

# Poverty and Marginalization Remains Key Factors for Substance Use, says United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

*Poverty and belonging to a disadvantaged community are some of the key factors that make young people vulnerable to substance abuse and mental health issues.*

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, February 17, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- World Day of Social Justice is observed on February 20 each year to recognize the need to promote social justice, and combat poverty, exclusion, and inequalities. As is widely recognized, social development and equality are key to obtaining peace, fulfilling universal human rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, according to the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), it is also fundamental in achieving effective substance use prevention. Overall, successful prevention aims to ensure children and youth's safe and healthy development to realize their potential and become contributing members of society. Research has proved that poverty and belonging to a disadvantaged community are among some of the key factors that make young people more vulnerable to substance abuse and mental health issues.



New Episode: Super Skills: A Carrot for All



Grow your #SuperSkills - and Thrive!

Maria Melchior is Research Director, Pierre Louis Institute of Epidemiology and Public Health at INSERM and Sorbonne University in Paris and an adviser to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). She has researched social inequities regarding substance abuse. She explains:

"We know that many problems in the area of substance use and mental health begin early in life and that children who come from less advantaged backgrounds are at higher risk. Those problems also influence their education and socio-economic

situation in the longer term, often fueling a vicious circle. Socioeconomically disadvantaged families often have many difficulties that come with the experience of being poor: job instability or unemployment, insufficient or fluctuating income, higher risk of negative life experiences such as domestic violence or divorce, neighborhood violence, and all of these are perpetual sources

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*Maria Melchior (INSERM)*

of stress which can prevent parents from having the right parenting skills and the ability to use them. Moreover, it is also often the case that in disadvantaged families, parents more often experience substance use and psychological difficulties themselves, which can influence the way their children grow up.”

Although poverty reduction should be an essential priority for governments' national substance use prevention efforts, programs focusing on parenting, supporting families, and children's social and emotional skill

development are also crucial.

"Research shows that children who have good psycho-social skills are less likely to engage in substance use, and they generally have other areas of interest in which they can fulfill themselves," explains Maria Melchior.

To celebrate this year's World Social Justice Day, the UN agency and its drug use prevention branch released a new video and educational materials under 'Listen First,' 'Super Skills – The Science of Skills.' This project emphasizes social and emotional skill development in substance use prevention and targets primary age children and those working with them, including educators, health and prevention professionals, and policymakers.



Social and emotional skills are key in preventing substance use

In this entertaining 3D animated video series, a team of Super-Heroes: 'Helpful Handy,' 'Likeable Listenup,' 'Loyal Lookup' and 'Sensitive Smellup' in the magical community Skilltown teach children about essential life skills such as goal setting, decision making, collaboration, motivation, compassion, empathy, curiosity, and respect to name a few.

The latest film, "A Carrot for All," gently deals with universal issues such as poverty and hunger and teaches compassion and empathy. Lookup and Listenup find a child saddened and hungry. Immediately, our heroes offer to share their sandwiches. But there are even more children who need to eat. It's time for them – all of them - to take action.

"This is not a stand-alone prevention tool, but rather it can be incorporated into overall programs aimed at teaching children social and emotional skills. We created the videos to be fun and educational for children, but to be watched together with parents, educators, or other adults," explains Ms. Giovanna Campello, Chief UNODC Prevention, Treatment & Rehabilitation Section.

The materials are available for educators, parents, teachers, policymakers, health workers, prevention workers, and the wider public.

"'Listen First' is great, and the videos are great. Prevention of substance use is key because it's very difficult to help people once they have addictive behaviors. Prevention is much more cost-effective, and it prevents a lot of suffering. It's also challenging for many countries to implement, so this is how 'Listen First' can help. It's essential to disseminate research findings. Many people still have a lot of difficulties understanding the sources of substance use and what can be done to prevent it. Parents can feel very powerless, and they don't always have the right tools to connect with their children to protect them, so these are great tools," concludes Maria Melchior.

To learn more about the link between inequality and substance use, read this [interview](#) with Maria Melchior.

'Listen First' materials are available in English, Spanish, French, and more on the 'Listen First' [website](#).

Organizations or Member States interested in translating or using 'Listen First' are encouraged to [get in touch](#).

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