“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” -World Health Organization, 1948

History of the WHO

In 1945 diplomats from around the world gathered together to discuss the establishment of the United Nations and one of the major points discussed was setting up a global health organization. It took three years for the World Health Organization (WHO) to come into power on 7 April 1948.¹ The WHO’s headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland but it operates in 150 countries. The WHO acts as an advisor on matters of public health as well as a research facility that collaborates with other UN related agencies, NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders (MSF), and prestigious medical research facilities.² According to its Constitution, the WHO was created with the purpose of “providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.”³

The World Health Assembly is the supreme decision-making body of the WHO, it meets annually, with the participation of ministers of health from its member nations. All countries that are members of the UN may become members of WHO by accepting its constitution. Currently, there are 193-member states.

The different functions carried by the WHO include; assisting governments in strengthening health services; improving nutrition, housing, sanitation, working conditions and other aspects of environmental hygiene; promoting cooperation among scientific and professional groups. The WHO has developed more than 50 programs related to health education, humanitarian health assistance, and worldwide programs to eradicate disease.\(^4\) Topics discussed by the World Health Organization include HIV/AIDS, pandemics, climate change, communicable diseases, and maternal health.

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**Current Role of the WHO**

Recently, the WHO is widely known for its key role in the fight against Ebola. The organization is a fundamental party in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS and it established UNAIDS in 1996.\(^5\) The WHO has many projects focusing on a wide variety of health-related areas including:

- Establishing Research agendas of centers all around the world,
- Preparation of emergency capacities in developing and underdeveloped countries,
- Preventing and treating communicable and noncommunicable diseases,
- Publicizing major risks to public health and raising awareness about public health issues.\(^6\)

Lately, the WHO has been shifting some of its attention towards mental health issues. It is currently compiling detailed reports and studies on mental health issues and disorders more than ever before. For instance, the WHO’s Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020, endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2013, recognizes the essential role of mental health in achieving health for all people.\(^7\)

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\(^5\)Who we are. in World Health Organization [http://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/en/](http://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/en/)

\(^6\)What we do. in World Health Organization [http://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/en/](http://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/en/)

Moreover, our first topic deals with developing cultural appropriate educational techniques to raise awareness and prevent substance abuse. Since its foundation in 1948, WHO has played a leading role in supporting countries to prevent and reduce the problems caused by the use of psychoactive substances and in recommending which psychoactive substances should be regulated. Prevention and reduction of the negative health and social consequences of psychoactive substance use is important given the public health significance of psychoactive substance use in the world.

In 2000, the Department of Substance Abuse was merged with the Department of Mental Health to form the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, reflecting the many common approaches of management of mental health and substance use disorders. Our second topic will explore approaches to de-stigmatizing adolescent mental health. In September 2015 the United Nations General Assembly included mental health and substance abuse in the Sustainable Development Agenda. This was the first time that world leaders recognized the promotion of mental health and well-being, and the prevention and treatment of substance, as health priorities within the global development agenda.

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**Your Job, as the WHO**

The WHO operates in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing landscape, its sphere of influence is enlarging and pertains multiple areas. The Delegates in the WHO should expect exciting and innovative debate. The goal of this committee is to find innovative means to push for reforms and to delve deep to discover the true roots of the issues that affect public health. Tackling the topics of substance abuse and adolescent mental health is an imperative if we want to prevent or treat any diseases that come with them.

The complexity of these topics will force Delegates to cooperate in order to consider all facets of the problems presented and develop solutions that can encompass and satisfy the needs of all nations. This requires an understanding of the nuances of healthcare polices and the extent of the WHO’s influence. This is an organization that, while not possessing imperative power like other organs as the Security Council, is the most respected authority in the public health field.

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**Resources:**

- WHO Official Website [https://www.who.int/](https://www.who.int/)
- WHO on Mental Health [https://www.who.int/mental_health/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/en/)
- WHO on Substance Abuse [https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/en/](https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/en/)
Topic 1:

Developing Culturally Appropriate Methods to Prevent Substance Abuse

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that 250 million people, or 5% of the global adult population were using drugs, and that an estimate 29.5 million of people experienced drug dependence and required treatment. The world drug problem remains a major concern for the international community. While there is not a universally accepted definition of substance abuse as different countries and organizations defines it differently, the WHO defines it as the “harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs.” However, a common element among accepted definitions of substance abuse is the struggle against an addiction that has its short- and long-term effects on the person’s physical, emotional, and sociological appearance. The effects of the abuse may vary based on the substance being abused, but at the end of the day the person’s health will be greatly affected.

The 70th session of the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to continue the progress achieved through the Millennial Development Goals. SDG 3, “ensures healthy lives and promotes well-being for all at all ages,” and it includes in target 5 the goal of enhancing the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. Moreover, in 2016 the General Assembly held the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS 2016). The goal of UNGASS 2016 was to define actions that should lead to the fulfilment of the Plan by 2019. In its outcome document, UNGASS 2016 made recommendations on demand reduction, prevention, treatment, availability, and access to controlled substances, supply reduction, law enforcement in drug-related crime and cross-cutting issues such as the role of women and youth.

In December 2016, the Prevention and Rehabilitation Section of UNOCD organized an event that was unique by its scale and scope: the Scientific Consultation on Prevention of Drug Use and Treatment of Drug Disorders. Thirty leading researchers from around the world presented the state-of-the-art science in front of over two hundred policy makers from eighty five countries and discussed the latest findings in drug prevention and drug dependence treatment. Policy makers had a chance to learn about a wide range of ethical and science-based drug prevention and treatment methods, as well as rehabilitation programs that have been proven

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9 UN DESA, Sustainable Development Goals, 2017.
12 UN General Assembly, Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem (A/RES/S30/1), 2016.
effective in stopping or reducing the negative health and social problems caused by drug use disorders.

The 2018 World Drug Report provides a global overview of the supply and demands of drugs as well as their impact on health. It highlights the different drug use patterns and vulnerabilities of particular age and gender groups. "The findings of this year's World Drug Report show that drug markets are expanding, with cocaine and opium production hitting absolute record highs, presenting multiple challenges on multiple fronts," said UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov. He highlighted that "UNODC is committed to working with countries to seek balanced, integrated solutions to drug challenges and achieve progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals."14

Moreover, the outcome document of UNGASS 2016 places an emphasis on maintaining public health and welfare. It the need for harm reduction, drug dependency treatment, and access to controlled drugs for medicinal and scientific purposes. WHO defines public health as “all organized measures to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life among the population as a whole.”15 WHO agrees that, a public health approach needs to address all aspects of human society, including the physical and social environments in which people live, and how these influence collective well-being. It understands that due to the criminalization of drug use and possession, many drug users are unable to access treatment and care without risking incarceration or stigma. A public health approach requires governments to be aware of the interplay between these social factors and health risks, and work to mitigate them.

Global Issue of Substance Abuse

Political issues tend to differ depending on the country that one resides in, and the culture that exists there. However, every country has some kind of health issues that exist within their borders, and every country has some kind of crisis relative to substance abuse. From the abuse of alcohol to the use of hard drugs, substance abuse is something that can be found in any corner of the world. While different governments have found their own ways to deal with substance abuse, usually by criminalizing it, global data show us that daily rates of drug use remain stable at around 5% of the adult population, which equates to roughly 250 million people.16 This statistic is staggering, and it does not show the lives lost due to the use of drugs. Opioid use is perhaps the greatest health risk pertaining to substance abuse that can be seen around the world and should be handled carefully when discussed in committee.

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15 https://www.who.int/healthpromotion/about/HPR%20Glossary%201998.pdf?ua=1
16 https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_2_HEALTH.pdf
Despite the fact that much has been done to decrease the use of dangerous drugs, it is still a devastating issue with no clear end in sight. Less than one-sixth of those abusing drugs have any type of access to rehabilitation treatment.\(^{17}\) When beginning to think about solutions to this issue, it is important to consider what has already been done; the model that we are using to fight the drug epidemic is not a sustainable one.

Cultural Challenges

While drugs have been criminalized in almost all countries, the penalties differ depending on where you are. Many countries within Asia enforced extremely strict drug laws, with the possible death penalty in places like Malaysia, China, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Iran, and many more.\(^{18}\) Western countries decided to take a somewhat softer approach to the issue; while still criminalizing drugs, they use prison time as punishment instead of a death sentence. In almost all countries around the world, there is some kind of penalty for the sale or possession of drugs, but the way that drugs are viewed vary depending on the culture of the country.

The criminal justice system’s development in a specific country has a significant impact on the way that drugs are dealt with and perceived in that society. In strict authoritarian countries there is little tolerance for substance abuse, and little to no treatment centers are available. The issue does not stop with authoritarian governments; even in more democratic countries that incorporate equality and freedom in their criminal justice system, there are issues linked with substance abuse. Within America, Europe, and much of Eastern Asia, substance abuse is seen as a “choice,” not as a health issue or addiction, resulting in the drug use being treated as a crime, and those suffering from addiction being treated as “criminals.” In countries where mental health treatment systems are still developing and the de-stigmatization of mental issues is still in process, it can be difficult to convey the idea of treatment centers for substance abuse.

Preventing substance abuse

Having established that substance abuse is an important public health problem, the question becomes how can the WHO support countries that want to look for solutions to the issue. Banning drugs and alcohol would violate the protocol and sovereignty of many nations.

\(^{17}\) [https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_2_HEALTH.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_2_HEALTH.pdf)

Many countries have different viewpoints regarding the most suitable steps in providing the best treatment for the health of the patient.

Delegates should think about old resolutions passed by member of the UN or one of its related committees, that focus on the health of the abusers and ways to providing the best care for them. Additionally, Delegates should think about how they can improve existing strategies or implement new ones. Such strategies could be improving health services and access to health services, improving legislation that emphasizes treatment over criminalization, and improving prevention strategies to reduce the use of substances. Health services should be equally available to all demographics of the societies, including rural and poor areas, and should be efficient. 19

Next, it is important to provide policies that are centered on treatment and work to further prevention of substance abuse and drug use. It is one thing to treat people, but if it is not paired with prevention, it has been observed that more and more people begin to abuse substances each year, if this happens then treatment programs will continue to be costly rather than gradually getting smaller as the number of people with addictions decreases. Awareness and prevention campaigns can be very effective. Additionally, campaigns should be directed not only at high risk populations but also to the general public. 20

In 2017 the UNODC’s Executive Director Yury Fedotov stated that ‘the lack of education around the topics of drug addiction and use is a serious issue.’ He stated that ‘there is the need for more promotion of health and the spread of education on how drug dependence and abuse can lead to serious physical conditions.’ Therefore, Delegates should look for methods to educate people on the consequences of substance abuse. Delegates must understand the need to develop strong solutions that revolve, not just on increasing treatment, but getting down to the root causes of why substance abuse is so prevalent in our world. 21

As we just saw, substance abuse has been an issue of focus in both WHO and UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) in recent years. It is an important issue to study and regulate because it is one of the only public health crises in the world that is more often treated as a criminal offence than as a health issue. One important role that the WHO plays in the issue of substance abuse is providing current research and statistics to reflect international drug/alcohol policies and how well they work. These reports by the WHO provide both information and recommendations for countries to consider when amending their alcohol and drug policies. Your role as a Delegate is to consider possible treatment methods or awareness

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20 ATLAS on substance abuse. 105 – 107 https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44455/9789241500616_eng.pdf?sequence=1

techniques that are culturally sensitive and that keep in mind the economic, medical and social impact of substance abuse.

**Issues a Resolution Might Address**

- In what ways can WHO decrease the use of illicit substances without advocating for law changes within sovereign nations?
- How should poverty be considered in any potential action against substance abuse?
- How can WHO develop culturally sensitive approaches to substance abuse that address the needs of a diverse global community?
- If countries agree to treat substance abuse as a public health crisis, how will they access the funds and resources needed to treat people?
- How can WHO help treat people with substance abuse disorders in countries that do not recognize substance abuse as a public health problem?

**Resources:**

- World Health Organization Topic on Substance Abuse Official Website  
  [https://www.who.int/topics/substance_abuse/en/](https://www.who.int/topics/substance_abuse/en/)
- European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction  
- World Health Organization the Management of Substance Abuse  

**Topic 2:**

**De-Stigmatizing Adolescent Mental Health**

**Defining Mental Health and Showcasing its Prevalence**

Mental health has been and continues to be a global issue. It usually is not the first issue that comes to one’s mind when thinking about health on a global scale. Physical ailments are commonly perceived as a more immediate threat; however, attention is rapidly shifting towards mental health. Mental health issues are defined as anything relating to mental, neurological, and substance-abuse issues, which constitute 13% of worldwide global health concerns. Depression is projected to rank first in the global burden of diseases by 2030, surpassing cancer and heart disease. For these reasons, it is imperative that topics surrounding mental health be discussed by the WHO, with a specific focus on the effect that poor mental health has on adolescents from

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around the world. It is also important to look at the ways in which mental health is still stigmatized in both developing and developed nations and is still not considered a valid illness.

**Adolescent Mental Health**

In order to address the issues that are posed by individuals struggling with their mental health, we must focus primarily on the mental health of children and adolescents. A staggering number of adolescents are faced with a variety of mental illnesses, and many of these are incredibly difficult to diagnose and cure or have no cure at all. Seeing as half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14, and 75% of all mental illnesses begin by the mid-20s, it’s obvious that these issues should be considered since a young age. While mental health in adults still merits discussion, a more direct solution can be found if the focus is shifted more towards adolescents. If mental health can be treated and addressed at its root, it can be prevented from affecting individuals later on throughout their life.

Adolescence is a difficult stage of one’s development, as it is full of emotional developmental and hormonal changes. Unfortunately, this provides a perfect time for mental illnesses to manifest and spread in the minds of young people. Outside factors such as socioeconomic status, abuse, drug use, and violence have a greater effect on individuals during these years of vulnerability. Without proper attention at a young age, mental illnesses will develop and grow increasingly serious as years pass. One of the most pressing challenges that adolescents face when they begin to develop mental illnesses is the stigma that surrounds mental health. It is difficult for adolescents to reach out to a trained professional when many of them do not believe that what they are going through is a real issue. In order to aid adolescents, de-stigmatizing mental health is the pivotal step to take.

There is a vast difference in the way that mental health is treated in developing countries versus developed countries. Young people in developed countries are much more likely to have access to counseling services and primary care providers. While providing more mental health services in developing countries is definitely an important aspect in tackling the issue of mental illnesses, it is perhaps just as important to focus on an element to this matter that can be observed in every single country. A stigma surrounding the legitimacy of mental health exists worldwide and it holds back adolescents from speaking out about their condition. No matter how technologically or medically advanced a country is, there are still people within the country who do not see mental health as a “real” health complication, because it is usually not immediately

visible to the naked eye. In addition to this stigma, many mental illnesses do not have a specific “cure,” only varied treatment methods that may or may not be able to help the individual being treated.

**De-Stigmatizing Mental Health**

Progress has already been made when it comes to the issue of adolescent mental illnesses; however, seeing as mental health is still one of the major health threats plaguing the world, it is obvious that much more can still be done. Multiple organizations and programs have been created by the WHO within the United Nations that address the mental health of adolescents specifically. WHO created the Mental Health GAP Action Programme (mhGAP), the Helping Adolescents Thrive guidelines (HAT), and the Early Adolescent Skills for Emotions guide (EASE). These three programs have different purposes, yet they all serve to strengthen commitment towards improving and destigmatizing the mental health of adolescents.

Looking at these programs specifically, they have a common goal in trying to assess the mental health of adolescents and guide them towards acceptance of their mental illness and considering treatment for themselves. The mhGAP is meant to be used by health workers and primary care providers in order to decide whether or not the adolescent in question has a serious mental illness that should be treated further. HAT created guidelines that explain the importance of intervening when a mental illness is detected, but also how to respect the privacy of children. Lastly, EASE is used as an “intervention manual.” It was designed to be used by caregivers in order to train them on how to help adolescents that have impaired functioning due to a mental illness (such as low-functioning autism and dementia, among many others). The WHO is also currently working on a digital intervention system with the goal of aiding adolescents in urban environments. This will be the first online support system for young adults facing mental health issues.

These programs and guidelines will have a positive effect on the way mental health is viewed and treated in countries across the world; however, the UN needs to put even more effort into fighting the stigma surrounding mental health. When delving into the difficult process of removing a stigma from society, there is a lot to consider. While looking for ways in which to improve the accessibility to existing resources with the intent of enjoying the most benefits possible, Delegates must keep in mind variables such as levels of economic development, governmental arrangements, and health systems. Therefore, the issue should be tackled while keeping in mind the needs of the society at the local, state, and regional level. Attention must be drawn to professional associations, advocacy groups, and non-profit organizations involved with adolescent mental health services.

By seeking new ways to create a more culturally nuanced support and treatment system the WHO aims to help adolescents to cope with stigma and to speak out against it. Finally, early intervention has been proved to significantly impact and reduce the probability of irreversible damages in the lives of young adults. While cultural changes and social progression do not happen overnight, Delegates should look at how they can set up short-term goals to help

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26 Ibid.
adolescents currently struggling with mental illnesses, and what they can do in the long-run to slowly erase this stigma surrounding mental health.

**Issues a Resolution Might Address**

- In which ways adolescent mental health differs in treatment from adult mental health?
- What has your country done in regards with mental health?
- Is mental illness stigma a problem in your nation? Why? And, does your country provide adequate mental health facilities?
- How well do the current WHO programs function? What improvements could be made when creating new programs?

**Resources:**

- Nature International Journal of Science Grand challenges in global mental health
  https://www.nature.com/articles/475027a
- WHO Official Site Mental Health Related Suicide Data
- WHO Official Publication on Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health Cluster
  https://www.who.int/nmh/publications/ncd-business-card.pdf?ua=1
- WHO Official Site on Child and Adolescent Mental Health
- United Nations – Disability Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Mental Health and Development