



# Addictions and Complexity: More Health, Less War on Drugs

*Gabriela María Richard Losano*  
*Director of ProSalud Foundation*

*Professor at the National University of Cordoba, Argentina*

## Drugs and Counterculture in the Current Context

**T**he slogan “Make love, not war” is associated with the underground culture of the 60s in the United States. Gershon Legman, a cultural critic, is considered its author: in April 1965, at a protest against the Vietnam War, he wrote that phrase on his jersey. The Rosemont activists spread the motto by printing hundreds of stickers and pins with the slogan and distributing said material on Mother’s Day. Its use continued in events led by young people and students who were members of movements against the system and in favor of the expansion of the pacifist movement.

It is time for this phrase to find a new meaning that matches cultural changes and the actual role of the market in shaping the system. A revision would broaden its symbolic field in the following manner: “Do what is healthy with love, not war”. Working for what is healthy when culture promotes all kinds of consumption, including intoxicating ones, currently becomes a counter-cultural fact that takes force from deep within.

## Pragmatic Responses, Prevention and Reduction of Demand

Addressing complex problems such as those associated with the drug phenomenon in contexts of high social and institutional deterioration can be overwhelming. It makes it even harder to define these problems only in terms of drug trafficking,

violence and insecurity. Addressing it in this way does not admit that increased drug use is the necessary condition for these problems to occur: drugs are being consumed by younger people in greater quantity and variety; with worse consequences and in the context of an expanding market. Each and every one of the consumers of the diverse supply of psychoactive substances is part of the network that allows large industries to work.

In order to provide perspective and relieve the burden of dealing with the social and health problems that this phenomenon generates, it is essential to discussing prevention in terms of demand reduction no longer from the prohibition perspective, but from the critical reading of the system that favours consumption as an inevitable part of the greater market.

## Including the Voices of the Forgotten Protagonists

An important element in this approach strategy consists of listening to the voices of those who have experienced or are experiencing this type of problem, but have the desire to face them. These people are usually stigmatized based on reductionist theories that suggest that they had problems with drugs “due to psychological weakness”, “various vulnerabilities”, etc. However, they know how to better explain the pleasure that consuming psychoactive substances produced in them in the initial stages, and how this pleasure overtook and overwhelmed them,

causing a growing discomfort that, whether due to pride or shame, was difficult for them to accept. This group decided to take a break to enjoy life itself again without being judged by their addiction. They have the best words to communicate the differences between having a healthy life and an intoxicated one. Listening with an open attitude is helpful for those who consume or are thinking of doing so, since it provides an opportunity to advance on a path of improvement, health, resilience, and dignity. This also offers a broadened perspective open to new questions and possibilities of integral approach, and it is valuable to institutions that work with multidimensional approaches.

**These voices tend to be despised or used only in a sensationalist way, without the space to critically reflect on consumer culture and the way in which it shapes desires and beliefs.**

**Giving the floor to social actors with a history of drug use who have decided to leave it behind is often postponed in the face of the tendency to focus on the opinions of those presented as “drug users”, as if their consumption practices were healthy and/or preserved from the addictive process, triggered by neurological and contextual reward circuits which seek to perpetuate themselves, as shown by countless evidence provided by neurosciences.**

## Reductionist Approaches and Possible New Questions

Understanding the interdependence between drug use and trade makes it possible to question some of the arguments that hinder the multidimensional approach and thus facilitate realistic diagnoses and effective pragmatic interventions. The new trends associated with positive public health approaches are related to the anti-system spirit in which the phrase “make love and not war” was conceived as a response to the consumption mandates associated with models for “magically happy” lifestyles.

Regarding the component that refers to wars, what is narratively defined as war might not have sufficient evidence regarding its multiple causes, and therefore limits the analysis of how to avoid it. The deliberately reductionist arguments that have been circulating for some years related to the phenomenon of drug addiction intend to install the binomial “with war against drugs” (supply reduction) versus “without war against drugs”, judging the first option as useless in order to discard it and position the

**Knowing what the people who are undergoing treatment or have overcome their dependence on drug use think; what do neurosciences contribute to stimulate healthy practices and habits in an innovative way; how to strengthen public health processes that include children’s right to grow up in healthy contexts; how it affects the market in the decision-making of governmental institutions, why the prevention and treatment of addictions should be a constitutive part of the comprehensive social assistance strategy.**

second as the only valid option. This old binary approach consolidated a fragmentary analysis that displaced or cancelled still pending discussions on the non-belligose health axis and other fundamental issues.

## Violence

Beyond the narrative surrounding it, the evidence shows a growing war for drugs, which is perceived in the links between people who live under the effect of different substances and whose attitudes and behaviors express mild, moderate or acute disorders. All the dimensions of violence linked to the phenomenon of addictions are interconnected and emerge from processes with initial stages that are usually imperceptible in their negative aspects.

There are numerous cases full of desire for improvement that are expressed when they find an environment that makes it possible to take a new path in terms of health. The above is conditional, since while the public health system and comprehensive social policies have the obligation to offer these paths for early approaches that make it possible to resume health processes unlinked to dependence on psychoactive substances, that is not always the case. This obligation is a mandatory condition for the right to health that all citizens are entitled to.

It is fulfilled less and less frequently, fostering non-inclusive strategies such as those focused only on the rights of those who use drugs and request their access to them in order to sustain their dependence and avoid overdoses or withdrawal crises that make them more emotionally unstable and socially. The health system has not adapted to the new context, reinforced its health promotion free of stigma for those who are going through various stages of their addictive process, nor does it offer an alternative space to market modeling.

These are other wars for drugs that hurt the social structure that with great effort expands thanks to values such as health, solidarity, love and work. Wars that would be unnecessary if the network of benefits they feed also ceased to be validated and supported by the macro system, increasingly conditioned by economic variables rather than those that are focused on the common good.

Despite the violence and sadness, a broad approach also allows including a range of opportunities. It is essential that they are accounted for, especially when the game of democracy fosters innovation in matters regarding public policies.

## A Look at Values

The discussion around the war against drugs, because it is fragmentary and binary, was left devoid of content. The evidence leads to recording and defining appropriate strategies for the new contexts that are intersecting with wars for drugs in general. This look allows reframing in a more inclusive way the fostering of values that have proven effective to achieve higher quality of life standards at all levels (individual, familial and collective), and in all the cycles of life since childhood. It is then proposed to say “do what is healthy with love, not war”, because what is healthy is above all commercial offers and is a genuine objective of sustainable development.

## References

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