

The Impact of Drug Use on Mental Health

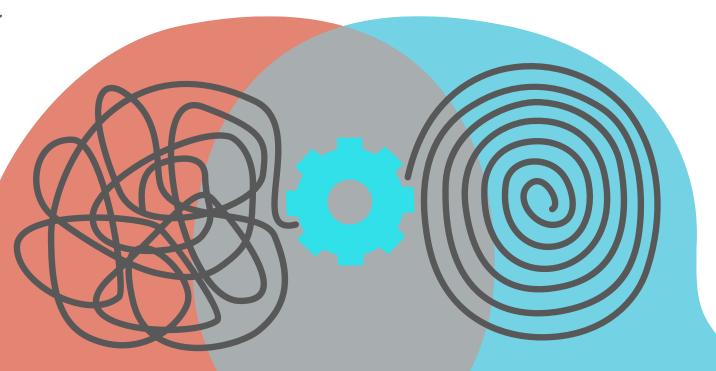
"The Chicken and the Egg Dilemma"

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Q STATEMENT



•NO COMPREHENSIVE INVESTIGATIVE STUDIES HAVE BEEN DONE IN THE CARIBBEAN REGARDING THE DIRECT IMPACT OF DRUG USE ON MENTAL HEALTH, THIS PRESENTATION USES GLOBAL DATA TO POINT TO AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATIVE STUDY. WE WILL HIGHLIGHT SEVERAL CULTURAL TENSIONS THAT FACE CARIBBEAN STATES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE MENTAL HEALTH DILEMMA



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Agency / Organization :

National Council on Drug Abuse

- Jamaica

OVERVIEW

Overview of Drug Use & Mental Health in the Caribbean

 Biopsychosocial Impacts of Substance Use on Mental Health

Case Study: Drug Use and Mental Health in Jamaica

- Barriers to Mental Health Care and Support
- Strategies for Prevention and Rehabilitation



Key Terms

- Substance abuse is defined as harmful use of a substance in a way that negatively impacts health, relationships or daily functioning
- **Health** is the state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease

Wellness is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her community. It is a crucial element of health and well-being that supports both our individual and group capacity to decide, form connections, and influence the world we live in.

-World Health Organization, 2018

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

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Social Gradient

Stress

Early Life and early adversity

Social isolation and exclusion

Physical Environment

Employment and income

Social support

Addiction

Food and food insecurity

Healthcare Access

Transport

Migration

Conditions in which people are born, live, learn, play, work, and age

Neighbourhood

Social Capital

Discrimination

Education

Source: Kirkbride et al. (2024); Alegria et al. (2018); Compton &

Shim (2015); Marmot (2005)

RISK FACTORS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Individual Risk Factors

- Low self-esteem/ low self-efficacy
- Alcohol and other substance use problems
- Loss (due to death, relationship, job, or status)
- Poor impulse control
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, powerlessness, or desperation
- History of trauma or abuse (e.g. physical, mental, or sexual)
- Prior suicide attempt (significantly increases risk)
- History of bullying or interpersonal violence
- Confusion or conflict about sexual orientation/identity
- Compulsive, extreme perfectionism

Family Risk Factors

- Family history of suicide
- Parental drug and alcohol use
- Depressed and/or suicidal parents
- Alcoholic and/or drug-addicted parents
- Changes in family structure (e.g. death, divorce, remarriage, frequent moves/relocation)
- Financial difficulties

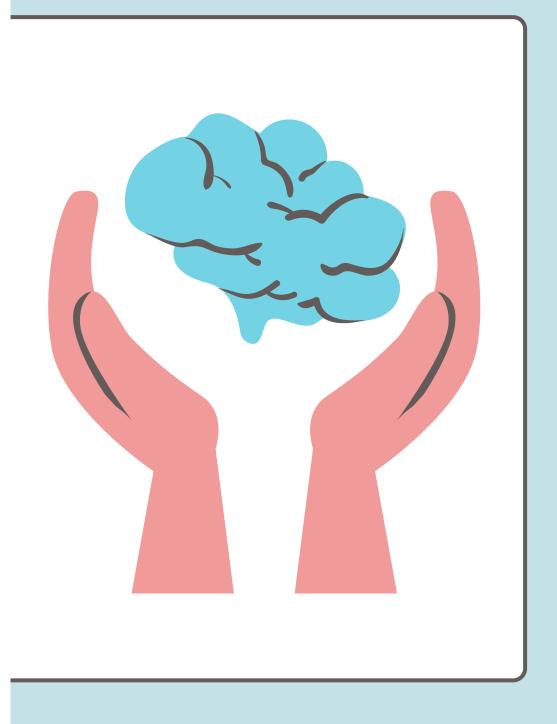
Social Risk Factors

- Access to lethal means, e.g. firearms or other lethal means
- Stigma associated with help-seeking
- Lack of access to helping services
- Loss of family, friends, or idols to suicide
- Anniversary of someone else's suicide or other death
- Incarceration or loss of freedom;
 trouble with the law
- Poverty
- Discrimination

MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE INTOXICAL

Table 1.3 Common mental health features of acute substance intoxication (for selected classes of substances)

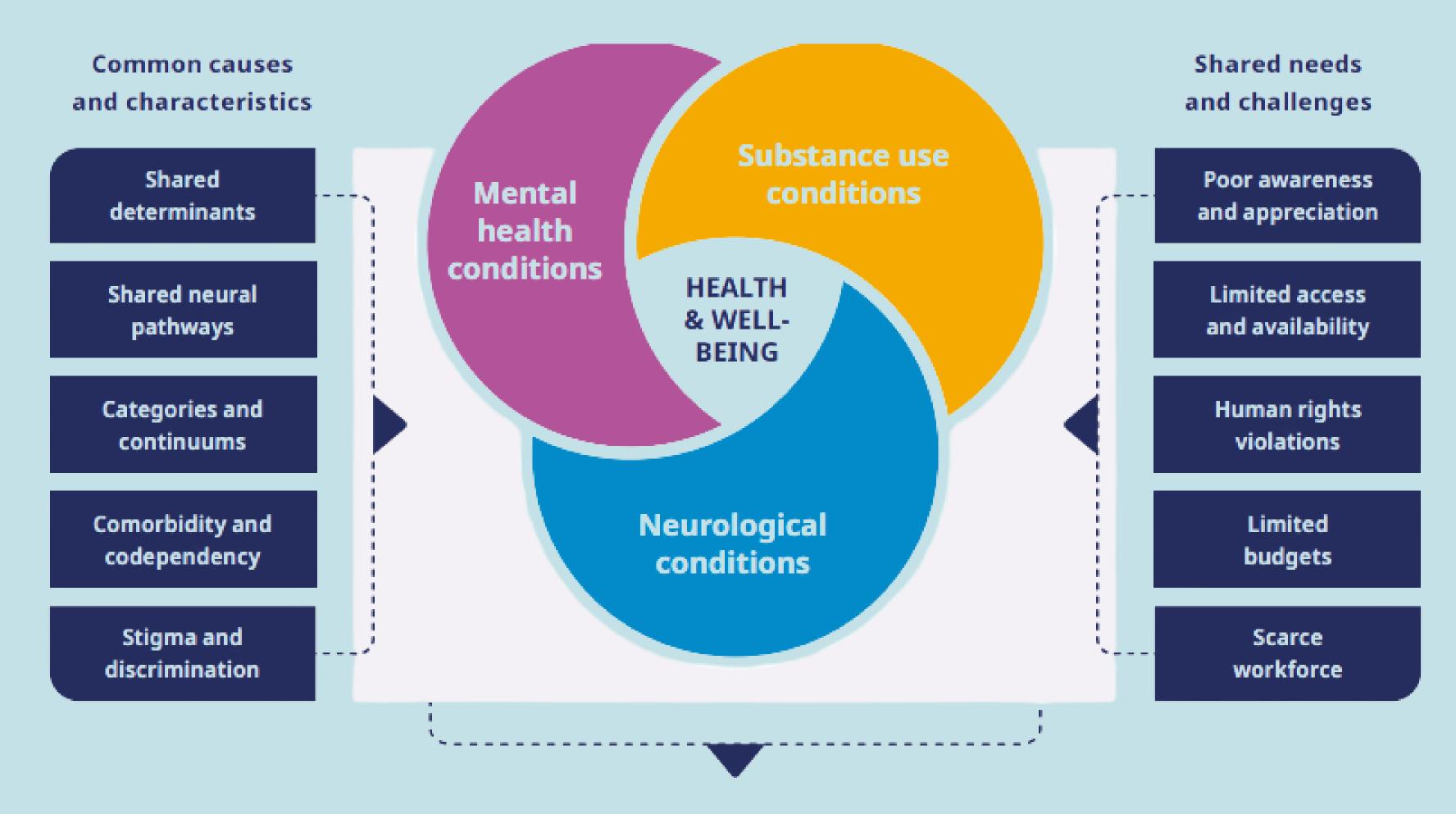
Alcohol Common mental health features of substance intox Impaired attention, inappropriate or aggressive behaviour judgement, poor coordination, unsteady gait, slurred spee	r, lability of mood and emotions, impaired
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or coma may occur.	
Cannabis or synthetic cannabinoids Euphoria, impaired attention, impaired judgement, perception of time, illusions), changes intensification of ordinary experiences, impaired short-tended cannabinoid intoxication may cause delirium or acute psychological process.	in sociability, increased appetite, anxiety, rm memory, sluggishness. Synthetic
Opioids Somnolence, stupor, mood changes (e.g. euphoria follower retardation, impaired judgement, respiratory depression, statention. In severe intoxication, coma may ensue.	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,
Cocaine Inappropriate euphoria, anxiety, anger, impaired attention paranoid ideation (sometimes of delusional intensity), aud sociability.	
Amphetamine-type Anxiety, anger, impaired attention, hypervigilance, psychological stimulants delusional intensity), transient auditory hallucinations, and transient auditory hallucinations are auditory hallucinations.	
Hallucinogens Hallucinations, illusions, perceptual changes such as dependent of senses, such as a visual stimulus evoking a smideas of reference, paranoid ideation, impaired judgement tremors, lack of coordination.	nell), anxiety, depressed or dysphoric mood,
MDMA or related drugs, Increased or inappropriate sexual interest and activity, and including MDA	xiety, restlessness, agitation.
Dissociative drugs including Ketamine and PCP Aggression, impulsiveness, unpredictable behaviour, anxious judgement, numbness or diminished responsiveness to page	7.1 7



THE CHICKEN AND EGG DELIMMA

- Mental Illness Leading to Substance Abuse
 - Self-medication. This coping mechanism for mental health conditions
 - Pain Response: People use substances to dull emotional pain, reduce anxiety, or escape trauma.
 - Biological Overlap: Both mental illness and addiction affect similar brain systems (e.g., dopamine and serotonin pathways), making individuals with mental health disorders more vulnerable to substance use.

- Substance Abuse Leading to Mental Illness
 - Substance Use—Can trigger or intensify mental health disorders:
 - Neurochemical Disruption: Drugs and alcohol alter brain chemistry, which can lead to anxiety, depression, psychosis, and cognitive decline.
 - Social and Emotional Consequences: Substance
 abuse often leads to isolation, shame, and impaired
 judgment, which can contribute to the
 development of mental health issues.



Shared strategies to address MNS conditions

OVERVIEW OF DRUG USE AND MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CARIBBEAN

SUBSTANCE USE PATTERNS / INFLUENCE

- Drug use in the Caribbean is influenced by cultural, economic, and social factors.
- Alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco are the most commonly used substances.
- Alcohol is the most common substance used in the Caribbean
- The Caribbean is a major transit and transshipment area for cocaine, which increases local availability and risk of use.
- The World Drug Report (2025) identifies the link between drug trafficking and security issues in the Caribbean. The overall increase in cocaine seizures globally in recent years appears to have occurred in parallel with increasing violence in the Caribbean
- Emerging threats include synthetic drugs like fentanyl and increased trafficking. Example: Fentanyl seizures reported in Cayman Islands and Jamaica (Source: CICAD/OAS, NCDA, www.moh.gov.jm)

MENTAL HEALTH PATTERNS

- 1 in 4 people in the Americas (including the Caribbean) experience mental health issues, with depression being the most common disorder.
- Women are affected at twice the rate of men due to biological and socio-economic factors.
- Among adolescents in the English-speaking Caribbean, 20–30% experience symptoms of mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression.

In Bermuda, a recent study found:

- 31.3% of adolescents reported moderate to severe depression symptoms
- 25.2% reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms
- 65.6% of those with depression also had comorbid anxiety

MENTAL HEALTH PATTERNS

In Jamaica, a recent data found:

- 20% of Jamaicans suffering from some type of mental Health Issue
- 23.5% of youth with mental health and behaviour problems {2023)
- 75 90% of people with MNS conditions do not receive treatment
- 2/3 of persons with substance misuse problem have a personality disorder [2014]
- Among youth in Caribbean: The overall weighted pooled prevalence of mental health and behaviour problems among adolescents was 23.5% in English Speaking Caribbean with common reports of depressive symptoms, suicidality, conduct problems and disordered eating behaviours and attitudes (Liverpool et al., 2023)

MENTAL HEALTH PATTERNS

> Suicide Rates - compared to 21.3 per 100,000 in the U.S



Country	Suicide Rate (per 100,000)
Guyana	40.8
Suriname	25.9
Cuba	15.8
Trinidad & Tobago	13.8
Haiti	7.2
Saint Lucia	6.8
Saint Vincent & Grenadines	6.2
Barbados	0.3

BIOPSCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS EXPLORED

BIOLOGICAL IMPACT



Brain Chemistry Alterations

Drug use increases dopamine levels, causing euphoria followed by depression due to chemical imbalances in the brain.

Neuroadaptation Effects

Chronic alcohol use rewires brain reward pathways, increasing dependence and reducing natural pleasure responses.

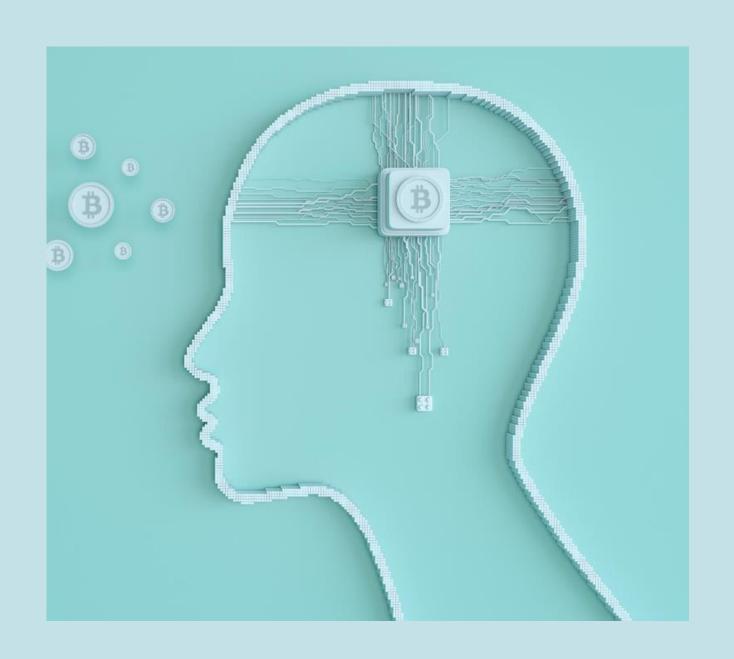
Physical Health Decline

Opioids cause hormonal imbalances and sleep disturbances, contributing to physical health deterioration.

Mental Health Impact

Biological changes from drug use significantly contribute to mental health disorders and their persistence.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT



Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional instability is common among drug users, especially trauma survivors using substances to numb anxiety.

Cognitive Impairments

Drug use like methamphetamine causes memory loss and reduced attention span, affecting cognitive functions.

Co-occurring Disorders

Depression, anxiety, and PTSD often accompany substance use, worsening mental health challenges.

Cycle of Dependency

Psychological impacts drive continued drug use as self-medication, leading to dependency and mental health decline.

SOCIAL IMPACT



Relationship Strain

Alcohol misuse often leads to family conflicts and social isolation, damaging personal relationships and mental health.



Economic Consequences

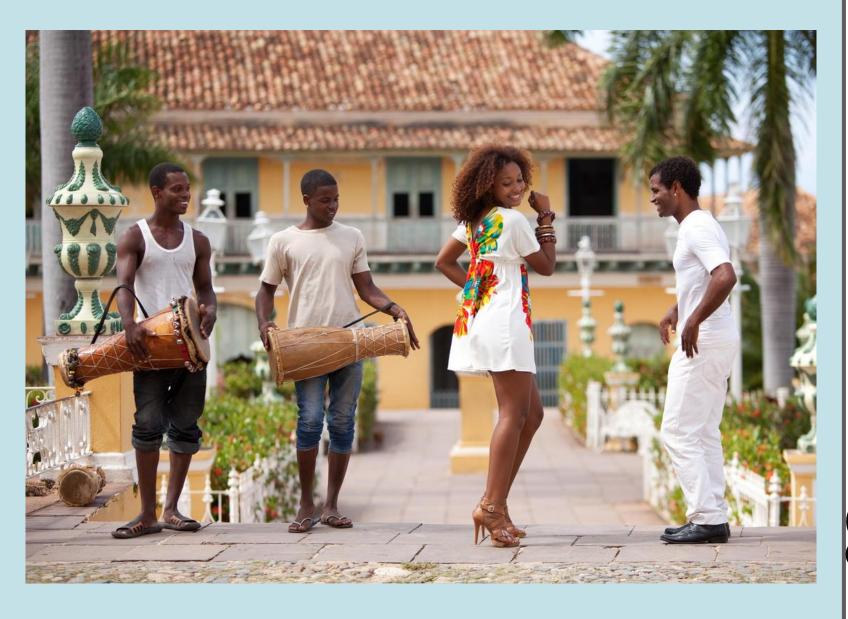
Job loss and financial instability caused by substance use increase stress, worsening mental health conditions.



Stigma and Marginalization

Judgment and discrimination discourage help-seeking and deepen feelings of shame in affected individuals.

Jamaican Cases Reviewed



Prison Population

- 18% of persons within the Jamaican prison population under study had a mental illness.
- Substance abuse was the most frequently diagnosed DSM IV disorder
- Substance abuse also presented more frequently as a comorbid diagnosis with psychotic disorders
- Psychotic disorders were significantly more prevalent in the Jamaican population, with just above half of the mentally ill prisoners having a diagnosis that included a psychotic disorder (56.6%), and 16.8% of these having psychotic disorders as the only diagnosis.
- Inmates diagnosed with substance abuse disorders alone or as a co-morbid diagnosis were generally the most likely to commit violent crimes and property crimes in both populations
- The prevalence of mental illness found in the Jamaican prison populations was approximately four times greater than the rate in the comparison population (England and Wales), indicating an over-representation of mentally ill persons in Jamaican prisons.

(A Comparison of Substance Abuse and Mental Illness in Male Offenders in Jamaica and England and Wales, Sewell et at 2015)

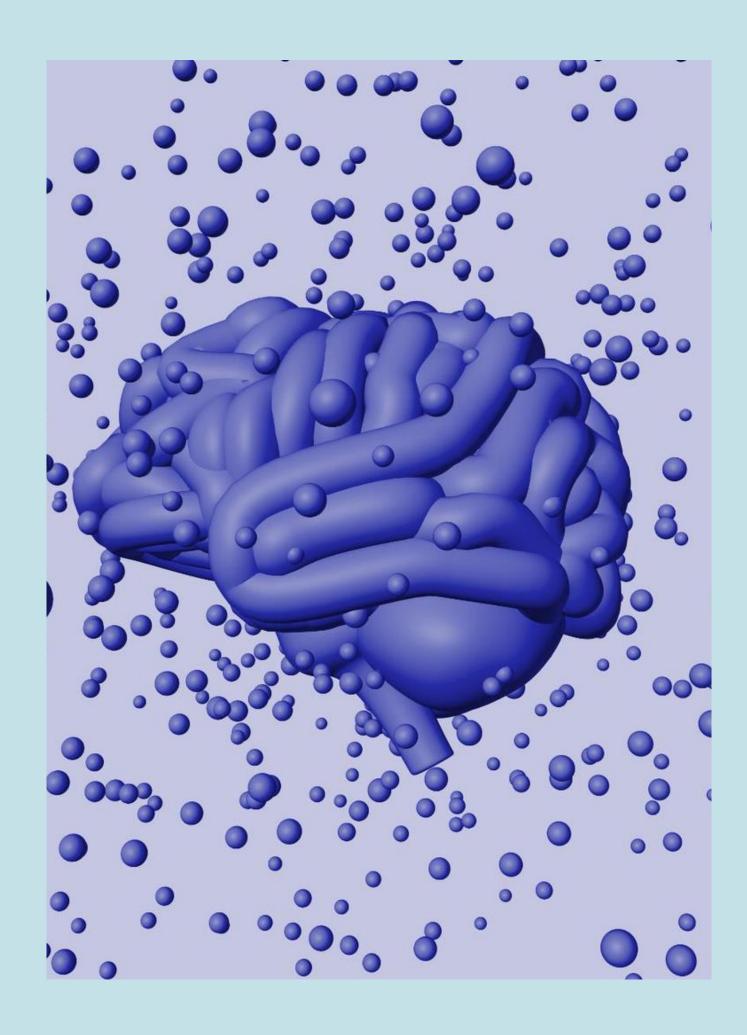
Jamaican Cases Reviewed



Domestic Violence

- Substance Abuse contributes more to the public health burden of domestic violence than any other risk factor. (Longman- Mills et al)
- A significant positive relationship was observed between household dysfunction and substance abuse, where higher levels of household dysfunction were found to be associated with substance abuse
- Additionally, witnessing a mother or caregiver being violently treated, living with an alcoholic family member or a household member who attempted suicide was found to be associated with substance abuse during adulthood.
- Significant relationship between physical abuse during childhood and experiencing psychological distress among university students (2015)

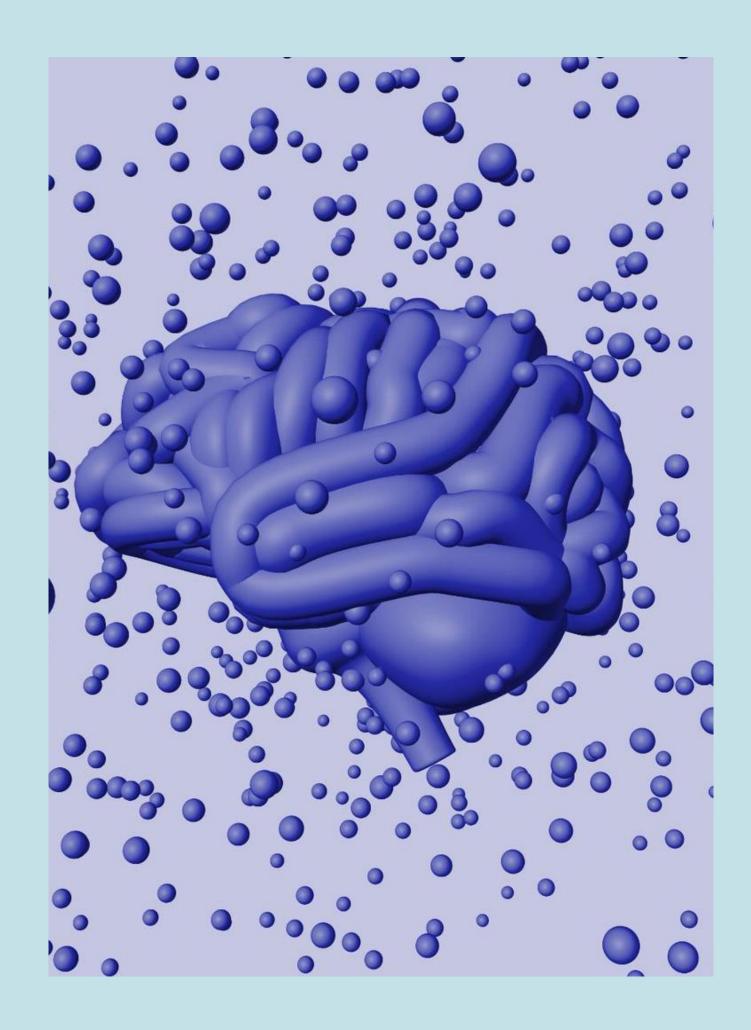
BARRIERS TO MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT



Barriers to Mental Health Support

- Resource Allocation
- 1.Caribbean nations spend only 1–5% of total health budgets on mental health, mostly on institutional care rather than community-based programs.
- 2.On average, countries allocate 4.3% of healthcare budgets to mental health, leaving services underdeveloped and under-resourced.
- Example: In Jamaica, 80% of visits are for psychosis, only 3% for depression.

Source: World Bank, PAHO, PLOS



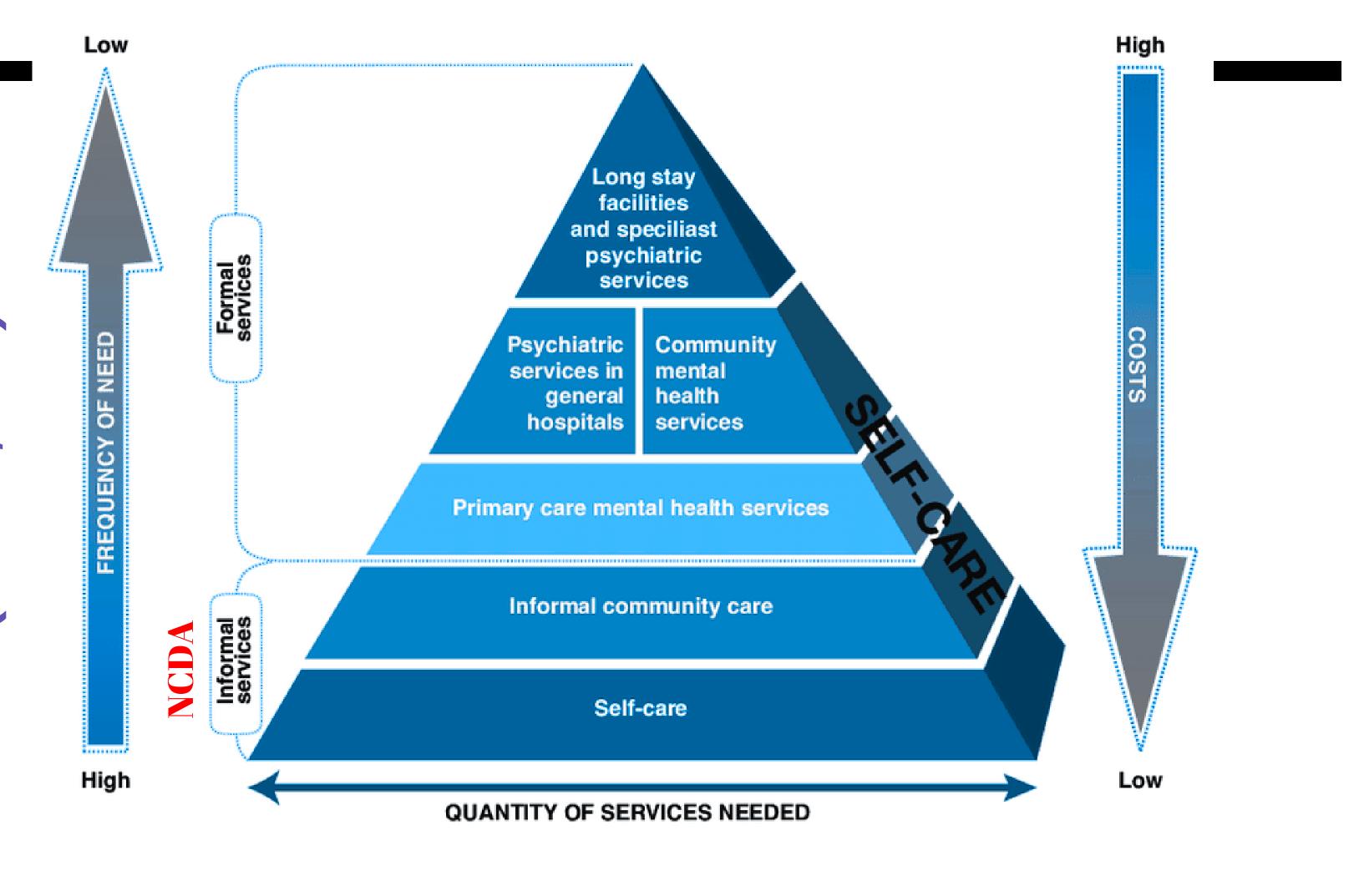
Barriers to Mental Health Support

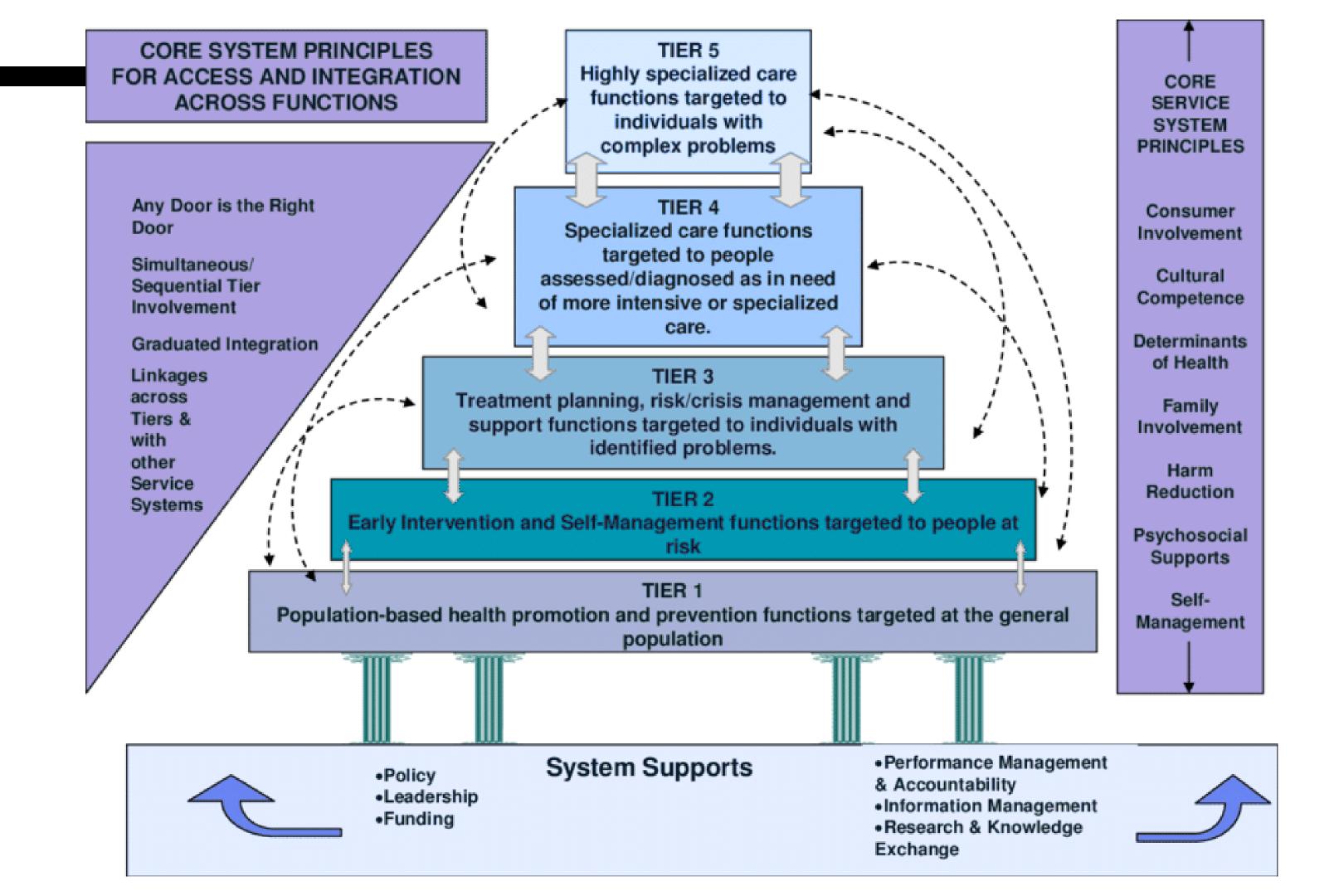
Key Challenges

- Stigma and cultural perceptions discourage helpseeking.
- Limited child and adolescent services—only two of six small island states have dedicated services.
- Underdeveloped health information systems and lack of local research.
- Limited infrastructure hampers the delivery of comprehensive mental health services across many regions.
- A shortage of trained mental health professionals restricts access to quality care for many individuals.
- Mental health services are unevenly distributed, leaving many communities without adequate support or rehabilitation resources.

STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION

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Government and Community Initiatives



Harm Reduction Efforts

Government and community programs emphasize reducing harm from substance use through education and support services.

Awareness Campaigns

Awareness campaigns are designed to educate society about substance use and mental health challenges.

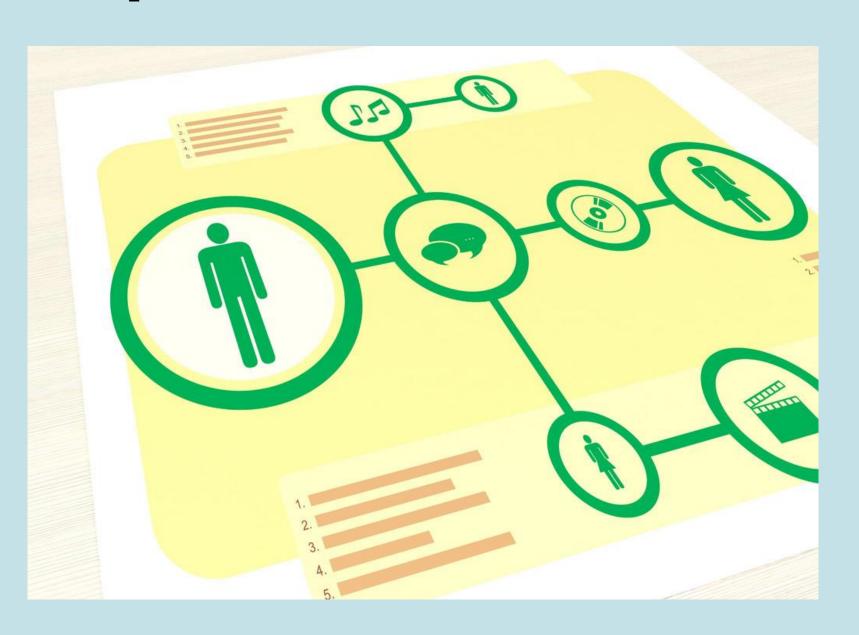
Improved Mental Health Services

Improving mental health services is a priority, enhancing access and quality of care for affected individuals.

Collaborative Approaches

Increased collaboration between government and communities addresses substance use and mental health holistically.

Policy Gaps and Opportunities for Improvement



Policy Limitations

Current policies often fail to fully address the intertwined issues of substance use and mental health disorders.

Legislation Strengthening

There is a need to enhance legislation to better support integrated care and resources for affected individuals.

Funding Opportunities

Increased and targeted funding can improve programs addressing substance use and mental health challenges.

Integrated Care Models

Developing integrated care models is essential to provide comprehensive support for mental health and substance use disorders.

Conclusion

Understanding Drug Impact

Comprehensive understanding of drug use effects on mental health is essential for effective intervention.

Accessible Mental Health Care

Providing accessible care is crucial to support individuals affected by drug-related mental health issues.

Collaborative Strategies

Coordinated community and healthcare efforts foster progress towards healthier communities.



Sources

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