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National Drug Intelligence Center
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The Impact of Drugs on Society

The negative consequences of drug abuse affect not only individuals who abuse drugs but also their families and friends, various businesses, and government resources. Although many of these effects cannot be quantified, ONDCP recently reported that in 2002, the economic cost of drug abuse to the United States was \$180.9 billion.

The most obvious effects of drug abuse--which are manifested in the individuals who abuse drugs--include ill health, sickness and, ultimately, death. Particularly devastating to an abuser's health is the contraction of needle borne illnesses including hepatitis and HIV/AIDS through injection drug use. NSDUH data indicate that in 2004 over 3.5 million individuals aged 18 and older admitted to having injected an illicit drug during their lifetime. Of these individuals, 14 percent (498,000) were under the age of 25. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 123,235 adults living with AIDS in the United States in 2003 contracted the disease from injection drug use, and the survival rate for those persons is less than that for persons who contract AIDS from any other mode of transmission. CDC further reports that more than 25,000 people died in 2003 from drug-induced effects.

Children of individuals who abuse drugs often are abused or neglected as a result of the individuals' preoccupation with drugs. National-level studies have shown that parents who abuse drugs often put their need to obtain and abuse drugs before the health and welfare of their children. NSDUH data collected during 2002 and 2003 indicate that 4.3 percent of pregnant women aged 15 to 44 report having used illicit drugs in the past month. Moreover, that same data show that 8.5 percent of new mothers report having used illicit drugs in the past month. Children whose parents and other family members abuse drugs often are physically or emotionally abused and often lack proper immunizations, medical care, dental care, and necessities such as food, water, and shelter.

The risk to children is even greater when their parents or guardians manufacture illicit drugs such as methamphetamine. Methamphetamine abusers often produce the drug in their own homes and apartments, using hazardous chemicals such as hydriodic acid, iodine, and anhydrous ammonia. Children who inhabit such homes often inhale dangerous chemical fumes and gases or ingest toxic

chemicals or illicit drugs. These children commonly test positive for methamphetamine and suffer from both short- and long-term health consequences. Moreover, because many methamphetamine producers also abuse the drug, children commonly suffer from neglect that leads to psychological and developmental problems. NCLSS data show that U.S. law enforcement agencies report having seized 9,895 illicit methamphetamine laboratories in 2004. These agencies report that 2,474 children were affected by these laboratories (i.e., they were exposed to chemicals, they resided at laboratory sites, or they were displaced from their homes), while 12 children were injured and 3 children were killed.

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The economic impact of drug abuse on businesses whose employees abuse drugs can be significant. While many drug abusers are unable to attain or hold full-time employment, those who do work put others at risk, particularly when employed in positions where even a minor degree of impairment could be catastrophic; airline pilots, air traffic controllers, train operators, and bus drivers are just a few examples. Quest Diagnostics, a nationwide firm that conducts employee drug tests for employers, reports that 5.7 percent of the drug tests they conducted on individuals involved in an employment-related accident in 2004 were positive. Economically, businesses often are affected because employees who abuse drugs sometimes steal cash or supplies, equipment, and products that can be sold to get money to buy drugs. Moreover, absenteeism, lost productivity, and increased use of medical and insurance benefits by employees who abuse drugs affect a business financially.

The economic consequences of drug abuse severely burden federal, state, and local government resources and, ultimately, the taxpayer. This effect is most evident with methamphetamine. Clandestine methamphetamine laboratories jeopardize the safety of citizens and adversely affect the environment. Children, law enforcement personnel, emergency responders, and those who live at or near methamphetamine production sites have been seriously injured or killed as a result of methamphetamine production. Methamphetamine users often require extensive medical treatment; some abuse, neglect, and abandon their children, adding to social services costs; some also commit a host of other crimes including domestic violence, assault, burglary, and identity theft. Methamphetamine producers tax strained law enforcement resources and budgets as a result of the staggering costs associated with the remediation of laboratory sites. According to DEA, the average cost to clean up a methamphetamine production laboratory is \$1,900. Given that an average of 9,777 methamphetamine laboratory seizures were reported to NCLSS each year between 2002 and 2004, the economic impact is obvious. DEA absorbs a significant portion of such costs through a Hazardous Waste Cleanup Program and in 2004 administered over 10,061 state and

local clandestine laboratory cleanups and dumpsites at a cost of over \$18.6 million. Nonetheless, resources of state and local agencies also are significantly affected. For example, 69 percent of the county officials responding to a 2005 survey by the National Association of Counties report that they had to develop additional training and special protocols for county welfare workers who work with children exposed to methamphetamine. Moreover, the time and manpower involved in investigating and cleaning up clandestine laboratories increase the workload of an already overburdened law enforcement system.

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