

EUCPN CONFERENCE ON URBAN CRIME PREVENTION – PROJECT ON
THE PREVENTION OF DRUG-RELATED PROBLEMS
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DRAFT PRESENTATION

The new phenomena connected to the drug use, the different consumption habits, the increased number of young people involved show an overall trend towards the use of different drugs, depending on the particular needs and situations, rather than the use of a specific drug.

The combined use of legal and illegal substances is a common habit among young people; it is a multi-drug consumption which mixes up a wide range of synthetic and non-synthetic drugs and not, resorting to the so-called self-management pattern, which is typical of multi-drug consumption.

In order to give a specific answer to synthetic drugs and to the above-mentioned consumption habits, it is necessary to organize the intervention services and systems at different levels, from prevention to drug treatment; this system is presently still poorly equipped.

In other words, there is a need for a stable and active network of workers from public and private bodies, as well as for different professional skills. In this way it is possible to early identify both the new emerging drugs and the new types of preparations, thus allowing a more-effective preventive activity.

It is thus necessary to share and make effective, also at the local level, the experiences which have been gathered up to now by building up long-lasting local networks. Such networks can act as early-warning devices making use of the scientific analysis and risk assessment.

On the basis of these considerations, in September 2001, the local government in Lombardia (Regione Lombardia) set up a so-called “Early-Warning System”. The police forces, the local health bodies, the University and representatives from the social private sector are partners of this initiative.

Such a project aims at realizing a “new border” of coordination and the Direzione Centrale per i Servizi Antidroga of the Department of Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior which is the centre of excellence in the field of coordination, also participates in it.

This project was actually launched on March 1st, 2003 at the provincial level, it is subject to further development at the regional level and open to other local bodies.

The initiative belongs to the actions for drug prevention and treatment and rehabilitation consists in a monitoring activity to early identify the drugs circulating in the area of interest, the new consumption trends and potential users/consumers populations.

The Project which was worked out also in cooperation with the competent Public Prosecutor's Office was limited, in a first stage, to the monitoring of the sole area of Milan.

Within their own competences, the Police Forces ensure through their specialized anti-drug units the forwarding of the data concerning the drug seizures, sent by their own chemical labs, to the Centro di Farmacologia Comportamentale e delle Tossicodipendenze (Centre for Addiction and Behavioural Health Research) at the University of Milan. The data entail the following information:

- When and where the sample was found:
- Description and chemical composition of the substance
- Circumstances (production, trafficking, distribution, abuse)
- Frequency (limited, moderate, diffuse)
- Availability (limited, moderate, diffuse)

As you can see, any action undertaken by Law Enforcement Forces – during the first stage, when routine prevention and counteracting activities lead to the seizure of suspect substances - is essential for further steps of this initiative.

The Pharmacological Centre elaborates and draws up accurate remarks on pharmacological effects, high toxicity and on risks, either medical or social, caused by the substances in question.

This system also considers the input of information gathered in a specific website, partly accessible by all users and partly not, as well as the publishing of a bulletin meant for Law Enforcement Forces and for the operators of those services concerned in the sector of drug abuse detection.

A study of this project called "M.D.M.A." (Monitoraggio Droghe e Manifestazioni di Abuso: Drugs Monitoring and Signs of Abuse), has clearly shown the aims of such a system, consisting in the acquisition of adequate and targeted information for the adoption of public health measures to counter the increase in drug demand and abuse, with particular regard to young people.

In addition, this project makes all data processed available for national and European Bodies concerned in the drug detection network.

The local health units and other public facilities, as well as private social services are charged of implementing ad hoc actions within their respective competences, with

particular regard to young people. The above mentioned bodies also deal with integrated training and refresher courses for operators and with the identification of the so-called “*sentinel events*” and any other significant information at local level.

The tasks of a Technical-Scientific Committee consist in monitoring and assessing, as well as developing the working programme; this Committee is made up of different signatories of the memorandum of understanding, as well as of representatives of the Ministry of Health and of the National Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Abuse. The initiatives are coordinated by the National Health Service, as the national point of reference for European Union with regard to the “*European system of early warning for the exchange of information on the new synthetic drugs*”.

This project, started as an experiment in 2003, had to last for about two years. However, it is still a valid instrument, as demonstrated by the extension to other local sectors. The Local Health Units of five regions are currently involved in this project.

Finally, we can affirm that the fundamental aim of this project is the accurate and precise monitoring of all drugs present on the illicit market (type, quantity, packaging) as well as an immediate knowledge of the consumption trends within the territory involved in this initiative.

All these data, along with information on the composition, active principle, cut substances which are provided by the above-mentioned Centro di Farmacologia of the University, are communicated to the Region that, through a dedicated Internet site, informs the treatment and rehabilitation facilities at the Local Health Units as well as the private centres in order to orient a targeted intervention towards treatment and rehabilitation.

In this way, all information gathered may also be used to raise an alarm on the presence of narcotic drugs, cut with noxious substances that can cause overdose deaths. Last year, in the illicit market of Milan and Bergamo areas, there were some cases of overdose deaths caused by cocaine cut with atropine.

The importance of the efforts made until now, in terms of sharing, know-how and intervention, emphasizes how “M.D.M.A.” goes beyond the project itself, representing an opportunity of growth and cohesion for a different approach to monitoring and intervention.