

Substance Use in the Philippines: Identifying Key Issues

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Substance Use in the Philippines: Governance, Research, and Practice

Context

Global and Regional Level

- **Population Growth, Urbanization, and Increased Income (among others)**

Philippines

- **Poverty, Poor Access to Health Care, and Systemic Problems in Governance**

Global and Regional Context

- **Expansion and increased sophistication (complexity) of the global and regional drug market**
 - Mobility and migration of organized crime
 - Expansion of network to include traditional networks and non-syndicate members
 - Emerging trend of exploitation of web/online-based facilities and other legitimate establishments facilitate its transactions

Context

- **Criminal Justice (Public Order and Law Enforcement) and Medical Prohibition**
- **Conventional approaches had set the legal and policy frame, strategies, programs, practices, and/or beliefs surrounding substance use**
- **Growing realization that these approaches and understanding of substance use, is insufficient, if not non-holistic.**

Global and Regional Context

- COVID-19 Pandemic
 - Did not impede the operations of the organized crime on drugs
 - highlighted issues related to the consequence/s of response solely based on conventional criminal justice / law enforcement

Global and Regional Context

- Methamphetamine as primary drug of concern
- In the Philippines, Methamphetamine as the most used followed by marijuana and ecstasy
- Trend of using new technologies, mixing multiple substances / cocktails, increasing use of pre-precursors and designer precursors, polydrug trafficking, polydrug use, with new substances entering the market, and cheaper price of these substances (methamphetamine)

Philippine Context

- 80% of the 42, 045 barangays (villages) were classified as ‘drug affected’
- Six of every 100 Filipinos are lifetime users
- Two out of every 100 Filipinos are current users methamphetamine as the most used, followed by marijuana and ecstasy
- Drugs are trafficked from abroad or locally produced

Philippine Context

- Republic Act No. 9165 or the Dangerous Drugs Act
- Philippine Anti-Illegal Drugs Strategy
 - Aims to achieve drug-free sustainable communities by 2022
 - Provides for the strategies and programs to be implemented by government agencies through the Dangerous Drug Board (DDB) and 15 other social development and security agencies

Philippine Context

- **Select DDB Issuances**
 - Ensure adequate supply of drugs for medical and scientific purpose
 - Prevent diversion of drugs from licit sources to illicit channel
 - Consolidated revised rules access to treatment and rehabilitation programs and services
 - Provide guidance for the oversight of general interventions and implementation of the Community-based Drug Rehabilitation Program at the local government units
 - DDB Board Regulation No. 7, series of 2019 provided for a Client Flow for a wide range of services and programs for communities

Philippine Context

- **Effects of response solely based on criminal and law enforcement and medicalized use of treatment centers**
 - Jail and prison overcrowding
 - Stigma and discrimination against people involved with drugs
 - Violations on the right to life and right to health
 - Contributes to the twin epidemics of HIV and Hepatitis C among people who inject drugs
- **Predominant Enforcement Approach transitioning to a more “Balanced” approach to Substance Use**

Philippine Context

- **Assert respect and promotion of human rights and human dignity as core foundations of drug-related responses**
 - **Strengthen of engagement of PWUDs in the design up to implementation of these responses**
 - **Sustain multi-sectoral collaboration**
 - **Improved programs and services in the different phases of the continuum of care – from prevention, treatment and care, and reintegration**

Philippine Context

- **Gender and Substance Use**
 - Lack of expression of gender-related aspects of substance use
 - insufficient consideration of gender in crafting and implementation of the various responses

Philippine Context

- **Community-Based Rehabilitation Programs (CBRP)**
 - CBRP an emerging field in the region, Philippines is the first to “institutionalize it” through policy
 - Need studies on the effectiveness of the CBRP strategy and the efficacy of its interventions
 - Reintegration of PWUDs into their respective communities (social, economic, spiritual, among others) is the ‘weakest’ component

Philippine Context

- **Health Care**

- Integrated services must address (substance use) continuum of care from out-patient including community-based programs to in-patient under existing health insurance system (PhilHealth)
- Sufficient health services and treatment is insufficient for persons deprived of liberty
- Need to strengthen online (support) services in relation to substance use including counselling, assessment, among others, and very little study on the effectiveness of online platforms in the delivery of treatment and care services

Philippine Context

- **Education to Combat Stigma and Discrimination**
 - Insufficient inclusion of a discussion on drugs and substance use in the education sector.
 - Needs for the academic community to participate in shifting messages about substance use towards a more holistic understanding

Action Points

- **Support**
 - Full implementation of the ‘Consolidated Revised Rules Governing Access To Treatment and Rehabilitation Programs and Services’ or the Client Flow for Wellness and Recovery from Substance-Related Issues (DDB Regulation No. 7, s. 2019), among others
 - Local and community-based responses institutionalizing public health approaches to substance use
 - Integration of holistic, interdisciplinary, integrative, people-centered, multi/cross-sectoral, and public health approaches, or elements thereof, in the framework for responding to substance use

Action Points

- **Support**
 - **The establishment of a PhilHealth Package for the entire continuum of care from out-patient, CBRP, to in-patient**
 - **Expansion of online health services for concerns related to substance use**

Action Points

- **Strengthen**
 - **Inter-government responses on drug-related concerns especially in the area of public health**
 - **Whole of Government Approach to substance use addressing / emphasizing response to the underlying determinants affecting substance use**
 - **Programs providing adequate livelihood, gainful employment, skills/training opportunities, access to economic activities to disincentivize participation in problematic drug trade**
 - **Establishment of community support systems for people involved in drugs in the communities**
 - **Development/creation of diversion system**

Action Points

- **Strengthen**
 - Efforts for a more integrated continuum of care on substance use
 - Implementation of Mental Health Law provisions related to substance use
 - Capacities of Governments to enable them to respond to rapid developments in organized crime and drug markets
 - Strengthen responses to overcrowded closed-setting institutions
 - Strengthen role of the academic community in drug/substance use education

Action Points

- **Allocate Resources**
 - For programs addressing economic and social realities connected to substance use (education, health, employment, etc.)
 - For provision of services covering the 'continuum of care' for PWUDs.
 - For access to health services of PDLs.



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Adoption of New Policies

Incremental shifts from prevailing conventional policy framework on substance use towards adoption of ‘compassionate pragmatism,’ a public health framework where PWUDs are at the center and where “principles of human dignity are the core foundations”

Adoption of New Policies

- **Mandating a people-centered approach - inclusion of PWUDs, their families, communities, and other stakeholders**
- **Furthering holistic, interdisciplinary, integrative, multi/cross-sectoral or elements thereof**
- **Preventing adverse health outcomes related to drug use such as fatal overdoses, prevalence of blood borne diseases and other infections, and drug-related death including self-harm and accidental death**

Adoption of New Policies

- Transitioning focus away from compulsory treatment centers and the medicalization of psychoactive substance use towards voluntary outpatient and CBDR modalities.
- Forwarding restorative and transformative justice that deals with pre-trial detention, mass incarceration, disproportionate sentencing in regard to drugs.

Policy Research Gaps

Multi-disciplinary, scientific, and evidence-based research to inform shifts in policy revisiting conventional approaches to substance use towards public health approach

Policy Research Gaps

- Impact of global and regional developments in drug-related problems to local context
- Intersection of local realities (political and others) and developments on drug market (e.g. money laundering, casinos, online gaming, corruption, etc.)
- Emerging trends on substance use and its public health implication

Policy Research Gaps

- **Unpacking economic, social, cultural, and other factors affecting substance use to enable responsive matching of interventions/solutions (that work)**
- **Monitoring and audit of existing programs or interventions both national and local including assessment of its cohesiveness and responsiveness, identifying gaps,**

Policy Research Gaps

- On integration/non-integration of various points in the continuum of care – client journey, attrition between points in the continuum, or integration/progression from closed-setting to community-based/out-patient facilities
- On community-based rehabilitation program and other local public health approach-based programs

Policy Research Gaps

- **stigmatization and discrimination related to substance use**
- **Towards developing an effective diversion system**
- **Intersection of substance use and gender**
- **Intersection of substance use and mental health**



- THANK YOU! -