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THE ROLE OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE IN DEVELOPING PUBLIC POLICIES ON DRUGS

58th CICAD Ordinary Session

The role of scientific evidence in developing public policies on drugs

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Objective

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- Analyze the role of scientific evidence using the public health approach as a strategy to reduce drug demand: recent experiences

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Two main topics

- Public policy
- Scientific evidence
  - How they communicate with each other?

Hemispheric Strategy

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- They shall develop and implement national drug policies that are evidence-based.
- They shall establish and/or strengthen national observatories on drugs…. for the purpose of contributing to decision-making and to implementing evidence-based drug policies and strategies that reflect the situation in each country.

Hemispheric Strategy

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- Access to treatment systems that offer a range of comprehensive therapeutic intervention models that are evidence-based and follow internationally-recognized quality standards should be facilitated.

Hemispheric Strategy

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- Demand reduction requires, in accordance with the situation and magnitude of the drug problem in each country, the implementation of a variety of evidence-based prevention programs, aimed at distinct target populations, which together constitute a comprehensive system. From a methodological and design standpoint, these programs should be systematic, with specific measurable objectives

Hemispheric Strategy

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- Governments' relationships with academic and research institutions as well as specialized nongovernmental organizations should be strengthened in order to foster scientific research and studies that will generate evidence on the various aspects of the demand for drugs, in order to contribute to the formulation of public policies and increased knowledge on the subject.

Guatemala Resolution, 2014

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- REITERATING the importance of advancing in a coordinated manner in the Hemisphere, in order to confront the world drug problem, considering new approaches that are based on knowledge and scientific evidence, contribute to the strengthening of national strategies in an effort to seek effective solutions and achieve better results in response to challenges that have arisen in recent years

Guatemala Resolution, 2014

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- To recognize that it is necessary for the states, in accordance with their obligations under international law, to consider:

- ii. Develop, according to the reality of each State and on the basis of an increased understanding of the causes of new challenges posed by the global drug problem, responses that prevent social costs or contribute to their reduction. When appropriate, review traditional approaches and consider the development of new approaches, based on scientific evidence and knowledge.

Guatemala Resolution, 2014

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- Also to encourage Member States to share information, data collected, and scientific evidence on the results of the implementation of new policies and control of illicit substances and instruct CICAD to work with the national authorities of Member States when they so request, to analyze the impact of those policies on regional efforts to address the world drug problem

Guatemala Resolution, 2014

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- To continue to support the implementation of the 2010 Hemispheric Drug Strategy and instruct the General Secretariat to evaluate the results achieved as of December 2014 of the plan of action 2010, 2015 and the Hemispheric strategy and the Plan of Action and request CICAD to prepare its Plan of Action for 2016-2020, emphasizing scientific evidence, **experiences and impact indicators provided by the Member States** with regards to the causes of the world drug problem and the new challenges generated in the region and taking into account the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism and the contributions and progress made by both specialized agencies and other relevant sectors.

Example

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- Technique: Telephone surveys and face to face surveys in affluent areas, using Tablet.
- Sample: 700 subjects: 497 telephone interviews were applied and 203 face to face interviews in affluent areas. Sampling error +/- 3.7 percentage points, 95% confidence interval.

What is EVIDENCE?

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- "Clear and manifest certainty which can not be doubted". (Royal Academy of Spanish) Variety of applications (e.g. justice)
- "The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid:" (Oxford English Dictionary)
- Personal Experience, observation by others, Interviews, Newspapers and Magazines, Books, internet, Journals, etc…

Not everything purported to be evidence, is necessarily evidence.

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The difference between evidence and scientific evidence

- "Evidence"
  - Refers to information regardless of the method by which it was obtained.
    - *It may include the intentional selection of information (sometimes based on ideological projections, or political and/or economic interests)*

- "Scientific evidence"
  - Refers to information obtained through objective and validated methods, which incorporate a measurable degree of certainty (reduces bias).

The former includes the latter, but the latter may not include the former.

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- "Evidence"
  - Oftentimes gives greater credence to ***who*** communicates as opposed to the ***content*** of the information.

    (the messenger is more important than the message)

- "Scientific Evidence"
  - Replaces the "***who"*** communicates the evidence with ***methodological transparency*** and provides an open forum for the evidence to be ***critiqued***.

    (the message is more important than the messenger)

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- The concept “scientific” is intimately related to the methods for obtaining evidence.
  - It responds to a specific question
  - Analyze the available evidence
  - Develop your hypothesis
  - Generate information (sample(s))
  - Analysis, validation of hypothesis and conclusions
  - Report findings
  - Feedback process

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- Sample questions:
  - Do DTC reduce the number of criminal actions within that population?
  - Does the X prevention program delay the age of first use of drugs in the school population?
  - Is treatment modality X for crack users more efficient than treatment Y in terms of reducing use or increasing abstinence, or improving quality of life among users?
  - Does the new regulatory framework for cannabis in country X reduce violence? Does it raise consumption among youth?
  - Has there been an increase in cannabis consumption in those countries (or states, provinces, cities) where medicinal cannabis was approved?

In summary

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- "Evidence" is not the same as "scientific evidence".
- The latter reduces the risk of a poor decision. It provides greater levels of certainty and therefore, better support for decisions.

Public Policy

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A collection of objectives, decision and actions that a government carries out **in order to solve problems** within its community.

Produces a desired change with clear objectives and goals.

Policy: alternatives?

Key words

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- A problem exists
  - Identify it clearly: diagnostic
- Intervene, make decisions
  - Identify the most appropriate interventions
- Change the state of the situation
  - Monitor and evaluate the changes of the interventions (indicadors)

AT EACH STAGE EVIDENCE IS REQUIRED

Quality of decision

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- A problem may have more than one solution (policy/ interventions), however, the better option will be the one based on the best information available (in quantity and quality), as well as the highest quality of analysis and interpretation of the information.

Summary

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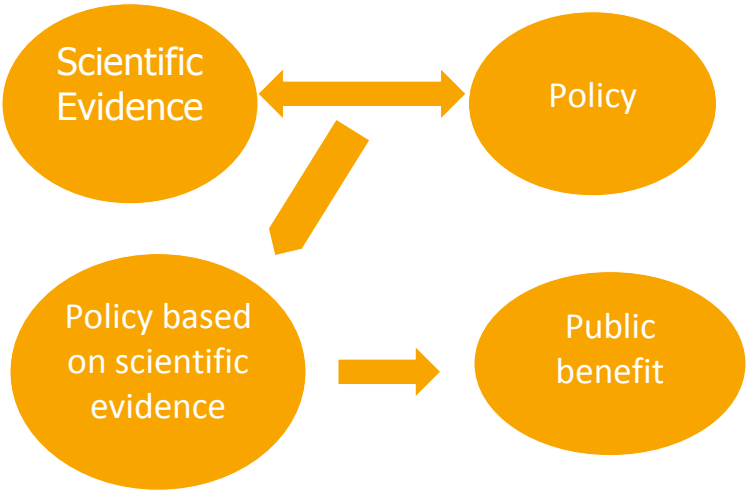

Key points

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- Not all information is evidence, and not all evidence is scientific.
- It is essential to have scientific evidence in for public policy.
- Scientific evidence is developed over time: it requires resources (human and financial)

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II Symposium on smokable cocaine: advances in scientific knowledge. A contribution to public policy on prevention treatment and reintegration based on evidence

Scientific knowledge as a basis for public policy destined to improve quality of life

14 words

Reflection

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"…we have a clear understanding of the concept of scientific evidence and therefore [we] should assume that it becomes an inescapable ethical obligation to be guided by scientific evidence, **especially in situations that concern people**."

Domingo Comas, 2014, ¿Qué es la evidencia científica y cómo utilizarla?

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Thank you!

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