

Editorial

What Higher Education Institutions ought to do before the drug consumption panorama

There are evidences from remote times that document the ritual, religious, medical and hedonist use of different drugs. We also know that in old times there was a risk perception of the consumption of drugs that ended up in the prohibition or restriction for a specific part of the population and for certain situations, such as the case of alcohol in the Aztec Empire or tobacco in Europe during the XVI century.

The expansion of the capitalist system in the last 150 years modified the relationship between human beings and drugs and today we face massive consumption that is seen as a problem; however, if this perception is quite recent so is the idea of responding to it as a public response. Since the Shanghai Conference in 1909 and throughout the XX century such response leaned toward policies and programs which privileged fighting drug supply by prohibiting substances that are considered illegal, some experts have classified this response as one based on scientific advances which shows the damages that drugs cause to the human body and according to other experts on economic and politic interests of the hegemonic countries such as the United States, considered one of the most important drug consumers of the world.

The division of addictive substances into legal and illegal has created a false perception that alcohol and tobacco are less dangerous, because they are legal, and therefore less addictive; in every language nicotine, alcohol or caffeine are not labeled as drugs nor are consumers addicts. Only cultural considerations allow the comprehension of how drugs like alcohol and tobacco are labeled as legal regardless of the social and medical toxic manias associated to alcoholism or smoking. Since including drugs in one or other category is a social creation, it can be changed as it is currently happening with marihuana in countries like the United States, Uruguay and Mexico which will impact the level of consumption and the perception of damage that it can cause to the body.

According to the 2015 World Drug Report the current consumption panorama of these substances in the world brings about the analysis of two sides of this phenomenon: drug supply and demand. The report establishes that there are no evidences of great changes in supply in the regions where these illicit drugs are produced

but that the markets and routes used to smuggle them are constantly changing. Also, that drug organization are starting to produce different drugs and carry out other criminal activities such as arms dealing and human trafficking, and they are becoming more violent. It is a fact that even with the growing cooperation efforts of the different countries that have signed the UN agreements on drug trafficking the supply has not decreased; on the contrary, there are constant new drugs on the market, the effects are yet to be studied, directed to younger people. This situation has influenced UN members to question the effectiveness and convenience of the prohibition policy that is currently in place and to reflect on other possible solutions that are not yet established.

Regarding demand, the 2015 Report estimates that the percentage remains stable due to the growth of the human population and establishes that 246 million people, one in every 20 between the ages of 15 and 64, consumed illegal drugs in 2013. The magnitude of the problem can be better analyzed when we are aware that 1 in every 10 consumers suffer a disorder. In other words, little of 27 million people are problematic consumers of illicit drugs and almost half of them consume injectable substances, which is associated to HIV in 1.65 million of illegal drug consumers.

Even though the report does not include legal drugs, we know that to the previous numbers we must add the results of the alcohol consumption exam that according to descriptive note 349 of the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015a) is associated to more than 200 illnesses and disorders, it is responsible for the death of over 3 million people (5.9% of the deaths of the world) and of 5.1% of injuries and morbidity in the world in men between 20 and 39 years, as well as social and economic losses. The Pan-American Health Organization (2007) has pointed out that this is a serious problem in America, since the percentage sporadic high alcohol consumption has doubled in males and tripled in females. Regarding smoking, descriptive note 349 WHO (2015b) establishes that this substance is responsible for more than 6 million deaths a year (80% in countries with low and middle income per capita) in which more than 600,000 people were non-smokers exposed to second hand smoke.

Drug related disorders are a chronic health problem that make people vulnerable all their lives, needing therefore a long term treatment. However, as Shekhar Saxena Director of the Department of the Mental Health and Abuse of the World Health Organization established that the national health systems frequently lack the capacity to provide such treatments and effective attention to drug consumers especially when it comes to women and people with low income.

To know the drug consumption world panorama through a journal such as *Drugs and Addictive Behavior* sponsored by Fundación Universitaria Luis Amigó provides the opportunity to reflect upon which ought to be the role of universities regarding this problem and start exercising their responsibility: education of new professionals, research to generate new knowledge and to assess intervention based on evidences; extension to transfer knowledge, cultures and services as well as promoting healthy habits inside and outside its campus.

For higher education institutions to understand the problem of drug consumption as an issue of public health and to assume the commitment to contribute to its solution, requires a transformation of academic programs to educate health related professionals to prevent, detect, counsel and provide an integral and multi-disciplinary treatment to drug consumers. Likewise, they also need to provide preventive interventions and educate professionals, regardless of the field, that promote physical, mental and emotional health in their community, creating awareness of the responsibility each person has with their own health.

It is necessary to direct research towards social and sanitary expressions of the problem of drug consumption from an applied research perspective in the field of biomedicine, health systems and translational medicine as well as addiction prevention and treatment, also to stimulate initiatives such as that of this journal that create awareness and share academic and scientific products on this topic from countries that need to understand and deal with the problem of supply and demand of drugs, such as Colombia and Mexico

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