

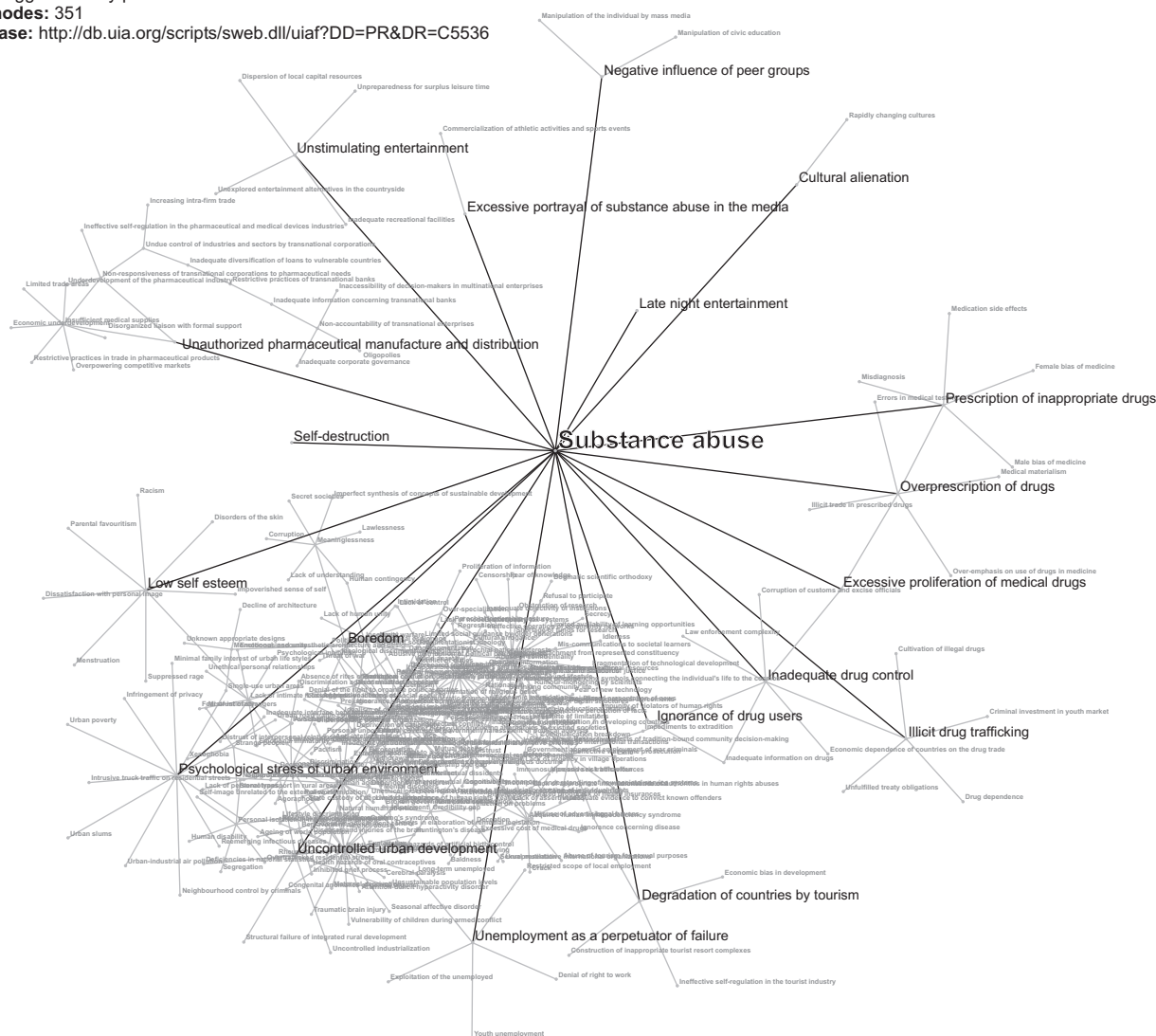
Figure 10.1.2.22. Substance abuse

Database: World Problems and Issues

Link type: aggravated by problems

Network nodes: 351

UIA database: <http://db.uia.org/scripts/swbe.dll/uiaf?DD=PR&DR=C5536>



Drug abuse is the use of any licit or illicit chemical substance that results in physical, mental, emotional, or behavioural impairment in an individual. Societies in all parts of the world have discovered substances that can alleviate pain and cure various ailments or give pleasurable sensations when consumed. However, some of these substances are dangerous because they share the quality of giving temporary euphoria and contentment; one can develop a craving for them which, in a short time, leads to complete dependence. The consequences of drug dependence, both physical and psychic, may be damaging to the user and to society. Modern-day society has witnessed a spectacular increase in the use of manufactured drugs in general and in the use of psychoactive drugs in particular. Psychoactive drugs are substances which affect the activity of the central nervous system or, in simpler terms, exert a strong influence on the human mind and behaviour. The category of psychoactive drugs is very large, and includes pain killers, mood changing drugs and hallucinogens. The risks of psychoactive drug-taking are not limited to the individual drug taker; the habit can affect his environment and the society in which he lives. An individual may start drug-taking for one or several reasons. The simplest reason is true for only a minority of persons - that drug-taking starts with the administration of a narcotic or psychotropic drug for therapeutic purposes; the majority of drug abusers start from a search for pleasure (or freedom from pain), out of curiosity or ignorance or alienation (escape from reality), to cope with daily life, or to identify with a group or with a drug-orientated society. The pleasurable effect of these drugs (euphoria) constitutes the first step to drug abuse; the second one comes when, after repeated administration of opiates, barbiturates, amphetamines or LSD, the individual does not experience the same pleasure, but requires greater and greater doses to produce the same pleasurable drug effect. This phenomenon is the development of tolerance. Regular and repeated drug administration leads to a state where the person has so adapted itself to the presence of the drug that an interruption in the continuity provokes abstinence (withdrawal) symptoms. These symptoms can be painful and severe, sometimes even fatal, as often happens in the case of barbiturates and opiates. This is the physical dependence on a drug. There are some drugs, such as cocaine, cannabis or LSD, which do not produce physical dependence. But the development of psychic dependence can create an even stronger compulsion for regular drug-taking than the 'craving' experienced by the physically dependent addict. Society's defensive reaction against drug pollution has now reached the level of the international community. The World Health Organization and the United Nations are variously involved in the delicate balance-keeping policy which calls for decisions on the following problems: which kind of drugs have to be controlled; what kind of national control is required; and how to complete this control by international action and assure the cooperation of governments which have the responsibility of drug control.