

Drug Use and Society



Definitions

- Drug - Any substance, other than food, that alters structure or function.
- Psychoactive Drug - Any drug that interacts with the nervous system to affect behavior, cognition, or emotion.
 - *Psychopharmacology*
- Illicit Drug - Any drug that is unlawful to possess or used unlawfully.

Patterns of drug use.

- Humans have been using psychoactive drugs for 1000s of years.
- Drug use is prevalent in our society.
 - In a typical month...
 - ... 50% of ages 12 and older use alcohol.
 - ... 30% use tobacco.
 - ... 8% use illicit drugs.

What about Psychology 117 students?

- What *you* reported using in the last 30 days:
 - Alcohol... 88%
 - Nicotine... 32%
 - Marijuana... 28%
 - Narcotic analgesics... 17%
 - Antidepressants... 4%
 - Antianxiety drugs... 9%
 - Cocaine... 4%
 - Amphetamine (& other stimulants).. 1%
 - LSD (& other hallucinogens)... 1%
 - MDMA... 4%

Western concern about psychoactive drug use is a recent development.



The Opium War

Why the concern about drug use?

- Morality Issue



Why the concern about drug use...

Toxicity Potential

- Toxicity distinctions:
 - Acute Toxicity vs Chronic Toxicity

- Physiological Toxicity vs Behavioral Toxicity

Drugs differ widely on toxicity.

- Thousands of people die each year from heroin overdose...
... but there has **never** been a documented death from marijuana *overdose*.
- Yearly mortality from...
All illicit drugs: approx. 15,000 people.
Alcohol: approx. 100,000 people.
Tobacco: approx. 400,000 people.

Newer “designer compounds” may be especially toxic.

- Designer Drugs - Drugs that are *custom engineered* in illicit labs.
 - At first this was legal!

Quality control of illicit drug labs can be poor.

- Variability in potency and purity.
- 1982 - A designer drug leads to the creation of “the frozen addicts”.

This illicit drug lab...

- Created synthetic heroin contaminated with a *neurotoxin*.
- The toxin selectively killed brain cells involved in voluntary movement.
- The result was *pseudo* Parkinson's disease.

Why the concern about drug use...

- Potential for addiction.
- Drugs vary in addictive potential.
 - Highly addictive – Heroin, Alcohol
 - Moderately addictive – Cocaine, Nicotine
 - Low addictive potential - Marijuana, LSD.

Why the concern about drug use...

- Relationship between drugs and crime.
 - Two-thirds of felons test positive for illicit drugs.
- Does drug use *cause* the user to commit crimes?
 - Not necessarily.

Possible links between drug use and crime.

- Are individuals more likely to commit crimes while “under the influence” of a drug?
 - Not likely with most drugs.
 - Alcohol *may* be the exception.
 - Alcohol is linked with
 - ... 60% of all murders.
 - ... 40% of assaults.
 - ... 33% of all rapes.

Possible links between drug use and crime.

- Are individuals more likely to commit crimes to support drug habits?
 - Unclear if drug abuse will likely *cause* a law abiding citizen to commit crimes.
 - Criminals will increase criminal activity to get drugs.

Possible links between drug use and crime.

- Of course *illicit* drug use is associated with crime...
 - ... More than half of federal prisoners were convicted on drug law violations.
- Would legalizing drugs be less costly to society?
 - *Harm Reduction Approach to Drug Laws*
