



HEALTH
KwaZulu-Natal

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**INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT
TRAFFICKING**
“Drugs are no child’s play”

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has selected the theme “Drugs are not child’s play” for its 2006 international campaign. 26 June is International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking and this day is observed in an effort to increase public awareness about the destructive power of drugs and society’s responsibility to care for the well – being of children.

Although children are seldom the subjects of national and international studies, drug abuse and illicit trafficking affect children of all ages. Street children, working and living in dire conditions, are vulnerable, as are boys and girls whose family members are buying or selling illicit substances. These kids are exposed not only to bad examples but also to violent behavior associated with drug abuse. Some children have lost their parents to this scourge and are now cared for by uncles, aunts or grandparents. At school, the situation may not be any better. Teenagers and peers may be pressuring kids to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol, at first, and it could lead to the use of other drugs like marihuana (dagga). Most of the studies conducted on KwaZulu-Natal reveal a steady increase of the use of drugs and a steady increase of heavy drugs like “sugars” and amphetamine. It is noted that children commence abusing drugs as early as below the age of 20 years, which includes children on school going age. 38 per cent of children are abusing drugs under the age of 20 years. Alcohol is the most used substance. The latest estimates indicate that 200 million people, or 5 per cent of the global population between the ages of 15 to 64, have consumed illicit drugs at least once in the last 12 months. The UNODC’s anti-drugs campaign urges adults to protect children. Parents, siblings and other family members can ensure that a child’s home is a safe environment and that children are aware of the dangers associated with drug abuse. Teachers and social workers also have a role to play by watching out for warning signs and taking measures to address any drug-related problems. Everyone can and should also contribute to the protection of children to make sure that all children grow up in a safe environment.

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