

FORUM:	World Health Assembly
ISSUE:	Measures to Reduce the Misuse of Prescription Drugs for Non-Medical Purposes
STUDENT OFFICER:	Minchae (Kaylyn) Kim
POSITION:	Head Chair of World Health Assembly

Introduction

The exploitation of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes can have detrimental consequences on one's health and the community around them. As of 2025, there have been over 13.8 million United States civilians who have misused prescription drugs, and of this group, over 55.3% are considered to have developed addictions. The National Institute on Drug Abuse has outlined that opioids, central nervous system (CNS) depressants, and stimulants are the three most exploited medications.



Depiction of a variety of illegal drugs

The misuse of prescription drugs can catalyze a lifelong pattern of addiction and health issues that extend beyond the individual responsible for the misuse. For one, drug addictions have been associated with various clinical conditions, including cancer, strokes, mental health issues, or heart disease. If a pregnant individual is engaging in substance abuse, the infant may be born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), which can cause tremors, seizures, and sleeping issues after birth, and it is also probable that the child will experience developmental issues in the future. The Central Narcotics Bureau also outlines that children growing up in households with substance abuse can develop psychological issues resulting from isolation, neglect, or stigma, while partners of drug abusers can experience a sense of betrayal or resentment for the relapses that abusers often experience.

As highlighted here, drug abuse often affects the communities, family members, and loved ones that are associated with the substance abusers. Hence, this issue is not only relevant for health on an individual level but for the well-being of communities around the abusers.

Background



TIANMUN

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has pioneered several initiatives to reduce the frequency of drug abuse globally, including a three-part process targeting the prevention, treatment, and access to prescription drugs. This office has emphasized the incorporation of community participation, youth awareness, and rehabilitation services for addicted patients. Rather than creating a culture of shame and stigma for abusers, the UNODC prioritizes implementing awareness workshops and official healthcare treatments to break the cycle of addiction.

Previous research has also shown that there are a wide variety of reasons individuals exploit prescription drugs, including attempting to find a coping mechanism in response to stress or easing



Depiction of cannabis, a drug that can be medically prescribed in the UK

physical, emotional, or withdrawal pain. The same study found that oftentimes, patients justified their abuse of prescription drugs by the fact that they were initially diagnosed with a medical condition that first exposed them to the substances. As they felt relief from conditions like back pain, anxiety, or stress after using these substances, abusers often felt more compelled to reinforce this cycle. Certainly, it is

important to recognize that some individuals exploit these prescription drugs for leisure, but the commonality between all of these patients was that the cycle of drug abuse began in increments. Whether it was being prescribed medicine by a physician or being exposed to addictive substances from a young age, the beginning stage seemed relatively innocuous but progressed to have significant consequences, providing insights into how government officials should prevent drug abuse.

Problems Raised

Long-Term Drug Abuse Addiction

The National Institute on Drug Abuse describes the positive reinforcement cycle that drug addiction often fuels. To start, drug addiction is defined as an uncontrollable urge to consume drugs, regardless of years without being exposed to the drugs. By exciting the dopaminergic systems in the brain, drugs often leave users with a feeling of intense happiness or pleasure. To chase this reward, users feel compelled to engage in substance abuse again at a serious cost, however. The cost is tolerance, where individuals have to take increasingly greater doses of the drug to experience the same feeling of pleasure and find less satisfaction from other life experiences. It is important to note that these addictions can be fueled by one's genetics and environment, where individuals who are more frequently exposed to drugs



TIANMUN

during their adolescent years may engage in such behaviors more and relapse into substance abuse once more. To cease this cycle of addiction, governments must prioritize understanding both the scientific mechanisms behind drug abuse and implementing the proper policies to prevent early exposure to drugs.

Degradation of Financial Security and Social Relationships

The use of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes has far-reaching consequences on one's economic and psychological well-being. As illegal drug trafficking is incentivized through the purchase of drugs for non-medical purposes, victims of drug addiction may find themselves in a place of economic insecurity. Although studies have reported difficulties in quantifying the exact costs associated with substance abuse, it is estimated that approximately \$740 billion USD is spent on drug abuse each year in the United States.

Furthermore, research indicates that social relationships are frequently compromised in the face of long-term drug addiction patterns. For one, pregnant mothers or any parents suffering from illegal substance abuse may expose children to these patterns from an early age, affecting the overall family dynamic, what is normalized, and what individuals grow insensitive to over time. There is also the matter of familial estrangement that can occur when individuals become overly dependent on illegal drug abuse that affects their way of interacting with others, protecting family members, or living without relying on illegal substances.



Illegal drug trafficking industry

International Actions

International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy

Aimed at advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, this international guideline provides Member States with recommendations from officials in the United Nations Development Programme, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, among other international entities. By organizing educational workshops aimed at building awareness of illegal drug use and investigating the human rights standards by which drug policies and laws are created, this guideline has enabled countries globally to address the issue of illegal drug trafficking and usage from the grassroots.



Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961

Established in 1961 and modified in 1972, this internationally binding guideline has placed limits on more than 145 different types of drugs. These limits can be differentiated based on the drug and on the level of control by government entities and the World Health Organization (WHO). For instance, if the drug is considered to be dangerous unless in a medical context, being found guilty of creating, distributing, or trading such content may lead to severe consequences. One concern that is plaguing the United Nations authorities is that drug traffickers are attempting to find loopholes in this system by chemically engineering substances that have not been officially recognized under this guideline. As a result, this emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the Member States and the International Narcotics Control Board that needs to occur for countries to stay updated on illegal drug activities.

Key Players

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime is a key global leader in the drug misuse conflict, publishing annual drug reports, collecting data on drug trafficking routes, and having specific leadership teams for different regions across the world. By encouraging stricter regulations on the Border Management Branch (BMB), the UNODC has dismantled various criminal networks and recovered from the environmental consequences of illegal drug activity. Going forward, Member States should prioritize collaborating with this UN branch to enforce legal solutions related to this issue.

International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)

The INCB was established in 1961 during the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961. Since then, the INCB has significantly contributed to resolving the issue of misuse of prescription drugs through the collaboration of a large body of expertise, including members from the Economic and Social Council as well as medical or pharmacological professionals. One of the key projects that the INCB has overseen is the Global

Operational Partnerships to Interdict Opioids' Illicit Distribution and Sales (OPIOIDS) Project, which tracks the online purchase records and physical delivery methods that underlie these illegal drug trafficking schemes. Once again, in the future, Member States should consider actively collaborating with



President of INCB at an Austrian press briefing on March 4, 2025



these bodies to reach both the source of the drug misuse and raise literacy on the health consequences associated with it.

Possible Solutions

Legal Protection of Vulnerable Entities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined in 2024 that roughly 15% of high school youth in the United States reported having been engaged in illegal drug activities, and previous research has also outlined that children who are exposed to substance abuse from an early age have a greater likelihood of engaging in such activities in the future. Together, these pieces of evidence suggest that government entities and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) must collaborate in protecting vulnerable populations from employing prescription drugs for non-clinical purposes. As substance abuse from an early age can create lasting imprints on individuals' growth and mental health, governments should prioritize drafting and executing legislation that shields vulnerable populations, including children and teenagers, from early exposure to illegal drugs, as exemplified through organizations such as the Child Drug Addiction Initiative and National Association for Children of Addiction.



Depiction of illegal drug trafficking in Latin America

Expansion of Research and Development (R&D) of Illegal Drug Trafficking

As mentioned previously, modern drug traffickers often manufacture “designer” drugs, or drugs that have been chemically modified in a way to bypass current legal standards on the drugs that have been categorized as illegal. Although it may be difficult for Member States to completely ban drugs used for medical services, increased investment in research into the development and distribution of drugs may reveal patterns about how drug trafficking operates and subsequently inform governments as they establish governmental regulations on the issue of misuse of prescription drugs. Ultimately, even as governments prioritize research, Member States should recognize the significance of international and cross-sector collaboration in addressing this public health threat.

Glossary

Prescription Drugs

Medical treatments that are approved and prescribed by a medical professional to an individual for a specific treatment or purpose

Drug Trafficking

The international practice of chemically engineering, spreading, and selling substances deemed illegal by existing laws or frameworks



Visual representation of prescription drugs



TIANMUN

Works Cited

- “Addressing Illicit Drug Challenges - United States Department of State.” *United States Department of State*, Dec. 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/addressing-illicit-drug-challenges/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Substance Use Among Youth.” *Reducing Health Risks Among Youth*, 29 Nov. 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-behavior/risk-behaviors/substance-use-among-youth.html>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- Drug Addiction: Different Types of Illegal Drugs*. <https://www.ardurecoverycenter.com/drugs-types-of-illegal-drugs/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- F. Ali, S., et al. “Understanding the Global Problem of Drug Addiction Is a Challenge for IDARS Scientists.” *Current Neuropharmacology*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1 Mar. 2011, pp. 2–7, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3137181/>, 10.2174/157015911795017245. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- INCB. “Opioids_Project.” *Www.Incb.Org*, https://www.incb.org/incb/en/opioids_project.html. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- “INCB Warns of Growing Threat of Synthetic Drugs.” *News.Cn*, 2025, <https://english.news.cn/europe/20250304/a5e8eea477544955ac9d31904404afb5/c.html>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- “International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy.” *Humanrights-Drugpolicy.Org*, 2019, <https://www.humanrights-drugpolicy.org/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- Lines, Lisa M. “Economic Impact of Addiction | EBSCO.” *EBSCO Information Services, Inc.* | *Www.Ebsco.Com*, 2020, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/economics/economic-impact-addiction>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.
- Merlo, Lisa J., et al. “Reasons for Misuse of Prescription Medication Among Physicians Undergoing Monitoring by a Physician Health Program.” *Journal of Addiction Medicine*, vol. 7, no. 5, 1 Sept.



2013, pp. 349–353, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24089039/>,

10.1097/ADM.0b013e31829da074. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics. “Prescription Drug Abuse Statistics.” *Ncdas*, 2024, <https://drugabusestatistics.org/prescription-drug-abuse-statistics/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Addiction and Health.” *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/addiction-health>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

---. “Summary of Misuse of Prescription Drugs.” *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, June 2020, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/misuse-prescription-drugs/overview>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

“North Jersey Recovery Center.” *North Jersey Recovery Center*, 12 Dec. 2025, <https://northjerseyrecovery.com/addiction-treatment/prescription-drugs/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

“Section 2: The Impact of Drug Abuse on Families and Loved Ones.” *Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB)*, 2025, <https://www.cnb.gov.sg/drug-victims-remembrance-day/the-impact-of-drug-abuse-on-families-and-loved-ones/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

“Substance Abuse for Children | Recognising Addiction in Children.” *UK Addiction Treatment Centres*, <https://www.ukat.co.uk/help-guides/recognise-substance-abuse-for-children/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

TGA, Therapeutic Goods Administration. “Prescription Medicines Overview.” *Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)*, 6 Apr. 2025, <https://www.tga.gov.au/products/medicines/prescription-medicines/overview/prescription-medicines-overview>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

“The Illegal Drugs With Legal Medical Uses.” *BBC News*, 6 Apr. 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-39513521>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

Trinkunas, Harold. “The Network Effect: Trafficking in Illicit Drugs, Money, and People in Latin America.” *Brookings*, 3 Dec. 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-network-effect-trafficking-in-illicit-drugs-money-and-people-in-latin-america/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.



TIANMUN

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “Drug Trafficking.” *Unodc.Org*, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

UNODC. “Index.Html.” *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treatment-and-care/index.html>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

---. “International Drug Control: How It Works.” *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2026, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2026/March/international-drug-control_-how-it-works.html. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.

“What We Do.” *United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2026, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/bmb/what-we-do.html>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2026.



TIANMUN