

Drug Education in Schools – Are We Doing Enough?

By Sehreen Qureshi
Youth Category: Age 18 – 20

“A drug can be defined as a chemical that causes changes in the way the human body functions mentally, physically or emotionally. This description includes many materials we normally think of as drugs, as well as things we might not usually consider to be drugs, such as coffee, tea, alcohol, solvents and tobacco” (Corrigan D, 2002). Drugs can be obtained in a number of ways such as extracted naturally from plants such as opium, cannabis and coca or prepared from natural materials by semi synthesis e.g. heroin or they may be totally man-made such as amphetamines and the tranquillisers. My knowledge of drugs, alcohol and tobacco has come from very many sources over the years; however my principal information came from secondary school through my Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) class.

I remember being told about drug use and misuse and how they work. We were given information regarding every aspect of the substances known as “drugs”, from all the information, some things one cannot forget, such as drugs, if used properly can be of a huge benefit in the treatment and prevention of disease in both humans and animals, but more importantly, that when it comes to drugs, a price must be paid, as the benefits of drug use are very often short term and also a fact that there is no such thing as a “safe” drug, taking these substances involves a lot of risk, harm and disease. Drug misuse comes straight to mind after realising that there is no such thing as a safe drug, it is the *“use of any drug, legal or illegal, which damages some aspect of the user’s life,”* (Corrigan D, 2002).

The problem we face today is that the number of people misusing drugs has increased and the awareness in the younger age categories is relatively less regarding this issue. According to research released in 2008, around 68,754 cases aged between 15 and 64 years were treated for the problem of drug use in Ireland between 2001 and 2006, which is an enormous number. Other relevant results included that in general, the profile of a typical drug user was that of a young male, with a low level of education, who was likely to be unemployed and in a minority of cases, had no stable home and that a crucial result was that the figures from the research indicated that at least half of treated drug users started using drugs when they were 15 years old (Research Health Board, 2008). These two results should probably be the most worrying concern in our community today.

Fifteen is a very young age to get involved in drug misuse hence it’s important that we need to concentrate on creating more awareness about drugs from a much earlier stage than secondary school. An example of a successful substance awareness programme has been run by the Knights of St Columbanus in Kilkenny, a programme that supplements the already existing SPHE programme in this primary school. Since this programme has been a success more schools have decided to implement such programmes in their curriculum.

I believe that we are not doing enough but through programmes such as those implemented by the Knights we can educate the youth about drugs. It's important that we as a society realise that the adolescent is curious about these substances and its effects and can harm themselves solely due to peer conformance. The SPHE programme employed by the Dept. of Education and Skills has been effective but it needs the help of supplementary programmes and more youth friendly and confidential organisations such as GBRD to work together with schools to further help and educate about drugs.