

DRUG ABUSE & TRAFFICKING



Czechoslovak health education poster: 'Don't abuse drugs'

Drug abuse has been a fact of life in eastern and central Europe since the late 1960s. But although illegal drug abuse is far from uncommon, illegal trafficking and organised crime have yet to take hold.

The situation in **Hungary**, illustrates important features of the region as a whole. Over the last twenty five years, several tens of thousands of the 10.5 million people living in Hungary have abused drugs in some way. Some represent a broader social movement and some are isolated individual users.

Those in the former category are mainly younger people who have got involved in the recent wave of drug abuse; some are regular abusers but many, like in the West, use but do not get dependent on drugs. Young abusers achieve the desired narcotic state by inhaling organic solvents (around fifty deaths from solvent abuse have been proven) and by abusing medicines. With greater western influence however, the knowledge and consumption of a broader range of drugs is taking place. Indeed drug abuse can increasingly be seen, as in the West, as 'a chemical loophole to an anti-social way of life and is at the same time the symbol of dissatisfaction with traditional values'. The use of drugs is one of the ways young people seek to embrace the new and abandon the old ideology.

The other group of abusers are adults.

They tend to be isolated and not part of a broader social movement like their younger counterparts; many of them are addicts. Their abuse of medicines often leaves them completely isolated but, because of their marginal position, they do not have significant impact on the rest of society.

Whilst the drug problems in **Czechoslovakia** and in **Poland** are broadly similar, different drugs are abused. In addition to solvents, the painkiller Analgon has been one of the medicines abused in Czechoslovakia, particularly in the second half of the 1980s. It gives rise to a morphine type dependence. Dependence on amphetamine-type substances is also fairly widespread.

There were 8,000 registered abusers in Czechoslovakia (out of a population of 15.6m) in 1987, and between 4,000 and 5,000 people undergo a medical examination each year for abuse. The number of drug related deaths has exceeded forty every year since 1978.

The 1970s saw a dramatic increase in drug abuse in Poland. 'Kompote', heroin made from the juice of green poppy-heads and from poppy stems has been particularly popular. It is injected intravenously and quickly leads to psychological and physical dependence. Opinions differ about the number of drug users in Poland but it is likely that their number is of the order of several hundreds of thousands. The Ministry of Education had 4,422 young people registered as drug abusers in 1989 while the police had 15,382 registered for the same year. There are a little over one hundred drug-related deaths each year.

Things are different in the **Soviet Union** and in **Yugoslavia** mainly because there is quite extensive trafficking. Although Yugoslavia is not the final destination, many Yugoslavians are involved in drug smuggling. There are more Yugoslavian citizens than foreigners arrested for smuggling; between 120 and 150 are arrested outside their country each year for drugs related offences. The mechanics of this supply of drugs presents a far greater problem for the authorities than do the 10,000-12,000 drug abusers in the country.

In the Soviet Union, both the supply and the demand sides of the drug problem cause severe difficulties. The daily newspaper *Izvestia* (12 May 1987) reported that the number of drug abusers in

the country had risen from 75,000 to 123,000 over the previous three years. Another report put the figure at one and a half million. The raw materials of the drugs abused, hemp and poppy, are grown in vast quantities and, according to one estimate by a Soviet state official, more than 50% of the authorised crop is left in the fields after harvest. This 'forgotten' crop is the main source both for abusers and for traffickers. Demand for drugs is increasing and so is trafficking, but it takes a form different to that in Yugoslavia. It supplies the domestic Soviet market and is part of an organised crime network involving crimes against property and corruption; this is a unique phenomenon in eastern Europe.

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In general, in the countries referred to above, drugs have not played a major part in crime figures. In Hungary for example, only 569 of the 50,000 who are convicted each year for some offence had committed drug related crimes; of these, only one in ten was convicted of trafficking and the rest were for abuse. The situation in Czechoslovakia and Poland is much the same.

Things are different in the Soviet Union where 40,000 drug related crimes are committed each year, many of these being associated with the sinister world of organised crime. As the Head of the Criminal Department of the Ministry of the Interior said, 'the narcotics mafia of organised drug sellers and buyers have control over trafficking in the country'.

Drug abuse is different in eastern and western Europe. Whilst the absence of hard drugs in eastern Europe and, apart from the Soviet Union, the absence of organised crime may make things look different for the time being, the situation could well change. Of the many influences which the West is having on the development of eastern Europe, the growth of both the demand and the supply of drugs could well be one of the more unsavoury aspects.

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