

- ANTH106 - Drugs Across Cultures

"Drugs are substances introduced into the body knowingly, but not as foods"

Lecture 1 - Drugs, Pharmaceuticals and Anthropology

- Zinberg's Theory of Drug Use:
 - Drug: the pharmacological action of the drug itself
 - Set: the attitude of the person at the time of use, including his/her personality structure and what they *expect* the drug to do. (Individual attitudes are significantly influenced by social values and social expectations)
 - Setting: The influence of the physical and social setting in which use occurs. This is shown in 2 dimensions:
 - social sanctions (i.e. prescribed by a physician)
 - social rituals (i.e. taking them with other people, taking them with alcohol, taking them at the same time of day, at a party and not by yourself etc. a ritualistic nature)
- Drugs and their effects on individuals can only be fully understood by taking into account the particular social, cultural, political and economic contexts, in addition to their pharmacological properties
- The higher your social status, the more likely a drug is to be accepted. The lower your social status, the more likely a drug is to be banned
- Nicotine is more addictive than most other drugs in society
- Nicotine causes more death than heroine, cocaine, alcohol, road accidents, HIV, murder and suicide than all put together.
- When you take drugs before a certain age, you are likely to become addicted. If you take drugs after a certain age you are unlikely to become addicted
- Over half of US adolescents have tried an illegal drug before graduating from high school.
- 300% markup on illicit drugs
- In the European Union, there is no relationship between illicit drug use and a country's drug laws. People use drugs whether the law is restrictive or not.

Readings: Robson (1999). Forbidden Drugs, second edition, chapter 2: "Consequences of Drug Use"

Short-term Consequences

- All legal and illegal drug use carries some immediate risk.
- Alcohol is a factor in up to half of all head injuries and a third of accidental deaths, and a third of pedestrians killed on the roads are over the legal limit for driving. A third of all adolescent suicides are intoxicated at the time.
- Illegal drugs have higher immediate risks as they have little quality-control during the manufacturing process. The purity level varies from batch to batch which makes an accidental overdose a high possibility.
- They can also contain toxic solvents, adulterants, bulking agents, pesticides, fungi or bacteria.
- An analysis of street heroin shows that the Diamorphine content can vary between 5% and

80%.

- Opioids were the primary cause of death in 21% of accidental overdose cases between 1985 and 1995.
- Morality rates associated with acute adverse reactions to opioids or cocaine are five times greater in men than women.
- Damage to the foetus of a pregnant woman, is extremely rare when the mother is an occasional or social user, although some adulterants commonly found in street drugs are potentially very toxic.

'Visible' and 'Invisible' Drug Users

- 'Invisible' drug users are those who never come to the attention of doctors, lawyers or policemen. They are invisible to research unless uncovered by population surveys.
- Only a tiny proportion of most population surveys on drug use actually present for treatment or help, are prosecuted, or contribute to the casualty statistics. This is the case for cocaine, heroin and an even larger discrepancy for users of cannabis, LSD, Ecstasy, or amphetamines. One can only assume that the vast majority use these drugs only briefly or in small amounts, or that they prove pretty well harmless to most people.
- A small amount of American studies do give limited support to the idea that relatively stable, controlled use of opiates is possible. Such people often develop rituals and routines which ensure that the drug remains just a part of their lives, rather than its epicentre. It seems that if the drug taking can be ritualised and compartmentalised then it can be more easily contained. (This brings us back to Zinberg's Theory of SETTING)

Longer-term Consequences

- Modest, controlled consumption of illegal drugs is much more common than regular, heavy, compulsive use. Transient or experimental use does not seem to be associated with measurable long-term harm.
- Around 10% of those who experiment with alcohol or illegal drugs will go on to develop problems with them at a later stage.
- Regular or heavy use during adolescence has a strong association with emotional and physical problems than and later, difficult family, social and sexual relationships, and disruption of education and employment.
- It is unwarranted to conclude that drug use has necessarily cause these effects, when it may be just another symptom of a dysfunctional family.
- It is important to not confuse the effects of a drug with the social conditions which surround it.
- Most commonly admitted problems of school students who drink regularly are problems with relationships, personal difficulties, sexual regrets and acts of delinquency.
- Virtually nothing is known about the natural history of people who continue to be 'invisible' drug users.
- Most available statistics regarding long-term 'hard' drug use only focus upon the 'visible' drug users, so these statistics are not reliable.