

REPORT

ASSESSMENT ON THE DRUG SITUATION IN GUYANA

Guyana is approximately 83,000 square miles with a population of approximately 750,000.

There is no reliable statistic on the amount of persons engaging in the use of illegal drugs or those described as addicts. What is obvious, there is a steady increase in the number of persons observed on the streets coupled with those who engage in the use of illegal drugs in social environment.

However the Ministry of Health did commission a Behavioral Surveillance Survey approximately four years ago among -In and Out of School Youths, Employees of Guyana Sugar Corporation, (GUYSUCO), Members of the Uniformed Services, Men who have sex with Men and Female Sex Workers.

One of the main objectives of the surveys was to establish a monitoring system to track behavioral trends among high risk and vulnerable target groups. The survey, as a matter of course accumulated information on the use of intoxicants (which is risky behavior).relevant findings from this report are as follows:

	PREVIOUS ALCOHOL USE (%)	MARIJUANA USE (%)	COCAINE USE (%)	HEROIN USE (%)
OUT OF SCHOOL YOUTH	59	10.1	0.7	1.1
IN-SCHOOL YOUTH	54	7.2	0.4	0.2
EMPLOYEES OF GUYSUCO	81	15	2.3	0
FEMALE SEX WORKERS	60.2	37	8.2	0.2
MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN	91	60	13.3	0.6

The above data is substantial evidence that substance abuse has penetrated several strata of the Guyanese society.

The illegal drugs of choice in Guyana today are marijuana, crack cocaine, cocaine and to a limited extent ecstasy.

Then we have alcohol. Both legal and illegal types (moonshine)
Guyana has two fulltime residential drug rehabilitation facilities and one drop- in center

Public and Private Agencies that assist with the drug issue:

I. Salvation Army Men's Rehabilitation Center:

This facility has the capacity to housed approximately forty-eight patients. It is residential facility that requires a minimum of six months intense in house counseling and other rehabilitative exercise. The institution is a male only facility. Its staff consist of an average of five counselors a few who were themselves patients of the institution.

Funding

The main source of funding for this institution is primarily voluntary contribution and the fees received from patients. I believe that there was offer of assistance from the government of Guyana. However, I am not sure whether the transfer of the cash has materialized as yet.

It should be noted that the fee which is G\$60,000 per month is extremely prohibitive in nature. I will dare guess that there are many addicts or family members of addicts that would like to see the cost become more affordable. Many addicts who are desperately in need of help are left out of the loop, simply because they are unable to pay the required fees. Private financial support and governmental subsidy will certainly help to defray the cost of treatment for those most in need of it.

In know of some cases where deportees to Guyana that are addicts and wish to seek rehabilitation at the Salvation Army do have their fees paid by their overseas relative. However \$60,000 per month is a significant amount for the regular Guyanese family.

Success Rate

In my most recent discussion with the authorities at the Salvation Army, I was told that they experience a twenty to twenty-five percent success rate of full recovery without relapse for patients entering the institution on the first occasion.

II. Phoenix Recovery Project:

This institution was commissioned in August 2008 and commenced accepting patients in September. It is an all female institution, the first of its kind in Guyana and equipped with 12 beds. A monthly fee of G\$50,000 is required of each patient. The average stay for each patient is six months. The institution is staffed with a medical and several counseling personnel.

The initial funding made available to the institution came about from financial contributions made by the Catholic Relief Services and the United States Department of State, Narcotics Program.

This program has received significant support from the Ministry of Health under its minister Dr. Leslie Ramsammy who is a strong proponent of substance abuse intervention programs.

I should mention that the rehabilitation services are offered by the Phoenix Recovery extend beyond the walls of the institution.

Staff members of this institution render counseling service to inmates of our prison system.

Funding

The institution currently relies on the fees charged and any additional financial support from the Catholic Relief Services and the Ministry of Health.

Success Rate

We have no available information on the success rate of the institution, since it has only been in existence less than three months.

III. Ministry of Health- Drug and Rehabilitation Treatment Services

Ministry of Health has established a drug and rehabilitation treatment center in the compound of its Public Hospital in Georgetown. This facility is located next to the Psychiatric Department. If diagnosis reveals that a patient may be suffering from medical and/or psychological problems associated with the use of narcotics, treatment is readily available for both problems.

At this institution, Clinical Sessions for drug addicts are held once per week, every Tuesday from 1-5 pm. We will all agree that not much could be accomplished for addicts receiving clinical treatment four hours per week. However I compliment Minister Ramsammy for this initiative and hope that clinical treatment will soon be available at least five days per week.

It should be noted that the Minister of Health has a great sense of appreciation for the serious implications of substance dependency and its impact on the economic and social stability of our society. The minister has committed his ministry to be involved in an exercise of national intervention and rehabilitation. Thus, the goal of the Ministry of Health is to establish at least one Rehabilitation Treatment Center in each of Guyana's ten region before the end of calendar year 2009.

Additional Demand Reduction Initiatives

§ Edutainment Programs in Schools

The Ministry of Education has introduced a school drug awareness program known as the Edutainment Program.

The program is designed to educate as well as amuse. It seeks to instruct or socialize its audience by embedding lessons about the danger of drugs in some familiar form of entertainment.

The vision of this program is to make sure that every youth across Guyana receives knowledge that empowers them against the dreaded disease of substance abuse and all consequential societal ills.

§ Awareness Programs via Media

The Ministry of Health has engaged the services media professionals to conduct awareness programs titled “Changing Course” These sessions are directed at radio and television audience of all ages. This exercise occurs once each week where viewers can call in with their questions and suggestions.

§ Anti-Drug Workplace Sensitization Program

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Phoenix Recovery Project will be commencing an Anti-Drug Workplace Sensitization Program aimed at educating employees of the public and private sector on the danger of drug use and abuse. This program will be conducted by a cast of technical persons and would involve interactive activities on the following information:

§ Types of Addiction

§ Causation Factors and the signs and symptoms of drug use

§ Consequences of drugs use and abuse

§ Effect of tobacco on the body

Additional Awareness Sessions being conducted by the Ministry of Health include:

§ Posting of “No smoking “signs at public agencies

§ Use of Motivational Speakers

§ Use of Life Experience speakers

The Ministry of Home Affairs has designed and circulated a comprehensive Curriculum on Drug Awareness Education to the relevant agencies, with the expectation that at least some of its recommendations will be implemented in our academic and non academic institutions in the very near future.

Supply Reduction Initiatives

Understanding that any successful exercise to the drug problem must be address both from and demand and supply angle, the Ministry of Home Affairs through several initiatives has entered into bilateral agreements

with some of its neighbors where a number of agreements on cooperation have been entered in to assist:

§ Training in respective languages

Guyana is not a cocaine producing nation. It merely serves as a conduit and or a transshipment point. The success of getting narcotics in and out Guyana is due to the porous nature of our borders.

Unlike many of the countries represented here, Guyana is bordered by three non English speaking countries each speaking a different language. Portuguese- Spanish and Surinamese/Dutch

§ Collaborative efforts to control access at our respective borders

§ Training and Assistance in investigating narcotics matters

§ Assistance in dealing with Control Substance—Chemical Precursors.

§ Training identifying and investigating clandestine synthetic drug operations

§ Technical assistance to identify and eradicate the illegal cultivation of marijuana

The Ministry of Home Affairs has conducted a Mid Term Review of Drug Strategy Master Plan to determine compliance by the various ministries and agencies. Our findings were compiled and appropriate recommendations were made.

PLANS and GOALS

Implement a Drug Awareness Educational Program that will benefit every child and adult in our society.

Establish at least one drug rehabilitation facility in each of Guyana's ten regions

Establish Employee Assistance Programs in every government ministry/agency

Although the Ministry of Health supports the program where a course titled "Social Work in Addiction is being taught at the University of

Guyana it continues to Identify and Recruit qualified personnel from other sources to serve as coordinator for each of its agencies.

CHALLENGES

1. Re-examination of our laws pertaining to penalties for possession of small amount of marijuana for personal use
2. Public Acceptance of Addiction as an illness
3. Failure of the Criminal Justice system to appreciate rehabilitation as an alternative to incarceration
4. Support for public funding for programs- Many citizens believe that resources should be spent for other purpose such as education, security and health.
5. Lack of any structured rehabilitation program in our prisons
6. The issue of deportees who are addicts
7. Synthetic drugs such as ecstasy
8. Inability of our law enforcement personnel to I.D. Synthetic drugs such as Ecstasy.
9. Inability to identify clandestine synthetic drug manufacturing facilities and conduct appropriate investigation

Submitted by

Errol E. VanNooten
Guyana

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