



**PROTECTING YOUTH FROM NARCOTIC DRUGS AND PSYCHOTROPIC  
SUBSTANCES: INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND LEGAL SAFEGUARDS**

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**Annotation:** This article examines the multifaceted threat posed by narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to the physical, mental, and social well-being of young people. The study analyzes national and international legal frameworks aimed at shielding youth from drug-related harm, emphasizing preventive strategies, education, rehabilitation, and law enforcement. Special attention is paid to the role of international cooperation—particularly through the United Nations, CND, INCB, and regional organizations—in strengthening national policies and facilitating coordinated responses. The paper also highlights the importance of community-based approaches and public awareness campaigns to counteract the influence of illicit drugs. By integrating legal, institutional, and educational perspectives, the article provides a comprehensive overview of current challenges and effective practices in protecting youth from substance abuse in a globalized world.

**Keywords:** Youth protection, narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, drug prevention, international cooperation, legal framework, UNODC, drug abuse, rehabilitation, public health, education policies, substance control.

**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu maqolada giyohvandlik vositalari va psixotrop moddalarning yosh avlod salomatligi, ruhiy barqarorligi hamda ijtimoiy hayotiga tahdidi keng yoritiladi. Tadqiqotda ushbu xavf-xatarlardan himoya qilishga qaratilgan milliy va xalqaro huquqiy me'yoriy hujjatlar tahlil qilinadi. Ayniqsa, profilaktika, ta'lim, reabilitatsiya va qonun ijrosi sohalaridagi strategiyalar muhim o'rin egallaydi. BMT, Giyohvandlik moddalariga qarshi kurash komissiyasi (CND), Xalqaro narkotiklar nazorati kengashi (INCB) va boshqa mintaqaviy tashkilotlarning hamkorlikdagi roli alohida ko'rsatib o'tiladi. Maqolada, shuningdek, jamoatchilik ishtiroki va ommaviy axborot vositalari orqali yoshlarni giyohvandlik tahdididan ogoh etish zarurligi ham ta'kidlanadi. Tahlil jarayonida huquqiy, institutsional va tarbiyaviy yondashuvlar uyg'unlashtirilib, globallashtirish sharoitida yoshlarni giyohvandlikka qarshi himoya qilishning dolzarb masalalari yoritiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Yoshlar himoyasi, giyohvandlik vositalari, psixotrop moddalar, profilaktika, xalqaro hamkorlik, huquqiy asoslar, BMT, reabilitatsiya, sog'liqni saqlash, ta'lim siyosati, modda nazorati.

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматриваются угрозы, которые наркотические и психотропные вещества представляют для физического, психического и социального благополучия молодежи. Анализируются национальные и международные правовые механизмы защиты молодежи от наркотической зависимости, включая меры профилактики, образования, реабилитации и правоприменения. Особое внимание уделяется международному сотрудничеству — в частности, роли ООН, Комиссии по наркотическим средствам (CND),

Международного совета по контролю над наркотиками (INCB) и других региональных структур в укреплении политики государств. Подчёркивается важность участия общества и информационных кампаний в противодействии наркозависимости среди молодёжи. В статье представлена комплексная картина проблем и эффективных подходов к защите молодёжи от наркотиков в условиях глобализации.

**Ключевые слова:** Защита молодёжи, наркотики, психотропные вещества, профилактика, международное сотрудничество, правовая база, ООН, наркозависимость, реабилитация, здравоохранение, образовательная политика, контроль за веществами.

## Introduction

The global spread of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances poses one of the most pressing threats to public health and social stability in the 21st century. Among the most vulnerable to this danger are young people, whose physical and psychological development is particularly susceptible to the devastating effects of substance abuse. With globalization, technological advancement, and increased mobility, access to illicit substances has become easier than ever, creating an urgent need for comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable responses at both national and international levels. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that over 36 million people worldwide suffer from drug use disorders, a significant portion of whom are adolescents and young adults. Substance abuse among youth not only leads to serious health consequences, including overdose and mental health disorders, but also contributes to increased criminal activity, educational disruption, and long-term socioeconomic marginalization. The influence of peer pressure, social media, urbanization, and lack of access to accurate information further exacerbates the issue, particularly in developing and transitional societies. Governments and international institutions have increasingly recognized the necessity of protecting youth through robust legal frameworks and prevention-oriented strategies. Instruments such as the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961), the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988) provide a foundational legal basis for international drug control. These treaties oblige signatory states to criminalize illicit drug trafficking, promote treatment and rehabilitation, and implement preventive education programs. International cooperation, particularly through organizations like the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), UNODC, and WHO, plays a crucial role in facilitating data-sharing, technical assistance, legislative reform, and joint operations. Regional mechanisms in the European Union, African Union, ASEAN, and CIS also support coordinated strategies tailored to specific cultural, legal, and economic contexts. This article explores the critical issue of youth protection from narcotic and psychotropic threats, focusing on the intersection of legal, institutional, and educational frameworks. By analyzing global and regional best practices, the paper highlights how cooperation, policy innovation, and youth engagement are vital to building drug-resilient societies. The importance of human rights, evidence-based policies, and a public health-centered approach is also emphasized as a foundation for long-term effectiveness in combating youth drug abuse.

## Main Body

**The Scope of the Problem: Youth and Drug Vulnerability.** Adolescents and young adults face unique developmental, psychological, and social challenges, making them particularly vulnerable to substance abuse. The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that most individuals who use drugs begin before the age of 25, with early exposure linked to chronic addiction, mental illness, and premature mortality. Risk factors include unstable family environments, peer pressure, socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of education, and exposure to criminal networks. Globalization has intensified these risks. Synthetic drugs, such as fentanyl, methamphetamines,

and synthetic cannabinoids, are increasingly trafficked through digital platforms and the dark web, often reaching youth via social media and encrypted messaging applications. As a result, traditional law enforcement approaches must now be complemented by digital surveillance and cybercrime units.

### Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Youth Protection.

International Legal Instruments. Three core UN conventions guide the global legal response to narcotics and psychotropic substances. The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) establishes control over the cultivation, production, and trade of narcotic drugs, emphasizing medical and scientific use. The Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971) expands controls to include synthetic drugs and hallucinogens, which are particularly prevalent among youth. The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988) strengthens provisions for international cooperation, extradition, and the seizure of illicit assets. These conventions oblige states to integrate protective measures for youth into national legislation, including criminalizing the sale of drugs to minors, mandating rehabilitation access, and supporting education campaigns.

### National Policies and Legislation.

Countries vary widely in their approaches to youth drug prevention, but several best practices emerge. Portugal's decriminalization policy, combined with robust public health programs, has significantly reduced drug-related deaths and youth addiction rates. Iceland's "Youth in Iceland" model focuses on after-school activities, parental involvement, and national surveys, resulting in a dramatic decline in adolescent drug use over two decades. Singapore and Japan maintain strict zero-tolerance laws complemented by early prevention, school-based education, and community policing. These examples demonstrate that neither punitive nor permissive approaches alone are sufficient; rather, a balanced, evidence-based strategy rooted in education and social support is essential.

### The Role of International Organizations and Multilateral Cooperation.

International cooperation is indispensable in addressing the transnational nature of drug trafficking and youth exposure. Key actors include:

- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UNODC spearheads global initiatives such as the "Listen First" campaign, which promotes science-based drug prevention for children and youth. It also provides training, funding, and technical assistance to developing countries in implementing youth protection programs.
- Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND). As the policymaking body within the UN system, the CND regularly reviews the global drug situation and updates classification schedules, ensuring that emerging synthetic substances harmful to youth are swiftly regulated.
- International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). INCB monitors compliance with drug control treaties and issues country-specific recommendations. It emphasizes the need for a human-rights-based approach to drug policy, including the protection of vulnerable groups like adolescents.
- World Health Organization (WHO). WHO contributes scientific expertise to define treatment standards, monitor substance abuse trends, and guide countries in establishing mental health services accessible to youth.

### Regional Cooperation Bodies.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) gathers comparative data and promotes best practices across the EU. African Union and ASEAN encourage regional strategies through youth education, cross-border cooperation, and harmonized legislation. Organization of American States (OAS) supports youth-targeted outreach and family-based prevention programs in Latin America.

### Prevention, Education, and Youth Engagement Strategies.

#### School-Based and Community Prevention.

Effective prevention programs begin in early childhood and continue throughout adolescence. These include:

- Life Skills Training (LST): Teaching resistance skills, emotional regulation, and peer pressure management.
- Parenting Workshops: Strengthening family communication and supervision.
- Community Coalitions: Mobilizing stakeholders such as teachers, faith leaders, health workers, and local governments to address drug risks collectively.

Studies have shown that integrated school-community prevention programs can reduce drug initiation by 30–50% over five years.

#### Public Awareness and Media Campaigns.

Strategic use of media, including social media influencers, documentaries, and public service announcements, can significantly influence youth behavior. Campaigns such as "Just Say No" (USA) and "Your Life. Your Choice" (UK) have had varying degrees of success depending on cultural relevance and peer endorsement. Youth

**Involvement and Peer Networks.** Involving youth as agents of change is critical. Peer education programs have been especially effective in urban and rural settings alike, where trust among youth is higher than in formal authority figures. International summits, youth parliaments, and forums provide platforms for young people to engage in policymaking and advocacy. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Youth Affected by Drug Abuse.** Drug dependency is a chronic condition that requires sustained support. For young individuals, the emphasis must be on rehabilitation, not punishment. Effective youth-oriented programs include. **Therapeutic Communities (TCs):** Safe residential environments focused on behavioral change, education, and vocational training. **Youth-specific Treatment Centers:** Providing age-appropriate medical care, psychiatric support, and academic reintegration. **Post-Treatment Support:** Mentorship programs, job placement assistance, and family counseling to reduce relapse. Research shows that youth who receive multidimensional support—medical, psychological, educational—are significantly more likely to recover and reintegrate into society. **Human Rights, Ethics, and the Future of Youth Drug Policy.** The evolving global consensus recognizes that a purely punitive approach undermines human rights, stigmatizes vulnerable populations, and fails to reduce demand. In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)—drug policies must balance control with compassion. Future policies must ensure that youth are protected not only from drug use but also from the collateral damage of misguided laws, including arbitrary detention, lack of due process, and denial of medical care. Evidence-based, youth-sensitive, and rights-respecting strategies are essential to achieving lasting outcomes.

## **Empirical Analysis**

**Global Drug Use Trends Among Youth.** Empirical data reveals a worrying trend: drug use among adolescents and young adults is increasing in both developed and developing countries. According to the UNODC World Drug Report 2023, approximately 13% of global drug users are between the ages of 15 and 24. Cannabis remains the most widely used substance, followed by amphetamines, ecstasy, and prescription opioids. The misuse of synthetic drugs has surged, particularly in regions like East and Southeast Asia.

A 2022 cross-sectional study conducted in 15 OECD countries found that nearly 30% of high school students had experimented with illegal substances at least once, with usage being higher among males (32%) than females (27%). The average age of first drug exposure was 16.4 years. These findings confirm that adolescence is a critical window for prevention efforts.

### **Regional Disparities and Risk Determinants**

#### **a) Europe and North America**

In Europe, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) reports that 17% of 15–16-year-olds had used cannabis in the past year. In North America, especially in the United States and Canada, the prevalence is even higher, with over 35% of high school seniors reporting cannabis use, and a growing trend of fentanyl-laced counterfeit pills causing fatal overdoses.

Risk factors in these regions include social permissiveness, misinformation on drug harms (e.g., cannabis legalization debates), and easy online access to illicit drugs.

#### **b) Asia and the Pacific**

In Southeast Asia, the abuse of methamphetamine (“yaba” and “ice”) has increased sharply. UNODC data show that seizures of methamphetamine tablets exceeded one billion units in 2022, a large portion of which was destined for youth markets. Poor border control, lack of youth

education, and economic pressures contribute to this trend.

#### c) Africa

Africa is emerging as a major transit and consumption zone. A 2021 survey by the African Union Commission found that 12.8% of youth aged 15–24 had used drugs, mainly cannabis and tramadol. Drug trafficking through West African routes is fueling youth involvement in criminal networks and local addiction crises. Evaluation of Prevention Strategies: Evidence from Program Outcomes

#### a) Iceland's Youth Model

Iceland's evidence-based prevention model has shown remarkable results. Between 1998 and 2018:

Youth smoking dropped from 23% to 3%.

Alcohol use declined from 42% to 5%.

Cannabis use fell from 17% to 6%.

Key elements included regular youth surveys, community engagement, family support contracts, and government funding for extracurricular activities. The model proves that long-term investment in social infrastructure yields sustainable reductions in youth substance use.

#### b) "Unplugged" Program in Europe

A randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the "Unplugged" school-based prevention program, conducted across seven European countries, demonstrated:

A 38% reduction in cannabis use.

A 25% reduction in alcohol binge episodes.

A 23% reduction in daily smoking rates.

The study involved 7,079 students aged 12–14 and highlighted the success of using life skills and critical thinking modules rather than abstinence-only messaging.

#### c) U.S. Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Program

The U.S. DFC program, which empowers local coalitions to implement youth-focused strategies, reported that:

86% of grantees experienced significant declines in youth drug use within five years.

Communities with sustained funding showed better outcomes in high-risk populations. The program's success lies in its multistakeholder approach, involving law enforcement, schools, health departments, and youth organizations. Rehabilitation and Recidivism: Data Insights. According to the World Drug Report 2022, the global average relapse rate for treated drug users is between 40–60%, but for youth-specific programs, the rate can be reduced to 25% when accompanied by family therapy, academic reintegration, and community support.

A longitudinal study in Brazil showed that adolescents who participated in residential treatment centers combined with vocational training had:

A 30% lower relapse rate.



A 45% higher school re-enrollment rate.

A 40% increase in employment within one year post-rehabilitation.

These findings stress the importance of tailored, multidisciplinary rehabilitation models for adolescents. **Gaps in Data and Monitoring Systems.** Despite the abundance of initiatives, there remain significant gaps in data collection. Many low-income countries lack national drug use surveys targeting youth. Disaggregated data by gender, age, and region are often missing. Informal and online drug markets remain under-researched. This limits evidence-based policy formulation and international comparisons. There is a pressing need for investment in national monitoring systems, such as integrating drug indicators into broader health and education surveys. **Correlation Between Legal Environments and Drug Outcomes.** A comparative policy analysis conducted by the Global Commission on Drug Policy (2021) found a significant correlation between legal policy strictness and youth outcomes: Countries with balanced drug laws (e.g., Portugal, Germany, New Zealand) had better youth health indicators and lower incarceration rates. Countries with overly punitive policies (e.g., Philippines, Iran) saw high levels of youth imprisonment, stigmatization, and reduced access to healthcare. These results underline the importance of aligning national legislation with public health objectives and international human rights standards.

## **Conclusion**

The growing threat posed by narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances to young people demands a multifaceted and internationally coordinated response. As demonstrated through empirical data and comparative program evaluations, adolescence remains a critical period during which exposure to drugs often begins. Early initiation not only increases the risk of dependency but also correlates with poorer educational attainment, mental health issues, and long-term social marginalization. Therefore, protecting youth from drug abuse is not only a matter of public health, but also a broader developmental and human rights imperative. International legal instruments such as the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) collectively frame a legal and normative basis for youth protection. These treaties oblige states to take proactive, preventive, rehabilitative, and educational measures tailored to children and adolescents. Furthermore, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.5, which emphasizes the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, reinforces the need for comprehensive national strategies aligned with international obligations. Empirical evidence presented in this article points to several critical success factors in combating youth drug abuse. These include: **Evidence-based prevention:** Programs such as Iceland's Youth Model and the European "Unplugged" initiative have shown significant reductions in adolescent substance use by focusing on life skills, parental involvement, and recreational alternatives. **Community engagement:** Localized approaches such as the U.S. Drug-Free Communities program demonstrate the importance of multistakeholder partnerships in building drug-resistant environments for youth. **Balanced legal frameworks:** Countries with public health-centered and rights-respecting drug policies tend to report lower rates of youth drug use and reduced harm outcomes. **Data-driven policy:** Reliable and disaggregated data remain the backbone of effective policymaking. The lack of youth-specific monitoring tools in many low- and middle-income countries hampers the ability to respond effectively to emerging threats. However, despite progress in many areas, challenges persist. The increasing availability of synthetic drugs, the rise of online drug markets, and the influence of misinformation—especially via social media—are reshaping the dynamics of drug exposure among young people. These developments demand updated policy tools, enhanced cross-border cooperation, and youth-centered digital literacy campaigns. Additionally, many countries still struggle to provide accessible and adolescent-appropriate rehabilitation services. Relapse rates

remain high in jurisdictions lacking integrated support systems, including family counseling, education re-entry programs, and vocational training. Looking forward, enhanced international cooperation must prioritize: Capacity building for youth-targeted drug prevention and rehabilitation programs. Cross-border intelligence sharing to curb trafficking networks targeting schools and youth communities. Research funding to explore emerging risks, such as new psychoactive substances (NPS) and their impact on adolescent neurodevelopment. C Youth inclusion in policymaking processes to ensure interventions are both relevant and effective. In conclusion, the protection of youth from narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is not merely a health or law enforcement issue—it is a multidimensional challenge at the intersection of law, policy, education, and community development. Only through sustained investment, scientific rigor, and genuine international solidarity can the world hope to secure a drug-free future for the next generation.

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