



Family Dynamics

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Effects of Environmental Degradation and the Elicit Drug Trade on Family Dynamics

The International Year of the Family (IYF) was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994 with the theme of “Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world”, and its motto: “Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society”.

The Proclamation underlined several principles: (a) The family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore warrants special attention; (b) Families assume diverse forms and functions from one country to another and within each national entity; (c) Activities for IYF will seek to promote the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms accorded to all individuals...whatever the status of each individual within the family and whatever the form and condition of that family; (d) Policies will aim at fostering equality between women and men within families; and (e) Activities for IYF will be undertaken at all levels – local, national, regional and international but with primary focus [on family life] at the local and national levels.

IYF programs must support families in the discharge of their functions rather than provide substitutes for such functions; they should promote the inherent strengths of families, their capacity for self-reliance; carryout self-sustaining activities on their behalf; and give expression to an integrated perspective of families, their individual members, to include community and society.

Underlining the importance of family life, in May 2016 the UN followed up IDF with “International Day of Families”, declaring that “Safe and supportive family environments are indispensable for children’s health and well-being”.

However, programs initiated under IYF and IDF face ‘swimming upstream against the tide’ of environmental degradation and the onslaught of an illicit drug trade, both of which now wreck threaten the stability and security of the human family structure.

The Effects of Environmental Destruction on Family Dynamics

The effects of environmental destruction on people's lives, especially family structures, are associated with being exposed to toxic air pollutants that can cause respiratory problems like pneumonia and asthma, known to have caused the death of millions. This problem is interrelated with problems associated with the illicit drug trade, which continues to engineer massive environmental destruction by converting arable land to produce the products that power the drug trade.

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This means that efforts put forth by IYF programs to promote, preserve and advance family life are severely handicapped due to the impact of a 'double-edged sword', environmental degradation and the illicit drug trade.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its report "The environment and health for children and their mothers" put forth a major issue: "More than three million children under five die each year from environment-related causes and conditions. This makes the environment one of the most critical contributors to the global toll of more than ten million child deaths annually -- as well as a very important factor in the health and well-being of their mothers."

The Affects of Drug Addiction on Family Dynamics

Substance abuse disorders can take a toll on family members and the individual struggling with addiction. 'One of the most common ways addiction affects the family is by creating emotional discord. Because harmful substances have devastating effects on the user, many may not take into consideration other people directly involved—how addiction affects the family. Spouses, children, and parents who witness a family member struggling with addiction experience emotional damage, as well as financial, legal, medical, and other consequences.'

'The effects of drug and alcohol addiction can be both short-term and long-term. Peaceful, loving homes can be divided by the strain caused by drug and alcohol abuse. Conflict becomes normal as family members fight to engage in a son or daughter who abuses heroin, for example. Trust begins to erode. Marriages can end due to changes caused by addiction. Family members see their relative(s) endure side effects of drugs or fly into rages when under the influence of alcohol [, drugs or opioids].'

'Addiction severely impacts young children as today 1 in 5 children grow up in a home where a parent abuses drugs or alcohol. Witnessing the trauma of a parent suffering addiction at a young age has long-term effects on the child, are more likely to develop substance use disorders in their adulthood, and they are also 3 times more likely being [physically and emotionally neglected], and sexually abused.'

'Teens can become overwhelmed by addictive substances and strained relationships at home and may want to run away from home. Parental distress can seemingly push troubled teens into the arms of a substance to "escape". Above all, once a teen runs away from home, they are vulnerable to sexual, economical, and emotional exploitation.' 'College addiction also can affects the family because teens who abuse substances are more likely to continue their substance use disorders into college. Once teens have an early exposure to drugs, they often form a tolerance and addiction in their college years. College campuses report high numbers of sexual assaults, property damage, and aggression directly linked to alcohol abuse.'

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The Center for Disease Control (CDC): Overdose Deaths and the Involvement of Illicit Drugs: Urgent Need for Overdose Prevention Interventions

“Illicitly manufactured fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, or methamphetamine (alone or in combination) were involved in nearly 85% of drug overdose deaths in 24 states and the District of Columbia during January–June 2019. More than 3 out of 5 overdose deaths involved at least one potential opportunity to link people to care before an overdose or to implement life-saving actions when an overdose occurred. These opportunities can be targeted to both prevent overdoses and improve response to overdoses to prevent deaths.”

The CDC also reports that underaged drinkers have more drinks per drinking occasion than their adult counterparts. Marijuana use is more common in teens than cigarette smoking and other drug use. Substances like cocaine can over-stimulate teens, causing to them sleep less and perform poorly in school or hang out with friends who abuse substances. Prescription opioids and synthetic opioids may produce euphoric effects, but consequently require frequent use with damaging side effects.

Points for Consideration

“Society should help make less available drugs not intended for medical and scientific purposes. It should encourage persons who serve as role models, such as teachers, prominent celebrities, and leaders of society, to lead drug-free lives. The mass media should provide information and educational programmes for the prevention of drug abuse and alcoholism and should be discouraged from providing publicity for psychoactive substances. International cooperation aimed at limiting the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and use of drugs to medical and scientific purposes should be promoted. Current United Nations programmes to control drug abuse can only succeed if all Governments and all sectors of society firmly commit themselves to working together for this common cause.”

‘An individual needs to have a sense of purpose in life; dignity, self-esteem and respect for human worth; ability to evaluate circumstances objectively, to postpone immediate satisfaction for a future goal; participation in an occupation encourages work in the spirit of universal service and is an impetus for personal growth and creativity; develop a spiritual orientation towards themselves and their environment; parents abstain from using alcohol and illicit drugs to set an example for their children; change of attitude of society; and countering the glamorization of psychoactive substances by the mass media.’

Internal Struggle

Many people are perceiving, to sense, and are engaged in a difficult internal struggle to realize and accept a very basic reality: that inherent human spiritual commonalities are the base-criteria needed to resolve seeming unsolvable social and economic problems.

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There are no simple solutions to the tasks we now face: to strengthen what we had previously considered being a sound family structure, a secure base for a viable society, but no longer is this an acknowledged reality. Human society now faces myriad problems, world-wide in scope and impact, that threaten its very foundation as it progressively develops globalized structures with an attendant ethos. We believe the excesses of a material adventurism are no longer tenable but ruinous, and if continued will only further confuse and compound an already difficult situation.

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