

Socioeconomic Inequalities and Substance Use Disorders

Informal Scientific Network Statement

CND 2019

Introduction

Substance use disorders are multi-factorial in nature and often follow the course of a relapsing and remitting chronic disease. Socio-economic determinants play a fundamental role in substance use disorders and, poverty and limited education increase their risk and worsen their health and social consequences.

The Sustainable Development Goals in particular 3.5, 5, 10, 16 provide an ideal framework to address the response pertaining to the socioeconomic determinants of substance use disorders.

The Informal Scientific Network identified three top priorities to address socioeconomic inequalities:

1. Policies and legislations

Decisionmakers should prioritize strategies and interventions that aim at minimizing inequalities and of recognizing human rights. For this the Scientific Network advises:

- Acknowledge that those with lower education are at greater risk of substance use disorders and their adverse effects. Hence every female and male citizen should have access to education.
- Governments should facilitate access to evidence-based prevention interventions that engage family, the educational system, communities, and health care.
- Develop policies to ensure that substance use disorders are treated like any other chronic medical condition and people affected are not stigmatized.

- Increase access to drug treatment services through the prioritization of evidence-based, low-threshold services to reach those in need.
- Persons with substance use disorders should not be criminalized. Efforts to prevent the continued over-criminalization of the most economically deprived should be acted upon, including rehabilitation, recovery and full re-integration into society.
- Collection and analysis of data to monitor the magnitude of the problem and the outcomes of policies and interventions, in order to tailor and guide strategies to address substance use disorders amongst the socioeconomically deprived.

2. Health care

The outcomes and quality of health care is much worse for those socioeconomically deprived. The Informal Scientific Network recommends the following:

- Services, involving prevention of drug use, screening, treatment of substance use disorders including comorbidities, should be integrated in the public health system, ensuring universal access to sustainable, evidence-based, quality services.
- Secure sufficient funds to provide treatment for substance use disorders and ensure adequate training of the work force.
- A broad perspective should be applied in the provision of prevention and treatment services (including housing, nutrition, health care and education) for the social and economically deprived, especially to the most marginalized.
- Evidence-based prevention interventions should be provided from pregnancy until young adulthood and include non-medical use of controlled substances, as well as alcohol and nicotine.
- Promote the use of information technologies, including mobile devices for supporting screening, treatment and recovery.

3. Communities and Social systems

Strong social support systems provide resilience and improve health and social outcomes of those suffering from substance use disorders.

The Scientific Network recommends:

- Create public policies and a community support system that strengthens the family as a unit of resilience and encourages meaningful social relationships through the engagement of community groups, such as spiritual organisations, schools, sports associations, police and fire departments, NGOs, and other entities.
- Integration and coordination between justice, health, education and social system, including mentorship.
- Encourage the use of resources to strengthen the use of community assets, to promote healthy lifestyles amongst the most socioeconomically deprived.