



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: D  
HISTORY ARCHAEOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY  
Volume 14 Issue 1 Version 1.0 Year 2014  
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal  
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)  
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

## Drugs, Motivation and Prevention Campaigns in Spain (1994-2007). Story of a Misunderstanding

By Juan Carlos Checa Olmos , María José González Moreno & Carmen Salvador Ferrer

*University of Almería, Spain*

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*GJHSS-D Classification : FOR Code : 160899, 220205*



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# Drugs, Motivation and Prevention Campaigns in Spain (1994-2007). Story of a Misunderstanding

Juan Carlos Checa Olmos<sup>α</sup>, María José González Moreno<sup>σ</sup> & Carmen Salvador Ferrer<sup>ρ</sup>

**Abstract-** The aim of this article is to analyze and frame the level of efficacy and adequacy of publicity campaigns for the prevention of drug use in Spain. To this end, the contents of the messages used by the FAD (Antidrug Foundation) in television campaigns broadcast between 1994 and 2007 have been reviewed. The content of these campaigns has also been linked to the progress and motivation of drug users, using the biannual surveys of the Ministry for Equality and Social Welfare. The results show that the discourse followed in these campaigns has no relation whatsoever with the said motivations linked with drug abuse. Consequently, a strategy is required which will have an impact on discouraging and dissuading drug users.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Agenda Setting theory indicates that the perception of social issues is conditioned to a great extent by their contribution (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Scheufele, 2000). The framing process is linked to two basic actions: selecting and emphasizing expressions and images to convey a point of view, a perspective or a certain angle with regard to information. Studies developed from this theoretical viewpoint show that when greater media emphasis is placed on a specific social matter or issue public concern on this matter tends to rise.

The Agenda Setting theory has been considered in this study because of its direct involvement in the planning and updating of drug policies (Beckett, 1994; Lancaster et al., 2011; Sharp, 1992; Stanojlovic, 2011). Prevention strategies led by the media try to reduce drug abuse. However, drug users consider that media information is hardly influential, as the greatest influence comes from peer groups. This would in turn explain the questionable effectiveness of prevention campaigns (Costa & Pérez, 1989). In other words, the power of the media over drug use is doubtful, for what often happens is that opinions in favour of drug use are reinforced, as opposed to achieving the aim of producing a real and substantial change in attitude.

There is no lack of research which states that the majority of drug prevention programmes are not effective (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and European Communities, 2006; White & Pitts, 1998). Some have even observed that

they have produced the opposite effects to those intended, due, above all, to lack of knowledge of the appropriate characteristics required to produce successful prevention programmes (Pim, 2002).

Therefore, the framing process imposes the established criteria on prevention campaigns, materialized in a discourse focused on the problems caused by drugs, on public alarm or on the effects of drugs on the social environment, but it is evident that, in the opinion of users, the reasons that lead to drug abuse are often ignored.

In short, through this study we would like to stress the need to add a new prevention model to the media which will correlate two highly relevant indicators: the evolution of the incentives to use substances and the prevention campaigns shown on television and designed by the Antidrug Foundation (FAD); since a clarification of the psychological and social effects of drug abuse would provide a new social perception of illegal substances, whilst counteracting the incentives that feed them. Therefore, it is vital to know which discourse and strategy fuel the design of campaigns to prevent and reduce drug consumption.

## II. DATA AND SOURCES

To achieve the aims of this paper, we have used secondary sources, that is to say: in order to learn about the incentives of drug users, we have extracted data from the biannual reports The Andalusian Population and Drugs<sup>1</sup>, which were carried out from 1994 to 2007<sup>2</sup>. The main objective of these surveys is to find out the predominance of the use of different psychoactive substances among the Andalusian population, as well as the main sociodemographic characteristics of the users. In any case, from this source we can verify the evolution of the type of drugs used, as well as the incentives that have driven users in Andalusia to their consumption through the last 13 years.

This survey collects both epidemiologic and social data. It has a probabilistic and representative nature, with a stratified, multi-stage sampling, according to gender and size of their habitat. Its universe is the population of Andalusia, between the ages of 12 and 64.

<sup>1</sup> Until 2005 the report was called The Andalusian people and drugs.

<sup>2</sup> Although this report continued to be published in 2009, references to motivation for the use of drugs were omitted.

*Authors α σ ρ:* University of Almería. e-mails: [jcheca@ual.es](mailto:jcheca@ual.es), [mgm302@ual.es](mailto:mgm302@ual.es)

A total of 23.764 individuals have participated in the sampling through these 13 years.

The questions about incentives were aimed at people who had consumed alcohol at some time, who smoke daily or had used some illegal substance in the last six months. A specific question was in what surroundings or under what circumstances had they started using, and why. Thus, they were asked to point out the two main reasons<sup>3</sup> for drug use.

With regard to prevention, we have analyzed the campaigns designed by the FAD, and broadcast through television during the period 1994-2007. To establish to what extent this objective was achieved, we have analysed TV campaigns from 1998 to 2007, with regard to their slogans, images and contents.

### III. RESULTS

The data from subsequent surveys reflect that the main incentives for drug use can be classified in five large groups: "passiveness and escape-avoidance", "adaptation and integration", "freedom and transgression", "symptomatologic incentive", "experimental incentive". Generally, through the years, the percentage of people who state that their main incentive for starting to use drugs was "symptomatologic" has decreased drastically, while the number of people naming the "experimental and pleasure seeking incentive" as their main motivation has gone up. Even from the year 2003, an increase has been detected in the "freedom and transgression" incentive.

*Incentives and publicity from 1994 to 2000: the devastation caused by cocaine*

On the whole, during this period was an increase in the use of cannabis, designer drugs, hallucinogenics and amphetamines, especially among habitual or frequent users. Within the problematic rise in drug use, cannabis needs to be highlighted, as well as amphetamines, designer drugs and cocaine, simultaneously with alcohol and tobacco, with the end result of extensive multi-consumption which lasted through the whole above period (Edis, 1994; 1996; 1998; 2000).

From the year 1994 until the year 2000, we find that the "escape and passiveness" motivation and "adaptation and integration" correspond, consecutively to the use of alcohol in both "moderate and excessive"

and "slight and moderate" levels<sup>4</sup>. The "freedom and transgression" incentives refer to the use of cocaine, ecstasy, heroin and amphetamines: whereas, "symptomatologic" motivation was the cause for taking tranquilizers, hypnotics and common and morphic analgesics (especially among women). Last of all, the search for pleasure and experiences is the reason for using alcohol (in high, excessive and high risk levels), cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogenics and synthetic drugs.

The incentives for the use of these drugs classified as a group were mainly attitudes of "passiveness and escape-avoidance" and "adaptation and integration". Experimental reasons remained important, while those based on symptomatology decreased, especially among elderly women and housewives (Edis, 1994; 1996; 1998; 2000).

<sup>3</sup> However, we need to bear in a mind that it is possible for one person to have consumed several psychoactive substances, whereas their reasons for starting to consume are asked in general for any substance used; that is, when the interviewee indicates their reasons for starting using drugs, the information given refers to any of the substances used in the last 6 months and it not specifically to any one of them. Therefore, the data obtained are only useful as an approximation to the most common incentives for starting to use each type of drug.

<sup>4</sup> After turning each drink into their alcohol equivalent, and with the user data of each individual interviewed, a drinkers typology can be established according to the amount of alcohol ingested daily on average, which is as follows: low, moderate, high, excessive and high risk. Over 75 ml. a day is considered is considered alcohol abuse for males, and 50 ml. for females, following international criteria. These data can also be measured in alcohol grams and in basic standard drink units (UBE) (SDU).

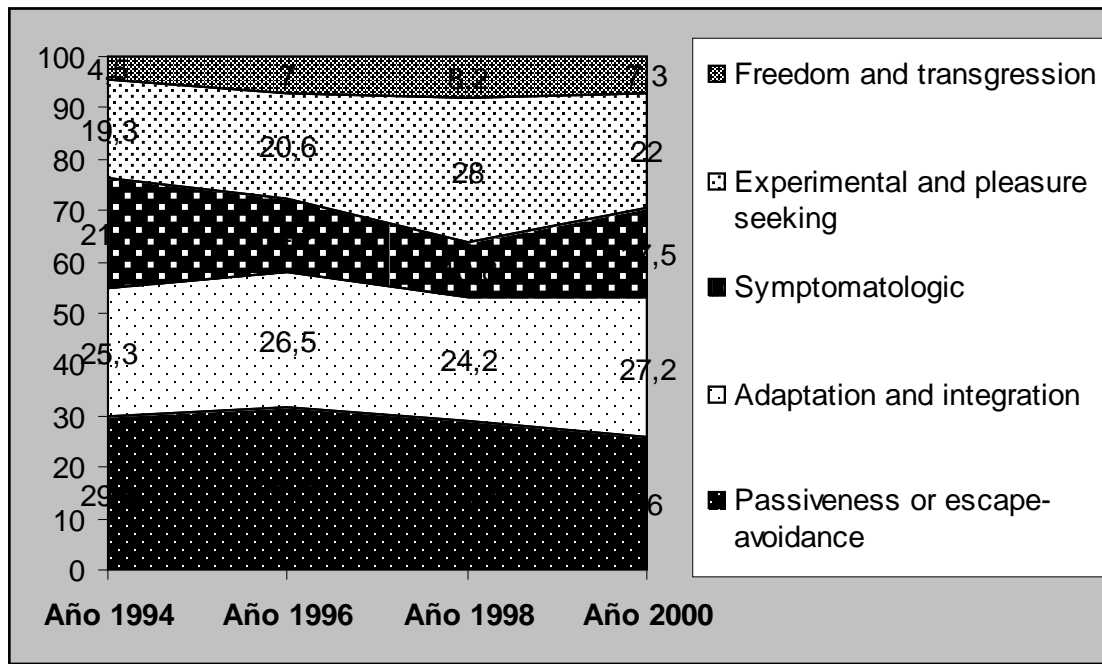


Figure 1 : Evolution of motivations from 1994 to 2000

Source: "Los Andaluces ante las drogas", (1994-2000). Author's own work.

As regards the publicity campaigns launched as a means of prevention by the FAD, there are with the motto "Chicken, dare. SAY NO" (1993/94) and "There are lots of reasons to say NO" (1995) from the agency "Lintas" addressed young people, urging them to reject emphatically, both the purchase and the use of drugs. Later on they would even list all the wonderful "things" in life (these things are Bart Simpson, my friend, the countryside, my dog, my neighbour, Winona Ryder, Michelle Pfeifer, pizzas...) which supposedly can stop people from taking drugs. The message is therefore say NO to drugs, as opposed to saying YES to other "things". With "Talk with your son" (1995), the agency "Tiempo/BEDDO" tried to put forward the need for communication between parents and children. It reminded parents of their responsibility to help their children to grow up. From the same agency came the campaign "Control" (1996) which was aimed at young people with the intention of demystifying the idea that it is possible to control drugs. With a language taken from young people's jargon, control is compared to sport activities that require self-control and balance (risk sports such as climbing or water skiing). The perception of "new drugs" as "more controllable" argued that the content of this campaign would reinforce the danger of drugs, trying to demystify the statement "I'm in control". In "Preventing is living" I and II (1997/98), the agency "Vitrubio/Leo Burnett" attempted to call the attention of fathers, mothers and teenagers through a new perspective, to prevention above all. In "Drugs are not a game" I and II (1998), the same agency encouraged

young people to reflect on the recreational aspect of drugs, and remarked the seriousness of drug abuse. With the motto "And you, what do you think?" and "Drugs, you are better off without them" I and II (2000/01) the agency SCPF showed young people the consequences of taking drugs in different everyday circumstances; and in the campaign "Free" (2000) people were invited to reflect on the extent to which we are free to make a choice about the use of drugs.

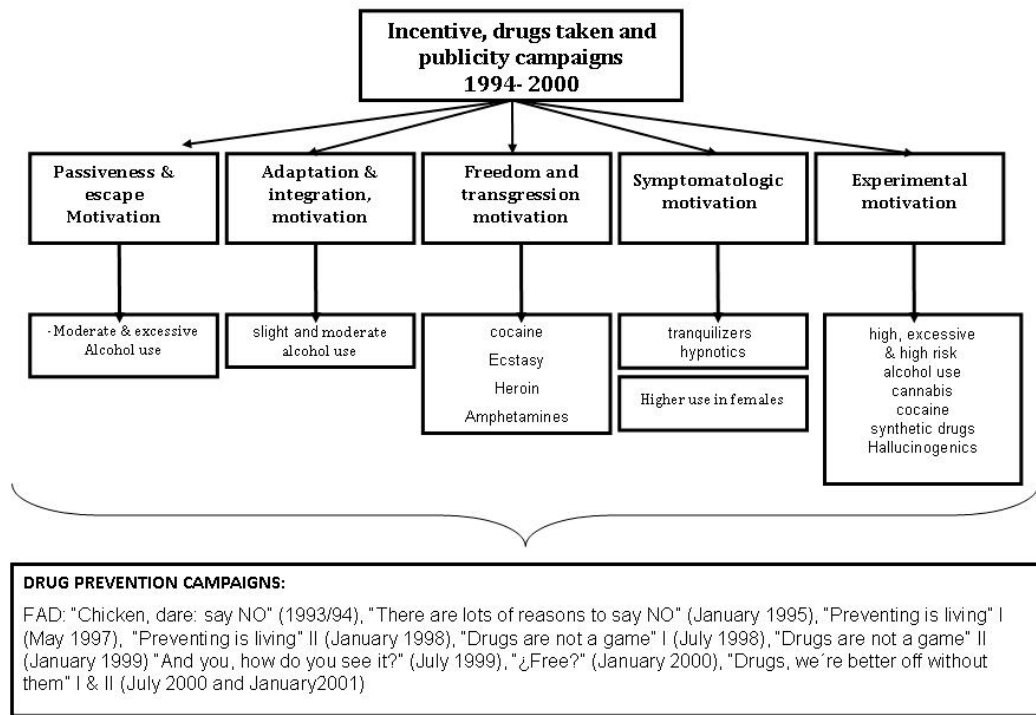


Figure 2: Motivation, drugs taken and publicity campaigns 1994-2000

Source: "Andaluces ante las drogas" (1994-1996-1990 and 2000). Own creation.

*Motivation and publicity from 2003 to 2007: Don't let the party stop*

From 2003 to 2005, comparatively widely used drugs use were, after tobacco and alcohol, cannabis, tranquilizers, hypnotics and cocaine. The use of the remaining substances was lower, fluctuating between ecstasy and even crack. Males' abuse of tobacco and alcohol was higher, likewise of inhalable substances, cannabis, cocaine, hallucinogenics and crack. Females, on the other hand, tended to use amphetamines, tranquilizers, hypnotics and opiate analgesics (Edis, 2003).

However, in 2007, the consumption of tobacco and alcohol continued to be high, but the illegal substances most widely used by the Andalusian population were cannabis and cocaine. Ecstasy and hallucinogenics were relatively predominant. Occasional use of cocaine, ecstasy and hallucinogenics increased in relation to 2005; the most recent levels of the use of these substances (last month) remain more stable (Edis, 2007). During the last year we have witnessed the birth of a new pattern of multi-consumption, characterized mainly by their recreational purpose and their use in festive events and circumstances (raves).

Incentives changed drastically from 2003. The most dramatic change occurred in two types of

incentives: "experimental and pleasure seeking", which became the main reason for drug use, and "symptomatologic", which went down to the last place (let us recall that in 1978 it was the main motivation for drug use). These reasons were followed by "adaptation and integration", which also decreased; and "freedom and transgression" which increased; whilst "passiveness and escape" remained the most stable at the time. Therefore, drug use motivated by "passiveness and escape" was a response to problematic or frustrating situations; and the incentives "experimentation-pleasure" and "freedom-transgression", were due to a hedonistic attitude, to such an extent that these three reasons appear in the majority of answers.

With regard to substances, we can observe how alcohol consumption dominated "adaptation-integration" and "passiveness and escape" incentives (light and moderate levels) and "experimenting pleasure" (abuse). Where other substances are concerned, "experimental-pleasure seeking" incentives were paramount, as in the case of inhalable substances, cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy and hallucinogenics. The main motivation for the use of heroin was escaping; and tranquilizers, hypnotics and other opiates were linked with symptomatologic motivation.



Likewise, males show the highest levels of “passiveness-escape-avoidance”, “experimental-pleasure seeking” and “freedom-transgressing” incentives, whereas for females it is “adaptation-integration” and “symptomatologic”.

From 2005 to 2007, “experimental”, “adaptation and integration” and “passiveness and escape”

incentives were confirmed as the most predominant, scoring 79.7% of the total of answers. “Symptomatologic” and “freedom and transgression” incentives (6.7% and 13.6%) account for the remaining 20.3% (cf. Figure 6).

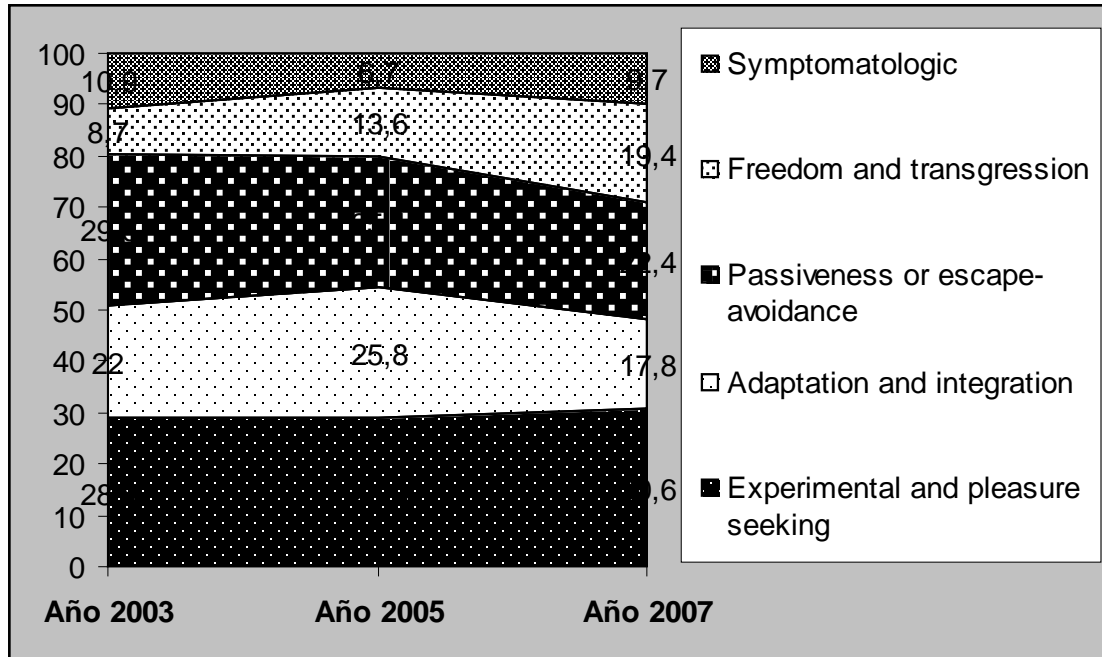


Figure 3 : The evolution of motivation in 2003-2007

Source: “Los Andaluces ante las drogas” (2003-05-07). Author’s own work.

In those years, FAD campaigns like “Do something” (2001) from the agency “Contrapunto” were shown on television, with the objective of disseminating the warning that drug use affects both users and their families, and announcing the existence of a telephone helpline for those needing information. From the same agency, the campaign “Education is everything” (2002) and “In nappies when facing drugs” (2002) were based on the belief that drug use and other more general conflicts are clearly and closely related. For this reason, the FAD stated that preventive education is absolutely necessary to give full training to be able to prepare the personality of a child against any risk of antisocial behaviour. With “We are all responsible” (2003) the same information was disseminated to publicity companies, parents, teachers, the media, musicians and sports people. Later on, the same agency designed the campaign “You don’t know what you are taking” (2003), aimed at preventing an increase in the use of synthetic drugs and cocaine during the summer, and at giving warning about the fun use of these substances, appealing to the responsibility of users, especially young people between 14 and 25.

The publicity agency “La Banda de Arnold” once more insisted on the education that parents and

teachers should provide in “Teach them how to live” (2004). With “Have a brain, pass on coke” (2004), the agency “Saatchi and Saatchi” designed a campaign to prevent drug use among young people, especially during the summer holidays. In the campaign “Empower your children in the face of drugs” (2004), the agency “Arnold Spain” addressed parents stressing the importance of teaching values to children and encouraging a critical attitude in them as a protection and prevention factor against the risks of drug use. Likewise, in “Every time counts. Think” I and II (2005), “Will this be the one? Think” (2006), “Drugs decide when your life is going to change” (2006) “Change your perception. Think” (2007), the agency “Delvico Red Cell” warned of the dangers of drug use, focusing on the false feeling of being in control that many young users experience with regard to drug taking, stressing the problems generated by drug use for society in general. Finally, the campaign “Everything has a price” from the agency “Sra. Rushmore” showed a perspective of the cultural aspect of drugs as another consumer product, trivializing their meaning and their risks. The creative concept of the new campaign is supported by the statement “The most dangerous thing about drugs is to forget what they really are”.

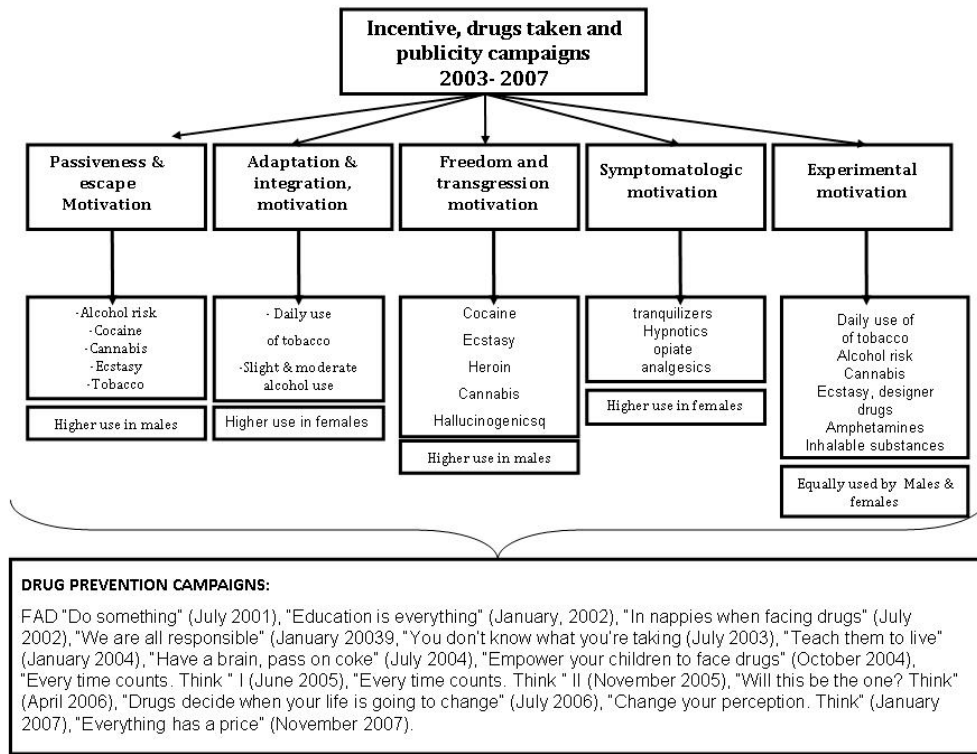


Figure 4 : Motivation, drugs consumed and publicity campaigns 2003-2007

Source: "Los Andaluces ante las drogas" (2003-05-07). Own creation.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Prevention campaigns from 1993/4 followed the same trend as in the previous period, as they pointed out that the responsibility and capability to make decisions about drug use, lay exclusively with individuals themselves, in an attempt to defend a worthy and brave attitude through the motto "say NO". The campaigns that followed tried in vain to convince people of the reasons why they should reject drugs. In "There are a lot of reasons to say NO" (1995), the audience were encouraged to appreciate and value a series of personalities, situations and "things". However, from these campaigns we can draw several conclusions: firstly, that drugs in the early stages of use have a well defined area of power, with which other situations and circumstances do not interfere (one can talk on the phone and watch football and still take drugs) and, secondly, that people do not take drugs to stop having a dog, or to stop liking famous actors, therefore, we must insist, drug use is caused by a number of complementary aspirations to those referred to in say NO. Therefore, if drugs were taken because of boredom or dissatisfaction, the most appropriate thing to do would be to explain how drug use can become tedious and tiring, meaningless and extremely frustrating. Drugs contribute nothing to a satisfactory way out of such circumstances, but they are often a waste of money,

they ruin the health and safety of the individual, as shown in the picture of a lost and ridiculous young man.

Subsequent prevention campaigns showed the dialogue that is necessary between parents and children to prevent them from using drugs. These campaigns tried to establish a shared responsibility in the prevention of drug use through family intervention. However, in most cases, drug prevention comes from group peers and even from the media, as it is a no-go area for parents in their children's life to which they have no access.

In 1996, the well-known phrase "I'm in control" was demystified through the campaign "Control" (1996); although none of the reasons given in relation to drug use at the time had this supporting motto "I take drugs because I am capable of controlling them". Let us just recall that the incentive of that period was a passive attitude of inertia, the exact opposite of being excessively self-assured, and so being able to "control drugs".

The television campaigns that followed "Drugs, we're better off without them" I and II (2000, 2001) focused on explaining the worst effects of the different substances on different young people in everyday situations, which showed a change of direction in the perspective of drug use, because cocaine, alcohol, cannabis and designer drugs involved a series of effects, which in most cases, produce undesirable and

unpleasant results. For the first time, the real effects of drugs were talked about, leaving aside social implications or rejecting drugs from a biased and reductionist viewpoint.

In the campaigns that took place in the following years, education and information were put forward as the main defence criterion when faced with drug use, in "Do something" (2001) in which adults (parents) appeared who were obviously drug users, spreading messages of the type: "Nobody is born a cocaine addict" or "Education is everything" (2002); and they even compared drug users to "babies" who lack the ability or the skill to defend themselves against drugs: "Facing drugs in nappies" (2002). Evidently, these messages were in no way linked with the search for sensations of users, nor with the pleasure that some drugs are supposed to produce, nor with the satisfaction of breaking conventional rules. Maybe, greater attention from adults could be a possibility for reducing drug use, without ignoring the fact that we would be in a vigilant and controlling state, which is far from being a real impediment and could immediately turn into an incentive to be overcome by young users.

The campaign "Everyone is responsible" (2003) broadened its horizon with regard to the drug phenomenon, to include different social agents, since prevention responsibility should lie with the media, parents and teachers. With categorical sentences like "If you have the power to make them believe that they can go through walls with certain jeans, imagine how powerful you are", they explained that selling dreams through advertising should not participate in a dangerous and unrealistic concept of drugs. In the years that followed, the view of prevention based on education continued to be milked in the campaigns "Teach them how to live" I and II (2004, 2009), "Have a brain, pass on coke" (2004) and "Empower your children against drugs" (2004), but in any case, they do not promote discouraging drug users.

Another prevention strategy developed in the same year stated "You don't know what you're taking" (2003). Thus, the lack of control over the composition of psychoactive substances and their reliability are brought to the foreground, in an attempt to show the danger of drug adulteration. Therefore, the effects of some substances when in a pure state are unknown, in comparison with the reality of those bought in the black market. When the population allude to pleasure as a reason to use drugs, it is necessary to clarify that this could be the case when taking pristine substances, but not when they have been adulterated at every link of the drug dealing chain.

On the other hand, FAD campaigns, such as "Every time counts. Think" I (2005), "Drugs decide when your life is going to change" (2006), "Change your perception. Think" (2007) were about understanding the drug problem in terms of the dangerous consequences

of taking substances. They gave a series of messages which exposed the naivety and falseness of the arguments about drug use, in which it can seem harmless and without risks, simply motivated by fun. However, if the risk of drugs is evident, it would also be so to explain that drugs are often not only no fun, but can also generate and cause many states of pain, anxiety and even of tedium; in such a way that the cost-benefit ratio of this search for fun, is often the opposite of the expectations it raised. Furthermore, the emotional, physical, social and economic costs of drug use is an outrage with regard to the benefit obtained, when the reaction desired often becomes a fruitless and regrettable trip. Thus, none of these campaigns exposes or highlights that drug use does not always lead to the pleasure or fun that is sought. The lack of pleasure that some drugs produce is as real and true as the pleasure that can be experienced on some occasions. The idea is, therefore, to make it clear that both sensations are part of the same action, in an attempt to cause disappointment, to demystify and discourage drug use, especially among the younger sector of the population.

Thus, users take drugs with the incentive and desire to improve their experience of life and because they underestimate the negative consequences and risks involved (Aitken et al., 2000). For this reason, prevention campaigns could be enormously beneficial if they were more explicit about the fact that the desired effects are not always obtained, and about the likelihood of suffering from the risks involved.

Some authors like Bobes and Sainz (2003) maintain that people who do not take drugs believe that users take them because they have no interest in themselves, because it is typical of meaningless lives and so they worsen the situation of the global community. Conversely, drug users argue that drugs are not taken by people through ignorance of their effects and "because of fear of their negative effects". Thus, the population who do not take drugs refer to users through stereotypes in very typical profiles of "meaningless lives, being manipulated, having a negative effect on society", which is an image that the media have contributed to develop, especially through their prevention campaigns. On the other hand, users refer to non-users as "misinformed and frightened", hence their abstention from drugs. In other words, they believe what prevention campaigns say. This leads to two reflections: firstly, that neither attitude is realistic, but both respond to media stereotypes, and secondly, that drug prevention does not involve drug users, as they do not actually speak about what taking drugs means, or of the motivation that sustains these habits. Thus, non-users are forewarned and users remain unchanged.

However, and despite this clear evidence, the FAD maintains the efficacy of its campaigns through a series of data, such as stating that over half the population of Spain between 15 and 65 indicate that



they know or have heard about the FAD or that 90,5% of the total of interviewees recall one or more pictures from the FAD campaigns. It insists that a vast section of the Spanish population between 15 and 65 years of age (91, 7%) believe that campaigns are important or very important. It also states that the proportion of those who believe that the continuity of these campaigns is relevant is very high (89, 5%). This means that people's awareness of prevention campaigns is enough to make these campaigns a success. We are not saying that prevention campaigns may or may not have reduced the prevalence of drug use and the number of users, but that we are not satisfied with the simple matter that television is actually watched, (and hence the FAD advertisements are seen).

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The incentives to take drugs in some population sectors respond to a series of expectations about the effects of these substances. Moreover, these "gains" coexist with some shared beliefs in the existence or non-existence of risks associated with drug use and with various agreed attitudes both in peer groups and in close social settings, in favour of drug use.

The analysis of contents of drug prevention campaigns, disseminated by the media, especially television, on behalf of the FAD, has allowed us to verify that these campaigns hardly counteract drug use, as they lack coherence with regard to the incentives referred to by users, in any of the periods studied here. To the extent that, if drugs maintain a position of power in the social imaginary, campaigns feed on a series of ideas supported by fear, alarmism and lack of realistic criteria, which separate them from their prevention objectives (the launch of these campaigns is especially relevant). Therefore, the ideas issued by institutions do not respond to or counteract the incentives that lead people to the use and abuse of the different drugs.

The lack of success of publicity campaigns against drug use, leads us to think that a new theoretical attitude to drugs is required, which ought to partly forget prohibition and social victimisation messages, in order to focus on the other side of drug use; that is, if drugs produce pleasure, they also generate high doses of displeasure, if the use of drugs causes new and pleasant experiences, the unpleasant ones are greater; if they produce euphoria, they also bring about sadness; despite offering social success, they can generate great social isolation, etc. Thus, reversing the image of drug use, in direct relation to the incentives that encourage it, becomes an option and a possibility to bear in mind.

To sum up, with this study we have intended to show the need to design a new prevention and educational option which will emphasize another explicit and harsh message on the basis of scientific truths derived from the use and abuse of drugs; acting more

on prevention than on prohibition criteria. To this end, the incentives listed earlier by users should never be ignored. This message should be added to the Agenda Setting for the prevention and reduction of drug use.

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