



THE GLOBAL CRISIS OF VIOLENCE

COMMON PROBLEMS, UNIVERSAL CAUSES, SHARED SOLUTIONS

Substance Abuse: Ending the Global Drug Epidemic



One in a series of six
briefing papers produced
by the Violence and
Development Project.

*The Violence and Development Project is a collaboration between
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OFFICE OF PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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Substance Abuse: Ending the Global Drug Epidemic

The production, distribution and consumption of illegal drugs has become one of the world's most corrosive threats, spawning crime and violence around the globe.¹ The problem has reached such proportions that the international retail value of illicit drugs now exceeds that of the world's oil trade and is second only to worldwide arms sales.²

Growing international commerce in narcotics has flooded the United States with drugs that endanger individuals, families and entire communities. Most of the contraband entering the country has been grown by poor farmers in the global South and processed and distributed by drug lords who wield enormous political and economic power.³

In the following pages, we will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on the drug cocaine, and its derivative "crack". More than any other popular drug in U.S. history, crack cocaine has caused social damage on an unprecedented scale. Crack cocaine induces violent behavior in users, and is credited in large part with an unparalleled rise in crime and murder rates in the U.S. since its appearance on the streets in the 1980s.⁴ While "gateway" drugs, such as alcohol and marijuana, are not generally considered to be as closely associated with violence, they are of concern because they can lead to the use of heavier drugs.⁵

The world's cocaine producing countries are Peru, Bolivia, Columbia, and, to a lesser extent, Ecuador and Brazil.⁶ The main cocaine consuming nation

is the U.S., which uses 75% of the world's cocaine.⁷ Both the drug producing and consuming countries are linked in a cycle of substance abuse and violence. Because the drug problem is global in nature, it cannot be solved by any one nation alone; rather, it requires a comprehensive and coordinated international response. The real solution to the drug crisis lies in eradicating one of its main root causes—poverty and the lack of viable economic opportunities—by promoting sustainable human development.

The Power of Crack Cocaine

Cocaine is a narcotic substance derived from the coca plant, a bushy shrub which is native to South America. The coca plant has been sacred to the Indian populations of the Andes since pre-Incan times because of its medicinal qualities. Cocaine is only one of 14 alkaloids contained in the coca leaf, which contains more than 28 nutrients that supplement many Andean people's daily diet.⁸

The hallmark of crack cocaine is its ability to induce persistent, intensive drug-seeking behaviors. Animal studies have shown that the reinforcing properties of cocaine are enormous, producing a powerful craving that leads the user to abandon everything to satisfy a compulsion to obtain more of the drug. The intensity and rapid onset of euphoria, combined with a strong craving that may develop, account for crack cocaine's strong potential for addiction. Crack cocaine use is concentrated primarily in high-risk, urban communities through-

out the U.S., where its sale in inexpensive single doses has widened its accessibility. The drug's low cost, ease of administration, and fast, powerful effects have made it a formidable street drug.⁹

Hundreds of thousands of people have become addicted to cocaine, particularly crack. Addiction should be viewed as a disease—not as a failure of individual willpower—from which many individuals can recover. Appropriate education can prevent some people from becoming addicted. For those who do become "hooked", treatment, not punishment, is the solution.¹⁰

Drug-Related Violence: A Global Affliction

In this section, we'll look at the three elements of the narcotics chain—production, trafficking, consumption—and the effects of drugs both in the U.S. and the global South.

Production. Peasant farmers in the global South often cultivate the coca plant for drug production as a means of survival. While they receive only one percent of the ultimate street price of the drugs they grow¹¹, the average \$1,000 a year they can earn producing coca is often 25 percent to 50 percent more than what they can earn from food crops such as bananas, corn, or oranges. A farmer from Bolivia said, "I have no fear of what I am doing. I am obligated to plant this coca to take care of my five children." Coca cultivation is appealing to farmers for other reasons as well. Unlike other crops, the coca plant requires very little

The Violence and Development Project

The Violence and Development Project, a collaboration between the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education, and the Benton Foundation, aims to educate social work professionals about the parallel conditions of violence in the U.S. and less economically developed countries. To this end, the project, with the help of funding from the United States Agency for International Development has prepared a series of six papers focusing on violence as a global affliction and sustainable human development as a global antidote.

In this series, we will address the following questions:

- What is the interrelationship between violence and related problems in the U.S. and less developed nations?
- What do social workers know about these problems, and what is the role of social workers in solving the global problem of violence?
- What can we learn from past and current international development efforts of the U.S. government and non-governmental development agencies?

This paper provides an overview of the connections between violence and development. The remaining papers in this series will focus on violence in relationship to five sub-themes: substance abuse, women and children, ethnicity, poverty, and trauma.

Key Concepts

Sustainable Human Development

The term development may be defined as "meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life." According to this broad definition, development focuses on fostering economic opportunity, equity, human rights, dignity, democracy, peace, and spiritual and emotional well-being.¹

Social workers will readily understand this concept, for it is what they strive to do everyday in their work with individuals, families, communities and organizations. In this series, however, we will be examining development from a national and international perspective.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a new consensus emerged within the international development community about how to best achieve long-lasting, positive change within poor countries. The agreed-upon strategy, known as sustainable human development, is based on these underlying principles:

- Meeting basic human needs for food, clean water, shelter, health care and education.
- Expanding economic opportunities for people, especially the poor, to increase their productivity and earning capacity in ways that are environmentally, economically and socially viable over the long-term.
- Protecting the environment by managing natural resources in ways that take into account the needs of current and future generations.
- Promoting democratic participation, especially by poor women and men, in economic and political decisions that affect their lives.
- Encouraging adherence to internationally recognized human rights standards.²

The International Development Community

The United States, through the federal office called the Agency for International Development, spent slightly less than one percent of the annual national budget, or \$14 billion, on foreign assistance in 1994. Of this money, 15 percent, or \$2.1 billion, went to fund projects to help people in poor countries better their lives. Other monies went toward military and security aid; food, exports, and other economic aid; and emergency humanitarian assistance.³

In addition to federal funds, there are several hundred U.S.-based charitable international development organizations, called private voluntary organizations (PVOs) or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These organizations receive an estimated \$4.5 billion a year from individuals and businesses that goes to support relief and development efforts in the poorest nations of the world. Some of the better known of these organizations are Save the Children, CARE, Oxfam and the American Red Cross.⁴

Global North/Global South

The term global North refers to the world's industrialized, wealthy countries, while the term global South refers to the world's poor nations. These terms are merely descriptive, as the split between rich and poor nations does not fall along strict geographic lines.

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According to per capita gross national product figures from the World Bank, there are 24 high-income countries, with 15% of the world's people, including the United States, Switzerland and Japan. Sixty-three countries, containing 29% of the population make up the middle-income category, which includes the Philippines, Romania, and Iran. The low-income sector, with a total of 45 countries and 56% of the world's population, includes Guatemala, Somalia, and Bangladesh.⁵

Violence

Violence may be broadly defined as an act or situation that harms the health and/or well being of oneself or others. Violence includes both direct attacks on a person's physical and psychological integrity, and destructive acts that do not involve a direct relationship between victims and the institution or person responsible for the harm.⁶

One of the goals of this project is to expand the common perception of violence to include such problems as racism, sexism, poverty, and hunger. These social ills grow out of institutions, governments, and economic structures that encourage the domination of certain groups of people over other groups, perpetuating unequal access to wealth and other resources. Inequities, which may be based on class, race, gender, or ethnicity, are often enforced through the use of violence by police forces, government troops or their proxies, foreign powers, and other forms of sanctioned militarism.

Threats to personal security and social stability come

from several sources. Among them: social and economic systems (deprivation, lack of access, oppression); the state (repression, torture, police brutality or inaction); other states (colonization, war); other groups of people (civil war, ethnic conflict, discrimination, hate crimes); and individuals or gangs (homicide, muggings). Violence may be directed against specific groups such as women (rape, domestic violence, lack of access to better education or jobs); children (child abuse, neglect); and ethnic populations (genocide, hate crimes, discrimination), or against the self (suicide, substance abuse).

Among the underlying principles of the Violence and Development Project is that long-term solutions to violence must include permanent changes in structural and institutional systems that give rise to deprivation and oppression and create a world of haves and have-nots.

NOTES (pp. 3-4)

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The following chart lays out three tiers of violence. These tiers form an intractable cycle, each feeding upon the other.

Structural

Avoidable deprivations built into the structure of society based on norms and traditions that subjugate one group in favor of another (poverty, hunger)

Institutional

Harmful acts by organizations and institutions (oppression, unequal treatment under the law, police brutality, torture)

Official forms of violence (state repression, war and invasion)

Personal

Interpersonal acts of violence against persons or property (rape, murder, muggings)

Harmful acts against self (alcohol, drug abuse, suicide)

Acts by organized groups or mobs (hate crimes, looting, rioting)⁷

care and is harvested only three times a year. In contrast, traditional crops require years of hard labor before they yield any fruit. In addition, they are much heavier to transport through the jungle.¹²

Along with the difficulty and low income-earning potential of growing food crops, farmers in the global South face other challenges. These include lack of long-term government support and armed conflicts that disrupt traditional planting practices and irrigation systems. At the international level, South American countries face falling prices for typical exports, as well as increasing international demand for illegal drugs.¹³

What happened in the Andes in the 1980s demonstrates how inadequate rural development contributes to the global drug crisis. After many mainstream agricultural initiatives to grow rubber, tobacco, coffee, and other crops failed, Colombian traffickers entered the Andes with coca seeds, demonstration plots, and venture capital, promising farmers that they would purchase their harvests. The Colombian cocaine "initiative" had a tremendous economic, social and political impact on South America and the entire Western Hemisphere. Brazil experienced spiraling street crime as a result of cocaine consumption. Ecuador and Venezuela became centers for drug money laundering. Argentina saw an increase in traffickers who exploited trade links with Europe. And Mexico and other countries became waystations en route to consumer markets, principally the United States.¹⁴

Trafficking. Free trade and high-speed telecommunications have facilitated the smuggling of illicit narcotics out of the global South.¹⁵ Through an intricate network of drug shipment routes and money laundering bases, international drug-related crime organizations have managed to infiltrate countries around the world.¹⁶ Cooperation among such groups is increasing on an unprecedented scale.¹⁷ Moreover, they often have the help of legitimate organizations and individuals, including banks

and other businesses and corrupt government officials.¹⁸ During the summer of 1995, Colombia was rocked by allegations that its president, Ernesto Samper, had accepted nearly \$6 million in campaign contributions from drug dealers in exchange for leniency in the courts. The Colombian defense minister resigned amidst allegations that he had ordered a campaign treasurer to solicit money from major drug traffickers. "Political parties are losing credibility . . . the system itself is shaking," said Francisco Thoumi, head of the Center for International Studies in Colombia.¹⁹

The sale and use of narcotics in the global South has been accompanied by considerable violent crime. In Brazil, for example, gangs selling cocaine terrorize the "favelas" or slums of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.²⁰ In Colombia, 45 judges and 42 journalists were assassinated by drug thugs in the 1980s, and the killings continue today.²¹

Narcotics trafficking has also had profound negative effects on entire economic systems. How? By distorting local currencies, impeding foreign investment, depriving countries of tax revenue from traffickers, and discouraging legitimate development by offering higher wages than legal businesses.²²

As in the global South, narcotics has also created an alternative source of income in the U.S. One of the most troubling results of the crack cocaine craze has been an increase in violent gangs in American cities plagued by high unemployment, substandard educational systems, and lack of services.²³ Forming an alternative economic system for people who otherwise feel shut out, gang participation in the street cocaine trade creates an illegal source of revenue for people of all ages, even nine-year-old children who earn \$100 a day serving as "look-outs" for dealers.²⁴ At the same time, the drug trade constrains legitimate economic development by fueling crime and violence.

When the sale and use of narcotics

creates social turmoil, the institutional response of the police or military is often increased repressive violence.²⁵ For example, to wage a "war on drugs", U.S. police SWAT teams and paramilitary task forces carry out sweeps in housing projects and mass evictions of drug suspects and their families. There have even been calls for deploying the National Guard and federal troops to patrol ghetto "war zones".²⁶

Consumption.

"We have watched many of our young kids turn to dope to cope because they are without hope. America has watched and wept as many lives have become twisted and have been snuffed out by the powerful lure of drug addiction."

—Congressman Rangel to the House select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control.²⁷

Drug consumption is at the other end of the narcotics chain. Most drug users and abusers live in the industrialized countries of the global North. In the United States during 1993, a total of just over six million users spent \$31 billion on cocaine and crack.²⁸ Their behavior often has enormous social, economic and political consequences not only for themselves and their families, but also for society in general. On a monetary basis alone, drug-related crime, law enforcement, and treatment costs the U.S. an estimated \$100 billion a year.²⁹ Studies conducted in 1989 revealed that "60 percent of (those arrested) for violent offenses tested positive for at least one illegal drug . . . and (it was confirmed that) violent crime frequency increases with drug frequency".³⁰

Drug use, however, is not limited to the global North. In recent years, some countries in the global South have experienced a dramatic increase in the consumption of hard drugs, particularly among young urban males. The risk of drug addiction is particularly high in source countries, where cheap drugs are readily available. Many urban areas of the

One source of Hope: The Entrepreneurial Development Institute (TEDI)

The primary goal of TEDI, based in Washington, D.C., is to equip youth and their families with the skills and resources necessary to become full stakeholders in the economic and social revitalization of their communities.

TEDI accomplishes this through an entrepreneurial education program that assists youths in developing their own small businesses. TEDI has a microloan fund available to students who have completed the first part of the training program and are ready to actualize their own businesses. To date, 75 business plans have been drawn up, creating over 600 jobs. Adjudicated youth make up 30% of the participants. Among this group, TEDI boasts an amazing 0% recidivism rate for drug-related offenses. Parents, teachers and counselors claim that TEDI graduates get better grades, act more responsibly at home and engage in long term education and career planning. TEDI proves that entrepreneurial education is a viable alternative to drugs and crime, a means to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and a pathway to academic excellence. TEDI is now planning to replicate its model in eighteen other cities across the country.

global South possess several of the same troubling characteristics that thrive in parts of America: high unemployment, lack of services, and inadequate educational opportunities, if any.³¹

A serious threat in the Andean region is the smoking of a mixture of coca paste and tobacco—pitillo in Peru and Bolivia and basuco in Colombia—which can cause quick addiction and permanent brain damage due to a high concentration of chemical impurities in the drug. Colombia is estimated to have as many as 500,000 basuco smokers, mostly unemployed youths and other marginalized people.³²

Around the world, substance abuse has created other victims. Unlike other drugs, crack cocaine quickly achieved a high rate of use and addiction among pregnant women and women of child-bearing age. Crack use has resulted in hundreds of thousands of drug-exposed babies, who are frequently born premature and suffering from nervous system or other damage.³³

Curtailing Drug-Related Violence Through Sustainable Human Development

“Development alone will not be the solution to the narcotics problem, but it does provide a more adequate platform for dealing with the underlying causes.”³⁴

— from *Why People Grow Drugs*

The past decade has been characterized by unrestrained resource consumption on the part of the rich countries in the global North, intensifying worldwide injustices and poverty. One result: increasing alienation and loss of hope that fuels the problem of drugs and violence.³⁵

Sustainable human development, as an antidote to hopelessness, is the most effective means of getting at the root causes of the drug problem.

Reducing production. As Shuman and Harvey point out, one of the key reasons the aggressive law enforcement approach favored by the U.S. has not been effective is that it fails to recognize that growers have a different motive than international traffickers: survival. The main reason why peasant farmers grow coca plants is that producing drug crops yields higher profits and guaranteed mar-

kets, providing an alternative to the abject poverty and government neglect that have plagued their communities for decades.³⁶

In order to curb production, farmers must have viable alternatives to earn a decent living. Replacing coca with other agricultural produce will not be sufficient. Rather, ensuring successful crop substitution will depend upon several factors including local marketing systems that protect perishable crops, transportation to market, steady buyers, the allowance of sufficient time for the new crops to take hold, and international policies that provide favorable trade, credit, infrastructure and price conditions.³⁷

According to the United Nations Development Program, it is unreasonable to expect the global South to bear most of the cost of clamping down on drug production and export because the narcotics trade is fueled by demand in the global North. The U.N. recommends that Northern countries be generous in supporting sustainable human development programs for peasant farmers, including assistance for farm equipment and small-scale loans.³⁸

Reducing trafficking. International interdiction of narcotics trafficking has been minimally successful to date, and requires a different approach. Currently, nations rely on primitive law enforcement networks to eradicate crops, to prevent large-scale laundering of drug profits, and to prosecute drug lords. In the absence of serious enforceable international drug laws, criminals simply move freely to countries with the weakest anti-drug policies.³⁹

In the U.S., youth will find it hard to resist the lure of the drug trade as long as they can make a hundred times more by selling drugs than by working for minimum wage at jobs that offer no health benefits and no chance of future growth. A social development approach is needed to combat the problem. Such an approach requires adequate educa-

tional opportunities, economic programs to bring business and industry back to poor communities, and improved community resources and infrastructure to support the healthy development of individuals and neighborhoods.

Reducing consumption. Because drug addiction is a disease (and because drug-related crime is often associated with feeding addiction) our focus should be on preventing and treating substance abuse. A federally funded study by the Rand Corporation found that drug treatment is seven times more cost effective in cutting cocaine demand than local law enforcement, 11 times more effective than border interdiction, and 22 times more effective than efforts to control foreign production.⁴⁰

One drastic proposal put forth to reduce drug consumption is the legalization of illicit drugs. This is a risky proposition, however, as consumption might actually increase. Ultimately, the best solution seems to be to promote social and economic development in the global North and South as a means of strengthening families and communities, providing alternatives to drug use, and offering hope.⁴¹

Funding Sustainable Human Development Strategies

Curtailing the drug epidemic requires long-term, multi-faceted approaches that address its root causes. Implementing such approaches undoubtedly would be

expensive. The irony is that the U.S. and the entire international community end up paying in any case — and they pay a lot more down the line than they would have paid upfront.⁴² For \$25 billion, which is half the cost American cities are now paying in terms of crime, sickness and other damages from the drug war, the United States could pay every rural family in Latin America \$1,000, the typical annual income for a coca farmer, not to grow coca.⁴³

Providing money for development in both the source countries of the global South and in underdeveloped areas in the consumer countries of the global North requires a change of priorities. The U.N. Development Program proposes a three percent reduction in global military spending from 1995 to 2000, which would produce \$85 billion in new funds for sustainable human development throughout the world.⁴⁴ For development programs to succeed, however, they must: meet the basic human needs of every person, expand economic opportunities for poor people, promote meaningful citizen participation, and protect the environment.⁴⁵

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What You Can Do

- Learn more about the interdependent causes and consequences of the maldevelopment-substance abuse-violence cycle, using the information and references in this paper as a start.
- Learn about solutions to the drug problem that focus on international cooperation to reduce both supply and demand.
- Develop a greater understanding of international development issues, and use that understanding to advocate for programs that address the root causes of the drug problem: poverty and inequity.
- Advocate for global reduction in military expenditures to free up resources for development.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852
800/729-6686

Information about narcotics in the United States.

Panos Institute

1025 T. Jefferson St., Suite 105
Washington, D.C. 20007
202/965-5177

Educational materials on issues of development, including the narcotics trade.

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