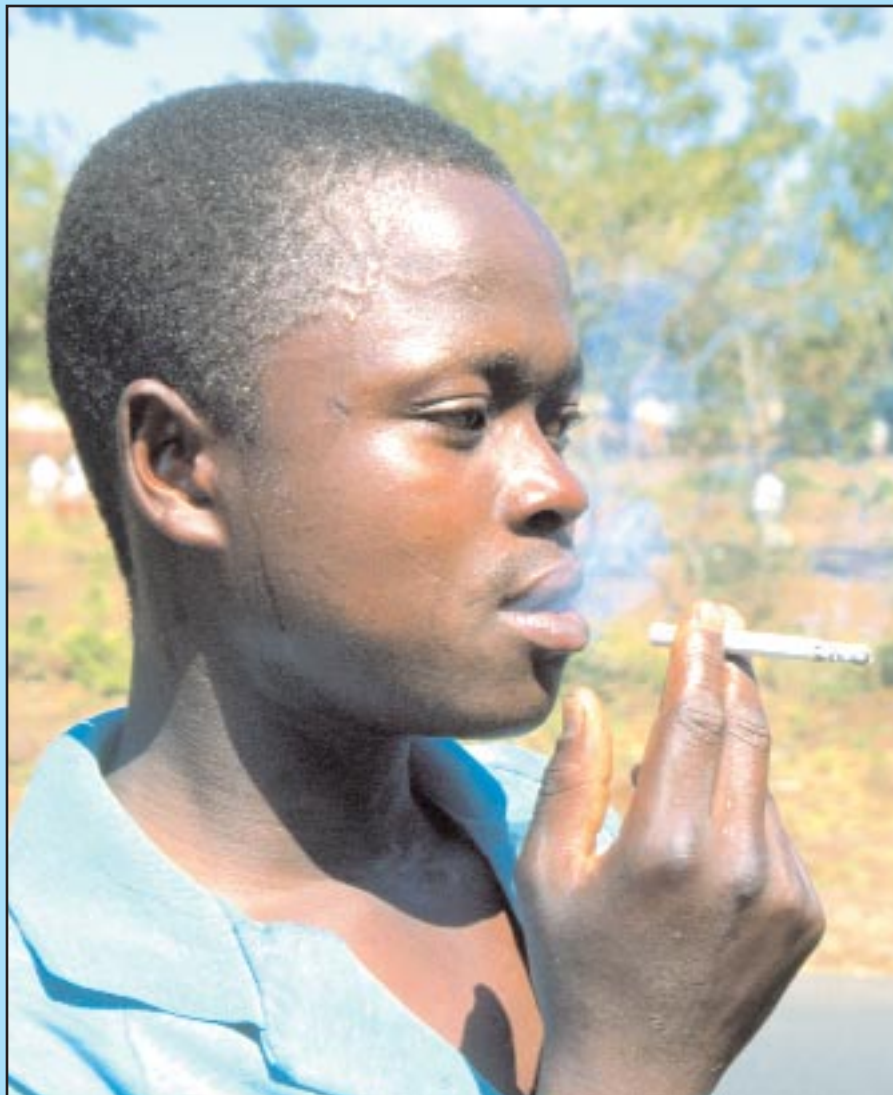


THE QUESTIONS ADOLESCENTS ASK MOST FREQUENTLY ABOUT

Drugs and Drug Abuse

AND THEIR ANSWERS

Vol. 7



This booklet was developed together with adolescents
by REPRO 

Recent studies in Tanzania show that a large percentage of adolescents have had experiences with drugs or substances like tobacco and alcohol at a low age. At the same time they lack basic knowledge about the effects and dangers of its consumption. This ignorance often puts them at risk. Health problems, diseases, including HIV/AIDS and social problems are a real threat to uninformed youth.

This booklet has been developed in response to this situation. It is meant to provide youths with information on the most crucial facts and guide them in becoming responsible decision-makers for their own lives. Without sufficient knowledge adolescents cannot make informed choices, and experience has shown that informed youth often choose the safer option!

All of the questions in this booklet have been collected in the year 2001 from pupils in primary and secondary schools. The youths originate from different regions of Tanzania and their ages range 11 to 20 years. Please note that none of the questions are made up by adults!

The booklet has been developed by a multi-disciplinary team of social scientists, medical doctors and education specialists. The adolescents were involved in all stages of the process. With the publication of this booklet, we hope to contribute to the prevention of avoidable hardship for adolescents, caused by their ignorance.

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Teamleader REPRO/GTZ

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What are drugs and what is drug abuse?

A drug is any substance that changes people's mood, their perception or behaviour. We talk about drug abuse if someone takes too many drugs, so that they harm the person, who is using them.

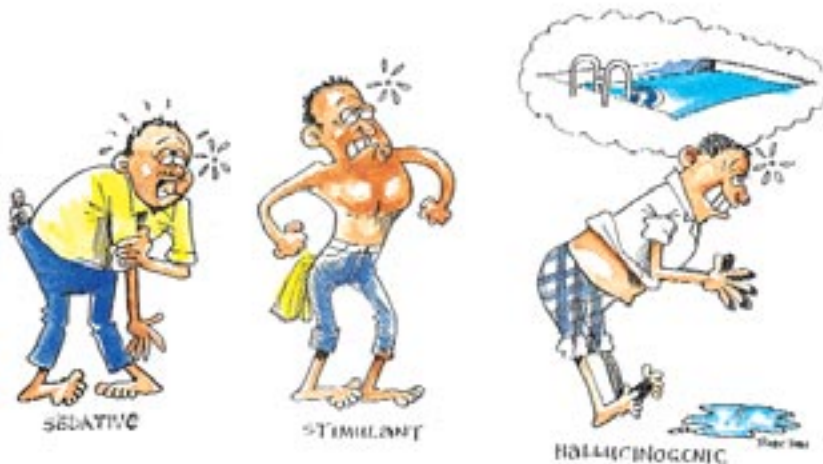
How many kinds of drugs are there and what do they look like?

We distinguish drugs that are legal and those that are illegal. In Tanzania, legal substances of abuse include tobacco and alcohol, as well as prescription drugs. Prescription drugs we call medicine, which needs a doctor's written order before you can get it in a pharmacy or drug store. They become drugs when they are not used for medical reasons or in a way a doctor prescribes them to you. Among the most common misused medicines in Tanzania are tranquillisers (e.g. Valium) and all kinds of painkillers like Panado and Aspirin. Common solvents, petrol, kerosene and glue, are also legal substances abused as drugs. These substances are sniffed or inhaled to get high.

Illegal substances are home-brewed spirits like gongo.

Illegal drugs common in Tanzania are cannabis in different forms (bangi, paste (cake) or hashish), khat also known as mirungi as well as methaqualone also known as mandrax, heroin and cocaine. Cocaine, which comes in a white powder form, is often called kokaini or unga. It is usually snorted up the nose or made into a solution and injected. Heroin is also dealt in white powder form. It is inhaled, smoked or injected. In a less pure form it is sold as chunks of various shades of brown also known as "brown sugar". Heroin is sometimes also called "unga".

Another grouping of drugs is according to their effects. There are sedative, stimulant and hallucinogenic drugs.



Sedatives such as alcohol, nicotine, tranquillisers and heroin calm and slow down. They make the user feel relaxed but also depressed. Stimulant drugs such as mirungi, cocaine and volatile inhalants have an exciting effect and give a rush of energy. Hallucinogenic drugs produce feelings, sounds, images, smells in a person though they are not there in reality. Bangi falls into this group.

Where do drugs come from and how do they get to Tanzania?

Drugs come from different countries in the world and some also originate in Tanzania itself.

For example cocaine comes from South America, heroin primarily from Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Burma. New, artificial drugs like mandrax are produced in many countries, also in Tanzania.

Bangi and mirungi are grown here in Tanzania. Prescription drugs as well as volatile substances, like petrol, can also be produced within Tanzania.

Those drugs, which are not produced within Tanzania, are smuggled illegally into the country via road, air or sea. There is a well functioning network of drug dealers.

The dealers promise quick money to convince many young people to engage into this trade as petty dealers. Many of these young people are not clearly aware about the dangers as drug possession, consumption and dealing is illegal and can lead to stiff sentences up to life imprisonment. Furthermore these young dealers support destroying other people's lives.

Often drugs are handed over by people the consumer knows well such as family members or friends. Remember that this is still an illegal and dangerous action!

Why do people take drugs?

There are many different reasons for people using drugs. Some people hope to forget about their problems. Others use drugs only for fun or because they want to show off and feel adult or strong - and some people just start "playing around" with drugs and

are suddenly unable to stop again. Others feel pressed or convinced by friends or relatives to try out drugs and "get the feeling" and some use drugs because they are bored.

Drugs mostly have unwanted side effects or their effects last only for a limited period of time. In that case, relief is only for a short duration: the problems are not solved but often even increase once a person is trapped in a viscous circle of drugs.

Do only young men use drugs and from what age do they start using drugs?

No! Drugs are used by people from all groups of society: women and men, old and young people, rich and poor! More men than women abuse drugs in Tanzania. Drug abuse among women is also less visible and more private, but women and girls are unfortunately catching up with males.

Some people start using drugs very young - even at primary-school-age! Often these very young start experimenting with drugs without knowing anything



about the effects and dangers. Some might harm their body and mind severely or end up abusing drugs regularly without being able to stop.

How do drugs affect the body and mind of a person?

One of the very scary things about drugs is that they affect people in different ways and so you can never tell for sure, how drugs will affect you! The effects of drugs depend on the type, dose and method of use of the drug. It also depends on the user's age, physical and mental condition and past experiences with the drug.

Short term effects occur shortly after a drug is taken, while long term effects show in the course of time and are usually caused by progressive damage to body organs such as the lungs and the brain.

Bangi e.g. leads to increased pulse rate, problems with short-term memory, with concentration, learning, thinking and problem solving. It may result in problems with co-ordination and balance. Often bangi smokers have reddened eyes. Some young people feel intense emotional reactions such as fear and panic after using bangi.

So-called stimulant drugs such as mirungi and cocaine make users feel alert, full of energy or confident and strong. At higher doses stimulants can make users feel anxious or even panicky. With increasing abuse mental health problems can occur and with excessive doses you can die.

Sedative drugs or substances like heroin and some prescription drugs produce a relaxing, peaceful and happy feeling. At higher doses, they lead to drowsiness,

decreased concentration and vision, nausea, vomiting and sweating. Still higher doses can result in a deep sleep, loss of consciousness and even death. Home brew like "gongo" may be dangerous for your health and its consumption sometimes leads to blindness or even death.

Using drugs clearly limits young people's ability of coping with and solving social and emotional problems. This makes many young people vulnerable to crime and abuse, such as sexual and physical abuse. And the change in behaviour of drug abusing adolescents very often leads to family conflicts and breaking up of friendships. Drug abuse is a major cause for accidents, accidental poisoning, suicide and infections.

Which drugs are the most dangerous?

Generally all drugs can be dangerous. Amongst the legal drugs nicotine, which is contained in cigarettes, is particularly dangerous, because it is very probable that you become addicted to smoking. This means, that your brain gets used to the drug and you need more and more of the drug to feel the same effects. Nicotine is also

especially dangerous, because young people often start using nicotine before moving on to harder drugs. This is why nicotine is called a "gateway-drug".

Amongst the illegal drugs abused in Tanzania perhaps heroin is the most addictive. It is also linked to many criminal activities. Heroin consumption is especially dangerous in regard to HIV/AIDS. When heroin is injected and needles or injecting equipment is shared, there is a very high risk of contracting or spreading HIV/AIDS. This is also the case, when heroin abusers sell their bodies in sexual activities for drugs or for money to get drugs.

Smoking bangi helps to overcome shyness or restraints. This means that bangi smokers are likely to forget to



practice safe sex and thus risk getting infected or spreading HIV/AIDS. Abuse of prescription drugs can also be extremely dangerous and cause death, when overdosed or when mixed with other drugs or alcohol.

Does taking drugs harm the community?

Yes! Taking drugs can harm the community severely! You have to consider that a person, who abuses drugs, may act different than his friends, may become aggressive, or extremely passive.

People who abuse drugs tend to become careless and thus contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS or other diseases within the community. They forget to take the necessary precautions, like using a condom. Some might already be in a stage, where their life does not have much meaning and they do not care about getting or spreading HIV/AIDS. Drug abuse weakens responsibility, honour and reputation.

The change in behaviour after taking drugs often leads to a bad performance in school or dropping out of school, with all the consequences like losing the

opportunity to find a job, support yourself, your family and the community. Drug abuse often is a reason for trouble in the family and the breaking up of a friendship.

And do not forget: using drugs is expensive! Often those who abuse drugs steal or commit other criminal acts to obtain money for the purchase of drugs. They risk getting involved in a court case and destroying their future by ending up in jail or having to pay a high fine.



Is there a difference in effects of drugs between young and older people?

Drug abuse affects all people alike. However young people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of drug abuse because they are still in a stage where the body and mind develop. Young people often get wrong ideas about drugs. If their peers are not good role models, they might encourage experimentation with drugs. It is very important to get the right information about the effects of drugs to be able to decide for oneself. Think carefully: it is your body, your life and your decision!

How long do the effects of drugs last?

This question is very difficult to answer, because the duration of the effects depends on a variety of different aspects, such as the kind of drug you use, the way you use it, your personality and the surrounding atmosphere, in which you take it.

A person may start using drugs regularly to keep up the wanted effects. For certain drugs and for some people regular use over a two-week period is sufficient to become dependent!

Why is bangi affecting so many people in Tanzania?

One reason for the widespread use of bangi is that it is easily available, because it grows in Tanzania and it is less expensive than other drugs. Another factor might be that young people see older family or community members smoking bangi and this leads them to think that smoking bangi is all right.

Another factor may be the wrong ideas and myths people have about the effects of bangi, especially the myth that it makes people stronger and able to work or study harder. But this is not true and people forget or just do not know about the potentially harmful immediate and long-term effects of bangi!



Another reason, why so many people in Tanzania use bangi is that it makes people psychologically dependent. After a while the person starts feeling unable to cope with normal stresses of life and living without bangi! Therefore there is continuing demand.

Is it harmful, when you try out drugs only once or when you take only very small doses?

Taking very small doses of drugs may not be dangerous, unless you get used to it. Often people start needing more and more drugs to feel the same effects and this can lead to addiction. The drug user might have become dependent without being aware of it!

Experimentation with drugs can be harmful if you end in a "bad trip". A "bad trip" is a frightening experience and is not at all funny! This can happen the first time you try out bangi or other hallucinogenic drugs.

Can you die from taking drugs?

Yes, you can. Death can be sudden or it can come from the long-term damage to your body organs due to drug

use. Many people die in accidents while they have drugs in the blood, because they are unable to judge dangerous situations.

Drug abusers may die suddenly from a so-called overdose, when one takes too much for the body to bear. Sudden death can occur with the abuse of cocaine and volatile inhalants even without taking an overdose. Those people who inhale volatile substances like petrol often use plastic bags to increase the amount of fumes they are inhaling. In such a situation it is very possible to lose consciousness and be suffocated by the plastic bag. Mixing certain drugs, like heroin, with other drugs especially tranquillisers (e.g. Valium) or alcohol, can also be deadly.

In general, drug use weakens the immune system. A weak immune system makes people very vulnerable, because it is easier for bacteria or viruses to attack the body. This is especially the case for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Depression due to drug abuse sometimes leads to suicide.

Can a person inherit smoking bangi?

No, you cannot inherit smoking bangi. But children often copy their parent's behaviour. When they see their parents or grandparents using bangi, they think it is all right and might start smoking bangi too.



Do people get crazy from using drugs?

A few drugs can lead to a mental disorder. These are the so-called stimulants like cocaine and mirungi.

When drugs are taken in high doses, they can cause short-term confusion that lasts for a few days or up to a week. This happens for example with bangi. There is a

misconception that all the mentally ill are this way because they abuse drugs. This is not true.

Can it be dangerous to take Valium or Chloroquine or any other drug, which you get in a pharmacy?

Yes! Any prescription drug, which is not used for the right purpose or in the right dose can be dangerous or even deadly. You should always listen carefully to the explanation by doctors or pharmacists. Never mix prescription drugs with alcohol or other drugs because this can be especially dangerous!

What happens when young people sniff for example petrol?

If young people breathe in the vapours given off by petrol they enter through the mouth and/or nose into the lungs and then to all parts of the body.

Effects of sniffing are very similar to those of alcohol. After sniffing the user feels light-headed and often dizzy. Some feel dreamy and happy but others feel sick or drowsy.

Inhaling can be very dangerous and also deadly, because people lose consciousness and are suffocated by the plastic bag. Some people die in accidents after abusing volatile substances, because they are unable to judge dangerous situations like traffic in the streets.

Long-term effects include nosebleeds, skin rashes around the mouth and nose, poor appetite, lack of motivation, brain, kidney, heart, lung and liver damage.

Is it true that smoking bangi makes you strong?

Definitely not! After smoking bangi, a person may feel more confident, courageous or strong. However, the actual effect of bangi is the opposite. Muscle strength actually is diminished. Smoking bangi affects the brain in a way that it becomes difficult to keep balance and hand steadiness and co-ordination of physical activities is impaired.

Is it true that smoking bangi increases intelligence and helps people to have a sound mind?

No, this is not true! Young people believe that they have

a sound mind after smoking bangi, because it gives them a feeling of experiencing more sensations, of hearing better or perceiving things more sharply.



But it is more likely that smoking bangi influences school, job or other performance in a negative way. Often young people who smoke bangi lose interest in school or training. They tend to be unable to set goals for their future.

Is it true that smoking bangi reduces stress?

Bangi reduces stress in the short-term as it causes a feeling of happiness and relaxation.

But of course problems remain and often increase later on. People smoking bangi only escape their real world into a dream world for a short while. Once the high feeling produced by bangi fades away the problems are usually worse than before. Using bangi only postpones and delays the solving of problems.

Is drug abuse one of the causes of HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's)?

Drug abuse is not in itself a cause of HIV/AIDS or other STD's, but drug-abusing people easily get and spread these diseases. Drug abuse weakens the body and immune system of a person. Thus viruses enter the body of a drug abuser more easily.

Drugs make people forget about the dangers of having many different sexual partners and having sex with persons whose health status they do not know. They forget to protect themselves and their partners by using a condom and they forget about their responsibilities towards their wives and children.

When drugs are injected and needles or injecting equipment is shared, there is a high risk of getting

infected or spreading HIV/AIDS. This is also the case, when drug abusers sell their bodies in sexual activities for drugs or for money to get drugs.



How does one stop to abuse drugs and how long does it take to be fine again?

The most important thing is that you really want to stop.

The first step you should take is to find out why you take drugs. When you know what you try to get from drugs it is easier to fulfil these needs in healthier ways. Try to gradually reduce the amount and frequency of



the drug and take vitamins and minerals to restore your health. Avoid other drug abusers and places, where you used to consume drugs. If you are not successful at your first attempt, do not give up! Many people do not manage to stop at their first try. Try again!

Getting away from drugs is like recovering from an illness. The situation is much easier to bear if you get support from friends and family. You might also seek the help of counsellors or doctors. Medical support is necessary with heroin or alcohol addicts, because they usually experience severe and sometimes life-threatening withdrawal symptoms.

It is very difficult to say how long it takes to recover from drug abuse, because this differs from individual to individual.

Why do people who start using drugs
want to continue?

This is exactly why drugs are so dangerous! Once you get used to them you have difficulties leading your life without them! With most drugs your brain adapts to their presence in your blood and then more and more of the drug is required to produce the same effects. This means that over time you use an increasing amount of the drug.

Once you try to reduce your drug consumption or give it up completely you might experience a so-called withdrawal reaction. This can be very unpleasant, painful or even dangerous for your life. Once a person is addicted, it no longer becomes just a habit, but a disease. Many people dependent on drugs do not use them for the pleasure they bring but to avoid the pain caused by the withdrawal syndrome. The best way to avoid this is simple: be strong and say "no". Do not experiment with drugs.

Why do people want to have sex after taking drugs?

Drugs influence the way our brain works. They change feelings and they help to overcome shyness and restraints. A person feels strong and powerful and is more likely to give in to sexual temptation than when he or she is sober.

Why are people who take drugs often very skinny?

Drugs irritate the normal functioning of the body, especially the stomach and intestines. Therefore drug-abusing people can absorb less nutrients, like vitamins and minerals, from food into the blood. This is what makes them skinny. It weakens their immune system and thus puts them at higher risk to contract diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Furthermore, people abusing drugs tend to lose interest in food and proper care for their bodies but concentrate all their energy on having a steady supply of drugs.

Can people using drugs get children?

Yes, this is possible. But you have to consider that people who use drugs regularly tend to be physically and psychologically weak and may thus not be in a good position to care for a child. They often neglect their own health. They lack motivation and spend a lot of time concentrating on their drug abuse, for which they spend a lot of money. This is not a very conducive environment for raising children.

What happens if women abuse drugs during pregnancy?

If pregnant women abuse drugs, these drugs also affect their unborn children. The baby in the uterus is



nourished through the blood of the mother. When a pregnant woman abuses drugs, these enter into the body of the developing baby.

The consumption of drugs increases the chances of having a miscarriage.

Why do people taking drugs lie?

Most drug abusers deny their drug problem. They lie because they do not want to admit their problem or they tell stories to defend themselves or blame others. Often they start lying or betraying friends and family members when they need money to buy drugs.

Are there specialists in Tanzania to help people with drug problems?

Yes. There are several NGO's doing drug counselling. In these NGO's you will find experts who listen to your problems and try to help you finding a solution to your problem. If someone is dependent on drugs or otherwise needs medical help, there are drug treatment centres in government hospitals. (See addresses on the last page)

Which drugs are forbidden in Tanzania and what happens when the police arrest you?

In Tanzania the use, production, possession, transport and dealing with narcotic drugs like bangi, heroin, mandrax, cocaine and mirungi is forbidden. This is also the case with prescription drugs, which are not used for

medical purposes. In Tanzania it is also illegal to brew home-made alcohol like "gongo".

If the police arrest a person acting against the law, he/she will be sent to court, sued and prosecuted. The law provides stiff sentences for drug offences: a fine of up to 10 million Tanzania Shillings or imprisonment for life or both.

Why are drugs produced and used in the hospital when they are harmful?

Drugs, as well as medicine, are used in hospitals to save lives and to reduce pain. This requires that only specialised personnel, like doctors and nurses, handle these drugs. This guarantees that the right drugs are used for the right purpose and in the right dose.

Which steps does the government take regarding drug abuse and illegal trade?

The government recognises a growing drug problem in Tanzania, as more and more drugs are smuggled through and into the country and consumed here. In response to

this situation it issued a law dealing with drug offences: the "Drug Control Act" of 1995. This law clearly lines out how to act in the event of drug offences and it provides harsh sentences for offenders. To support the fight against drug abuse the Tanzanian Government in 1996 established a commission of experts. It is called the Commission of National Co-ordination of Drugs Control.

The Commission supports the police, the border-police and customs, which try to keep under control the drug supply in the country and at the borders and destroys plantations of bangi and mirungi. These agencies now work together with partners in neighbouring countries to more effectively control the cross-border drug traffic.

It also supports and trains drug experts within different NGO's, whose task is to inform people about the effects and dangers of drugs and to support those who have a drug problem.

The commission of experts also started to think about a nation-wide campaign highlighting the dangers of drug abuse. Of course these tasks of the Commission are

difficult to fulfil and the fight against drug abuse is not the responsibility of the government alone. It needs the support of everyone and the whole society!

If parents offer drugs to their child
will they be prosecuted?

Of course they will! Sometimes parents send their children to get or buy alcohol or cigarettes but also drugs. Using and distributing drugs is against the law in Tanzania and it is not a private decision within a family.



Who is to blame for drug problems in Tanzania: the
government or the supplier and user?

No one is to blame, but everyone is responsible!
Everyone has to do what is in his/her scope to reduce
the problems of drugs.

The government has to ensure the effective implementation of the Laws and Regulations. It also has to support those having a physical or psychological drug problem, by providing health care facilities.

Of course those who deal with drugs make a business out of other people's problems. But there would be no supply without demand: In the end the user has to take his own decision in acting responsible for his health and life. This is why people, especially young people, have to be well informed about the risks of taking drugs.

How can we avoid drug abuse among young people in our society, as they are needed to build up the nation?

It does not make much sense to only forbid and be harsh on the question of drug use, because often young people find it especially interesting and tempting to try out things that are forbidden. A much better way to avoid drug abuse among young people is by telling them about the effects and dangers drugs may have on their future life. Giving and distributing honest information is essential to give young people the possibility to choose

for themselves and opt for a drug-free and healthy life. Young people should not be deluded through media and advertisements that only depict the fun-side of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, but never the negative effects of these drugs.

If you find yourself in a situation, where drugs are offered or you are even urged to take some and join, try to be firm! It might be difficult, but try to say "no" if you decided that you want to lead a drug-free life and reach your goals in life. Talk to your friends and explain why you decided not to take drugs. Be strong!



If a friend or family member is hooked on drugs, can I change him/her?

If a friend or family member asks you for your support, of course you have to try to change him/her! Try to give him or her all the information you have, and tell him honestly about the dangers of using drugs. Even your own parents might welcome your advice, when they see that you are caring for them!

Sometimes, people with a drug problem are not ready to listen to your concerns and to receive your help. It may happen that the person gets angry with you or that your friendship cannot continue. Do not blame yourself! You tried to help and you did the best you could. Sometimes it is even better, if you terminate the friendship for your safety and the sake of your friend. He or she might start to realise that there is something wrong and subsequently decide to address his or her problem.

If this happens, or if you have a friend or relative who is dependent on drugs and is seriously endangering his/her health you may not try to help on your own. It might be necessary to seek professional help.

What can I do to avoid the abuse of drugs and how do I get out of a bad friendship?

Sometimes it is very difficult, but it is very important to say "no" when you mean "no". Try to be calm and not become aggressive. Try to calmly explain your reasons and explain your friends that you know what you are doing. So you will gain the respect of your peers and friends.

If young people urge you to take drugs when you do not want to, they may not be good friends. Remember that a friend is someone who cares, protects, and looks after the welfare of his mate! Therefore how can a person who willingly and purposely provokes you to do something harmful and does not respect your decisions be a real friend?



Selected organisations providing support on drug and alcohol abuse:

AMREF:
P.O.Box 2773
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2116610
Fax: 022-2115823
amref@afrikaonline.co.tz

UMATI (Temeke):
P.O. Box 1372
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2111638/9,
2111774

Save the Children:
P.O. Box 10414
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2760798
scfdar@maf.org.uk

SOBER Tanzania:
P.O. Box 1925
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2128410

Student Partnership
Worldwide (SPW):
P.O. Box 737
Iringa
Tel./Fax: 026-2700224;
spwtz@maf.or.tz

Muhimbili University
College of Health
Sciences:
Department of Psychiatry
P.O. Box 65023
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2152723

Infectious Diseases
Clinic:
P.O.Box 10011
Dar es Salaam
Tel.: 022-2137540

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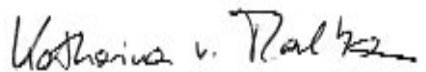
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This booklet is part of a series of eight booklets with the following titles:

1. **Growing Up**
2. **Male-Female Relationships**
3. **Sexual Relationships**
4. **Pregnancy**
5. **Healthy Relationships**
6. **HIV/AIDS and the New Generation**
7. **Drugs and Drug Abuse**
8. **Alcohol and Cigarettes**

If you are interested in any of the booklets,

feel free to contact: REPRO 

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