



Impacts of Drug Policy on Young People Who Use Drugs in Kyrgyzstan

The study was conducted in the cities of Osh and Bishkek, with the financial support of Youth RISE and Open Society Foundations.

Purpose: To determine the impact of drug policies on young people who use drugs through questionnaires, and to make recommendations for the improvement of drug policy for young people.

1. Social and demographic profile of survey participants

In Bishkek, 30 young women who inject drugs were interviewed, and in Osh, 30 young people use drugs (male and female):

Gender: Women (43), men (17).

Age: 18(4), 19(3), 20(3), 21(4), 22-7, 23(6), 24(5), 25(8), 26(7), 27(7), 28(6).

Types of drugs and method of use: 42 of the people interviewed indicated that they had used heroin by injection. Eighteen people have had the experience of heroin use, but are currently smoking marijuana and using tranquilizers.

Age of initiation: The age at which young people began to use drugs is 8 -14 years, 49 of the respondents indicated that they were introduced to 'softer' drugs such as marijuana, glue, "Ecstasy" tablets (Relanium, diazepam, diphenhydramine, etc.), or a mix of drugs. Eleven respondents indicated that they immediately began using heroin (through the nose).

2. Experiences of receiving services in harm reduction programs

In Bishkek from 30 respondents, 6 women have accessed harm reduction services in a partner organization "Asteria". Four women accessed Asteria for HIV testing and 2 for abortion services. The remaining 24 women interviewed reported that they did not know harm reduction services existed and have not accessed them. In Osh, 4 young men accessed the the organisation "Centre Plus" for temporary residence. Eleven persons experienced refusal of services in Osh because they were injecting drugs.

3. Knowledge of the laws relating to drugs

Article 246 of the Criminal Code states that illegally manufacturing, acquiring, possessing, transporting or mailing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances in a 'small quantity' when committed without intention to sell and after an administrative fine has been imposed for the same offence, is punishable by 'communal works', a fine, the restriction of freedom for up to two years or imprisonment for up to two years.

Knowledge of the drug law remains low, as noone interviewed was able to explain the law and punishment when the law is violated. Any knowledge of the drug law is received from their friends. All 60 respondents said that drugs are often planted by law enforcement.

4. Position and the situation concerning Article 246 of the Criminal Code

	Neutral	Agree	Totally Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
These policies effect my life	2	0	0	58	0
This law effects my decisions to use drugs	5	9	0	42	4
This law has a positive effect on my life	0	3	0	1	56
This law effects my life	0	1	56	3	0
This policy is valid	0	0	0	0	60
I didn't not know about the existence of this law	37	23	0	0	0

The survey participants were asked a series of questions:

"Were your friends and family affected by the drug law?"

For 52 of those surveyed, drug policies have affected friends and family.

'The police came into my house. They were without a search warrant. We were all searched and they forced everyone to lie down on the floor, including my grandmother, and put our hands behind our heads. When they searched they found 2 grams of heroin (though I know for sure that there was no heroin in the house) and began demanding money. My father gave 1200. when they left, my grandmother was very ill. I was later kicked out of the house and now I live with a friend'.

"Would you like to have an alternative to imprisonment under Article 246 of the Criminal Code?"

All respondents wanted to use an alternative to imprisonment, however the majority of young people who use drugs were not aware of the alternative penalties provided under

Article 246 of the Criminal Code, for example administrative fines, rehabilitation and community work. Whilst it is written in the law, it is not always applied in practice.

As noone teaches young people about their rights and the law, their rights are often violated.

'I was detained by the police with 1 gram of heroin. I had to pay a bribe of \$300 to the police officer on the spot so they would release me. I was released under the condition that I would not exit the country. Then, at the court, I had to pay a bribe of \$500 to the judge so the judge would change the punishment to an administrative one. However as I had no criminal record and this is already in the law, no bribe was actually needed.'

"Does the drug laws influence your decisions around drug use?"

Fifty-five respondents said that the law does not affect their decision whether or not to use drugs. They believe that it is their own business and no one the right to decide for them. All respondents also believe that if the law enforcement and judicial systems worked within the law and the police did not exceed their authority, then they would not have suffered and experienced drug related harms.

Five women reported that they are trying to stop using drugs for fear of police and arrest.

"Have you been detained under Article 246 of the Criminal Code?"



Nineteen young people who use drugs who were interviewed were detained by police under Article 246 of the Criminal Code and released after payment of a bribe. Eight respondents indicated that they had been in prison and continued using drugs during imprisonment.

Regarding abuse experienced by law enforcement, 27 respondents indicated that they had experienced psychological abuse when they were detained by police and 16 had received physical beatings.

Below are some quotes captured during the interviews of experiences young people had with the police.

Lena: *'I was detained with heroin weighing 0.2 grams, was beaten by police who also demanded money. I gave them everything I had and they let me go.'*

Anara: *'I was detained with a used syringe and planted heroin. I paid money and they let me go, even with the heroin'.*

Olga: *'I work in the sauna and the police know about it. When they have parties, they make me have sex with them for free.'*

Bemka: *'When I was brought in by the police, they forced me to undress so they could search me. As it was my first arrest, I did not know that they should have called a woman to do the search. They searched me and laughed at me and forced me to squat. I was humiliated.'*

Altysh: *'When I was detained, I was severely beaten... now I am all sick'.*

Zhenya: *'I was caught with heroin and refused to give or sign any documents without a lawyer. So the police officers took me out of the city and beat me up so bad that they got frightened themselves with what they did. When they got back to being sober, they said that they would drop the investigation on me if I didn't complain to anyone. They gave me heroin and let me go'.*

Ira: *'Me and my boyfriend were caught at yama and we were brought to the police station. My boyfriend had heroin. I had used needles. They wanted to bribe us. My boyfriend made a deal with them that he would go and get the money for the police officers. I stayed at the police station. My boyfriend never came and during the night I was raped by three police officers. Then, I was released.'*



Renata from Ganesha interviews a young girl

5. Conclusions

- Very low involvement of young people in various organizations and programs, and there is no attention paid to young people's needs and requirements;
- There is no focus on HIV prevention and harm reduction for young people;
- There are no programs for young people who are not injecting drugs;
- There are no rehabilitation programs or shelters for pregnant teenagers;
- Alternatives sentencing in the form of community service or rehabilitation is not applied to young people who use drugs;
- Low access to counseling and testing for HIV and other services;
- Very few statistics and data on young people who use drugs.

6. Recommendations

- a) Necessary to carry out systematic peer education training by young people in Bishkek and Osh. In response to this need, Ganesha has conducted a series of peer training sessions that addressed low awareness or lack of knowledge about HIV and sexual health in general among young drug users;
- b) There is a need to develop leadership of young people who use drugs in the region;
- c) To conduct a study among young drug users to consider the issue more convenient for them to obtain information and services;
- d) Human rights training is needed, including human rights in relation to drug policy and health care. (for example: on Art. 246 of the Criminal Code, abortion and medical examination);
- e) It is necessary to conduct a number of advocacy activities on the conclusions and recommendations;
- f) There is a need for regular monitoring of Art. 246 of the Criminal Code with respect to young people who use drugs;
- g) Analyze and investigate the problem in respect of students who use drugs and resort to the Center on Addiction and thus, the prosecution require schools to put them in the course and to report all drug users;
- h) Create a website for young people, including in the Kyrgyz language including information on drugs, their effects and drug related harm reduction;
- i) Develop partnerships among Government and other structures.

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make this research possible!***

