

INTRODUCTION.

In today's world, health and safety at the workplace has become of utmost importance. A lot of people associate the aspect of health and safety with protective clothing such as safety shoes and safety helmets. However, health and safety implies more than just the physical aspects, but also the social and psychological aspects.

Drug and alcohol abuse cause health and safety concerns of a physical, psychological and social nature at the workplace such as:

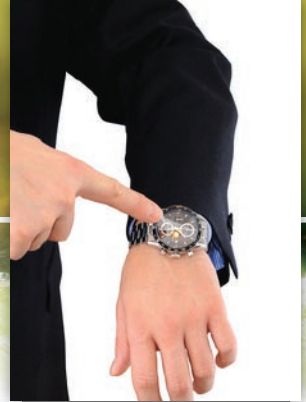
- accidents
- absenteeism
- inefficiency
- problems between staff members

Sedqa offers a preventive programme better known as the **Substance Abuse Free Employees (S.A.F.E.)** Programme in order to help employers and employees deal effectively with the issue of substance abuse at the workplace.

The programme includes informative sessions regarding substance abuse and employers are encouraged to adopt a substance abuse policy at their workplace.

This booklet offers an overview of the different drugs, signs and symptoms of substance abuse, and how these drugs may affect a person at the workplace. The booklet also includes details of the services available for persons with drug or/and alcohol related problems.

ABSENTEEISM



ACCIDENTS



LOW PERFORMANCE



EXPERIMENTATION



REGULAR USE



ADDICTION



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUBSTANCE USE, ABUSE AND DEPENDENCE/ADDICTION?

USE:

When a person drinks alcohol or uses drugs out of curiosity and/or at the urging of peers, on social occasions or to experiment.

ABUSE:

The use of a substance to modify or control one's mood or state of mind in a manner that is harmful to oneself or others. In this state the person is more at risk of having accidents and experiencing other problems at the workplace.

DEPENDENCE/ADDICTION:

When a person experiences three or more of the following:

- craves alcohol or other drugs
- continues to abuse alcohol/drugs despite adverse consequences
- repeatedly fails to control the use of alcohol/drugs
- becomes more tolerant to the substance in a way that s/he does not feel normal or good unless s/he uses the substance
- experiences withdrawal symptoms (such as tremors) if s/he does not take the usual dose
- considers drugs or alcohol as the most important thing in one's life (sometimes more important than family or work).

CAFFEINE: STIMULANT



ALCOHOL: DEPRESSANT



LSD. HALLUCINOGEN



WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STIMULANTS, DEPRESSANTS AND HALLUCINOGENS?

STIMULANTS:

- those drugs that decrease the anxiety caused by thoughts and emotions but stimulate energy physically and psychologically. Cocaine, caffeine, steroids, amphetamines, nicotine and certain types of medicines are classified as stimulants.

DEPRESSANTS:

- those drugs that block anxiety but also decrease the body's energy. Heroin, morphine, alcohol, marijuana, volatile substances (inhalants) and certain types of medicines are considered as depressants.

HALLUCINOGENS:

- those drugs that either block emotions and create a fantasy and euphoric world around the individual or else transform the present emotions into a fantasy world which is unrealistic. Ecstasy, LSD, magic mushroom, marijuana and volatile substances are hallucinogens.



ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION



DISTRESS



ALCOHOL

In Malta alcohol is the leading drug of abuse in society at large, including the workplace.

What is one unit of alcohol?

- a glass of wine (goblet glass)
- a tot of spirit
- a small bottle/can of beer (half pint)

Research conducted in Europe (British Medical Journal 2011) found that men who drink more than two standard drinks a day and women who consume more than one standard drink a day are particularly at risk of alcohol-related cancers.

What are the dangers related to alcohol abuse at the workplace?

- Consuming alcohol increases the likelihood of accidents for persons operating vehicles, machinery or heavy equipment.
- Low doses of alcohol reduce inhibitions and negatively affect decision making.
- Change in the person's behaviour (for example the person becomes depressive or aggressive).

Excessive drinking can also cause several problems outside work.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS/SYMPTOMS

Physical:

Cancers of the mouth, tongue, oesophagus, rectum, breast and skin, kidney and liver disease, ulcers, spontaneous abortion.

Psychological:

Anxiety, depression and other mental health problems.

Social:

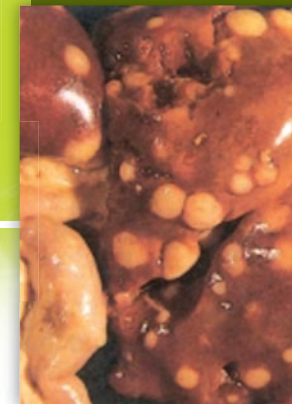
Domestic violence, family neglect, financial problems, problems with the police and problems at the workplace.

Some signs of alcohol abuse include:

- odour of alcohol on one's breath
- lack of physical coordination
- blabbering
- slowed reaction time
- reduced inhibitions
- slurred speech

Situations where it is not recommended that one drinks include:

- when individuals are under legal drinking age
- during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- when driving or operating machinery
- when taking medicines
- if suffering from certain health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure



FAMILY PROBLEMS



FINANCIAL PROBLEMS





FOETAL ALCOHOL
SPECTRUM DISORDER



BORN WITH FASD



DRINKING & DRIVING

Alcohol should be avoided when one intends to drive. Even as little as one unit of alcohol impairs concentration. It also affects the reaction time and reflexes, therefore, significantly increasing the risk of traffic accidents.

According to Maltese law, one cannot drive if alcohol exceeds 80mgs per 100mls of blood (which is equivalent to 0.8mgs/1ltr of blood) or 35 micrograms per 100mls of breath or 107mgs of alcohol per 100mls of urine.

The risk of having a traffic accident increases six-fold when driving under the influence of alcohol.

Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

When a pregnant woman consumes alcohol, she increases the risk of miscarriage. Alcohol consumption during pregnancy may also lead to FASD.

Babies born with FASD might:

- have a slower rate of growth/development
- have abnormal facial features (such as smaller circumference of the head than usual, ears would not be the same size, very thin upper lip and flat, wide nose)
- be small and underweight
- have a smaller brain
- have intellectual difficulties as grown ups
- be hyperactive and lack attention

TOBACCO/INHALANTS

TOBACCO:

Tobacco is a legal drug that is very harmful to the body. The active drug found in tobacco is referred to as nicotine.

Signs and symptoms:

- person feels stimulated
- staining of fingers and teeth
- loss of appetite
- coughing
- breath smells bad
- shortage of breath
- loss of smell and taste
- increased blood pressure
- heart problems
- thinning of the veins
- higher risk of developing a cancer

INHALANTS:

These include substances that can be found at the workplace, such as glue, petrol, cigarette lighter fluid and thinner. When inhaled, these substances can make the user feel 'high'.

Signs and symptoms:

- nausea
- sneezing
- coughing
- nosebleeds
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- pale, bluish skin
- bloodshot eyes
- slow, slurred speech

Dangers:

- Inhalants can make a person feel disorientated and can also induce visual distortion and confusion.
- Continued inhalant use can lead to permanent brain damage.



INHALANTS



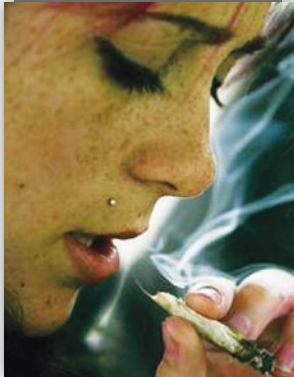
HUFFING



JOINT



SMOKING MARIJUANA



BLOODSHOT EYES



MARIJUANA

Marijuana is by far the world's most commonly used illicit drug and far more dangerous than most users realise. It could be found in different forms, that is, grass, oil and resin. Marijuana could be smoked or brewed into tea or mixed in baked products. When taken in small doses, the user feels relaxed and his/her view of the world is altered.

Signs and symptoms:

- increased heart rate
- bloodshot eyes
- dry mouth and throat
- increased appetite
- loss of memory
- loss of concentration

Dangers:

- Due to the lack of concentration and the change in how the person views the surroundings, one would become dangerous both to oneself and to colleagues at the workplace.
- It is important that the user does not drive or operate machinery if under the effect of marijuana.
- Long-term dangers include cancer, traffic accidents and other kinds of accidents.

ECSTASY

The most popular form of ecstasy is a pill which varies in colour, shape and size. Although this type of drug is not usually abused at the workplace, the employee could still be under the effect of the drug, even after five days from consuming it. Ecstasy is also referred to as the *love drug* because initially the person feels happy, relaxed and friendly with everybody.

Signs and symptoms:

- increased/fast heartbeat
- increased body temperature
- increased blood pressure
- increased confidence
- perspiration
- anxiety
- loss of appetite

Dangers:

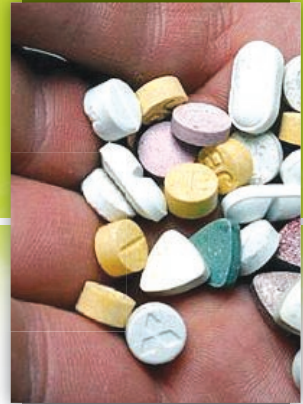
Ecstasy use can cause death due to:

- harmful overheating (hyperthermia)
- drinking too much liquids over a short period of time and therefore leading to hyponatremia (lack of sodium in the blood which in certain circumstances could be fatal)
- over-stimulation of the nervous system that can cause heart attacks or brain haemorrhage

Warning signs of overdose are:

- feeling hot or unwell
- becoming confused, not able to talk properly
- headaches
- vomiting
- lack of perspiration
- racing heart or pulse when resting
- fainting or collapsing
- loss of control over body movements
- tremors
- problems to urinate

ECSTASY PILLS



RAVE PARTY



HANGOVER





COCAINE SNORTING



DRUG DEALING



COCAINE

Cocaine is a stimulant. It is most often seen in the form of a white, crystalline powder. It is extracted from the leaves of the coca plant. The primary route of administration for cocaine powder is through inhalation, commonly referred to as snorting. Another route of administration is by injecting the substance intravenously (shooting).

Cocaine powder may also be converted into crack or rock using baking soda. Users smoke crack in a pipe or mix it with tobacco or marijuana.

Signs and symptoms:

- periods of increased activity followed by fatigue and depression
- chronic cough
- nosebleeds (if snorted)
- insomnia
- irritability
- sense of confusion
- aggressive behaviour
- overconfidence
- talkativeness
- agitation
- impotence
- hallucinations
- tremors
- weight loss
- fever
- perforated nasal septum (if snorted)
- convulsions
- elevated blood pressure

Dangers:

- The addictive nature and cost can lead to theft and/or drug dealing at the workplace.
- Work performance becomes erratic with periods of high performance and other periods characterized by forgetfulness, missed assignments and absenteeism.

HEROIN

Heroin is a depressant. It is most often seen in the form of a brownish powder (although pure heroin is typically white). Heroin is commonly inhaled (chasing the dragon) or injected (shooting), although it may also be smoked.

Signs and symptoms:

- physical withdrawals (aches and pains)
- social aspect of life is neglected
- lack of personal hygiene and neglecting one's personal appearance
- lack of concentration
- drastic change in body weight
- loss of appetite
- constricted pupils and reduced night vision
- longer time to recuperate from common illnesses such as flu
- lack of physical coordination
- fatigue
- constipation
- needle tracks in arms, legs and groin
- dry, itchy skin and skin infections
- decreased sex drive
- craving for sweets
- tolerance to pain

Dangers:

- Due to the lack of concentration and lack of clear thought, heroin abusers can become dangerous both to themselves and those around them.
- Most of the time they are apathetic, indifferent to consequences and unable to sustain personal relationships and other commitments.
- Heroin users still in employment find that their wage does not cover the cost of the drug.
- Many often resort to stealing from the workplace or elsewhere in order to maintain/sustain their habit.
- They may also resort to drug trafficking.



HEROIN INJECTING



VULNERABLE RELATIONSHIPS





PARAPHERNALIA USED IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Apart from the signs and symptoms that we mentioned earlier on, one has to look out also for other clues including paraphernalia (also referred to as *objects* or *works*) associated with drug use. If the paraphernalia are found at the workplace, this could mean that an employee is abusing drugs during working hours.

Paraphernalia associated with drug abuse are:

- pipes in strange forms
- syringes
- burnt/bent teaspoons/tablespoons
- shortened straws
- razors
- small pieces of mirrors or glass
- pieces of foil
- citric acid
- variety of pills
- traces of powder
- traces of leaves and twigs
- thick pieces of elastic or cord
- papers used to roll cigarettes
- pieces of paper, folded to form small sachets

Is there any treatment for alcohol or drug abuse?

Yes. Sedqa offers a wide range of services to treat those who abuse of alcohol and other drugs. These include:

Alcohol:

- community programme
- day programme
- residential programme

Drugs:

- community programme
- residential programme

The aforementioned services can include:

- assessment by a social worker
- medical assessment
- psychiatric assessment
- detoxification
- family therapy
- individual support and counselling
- psychotherapy (by a psychologist/psychotherapist)
- group therapy

Sedqa offers also prevention services and programmes:

- at the workplace (S.A.F.E. Programme)
- in primary schools
- in secondary and post-secondary schools
- for parents and professionals
- for the community in general





SUPPORTLINE 179

How can one help a colleague who has a drug or alcohol problem?

Some people think that the best way to help a colleague who has a drug or alcohol problem is by hiding the problem from their employer or family members (*enabling*). This is a misconception. The colleague must be encouraged to face the problem and to look for help.

In such a case where a colleague has a substance abuse problem, one:

- **Should not withhold the information.** This would be more harmful.
- **Should not ignore the problem.** One should seek immediate advise from someone who the abuser trusts so that the necessary steps can be taken (for example the abuser could be referred for help).
- **Should not hide the problem.** Hiding the problem may lead to continued substance abuse which puts the user and colleagues at risk. Often, the abuser is more willing to accept help if faced with the possibility of losing the job rather than if encouraged to seek help by family members and friends.
- **Should not intervene alone.** One should encourage the user to seek professional help from one of the agencies that treat alcohol/ drug abusers. Drug and alcohol problems are complex and serious and they require professional help from experts trained in the field.

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP

Help regarding problems associated with alcohol and other drugs can be sought 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on **Supportline 179**.

This free and confidential service is also available to family members and friends of the alcohol/drug user.

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