



United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Topic B: Strategies to eliminate the use of children in the production, sales, and trafficking of drugs

Introduction:

Examining the disturbing world of kids entangled in the drug trade's supply, distribution, and manufacturing exposes a distressing story. These young people are drawn into a dangerous existence in a world that is supposed to protect innocence and promote their growth and development. Their exploitation reflects societal breakdowns that allow such aberrant behaviors to continue. The portrayal of childhoods snatched and the pressing need to save these defenseless children from the grip of illegal enterprises is heartbreaking.

The complex difficulties that children face in this grim situation go beyond the direct risks associated with the illegal drug trade. The enduring effects on their mental and physical health highlight the critical need for all-encompassing intervention techniques. Taking care of the underlying issues, promoting more effective laws, and providing robust support systems, are essential components of a collective effort to break the chains that bind to such illicit acts.

As children have become more vulnerable and exposed than ever thanks to the internet, they are also increasingly involved in the business of drugs. They are contacted by social media websites and then asked to pick up and deliver packages to several locations, in exchange for an exceptionally good and easy pay. Although these cases are normally found to be done by poor children, all young people are an easy target to become involved in the drug world.

It is crucial to acknowledge the systemic problems that exacerbate these young people's vulnerability as they negotiate the hazardous road of drug-related activities. Children are frequently exposed to exploitation in environments that are created by poverty, illiteracy, and unstable social structures. The circle of hopelessness never ends, imprisoning future generations in an inconceivably problematic world.

Beyond the urgent rescue efforts, more must be done to break up this pattern. Investing in education and community development becomes an essential first step in eliminating the systemic injustices that allow children to be used for illegal purposes. Solid law enforcement and international collaboration are also essential to bringing an end to the criminal networks that prey on the innocence of the vulnerable.

Considering this harsh reality, society must address the underlying causes of children's continued involvement in the drug trade, in addition to treating the symptoms. Giving these young people a chance to restore their lost childhoods and clear the path for a better, safer future by working together in a comprehensive and coordinated effort.





Concepts and definitions:

- **Child labor:** “often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity”, and that is “mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful” for them (ILO, n.d.).
- **Drug trafficking:** “a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.” (UNODC, n.d.).
- **Drug Trafficking Organizations:** “complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs” (US Department of Justice, 2010).
- **ILO:** International Labor Organization.
- **Organized Criminal Group:** a structured group of three or more persons that “acts in concert with the aim of committing at least one serious crime, to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit” (UNODC, n.d.).
- **UNGASS:** United Nations General Assembly Special Session.
- **UNODC:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Current issue:

Child labor is a significant issue today. Millions of children work in harmful conditions that prevent them from getting an education, affecting their physical, mental, or social development. In 2020, it was estimated that 160 million children were engaged in child labor (79 million of them performing hazardous work). This accounted for an estimate of 1 in 10 children (working) worldwide. Most of them ranged between the ages of 5 to 17 years old (ILO, 2020). Global progress against child labor has stalled since 2016, with child labor rates holding steady while the overall number of affected children risen by 8 million between 2016 and 2020. The percentage of children in hazardous work remained the same but the number of children increased by 6.5 million (ILO, 2020).

It has also been found that child labor often leads to absence from school. Many young children who work are not in school, even though they are of compulsory education age. Over 25% of children aged 5 to 11 and over 33% of children aged 12 to 14 that worked were not attending school. Many underage laborers find it difficult to manage school and work simultaneously, harming their education and denying them leisure (ILO, 2020).

It is well recognized that young people engaging in street crime are a demographic that is usually in economic poverty and frequently turn to dangerous jobs such as drug sales to make ends meet. Even though those who use illegal drugs are more likely to be





incarcerated and are linked to greater economic vulnerability, interventions for this demographic are still insufficient. It is less known if recent incarceration prevents vulnerable youth from selling drugs, even though prior research has shown the importance of incarceration in further entrenching youth in the criminal justice system and street life.

It is crucial to identify how children are or could be involved in the drug trade since it is commonly believed that there is a clear-cut exploitative relationship between kids and people who engage in crime. It is also important to understand the context in which children engage in illegal drug trade and production. A young person working on her family's opium plantation differs from a middle-class adolescent dealing drugs to pay for pricey aspirational products, from a young person involved in the street and selling drugs to make ends meet, from a young person enlisted in the Rio military as a child soldier and from a young person in a Honduran gang, to name some examples.

Even though there are significant gaps in our knowledge regarding drug usage, drug-related risks, and children's involvement in drug trafficking, it is important to acknowledge that there may be a link between drug usage and participation in the drug trade. Early drug use can have a negative impact on development, and drug users are more likely to experience health problems. Furthermore, it is commonly known that starting a drug use habit in adolescence increases the likelihood of longer-term usage and dependence compared to starting a habit in adulthood. As a result, there is broad consensus regarding the significance of drug-using children and youth prevention, as well as effective, focused therapies. Furthermore, the majority agrees that drug-related violence against children and youth is extremely harmful and that organized crime groups should be stopped from using children as props in the drug trade.

But far too frequently, the harm that drugs pose to kids and teens is just mentioned without enough consideration given to the suitability and efficacy of the safeguards put in place to keep them safe. This makes it difficult to conduct fair assessments and deliberate over suitable policies. Even while there are helpful initiatives and policies that may be studied, it is important to remember that most of the tactics used to combat the "global drug problem" have been shown to have little effect on kids and teenagers.

In addition, involvement in the drug world is also related to homelessness. A recent Canadian study found that out of 529 young people, ages 14 to 26, who were out in the street, the majority admitted to trafficking narcotics. Individuals engaged in drug sales were more likely than non-sellers to be homeless, crack cocaine users, and driven by basic survival requirements and drug dependence (Werb, Kerr, Li, Montaner & Wood, 2008).

Growing illicit crops is one of the most common jobs that involves children in the drug trade in Afghanistan and Colombia. These customs are invariably connected to the child's survival and are made possible by the intricate interactions between tradition, conflict, and poverty. Social and economic issues, such as economic opportunities and basic infrastructure, need to be addressed. Several alternative development initiatives to the production of illicit





crops offer valuable insights; however, scaling up these initiatives remains a persistent challenge.

In Brazil, children's involvement in the drug trade serves as another illustration of this necessity. Most of them are from the poorest families, with low educational attainment, and part of marginalized groups. Consequently, they find it difficult to leave the drug trade due to financial necessity, friendships, and police extortion. According to a 2002 International Labour Organization (ILO), children involved in drug trade reported that their biggest fears were going to jail or getting killed.

There has been limited international work done in this field, despite the complexity of these issues and treaty obligations to forbid children's involvement in the drug trade. The UNGASS process offers a chance to start filling this significant void and enhancing the issue's policy focus.

Children's participation in the manufacture, distribution and trafficking of drugs is a very unsettling phenomenon that calls for immediate attention and group action. These young people's innocence is stolen by this heinous exploitation, which also feeds the cycle of violence, destitution, and hopelessness. Beyond just denouncing such horrible acts, it is our collective duty to actively seek to demolish the systems that support them. By working to create a world where every child can gain experience in an environment that nurtures their potential, rather than taking advantage of their vulnerability, by addressing root causes like poverty and systemic vulnerabilities.

To guarantee a more hopeful and caring future for every child, we must understand the complexity of this phenomenon, and undertake worldwide collaboration to remove this terrible stain on humanity.

International initiatives:

The global community has established comprehensive strategies to address this issue and safeguard vulnerable children. The following key approaches highlight the international efforts being undertaken:

1. Legal Frameworks:

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a pivotal treaty embraced by all member states. It prohibits the sale and trafficking of children and asserts their entitlement to protection from economic exploitation. The ILO Convention 182 specifically targets the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in drug production and trafficking, thus presenting the importance of eradicating such practices.

2. Law Enforcement and Judicial Cooperation:

INTERPOL, as an international police organization, actively combats drug trafficking and child exploitation, providing training and resources to member countries to enhance their law





enforcement capabilities. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) works in collaboration with governments, by strengthening law enforcement capacity and facilitating the development of effective legal frameworks to combat child exploitation. The Joint Operations international collaboration between law enforcement agencies serves to disrupt trafficking networks, rescuing children from the clutches of exploitation.

3. Prevention and Rehabilitation:

Community Outreach Programs are essential educational initiatives. Coupled with providing alternative livelihoods, they are instrumental in preventing children from being taken into the drug trade. Psychosocial Support Children, a program intended for those who have suffered exploitation in the drug trade, provides access to comprehensive physical and mental health care to recover from trauma and reintegrate into society. Education and Vocational Training empower children with quality education and vocational training, assisting in their escape from poverty, thus reducing vulnerability to exploitation.

All international strategies collectively contribute to the eradication of child exploitation in the drug trade. While considerable progress has been made, ongoing efforts are crucial to ensure the protection of all children from such forms of exploitation. Everyone has a role to play in protecting children from exploitation. By raising awareness, supporting initiatives, and demanding accountability, a world where all children can live free from harm can be created.

Guiding questions:

- What are the prevalent factors contributing to the involvement of children in the production, sales, and trafficking of drugs that you can identify in your delegation or region?
- How does the legal framework in your delegation address the issue of child exploitation in the drug trade, and what measures are in place for the protection and rehabilitation of affected children?
- Are there any specific regions or communities that are more susceptible to the recruitment of children in drug-related activities, and if so, what are the underlying reasons?
- What initiatives or programs has your government implemented to combat the use of children in the drug trade, and how effective have these measures been in practice?
- How do non-governmental organizations and international bodies collaborate to address the issue of child involvement in the drug trade, and what success stories or challenges have emerged from these collaborative efforts?





- Are there any specific case studies or incidents in recent years that highlight the gravity of the problem in your delegation, and what lessons can be learned from these situations?
- What measures can educational institutions take to raise awareness and prevent the recruitment of students into drug-related activities?
- How do international collaborations and partnerships benefit the overall efforts to eliminate the use of children in the production, sales, and trafficking of drugs, and what are the potential areas for improvement in these collaborations?

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