

## Topic 4:

# Understanding the Impact of Drug Abuse



# Is Drug Abuse an Individual Issue?



Drug abuse is a **pervasive issue** that affects more than the individual drug abusers; it also affects families and communities surrounding the drug abuser.



By knowing the **far-reaching implications** of drug abuse and the various affected parties, we gain critical insight to develop prevention and intervention strategies.



You can do your part in preventing drug abuse by **raising awareness on its consequences** and dispelling the misconception that drug abuse is victimless.

# Impact Levels of Drug Abuse

## Individual

The physical harms can be categorised into



Acute  
toxicity



Long-term  
health issues

## Family

Drug abuse can take a significant emotional, financial and relational toll on



Parents



Children



Siblings

## Society

Drug abuse can impact society by



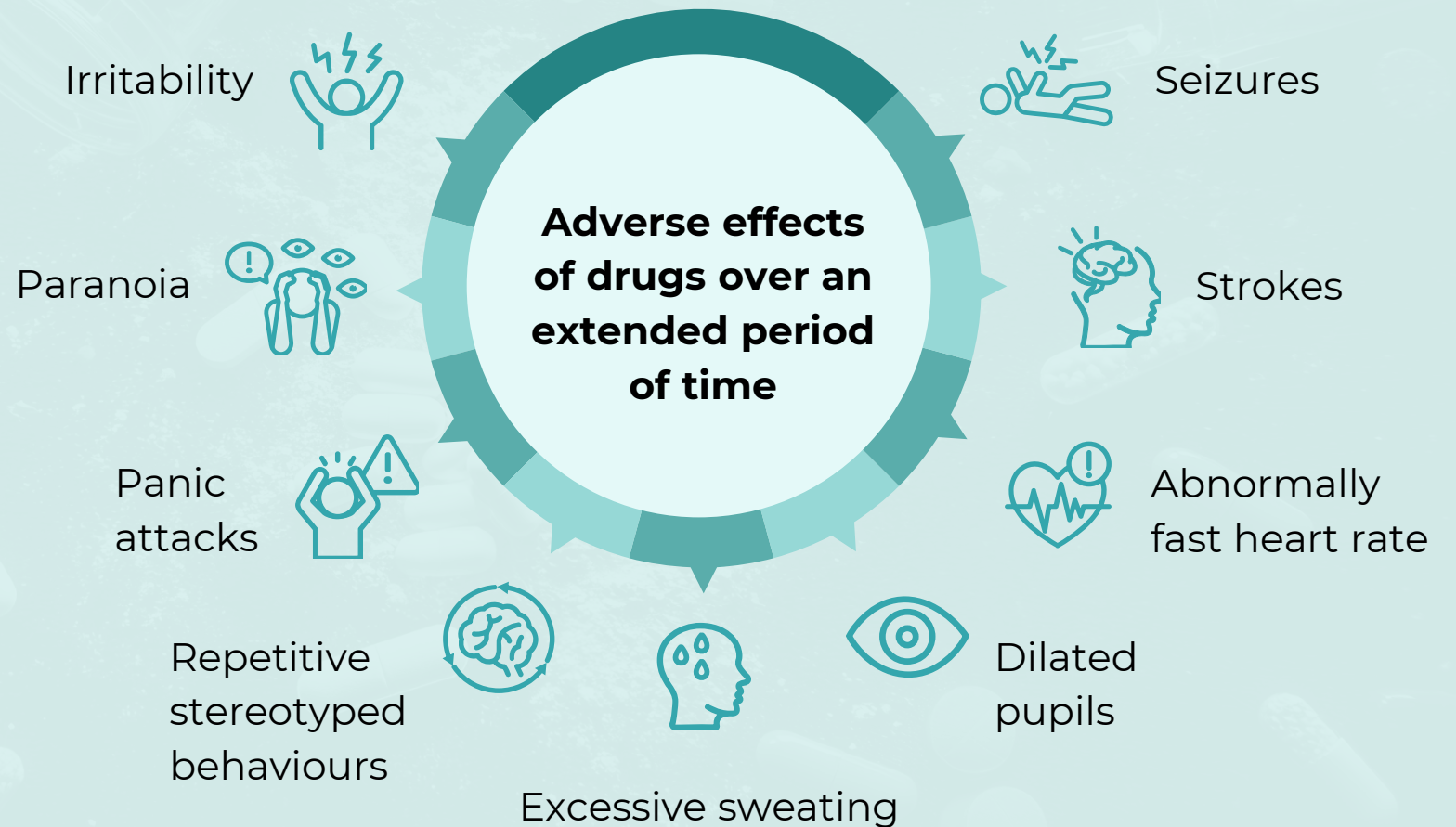
Posing an  
economic burden



Creating social  
instability



# Individual Impact: Acute Toxicity



You may refer to [Topic 3: Understanding the Basics of Drugs](#) for more information on the effects of cannabis and methamphetamine abuse.





# Individual Impact: Long-term Health Issues

**Long-term drug abuse can result in chronic physical and psychological health issues.**



For example, regular cannabis abuse can cause chronic cough, increased mucus production, airway inflammation, depression and schizophrenia.

Cannabis can also cause abnormal cell growth that could lead to cancer (Tashkin, 2005).

- Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in cannabis may worsen these effects by causing oxidative stress and disrupted cell function.



Psychedelic abuse can result in flashbacks and hallucinogen persisting perception disorder.



Substances like 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA, or commonly known as 'ecstasy') and cocaine can lead to impulsivity, irritability, sleep disturbances, anxiety and addiction.



# Familial Impact: Parental Drug Abuse

**Parents who abuse drugs often struggle to fulfil their caregiving roles, which can result in:**



Neglect  
or abuse



Ineffective  
guidance



Inadequate  
supervision



Failure to provide  
emotional support



- These factors can disrupt their children's development and sense of security, as well as cause emotional distress and trauma.
- Drug abuse in married individuals is closely linked to higher rates of conflict, separation or divorce (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022).
- Living with a partner who abuses drugs can result in broken trust, emotional trauma and frequent disagreements. In many cases, the relationship may deteriorate to the point of divorce, leaving families fractured.





# Familial Impact: Parental Drug Abuse

- There have been several distressing cases in Singapore that highlight the devastating consequences of parental drug abuse.

No money for milk, mum used it on drugs: More children rescued in CNB raids in 2024



A baby (left) is carried by an inspector after his mother was arrested for consuming drugs in 2024, and CNB officers re-enact a raid. PHOTOS: CENTRAL NARCOTICS BUREAU, KUA CHEE SIONG

Source: The Straits Times, 2025

**SINGAPORE** – A recalcitrant drug abuser is back behind bars after handing his 14-year-old son methamphetamine from his own stash when the boy asked him for some.

The father had also openly consumed the drug at home in full view of his 15-year-old daughter.

The 52-year-old man, who has been in and out of a drug rehabilitation centre (DRC) multiple times over the past three decades, was sentenced to six years and eight months' jail on Oct 4.

Source: The Straits Times, 2024



# Familial Impact: Children of Drug Abusers



- Children of drug abusers may grow up feeling socially disconnected due to prolonged periods of parental absence or social exclusion due to the stigma of drug abuse. This isolation can severely affect their self-esteem.
- Many children of drug abusers are at risk of developing anxiety, depression or behavioural issues.
- Early exposure normalises drug abuse, and may put these children at an increased risk of abusing drugs in adolescence or adulthood.



Children of drug abusers are at a higher risk of academic failure and social problems (Lander et al., 2013).



A study found that one in five children of drug offenders had committed a criminal offence (Loh et al., 2020).





# Familial Impact: Siblings of Drug Abusers

- Siblings of drug abusers may feel overshadowed or neglected when their family focuses their attention on the drug abuser. This may cause them to experience:



Resentment



Anxiety



Low self-esteem

- Drug abuse may also cause strained relationships between the drug abuser and their siblings due to:



The drug abuser becoming unreliable, lying or stealing to sustain their habit, resulting in loss of trust.



An increased risk of emotional volatility or violence, which may cause conflict, psychological distress or even, physical harm to the siblings.

- Siblings may take on the emotional burden of managing conflicts within the household or protecting the drug abuser, which can result in long-term emotional and relational challenges (Lindeman et al., 2023).



# Societal Impact: Economic Costs

- Drug abuse directly and indirectly creates an economic burden on society.

## Direct Costs



Healthcare expenses for treating drug-related illnesses



Law enforcement costs for dealing with drug-related crimes

## Indirect Costs



Loss of productivity due to illness or incarceration



- The annual total economic cost of drug abuse in the UK is estimated to be in the billions (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2021).
- The annual global cost is estimated to be more than \$740 billion (National Centre on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2020).
- A 2016 study by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) revealed that dealing with drug crimes cost Singapore more than \$1.2 billion in 2015, equivalent to approximately \$1.45 billion today.



# Societal Impact: Crime and Social Disintegration

- In affected areas, drug abuse can result in:



Increased rates of crimes committed to fund drug abuse, such as theft, robbery and drug trafficking



Increased rates of crimes resulting directly from drug abuse, particularly violent offences

As rates of drug abuse within a community increase, so do drug-related crimes. This leads to:

## Consequences such as

- Overcrowded prisons and a cycle of reoffending (Mumola & Karberg, 2006)
- Strain on law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system

## Community impact such as

- Eroded community trust
- Reduced social cohesion
- Diminished quality of life
- Increased poverty, homelessness and violence (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 1995)





# Societal Impact: Crime and Social Disintegration

## Case Study: Drugs and Broader Criminal Behaviour

- Ecuador is a crucial transit point for drug trafficking due to its location between Colombia and Peru, the world's largest cocaine producers.
- To address drug abuse as a public health issue, a new criminal code was implemented in 2014, which decriminalised personal drug use and possession (U.S. Department of State, 2015).
- Today, approximately 70% of the world's cocaine flows through Ecuadorian ports (Wells, 2025). This has resulted in:



Rise in violence  
(i.e. dramatic increase  
in homicide rates)



Evolution of criminal  
organisations  
(i.e. increase in number  
of criminal gangs and  
criminal activities)



Challenges to authority  
(i.e. prison system crises,  
media institution attacks)



# Societal Impact: Crime and Social Disintegration

- Local cases highlight the alarming effects of drug abuse which has, in these examples, caused the brutal deaths of family members.

SINGAPORE - A man who fatally stabbed his 56-year-old mother in the heart and punched his 90-year-old grandmother to death after taking mind-altering drug lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) will be confined indefinitely.

The High Court on Friday found that Gabriel Lien Goh, 25, **had committed the acts in 2019** but acquitted him of two charges of culpable homicide on the basis of his mental incapacity.

Goh was found to be of unsound mind when he killed the two women at about 7.25pm on Oct 27, 2019, at Block 7A Commonwealth Avenue owing to his voluntary consumption of LSD, a potent hallucinogen.

Source: The Straits Times, 2022

Singapore

## **Mother of girl who was killed, burnt and left in pot gets 14 years' jail for child abuse, perverting justice**

The mother of seven physically assaulted her children and left them at home without food or water.

Source: CNA, 2024

# Key Takeaways



Drug abuse is not victimless. Its consequences can devastate individuals, families and society.



It is critical to consider the different aspects of harm caused by drug abuse to develop prevention and intervention strategies.



It is important to support not only individuals, but also families and communities affected by drug abuse.

You play a vital role in creating a protective environment for our people, especially youths.

**Let's apply what you have learnt here to build a drug-free Singapore!**





# Further Reading and Resources



**PDE Information Package**



**List of Controlled Drugs  
and Inhalants**



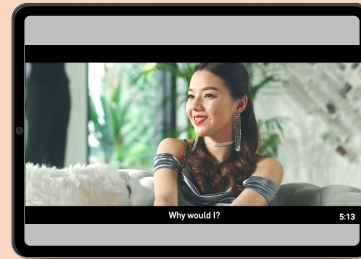
**Stories from Victims  
of Drug Abuse**



**Compilation of Narratives from Family  
and Loved Ones of Drug Abusers**



**Be Aware. Be Wise. Think Twice.**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzQ0mVPuCz0>



**Down the Rabbit Hole**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5A4sbCSuhQ>



**Mythbuster Series**  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL\\_z4\\_PYbFdxUtbG7-isKGSyyN0MX8LD77](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_z4_PYbFdxUtbG7-isKGSyyN0MX8LD77)

**Stay informed on our efforts to keep Singapore drug-free by following us on social media.**



**@CNB.DrugFreeSG**

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