

**Address by the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,
Vice-President and Minister of Public Security
At the Launch of the Household Survey 2016
Cara Lodge Hotel - Thursday, February 9, 2017**

Mr Chairman, OAS Representative Mr Jean Ricot Dorneus, CICAD Representative Mr Clarke, friends all;

I want to immediately thank the OAS and the Inter American Drug Abuse Commission for their fine work in sponsoring this 2016 Household Drug Survey 2016 in Guyana.

This comes after a major survey of Drug Use among Secondary School Students was launched in 2015.

Drug use among households across the country is a most welcome piece of information any country should want. These cold, hard facts about the state of our households as it relates to households use of licit and illicit drugs, that is tobacco, alcohol, marijuana among others, tells a worrying story. Behind these statistics too we will come to know what we have become, and what we can do about it.

I have been fortunate to get a preview of the findings of the Survey from Mr. Mike Atherly. And with Michael's permission I shall state some of these findings. Quite frankly I feel disheartened by them.

The objectives of this important, if you did not know, were to determine the prevalence of psychoactive substances in households in Guyana and to detect patterns of use of these substances. The findings include:

- **40.9% of respondents believe that it is easy to access Marijuana**
- **19.8% of respondents believe that it is easy to access Cocaine**
- **9.1% of respondents believe that it is ease to access Ecstasy**
- **10.0% of respondents believe that it is easy to access Crack**
- **66.5% of respondents believe that drug use has increased in Guyana in the past few years**
- **46.7% of respondents believe that drug use will get worse in the coming years**
- **56.4% of respondents believe that the drug issue is among the core concern of the government**
- **While 92% of respondents indicated that they do not know of any drug awareness or prevention programmes in their neighbourhoods.**

Alcohol Binge Drinking among current users are as high as: in males 64.2 % and in females 46. 3%.

	Tobacco	Alcohol Use	Marijuana Use
Life-time Prevalence	26.2%	67.2%	9.8%
Used in the last 12 Months	12.5%	46.2%	4.6%
Used in the last Month	10.5%	32.5%	3.3%
Average age of First Use	17.7	18.7	18.9
	years	years`	years

21.5% of respondents from Region 3 and 24.5% from Region 7 said that there is a great deal of drug dealing in their neighborhoods.

My intention here is not to create a moral panic, but in all honesty, and I wish to repeat words I used at the School Survey Launch, these statistics paint a picture which shames us all. It is an outrage! And we must do something about it.

These troubling statistics are corroborated by what our Traffic Chief recently informed me about. Already from the from the period 1st to 15th January 2017 as compared to 1st to 15th January 2016, the cases made out of driving under the influence of alcohol tripled. There was 89 in early 2016. It is now 228 in early 2017.

Links between Drugs and Violence

Drugs misuse and violence both act as a catalyst for each other. Study shows that drug consumption is linked to drug abuse, delinquency, anti-social behaviour in adulthood and educational failure.

Not only does drug use affects physical and cognitive functions but it also contributes to reduced physical control and the ability to recognize warning signs in potentially dangerous situations which can make some drinkers easy targets for perpetrators of criminal acts. Additionally, individuals' expectancies and societal beliefs about the effects of drug (e.g. increased confidence, increased aggression) can mean that drug is consumed as a preparation for violence (PAHO 2007).

Victims and children who experience and are subjected to drug related violence strongly develops emotional and behavioural problems and are often known to seek the use of drugs as a coping mechanism.

As such the domino effect of drug abuse now becomes an economic burden to the State, since both the health and criminal justice sectors are directly affected.

Apprehending and treating offenders of and victims of drug related violence is costly and diverts resources from other health and crime related issues (PAHO 2007).

Social consequences of drug related violence should also be considered since it can extend beyond the individuals involved. A high prevalence of drug related violence within a community can also affect the quality of life, thus reducing community cohesion, increasing fear of crime and preventing persons from visiting places associated with disorders especially at nights.

One of the most robust findings in drug (especially alcohol) and crime research is that drug-related incidents frequently occur late at night or in the early hours of the morning and weekends.

In a study titled "Drug in Norway: Use, Consequences and Cost", the grave impacts associated with drug abuse resulted in increased mortality rates due to motor accidents and increased health problems (increases of several diseases such as liver and lung disease, cancer and heart diseases). As a consequence, the Government was faced with the task of additional health care services for affected citizens, resulting in the need for and utilization of more resources.

Other negative consequences include:

- Mental health problems and behavioral disorders.
- A range of health care services for drug-related health problems
- Crime – a significant proportion of perpetrators are under the influence of drug and the link may be causal.
- Loss of productivity because of increased worker absenteeism, loss of life years and lower quality of work.

- Negative consequences on family through unstable and problematic childhood – 1 out of 5 children grow up in a family where drug is a problem (Gjelsvik, 2004)
- Increased risk of divorce – in 25-33% of all divorce cases, drug is provided as the main or one in many reasons for divorce.

Though we in Guyana have not carried out such an extensive specific study on the costs and impacts, these negative consequences in Norway must ring a bell and warn us that here in Guyana we too suffer from these adverse consequences and probably even many-times worse.

I say so because in this Household Survey, surprisingly, respondents seldom reported any ill-effects of their drug use. On the contrary, many highlighted what they considered as desired effects of drug use, in particular marijuana use.

Further, the respondents associated with a treatment centre pointed out that treatment centres face three main challenges: financial resources to scale up interventions and treatment; lack of trained specialized human resources; and capacity to monitor persons on treatment to assess progress toward rehabilitation.

Now as we all know Norway is not as cash strapped as we are.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I am happy there were a set of recommendations made in view of the findings. These will have to be added to the efforts coming from the the law enforcement standpoint, namely, that which was stated in the Drug Strategy Master Plan 2016-2020 to be executed largely by two existing agencies Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) and the Guyana Police Force.

Recommendations proposed to curb illicit drug use:

1. There is need for regular sensitization on the harmful effects of licit and illicit drug use. The materials developed should cover both the desired effects and the serious consequences associated with drug use. Prevention messages should be appropriate for different age ranges and the needs of individual drug users and should provide alternatives to drug use.
2. Drug addiction should be given greater priority in health promotion and disease prevention programmes such as what is currently being given to diseases such as HIV/AIDS.
3. Continued training of persons who have shown an interest in the field of treatment and prevention and the establishment of more treatment and rehab centres across the country.
4. Creation of more recreational centres and spaces for individuals appropriate to the various stages in the life-cycle.
5. Expansion in job training and economic insertion activities.

6. Create and implement mentorship programmes for youths coming from communities and households that display risk factors for illicit drug use.
7. Parental involvement is critical in preventing youths from drug use. Parents should constantly practice drug free lifestyles and the benefits of this type of drug free lifestyle.
8. Media campaigns targeted at Youths should also address the role of parents in drug use prevention.

All of these and much more we have to do. But we must never be daunted by the task at hand. To enjoy this country in a couple of years, mean we must put in the efforts now. I am glad that with studies and Surveys like these our efforts will be more clinical, more evidence-based.

Thank you