



**MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DRUG ABUSE**

**“INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT
TRAFFICKING 2007”**

Drug abuse, also known as substance abuse, can simply be defined as a pattern of harmful use of any substance for mood-altering purposes. It also refers to the use of a drug for purposes for which it was not intended, or using a drug in excessive quantities.

Drug addiction is a state of physical and psychological dependence on a drug manifested in compulsive uncontrollable cravings which comprises drug seeking, drug use and recovery from the effects of the drug. Physical addiction is characterized by the presence of tolerance (needing more and more of the drug to achieve the same effect) and withdrawal symptoms that disappear when further medication is taken.

The NCDA undertook a National School survey in 2006 to determine the level of drug use and abuse among our school population. Students were taken from grades 8, 10 and 11 and represented the 11 to 19 years age group. The result of this survey showed that alcohol was the most frequently ever-used drug, with approximately 70% of the school population experimenting with it. This was followed with solvents and inhalants seeing 28%, tobacco with 27%, ganja 24% and beady 14%.

Overall the gender gap is narrowing, where more female students are now involved in drug use and abuse. The major reasons given for using and abusing drugs include peer pressure, release of stress and the need for relaxation.

A significant concern is the health status of our youngsters and how some of these drugs affect their academic achievement and their ability to stay in the school system. The link between drug abuse and irresponsible sexual behaviour resulting in STI's, HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies is also a major concern that we need to address urgently.

The NCDA is committed to our population generally, and our youth in particular. This has resulted in a number of new initiatives to address the worrying trends of drug abuse. These include our *Smoke Free for Life* project, which is an anti-smoking campaign for Jamaican children ages 3 – 11 years. Our *Community Clinic and Services for Substance Abusers and their Families* project, which will see the delivery of counseling and support services for substance abusers and their families, persons with HIV/AIDS and persons traumatized because of violence or physical abuse. This will see a partnership with Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) and Community-Based Organizations (CBO's). Our Field Officers have been trained to deliver primary care and will work directly with these communities on these projects

The agency continues to collaborate with national, regional and international partners to stem the level of drug abuse, and calls on parents, care-givers, teachers, guidance counselors and corporate Jamaica, to become more involved in our programmes so that they are able to help our youth in the fight against the use and abuse of drugs in our society.

Michael Tucker