



Drug abuse

Drug abuse is a national security concern in Ukraine. The number of drug addicts is increasing by 8 percent annually, which is among the highest rates worldwide. Seventy percent of drug addicts are under the age of 25, and drug abuse among females in Ukraine is the highest in Europe. Drug abuse is contributing to the country's negative demographic trends, and its impact will increase in the future.

Experts, including police and doctors, are gravely concerned about the drug situation in Ukraine. In their view, the lack of an efficient legal framework has led to a situation in which drugs are largely permitted in the country, rather than banned. Amphetamines are widely available on the streets, while common Chinese analogues of psychotropic substances are no longer included in the lists of prohibited substances, but are even being sold via the Internet. Increasing numbers of drugs are being produced in laboratories in Ukraine, as the components used to create the most dangerous drugs, such as amphetamine, methamphetamine and methadone, are easy to obtain. Although the police have shut down hundreds of such laboratories they are soon back in operation because the process is so simple. To tackle the problem, punishments for those who produce and sell drugs should be made more severe, and the authorities should review the list of banned substances and the ways in which they are distributed.



Common signs of drug use

A person may be a drug user or addict if they have:

- the appearance and behaviour of a drunk but do not smell of alcohol;
- fluctuating moods (talkativeness, aggression, or inappropriate behaviour);
- unusually dramatic gestures, excessive movements, restlessness or immobility, lethargy or weakness;
- an unsteady gait with a swinging body, a swaying motion when sitting, possibly with closed eyes, and impaired handwriting;
- unnatural skin tone (strikingly pale or uncharacteristically red in the face);
- glassy eyes and/or a glazed expression;
- severely restricted or dilated pupils that do not react to light;
- altered salivation (increased saliva or a dry mouth and lips and hoarse voice); or
- altered speech (rapid, accentuated, dull, slow or slurred).



Most commonly used drugs



Amphetamines are synthesised chemicals that have a stimulating effect on the nervous system. They come in capsule or tablet form. The prolonged use of amphetamines, or taking large doses in combination with sleeping pills, can be very dangerous. They are especially harmful – even in small quantities – when taken with alcohol. Amphetamines are available legally but are often distributed illegally through criminal channels. The availability of amphetamines leads to high levels of abuse.



Opiates (heroin, morphine, codeine) directly depress the central nervous system. They are prepared from the juice of the opium poppy. The physical effects of opiates depend on the drug, its dosage and the method of administration. They may include a brief state of euphoria followed by drowsiness; slowed heartbeat and breathing; decreased brain activity; loss of appetite, thirst, sexual desire and reflexes; and a higher pain threshold. Risks associated with the use of opiates include AIDS, blood poisoning and hepatitis resulting from injections and the use of non-sterilised or shared needles; death as a result of using crude heroin; death from overdose; and opiate (especially heroin) addiction, which develops rapidly.



Methadone is a synthetic opiate used as a surrogate for heroin and officially prescribed for the treatment of heroin addiction, although it also causes dependence. The effects of methadone last far longer than those of morphine-based drugs. Withdrawal symptoms develop far more slowly and are less severe than those related to morphine and heroin, but they continue for longer. Ironically, methadone, which is used to control drug abuse, often appears on the black market. There are also reported cases of fatal methadone overdoses.



Cocaine and derivatives (crack, freebase cocaine) cause a brief but intense feeling of euphoria and increased confidence. They stimulate the central nervous system, quicken the pulse and breathing rates, raise the blood pressure and body temperature, and cause the pupils to dilate. They also lead to increased agitation and anxiety, insomnia and chronic fatigue. The dangers of cocaine use include bleeding and other damage to the nasal cavity; paranoid psychosis, hallucinations and other mental disorders; impaired motor reflexes; and death from cardiac abnormalities or respiratory arrest. Addiction to cocaine, in the form of both physical and psychological dependence, may occur after only a short period of use. In many cases, the use of crack results in immediate dependence.



Marijuana and hashish may cause euphoria, a sense of carelessness, lack of motivation, incontinence, increased talkativeness, dry mouth and throat, increased appetite, impaired coordination, decreased concentration, memory loss and heart palpitations.

Immediate associated risks include poor learning and work performance; confused thoughts, frustration, depression and feelings of isolation; delayed sexual development and maturation, including adverse effects on sperm production and disruption of the menstrual cycle; and lung and respiratory ailments (smoking one marijuana joint is equivalent to 25 tobacco cigarettes). Large doses can cause hallucinations and paranoia; increased risks to health and safety due to impaired coordination and slowed responses; and dependence.

Marijuana is often classified as a “starter” or “gateway” drug, as some marijuana smokers later turn to harder drugs such as cocaine, LSD and other hallucinogens.



Hallucinogens are drugs that distort human sensations, thoughts, emotions and perceptions. Phencyclidine (or PCP) is a synthetic drug that may be in the form of a white crystalline powder or transparent liquid. In both forms, PCP is a strong drug and is often taken with marijuana, either smoked or eaten. The use of PCP results in impaired judgement and awareness, disorientation, confusion and memory loss; extremely unpredictable and sometimes bizarre or violent behaviour; extreme excitement; impaired driving ability; and an increased pain threshold. Physical dependence on PCP may be accompanied by memory loss, aggressive behaviour, weight loss and paranoia. Ecstasy generally comes in the form of tablets or capsules. It increases visual and auditory perceptions and is a highly effective mood stimulator. Ecstasy is associated with underground dance parties (“raves”) where there is no alcohol but an abundance of ecstasy. The use of ecstasy increases the heart rate and may cause overheating and kidney, liver and heart damage. Taking the drug can cause seizures, brain swelling and permanent brain damage, and can kill.



Volatile solvents include glue, nail polish remover, lighter fluid, nitrous oxide, ether, hairspray, insect repellents and cleaning agents, which have psychoactive effects when inhaled. The prolonged use of volatile inhalants may cause sneezing, coughing, runny nose, nosebleeds, nausea, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, loss of coordination and balance, and inability to make decisions. Volatile solvents also cause damage to the liver, brain and nervous system and may lead to loss of consciousness or death from heart failure, respiratory arrest or choking, as they displace oxygen from the lungs and depress the nervous system.