

UN report says COVID pandemic fuels major increase in drug use

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United Nations, June 25 (RHC)-- Around 275 million people used drugs worldwide in the last year of unprecedented upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, up by 22 percent from 2010. That's among the key findings of the latest annual report released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which also provides an overview of global drug markets, as well as their impact on people's health and livelihoods.

According to UNODC's World Drug Report 2021, cannabis potency has quadrupled in some parts of the world over the last two decades, while the percentage of adolescents who perceived the drug as harmful fell by as much as 40 per cent.

This perception gap prevails despite evidence that cannabis use is associated with a variety of health and other harms, especially among regular long-term users. Moreover, most countries have reported a rise in the use of cannabis during the pandemic.

"Lower perception of drug use risks has been linked to higher rates of drug use, and the findings of UNODC's 2021 World Drug Report highlight the need to close the gap between perception and reality to educate young people and safeguard public health," said UNODC Executive Director, Ghada Waly.

The COVID-19 crisis has pushed more than 100 million people into extreme poverty, and has greatly exacerbated unemployment and inequalities, as the world lost 255 million jobs in 2020. Mental health conditions are also on the rise worldwide. These factors have the potential to spur a rise in drug use disorders.

Moreover, changes have already been observed in drug use patterns during the pandemic, including increases in the use of cannabis and the non-medical use of pharmaceutical sedatives. Underlying socioeconomic stressors have also likely accelerated demand for these drugs.

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