussion of drug control, it is imperative to recognize the fundamental characteristics of drugs and drug trafficking that in turn form the premise on which drug control is based. The most prominent issue associated with illicit drugs is usually public health, as most illegal drugs have very harmful effects on humans. The second major issue is the violence that is associated with drugs and drug trafficking, which we can especially see in the activities of drug cartels in Latin America.

## Health

The principle reason for anti-drug policy is to maintain, protect, and enhance public health, particularly when it comes to substance abuse — a form of anguish common with all illicit drugs. The term substance abuse is usually used to describe the use of drugs — both legal and illegal, and including alcohol — with detrimental effects to the user, and in the case of legal drugs, without proper prescription.<sup>1</sup>

As specific drugs or types of drugs have different health effects, it is beneficial to identify the basic issues associated with the most prominent illicit drugs that have led to their condemnation and criminalization in most countries.

## Marijuana

Marijuana (also known as weed, pot, and dope) is the world's most common and perhaps most controversial illicit drug. It is grown from the *Cannabis sativa* plant, and has been used throughout history for different purposes. Cannabis is generally inhaled by smoke through various instruments including pipes, joints, blunts, and bongs.<sup>2</sup> The chemical that produces the high is called THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), which travels through the bloodstream to the brain and other parts of the body.<sup>3</sup>



Although marijuana is used to treat some health issues, this fact is often distorted to give the false impressions that the drug is safe. Like marijuana, many pharmaceutical drugs have medicinal properties that can be effectual under certain conditions; however, they can be quite dangerous for non-prescribed use. Another prevalent but mistaken belief is that since marijuana comes from a plant, it is natural and therefore safe. This direction of thought is fallacious, as many illicit drugs including heroin and cocaine are derived from natural sources, and nature produces many toxic, poisonous chemicals that are unsafe for consumption. In general, marijuana has become an egre-

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.who.int/topics/substance\\_abuse/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/substance_abuse/en/)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/health\\_information/a\\_z\\_mental\\_health\\_and\\_addiction\\_information/marijuana/Pages/marijuana.aspx](http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/health_information/a_z_mental_health_and_addiction_information/marijuana/Pages/marijuana.aspx)

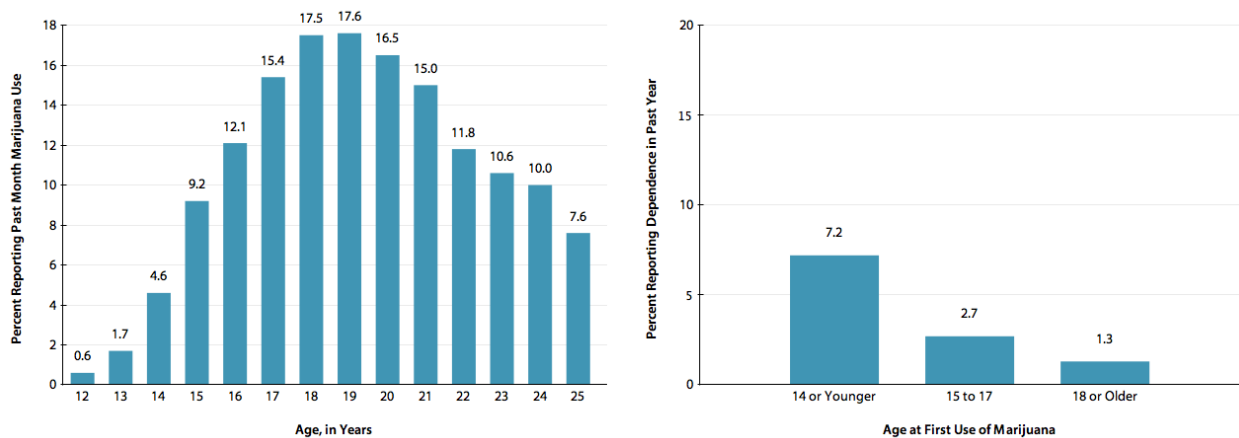
<sup>3</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugsmarijuana>

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giously large business, and with the business comes relentless propaganda that has beguiled much of society.

In fact, marijuana directly affects the brain. Though controlled tests on marijuana have only been conducted in recent history, research thus far has linked marijuana to a variety of other medical problems including slower brain functions, panic attacks, depression, psychosis, asthma, and even cancer. Additionally, increased marijuana use appears to be directly proportional to decreased educational performance, as heavy users are less able to grasp onto information or stay focused. Especially in youth, frequent marijuana use can also lead to increased academic failure.

Though not as addictive as some other drugs, marijuana does cause dependency in many users. Additionally, many studies have shown that marijuana is a gateway drug, meaning that its use can lead to use of other, potentially more harmful, drugs.



Marijuana use is common at an early age.<sup>4</sup> (2000)

## Cocaine

Cocaine is drug that is derived from the coca bushes that are native to South America. After it is processed into a white powder, it can be snorted or injected. By chemically changing it further and adding other substances, cocaine can also be smoked. When used, cocaine travels through the bloodstream and enters the brain, where it increases the amount of dopamine and may consequently increase the user's feelings of pleasure. Cocaine alters the mental state to the user, often making them more alert and sociable; however, after its use, the user will often experience bouts of severe anxiety or depression and become highly dependent on the drug. Some other short term effects of cocaine include the delay of feelings of exhaustion or pain (which are often exacerbated after use), reduction of appetite, increased blood pressure and heart rate, faster rates of breathing, pupil expansion, uncontrollable reflexes, parched mouth, and para-



<sup>4</sup><http://www.samhsa.gov/data/2k2/MJ&dependence/MJ&dependence.htm>

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normal thinking.<sup>5</sup>

Long-term cocaine users feel even more severe effects; examples of symptoms include depression, mood swings, relentlessness, suicidal thoughts, paranoia, hallucinations, chest pains, and breathing difficulties. Cocaine use can even lead to fatal strokes and heart attacks,<sup>6</sup> as blood vessels contract upon use.<sup>7</sup>

## **Heroin**

Heroin is an opiate (a drug that is produced from the opium poppy plant) that is used by injection, smoking, or snorting.<sup>8</sup> The drug quickly travels through the bloodstream to the brain, where it unleashes strong feelings of euphoria in the user by stimulating opioid receptors.<sup>9</sup> During this state, the user will feel relaxed along with a lack of both physical and emotional pain.<sup>10</sup> After the feelings of euphoria, users often feel a twilight state marked by a sense of tranquillity.<sup>11</sup> Some short-term effects of heroin include apathy, nausea, vomiting, unwillingness to eat, improper functioning in the nervous system, visionary issues, constipation, skin problems, and headaches.<sup>12</sup>



The opioid receptors that are affected are responsible for regular life-sustaining functions, including respiration, control of blood pressure, and sexual feelings.<sup>13</sup> On overdose, users may develop abnormally constricted pupils, cold and/or blue skin, low blood pressure, decreased heart rates, slower and shallower breathing, and unconsciousness which may result in a coma. Heroin can be particularly dangerous when mixed or used with other substances. Strychnine and chalk are two common substances used to dilute heroin, the former being poisonous and the latter having the potential to clog blood vessels due to a lack of dissolution.<sup>14</sup>

## **Methamphetamine**

Methamphetamine (commonly referred to as *meth*) is a synthetic drug that comes in powder, crystal, or chunky form. It can be smoked, snorted, injected, or taken orally. The injected form of meth is known as speed (amphetamine), and the smoked form is known as crystal meth.<sup>15</sup> Meth affects the brain by changing functions with dopamine, establishing a feeling of euphoria during use.<sup>16</sup>

Constant use of methamphetamine considerably changes brain functions and causes brain damage,

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/learn-renseigne/cocaine-eng.php>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/cocaine>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugscocaine>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugsheroine>

<sup>9</sup><http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/heroin>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/learn-renseigne/heroin-eng.php>

<sup>11</sup>[http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/drug\\_data\\_sheets/Heroin.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/drug_data_sheets/Heroin.pdf)

<sup>12</sup><http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/learn-renseigne/heroin-eng.php>

<sup>13</sup><http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/heroin>

<sup>14</sup><http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/learn-renseigne/heroin-eng.php>

<sup>15</sup><http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/learn-renseigne/meth-eng.php>

<sup>16</sup><http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/methamphetamine>

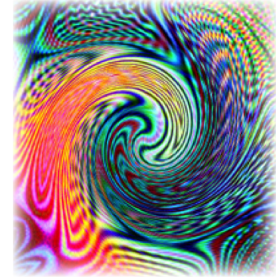
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including impaired motor skills and difficulties in learning. Meth also changes many parts of the brain dealing with emotions, leading to severe depression and other psychological problems with frequent use: excessive weight loss, dental problems, anxiety, confusion, insomnia, mood disturbances, paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions. Methamphetamine dependence is also very common, as changes in the brain result in a physical need for the drug.

## Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens are drugs that establish a false sense of reality in the user. Common hallucinogens include LSD, MDMA, and Psilocybin mushrooms. These drugs change the way the human senses function, and often cause fluctuating moods, by altering parts of the brain and modifying the user's perception of time and reality. Many users of hallucinogenic drugs suffer mental traumas and may develop mental disorders, sometimes even after a single use.<sup>17</sup>



MDMA, or ecstasy, is a drug that is both a hallucinogen and a stimulant.<sup>18</sup> It is usually taken through the mouth, either in a tablet or a capsule, and affects parts of the brain that deal with serotonin, which is responsible for several bodily functions including emotion, mood, sexual feeling, aggression, excitement, etc. The use of MDMA can lead to confusion, states of depression, difficulty sleeping, anxiety, drug dependence, brain damage, and ultimately, death.<sup>19</sup> In tablet form, ecstasy is often mixed with other drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine, which are harmful on their own and even worse in combination.<sup>20</sup>

LSD, commonly known as acid, is a very strong hallucinogen that severely affects the user's perceptions of reality, senses, and thoughts.<sup>21</sup> Like MDMA, it is usually taken through capsules or tablets, and result in trips, or visual hallucinations that are accompanied by a distorted sense of time and physical reality. Often, users of LSD experience petrifying thoughts and feelings that may produce frightening flashbacks throughout the user's regular life. Although LSD is not generally considered to be an addictive drug, users can gain tolerance, requiring increased dosages to produce the same effect. LSD use can result in dilated pupils, increased body temperature, rapid heart rate and blood pressure, extreme sweating, lack of appetite, lethargy, dry mouth, and tremors.<sup>22</sup> Long term LSD users can also develop psychosis, depression, and Hallucinogen-Induced Persisting Perceptual Disorder (HPPD), a condition where the flashbacks appear regularly.<sup>23</sup>

## Tobacco & Alcohol

Tobacco and alcohol are legal in most jurisdictions, but can nevertheless have harmful conse-

<sup>17</sup>[http://teens.drugabuse.gov/mom/tg\\_hal1.php](http://teens.drugabuse.gov/mom/tg_hal1.php)

<sup>18</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugsecstasy>

<sup>19</sup><http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/mdma-ecstasy>

<sup>20</sup>[http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/drug\\_data\\_sheets/Ecstasy.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/drug_data_sheets/Ecstasy.pdf)

<sup>21</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugslsd>

<sup>22</sup><http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/hallucinogens-ld-psyote-psyocybin-pc>

<sup>23</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugslsd>

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quences, sometimes worse than those produced by some illicit drugs. Tobacco contains nicotine, a highly addictive substance that unquestionably leads to cancer and lung disease.<sup>24</sup> About 443,000 people die in the United States alone every year from cigarette smoking, and another 8.6 million live with serious illnesses.<sup>25</sup> One in ten adult deaths are caused by tobacco, making it the world's most preventable cause of death.<sup>26</sup>



Alcohol, although generally not producing negative effects in moderate drinkers, can have harmful effects when consumed in excess.<sup>27</sup> Alcohol is addictive — about 15% of Americans are labeled as



problem drinkers.<sup>28</sup> Many users develop drinking problems because they use alcohol to emotionally handle life's troubles, which can be very problematic and lead to further problems and such as alcoholism (alcohol dependence). Especially dangerous is binge drinking — when a large amount of alcohol is consumed in a short period of time. Binge drinking can make the user unable to think properly, leading them to act recklessly.<sup>29</sup> Additionally,

heavy alcohol drinkers are twice as likely to die of heart disease or cancer, twelve times more likely to die of liver cirrhosis, three times more likely to die in a road accident, and six times more likely to commit suicide.<sup>30</sup>

## Violence

There are several ways that illegal drugs can initiate violence and homicide. As outlined by Paul Goldstein in his renowned 1985 article *The Drugs/Violence Nexus*, drug violence can be placed into three categories: the psychopharmacological, the economically compulsive, and the systemic.<sup>31</sup>

Psychopharmacological refers to violence that is a result of direct effects of the drug on the user,<sup>32</sup> which can lead to irrational and violent behaviour. Economic-compulsive refers to violence that is executed by individuals or groups so as to acquire drugs or the financial means to do so, such as robbery. Both of these types of drug violence are relatively less serious and common compared to the final category: the systematic.<sup>33</sup>

Systematic violence is a broad category that encompasses violence carried out as a result of the distribution and use of illicit drugs, including drug territory quarrels and drug debts. In other words, this is comprised of the violence that results from drug trafficking, a phenomenon hindering the

<sup>24</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugstobacco>

<sup>25</sup><http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/osh.htm>

<sup>26</sup>[http://www.who.int/tobacco/health\\_priority/en/](http://www.who.int/tobacco/health_priority/en/)

<sup>27</sup><http://www2.potsdam.edu/hanson/dj/AlcoholAndHealth.html>

<sup>28</sup><http://www.alcoholaddiction.info/alcoholism-statistics.htm>

<sup>29</sup><http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugsalcohol>

<sup>30</sup><http://www.ledgehill.com/resources/addiction-info/alcoholism-in-canada/>

<sup>31</sup><http://www.drugpolicy.org/docUploads/nexus.pdf>

<sup>32</sup>[http://wdr2011.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/WDR\\_2011\\_Case\\_Study\\_Trafficking\\_Violence.pdf](http://wdr2011.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/WDR_2011_Case_Study_Trafficking_Violence.pdf)

<sup>33</sup><http://www.drugpolicy.org/docUploads/nexus.pdf>

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development of many regions around the world.

Within the systematic category, there are many specific conditions that fuel violence:

- *Violence that occurs between drug cartels.* Since drug trafficking is illegal, dealers are unable to lawfully hold their customers accountable for their purchases. Often, drug dealers use violence in order to receive payment for their services. Additionally, different trafficking individuals or organizations may resort to violence in order to reduce competition, consequently initiating serious conflicts and eruptions of mass murder.
- *Violence that erupts within drug cartels.* Once again, due to the illegality of these organizations, they are unable to take their employees to court and hold them liable for debts or even criminal acts, as they would risk their own exposure to prosecution. Consequently, many drug traffickers resort to violence for personal gain — to enforce their own laws and gain power over rivals.
- *Direct and indirect impact of drug-related violence on the general criminal justice system.* When law enforcement efforts are focused on drug trafficking issues, it can divert institutional resources, indirectly decreasing efforts to combat other criminal sectors. Additionally, through bribes given to police, judges and prosecutors, drug traffickers can corrupt the criminal justice system, leading to similar extended troubles when dealing with other crimes and thus augment the outbreak of criminal activity.
- *Proliferation of small arms.* Often, drug trafficking leads to an increased frequency of gun trafficking; therefore, violence that is both related and unrelated to the drug trade is amplified and aided. As noted by the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, “the relationship between homicide, firearm, and drug commerce is central. Drugs finance the purchase of firearms, which sustain gang wars for control of territories and trafficking.”

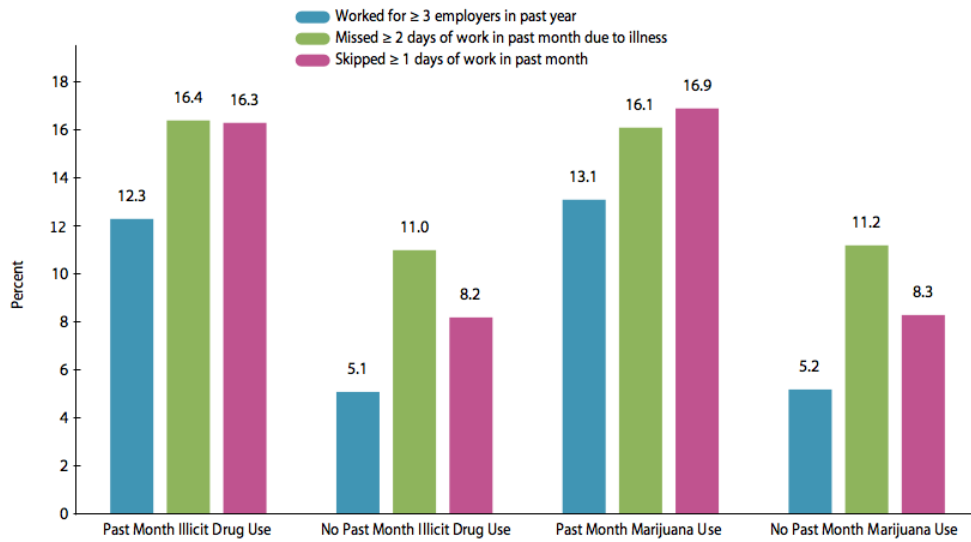
Finally, drug violence can also be a cause of drug prohibition and government infliction. With arrests, law enforcement, and seizing of drugs also come retaliation and violent altercation between police and suspected drug traffickers.

### **Socioeconomic Behaviour**

Like crime, there are many socioeconomic characteristics associated with the use of illicit drugs. Some aspects of socioeconomic behaviour include those directly attributed to dependence, such as the act of prioritizing drugs over other essential tasks in one’s life (i.e., education, work, and relations) which in turn suffer.

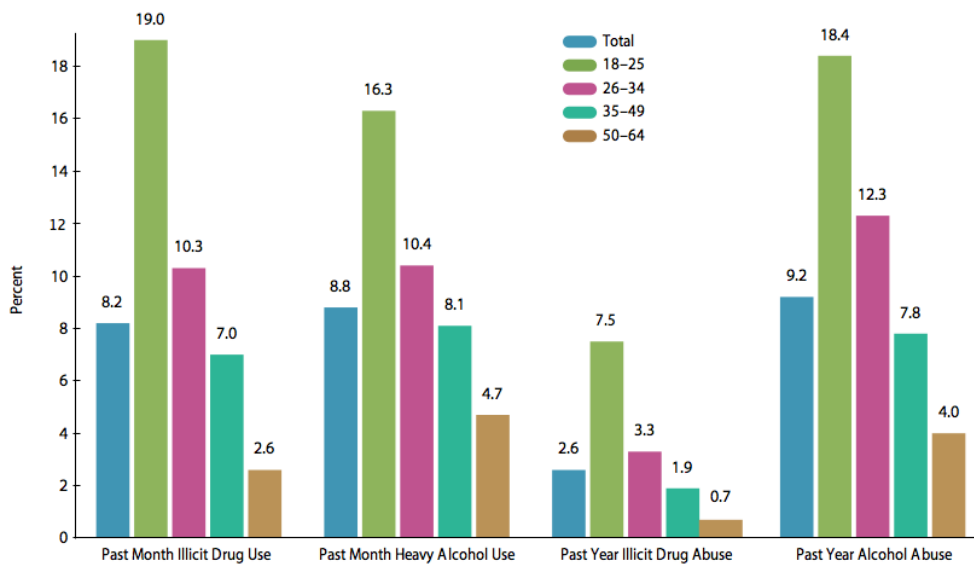
The link between illicit drug use and socioeconomic status is very strong. A study in Sweden, for example, found a correlation between lower socioeconomic status and marijuana use. Another study in England and Wales found that the use of heroin and cocaine has a correlation with homelessness and educational progress. In some cases, drug use can affect one’s socioeconomic status, and in others, one’s socioeconomic status may affect his drug use. In most cases, the relation works both ways, often engulfing substance abusers in a vicious cycle.

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Workplace behaviour among full-time workers aged 18-64 by past month substance use<sup>34</sup>

Illicit drug use also typically begins at a person’s youth. In a survey done of adult marijuana users, 7.2% of those who said they began at or under the age of fourteen were dependent, compared to 2.7% of those who began between the ages of 15 to 17 and only 1.3% of those who began after the age of 18. Because their bodies and brains are growing, youth substance abusers are also more susceptible to negative health effects – both short term and long term – than adults.



Substance abuse is more common in younger people<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup><http://www.samhsa.gov/data/work2k7/work.htm>

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*