

Background sheet: Targeting Alcohol and Drugs

Problem statement

People with schizophrenia, depression and mood disorders are at increased risk of risky drinking and alcohol dependence and vice versa. Alcohol-dependent individuals demonstrate a two- to three- fold increase in risk of depressive disorders, with a greater risk the greater the level of alcohol consumption. In a substantial number of cases, alcohol use disorders precede the onset of depression.

Studies in some MS show that over 50% of individuals (irrespective of age) seeking acute mental health treatment have alcohol or drug problems and vice versa (patients seeking contact with alcohol- or drug treatment have mental health problems).

A similar co-occurrence exists between mental health problems and the use of illicit drugs or the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs, sometimes together with the consumption of alcohol.

Indicators

Heavy drinking is a major risk factor for suicide and suicidal behaviour among young people and adults. There is a direct relationship between alcohol consumption and the risk of suicide and attempted suicide. The relative risk of suicide by alcohol intake increases from 1 (alcohol intake below 10 g/day) to 2, 5 times for females (40 g/day or more) and males (60g/day or more).

One American study found that 32 % of individuals with mood disorders and 56 % of individuals with any bipolar disorder (severe manic depression) are substance abuser or alcohol dependent), 11 % of individuals with major depression were dependent on alcohol and conversely, 20% of individuals dependent on alcohol had a major depressive disorder.

According to the World Health Organisation's Global Burden of Disease project of 2001¹, more than 1.8 million deaths were attributed to alcohol-related risks and 205,000 deaths were attributed to illicit drug use.

Objectives

- To reduce the health and social harm due to alcohol consumption and thereby contribute to higher productivity and a sustainable economic development in EU in line with the objectives set out in the Lisbon Strategy;
- to protect and improve the well-being of society and of the individual, to protect public health, to offer a high level of security for the general public and to take a balanced, integrated approach to the drugs problem

¹ http://www.mentalhealth.apha.org/article.php3?id_article=20

This paper was produced for a meeting organized by Health & Consumer Protection DG and represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumer Protection DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.