

Famine, Poverty & Violence:

Three More Ways Drugs Cause Death

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Among the unreached peoples, especially the Frontier People Groups, the suffering that drugs cause to individual addicts is far outweighed by the misery caused to families and communities. Millions of deaths are *directly* caused by addictions, but there are also millions of *collateral deaths*. Should missionaries merely call for prayer for those struck down by famines, poverty and violence, or should we follow the example of previous generations who discerned root problems and globally exposed the evils and destruction caused by the death industries of their day? Any attempt at development and poverty elimination must confront these issues:

1. Drug crops displace food crops causing famines.

The current famine in Yemen is risking millions of lives and may be the worst humanitarian disaster of this decade. Yemen's annual production of "khat," an addictive drug cash crop, has reached 190,000 tons and taken over 15% of arable land and 38% of agricultural water badly needed for food production.¹ Food prices soar, burning profits made by growing lucrative drug crops instead. This problem is global, including hashish (marijuana) from Mexico to Morocco to Albania, coca (cocaine) in Latin America, opium from Afghanistan through Asia. All it takes is bad weather or war to trigger widespread famine. But it becomes extremely complex to return to other crops once a generation of farmers has only learned to raise drugs.

From 1700-1900, some 60 million people died of famines in India, where significant land area was used for opium and hemp/marijuana, reducing the state of Bengal from wealth to poverty.² Some argued opium was helpful because it assuaged the appetite of starving people! Globally, billions of acres produce non-nutritive crops like nicotine (tobacco) and caffeine (coffee/matte/tea). Increasingly, foods that could be eaten are


used for alcohol production, including 98% of barley and 40% of corn grown in the USA,³ where also 85% of the profits from growing grapes come from wine production.⁴

2. Drugs impoverish whole families because they use up valuable income and make addicts unable to work productively.

Evangelical missionaries have often raised the standard of living and health of poor communities significantly simply by helping those coming to Christ get rid of expensive and debilitating addictions. Drugged family members cannot hold down jobs. Frequently 30% to 50% of the income of poor families goes to purchase tobacco, alcohol and drugs. Wives hide their money so their husbands won't steal it and spend it on their addictions. The founder of the Evangelical movement, John Wesley, quickly found that poor families were healthier and wealthier if their income was not spent on non-nutritive addictive substances.

3. Drugs increase violent crimes & collateral deaths.

It is hard to tabulate the number of deaths caused to the spouses or children of drug users due to neglect or domestic violence. Roughly 40% of all crimes in the USA are committed under the influence of alcohol—counting other drugs, over 60% (using urine tests).⁵ Tens of thousands are killed by drunk or drugged drivers and in other accidents.⁶

It is fair to say that, apart from abortion, addictive drugs are globally the greatest man-made cause of poverty, misery, and death. Evangelical missionaries have found that helping people groups to come to Christ must include helping them put off the very substances that are dragging their families to the grave. 

1 www.scidev.net/global/farming/news/khat-cultivation-food-crisis-yemen.html

2 Chaudhury, Sushil (1999). *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal*. Manohar Publishers and Distributors.

3 www.scientificamerican.com/article/time-to-rethink-corn/

4 www.agmrc.org/commodities-products/fruits/grapes

5 www.verywellmind.com/crime-and-alcohol-statistics-from-1998-62821

6 www.alcoholrehabguide.org/alcohol/crimes/